

Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy
Dance Teacher MA

MY ENTRY TO THE ARC OF
SHIFTING ROOTS

THESIS

Made by: Csasznyi Blanka Flóra

Supervisor: Berger Gyula

Budapest, 2020

I would like to thank Joe Alegado for the guidance, knowledge, and trust he has placed in me during the past ten years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
LIMÓN BASED MODERN TECHNIQUE CLASS	6
Shifting Roots – The Alegado Movement Language Class Connection To The Limón Technique.....	6
Limón Based Classes: Differences And Similarities	10
SHIFTING ROOTS	12
The atmosphere on class	12
The role of music on class	13
Arm and hand gestures	14
Class creation process and class structure	17
PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS AND METHODS	24
Repetition.....	24
Visualization	25
Practicing to both sides	27
Giving corrections.....	27
Improvisation	29
CONCLUSION	31
REFERENCES	33

INTRODUCTION

I met Joe Alegado¹ in 2009 in Vienna during the ImPulsTanz Dance Festival. Back then, I visited the festival as a dance student full of curiosity, desire and excitement of learning from new teachers in order to complement my dance studies in Budapest, Hungary. One of the workshops I chose to attend was Joe Alegado's class. His class was advertised as a Limón² based modern technique since he had been a member of the José Limón Dance Company.

The principles of movement in class were deeply rooted in José Limón's work as far as playing the never ending game of surrendering to gravity and the amount of resistance towards this same force. All this communicated through a complex level of coordination of arms, legs and torso as well as rhythmic changes, weight shifts and dynamic transitions.

I discovered my natural connection to the movement material from the very beginning. Following this first experience at ImPulsTanz Festival, I kept visiting Joe Alegado's classes regularly. After a couple of years of attending workshops around the world, I started to work with him on a more consistent basis and have been working with him ever since. My first job was as minimal as just standing in the first line so students could follow. Throughout the years, I got more involved in his work by starting to take part in the research for movement material in the preparation of class as well as creating the floor-work sections of class. I assisted him in several choreographic creations and danced solos created by him. Our collaboration in the past eight years has grown to the point where today I am honored to be licensed in his movement language. My own pedagogical journey in teaching will begin as my work with Joe Alegado continues.

In the time I have been working with Joe Alegado, I have experienced his work going through a decisive evolution. Just like a volcanic eruption builds up slowly before the explosion, this evolution also had its gradual development. As I mentioned before, his

¹ Joe Alegado (1952-) american dancer, choreographer, the creator of Shifting Roots Alegado Movement Language

² José Arcadio Limón (1908-1972) mexican dancer, choreographer, the creator of the Limón-technique.

teaching of the Limón technique came as a result of his being in the José Limón Dance Company. Eventually, his classes took their own rhythm while growing and evolving to the point in which he felt the desire to distinguish between his personal evolution in dance and his work with the José Limón tradition. At this point, he decided to categorize his work as a movement language and named it Alegado Movement Language (AML). The reason was “to give more substance to the fact that the foundation of all his somatic experiences since childhood to the present have contributed to the movement vocabulary in his dance.” (Alegado, 2019) Furthermore, naming his work the AML, was a natural extension of what had been evolving through the years since leaving the José Limón Dance Company.

Joe Alegado had no intention of creating a new dance technique or methodology. Because of his unique movement characteristics, his movement language had become so very different from Limón’s, making it necessary to create the separation. Going even deeper in support of this constant change, he chose to further define his work. The search for a name to best describe the origin of his work, has taken him back to his feeling of our human connections, back to our roots as beings moving through this earth. Since we, as people, are in continuous movement throughout the world, he has chosen the name Shifting Roots – Alegado Movement Language.

In my thesis, I would like to go deeper into this evolution by delineating the timing of my entry into this process as I follow its journey to the present time. At the point of my introduction to his work, the structure of Joe Alegado’s modern technique class had not yet shifted into its present form. The class structure had already begun to include its distinctive hand and arm gestures but, the synergy of our collaboration produced elements to the class structure which did not exist before: 1) the coordination of hand/arm gestures in relationship to a shifting pelvis, 2) the use of different directions in space during the initial exercises, 3) the use of the thematic hand/arm gestures for the floor-work.

The synergy of our collaboration produced the present structural character of the class which inspired the need to distinguish his work from others. The result of this separation led to its present shape and nature as an independent movement methodology.

LIMÓN BASED MODERN TECHNIQUE CLASS

My knowledge of the Limón technique came, initially, from the many years of working with Joe Alegado. Since both the AML and the José Limón technique share the same concepts and principles of movement, I felt it important to refer to Daniel Lewis' book "The Illustrated Dance Technique of José Limón" (1999), as my source for the Limón perspective when writing this thesis..

Shifting Roots – The Alegado Movement Language Class Connection To The Limón Technique

Dancers who wish to go deeper into the world of the Limón technique, learn to approach movement from the perspective of alignment, succession, potential and kinetic energy. Each of these aspects relate directly to the elements of fall, weight, recovery and rebound. By applying these aspects and perspectives, the dancer can come to a better understanding of how the elasticity and strength of the muscles of a plié can make possible the characteristic swings, suspensions, off center turns and even more complicated movement of the Limón technique. These concepts form the foundation on which the basic vocabulary of the Limón style is based.

