

## The educational role of corporeity and dance

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**Abstract:** Dance can become a fundamental teaching tool as it does not act exclusively on a physical level but also on the cognitive, emotional and social one. The knowledge and practice of this discipline represent an important opportunity for growth especially for children, as they learn about their body, get in touch with their respective creative potential, recognize strengths and use movement as a means of communication with the outside world.

**Keywords:** Body Language, Creative Movement, Educational Dance

**Riassunto:** La danza può diventare uno strumento didattico fondamentale in quanto non agisce esclusivamente a livello fisico ma anche cognitivo, emotivo e sociale. La conoscenza e la pratica di questa disciplina rappresentano un'importante opportunità di crescita soprattutto per i bambini, in quanto imparano a conoscere il proprio corpo, entrano in contatto con le rispettive potenzialità creative, riconoscono i punti di forza e utilizzano il movimento come mezzo di comunicazione con il mondo esterno.

**Parole Chiave:** Linguaggio del corpo, movimento creativo, danza educativa

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### 1. Introduction

Since the dawn of civilization, dance has been part of the main forms of human expression, has transformed and has changed along with the thought, habits, culture and needs of the time and society that expressed and reflected: from a liberating outburst of emotions to a propitiatory and celebratory rite, from an intimate and inner expression to a code of social behavior, from shamanic ritual to a therapeutic path, from an art form to collective entertainment (Franco, Cobos, 2019). Yet, today, the majority of people are accustomed to think of dance only in terms of steps, styles and techniques and to consider the dance event as the final outcome of a path of literacy linked to even complex motor languages. For the purposes of the present study, which aims to consider and illustrate a broad use, educational and formative dance, it is essential to adopt a perspective that is not exclusively focused on the way you dance, but that, rather, is oriented to identify and analyze first the reasons why you dance. It is no coincidence that, at the time of the "late" entry of dance among the various integrative activities of the artistic area present in the Italian school (early 90s), there was a need to add the adjective "educational" to the word dance just to draw attention, not so much about the

type or style of dance, but rather about the context and its function (Lykesas, 2018). And so, in Italy, when we talk about dance in school, we usually use the term educational dance. The personal urges that lead an adult, young person, child or elder to dance can vary considerably and may depend on contexts and situations. But there is an element that unites them all: the spontaneity of the act (Gilbert, 2015). No one dances because he is obliged to do so, if anything, he dances because he cannot do without it. The act of dancing is, then, something that - beyond everything - must have to do with the desire, the will and the pleasure of moving, with the ease and ease of saying (McCutchen, 2006). It can hardly be imposed; it is a spontaneous activity that is exercised for the sake of being made, the gesture of the dancer does not have, in this sense, a concrete purpose, but it means by itself and finds its end in its own making. It is a gesture that is directed towards the world, but not with a practical or utilitarian purpose; the movement danced, does not produce, or get anything actual, does not build anything of material; it is ephemeral, changeable and transitory (Moreno, 2017). Thanks to this perspective, the field of action of the gesture (intended as a motor act not random, but done with no other purpose than to be in the space and time of its execution) is widened by its more usual and daily use, to that of symbolic and evocative type that you have in dancing. It is not so much the type of gesture, but its quality, made of executive and expressive significance, that makes the difference: that same movement that is used for a daily action such as, for example, cleaning a glass, can become that dancing gesture of the arm and hand that unfolds in the space in front of and around me (Piek, 2013; Lykesas, 2014). The movement of any person can thus be considered a concrete basis on which to work to arrive at a form intentionally reworked: a walk is a movement of movement of our functional body in order to go from one point to another in space (Cleland Donnelly, Millar, 2019). The experience of walking will be qualitatively different, if the time of that movement, for example, is deliberately altered, it will be different to walk slowly and with dignified steps, or quickly with short and hasty steps, in a light or heavy way, using as much space as you can, with your back curved or with your back straight and so on. In each of these examples walking will continue to be an action of movement given by the transfer of weight from one foot to another, but it will be the qualitatively different nature of our subjective feeling to constitute the matter of our knowledge; those same movements, those gestures, which

