Training my mind at school

EDUCATIONAL KIT: PART II
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INTRODUCTION

This educational kit has grown out of the *The Mind Makes a Champion* exhibition, which explores the mental journey of athletes (Olympic Museum, 23 November to 2 September 2007). However, it is not a visitor pack, and can be consulted independently¹.

Drawing on sports psychology, the aim of this kit is to *identify six mental processes worked on by athletes, then enable their transfer into a school environment*. In their learning methods, pupils can in fact have recourse to skills similar to those used by sportspeople in their preparation: understanding their motivation, coping with stress, using protective thoughts, programming actions through visualisation, knowing how to focus attention and setting themselves useful objectives.

These skills, which do not form an exhaustive list, are of course already taken into account in schools – this kit does not claim to be making up for something which is missing! Instead, it proposes using the example of sport to tackle specifically some abstract and at times difficult to grasp notions. Through a theoretical approach and different activities, pupils embark on a journey to find out about the mental training of athletes and so come to *identify* the mental skills necessary for learning, whatever kind of learning that may be. They are then invited to transpose them *into the school environment* and *compare them with their own way of working*.

To help introduce the themes into the classroom, teachers are offered a description of each skill and the basic notions relating to it. Theoretical developments enable them to take things further, if necessary.

This kit has been produced thanks to the contributions of various authors from the fields of psychology, sports psychology and education. For those pupils who may be less receptive to sporting examples, accounts from performing artists offer a glimpse into mental preparation in the world of the arts.

¹ A visitor pack aimed at helping teachers and students to discover the exhibition is available on the website www.olympic.org/education

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Practical information

This kit is intended for pupils aged 12 – 16. The presentation of the six mental skills follows no chronological order. The teacher is free to choose and deal with the subjects in accordance with the priorities he/she identifies.

In relation to each skill, the following is provided:

A theoretical approach (intended for the teacher):

Section I - Description of the mental skill in question and fundamental notions inspired by sports psychology
Section II² - Taking things further: theoretical developments and the perspective of educational science.

An activities sheet (intended for the pupil):

Section III - Description of the subject
- Activities which help to identify and understand the skill

The activities can be carried out collectively or individually. Questions are open and do not involve true or false answers. They simply aim to encourage thought and discussion in class.

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¹ Theoretical developments are put forward where appropriate, not for each skill.
ATHLETES AND MENTAL TRAINING

While it is relatively easy to picture the physical preparation phases sportspeople go through before a high-level competition, this isn’t the case with regard to mental preparation. What does it involve? How do you prepare a state of mind? How do you work on concentration or stress management?

**Mental training**

Mental training consists of systematically applying strategies which enable greater control of the psychological factors associated with a performance.

Many athletes use mental preparation techniques, learned through experience, on the advice of their coach or following consultation with specialists in mental preparation in sport. Who has never seen skiers at the start, eyes closed, visualising their route before launching themselves onto the course? Or a team huddling together, joining hands and shouting encouragement at the start of a match? These are simple examples which illustrate the role of the mind in competitive sport.

**The role of the mind in sport**

*From the viewpoint of Jérôme Nanchen, sports psychologist*

According to popular belief, top-level performance is the result of a “positive mental state”. “Mentally he’s really strong”, we say about somebody who successfully confronts a competitive situation. Such expressions conjure up an image of an individual who has developed abilities which enable him to manage, even control, unconscious fears, detrimental thoughts, unfavourable events... as well as everyday worries, all in the full glare of the media, for those at the highest level of sporting achievement.

To talk about the "mind" in this way is somewhat simplistic: it confines athletes to their sporting identity and detaches them from the preoccupations they share with all human beings: responding to the requirements of their environment, thinking about their personal development, achieving a certain quality of life. In other words, if the mental journey of sportspeople does have specific features – associated with the objectives they set themselves –, it is, for all that, still dotted with worries peculiar to each one.

Top-level athletes distinguish themselves mentally by constant affirmations of their motivation, the presentation of their bodies (specific morphology, clothing, sponsors’ advertising) and the assertion of their personality as an athlete (expressed through the action and values of competition: surpassing oneself, winning, conquering, etc.).

Athletes learn to work on their minds: it is a resource which is necessary for performance, a course which they must follow to achieve their objectives. Through the “mental” training they follow, athletes develop potential and skills, in order to acquire the extraordinary qualities required to face up to situations which are out of the ordinary: athletes symbolically play out their lives in a match or in a tenth of a second.

Sports psychologists intervene at two levels: they initiate and conduct the psychological supervision of the athlete (work on motivation, objectives, life events and self-confidence) and organise the mental training (management of stress and thoughts, concentration, activation control, visualisation). Everyone practises “mental gestures” on a daily basis, to different degrees. As for athletes, they super-invest in them, seeking answers to anxiety, means for their ambitions, a name for their “ills”, and... room for life as a human being.
To talk about the mental process in sport, we thought it judicious to present an athlete whose practice is solitary. That solitude symbolises the personal, even intimate, approach involved in the mental task. The experience brought to you here – one among many others, of course – is enlightening and a useful basis for the rest of the kit.

“Alone in making decisions”
Athletics requires a great deal of autonomy: being on your own and having to give your best. This requires great psychological stability, great assurance, a perfect understanding of yourself and contextual intelligence, as you are often alone when making crucial decisions, and in the space of a hundredth of a second too.

“My commitment? A quest for pleasure”
There are two types of essential motivation for explaining commitment in a sport. The first is based on the quest for a state of better well-being, or even deferred happiness which is associated with the acquisition of the status of a champion. In this approach, the task of learning is agreed to and experienced with more or less pleasure, and therefore more or less sacrifice, as an investment for a future which is assumed to be better.

The second is based on the quest for pleasure, or even instantaneous happiness associated with a practice. The latter may combine pleasure from the senses, social pleasure, intellectual pleasure, and so on.

So, work and learning are carried out and experienced as recreational activities. I came into athletics for these latter reasons. Then, grafted onto the pleasure of racing came the pleasure of puzzling over and building something through sporting competition. Finally, I think that the feeling of control and the capacity for action over your own life obtained through a sporting career contributed a lot to my motivation.

Having started my top-level career the day after the Ben Johnson affair in 1988, I always wanted to know how far I could go on my own, and to prove myself and to as many people as possible, that I could go a very long way without resorting to doping. Later on, some journalists, on the day after I placed third in the 1995 world championships – where I could have expected better –, floated the idea that my nice side, my lack of “killer” instinct would keep me from being world champion one day. From that moment on, I wanted to prove that hate was not the only driving force behind success, and that personal demand could be at least as effective. Such intrinsic motivations have always been essential to me. I have always felt the financial and media parameters of my practice to be more or less fortunate consequences.

“I wanted to express what I felt myself capable of”
In top-level competition, my sole objective was to show 100% of what I felt myself capable of. While trying to estimate as accurately as possible my adversaries’ potential of, I knew that this “100%” was what would enable me to be on the podium or not, to be first or not.

The prime quality of an athlete (and of his/her coach) must be to evaluate, as accurately as possible, what time, potential and skills (internal and external) he or she possesses in order to define an objective, in a given competitive context (it too being evaluated as accurately as possible). This process is repeated throughout a career.

Two sub-objectives appear each time: setting yourself suitable objectives (accessible but not too accessible, demanding but not too demanding, realistic and not demotivating) and being right on the day. They are the only fields of excellence and performance which you can have an influence on as

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3 Ben Johnson was found guilty of doping after winning the final of the 100m at the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988 (he had created a new world record of 9.79 seconds, before he tested positive).
an athlete. Access to the podium or to a title is just a fortunate consequence of success in this process. The principal danger in focusing on the podium (apart from all those associated with the conviction that the end justifies the means) is to set off down a road, forgetting to see how it leads to the podium.

