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CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS OF DANCE AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

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Abstract

Due to the countless functions it fulfils, dance is at the border between sport and art, being a motor activity expressed nonverbally both in the sphere of bodily expression and from a narrative point of view through the execution of rhythmic movements based on choreographic scenarios involving multiple body movements. Dance is a sensorimotor complex that includes physical, cognitive and social elements aimed at improving mental and cognitive health. It requires both anaerobic but especially aerobic effort. Such artistic activities support brain function and reduce the rate of brain ageing by stimulating attention, coordination and creativity, as well as enhancing the cardiorespiratory system. Dance is a physical activity with various forms of manifestation. Its complexity and aerobic nature provide health benefits, reducing excess weight, correcting posture and strengthening muscles. Dance functions can be considered as praxeological ways of action that are bio-psycho-socially conditioned and have a particular destination. The analysis of dance functions presents, through the benefits and conditioning factors for participants, a multitude of aspects such as bio-physiological, psycho-social, motor ones and more. Ballroom dance improves self-esteem and self-confidence, oxygenates the brain increasing the capacity for concentration, memory and attention, is a means of play and socialisation being associated with fun and pleasure, stimulates the motor system and balance, releases endorphins, and thus participants feel a state of well-being after training.

Keywords: dance, physical activity, art therapy.

CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS OF DANCE

Due to the countless functions it fulfils, dance is at the border between sport and art, being a motor activity expressed nonverbally both in the sphere of bodily expression and from a narrative point of view through the execution of rhythmic movements based on choreographic scenarios involving multiple body movements such as travels, twists, jumps, turns, flexion and extension, etc. (Năstase, 2011).

As a creative process, dance involves the intellect for the correct representation of movements; emotions, as a natural form of expressiveness; the body, as the external way of conveying the artistic form of dance; and personality, which animates the other components (Vișan, 2005).

The elements of dance, namely space, time and force (energy), become the basic elements that make up the dance form with specific structures (Kassing & Jay-Kirschenbaum, 2020). The combined aspects of musicality and coordination of body segments develop artistic intelligence through plastic and expressive execution, through aesthetic interpretation and choreographic construction (Macovei, 2007).

Dance differs from other activities that include nonverbal communication through its aesthetic side. Sometimes choreography can follow a narrative thread or theme and exemplifies how a bodily movement can create its own universe in the time and space imagined by the dancer (Berleant, 2016). Movements are controlled, alternating fast and slow, jerky or fluid steps, and each segment of the body is important in expressing the artistic act.

In the context of the individual's participation, dance can be found under two aspects: for oneself, having an educational-formative, therapeutic or leisure purpose; for others, as an artistic act with a high level of expressiveness and clarity, which is performed in a professional, spectacular and competitive manner (Năstase, 2011).

OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS OF DANCE IN RELATION TO CHILDREN'S GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The variety of benefits and objectives it offers organizes dance into three distinct categories (Aducovschi, 2007):

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- dance for all – aims to ensure optimal health, improve mental performance, foster harmonious physical development, prevent disability, facilitate social communication;
- professional dance – aims to develop conditional and coordination skills, consolidate and refine specific steps, educate body aesthetics, cultivate notions related to music and the perception of rhythm and musical tempo;
- adapted dance – helps improve health, regain self-confidence and optimism, correct defects through its compensatory effects, integrate into society.

Dance *functions* can be considered as praxeological ways of action that are bio-psycho-socially conditioned and have a particular destination. The analysis of dance functions presents, through the benefits and conditioning factors for participants, a multitude of aspects such as bio-physiological, psycho-social, motor ones and more (Năstase, 2011):

- ❖ Physical and harmonious development function – dancing under controlled conditions maintains vital functions at beneficial parameters for optimal health and stimulates balanced somatic-functional development;
- ❖ Recreational function – is mainly found in the "dance for all" category and involves physical and mental release;
- ❖ Educational function – involves the harmonious development of personality, which includes motor, aesthetic, biological, functional, intellectual and moral skills (Dragnea et al., 2006);
- ❖ Motor function – dance improves the development of coordination skills, as well as motor skills and abilities;
- ❖ Therapeutic function – dance is recommended for maintaining optimal physical and mental health or recovering bio-psycho-social skills, as it is also effective for people with mental or motor disabilities;
- ❖ Socialisation function – dance produces a healthy emotional environment, provides relaxation and good mood within a group and develops competitive spirit. In dance, the social integration function is manifested at affective, cognitive and cultural levels.

Compared to people engaged in other physical and leisure activities, dancers have a greater ability to distinguish sounds, understand information, anticipate and imitate the next movements of people or other living organisms around them, feel the rhythm and synchronise movements to music, orient themselves in space and time, and control their postures (Karpati et al., 2016).