are part of the natural and spontaneous activity of so much motor education, can, through this perspective, be reworked and voluntarily assembled within a system of signs that has the ability to self-regenerate (Nikitina, 2003). In dance it is not the isolated gesture that represents a signal, but the role and function assigned to it within a set of movements that generates its meaning. Teaching in a movement laboratory does not mean providing children with the tools to translate a verbal delivery into motion, it means rather providing stimuli, preparing situations, in which children can observe and know the world around them through the emotions that this gives rise to them and to express these emotions through a series of conscious movements" (Hall, 2011). This is how it is: through dance it is possible to approach a different way of knowing and feeling, and through an experience of global body perception, to develop and acquire instruments of symbolic transformation of the real. Dance, all dance - that of children and that of adults - thus acquires the power to transform movement into language without using the word and to shape images into forms, but without reproducing reality. In this transfigurative and representative value and in its ability to reconcile motor development with expressive and communicative development, the true formative and educational essence of dance must be identified, which we can thus define as: the art of using and organizing the movement to express themselves, communicate and invent (Moore, Linder, 2012; Sharma, 2020). It is evident that on the pedagogical level this perspective clearly highlights the distance from forms of motor learning of a training, imitative, exclusively executive, or, on the contrary, excessively spontaneous (Graham 2002; Bergstein Dow, 2010; Marc Richard 2013; Leandro, 2018). Rather, it orients us towards an educational style that is attentive to motivating, involving and inducing students to move in a fluid, simple and driving way, but at the same time obliges us to define precise methodological support systems: It is not enough to make things in a fun and participatory way to transform them into educational and formative experiences, they serve precise references capable of directing and guiding practices.

## **2. Background of reference**

In the educational and community dance we refer to the theories of analysis of the movement elaborated by Rudolf Labans from which derives a methodological system centered on an exploratory and analytical orientation that is extremely functional to

promote creative practices of invention and combination of motion. In this perspective, those who dance become both interpreter and creator and learn to recognize those same elements that they are experiencing and experimenting in their own dance, even in that of others. It can do this because the drive elements have been classified and ordered within precise reference grids organized according to universal factors (space, time, weight, flow). Answering the questions: “What moves?”, “Where?”, “How?”, “With whom?”, the contents of the dance are perceived, processed, analyzed. Experiencing, observing and analyzing what is moving means focusing attention on the body, its structure and the main motor actions. Analyzing where and towards where one is moving one’s dance or what one is observing, means considering the space used and usable, the directions, the drawing and the traces left by the body in motion. How dance determines the qualitative and dynamic characteristics of movement. It is linked to the sense of weight and time, to flow, to space. Considering the relationships that are established between parts of the body, with other people, or with objects, means experiencing how the relationship between different agents modifies, redefines and influences dance. This classification is placed in an experiential perspective: it does not teach, that is, to "do" things in a given way, but teaches to make them own, see and recognize them according to common parameters. In this system, experiencing a certain dynamic quality (for example lightness) is considered essential for it to be recognized in the phase of analysis and observation. But the opposite is also true: being able to recognize and analyze it in the movement of another, will also facilitate its execution that will be more aware and clear. At the center of the process of knowledge is placed the dancing person (child, adolescent, adult, elderly), who is involved in a movement experience focused on concrete, habitual, daily actions; such actions are "disassembled" and then "reassembled" and transformed. The expressive and creative process, in this way, does not come from nothing, does not rely on the originality and predisposition of the individual, but is based on known motor elements (because of the daily type or because learned) On which to graft a fruitful process of reinvention (Ratey, 2008). You can perform, so, usual and spontaneous actions, but never random and involuntary, as they become consciously motivated within paths of sense able to refine their structure. The dance in this perspective is not something that exists outside of me and that I must learn and shape on me, but something that exists within me and that I can intentionally