“Stress is inevitable, but it can be beneficial…”

The highest level of stress I ever felt at the Helsinki European Championships in 1994. For the first time, I was considered to be a favourite by observers and, because of that, I had taken on that mantle. Wrongly, because I didn’t have the conviction that normally goes with it. Stress was inevitable: I woke up on the morning of the final with a sweat-drenched pillow, telling myself: “If that’s what top competition is, I’m stopping, because I’m not getting any pleasure out of it”. Result: I messed up my race and finished third!

In the light of that experience, things progressed. I came to understand that stress was inevitable, but that there is good stress and bad stress, the one which allows you to give your best or the one which destroys you. I was the victim of the latter in 1994, because my concentration was focused more on the consequences of my race than on the race itself and on the key factors I should have controlled to be successful. By the end of my career, and when I managed to achieve my objectives at the big meets, my strategy was perfected: I had realised that to succeed on exceptional occasions, I could not to force myself to achieve the exceptional, which generates stress, but only to do what I knew I could do, neither more nor less.

“Questioning is a source of progress”

Doubt, for me, is something which can be positive, because it allows you to question and is therefore a source of progress. However, there is a right time to express it: be confident in the starting-blocks and be capable of questioning yourself when the time comes to take stock! It wasn’t in my nature to be plagued by doubt, because I shared a vision of success very closely with my coach. However, when I was injured at the time of the Atlanta Games in 1996, I suffered enormous disappointment. After many years of international podiums and finals one after the other, I wondered if my career wasn’t behind me. That episode nonetheless enabled me to bounce back and become world champion the following year. I acquired that extra bit of determination and strength which makes the difference on the big occasions, whereas before that event, I thought I had my life ahead of me to reach the podium. That moment taught me that you really have to grab your opportunity when it comes along.

My passion for running and for my discipline also helped me to understand that it hadn’t all been about sacrifice: above all I ran out of need, regardless of any competitive perspective.

“Sport taught me about self-assessment”

The main capacities sport brought me are those of concentration, of understanding how confidence is built up and of faith in the fruits of well-directed work (quantity and quality). My competitive career allowed me to develop my aptitude for knowing whether I had the means to succeed in a challenging situation, that is to say, my self-assessment capacities. For example, at the age of 18, despite disastrous “mock exam” results a few weeks before the real thing, I felt a strong conviction about my ability to pass them. I felt that it would be borderline, but that it was possible. I needed 230 marks, I got 231! Eight years of sport had already taught me to form as accurate an assessment as possible of myself. I think that today that still serves me well.
“What sport can give young people”

Sport shows the virtues of hard work and reflection, in a universe which young people appreciate. It teaches us we have control over our own destiny and that what happens to us is earned through hard work and perseverance. Sport can be used to show that everything isn’t simply down to chance and that everybody has a quite considerable margin of manoeuvre over their life’s journey. It is important to get young people to tackle the idea of planning. In teams and individually, it is beneficial for them to develop ideas of self-assessment, evaluation and strategy, in order to become aware of the importance of knowledge and know-how as prerequisites to action. These notions fashion both our lives and our world. Not everything is down to fate!
MENTAL SKILLS
> WHAT IS MOTIVATION?
The word motivation has its origins in the Latin term “motus”, meaning movement. Motivation is what drives the athlete, what sets him or her in motion, what serves as a motor. It represents the forces which push an individual to act.

Motivation in sport
Motivation is an omnipresent concept in the sporting environment: “I’m 110% motivated!”, “Training is motivating!” we often hear. But to train for several hours a day and compete regularly, athletes must have reasons for committing themselves: pleasure in action, the prospect of a medal, victory, social recognition, etc.

Motivation is multidimensional and depends on athletes themselves (needs, goals, interests…), on the situation with which they are confronted (coaching staff, other people involved, sporting facilities, performance to be achieved…) and on the interaction between the athlete and the given situation (willingness to learn, feeling of competence, perception of the value of an activity and its controllability…).

Types of motivation
There are two types of motivations which interact with each other:

• Intrinsic motivations: the athlete engages in an activity for the satisfaction of discovery and learning; for the pleasure and sensations experienced.

  “As soon as I put skates on, it was something I liked straight away. From the age of 7, I really enjoyed being on the ice rink”
  Stéphane Lambiel (Switzerland), Olympic silver medallist, figure skating

• Extrinsic motivations: the athlete engages in an activity to obtain a reward or avoid a punishment; to respond to pressure, external demands or orders.

The effects of motivation on commitment and performance
Sports psychology takes a particular interest in the effects of motivation on commitment and performance. Various studies have described these relationships:

• Motivation increases with the perceived difficulty, until the latter reaches a limit beyond which the task no longer seems achievable. If athletes think they cannot achieve the objective, they will not be motivated to train to do so.

• The theory of self-determination postulates that a chosen activity, determined by the individual, generates greater motivation.

  “I didn’t know how far I would go, but I liked it from the start.”
  Nadia Comaneci (Romania), Olympic champion, gymnastics

...AND AT SCHOOL?
Motivation represents one of the principal determinants of school performance. It is directional (you are motivated by one subject rather than another) and may vary in intensity: modest or consistent engagement in the learning process. To better manage motivation, it is necessary to be aware of its characteristics. To help pupils do that, they are invited to identify the types of motivation which drive them, the attitudes and behaviour they currently have and those they should adopt in order to achieve learning objectives.
The different dimensions of motivation

Individual needs
Some dimensions of motivation, in sport as in school, depend essentially on the individual. Such is the case for personal and physiological needs, the need for security, love and belonging, for self-esteem and the esteem of others, and for personal accomplishment. Not everybody necessarily has the same needs at the outset.

Context
Other aspects of motivation depend above all on the situation with which the individual is confronted. It is well known that the presence of promised or expected rewards encourage engagement in an activity while the prospect of almost certain failure will divert us from it or, if it cannot be avoided, will cause us to engage in it without energy or perseverance.

The individual in a context
Finally, some dimensions of motivation can only be understood in the interaction of a particular person with a given situation, activity or environment. From this angle, nobody is motivated by nothing, just as there is no situation capable of motivating everybody.

Willingness to learn, feeling of competence, perception of the value of an activity and its controllability
Motivation is the result of a calculation which individuals undertakes when faced with a situation, either sporting or academic. Their willingness to engage in the situation, to get involved, will be all the stronger if the reply to each of the following questions is “yes”:

- “Will I get any benefit out of this situation, come through it, win?” (feeling of competence)
- “In my eyes, is this task important, what is the point, does it attract me?” (subjective value of a task)
- “Is my investing in this task worth the effort? Am I personally in a position to influence the outcome of events?” (feeling of controllability)

A combination of strong feelings of competence and controllability generates motivation. On the other hand, an impression of incompetence backed up by the feeling that you have no control over the situation diminishes motivation. Between the two, in principle, engagement only takes place if there are secondary benefits, that is, if extrinsic motivators enhance the value of the activity in the eyes of the person who is to undertake it.

What motivates: learning goals and performance goals
Individuals can be motivated by performance in itself (proving competence) or by wanting to learn something. Different motivational goals have implications for the way in which the individual tackles a task: for example, a gymnast who above all wants to learn will not be discouraged if the task is a little beyond him. Somebody who wants to prove his competence, on the other hand, will be very frightened of failing (thus revealing his incompetence).