These same concepts are the basis for Shifting Roots - Alegado Movement Language (Shifting Roots AML). This shared philosophy, is what allows dancers in the Limón technique as well as Shifting Roots AML, to embrace each respective movement vocabulary and give it the quality of effortlessness, presence and freedom.

Alignment in Limón technique and Shifting Roots AML

When I talk about body alignment I refer to the placement of all parts of the body in relationship to each other, most specifically mentioning the placement of the feet, hips, shoulders and head in a standing posture.

In Shifting Roots AML, just like in the Limón technique, our goal is to be aware of the body's alignment while standing. This body awareness while standing allows a dancer to have the possibility to move any direction, at any moment and be able to return to standing quickly and fluently.

This position means having the feet in parallel right under the hips with toes pointing to the front. Also, the shoulders should line up over the hips, the arms hanging loosely by the side of the body, the spine feeling long, the head resting on top, looking straight ahead while the weight of the body is evenly shared between both feet. In this position a dancer should be able to sense their vertical axis and feel opposite energies floating through their body through the top of their head up to infinity and to the bottom of their spine continuing to the center of the Earth. Tilting the pelvis back or having the lower back rounded puts strain on the spine and hinders efficient movement therefore, our goal is to align the whole body so that exaggerated curves in the spine are corrected and any unnecessary muscle tension on the spine is relieved. Minimal muscle action is required to hold the body upright if it is properly aligned.

Succession: the journey of the head rolling down the spine

One of the basic principles of both Limón technique and Shifting Roots is successional movement. This principle means the connection between different body parts through a consecutive path of movement like a chain reaction.

One aspect of successional movement is rolling down from the top of the head to the point of hanging over the legs. This is a basic element of both movement vocabularies whereby the dancer can experience the succession of each vertebra as they go down the spine. While rolling down the spine, it allows the dancer to discover the connection between the shoulders, arms, chest and pelvis. This concept is very important because only then will it be possible to begin to understand how the hands and arms move in relationship to the spine and pelvis. Therefore, it is clear the rolling down and up spine exercise at the

beginning of class is an essential key for all the more difficult sequential movement coordination happening throughout any Shifting Roots class.

The action of rolling down in a Limón and Shifting Roots class always starts with the top of the head moving forward and down by allowing the weight of the head to begin the process of rolling down. This is only possible by keeping the neck muscles relaxed. Feeling the weight of a part of the body means isolating it without tension and allowing it to surrender to gravity. While maintaining the feeling of opposite energies in the rest of the body, the head should feel as if it is hanging from a “high point” at the middle of the spine below the ribs and we should be able to feel the full weight of it. Using this weight, we keep rolling down vertebra by vertebra letting the shoulders and chest follow all the way to the point where pelvis remains over the feet. Keep the shoulders relaxed and feel as if the upper body is hanging comfortably from a high point.

In Shifting Roots AML, this point in our descent, is called our curve and can be referred to as our ‘home’. We will, many times, pass through and return to this point when moving through space yet, when rolling up and down through the spine we always pass through this ‘home’.

We keep rolling all the way down till the bottom of the spine and let the body hang. This is a complete successional rolling down. The sequence of rolling up starts from the bottom of the tailbone uncurling the spine vertebra by vertebra passing through our ‘home’ and continuing the roll back up to standing vertically. When rolling down to the side, the principle of successional rolling down and up is the same the only two differences are that we are taking the movement down to the side rather than forward and never go deeper than our ‘home’ curve where our pelvis can maintain in its natural position over the feet.

Fall, recovery, rebound and suspension

The initial exercise (pre-exercise) at every level of class involves the successional spine rolls. This exercise is a preparation for the rest of the training in each class. Besides understanding the concept of successional movement, this exercise helps the participants to understand other principles of Shifting Roots, like fall, recovery, rebound and suspension.

Just like in the context of Limón technique, as it is in Shifting Roots AML, our goal is to learn how to let different parts of the body fall independently from each other. Letting parts of the body fall through space means the complete release of the muscles surrounding the body part, allowing it to surrender its weight into gravity.

For example, in our pre-exercise, our head, shoulders, arms and chest fall forward or to the side while the pelvis remains over the feet. This is done in plié or straight leg. While letting the weight of the upper body fall, we create an opposite energy upwards by activating the core. This gives support to the legs receiving the falling body weight. The level of activation in the core directly relates to the speed and intensity of the fall. During this movement, energy is released from the opposition of the falling body and the reinforcing of the core activity. We call this - kinetic energy. We can use this energy to create momentum while moving and experience the quality of recovery or rebound.

Recovery is a pendulum like movement. It happens by releasing potential energy in a fall, gathering it in the bottom of the fall and continuing it in the same direction. For example, a torso swing consists of the falling body from one side to the other by way of the 'home' curve.

In a rebound, the bottom of the same kind of fall, collects energy and takes the movement to a new direction. This is possible when letting the muscles reach their limit of stretch during the fall and allowing them to naturally pull back to its fullest suspension. For both of these motions, our muscle system needs to be elastic.

The opposite of giving into gravity and fall is delaying the takeover of gravity and lengthening the highest point of our movement. This motion in both the Limón technique and the Shifting Roots AML is called suspension. By suspending a movement, a dancer can create the impression of a weighted body at the point before falling.