activate in a natural way. It is a latent dimension in each of us. There can therefore be no defined boundary between "suitable" and "unsuitable" movements, between "right" and "wrong" movements (Lykesas, 2018). What interests us is not the muscular efficacy, the performative efficiency, it is not the age, the physical prowess, the agility, the looseness, the strength, but the body as an expression before acting and interacting with others and the essential basis of existence. We are not prefiguring techniques and codes of movement to be studied and learned, what we pursue is not a dance for a few extraordinary "someone", but a dance for "everyone and everyone" that is offered to the needs of people, their needs, needs, to individual and collective emotions and feelings (Stinson, 2010). The eyes of those who work must be inclusive, open to the territories of a movement inhabited by bodily experience, at the service of personal expression and participatory sharing (Becker, 2013). What an operator proposes and offers to any person who wants to dance is therefore a path of growth and acquisition of criteria of aesthetic and subjective choice. Because while it is certainly the motivation to define the presence of the gesture (I dance to have fun, meet people, vent...), it is also true that it is the intentional consciousness that, in the path, redefines the motivations and quality (I dance to express myself, communicate, create, invent...).

### **3. The formation of the "dance educator"**

The reality of school and society today seems not to be made for dance: the body is often detached from the sphere of emotions, separated from the interior, disharmoniously induced to a passive fruition of external and massifying models. The body proposed by the educational and community dance is, instead, a sensitive, harmonious body, attentive to subjective feeling, concerned with the relationship with others. This is why those engaged in educational practices (in schools, education, art, social, etc.) cannot afford to rely on the instinct of doing without worrying about activating a reflection on the most appropriate ways of acting (Lykesas, 2014; Tsompanaki, 2019). Even the most fun and carefree operating proposal, the most natural and spontaneous gesture, as well as the most sensitive and inspired approach, must have behind the acquisition of what we might call a deontology of reflexivity (Chatzopoulos, 2018). The challenge then becomes to be able to identify and prepare figures of

operators in which the reflective competence on their motor actions becomes more important than the technical skills needed to perform those same actions (Temple, 2020). The action of moving cannot exhaust its effectiveness in the space and time of its execution, but must be able to create a positive impulse to act and to think of everyone, an attitude to seize opportunities to listen, rethink, redesign, a drive to discover new opportunities. Feeling, listening, observing, reflecting, inventing, acting, having fun, being well, then become pivotal words on which and around which it is possible to activate personal and collective paths of deepening and improvement of methods and practices (Leandro, 2018). It is around this complex mode of thinking and acting then accordingly, but also, and above all, of thinking acting, it is around this training against a way of operating always lowered in the dialogical confrontation even with themselves, that the formative path of the "educator dance" is built. The Course for Dance Educator is active in Bologna at "Mousikè-School" of training and research in educational and community dance, since 1999. What is currently being proposed is an integral and articulated formation, which ranges through wide areas of study: from the methodology of educational dance to the analysis of movement, from the history of dance in education to child pedagogy, from improvisation in dance to the musical landscape, from community dance to the pedagogy of inclusion (McCutchen, 2006). The professional field in which the dance educator is placed, is characterized by a didactic proposal of a laboratory type, centered on a rich range of motor experiences, creative and expressive and characterized by interventions that can be made in a very diverse, for duration, organization and content. For this reason the professional profile of the dance educator must be based on a specific artistic, pedagogical and educational competence, which allows to intervene on the different realities of the school and social context, Enhancing the individual situations and encouraging the implementation of rewarding and uncompetitive experiences, which set in motion the desire to move, to express themselves, to invent and see dance (Neville, Makopoulou, 2021). The training course is divided into three areas: personal training that promotes the rediscovery of body feeling and deconditioning from the stereotypes of the danced movement and the awareness of their own bodily action in the interpersonal and educational relationship, getting used to self-assessment processes.