The goal of performance is stimulated by competitive situations. It is particularly present in certain sportspeople and in those preoccupied by their image, higher too in less bright pupils than in the better ones. The goal of learning, on the other hand is stimulated by cooperative situations and is particularly high in good pupils. Alternating or combining cooperation and competition situations introduces a balance between these two goals and may in the long term prove wiser as a growth strategy.
What is motivation?

Here are a few examples of motivation often mentioned by sportspeople. Put in front of each example an "i" if it is an intrinsic motivation (the athlete does it for the activity itself), and an "e" if it is an extrinsic motivation (for something other than the activity itself).

> WHAT IS MOTIVATION?

Motivation is a phenomenon which is essential to my commitment, whether sporting or academic. For me to train several hours a day and compete regularly, to study in class and at home, I need motivation, that is to say forces which encourage me to act, reasons to get involved.

UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION

WHAT ENCOURAGES ME TO ACT?

ACTIVITY SHEET

“At the age of 5, I told my father: "I want to win that title that you didn’t win." I want to be remembered as one of the most extraordinary athletes in history, by becoming boxing world champion after having come from a team sport. Then the whole world will listen to me. I will be able to defend the rights of my people, fight for equality, the freedom of Aborigines. The more successful I am, the louder my voice will be." Anthony Mundine (Australia), a boxer of Aboriginal origin

What is motivation?

Here are a few examples of motivation often mentioned by sportspeople. Put in front of each example an "i" if it is an intrinsic motivation (the athlete does it for the activity itself), and an "e" if it is an extrinsic motivation (for something other than the activity itself).

> From the above examples, underline the ones which can be found in a school environment.

> Further examples:

How do sportspeople show their motivation?

1. By making a commitment (e.g.: "I’m joining the programme Ski-SportStudies");
2. By the effort they put in (e.g.: "I will train four times a week");
3. By the intensity of that effort (e.g.: "I will run ten series of 200m in less than 40 seconds");
4. By their perseverance in the face of difficulty (e.g.: "After four slalom runs, I’ll work on my mental preparation techniques with my coach").

> At school, what motivates me most? Describe how you show your motivation:

How can I increase my motivation?

There is no miraculous recipe, but there are ways of increasing levels of motivation!

Example: After a bad training session, a skier’s motivation may drop. To remedy the situation:

- She sets some objectives for herself: "I will succeed in two rounds out of four in this weekend’s races";
- She describes the methods to be used: "I will do visualisation and thought control exercises";
- She thinks about her successes, her effort and her progress: "I trained really well this summer on the glaciers, I made a lot of progress with my technique, that will serve me well";
- She seeks advice, encouragement: "I’ll ask to talk it over with my coaches".

> A particular situation in which I am not motivated:

To increase my motivation, go through the methods above one by one and try to work out what they could correspond to specifically for me:

- I set objectives for myself;
- I describe the methods to be used;
- I think about my successes;
- I ask "Who can help me?";
> WHAT IS STRESS?
Stress is a defence reaction by the body which allows you to adapt to a given situation. It can be positive because it stimulates, rapidly mobilises available energy and allows an appropriate reaction. On the other hand, when an imbalance is perceived between the requirements of the situation and the capacities recognised in yourself to cope with it, it becomes negative.

Stress in sport

In everyday language, the word stress has become synonymous with negative stress. The stress level of an athlete is comparable to his level of physical and mental activation: it can be too high or too low, in which case it becomes negative stress. If, however, the athlete’s activation is at the “ideal” level, the stress is positive.

Before a sporting competition, some athletes feel lethargic, lacking energy (absence of stress). Others concentrate tension in the shoulders or stomach; they lose energy and fluidity in their movements (excess stress). It is a matter of finding the happy medium (good stress) between relaxation on one side and excessive tension on the other:

To situate their optimum activation zone (and therefore regulate their stress levels), athletes may use protective thoughts or specific activities, like relaxation or dynamisation exercises.

Stress levels impact on performance quality: when the stress level is too low, performance is low. If it rises, performance will be improved, up to the optimum performance zone. But beware! If stress levels rise further, the level of performance will decrease.

The relationship between stress level and performance is shown by the graph below:
The optimum performance zone **depends on the action the athlete has to carry out**. For example, to be in his optimum activation zone, a golfer must be motivated without putting excessive pressure on his shoulders. To play a shot, he must regulate his activation level so that it will match the **energy he needs** for that action. If he thinks about the final score, for example, he generates too high an activation level, corresponding to the energy necessary to play a full round. His swing will then be adversely affected: it will lose its fluidity and will be transformed into a jerky movement (which will, of course, have negative repercussions for the score). At the other end of the scale, if he plays the same part without desire, with no objectives or interest, his activation will be too low and his putting will be less precise.

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**Excessive stress in sport**

During competitions, athletes undergo significant pressure which can endanger their performance. In a few seconds, they can be selected for the next round, win a medal or slide into anonymity.

When an athlete has qualified for the Olympic Games, for example, she may go to pieces on the day. She must manage to control her stress so that her performance will be up to the level of her ambitions:

> *Even if there are 10,000 people watching you, you have to do it the way you do it every other day.*
> Tony Hawk (United States), skateboard

**Symptoms of excessive stress**

- Sweaty hands, stomach pains, tension.
- Unusual mistakes at key moments.
- Changes in behaviour in competition (low commitment, poor performance).
- Signs of emotional overload (anger, going to pieces, tears, etc.).

**Not everybody is the same when faced with stress!**

Stress is a matter of perception, of personal evaluation. A situation can be **perceived** as being stressful for one athlete and insignificant for another (for example, the fact of playing in front of a crowd can delight or terrify!). If the athlete perceives the possibility of exerting control over the event, the stress will be of less consequence than if he/she has the impression that the event is dependent upon others or upon chance.

These perceptions are strongly influenced by personality, past history, and the experience of stress. As such reactions have been "learned", it is possible to become aware of them and work on modifying them.

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**A relaxation exercise to be suggested to pupils**

Practical advice: a gym would be a suitable place for this exercise.

> Make yourself comfortable and close your eyes. Fix your attention on your breathing, make it calm and regular. ... relax the muscles in your forehead, your eyes, your mouth, your jaw. Relax your shoulders, your arms, ... your elbows, your forearms and your hands right down to your fingertips. Relax your neck and the back of your neck as well. Think about the shape of your back, the whole of your back, your back relaxing into the floor. ... Relax your pelvis, your thighs, your knees, your calves and your feet right to the tips of your toes. Let all the feelings of well-being inside you come out and savour them. Feel the presence of your breath, calm, harmonious; the presence of your body, relaxed. Then come back to the here and now; move your body gently, stretch ... and open your eyes.”

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**...AND AT SCHOOL?**

Controlling your stress level is an important parameter in academic performance. It is closely linked to concentration: whether for an oral presentation or a written question, the pupil must be able to be alert and able to regulate the energy needed in accordance with the activity required.
Worth knowing: stress over time

Stress, a survival and adaptation factor
When the body is subject to stress, internal modifications represent real alarm reactions, mobilising the body and preparing it to flee or fight. In fact, “stress prepares living beings for rapid and intense muscular responses without which they could not survive” (Schwob, 1999). This “reaction” (to stress) has enabled man to survive over the centuries. However, during the course of human evolution, situations of aggression directly putting life at stake have progressively disappeared and stress factors have changed in nature—today they are more emotional and psychological (e.g., conflict at work, problems between couples, …) than physical. Consequently, nowadays some reactions (like, for example, aggressiveness), which were appropriate in other times are now socially unsuitable.
WHAT IS STRESS?
To deal with a situation, I must mobilise my energy, learn to channel it and know how to use it to the best when the moment arrives. Stress becomes negative when I don’t know how to deal with a situation, when I feel powerless and anxious in the face of a situation.

