

4th International Conference on New Horizons in Education

The role of dancing in the educational process

Marzia Candela^{a*}, Rosa Conte^a, Nicolina Pastena^b, Cristiana D'anna^a, Filippo Gomez Paloma^b

^a Faculty of Education Sciences – University of Salerno (Italy)

^b Department of Human, Philosophical and Education Sciences – University of Salerno (Italy)

Abstract

The aim of this work is to show how dancing, as well as other disciplines, may help to fully shape a person by acting at a physical, psychic and intellectual level simultaneously. We talk about educational dance, which looks at the person rather than at the dancer training and refers to a specific environment, the school context.

The reviewed reference literature analyses the so called Free Dance or Modern Dance, a revolutionary movement consolidated in the artistic field at the beginning of the 20th century. It questions the dichotomy mind-body and support a corporeality free from conditioning. Thanks to its pioneers we witness the gradual access of dancing into physical education programs.

Therefore, our inquiry on the relation Dance-School in Italy starts, taking in consideration the earliest normative references: the National Programs 2012.

The carried analysis fosters us to review the methodological approach commonly adopted in the school context, for it is still too fossilized on the cognitive aspect and poor of bodily-playful-creative doing. As a result, we believe the teaching workshop is the best solution to prompt the practice of dancing in the school.

Because it contemplates either the bodily and psychic aspect or the emotional and cognitive one, more than any other expressive languages, dancing can teach children to “dwell” their own body and find out the untapped potential, heightening the self awareness. Furthermore, the flexibility of dancing allows to link it primarily with music but with other disciplines as well, therefore facilitating their bond and contributing to the achievement of a global vision of knowledge.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of The Association of Science, Education and Technology-TASET, Sakarya Universitesi, Turkey.

Keywords: eucation; modern dance; body; movement; workshop;

* Corresponding author. Tel.:

E-mail address: marziacandela@libero.it

1. Introduction

Let us imagine some children engaged in listening their own body and finding out its pace, its expressive skills.

Let us imagine some children with bare feet, free to allow feelings to pass across their body and express themselves through the movement while a music is driving them. Let us imagine some children that finally devote their time to the discovery of those aspects belonging to the self, which are often neglected.

Now, just try to recall your school experience: when and how many times did you experience those feelings at school? Probably, we can count them on the fingers of the hand. Perhaps, the words stuck in your mind are: “be quiet, stand still, keep attention”.

Well, if you try to ask the same question to today’s children you will notice that the answers are almost similar. Although the value of the body has been recognized since a long time and the dichotomy mind-body seems already overcome, the reality shows something different. Though many studies confirm the holistic unity of the individual who learns, the school reveals a scenario rather contradictory. Nowadays, it is being given more importance to the cognitive and logical-mathematical intelligence than at the creative, ludic and bodily doing, which is rarely found in a school context and it often lacks a careful planning.

Children, more than adults, because of their feeble control of the verbal language, talk through the body and interact by gestures, they listen with the eyes. Then, why is the school so deaf in dealing with all this? Why does it tend to restrain the children’s free and playful movement?

2. Objective

On this track, the present work is aimed to lead the reader toward a reflection focused on one of those aspects quite often underestimated in the school context and considered a mere recreational activity, we talk about dance. My experience in this sector led me more than once to think about the actual educational values of dancing. This is the reason why I mean to illustrate the purposes, goals and benefits that dancing carries out and its contribution to the integral formation of a person as it acts at a physical and psychic level simultaneously.

3. Method

To achieve all these goals in the school context it is required a specific teaching method that according to us can be represented by the art model by Jacqueline Smith Autard. Born in the eighties, it is a method based on the threefold matrix Creating-Performing-Appreciating. The child, beyond the experience of “doing” dancing, is being driven to “compose” and “view” his own dancing, therefore stimulating executive, creative and analytical skills at the same time. Essentially, the model takes in consideration three aspects: the ability of doing (deepening the experience of movement and dance), the ability of creating (developing skills of exploration and invention of movements by assembling different elements together), the ability of observing (through the vision and comparison of different types of dance, children acquire the skill to develop a constructive criticism free from judgment and competition).

Another valid support to implement good teaching methods in the school is represented by the Pioneers’ theories of the Modern Dance, a revolutionary movement consolidated in the artistic field at the beginning of the 20th century. It questions the dichotomy mind-body and supports a corporeality free from conditioning. It discloses the movement as the raw material of the expression and the necessary tool to express the human’s interior dimension because the movement stems from intellectual and affective experiences.

In opposition to the ballet, this type of dance let the body move freely and allows the student to dance with bare feet or lying down on the floor. Therefore, it rediscovers an authentic movement as a soul’s mirror. (John Martin, 1991)

Finally, the schooling of Modern dance is not focused on the imitation of teacher's movements, but it is based on the improvement of the natural movements for children. It helps children to create their own movements and it does not impose rigorous and stereotyped movements.