#### 4. The educational style

In every educational and community dance experience, the operator's style of leadership is the primary driver of every possible work orientation. The type of conduction to which I refer is not to be understood as a unique and monodirectional act, but rather as a complex process that moves in an interconnected manner on different planes. A rational plan, which has to do with objectives, with the analysis and reworking of what happens or has happened; a sensory plan, which has to do with instinct, reactivity, sensitive activation of sight, hearing, touch; and a poetic plan that has to do with imagination, aesthetic sense, artistic planning. It is necessary to avoid rooting with too much solidity exclusively in one of the three floors, trying rather to remain available to the fluid passage from one to the other (Theocharidou, 2018; Temple, 2020). It is a behavioral behavior that requires commitment, is almost never born spontaneously and depends primarily on willingness to listen. The here and now of the moment lived with careful participation and with a sense of immediacy with respect to what is happening, allows the dance educator to establish a general climate in which it regains the pleasure of being in the movement without the experience being loaded with expectations of possible or hoped results (Aucouturier, 2016). If the leader learns to shift his gaze from what he should or should be, to what he is at that moment, he will suddenly find himself in a clearer and more productive dimension similar to that of the navigator who loves to feel himself at sea, not so much for the goal to be reached, but for the pleasure of sailing. The movement of any person can thus be considered a concrete basis on which to work starting from what he is and can do at the moment, without entering into a frustrating and unproductive mechanism aimed at chasing what he could or should be able to do. Such a mobile and flexible work perspective implies an opening to the unexpected and the unexpected that is built without doubt primarily through a non-judgmental management (which does not express judgments, but offers visions, looks, descriptions of what is happening) but at the same time it needs a safe and clear direction capable of directing individual and collective research. Show, make repeat, be imitated, are part of the technical tools of those who lead, like the solicitations to invent, create, improvise. Of course, the working climate that must be breathed must not be that of the most formless spontaneity: it is not enough that a person does not feel judged, so



that he can decide to enter the flow of his own movement, It could, indeed, compensate for the lack of driving with a much stricter form of self-control. It is important to convey, instead, with firm conviction the positive value inherent in trying to confront the limits that each, in a different way, possesses; this does not mean creating a sense of challenge and competition, how much rather to provoke the free circuiting of a proactive and vital energy that pushes to do and act, without ever forgetting to emotionally support any indecision, any discomfort and reluctance. The goal is to create autonomy, make sure that everyone rediscovers the pleasure of exploring, inventing, understanding and making sense of gestures and movement. No need to hurry: the sense of time is a fundamental key in a participatory dance management, this means carefully considering whether you have left enough time to explore, express yourself, listen, if it's time to move on to another exercise, to stop for a moment, if you need to talk more slowly about what you were doing, or even to use words other than those used. The predominance of non-verbal messages and informants used in meetings must not in fact overshadow the importance of the use of the word to convey indications, to correct, to communicate trust. The words of those who lead have a sound, a quality, are carriers of meanings and imaginary, express content, clarify the movement, create confidence, but can also generate discomfort, misunderstandings, doubts. Direct and welcoming gestural behavior cannot be accompanied by a monotonous, dull, ineffective voice. An incitement to "jump" and let go of the movement cannot be made in a low, uniform, whispered tone. Working on the use and variation of the voice, training to a different sound emission, discovering the timbral ranges in our possession, can help to improve in a surprising way the response of the groups, but it is not enough. The words we choose, the number, the juxtapositions, the rhetorical artifices we use, are just as relevant: using too many words can turn off the desire to move, words not carefully chosen lead to different reactions depending on the interpretation of each, Wrong metaphors can lead to different working paths from those envisaged.

### **5. Conducting an educational dance session**

Many of the proposals for intervention in the educational and community dance are characterized by recourse to ritualized ways of sharing. Participating in a practice that is repeated can facilitate the development of the sense of belonging to the group and



encourage individuals to take appropriate behaviors to work together. Of course the implicit concept of repetition linked to routine practices concerns only the organization of work and does not mean "repetition of exercises" or a mechanical alternation of separate moments; on the contrary, the operational proposals must be able to flow in an organic and original way one inside the other: in this way, the phases that follow each other have a reassuring recognition, essential to the successful realization of the lesson, however the atmosphere that you breathe, so widely marked by the free expression and the proactivity of each, contributes to create a dynamic and creative situation. The opening phase is dedicated to creating an atmosphere of collaboration and participation in which rituals of knowledge and socialization are proposed: this phase has the task of delimiting a value frame, characterized by its own rules (implicit and explicit). This is a discipline that distinguishes it from other motor activities. At this point, after activating the sense of participation and the availability of the group, people will be ready to move and enter the second phase, that of warming up: The purpose of this second step is to discharge physical tensions through an activation of the consciousness of joint mobilization, postural arrangement and use of breath. These activities should be used to prepare for body work by stimulating concentration and listening and can help to expand and refine the gestural and rhythmic-motor vocabulary. When warming up is performed by imitation, it is essential that the operator performs the motion sequences rhythmically and with dynamic quality, these must be sufficiently easy to be carried out by all but not too elementary in order to maintain active participation. With groups already used to working together, it is useful to propose, as an alternative or in addition to imitation, also a body listening work guided by the voice of the operator who, with a non-directional language, but open to metaphors and visualizations, will suggest possible exploratory paths. At this point, we arrive at the most delicate moment regarding the involvement and direct participation of students: the presentation of the topic of the lesson. Typically, the work is initially individual, even if performed together with the whole group (because it is necessary for each participant to compare with their abilities and their way of feeling and living the proposal by finding personal and original paths) then it can become team work or group work. Of course, the dance educator will guide and observe the proposals alternating varied moments of bodily practice to others of exchange of opinions to still others of enlargement of the body