HOW I MANAGE STRESS
ACTIVITY SHEET

“I was very, very nervous because I had never been in such a championship with people who were expecting so much of me... I couldn’t lose; I was even supposed to break the world record. It was crazy! I really felt that pressure.”
Jonathan Edwards (England), Olympic champion, athletics

WHAT IS STRESS?
To deal with a situation, I must mobilise my energy, learn to channel it and know how to use it to the best when the moment arrives.

HOW CAN I MANAGE STRESS?
Resistance to stress can be increased by modifying my habits a little. For example:

My lifestyle: how many hours do I sleep at night? What are my eating habits? Am I doing enough physical exercise?

My sense of humour: do I know how to take a step back and laugh at myself a bit?

My people-resources: who can help me, who can listen to me, who can give me the information I need? Who have I turned to previously?

Self-confidence: what are my qualities, my successes?

Control of my negative thoughts: do I let myself get easily sidetracked by intrusive thoughts? How can I neutralise them?

My relaxation exercises: do I take the time to relax? Do I know exercises which help me to relax?

“Tricks” for relaxing
Before an important exam or an intimidating oral presentation, I can control my activation level by doing some relaxation exercises:

Exercise 1. “I make myself comfortable and fix a point in front of me; I focus my attention on my breathing (its sounds, its rhythm), on the parts of my body which move when I breathe. I pay attention to the first signs of relaxation which enter my body and my mind...”.

Exercise 2. “I increase my breathing by prolonging it a little on each inhalation and exhalation. I breathe in and out five to seven times”.

Exercise 3. “I relax my forehead, which becomes smooth and slack, then my shoulders, which become heavy, then my stomach which inflates and deflates with my breath...”.

“I was very, very nervous because I had never been in such a championship with people who were expecting so much of me... I couldn’t lose; I was even supposed to break the world record. It was crazy! I really felt that pressure.”
Jonathan Edwards (England), Olympic champion, athletics
Finding the happy medium between excessive stress and absence of stress!

"You can’t be stressed, otherwise you fall to pieces, or too relaxed, otherwise you are not aware of the stakes."

Marcel Dessailly (France), Football World Cup

When I am completely lethargic, when I can’t concentrate or throw myself into an activity, it’s because I’m lacking energy, my stress level is too low. I have to activate myself, that is to say, raise my level of activation!

“Tricks” to dynamise myself

> Exercise 1. “I focus my attention on some music, a person, an action or an event which gives me dynamism, energy, strength.”
> Exercise 2. “I do some short and powerful exhalations, through my mouth, rapidly”.
> Exercise 3. “After two deep breaths in, I hold my breath, tense up my hands and arms, then do some “pumping” movements (up and down) with my shoulders for about ten seconds”.

Good stress can be effective!

A bit of stress before an exam can be beneficial. But how can I recognise a positive activation level, which keeps me alert without making me too nervous?

To test my activation level, here are two exercises. Does one seem more stressful to me than the other?

> Situation 1

My partner is in the same position. He increases the release rate (around every 2 seconds).

My starting position for catching the ball or balls:

My arms are alongside my body palms against my thighs. I catch the ball or balls dropped one after another, and return it or them straight away.

> Situation 2

My partner is in the same position. He increases the release rate (around every 2 seconds).

My starting position for catching the ball or balls:

My arms are alongside my body palms against my thighs. I catch the ball or balls dropped one after another, and return it or them straight away.

> Did I notice any difference in stress between the two exercises?

> For each situation, was I able to identify differences in my behaviour (muscles, body position, what I said to myself, concentration, etc.)?

> What signals indicate to me that I am stressed?

> What signals indicate to me that I am calm?
Using “Protective” Thoughts

Basic Theory

> What are “Protective” thoughts?
Each action is accompanied by a thought. Negative thoughts, or “intrusive thoughts”, lead to edginess, frustration and tension. In order for them not to hinder performance, they must be turned into positive thoughts, or “protective thoughts”. A protective thought is constructive and can be immediately applied to the situation.

“Protective” thoughts in sport

During a performance, what athletes say to themselves is fundamental: their thoughts condition their actions and their results. There are several pieces of research showing that negative internal dialogue is associated with poor performances, while positive dialogue is predominant in the best ones.

Negative thoughts, positive thoughts
“My opponents are huge!”, “Rain again!”, “I haven’t trained well this week”... are thoughts orientated towards fear, limits and doubts (in sporting competition, the difficulty of the task and the intense emotions the athlete experiences often cause such thoughts). They put athletes on the defensive and penalise them. Athletes can however learn to reformulate intrusive thoughts into protective thoughts: “I’m going to play using my qualities”, “It’s wet for everybody!”, “I’ll rely on my match strategy”... such positive words enable them to remain concentrated and confident.

Internal discourse
To be able to transform negative thoughts into protective thoughts, athletes must first of all be aware of their internal discourse. This involves identifying the discourse by remembering past situations, visualisation or keeping a diary in which to note what was said or thought at such or such a time. Athletes analyse a specific event – for example their last match – with the aid of the questions such as the following:

- When I talked to myself, what did I say?
- If something didn’t work, what did I say to myself?
- What thoughts preceded and accompanied the good moments?
- Were my thoughts associated with myself, other people, luck, something else?

Knowing how to control your negative thoughts
When negative thoughts occur regularly, athletes must first identify the event which generated them: a comment by a coach? a fall? a bad result? Then, rather than taking them at face value, they question their validity, countering them with logic and common sense:

- To what extent do I believe in that thought? (mark from 0 to 10)
- Is it a specific fact or an interpretation of the facts?
- Is there an alternative to that thought?

Athletes can then call upon several techniques which help modify negative thoughts:

- Reformulation: the athlete formulates counter-proposals and thus creates a different way of envisaging a situation. For example: “It’s raining” ◀ “It’s raining for everybody”.
- Stopping the thought: the athlete instantaneously interrupts negative thoughts through a verbal order of the type: “I can succeed”.
- Model imitation: the athlete refers to a model and tries to act “like Federer would in the same situation”.

...And at School?

At school too, it is important to learn to transform your negative thoughts into protective thoughts so that they do not adversely affect learning and do not generate destructive stress.
Negative thoughts

When negative thoughts are repeated, they rapidly become real psychological attitudes. Here are three major types of such attitudes:

- **Anxious attitude:** “I should be good”. This translates into a quest for perfection, a continual expectation of recognition by others, a considerable fear of failure;
- **Devaluing attitude:** “I’ll never manage it”. This indicates a negative generalisation of behaviour, pessimistic anticipation, incorrect assumptions about success or failure, dramatisation of frustrating events, constant feelings of self-depreciation;
- **Intolerance of frustration:** “I’m sick of school”. This is shown by an immediate need for results (pleasure), a rejection of any intellectual conflict.

Negative thoughts can engender a feeling of stress which, if prolonged, may discourage the individual. If these thoughts become automatic, the individual finds himself in a vicious circle:

**Automatic thoughts** are always present. They are part of our normal world and are a permanent feature of our emotional state. The good news is that modifying your thinking habits is remarkably effective against stress. To do so, you must first become aware of your automatic thoughts. They are often few in number and recur frequently.