These are the basic principles and movement qualities which Shifting Roots AML inherits from the José Limón legacy. Even though the basic concepts of the foundation in both dance styles are coming from the same roots, Joe Alegado continues to follow these principles in a personal way by creating his own movement vocabulary.

Limón Based Classes: Differences And Similarities

The evolution of the José Limón technique has taken many diverse paths. In fact, José Limón wanted his dancers to follow their own dance journey. According to Carla Maxwell, former director of the José Limón Dance Company :

“He did not want his technique codified; he wanted it to grow and develop. There is no rigid, set Limón class and no two teachers will impart the movement principles in the same way. José was always encouraging people to find the dance that was in them; to find their own way and trust the creative process.”(Dunbar, 2003, quoted by Alegado, 2017, 10.)

In order for Limón’s wish to be fulfilled, each dancer doing his or her own work would have to possess a desire to choreograph. Not everyone working in the Limón tradition has had this desire, therefore, their work in class would not necessarily reflect an evolution based on a choreographic passion.

An example of this point is the difference between two former José Limón company members and how each, presently, teaches their class. Risa Steinberg and Joe Alegado were both members of the company during the early 1980’s. Each continue to teach extensively throughout the world and, even though each teaches the concepts and principles of the

Limón tradition, the character of their respective classes, differ in that Risa Steinberg continues using movement vocabulary taken from the Limón repertory, whereas Joe Alegado is drawing movement from whichever creative movement source he happens to be immersed in at the very moment he is creating class.

Each teacher maintains the integrity of the Limón tradition with its focus on the fall and the recovery of a body, the breath and suspension of a body in space and its inevitable fall and surrender to gravity. The differences begin when the momentum from these falling bodies, generates movement which either duplicates that which has been performed in Limón's traditional repertory or, when it generates movement from an original creative source.

Both are similar in that they follow and respect the concepts and principles of the Limón tradition yet, they differ when the choreographic factor is placed into the equation. One follows tradition, the other continues "*to find the dance that was in them*".(Dunbar, 2003, *quoted by Alegado, 2017, 10.*)

SHIFTING ROOTS

Shifting Roots - AML is the synthesis of a philosophy of movement with a set of principles and concepts which prepare the body, mind, heart and soul for the ultimate purpose of creating performance tools for expressing and communicating the human condition.

The atmosphere on class

In order for the synergy of all elements to be present within the studio, it is important to welcome the people to an environment of openness, curiosity and hard work. For this atmosphere to exist, every element of class is essential for supporting the learning environment, from the moment the dancers enter the space, to the moment we begin class.

Every class experience will be a little bit different, but our ideal situation is when we can offer a calm and natural open space where the dancers can prepare themselves and warm up before the beginning of class. The individual time before class gives us a chance to create a personal connection with them by getting to know all of their names. In this way, the energy for learning begins to circulate through the classroom not blocked by the traditional student/teacher barriers. Once this human connection is established, the environment opens up for a dialogue between teacher and student. In this way, giving personal corrections during class becomes more of a conversation about finding solutions to problems. Also, when the students hear each other's names being called out during corrections, it gives everyone the opportunity to get to know each other. This brings a positive social dynamic to the group, offering a platform for the dancers to share their ideas, new images and unique approaches while we are there to guide them through the journey of learning and discovery. At the same time, this approach gives us the possibility to learn from their experiences.

We sometimes build on this atmosphere by asking the people to correct each other and, in doing this, we are making them part of the teaching process. In many cases, they learn faster through the practical experience of visually seeing someone else's challenges and participating in the correction process.

As much as we are consciously trying to create a platform for good social dynamics in the group, it is there to support the main goal of class which is to discover how to listen to our bodies. When we are able to reach this level of sensitivity to our instrument, we can find and then free the pathways which will allow us to reconnect to our roots and our relationship to the ground we are standing on...our connection to the Earth. For us, as dancers, when learning a new movement language, it is of the highest importance to connect with the source of our movement. This connection can only be experienced through an open pathway between the physical body and the ground we stand on.

The role of music on class

One of the other very important components for creating the ideal environment, is the music used in class. The process of choosing the right music for each exercise goes way back to the moment before the creation of class begins. Joe Alegado spends a lot of time searching for music which he feels can make its way in through the body and straight to the origin of a movement. For him, a piece of music has to be able to begin in that place and, then, move outward in space to create a visual experience. When he finds this kind of music, he begins to improvise. The majority of the classes created by Joe Alegado have, as their foundation of movement, the initial experimentation and exploration of hands and arms. It is on this foundation of elements, where the Shifting Roots AML has as its origins.

The usual class structure has three exercises: pre-exercise, first exercise, second exercise. These three layers in the evolution of the class, lead to the final stage where all previous layers are brought together to create a choreography. Later on, I will write more about the structure of each exercise but for now, I would like to stay on the subject of the music used for each exercise.

The pre-exercise and the first exercise are similar in that they both require music which is meditative in nature and has a symmetrical musical structure. These qualities, in the beginning of class, allow the dancers the time and calming environment to apply new

information and sensations into their bodies. Since these two exercises include all the basic movement themes to be used throughout the entire class, it is very important to introduce them into the student's bodies in a patient, clear and organic way. It is the relationship between music and the movement language created for this music...where the distinct characteristics of the class methodology originate.

