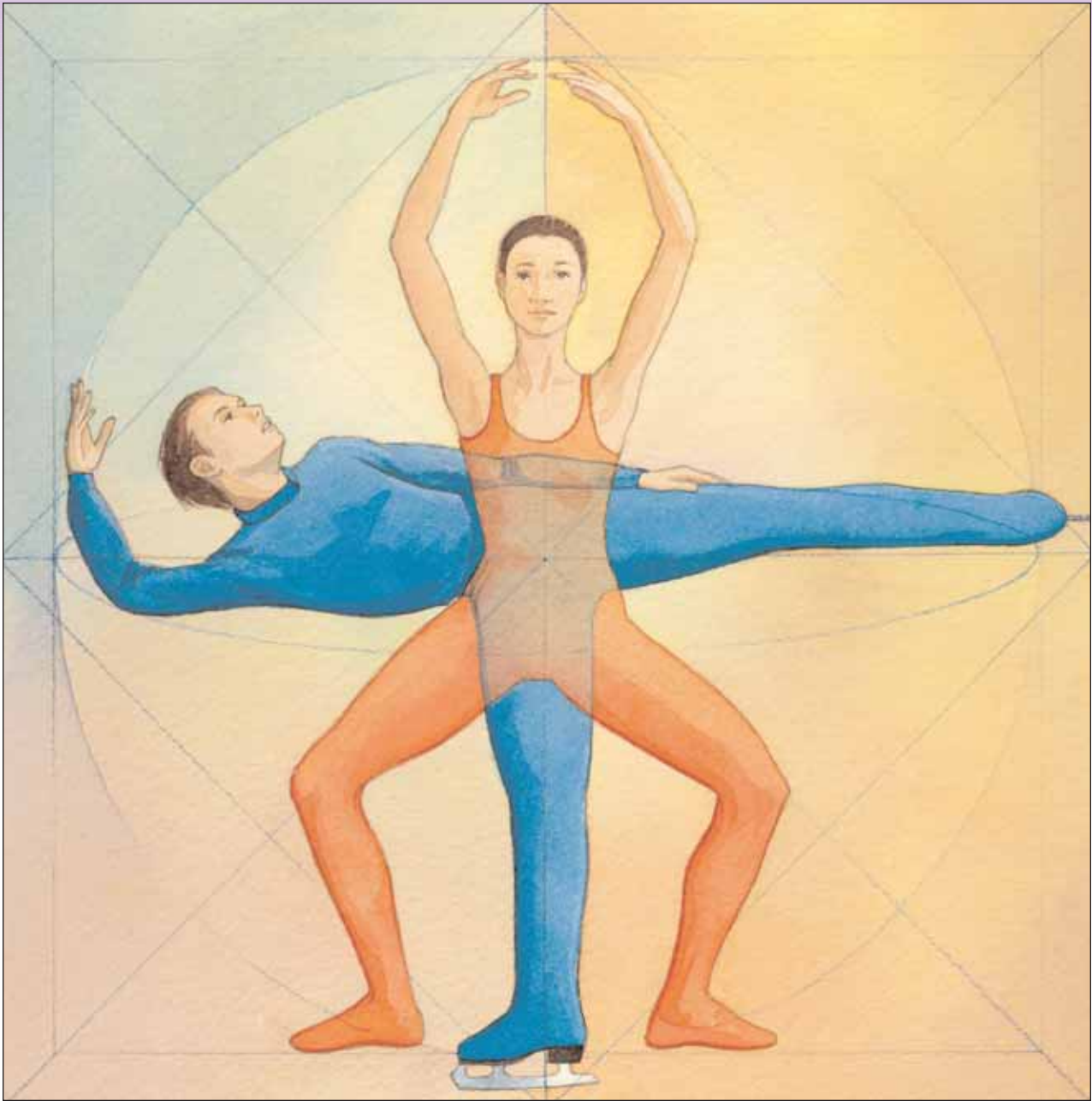


CHAPTER ONE

A Unified Approach to Movement Training

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Continuity in movement training brings organization to the learning process.

How We Learn

To teach any subject effectively, as many facets of a student's ability to learn should be engaged. Each student learns differently and not all teaching can be assigned to the left side (analytical/cognitive) of the brain. So too, trainers and coaches have come to understand that sports training cannot simply be relegated to the "just do it" mentality.