Fig. 1 – The Art Model



4. Results

According to our studies, which refer to the Autard method, a dancing lesson in the school context may be built on the basis of a diagram that consists of five stages (Franca Zagatti, 2009):

1. *Welcome*. It is the first explorative contact with the environment in which the activity is going to take place. It is important to create a serene listening atmosphere in order to urge the familiarisation and direct children's attention to the activity that is going to start.

We can employ a greeting ritual based on contact gestures to improve the relation or the meeting between participants. Its length is around 15 minutes.

2. *General activation*. It is based on the preparation of the body at the physical activity. The preparation can be performed by following the movements suggested by the teacher.

3. *Exploration*. It is the central stage in which a path of experimentation and research around a dancing element takes place (the space, the strength, the rhythm etc). Therefore, it is the stage where the topic is being presented. To arouse the attention and interest on the topic it is important to use some motivations: books, images, objects, fantasies, facts. It lasts around 15 minutes.

4. *Composition*. In this stage the children's creative ability finds space. They are engaged in composing individual and collective sequences, coordinating the different movements. It is important to make children understand the concept of a phrase or sequence: dancing has to be created starting from a beginning that, through a recognizable development, arrives at the end. On this regard we can assign to children a structure that they can follow, for example an ABA and so dancing will start and end at the same way while the students will fill the

central part; or an AB and offer the possibility to work on the dynamic or spatial contrast (light- heavy; little-big).

5. *Conclusion.* It is a dismissal stage and it is important either for the teacher or the student to end the meeting in a satisfying way. A verbal comparison can be proposed whose purpose is to discuss the experience just lived and understand what it is done e how it is done. Otherwise, a greeting ritual or a collective dancing concludes the meeting in an energetic and lively way.

Fig. 2 – Lesson’s structure

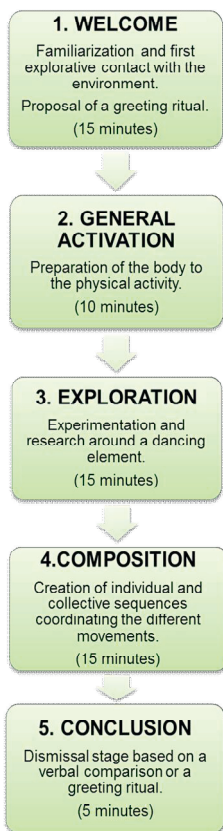
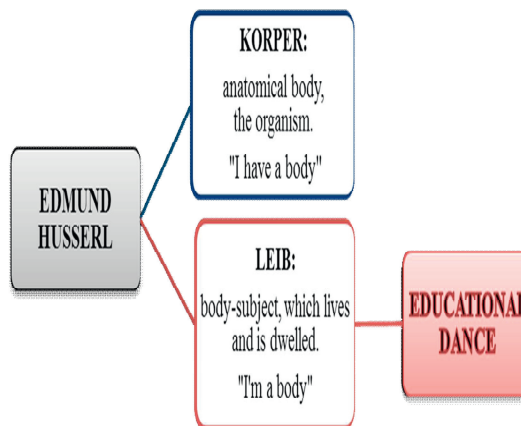


Fig. 3 – Körper and Leib



5. Discussion

Dancing finds its most proper historical and cultural collocation in the educational arts context, whose area of knowledge is shared by similar arts (music, theatre, visual arts) in order to develop a defined set of attitudes and competences. All the arts promote the development of a perception and thinking skill different from that of other disciplines: a thought that is intuitive, flexible, open to imagination, neither linear nor stringent. Therefore, the arts are fundamental components of our history, our culture and last but not least our education.

Although the arts are not yet given the right weight in the institutional Italian school, devoid of appropriate tools and skills in the artistic field, dancing has a precise collocation within the most recent regulatory references. We want to underscore that dancing is already part of the scholastic curriculum of many world’s countries, which

means that many nations question themselves on the modalities of access in the school. In Italy, only in recent years, research on the introduction of dancing in children's education has aroused interest and curiosity.

Although dancing is not mentioned in the Programs '85, it appears for the first time in the National Programs 2007 and in the current National Programs 2012, which promote an use of dance as a means to convey emotional and affective experiences through gestures and body language.

Its collocation in the physical education discipline emphasizes the connection with the education on one hand and the body and the movement on the other. Dancing has the ability to associate and combine the physical development with the expressive and emotional one.

The sciences argue that the person does not exist without a body revealing its soul and the soul cannot exist if it does not express itself through the body. The body and the psychic are two separate poles that influence each other in a circular way within a single system, the person. And the educational process have to refer to both (Gomez Paloma 2009). Dancing can concretely accomplish this integration. Its aim is to combine body and mind and train the former, for it represents the means through which one can find good qualities because they are natural, innate, and reflect the anatomical structure of the body.

The body is the reference point of the child, it links him to other children and to the world, it is the means through which he expresses and becomes aware of himself therefore building his own identity.

In this regard, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl uses two different words referring to the body: the *Körper*, defined as a tool-body, according to which I can state that "I have a body", and the *Leib*, termed as the body that lives and is dwelled, for which I can state that "I am a body". It is pretty different having a body from being a body (Edmund Husserl, 2002).