When all these basic movement principles are introduced to the students, the next goal is to take all of these elements and apply them while moving through space. The music chosen for the second exercise is usually faster and more dynamic. At this point, it is time for the students to take all the corrections from the initial two exercises and apply them to a foundation which is now shifting through space.

The music for the choreography, depends on all the elements which have led from the beginning of class, to the start of the choreography. Joe Alegado tries to get a sense of which direction each exercise music takes in the evolution of class. Since the music inspires the movement material for each of the exercises, each class will then have its own movement character. Sometimes the resulting choreography will have a quiet flow, other times it will take a powerful and energetic direction. Yet, regardless of the direction the choreography takes at the end of every class, each will have its roots reaching back and down to its origin – the music.

Arm and hand gestures

Arm movements and hand gestures are not only an essential part of the class creation, they are also the movements which are the most recognizable characteristics of Shifting Roots AML. Many of the gestures Joe Alegado uses come from an activity in life which are directly related to his somatic movement experiences in his past. Some of these gestures' origin are: holding a ball with two hands, throwing a ball, digging a hole in the earth for planting, or taking sand into one hand and releasing it back to the ground. The physical sensations of these memories inspire the beginning of hand and arm sequences which,

consequently, form the thematic movement material for the evolution of the entire class from the beginning exercises through their progression into the choreography at the end of class.

Each arm gesture can initiate a sequential path of movement by sending impulses to different body parts. By listening to these impulses and letting the body parts react, a chain reaction is set into motion from that very first initial gestural impulse. These successive movements started by the impulse of a hand gesture, can happen in relationship to a swinging torso, the rolling up or down of the spine and is, most always, reflected in the pelvis shift as well as the plié responding to the needs of the hand/arm gesture.

Another aspect between hand and arm gestures and the rest of the body is the individual role the spine plays. For example, if the head is rolling down the spine or the torso is swinging from one side to the other, there should be no disturbance of the spine by the hand/arm gesture. Conversely, the work and activity of the spine should not interfere with the hand/arm gesture. This isolation of different parts of the body plays an important role in the overall interplay within the body when creating and expressing through hand and arm gestures.

In order to fulfill all the possibilities of movement which an arm gesture has to offer, we need to be able to shift in space smoothly. Such a shift is only possible when supported by a generous plié. This plié must be able to receive the weight of different falling body parts and, at the same time, allow the pelvis to glide through space.

The level of difficulty of an arm gesture sequence is determined by the level of class being prepared. When forming the basis for a Beginner class, the right and left arms are, most always, doing the same thing. In addition to the basic hand and arm gestures, more texture can be added with the use of simple arm movements like the swinging of arms from a crossed position in front, to an open second position.

In the case of simple arm swings to the side, the release of tension in the shoulders can separate our arms from the rest of the body. This action lets them move, fall and swing freely. By achieving this separation between the arms and the rest of the body, we can allow our body to play different rhythms between the many body parts.

For example, a swing of the arms can happen on top of a slow plié or it can happen supported by two shorter plies. Such a coordination is already difficult for most of the people, therefore, in the beginner levels we try not to overcomplicate class by making the arm movements too complex but rather, to go for simple gestures in order to make sure the basic principles of release and fall can sink deeper into the dancers bodies.

When the dancers have mastered this, we can move to the next level. In an Intermediate class, we can work with the same gestures from a beginner class but this time applying the idea of a canon. As each arm performs the same movement at different times, the skeletal structure reacts in a more asymmetrical way. When this is applied to a pelvis shifting in space, the entire movement coordination becomes more complex.

An example of this would be the gesture of digging a hole in front of the pelvis with both hands. By adding a plié to this movement, we must discover how to coordinate this canon of arms with the plié. In the case of doing a canon of arms with the same hand gesture, each hand must reach the bottom point of the digging action yet, it will only be the second hand in the canon which must coordinate with the bottom of the plié.

The entire process begins by starting the canon with the first arm coordinating with the beginning of the plié. While the second hand is following right behind, the plié is timed to reach the bottom when the second hand reaches the bottom. It is at this point when the first hand begins to move the body out of plié to continue the evolution upward.

In the Advanced class level, the two arms start to meet in a dialogue of movement with each responding to the other. This connection can be physical (one hand moving the other), or it can be one hand reacting to the other hand without touching (like throwing and

imaginary ball from one hand to the other). Either way, the interaction between the two hands have the potential of transforming a simple dialogue, into a physical movement reaction which, in turn, creates a more complicated coordination of the entire body.

Class creation process and class structure

I started to take Joe Alegado's classes at the age of fifteen. At the age of seventeen, I began to work with him as an assistant in some of his workshops. The evolution of my learning process went hand in hand with the number of workshops I participated in throughout that initial period of my education. In other words, I was learning through the experience of taking classes and working through the process of applying the concepts and principals of his methodology, to actual physical knowledge.

At first, my role in class was very simple. I learned the movement material before class and then I would stand in front of the dancers in order to offer them a support system while they learned the movement sequences.

In the beginning of my studies with Joe Alegado, his class structure was similar to that of a ballet class. Because ballet was the foundation of his initial dance training, he followed the natural evolution of a ballet class: the plié, the tendu/ronde jambe, stretch and choreography at the end of class.