Whether a student is primarily *left* (analytical/cognitive) or *right* (creative/intuitive) brained, we now know that for real success in any subject, both sides of the brain need to be engaged in the learning process. *When a student or athlete is encouraged to reason out a process as well as creatively integrate the application of that process, he or she is more likely to enjoy, remember and apply with accuracy what is being taught.*

Dr. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory states that there are at least seven distinctive styles of learning. Each of us learns by using unique combinations of these styles simultaneously. Effective teaching uses a combination of these styles in order to reach all students successfully.¹

Integrating Off-Ice Classes

Figure skating is both art and sport and skaters need to comprehend their off-ice training in a way that will make complete and immediate sense on the ice. Their off-ice classes should have continuity, meaning and a focus which will further their understanding and progress on-ice.

Recently athletes have been calling the quality of having at one's command the full package (excellence in technique and artistic interpretation) as being *In*

the Zone. We need to teach the capacity for this quality right from the start and not simply leave it to chance that the skater, if talented enough, will develop it on his or her own. For example, if an off-ice class ignores flow of movement, timing, or teaching the student how to feel correct musculature, most skaters will have

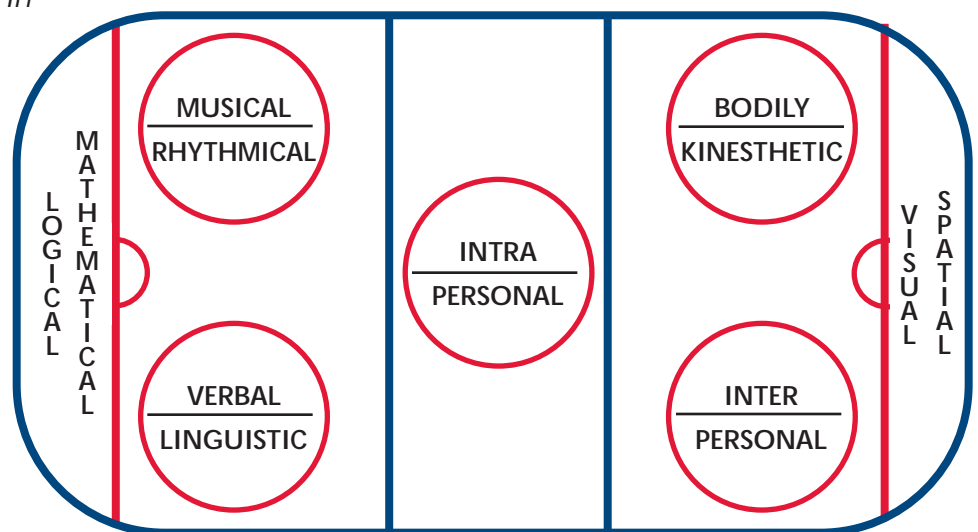


Fig. 1.1 **Howard Gardiner's Seven Basic Intelligences:** (a) Verbal Linguistic (word/communication); (b) Interpersonal (people/empathy); (c) Bodily Kinesthetic (body awareness/movement); (d) Musical Rhythmic; (e) Visual/Spatial; (f) Logical Mathematical; (g) Intrapersonal (reflective thinking).

difficulty incorporating what they have been taught off-ice into their on-ice work.

If, on the other hand, we understand that technique and true artistry support one another – that they are *both* cognitive and intuitive – we will then comprehend and teach all movement from a more wholistic perspective.

It is interesting to note that the word “Technique” comes from the Greek word “Techni” which actually means ART!²

Analyzing musculature and its relation to proper alignment and good technique, *exploring* the use of breathing and musicality in timing (yes, bring some music into that plyometrics class!), *visualizing* the patterns of movement as a continuous flow and *focusing* on feeling and *remembering* correct muscle usage all play an important part in creating a well

rounded and confident skater. Engaging the student's capacity to reason, analyze, feel, visualize, integrate and communicate what is being learned will ensure that your skaters are using all of their abilities to grow and perform with excellence.

Teaching vs. Training

I'd like to clarify what I mean by “movement training” as I use the term throughout this book to explain the combined efforts of both teachers and trainers. Teaching and training are equally vital and necessary for athletes and dancers to perform to their highest potential. I recently observed a Russian ballet company class where both a teacher and a trainer were involved together in leading the class.