When dancing enters the school context it gives primary importance to the *Leib*, an expressive body that moves intentionally to communicate and experience and it denies the word's predominance.

It also underlines the partiality of physical education that, in many cases, is still too based on the tool-body (*Körper*) that can be trained according to a sportive functional perspective.

Dancing values the body as a personality constitutive element and starts from the concept that by training the body we can train the feeling, the thought and accordingly shape the person.

In this way it becomes educational dance where the adjective 'educational' wants to mean a dance teaching that looks at the person more than at the dancer training and is referred to a specific context, the school context. It is a type of dance aiming primarily at the expressive awareness of the movement. It is conceived as an artistic and expressive body language that integrates the pupils' physical and psychological development and not as a specialized path aimed at the dancer's artistic education. It is not based on standard movements to be conveyed to pupils but it promotes more natural shapes of moves that are being conceived and recognized as such in order to become expressively aware movement (Franca Zagatti, 2009).

Thanks to dance it is possible to achieve goals in psychomotor, cognitive and affective areas, standing in a playful and socializing context.

From a psychomotor point of view, dancing encourages the physiological strengthening because it represents a muscle gymnastic very important for the harmonic development of the organism.

The action of dancing involves all muscles, including the musculature that is not usually employed in daily movements and risks to remain atrophic for its reductive use.

Dancing's exercise affects the osteoarticular system as a whole, the blood circulation and the internal organs. It increases the respiratory ability and strengthens the cardiac muscle, encouraging at the same time the tissues' oxygenation with considerable advantages for every organism's functions (Guido Giugni, 1986).

Moreover, dancing improves other abilities such as the quickness and accuracy of the movement, the vasomotor and visual-spatial coordination but also the laterality and segmental coordination.

Because of the kynesthetic sensations it carries out (postural, thermal, tactile and pain sensations), the body pattern becomes wide. We cannot know much of our body if we do not move it. Finally, dancing consolidates and improves static and dynamic motor patterns that are essential for the movement organization.

For what concerns the cognitive aspect, dancing encourages the spatial-temporal organization: it helps the child to acquire concepts about space and orientation (forth and back, right and left, near and far) and develop notions about time and rhythmic structure (slow and quick, before and after). Dancing improves the development of the rhythmic sense: the rhythm is expressed through the movement and our body is the main tool that allows us to live and express it. Through dancing the student learns to acknowledge different types of rhythm in which the movement can be expressed or he can adapt his movement to the rhythms required by different situations.

It is important to help the child to become aware of the fact that every movement repeated with steady pace in time is a rhythmic activity. Examples of this can be bouncing a ball, marching , jumping , etc.

Furthermore, rhythmic sense will help the child in his school path (in language- reading- writing learning process).

Finally, from an affective-relational standpoint, dancing is an art that fosters socialization, facilitates integration, promotes dynamic relations, stimulates the self-esteem and also helps to overcome relational problems between students of different sex which are quite marked in compulsory schooling.

6. Conclusion

On the basis of the arguments here reported, we foster to consider educational dancing as a valuable tool for the formation of everybody. The right education should not aim at introducing even more notions in the student's mind, rather it would have to chaperon them toward their own trust, the knowledge of their body and of the world. The self is not just the body, neither the mind nor the feelings. It is the overall being and dancing puts it in relation with all three aspects simultaneously.

Through dancing the child understands how his body, his mind and his imagination work. He learns what his body can do, what kind of strength and energy he has. For example, while he is jumping he acquires the meaning of jumping. As a result, not only he reaches the self-awareness and learns to use the movement as a tool of communication with other children, but he perceives the change of his movement according to emotions and sensations as well. Dancing can help to free him from an uneasiness or a fear hidden inside him.

By acting as a trait of union between cognitive and emotional, dancing can actually teach children to “dwell” their own body.

References

- Zocca D. (2004), *Laboratorio danza. Attività di movimento creativo con i bambini*, Trento: Ed. Erickson.
- Edmund Husserl, (2002), *Meditazioni cartesiane*, Milano:Bompiani.
- Zagatti F. (2004), *La Danza Educativa. Principi metodologici e itinerari operative per l'espressione artistica del corpo nella scuola*, Bologna: Musikè Progetti Educativi.
- Gomez Paloma F., (2004), *Corporeità ed emozioni. Una formazione psicomotoria per il saper...essere*, Napoli: Alfredo Guida Editore.
- Guido Giugni, (1986), *Il corpo e il movimento nel processo educativo della persona*, Torino: SEI.
- Le Boulch J. (1979), *Educare con il movimento*, Roma: Armando Editore.
- J.Smith Autard J. (1994), *Dance Composition. A practical guide for Teachers*, London, A & C Black, 1992 e *The Art of Dance in Education*, London: A & C Black.
- John Martin, (1991), *La Danza Moderna*, Roma: Di Giacomo Editore.
- Marion Gough (2010), *Insegnare danza*, Bologna: Musikè Progetti Educativi.
- Maurizio Padovan, *Danzare a scuola. Proposte operative per un'attività di danza nella scuola di base*, Mercatello sul Metauro: Progetti Sonori Edizioni.