The first exercise was done for the same purpose as it is done now: allowing the mind and body to find a calm state of being. The meditative quality applied to the rolling up and down of the head along the spine is the basic foundation for the characteristic layering of hands and arms forming the thematic movement material of the class structure.

In the initial years of my work with him, the movement coordination between hands/arms and spine, was applied to the plié in parallel, first and second positions. After each position,

a short sequence on the floor would be used as, not only a transition to the next position but also, to allow the student the opportunity to establish a deeper relationship with the floor. By approaching the transitional floor work from this perspective, the student was given the opportunity to experience a moment with the body in direct contact with the earth. From this connection, the student would then gradually make their way up from the floor in preparation for the next position. This state of total surrender to gravity cleared the mind and helped prepare the body for experiencing a moment of total rest. It also allowed the student to learn the very important lesson of how to regulate the body's energies as it traveled from standing, to moving on the floor, to returning to the standing position and, finally, moving out through space.

During these first few workshops, I was able to make considerable progress within the movement language. He grew confident enough in my abilities to where he asked me to assist him in the actual creation of the floor work sequences.

The purpose of the second exercise was to use the movement material from the first exercise and apply it to a shifting body in space. One application of this would be the shifting of the pelvis from one foot to the other while doing a variation of tendus and developpés. Even further, the coordination of hands and arms on top of a pelvis shifting between two feet, already requires the dancer's ability to multitask; yet, to fulfill the coordination of hands and arms, on one leg, as the body is moving through space...requires a highly developed level of coordination.

Both of these exercises remained facing to the front and, very rarely, did they move around in space. The main reason for that was to make it easier for the dancers to see and follow the exercises throughout the class. Since the exercises were usually very long (especially in the case of the first exercise which was repeated in each position), having me in the front to assist, allowed the students to feel more confident. Consequently, this sense of confidence from the students, created a more open environment for learning.

After several years of working together, I started to become more and more involved in the creative process. As I started to feel the movement language deep inside my bones, the preparation for class became more and more of a research and collaboration between the two of us. It was at this point when the Shifting Roots AML stopped being something I simply learned, it also became a part of me, as I became a part of it.

Joe Alegado has always been very open to positive influences entering into his work. The fact that my contemporary dance background was different from his modern dance education, did not

bother him. In reality, this difference inspired him with ideas which led him into new territory, new directions.

The structure of the exercises started to change as the movement language continued to grow and evolve. This evolution reached the point in which he felt the desire and the need to distinguish between his personal evolution in dance and his work with the José Limón tradition. It was at this point, when he decided to categorize his work as a language by naming it the Alegado Movement Language. Few years later, going even deeper in support of this constant change, he chose to further define his work. The search for a name to best describe the origin of his work, has taken him back to his feeling of our human connections, back to our roots as beings moving through this earth.

"In my desire to distinguish the differences between my personal evolution in dance and my work with the José Limón tradition, I chose to categorize my work as a language - the Alegado Movement Language. This was to give more substance to the fact that the foundation of all my somatic experiences since childhood to the present, have contributed to the movement vocabulary in my dance.

Going further, and even deeper...below this somatic foundation...are the roots which extend further down into the very soul of our Earth.

And because, we as humans, are in constant movement through the Earth's landscape, I have chosen to further define my work. From this point forward, the term: Shifting Roots - the Alegado Movement Language.....will serve as the light guiding the road ahead." (Joe Alegado, 2019)

One of the influences from contemporary dance was the opening up and use of the space. While creating the exercises, we did not think of only facing the front but, instead, started to research how and where the impulse of the arm gestures would naturally move us. As a result of this exploration, the pelvis gained more freedom in determining where it would end up in space. This freedom of the pelvis led us to facing different directions which, in turn, created the need to restructure the first exercise.

In other words, since the creation of the first exercise was no longer oriented to the goal of passing through parallel, first and second position, the pelvis was now free to be influenced by the impulse of the hands and arms, to whichever direction felt most natural. The movement of the spine and pelvis in relationship to the receptive plié, coordinated with the thematic hand gestures, has become the synergetic collaboration of movement which characterizes the first exercise of every class in his work today.

The second exercise has also changed its goal of being a "tendu" exercise and, instead, has become the next step in the evolution of synergy between the body parts explored in the first exercise. At this point in the class, the goal is to move in space. By letting the arm gestures serve as the catalyst for moving the body structure through space, a more complex and advanced shifting of weight starts to take shape. The amount of space covered, the variation of different dynamics and the difficulty of all body parts in total coordination, has begun to expand more and more at this stage of the class structure.

Since his thematic arm movements have become the initiator of the creative process for constructing the class, taking this idea into the creation of the floor work, has become my responsibility. Using his hand and arm movements as impulses, I use the same concept to research its application on the floor. Each hand and arm sequence has the capacity to take

the body through its most natural pathways on the floor. In following this concept, we have been able to establish a relationship between what is done standing, to what is being done on the floor.

By establishing this connection between the floor work and the standing part of a given exercise, we have made it easier for the dancers to understand the mechanics of the movement language in general. As it is with the standing part of class, so it is with the floor - the goal is to free the body of unnecessary tension. The releasing of tension in our articulations allows us to experience freedom and mobility in the arms, legs and head which, in turn, allows the students to experience the true weight of these body parts. By having a body free of unnecessary tension and by using the resulting true weight of the different body parts, we can use this weight to create the momentum and energy to move on the floor with minimum effort.

