



A DANCE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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EL SALITRE
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*"You've gotta dance like there's nobody watching,
Love like you'll never be hurt,
Sing like there's nobody listening,
And live like it's heaven on earth."*

- William W. Purkey -

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Movement is the one speech that cannot lie.

Helen Thomas

Introduction

Dance is one of the oldest and most influential arts created by humans. Since it is a powerful and vital tool in the social development of young people, we decided that using it would allow us to forge a space for individual and social construction. Dance transforms our reality and expands our freedom. It "leads to the exterior everything in the interior" (Barbosa-Cardona, p. 10).

When we first started, we had various and different proposals for the development of the project. We only knew with certainty that our approach would focus on positively impacting society.

The objective of our project was to observe and analyze the process and progress of the social, cognitive, and motor development that occurs in a community through dance. We agree with Barbosa-Cardona when she declares that "the dance scene is assumed as a magma in which feelings, activities, abilities, and capacities are merged in a symphony that recognizes the right dimensions of the motor, the corporeal, the psychological and the social" (p.05). We wanted students to learn new things about themselves and their peers through this artistic expression, interaction, and movement. Just as Lynne Anne Blom, we consider dance to begin from within, with body awareness and sensitivity to one's movement and those with whom one dances (p.22). In this way, we wanted the community members in whom we were going to intervene to open themselves up, giving them the opportunity of having new experiences and learning to live in a safe, healthy, and friendly environment for their development and well-being.

Since the beginning of the project, we wanted to know each student's physical and mental strengths and weaknesses, working to improve their security and self-esteem and forging values and virtues. We sought to build a space where children could liberate themselves from every physical and mental limitation, the monotony of the day, their problems, oppression, traumas, and stress. At the same time, they revitalized their body, mind, and spirit. We intended to make each individual in this community connect with themselves and rise to harmony, fulfillment, and happiness.

As we investigated and expanded our knowledge, we realized the children needed to know their body's limits and physical and mental abilities. We wanted the children to explore their bodies since this is "the child's first means of perception and expression, his first means of communication with another human being" (Lapierre, pp. 6-7).

They also needed to experiment with time, space, and energy to promote a space for social and artistic integration through dance. Finally, we tried to ensure that the children

distinguished the different stimuli, both sensitive and social, and that they learned to act upon them, solving the conflicts they encountered (García, pp. 194-197).

Since our early school life, we have been acquainted with P.D.R. (Plan-Do-Review). This outline consists of three actions for a complete and successful project: planning, doing, and finally, analyzing and reviewing what has been done. From the beginning, P.D.R. guided our project, making planning an imperative aspect of its development. The first thing we did was to establish a general project development plan with the help of a mind map. However, when we saw ourselves in the task of conducting the classes, we established that rigorous and detailed planning of each would be the most appropriate. According to García, "If you want the success of a project, it is essential to prepare a good plan for each session. This will allow the teacher to organize and progressively develop the activities more effectively" (pp. 147-148).

With this in mind, the classes were organized giving priority, in dance terms, to flexibility, strength, coordination, agility, balance, spatial awareness, cardiovascular endurance, aerobic capacity, imagination, creativity, spontaneity, memory, body awareness, rhythm, posture, among others, to improve motor skills, since this is "how the subject develops the ability to relate to himself, with the others and with the universe" Barbosa- Cardona, p.07).

Likewise, individual and group activities of reflection and interaction with others were carried out, promoting children's social skills and improving communication. Dance allows dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious; these two mind areas interact (Papadopoulos, 2001). We worked to help the students overcome embarrassment and shyness and improve their self-esteem and security by exploring their physical and creative abilities.

When we began to teach the classes, we found it appropriate to establish a close relationship with the students to understand their cultural and social context better. From the beginning, we considered that by doing this, we would connect more with the children and generate a more significant impact on them, therefore obtaining a better result in the sessions. As we advanced in the investigation, we realized that what we did by intuition was the right thing to achieve a positive change in a community. Knowing the cultural context of people is essential to understand their development when some therapy is carried out (Payne, pp. 112-128).