**How do you inhibit attitudes of self-depreciation in pupils?**

Pupils who devalue themselves often dysfunction mentally on a psychological level, that is, they produce exaggerated or incorrect thoughts, which do not correspond to reality, and may even seem irrational. Here are some examples:

- “All or nothing” thoughts: there is no scope for nuances where evaluating or judging is concerned.
- “Everything I do must be perfect.”
- Over-generalisation: drawing exaggerated conclusions from a single fact.
  “I messed up my exam, therefore I’m useless”.
- Negative mental filter: seeing everything in black.
- The positive is “disqualified”: any event of a satisfactory or positive nature is discounted, cancelled, considered insignificant or normal, of no particular interest.

**What it is possible to do, as a teacher:**

- **Try to put the pupil into learning situations where he/she can progress.** Pupils must realise that any undertaking or any learning happens in stages. Break “lessons” and homework into several, more manageable, parts.
- **Don’t be disturbed by the pupil’s lack of motivation.** Try and remain neutral in the face of pessimistic remarks and discouragement. Avoid comments like “You give up easily… how are you ever going to cope next year!…”
- **Reinforce behaviour which shows progress.** Try to identify and reinforce even the slightest positive change in attitude in the academic field.
- **Establish graphics to visualise progress.** Pupils like to see their progress.
- **Ask a pupil to help a weaker classmate in his/her strongest subject.**
WHAT ARE “PROTECTIVE” THOUGHTS?
What I tell myself about an activity, its progress and its result, condition my mood and my commitment to that activity. Negative feelings will not be favourable to it. It is in my interest to turn them into positive thoughts, also known as “protective thoughts”.

Imagine some “protective” thoughts
At one time or another, we are all subject to negative thoughts: “It’s too difficult, I’ll never be able to do it...” To avoid them preventing starting or progressing in an activity, I must learn to reformulate them into “protective” thoughts.

For example, the athlete will reformulate:

“I must not make a mess of my service” into “I will apply my service routine”
“Rain again!” into “It’s raining for my opponents as well”
“With this referee...” into “It’s got nothing to do with him; I’m going to concentrate on my own game”

Exercise “I am getting rid of my negative thoughts”.
Once I have identified negative thoughts or emotions, I can decide to get rid of them. To do so, take some deep breaths and repeat with each exhalation: “I am emptying myself of...” followed by whatever you want to eliminate: anger, frustration, fear, detrimental thoughts, tiredness, tension, etc.

> Then after a few normal breaths, increase once again your breathing repeating with each inhalation: “I’m filling myself up with...” followed by whatever positive notions will be useful: energy, calmness, strength, dynamism, confidence, past success, etc.

> How I feel after this exercise:

Deeply ingrained thoughts
When a same thought systematically returns and constructs itself through my experiences, I end up firmly believing in it. In this way, I engender certain “beliefs”, thoughts about which I am intimately convinced. Such beliefs can condition my actions negatively.

> What could I tell myself if such a thought occurred to me before each question? In your opinion, what would the best protective thought be?

Together:
> With the class, discuss your protective thoughts proposals – what does each contribute?
WHAT IS VISUALISATION?

Visualisation is a technique which allows the athlete to mentally illustrate the development of a movement or an action without executing it at the same time. Its aim is to help anticipate events and to “plan” precisely what should be done.

Visualisation in sport

Visualisation is one of the most commonly used skills in sport. Top-level athletes share a capacity to represent their performance very accurately, even in difficult situations.

To ensure a top-level performance, a ski-jumper, for example, will initially work on visualising with the help of video images. By looking at images of correctly executed jumps, positive examples of the movements to be executed fill his head. The second stage consists of transferring the visual example into a mental example. The visualisation then becomes mental imagery. Repetition of this exercise leads the athlete to assimilate the technique and the feelings peculiar to the jump and increases his certainty of being in a position to execute the performance as he has mentally repeated it.

To visualise a movement or its follow-up in their mind, the sportspeople can also recall situations he has been through, recreate experiences or imagine future actions.

We can distinguish two types of visualisation:

1. Internal imagery: the athlete imagines the execution of an action from his own point of view; he sees himself, feels himself in the process of carrying it out; he is the actor.
2. External imagery: he is a spectator and perceives the situation like on a video.

Trained athletes use all their senses to create different images, which are as lifelike and detailed as possible:

- visual: the place, the people present, the objects, etc.
- audio: the sounds, rhythms, etc.
- physical: the actions, gestures, etc.
- emotional: the mood, feelings, etc.

It is important that athletes construct desirable images, i.e. the right and effective movement rather than a technical error, a successful action rather than a fall. Visualisation fulfils a “control” function: it helps to contradict the pessimistic representations which can arise and to generate stress.

AND AT SCHOOL?

Learning requires being in a certain state of mind, creating images for yourself and arranging them to suit a learning situation. In other words, it means reactivating the knowledge you have of a particular situation (memorised images) and organising them so as to plan future mental actions. Visualisation is at the heart of this process.

Advice for carrying out the activities:

The activity “I act out my own situation” on the following page would be appropriate some time before a written question, as “mental preparation”.

PROGRAMMING YOUR ACTIONS THROUGH VISUALISATION

BASIC THEORY
WHAT IS VISUALISATION?

Visualising is mentally representing to yourself a situation or an action. Athletes very often use this technique to prepare for a competition. At school, mental representation – in a positive way – can help me to put myself in a favourable position for learning.

I IMAGINE WHAT I’M GOING TO DO

ACTIVITY SHEET

“Before each match, I close my eyes, I create a vacuum around me and I try to visualise successful actions”
Zinedine Zidane (France), Football World Cup

EXPERIMENTING WITH VISUALISATION

> WHAT IS VISUALISATION?

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Experimenting with visualisation

> Close your eyes and imagine an animal. What images come to mind? Think about the noises that animal makes, what it feels like (What is its fur like? What impression does running my hand over its wet nose make?), its smell (does it have a specific odour?). “Visualise” the emotions evoked by the animal (How do I feel when I touch... its skin? And when it comes racing towards me?...)

Take a few minutes to do the following experiment:

I have a presentation to give in front of the class. Beforehand, I prepare myself mentally:

> I visualise the place, the classroom, the faces, I hear noises in the school yard, I see myself, my gestures, my position, I hear my voice, I imagine myself in the process of giving the presentation to the class...

> What difficulties can I manage to identify which could hinder my presentation?

> What will I do about them?

> After finding solutions to the problems, I visualise the “corrected” scene.

> SOME “TOOLS” TO HELP YOU VISUALISE

To visualise, I can use different types of images:

- visual images: of places, people, objects; etc.
- audioimages: sounds, rhythms, etc.
- images of the body: actions, movements, etc.
- images associated with my mood: what I say to myself, the feelings or emotions experienced.

Acting out my own situation – visualisation opportunities

> Inspired by the exercise above, I mentally prepare a written question:

> I picture myself seated at my desk, the question sheet in front of me. I go over the key elements of the subject in my head, and the way I am going to organise them in my answers.

> What are the points I need to think about?
**WHAT IS ATTENTION?**

Mobilising our attention means seeking and selecting the information relevant to the situation in which we find ourselves. **Concentrating, is then directing your attention towards a specific element** and disregarding other stimuli. It is knowing how to focus your attention. Easier said than done, because our brain’s job is to indicate all the information it receives (from our five senses!). Concentration therefore demands deliberate effort and can not last very long without causing mental fatigue.

### Attention in sport

At the moment of shooting, an archer must know how to focus her attention on his own movements, her own feelings and on the target. This state of concentration is difficult to maintain; the slightest noise from the neighbouring archer’s bow can make the archer jump and cause her to release the arrow before being completely ready.