The muscular system plays a very vital role while standing as well as while working on the floor. The release of tension in the articulations, allows body parts to have their true weight. In order to compensate for this weight falling, we must create an energy equal, in strength and resilience, to the activation of the core towards the opposite direction.

When moving through the floor, the key is to supply only the strength necessary. One extreme would be to use too much muscle. This could result in a body unable to move smoothly through the floor. The other extreme would be to apply an insufficient amount of muscle making it more likely that the body collapses to the floor because of not having enough support.

Finding the perfect balance between being free of unnecessary tension in the body and the true weight it produces and, the quality and use of the muscular system, places the body in a state where there is freedom to play with hand and arm sequences. Once this freedom is achieved, it is easier for the body to be influenced by an impulse coming from any source: the hands and arms, the head, ribs or the feet.

When all exercises are created from the same principles and with the same roots, there is more coherence in class structure. With reference to the new class structure, exercises are evolving in an organic way. One exercise leads to the next one which, in turn, leads to the next one and onward until the end of class. In this case, the beginning of the class is the stone foundation which supports the entire process in the methodology of class because it establishes all the principles and concepts of what is to follow.

The Shifting Roots AML stone foundation is: *"...in its simplest manifestation, the combined weight of the pelvis and head falling in unison, hitting bottom at the same time, is directly and proportionately related to the muscular resistance required to support the plié with elasticity and strength in the moment of impact on the floor."* (Joe Alegado, 2017, 66.) On top of this stone foundation, we build the thematic hand and arm movement material and, step by step, we take this foundation and move it through space all the way to the choreography at the end of class.

The stronger the foundation, the more we can build on top. It is with this in mind, that it is very important for dancers, who seek to learn Shifting Roots AML, to understand the head-pelvis relationship in coordination with a receptive plié. The adding of a layer of thematic arms on top of this principle often disrupts the dancers mind and challenges their ability to multitask. In order to later fulfill the potential of each hand gesture, the dancer first needs to feel confident about providing an open channel through the spinal column in order for the head to initiate the process of rolling down and back up through each vertebrae of the spine. This, in turn, allows the hands and arms to have a clean passage to move freely.

Beginning with the first exercise all the way through the entire process of class, there are so many small details which are very important and essential for the full understanding of the complex coordination of different parts of the body. Because of this, it was decided it would be a good idea to create a simpler exercise which would precede the more difficult and detailed foundation of the first exercise. This beginning was named: the pre-exercise.

This pre-exercise contains basic spine rolls, the torso moving in circles, as well as simple pliés without the very complex hand and arm gestures. This allows the student time to prepare their leg strength and elasticity to get ready to receive the weight of the head, the pelvis and the skeletal structure in general. In the class creation process, the pre-exercise is created at the very end of the class. After the construction of the full arc of the class, we peel away the layers of difficulty all the way to the “bones” of the movement until the only thing which remains...is the essential and simpler, pre-exercise.

The evolution of the pre-exercise and the first exercise, together with the consequent development of the second exercise, serve as the ultimate goal of class: gaining the necessary physical tools for dance performance. The exercises, which are developed in a step by step process, come together in their final transformation – the choreography. All the slow and detailed work in the beginning of class, is a preparation for the dancers to go beyond the idea of exercises and, instead, to go into the experience of finding the magical, within the simplest of exercises and to, ultimately, transmit this magic into the choreography at the end of class.

PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS AND METHODS

Shifting Roots AML is a very complex, detailed movement language which challenges the dancers ability to multitask on different levels. To gain a physical and mental understanding of its principles, time and practice is required.

Most of the time while working with Joe Alegado, we are teaching workshops where all the information we want to give about Shifting Roots AML has to fit into a three day weekend workshop. To squeeze in such detailed work into a few days, is very challenging. The method of learning requires patience and self-awareness from the dancer. There are different ways we can help the dancers make the learning process smoother while, at the same time, being educational.

Repetition

As I mentioned before, the exercises in class are constructed step by step. All the information the dancers receive and learn in an exercise, will help them when they apply it to the following exercise. In the beginning of class, all information is new. As we progress towards the end of the class, the student will discover there is less and less new information to learn. The reason for this is: all of the movement language is presented in the first two exercises. From this point forward, the dancers will learn how to best utilize the coordination of the thematic hand and arm movements with the shifting of the pelvis. The evolution and variation of this movement material is the process by which the student will learn how to sharpen strong performance tools for the future.

The time we spend learning a new task is directly proportional to the amount and the difficulty of new information. Therefore, the beginning of class is slow and meditative with a high amount of repetition. Towards the end of class, when the dancers begin to get more familiar with the thematic movement language, the flow of class becomes more dynamic, creating an easier transition to the development of movement variations for the next level.

Another reason for repetition in class is to eliminate fear. Therefore, it is important to repeat movement which requires the student to leave their comfort zone. One simple example of trying to eliminate this fear is when we give an exercise which requires the rolling of the head down the spine, without tension in the neck and without looking at the floor. As so often happens, the feeling of being lost and the fear of falling, creates doubt and insecurity in our mind, consequently, we look at the floor because of fear. This simple exercise at the beginning of class, done very slowly and repeated many times, begins the process of giving them the sense of security when falling through space and landing on the floor.