At the beginning of the project, we started teaching classes at La Escuela El Salitre. The teachers' strike nationwide, which lasted more than fifteen days, completely halted our project, preventing us from conducting dance sessions with students from that public institution. It was then that we began to work with the girls of one of the shelters of Nuevo Futuro Foundation, which is a non-profit entity whose purpose is "the human and social promotion, and fostering of children and young people deprived of a normal family environment to favor their integral development through individualized attention" (Sánchez, 2010).

When we started to work with this group of girls, we needed to do activities that aimed to help heal and mend the wounds suffered by using dance as a therapeutic tool. After a person experiences some trauma, they need to address it and change their perception of themselves and the world around them (Payne, p.58). Studies show that this trauma, especially childhood trauma, can have significant bio-sociological consequences, affecting the ability to modulate emotions and making it difficult to learn new skills and interact with others (van der Kolk, pp. 253-265). These traumas, for the most part, are present in people's unconscious, being reflected in nightmares, flashbacks, panic attacks, phobias, and other physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms (Payne, p. 61).

In all the sessions, we considered the girls' development. We were always attentive to observe and identify any progress and failure in social and motor terms. To carry out this analysis and registration effectively and profoundly, we recorded videos and took some photos, obtaining a graphic overview of the development of the classes. To complete the process documentation, we evaluated the girls on eight different criteria that made it possible to measure their progress according to our previously set objectives. We also documented in writing the main events of the project, especially the classes, which are the ones that show the process and the progress of the project. Analyzing these logs and the evaluated criteria helped us see more explicit and organized progress in the group.

Any hint of progress takes time to manifest and cannot always be quickly identified, in this case, from one class to another. When we arrived in the community, we identified several problems regarding the relationships between the girls, the main one being that some did not get along with the group. During the first classes, group activities were hampered by different problems, most of them centered on the fact that the integration and trust of some of the girls with their peers could have been more present. Also, since our relationship with them was barely nascent, it was not in our power to do something about it. We noticed motor and social progress as we developed our project and taught more classes. We needed to take advantage of every opportunity to get to know the girls more deeply, creating a stronger bond in the student-teacher relationship. Eventually, the group activities began to be carried out much more fluently. Those girls previously excluded by their peers began to be received with open arms.

Over time, the activities and games that required the girls to put their trust in others began to generate much better results. It was evident to us that the trust between them was increasing substantially. The embarrassment and shyness that they showed were less and less. In the beginning, when the girls had to come to the front and present anything, they refused because they felt embarrassed and mortified. Fortunately, throughout the sessions, and thanks to the classes' emphasis on spontaneity and shyness, the girls let loose in such a way that they came to propose improvisational activities that involved small presentations. At the end of the cycle, most girls exposed and manifested their ideas and work without fear of being judged.

In addition to their social progress, we could also identify physical progress. Even though this aspect demands more time to see some results, the girls improved their flexibility, cardiovascular endurance, agility, and strength.

To promote group cohesion, a sense of belonging, musicality, rhythm, and integral growth in artistic terms of the girls, we set up a choreography that showed the sum of the project. According to Van der Kolk, "choreography is essential so that patients can recognize their bodies and sensations, and accept themselves" (pp. 253-265).

This experience was truly unique and unforgettable for us. Being able to carry out our project with those powerful, fearless, and brilliant girls filled us with feelings that were difficult to express in a few words. We are infinitely grateful for having had the opportunity to make a positive impact in such a wonderful community, to see the smiles and joy with which the girls received and said goodbye to us every day, and to have been able to know them profoundly and, to share experiences, knowledge and moments with them.

These girls allowed us to expand our perspective, giving us the certainty that dance generates emotional and social changes. However, it has yet to be conventionally used as an instrument of change. In addition, working with them allowed us to know more about ourselves and our reality, which sometimes we do not appreciate enough. They reminded us of the sense of gratitude, not only for ourselves and the life given to us but appreciation for enriching those around us with positivity and kindness. This project also allowed us to reinforce and work on some of our skills, such as writing, documentation and research, photography, editing (in photographic and journalistic terms), and pedagogy.

To finish, we want to leave in the words of the poet and theologian of the XXII century, Yalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi. To all our experiences: "Dance when you are broken open. Dance if you have torn the bandage off. Dance in the middle of the fighting. Dance in your blood. Dance if you are perfectly free".