Training has to do with giving a dancer or athlete a prescribed set of conditioning exercises to be performed and repeated daily under the trainer's motivation and supervision. This daily training is *vital* as it shapes and forms the bones, muscles and neurological movement patterns so as to produce a disciplined body. The down side is that it leaves most of the *thinking* to the trainer and the *doing* to the athlete/dancer. For example, an athlete who performs 30 leg lifts without any explanation given by the trainer of the “internal process” or how the movement fits into the body as a whole, will use some of the right muscles but not all, and not consistently. Depending on the muscle tone, body awareness and overall skill level of the athlete/dancer, he or she will achieve some strength, height or endurance, but with little refinement and even less ability to analyze the movement or put it into the context of whole body alignment.

Teaching, on the other hand, has to do with the teacher imparting knowledge of the subject to the dancer/athlete, thus creating an understanding of the purpose of the exercise and how it fits into the whole. Using the same leg lift example, if the function, purpose and action of a leg lift is taught with careful attention to correct demonstration, placing hands on the student to show where and what to feel (i.e. the stretch under the working leg, the stretch of the spine and lift in the torso, the straightness of

the supporting leg, etc.) then the athlete/dancer gains the understanding of how to reproduce the action correctly, how it fits into the whole and what it will take to improve on that action.

Teaching in itself cannot produce a disciplined body, but with the mind thoroughly engaged, the necessary training period will be greatly shortened.³

Teaching (mental motivation) and training (physical motivation) each play a distinct and vital role and it is the *combination of the two* that best serves to create a complete dancer/athlete.

Fundamental Unity in Movement Technique Training

Most often movement training is compartmentalized and specialized in the minds of both the participants and the instructors alienating what are naturally related principles; but whether it be dance, figure skating, gymnastics or downhill skiing, our bodies must move through space and in time according to certain unalterable physical, kinesthetic, and biomechanical laws. For example, the *Whys* and *Hows* of:

- moving from a stabilized core (pelvic girdle)
- correct bone and muscle alignment
- movement efficiency
- achieving and maintaining balance
- acceleration
- velocity
- elevation
- timing

All of these have everything to do with the fact that we are all moving with the same basic skeletal and muscle structure under the same laws of physics.

Even under varying conditions such as age, body type, height/weight ratio, and velocity, many principles remain the same:

- “turn-out” is still stabilized at the hip joint
- good spin rotation is achieved by good timing, balanced centrifugal force, a stable torso and a well aligned spine
- the power of a jump comes from the strength and flexibility of your *plié*, breath control and full body coordination.

These principals are universal and will essentially remain constant no matter what type of class you are in, but it is the development of both the analytical and the intuitive senses within each athlete/dancer that empowers you to synthesize

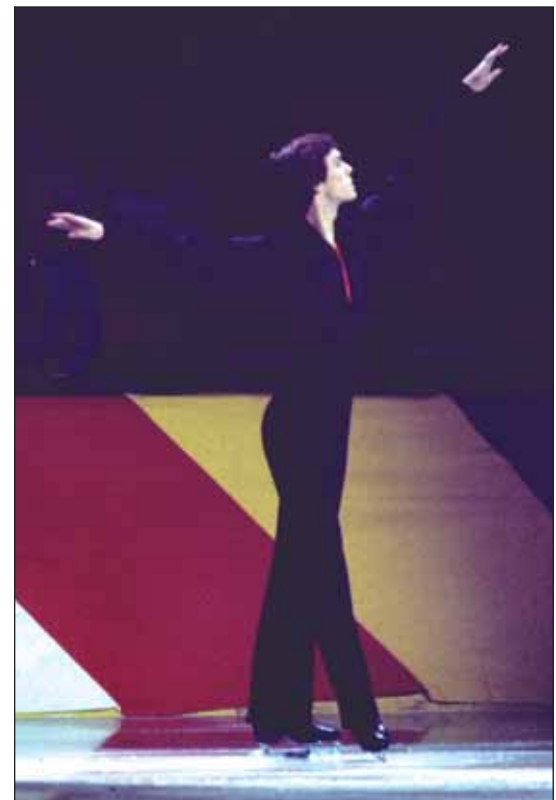


Fig. 1.2 1976 Olympic Gold Medalist John Curry's ability to translate classical ballet exercises into his skating programs and on-ice Ballet Theatre classes is a primary example of synthesizing movement analysis under varying conditions.

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