The next logical step is to have them repeat the same movement falling onto a plié on two feet. This progresses into having them fall onto one foot. Slowly, as the dancer gets accustomed to falling through space onto a secure plié, their level of confidence grows to the point where more difficult movement material can be introduced.

The final step is to get the student to the point where they are so secure in their plié that they will be willing to take more risks with difficult movement variations such as torso and arm coordination added to turns and jumps. When the dancer has learned to trust their plié, they are more free to take chances as well as more open to expressing a wider variety of human emotions. Ultimately, this gives them the potential for a more dynamic expression of any movement material.

Visualization

The opposition of vertical energies – one, in the form of a visualized energy moving upwards from the ground / the other, the true weight of the body surrendering to gravity and falling back to earth - is part of our everyday life. In dance, this opposition plays out on a much bigger scale of difficulty.

When referring to dance, the extremes of this opposition, exists on a much bigger scale of difficulty. We, as dancers, are consciously challenging ourselves to play with gravity. Our

visualization and tangible application of these opposite energies is essential to a dancer's journey from the beginning of our education to the performance stage.

Concerning Shifting Roots AML, a basic example of this opposition exists between the interplay of head and pelvis in contrast to the visualized energy traveling from the ground and up through the spine in a continuous line upward. The head rolling down the spine in surrender to gravity, is directly related to the oppositional energy traveling upward generated by the core muscles. Both of these energies are assisted by other factors.

When we can feel the actual, physical weight of the head falling as it relates to the weight of the falling tailbone, then we can coordinate their impact on the floor. In contrast, when we can generate a proportional power upward through the activation of the core muscles, we can use this power as we visualize its continual energy rising.

When both these oppositional energies are brought into harmony, then we begin to discover the true meaning of a plié and the invaluable role it plays in our dancing.

To create this internal image between the different parts of the body, the dancers need to find the path of movement in their muscles and how they connect. Then, they can search for an image that expresses the quality of this connection within their body. The internal interconnectivity of the muscle structure can be made to respond to an external image by applying visualization tools. For example, when throwing a ball against a wall, the body's structures, both muscular and skeletal, have to respond to the energy of the ball returning, in order to time the catch perfectly.

Finding visual images (both internal or external) can help in the early stages of learning to define the quality, rhythm, shape and overall pattern of a movement. Once the dancers have experienced and learned the movement in the correct way, muscle memory can take over as these visualizations will be functioning more in the subconscious. We have found that one visual image does not always work for everyone so, therefore, we always try to inspire the students to discover their own.

Practicing to both sides

In Shifting Roots AML we apply different levels of bilateral coordination based on the level of the thematic arm gesture. Bilateral coordination is the ability to use the right and left sides of the body at the same time, with the same movement on each side or with different, alternating movements. Starting with the beginner level where both of the hands are doing the same thing, we move on to the intermediate level where we introduce the canon of hands (one hand following the other) and, finally, to the advanced level where the two arms are each doing different movements. All these variations of possible coordination are challenging and improving the dancers ability to multitask. In order to train the body symmetrically we teach all the exercises to both sides.

Most times we have the dancers transfer an exercise from one side to the other. In this way, the dancer begins the exploration of how best to achieve this. If they become confused, we encourage them to review the side they already know by breaking it down and applying it, step by step, to the other side. In time, the dancers can become more self-sufficient in finding solutions to problems as they deepen their knowledge of the side they originally learned.

Giving corrections

During the teaching of each exercise, we spend a lot of time clearing up the characteristics and patterns of each movement. It is very important for us to create an environment where knowledge is being shared. We try to offer them the information necessary to make intelligent, intuitive decisions of their own. Our goal is to guide them through the process of learning how to learn and how to discover for themselves. There are times a student will require more help. It is in this instance where we offer more concrete corrections. To achieve this open environment for learning, we prefer to show the dancers different options and alternatives in order to make their movement more efficient, rather than tell them their way of moving is wrong.

Since everyone is different in their approach to movement, it is important for a teacher to

determine whether a student is having a hard time executing a movement because of not understanding what the movement is or, if it is a matter of insecurity and fear. By insecurity and fear, we mean to say that a dancer might have a difficult time with a movement phrase because of the fear of falling. The natural response of the body to protect itself will be activated when a dancer is not sure of what they are doing.

Therefore, in a case such as this, we approach it by offering options and alternatives for solving the problem. There are times, the dancer needs help in correcting specific movement, for example, hand and arm gesture coordination. Once they are more confident in the actual movement language, then they are able to move forward to the next movement.

Most times, insecurity in moving through space originates in the moment of transition from one movement to another. When there is uncertainty, insecurity and fear in a dancer while moving, it is most always their confusion in the moment of transitioning and connecting to the next movement.

There are times the simplest of adjustments can make a difference in whether a student understands a movement or not. This is why we examine whether a student's posture or alignment might be creating an obstacle in their understanding of a particular movement. If the student has patience and the will to go through a period of feeling awkward in this new alignment or posture, then, through persistence, they can adapt to the new sensation in their body and develop it into a new awareness of body alignment and function.