#### The different types of attention

Athletes must know how to shift their attention according to the requirements of the task they is going to carry out (a bit like changing tactics according to the movements of the opponent).

Golfers, for example, will concentrate successively on four different elements (which correspond to four types of attention or four possible locations):

1. **ON THE ENVIRONMENT**
   - “Takes a note of the distance, the slopes, the obstacles”

2. **IN THE MIND**
   - “Chooses a club, a trajectory and imagines the shot to be played”

3. **ON AN OBJECT**
   - “Looks at the ball, the target (where the ball should land), then the ball again”

4. **ON THE BODY**
   - “Relaxes, carries out some test swings”

Each kind of attention relates to specific mental processes:
1. Obtaining information
2. Analysing, making choices, visualising
3. Relaxing, dynamising himself, making movements
4. Accomplishing a precise action.

The difficulty in shifting attention in this way lies in the choice of the relevant element, the one on which attention is focussed. The quality of the attention then plays an important role: from vague to intense, it defines the mental engagement of an individual in a task.

### ...AND AT SCHOOL?

Lack of attention in class is at the origin of many academic difficulties. The capacity to concentrate, to focus attention on the relevant elements (verbal instructions, the text to be tackled, the exercise data) and to continue doing so for the amount of time necessary represents a guarantee of success. Scant attention or poor attentional choices penalise academic performance.
WHAT SHOULD I CONCENTRATE ON?

“WHAT IS ATTENTION?”

Knowing how to focus attention is the basis of both sporting performance and academic learning. In class, even if I’m always concentrating on something, am I always concentrating on the most relevant element? Looking out the window at the schoolyard or adjusting my watch, for example, are not the most useful ways of understanding a new subject...

What kinds of attention are required for this game:

Attention is achievable!

I time how long it takes me to find, in the right order, the numbers from 01 to 36 contained in the grid below. I point at them one after another with my finger. 

> WHAT IS ATTENTION?

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Attention, it moves...

To achieve a performance, the athlete must know how to shift his attention:

1. What information do I get from my environment?
2. What goes on inside my head?
3. How do I position myself? What movements do I make?
4. What do I concentrate on: What do I do?

> > I time how long it takes me to find, in the right order, the numbers from 01 to 36 contained in the grid below. I point at them one after another with my finger.

> A recent situation where I was concentrating well at school:

> A recent situation where I was concentrating badly:

Attention is achievable!

I time how long it takes me to find, in the right order, the numbers from 01 to 36 contained in the grid below. I point at them one after another with my finger.

What kinds of attention are required for this game:

The types of attention to avoid:
WHAT IS A USEFUL OBJECTIVE?
To be useful, an objective must be clearly defined and well suited to the level of the person pursuing it, so that it will be possible to evaluate the stages and resources leading to its realisation – or not.

Useful objectives in sport
Athletes frequently express their goals in terms of objectives. They imagine where they want to go, choose their path, make a the list of what they need to get there and move into action. A season is too long and a career too short to be led by intuition alone!

In sport, everything starts with a dream: winning a major competition, becoming an international player, etc. Throughout the journey, the dream has to be broken down into three types of objectives:

- **Long-term** objectives: from a few months to a few years, like "playing in the Superleague, winning the national championships, taking part in the Olympic Games";
- **Medium-term** objectives: from a few weeks to six months: "improving mental management of a competition, moving up in the rankings";
- **Short-term** objectives: for a training session, a competition, or for a few days; "setting the rhythm of attack " in volleyball, "applying a defensive scheme" in basketball, for example.

Realistic objectives
Clear, diverse and precise objectives represent the unifying thread of sporting practice. They need to be relevant in terms of difficulty: if they are unattainable because they are unrealistic, they will be a chronic source of stress; if they are too easily attainable, they will not motivate and will not mobilise all the player's skills.

**A well chosen objective obeys the 50–50 law:** 50% chance of achieving it (you think it's possible and you perceive it as a challenge), but 50% risk of failing (so it is necessary to commit yourself fully).

The means to achieve an objective
Once the objective is defined, the resources required to achieve it still have to be defined:

- an extra weekly training session;
- more appropriate food;
- mental training;
- development of quadriceps strength;
- etc.

It is then a matter of organising and planning the coordination of those resources. The path towards the objective must be assessed regularly along the way, in relation results marking progress. In the long term, it is the objective which will be used to analyse success or otherwise, to measure the obstacles encountered, to assess the relevance of the required resources and the "corrections" to be introduced. Then, it's off again... towards new objectives!

AND AT SCHOOL?
Pupils always acts in accordance with a objective, explicit or implicit, conscious or not. But objectives vary in their relevance, the possibility of achieving them, even in their effects. Being aware of the real objectives of each person and of their efficiency must be encouraged.
Priorities... and priorities
Setting yourself objectives allows you to shorten the distance between what you are and what you would like to be, between dreams and reality. Very often, in fact, dreams seem too far off to know how to be able to achieve them. A clear objective is not only easier to achieve than a dream, it generally brings with it a concrete step to take, as well as markers which make it possible to see whether you are getting close or straying away from the objective. At each stage, an objective allows you to make choices and set priorities. It would be wrong however to confuse priority and haste, the best way to achieve an objective is not always to take the shortest route to it. In tennis, for example, the best way to win the point is not always to try the winning shot straight away.

Choosing your objectives well
For an objective to be accomplished and to be able to serve as a benchmark, it must be sufficiently clearly defined. This allows you to decide whether it has been attained or not, if you are still a long way from it or if you are getting close to it. The closer it is, the stronger its attractive force will be. But be careful! Close does not necessarily mean easy to achieve; objectives which are too elementary, with too high a probability of being achieved, reduce the desire to make an effort to obtain them. Those who set themselves goals attainable in the short term, but whose probability of attainment is 50-50, develop a greater interest in the activity, a greater feeling of effectiveness and achieve greater success, more so than those who set themselves goals which can only be attained in the longer term (“distant goals”), … or no goals at all.

For pupils, as for a sportspeople, a good objective is also an objective which will allow him to make significant progress. In mastering everyday skills, children succeed, if they can rely on someone more competent or on favourable conditions, in producing more evolved movements than those they perform when acting alone. From this point of view, a good objective is any activity which allows the person concerned to work on situations slightly out of their reach. This is referred to as being within the individual’s “proximal zone of development”.

Objectives and the resources for achieving them
A good objective must still be applicable or at least be able to be applied; an objective fulfils these conditions if it is possible to determine its place in a chain of mental operations or actions which allow it to be achieved and to fix in advance which criteria will be used to judge whether or not it has been achieved. In this respect, objectives which can be described in behavioural rather than mental terms are preferable; it is in fact easier to verify whether you are or are not capable of doing something than verify whether you know or don’t know something.

The notion of obstacle-objective
A metaphor for an objective could be the image of a fairly flat road which you take in the direction of the next stage. In didactic theory, inspired by the works of Bachelard on the obstacles to knowledge, and in reaction to the sometimes simplistic vision of teaching by objectives, the metaphor of obstacle-objective is also used. That is, faced with a major difficulty, a conceptual misunderstanding which blocks access to knowledge, it can be judicious to make overcoming the obstacle the objective itself. Sportspeople or performers are well aware of this: progress is only rarely linear. Confronting that which prevents us from progressing – whether it be inadequate mastery of a movement, inadequate assimilation of a technique, nerves or some other psychological obstacle – sometimes merits becoming an objective. In the classroom too, pupils must learn not to systematically avoid problematic situations. Giving yourself the courage and the resources to confront and overcome what, at a given time, is an obstacle on your road towards knowledge can be a highly worthwhile objective in itself, the achievement of which provides at least as much pleasure as an additional average performance in a tournament without obstacles or true stakes.
WHAT ARE USEFUL OBJECTIVES?
Setting myself an objective, is deciding where I want to go, choosing my route, the resources required to achieve it and finally, taking stock. Without objectives, I may get somewhere, but I won’t always reach my goal!