THE EFFECTS OF DANCE ON HEALTH AND HARMONIOUS BODY DEVELOPMENT

Dance is a sensorimotor complex that includes physical, cognitive and social elements aimed at improving mental and cognitive health (Merom et. al., 2013). It requires both anaerobic but especially aerobic effort. This sport supports brain function and reduces the rate of brain ageing by stimulating attention, coordination and creativity, as well as enhancing the cardiorespiratory system (Alves, 2013).

Dance is a physical activity with various forms of manifestation. Its complexity and aerobic nature provide health benefits, reducing excess weight, correcting posture and strengthening muscles (Ward, 2008) (Table 1).

Table 1. Health benefits of dance

BODY FLEXIBILITY DEVELOPMENT	Warm-up involves mobility and flexibility exercises followed by complex, large and strenuous dance movements.
INCREASED BODY STRENGTH	Develops whole-body muscles, especially in the lower limbs.
INCREASED PHYSICAL ENDURANCE	Regular physical activity increases heart rate and improves heart function.
EMERGENCE OF POSITIVE MOOD	Combats stress and increases self-esteem through its social nature.
MEMORY STIMULATION	Stimulates cognitive functions and slows volume loss in the brain area.
STRESS RELIEF	Relieves muscular and mental tension.
DEPRESSION PREVENTION	Removes negative thoughts and provides vitality.
HEART DISEASE PREVENTION	Its effect on breathing, heart rate and quality of life is faster and more effective than in the case of other activities such as cycling or using cardio machines.

EASIER WEIGHT LOSS	Approximately 30 minutes a day of dancing at a moderate pace can eliminate 0.5 kilograms per week.
BODY DEFINITION	All major muscle groups are trained during dance, which results in harmonious body development.
IMPROVED BODY BALANCE	By maintaining correct body posture and performing various movements, good control of the body segments is achieved.
INCREASED ENERGY LEVEL	Positive physical and mental effects are reflected in increased physical performance and energy levels throughout the day.
STRENGTHENED IMMUNE SYSTEM	Due to improved blood circulation, there is an increase in the number of leukocytes, antibody resistance, endorphin levels and internal body temperature, which prevents the growth of bacteria and stress hormones.

DANCE AS AN EDUCATIONAL MEANS FOR CHILDREN

Lack of extracurricular activities and parental attention affects child development (Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015). The education system must be constantly updated and meet the needs of new generations of children. Participants' interest in physical training can be maintained through activities performed on a musical background, which involve energy release and provide satisfaction and good mood (Teodorescu & Bota, 2008). The designed educational interventions that are implemented in programmes for institutionalised children verify the effectiveness of complex means of training with a multidimensional influence on each one's personality. Among these means, dance has also been identified as a form of nonverbal expression through body movements (Woodley, 2014), which develops coordination, rhythmicity, motor skills and spatiotemporal orientation (Zahiu, Manos & Drăghici, 2020).

Recent studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of introducing dance-based educational programmes that allow for better holistic training of students and provide psychological benefits (López-Serrano et al., 2017). They have an impact on cognitive and academic development, stimulating the practice of sports and artistic activities, but also increasing school motivation and integration into society.

Pedometric measurements were performed, effects on heart rate were analysed and changes in body mass index were monitored in a four-week study carried out by Lipman (2012) with 34 children (12 girls and 22 boys) aged 4-12 years who participated in street dance training sessions during which a 30-minute dance was taught weekly. The average number of steps taken by the investigated children on training days was 1,760 (increasing with each activity day), while on non-dance days, they took only 851 steps. Their resting heart rates increased compared to baseline.

A similar programme was conducted in a New York school with 64 fourth and fifth graders who participated in an after-school study based on free dance in Mambo, Cha Cha, Hip-Hop and Swing styles for 16 weeks, 50 minutes per day. At the end, positive changes were noted in terms of body composition, endurance and biological aspects – heart rate and risk of developing diabetes (Hogg et al., 2012).

A scientific study (Archive of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine) involving 112 children with back and neck problems, as well as anxiety and stress, proved the effectiveness of a dance intervention in improving their mental health. Half of the children who attended weekly dance classes enhanced their overall health, including emotional well-being, and managed to overcome depression.

Conclusions

Ballroom dance improves self-esteem and self-confidence, oxygenates the brain increasing the capacity for concentration, memory and attention, is a means of play and socialisation being associated with fun and pleasure, stimulates the motor system and balance, and releases endorphins.

Because dance is a complex sport, it has the potential to simultaneously improve several aspects of development, which contributes to an individual's overall development. The difficulty of steps and the variety of dance styles make it possible for each participant to develop bio-psycho-socially as a result of dance classes, given that this sport stimulates the musical ear, requires logic and communication between dancers or with the audience, can be a way of expression and release, and helps develop psychomotor skills, providing physical and psychological benefits. These positive effects also influence social behaviour and results in school or leisure activities.

Our research can contribute to the theoretical substantiation of the literature about the importance of dance therapy for the improvement of multiple intelligences in children and their harmonious development, and we consider it appropriate for dance-based educational programmes to be implemented in Romanian schools.

Authors' Contributions
All authors have contributed equally to the work.

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