There is no wrong way to execute a movement yet, there are options and alternatives to finding solutions to movement difficulties. Sometimes it is an adjustment here and tweak there which will help the student discover, on their own, a solution to the difficulty. There is never a time when it should be necessary to negatively attack a student for a problem they might be having. Offering support by sharing knowledge, proposing alternatives and having an open dialogue to problem solving, will go a long way in the development of an independent mind searching for solutions to movement problems.

Improvisation

We have been exploring ways of including the tools of improvisation into the class structure. The reason for this is to give space for individual approaches in the process of understanding the principles of Shifting Roots AML.

One of the areas where we have utilized the tools of improvisation for helping the dancer achieve a deeper understanding in movement, is in the process of finding the connection between the abdominal muscles and the spine in order to create support for movement. Since everybody is different in shape, strength and mobility and, through Joe's desire to have the dancers strengthen their cores, he asked me to create an exercise where the dancers can search for this connection in their bodies in their own rhythm.

The idea of the exercise is very simple. It starts with the student lying down on their back. I begin to guide them in discovering how to activate the deep abdominal muscles and their connection to each vertebra, as they use their breath to support this search. Once this connection is discovered and applied, we slowly start to improvise moving our arms, legs and head to explore how the activation of the core can free and support these body parts in movement. By increasing the dynamics and area of the movement through improvisation, the dancers can discover the level of intensity at which the core has to be activated in order to move fluidly through space. By improvising their own journeys from lying on the ground to standing and by using only the necessary core activity to move them through the floor, the dancers will have the opportunity to discover for themselves how they can apply these connections to the thematic exercises of Shifting Roots AML.

The characteristic hand gestures used in the AML is what often creates difficulty for the students, therefore, another possibility Joe Alegado wishes to continue exploring is the use of improvisation within the context of having the dancers feel the surface of a shoulder, a head, a knee or any other of the multitude of parts of the human body. By having the student improvise these moments of contact and touch, they can then begin to accumulate tangible, physical sensations of what it means to hold and feel something in their hands.

When they are able to retrieve these sensations from their physical memory files, they will then be able to experience the weight, the energy and the density of whatever it is they are trying to simulate in their movement. This gives the movement more authenticity.

In order to practice the sensation of throwing, grabbing, pushing, pulling, we experiment with the dancer's gestures in physical contact with each other. During this exploration, the person being touched should move only if the impulse from the other person creates a real effect on their bodies. As a result of this exercise, the dancers can get a different and deeper perspective on how the thematic hand and arm movements function. With this understanding they are better able to apply these impulses more honestly when moving by themselves.

Sometimes we have applied this concept to the choreography at the end of class. By using the idea of physical contact, we are able to use these moments of improvisational contact to transition between one period of fixed material to another. This moment of transition can take place between two or more persons, giving them the opportunity for new experiences as they move through the process of class.

This development in the methodology creates a playful platform where the dancers get a chance to break out of their individual application of concepts and principles, while they learn valuable lessons in movement transition, authenticity in the art of the gesture and the overall creation of performance tools.

CONCLUSION

The methodological process which Shifting Roots - Alegado Movement Language has gone through in the past ten years, has been a natural evolution in the search for a synthesis of a philosophy of movement with a set of principles guiding the process in class. This research has resulted in the discovery of a method of education which has as its ultimate goal – the creation of a methodology which will not only help a dancer in body, mind, heart and soul in the attainment of performance tools, but will also prepare them for expressing and communicating the human condition.

To "give a voice to all that is inside in order to say firmly and clearly to all who can hear, see and feel". (Joe Alegado, 2017)

Every time a step was taken in the exploration of the depths of Shifting Roots AML, it opened other doors and created new pathways within the movement language. With every excess layer removed from the creation of class, new information revealed itself. By feeling the winds of change, adjustments were made to reshape and refine the work as it took us closer to better identifying the components of Shirting Roots AML, consequently, allowing these components to guide the work towards further evolution.

Even though the basic concepts of the foundation of his work were deeply rooted in the Limón legacy, Joe Alegado remained true to his convictions by following the impulses of his unique movement characteristics and further distinguishing his work from the José Limón dance technique.

The synergetic collaboration of movement of the spine, torso and pelvis in relationship to the receptive plié, coordinated with the unique hand and arm gestures, is where the Shifting Roots AML had its origins.

Being committed to the Alegado Movement Language from the moment I first started to take classes ten years ago, to being part of the process of it becoming Shifting Roots AML, was also a journey in which I was able to find my own approach to teaching dance. Being guided by the founder of his own movement language and receiving the gift of possibility for the future, I realized I now had the foundation to invest in my own creativity and passion for dance. The relationship between me and Shifting Root AML will remain with me forever. The evolution of the Alegado Movement Language directly corresponds to my own evolution as a dancer, teacher and performer. And, because of it, I will be able to teach it with a true and honest voice.

The journey of our collaboration continues...

REFERENCES

Alegado, Joe., (2017) *A trajectory in dance - Evolution of the Alegado Movement Language* (thesis), Budapest, Contemporary Dance Academy, Available at: http://tanc.org.hu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/JOE_ALEGADO_MA-2017.pdf
(access: 2020.01.18)

Alegado, Joe, (2019) (*note on his facebook page on the 18th February*), Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/joe.alegado.5/posts/10156421063808409>
(access: 2019.02.20.)

Lewis, Daniel (1999) *The Illustrated Dance Technique of José Limón*, New Jersey: Princeton Book Company