

CLAIN PILATES+



“First train the mind, then train the body!”

Joseph Pilates believed in the power of the mind over the body. I have come to believe that each muscle system has its own intelligence. Mind Body Intelligence.

Ann came to me for Pilates training and was really looking to strengthen her core for pain relief and tighten her waist. As a child she had contracted Polio and as a result her lower right leg muscles had never fully formed and were atrophied. She had a limp in her gait as she had to move about by lifting her right leg with her hip and pelvis, sometimes requiring the use of a cane. She also had scoliosis from this gait pattern which caused pain in her back and side. She had no hopes for her lower leg.

Ann was surprised to hear me say that we should concentrate on her lower leg. She had long ago accepted her condition and was resigned to it. We began with the footwork on the Reformer. I explained to her that even though she had little response in her lower leg muscles that she should visualize them moving in the way I directed. We tried to tap her foot while standing, which was very difficult for her, as at first as she would lose her balance.

I was very persistent to encourage her to keep her thoughts committed to her lower leg throughout our work out. Plantar Flexion and Dorsal Flexion (foot pointing and flexing) was very difficult, but we continued throughout the session.

Within five weeks of working out twice a week (10 sessions) she was delighted to be driving a car for three hours. Before this she did not have the strength in her right foot to use the gas and brake pedals for so long a period.

After six months she dropped down to one session a week and we continued to note significant progress. She performed the side series

on the table, which was difficult to perform on her right side as she could hardly lift her leg. With time and practice she gained the strength to fight gravity. She got stronger.

Mind Body Intelligence

Throughout her sessions I instructed Ann to visualize her muscles, showing her pictures of fully formed muscles. Often I would palpitate or tap her lower leg where the muscles respond. This was to stimulate her nervous system to locate and develop new neural pathways. My understanding of Pilates' method was that the brain controls the body in all ways. The nervous system will respond to the individual's thoughts and drive the body's muscles to perform. The prior nerve damage had necessitated developing new neural pathways for the lower leg.

Within the year of working this way her lower leg developed mass, Ann was limping less and had less back pain. She had become much more capable physically in other areas of her daily life.

Exercise works! The benefits of practice allow form to follow function helping to form muscle mass on her shin and calf that had not been there previously.

Instructor's Intention

During the workout I would include in my focus Ann's lower leg muscles. My intention being to communicate to them in a comforting and reassuring manner. This was all silently in my mind, however, occasionally I would express this to Ann verbally.

Ann would humor me, struggling to perform what I would ask of her. We would try swinging her toe to the left or right and she would do her best to perform the movement. In time this became much easier for her.

She would often say that she still can't do this or that. My response would be that she is still doing more than she did before, and she would agree. I always kept it playful which kept her thoughts on a positive track.

My goal was to support what was working and reward her leg unit as a whole for doing such a good job. Toes foot, ankle, leg, knee, thigh, and the neuromuscular system which allowed the information of direction, control, sense of balance, place in space, and effort. The reward would be the communication itself to the atrophied muscles. As Ann had long ago given up on her lower leg, she did not bother to try to communicate with it anymore, she shut it out of her consciousness.

I was set on having her change neglect to a positive feeling or intention that would reopen her lines of communication.

The Mind -Body Intelligence is a wonderful mechanism designed to heal, improve and strengthen. The survival of the mechanism as a whole depends upon this.

My role as her instructor was to reintroduce and mediate between Ann and the intelligence

of her lower leg, not just mechanically but also intuitively. This way her lower leg unit could reintegrate with the rest of her.

Reawakening the possibility of recovery was the first step! A step that must be addressed before progress can continue, otherwise we would be working in conflict with her lower leg intelligence. How much more desirable to enlist the aid of her lower leg by treating it with respect?

This is a part of my core belief system, that the body wants to heal itself and that each organ has an individual consciousness.

Romana, my first teacher, always said that she believed Joe was a healer. Later on while studying with Irene Dowd, Master Anatomist and Movement Instructor, I heard her say that correct movement will heal and that movement depended upon communication. I had to ask her to repeat this because I did not understand it at the time. I believe that the Mind's Intention is integral in practice when communicating with the body to perform healing movement.

The reformer and its springs are an incredible laboratory for clients to experience parts of themselves that had been forgotten or neglected for whatever the reason. Then they can call upon these parts to perform in everyday life.

As instructors our precise intention is required for each exercise, each movement, and each muscle group. To pay attention to the needs of the body before us. I remind myself to look at the body before me with fresh eyes.

I always asked more of Ann than she thought she could do because she would be challenged mentally to create the pathway. As she did this I would hold focused intentions from my lower leg intelligence to communicate to her lower leg intelligence.

This is similar to teaching clients while standing in Pilates Stance. We are communicating with our powerhouse to the client's powerhouse.

Simply put concentration can be catchy!

If we focus on the clients need the client will receive benefit from the attention whether spoken aloud or just received passively. They may not even be aware of what the instructor is doing or saying. They will however feel a benefit they will attribute to Pilates and working with their instructor.

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