ACTIVITY SHEET

“I had set myself a place in the top 20 in order to take 10 points. I’ve got 15. That first objective is achieved.”
Didier Cuche (Switzerland), Olympic silver medallist, Alpine skiing

> WHAT ARE USEFUL OBJECTIVES?
Quality and precision
If I have objectives, that’s a first step; I must still define priorities among them, arrange them in order of importance and relevance.

At school as in sport, the choice of a relevant objective can change a lot of things; “I must work more regularly” is a vague objective. On the other hand, “I must go over my German vocabulary every Monday evening” is a precise objective; it involves a given action over time.

> From the examples below, identify the objectives which are quality objectives. Enter the number of each objective on a continuum going from “Vague objective” to “Precise objective”.

Vague objective Precise objective
```
1. Improve my history average
2. Ask a question whenever I don’t understand something
3. Work on maths 2 hours a day
4. Do as well as Patricia
5. Complete 2 exercises from the previous class before each lesson
6. Revise the subject regularly
7. Dedicate more time to mathematics
8. Make up my gaps in geography
9. Work for 30 minutes a week with Axel on the current chapter.
```

> An objective I set myself at school:

> In my view, is it easy, attainable or unrealistic?

What path towards attaining my objective?
> Enter your objective in the middle of a target drawn on a separate sheet. Then define the intermediate stages necessary to attain it, so that each stage becomes a sub-objective.
THE ACTOR
BY JEAN-PIERRE ALTHAUS, ACTOR AND DIRECTOR

When an actor is chosen by a director to play a role, he feels great satisfaction. Being chosen is a professional acknowledgement, which also brings the pleasurable prospect of interpreting a character.

Setting yourself relevant objectives
The first moment of elation having passed, the actor then asks himself the question: am I capable of taking on this role? Before agreeing to play the part, the potential benefits and problems must be carefully assessed. It is a matter of considering individual possibilities and limitations objectively. An actor’s career is patiently constructed and built around a reputation. A success accelerates the actor’s rise, a failure slows it down or may even compromise it. It is sometimes better to turn down a role if you don’t feel drawn to the character or if you believe you’re not ready for the role.

If the actor feels sure of successfully playing the role, he uses his experience and know-how to implement a work plan. Before starting to work with fellow actors, there are lines to be learnt by heart. At this stage, this involves learning the text without trying to interpret it so as to avoid expressing sentiments which are not in keeping with the orientation desired by the director. By mastering his lines from the first rehearsal, the actor’s mind is liberated from the constraint of searching for his words. Nonetheless, there are performers who prefer to memorise their lines during rehearsal. Everyone is free to adopt their own method providing it suits them.

The solitary preparation which precedes rehearsals is not restricted to memorising, it also consists of becoming familiar with the play and with the psychology of the character to be played. Once these objectives are attained, the actor is in the optimal position to start work with his fellow actors and the director.

Managing your intrusive thoughts and transforming them into protective thoughts.

Knowing how to concentrate.
The actor Jacques Dufilho said: ‘Theatre is easy. You just have to listen to the other person and answer him.’ That’s true, but it’s not quite that easy to do! Listening carefully to your partner allows a dialogue based on an exchange of sentiments and emotions. Listening carefully demands faultless concentration. To be capable of it, it is essential to get rid of the two most disruptive elements: doubt and intimidation.

An actor may be intimidated by a colleague (because of their age, their experience, their reputation, their nature, their charm, etc). To retain confidence and avoid devaluing himself, developing a complex or withdrawing into his shell, principle of the trade consists of keeping the mind open. The actor must see the other person not as an adversary, but as a partner, who has an essential role to play in the theatrical dialogue. What he is providing is as important as what the others provide for the success of the collective work.

Sometimes a performer runs into a problem (a line, a monologue, a movement) and doubt begins to creep in. When he is unable to respond immediately to a sign from the director, it is important that he overcomes his nerves and keeps calm. All he has to do is consider the obstacle as a challenge to be overcome, to look at the difficulty from another viewpoint. If an actor remains composed, all his capacities can be used to the full. Self-confidence and concentration are important in eliminating any inhibiting thoughts.

Managing stress
The actor’s most dreaded opponent is nerves. They are brought on by the pressure felt under the stare of others. During rehearsals, the actor is assessed by the director and his partners; during performances, he is judged by critics and subjected to the assessment of the public. Nerves diminish performance (risk of a memory blank, stage fright, loss of energy, etc.). The actor must endeavour to convert the irrational fear of nerves into a more stimulating form of energy which includes the notion of pleasure: the pleasure of rehearsing, the pleasure of performing. By not losing sight of the entertainment value of his performance, nerves can be transformed into an exhilarating fervour. The best way of overcoming a handicap such as stage fright is the ability to maintain concentration.

When acting in the cinema, the actor is, apart from a few slight differences, subject to much the same considerations. The difference lies in the fact that he is not performing his lines in one go in front of a live audience. A film actor can redo a scene, not so a stage actor.
**The Conductor**

**By Hervé Klopfenstein, Musician and Conductor**

An enthusiasm towards others first, then a love of music
I was given a flute because it is an easy instrument and I wasn’t very gifted... I managed to do something with it, because I wanted to show that I could do it all the same. I was acting on reflex, to show that I was as good as my brother... When the time came when I wanted to make it my trade, my musician father told me: "Don’t do it, you’ll be poor and often out of work; you’ll never make it!" My reaction was to persevere... Initially, music allowed me to get nearer to others. Then it became a way of expressing myself which slowly and inexplicably imposed itself. Gradually, I fell in love with certain pieces and composers.

Channelling emotion
There are some people who seek only technical perfection. I don’t think I was dedicated enough to go any further with the flute, my temperament prevented me from playing it any better. It is true that emotion can destroy both technique and control. The flute, for example, involves an exchange of breath, the movement of both hands, a quite intimate relationship with the mouth, the lips... you have to master the both the instrument and your emotions. If I became a conductor, it is because, amongst other things, it involved a physical effort which allowed me to channel this surplus of emotions which certainly would not fit inside my flute at all!

Harmony between mind and body
During classes I give, I am in the habit of filming my students while they are conducting. In general, it’s an enormous shock for them because the mind is exposed through the body. It's not something you realise before you’ve seen it: there is a relationship with the body which the students have never even thought about before going through the exercise. They thought that it was just intellectual work, however, the first role of the conductor is to move! It is true that the body is a complicated thing and the exchange with an orchestra, like an exam that you take at school, is delicate from the moment you are not well, not at ease or stressed. In such moments, my movements don’t work well at all. To get around it, it's a matter of creating a distance with your body and being able to imagine the movement you have to make. I project myself outside myself, think about my body, see what movement am going to make and what harmony that will create with a very clear musical thought. Managing to think about yourself outside yourself can be an inner strength.