survey area (inserting difficulties, adding stimuli, accepting changes of path). Whatever is proposed, the climate must be open to collaboration and participation. Initially the dance and the experience of movement will depend totally on the proposal of the operator, as each person has their own ideas, some prejudice, various experiences and abilities different from the others: Therefore, it will be the task of those who lead to reassure and involve the participants to shift their attention and the general point of view towards a bodily experience that goes to redefine the artistic sense of dancing together; It is a displacement action that shifts individual feeling from a rather unproductive self-referentiality to an intentional manifestation of self. When an operator has managed to "transport" people to a new area, in a territory of conquest until then unexplored where the word "dance" can begin to mean some kind of experience shared by all, then it's time to loosen the metaphorical reins of the conductor and facilitate the transition to another phase, that of putting in shape. Giving shape to the work done means facilitating and urging a more conscious and personal re-appropriation of the movement; The goal, of course, is not to test the learning of different stylistic models of execution towards which to strive but to build environments capable of stimulating the thought and creativity of the body of the dancer: is a phase of refinement of the materials that engages in practices of invention, selection, repetition and invites to the manifestation of the self and its personal preferences and abilities. It is essential that a person feels comfortable, free to move as his body knows and wants to do and that he feels a look, or more looks - those of the other participants - ready to welcome and enhance his movement. What is activated in this way is a circular process of restitution that allows each person to enter into a dance experience, living it as his own. The gesture, first performed and explored in a spontaneous and sometimes unconscious way, is thus observed and recognized by the educator dance that returns it to the performer loaded with sense and artistic significance. In this way a meeting of educational dance or community expresses with balance the dimension of experience between individual and collective, between spontaneous expression and artistic research, between transmission of indirect gesture and direct personal reworking. Finally, before saying goodbye, there is still a ritual to be performed, the closing one: it is a moment to complete the work session and say goodbye and it is useful both to the teacher and to the students to complete the meetings with the right enhancement of the experience made together: you

should always know how to calculate the time correctly to try to never finish any meeting dismissing the group in a rough and hasty. As at the beginning, you can choose a short farewell ritual (a characteristic motto or gestures) or adapt from time to time to what happened during the lesson, leaving room for moments of verbalization and/ or relaxation.

## 6. Conclusions

In the light of this work, it is evident that danceability is a technique that allows people with or without disabilities to meet to dance together, through a research path that exploits individual physical and expressive skills. The aim is to make the language of dance accessible to all interested people, without any restrictions of age, experience or physical and mental condition. Dance develops through the technique of improvisation (based on self-awareness, relationship and mutual trust), allows you to make new experiences with your different skills and moving with others, going beyond the limits to which you are accustomed: not a "therapy" or a "dance therapy" but a real artistic and creative expression. The primary task of the operator is to encourage the expression of everyone by establishing a serene and collaborative atmosphere, demonstrating sincere interest in everyone and offering careful and participatory guidance. Each student must be seen in his psychophysical totality and in respect of the individual times necessary for the rediscovery of a more direct relationship of sensitive listening to himself and others. Only in time can each participant understand the difference between an inhabited movement and one that is not, between a stereotyped gesture and a personal one, between a confused proposal and one organized with awareness.

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