The solitude of the conductor – his power of visualisation
Paradoxically, to establish a relationship with others, first you have to be alone for a very long time. One hour in front of an orchestra, means 50 hours of solitary work. To work a score, you must be able to hear what you are reading in silence. That means that you spend an enormous amount of time making yourself an inner sound image of what you are reading. Gradually, that sound image will become ingrained... gradually you assimilate the work, the score enters you and lives within you night and day. Before taking to the stage, Mahler’s fifth symphony, which lasts 70 minutes, must be able to be reconstructed by the conductor at accelerated speed in a 10 minute version perhaps, in order to visualise the start, the middle, the end. What the public sees at the finish, is only a fraction of the enormous work of preparation.

The conductor and the orchestra – a non-verbal exchange
The conductor is powerless, it is the orchestra which produces the sound... without it you are nothing. You are there in the flesh, in front of people who have instruments in their hands, you breathe and they play. It is breathing, the metaphorical heart of life, that you transmit through a movement. I teach my trainee conductors to direct an orchestra without moving their little fingers, just with a column of air. It is a relationship which awakens all sorts of sensations and reactions. This initial relationship, established through breathing, is the first test of what is going to happen next. The beginning is the only time the musicians look at the conductor. Afterwards, they read their score. This means that the conductor must at that moment, through his presence, his physical attitudes, his breathing, his positioning, reach into and touch their unconscious.

Playing together
The big problem is making the link between the imaginary world and the present action: producing music together. All the sound images that you have in your head suddenly must become real, with the musicians. That encounter is the most uncertain one. Some have the talent to do it better than others. Some are more weighed down by their imagination and suffer from it.

The same orchestra with two different conductors will never give the same sound. Nonetheless, the conductor is not all-powerful. He must know how to take what the orchestra gives him. You can begin to build up
an interpretation, a tempo and suddenly, there is a tone to the orchestra which you had never imagined, which is wonderful and which you can integrate into your artistic project. The same works interpreted by a same conductor, but with different orchestras, will never be alike. There will be some common points but orchestras do not have the same sound... Ultimately, the interest in listening to those different versions, is to see what is the conductor’s part and what has come out of the orchestra. There is a humility in knowing how to take what the group can offer.

The moment of grace
To be honest, I am less stressed in concert than in rehearsal. Rehearsal is very difficult: you have to manage time, people, you have to please, you have to criticise without hurting... there are lots of restrictions. Concert time to me is a time of release. There is the pressure which exalts you, which makes you feel better. That is happiness. Of course the public obliges you to explore the full extent of the work. In rehearsal, you stop, you talk. In concert, the public is there for you to reproduce the work in full. It is a sacred moment. Even though you don’t really think about the public when you are on the podium, you are “boosted” by the atmosphere and you give everything you can. The public gives musicians a quality of concentration that they cannot maintain during six hours of rehearsal.

In spite of everything, one of the big risks, is of suddenly losing the thread and having intrusive thoughts: an ill-omened daily paper, a strange noise... yes, that’s something to be wary of! Personally, mistakes in the orchestra can also undo me and I may put the orchestra at risk. To reconcentrate, I use the stage setting... I look at who is where, I look for reference marks, frontiers: the background, the separation between the registers, can reassure me. This is the space which has to be enclosed to allow it to be dissected, so to find the source of the sounds again...
THE DANCER

BY ELISABETH LAURENT, DANCER AND CHOREOGRAPHER

Initial motivations

The principal motivation is something like self-progress. It requires layered learning which enables progress and the gradual overcoming of increasingly difficult challenges.

As a spectator, the apprentice dancer quickly assimilates her efforts in the dreamlike world of the show. Once a professional, it is then the multiplicity of artistic challenges which feed motivation throughout her career. Motivation is also fed by the desire to do well, which is common to everyone who wishes to realise their full potential in life.

Objectives

Motivations and objectives are carved out incessantly. Each new project is a new objective, with its own artistic and human challenges (working with different choreographers, shows in other countries...). And each day, the quest to do better, to refine one's work is motivated by the desire to surpass oneself. It is the quest for ecstasy. And it is sometimes the chance to surprise!

Objectives are therefore short-term and are nourished by meeting with others, whether they be professionals or spectators.

Relationship with stress

The dancer in a performance is confronted by herself. The burden of this responsibility plunges her into needing to do well and always seeking to fulfill herself.

The stress encountered during preparation work is associated with her own judgement and with the views of others, in particular other professionals. During performances, stress becomes "nerves", because at those times, you can no longer "shrink back". Nerves are positive, they correspond to a surge of adrenaline necessary for concentration and the successful performance of the show. Stress, when experienced as nerves, is therefore an excellent motor.

Doubts and intrusive thoughts

Doubt is an integral part of the job of dancing. It allows questioning depending on the situation and the objective to be attained. At the same time, the dancer can not tolerate intrusive thoughts. She must be able to detach herself from others' opinions while remaining attentive to their requirements.

At performance time, intrusive thoughts are channeled partly through nerves and concentration. The personal life of each performer can increase the difficulty of overcoming such thoughts (for example: the presence of close relatives in the audience).

Visualisation

Video visualisation is rarely used as dance requires work on the sensations which goes beyond simple technical representation. It may, however, be useful in preparation for an exam or a competition.

On the other hand, mental visualisation is often used. It provides the option of projecting oneself mentally and stretching towards an imagined and desired "ideal". It part of effective concentration and allows a quick assessment to be carried out of the important points of the performance, whether they be technical or artistic.

Attention

During working periods, attention is necessary. It develops increasingly with experience until it becomes automatic. Knowing your own working rhythm and your own investment capacities allows for constructive dosing of effort, to progress and not to waste time.

The numerous elements associated with dance multiply the options for maintaining attention: music, technical performance, staging, contact with others, etc.

During the performance period, attention is implicit. It has been worked on throughout the preparation time and is reinforced by the "danger" of the moment.

Benefits of mental work

Mental work is sine qua non physical work. By deepening the awareness of what one is achieving, by learning to manage one's stress and make use of it, or again getting to the end of each project without failing in the face of unexpected events and difficulties, one learns above all to know oneself, with one's capacities and limitations.

These are the lessons of confidence and self-affirmation.

In dance, the need to renew one's efforts and to push back one's limits is also accompanied by an "inner poetry". Physical work is invested with an abstract space, sensitive and imaginary, which is personal to each dancer and...
which also develops throughout a career.

**Transferring to everyday life**

Physical training goes with mental training. The aim is to have a "mind of steel" eliminating as far as possible one's fragilities. It's a notion that is often difficult to transfer into everyday life because it is so important within the sphere of a dancer's career that it is difficult to maintain outside it. The objectives of daily life seem less significant and the greatest effort is concentrated on dancing. At the end of a career, the mental aptitudes of a dancer will be further highlighted. It is the capacities of rigour, tenacity and adaptation which will allow her to succeed in projects outside dance. A dancer learns to rely only on herself and does not expect others to assist in the achievement of her personal projects. She benefits from great autonomy. Moreover, the levels of stress are often lower than in the situations she has experienced on stage.
RECOMMENDED REFERENCES

Sports psychology, general works


Psychology, reference works by skill

Theme I: Understanding motivation

Theme II: Coping with stress

Theme III: Using “protective” thoughts

Theme V: Knowing how to focus your attention

Theme VI: Setting yourself useful objectives

Theme V: Knowing how to focus your attention

Theme VI: Setting yourself useful objectives

Literature
Internet links

IOC official website
www.olympic.org

Réseau Suisse d’Écoles en Santé
www.ecoles-en-sante.ch

Réseau Européen d’Écoles en Santé
http://www.euro.who.int/eprise/main/WHO/Progs/ENHPS/Home

Swiss Sports Psychology Association
www.sportpsychologie.ch

Office Fédéral du Sport, Macolin
www.baspo.admin.ch