

10 Human flourishing through dance practice

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Introduction

Empirical evidence from affective neuroscience and experimental psychology reveals that individuals who consider themselves “happy” and “self-actualized”, generally, have three important components in their life: they have regular experiences of hedonia (pleasure/positive affect), eudemonia (life meaning) and agency (a feeling of engagement/being in control of one’s life) (Seligman et al., 2005; Kringsbach and Berridge, 2009).

Life does not always afford easily accessible opportunities to experience these three components and to flourish as a person. Resilience, the cognitive capacity to deal with adversity (Wu et al., 2013), can include seeking out opportunities where pleasure, eudemonia and agency can be experienced, when they are not offered by everyday life. The arts, and, in particular, dance practice, are contexts in which opportunities for experiencing these three components of a flourishing life can be experienced regularly. For this, mindful practices that foster empathy and agency need to be incorporated into the teaching technique, as we will show in what follows.

From mainstream school pedagogy, we know that the educational curriculum can be designed to reinforce prosocial behaviours in students (Farmer, 1984), to trigger self-actualisation by using pedagogical techniques that stimulate students to take agency within the classroom (Yavgildina et al., 2019). It has been proposed that a way to achieve this is through recreational activities such as the arts, sport, etc. (Pelowski et al., 2016; Steenbakkens et al., 2018), which cultivate both prosocial behaviour (Kou et al., 2019) and self-actualisation (Blonigan, 2010). The art form of dance affords precisely these opportunities for human flourishing.

Dance is a complex multisensory art form which happens in time and space simultaneously (Mettler, 1947; Kostelanetz and Anderson, 1998). Dance practice challenges and stimulates many aspects of the individual’s neurocognitive machinery and, thus, affords several benefits for the individual (Christensen et al., 2021).

At first sight, dance training obviously teaches the individual to dance, to follow and to understand music, and it keeps the body and the brain fit. However,

DOI: 10.4324/9781003158790-14

this is not all. A closer look at dance classes reveals a very structured learning environment that is literally teaching the individual to learn. The elements of a dance class are often unknown to people outside the dance world.

The ideal learning environment for any skill is where students feel confident to express themselves without being judged (Campbell, 1960). At the same time, they should clearly understand that they must respect the other students and the teacher. For this to happen, the teacher should set clear boundaries and define what constitutes acceptable behaviour, while at the same time remaining attentive and compassionate. Ideally, the student feels that the teacher is there to help and not judge, while understanding that crossing specific boundaries is not allowed. This structure will build students' trust in the teacher and provide a sense of comfort that will allow the students drop their guards and be more creative and expressive. The structure of dance classes afford precisely that.

The dance exercises and how they are required to be performed give the student opportunities to develop *self-discipline* (e.g. by practicing turn taking, repetitions and deferring gratification), *self-awareness* (e.g. by practicing and developing emotional and physical awareness through kinaesthetic feedback from the body), *self-respect* (e.g. by practicing and developing care and consideration for bodily needs) and *respect for others* (e.g. by the non-judgemental environment and clear boundaries created by the instructor). Many dance instructors support these skills intuitively, as a supportive environment is a part of any structured dance class. However, dance teachers who are explicitly conscious of these components (self-discipline, self-awareness, self-respect and respect for others), make sure emphasise them explicitly in class. All of the above behaviours foster healthy, well-adjusted individuals (van Staden et al., 2009). They are also key to developing prosocial behaviour in the dance class and beyond.

For the purposes of this chapter, we would like to bring the attention to the new dance teaching methods/techniques that are flourishing in recent decades in the dance field, as opposed to “old-school strategies”. We will specifically focus on the following components of prosocial behaviour that we propose are nurtured in a dance class: *life skills* (social problem-solving, self-awareness, agency and turn taking), *empathy* (non-judgemental, not framing and avoiding labelling) and *theory of mind* (the ability to see the stand point of the other). We also make proposals with real-life examples about how to implement them in the dance class.

How to nurture human flourishing in (dance) practice?

Several real-world experiences by dance professionals are presented below as ideas and inspiration for how different strategies can be implemented to encourage self-actualisation, self-control (the ability to control one's behaviour and cognitions to achieve a goal; Li et al., 2022), and prosocial behaviour in amateur dance classes and in professional dance companies alike.

Example 1 “in a dance class”

The first example is by Shahrzad Khorsandi, about a dance class. See Box 10.1.

In this example, David might have had a high expectation of himself which is associated with fear of failure (“*David had reached the end of his rope*”. *He started crying and saying “our dance is not looking right and my team is going to fail!”*). Fear, especially fear of failure, might be associated with shame, anxiety or low self-esteem (McGregor and Elliot, 2005), which becomes visible by inhibitory

Box 10.1**Situation**

In preparation for a dance performance which ended a nine-week residency in a local elementary school, I was doing a final rehearsal with the students (age 7–8). In a section of the dance small groups of students had been assigned to prepare their own short choreography to perform while the others sat in a half circle and clapped to the beat. This process of putting the kids into small groups where they have to dance together and in be sync not only teaches them the democratic process but also allows them to feel the synergy of doing the same movement together, and encourages them to do creative problem solving. From the first day of class I noticed one boy (David), who behaved differently from the others. I was told by the administration, based on a previous behavioural assessment it was decided that he is hyper-sensitive and if he shows signs of anxiety, he should be allowed to stop participating in the dance class. He would sometimes leave the dance space in the middle of our session and sit at his desk and draw. At times he would be joyful and other times anxious, becoming upset and crying due to apparently small incidents. I knew I had to be very careful in my interactions with him.

David was in a group with two other boys who were very rambunctious and did not always follow the rules. Unlike his partners, David was very focused and determined. He was having a hard time and getting frustrated. During the practice run of the dance, David’s partners refused to participate in the small group performance. David had reached the end of his rope. He started crying and saying “our dance is not looking right and my team is going to fail!” Here was a student who was so emotionally fragile that he completely broke down and cried, seeing this frustrating situation as his failure.

Strategy

I stopped the rehearsal and explained to everyone that dancing was not a failure or success type of experience, that the point is to express yourself through dance, however way that happens. And that your dance may not turn out exactly the way you planned it and that is all right. I noticed David looking at me very intently as I explained. I saw that his facial expression went from anxious to relaxed. His frown instantly disappeared and was replaced by a subtle smile. His body language also changed: his tense shoulders relaxed and his rigidly held spine released. He clearly looked relieved.

Then I told the kids to run through the whole dance and when it came time for the group presentations to cheer loudly for the other groups. I told them to just dance and have a good time, no matter how the movements turn out.

Outcome

David did the dance much better and even though his teammates did not do all of the movements correctly, he did his best and everyone cheered for him. I could see that he felt better.

Dancing makes us vulnerable, and performing in front of an audience, with all eyes on you can be scary. The next day was the performance. During the performance, when it was time for David's group to come to the middle, the other two boys in David's group decided not to participate at all! Here was a moment where things could have gone in a positive or negative direction. Well, David stood up, hesitated for a moment when he noticed his teammates were not joining him, and then he made a decision. He walked confidently to the middle of the dance floor and performed by himself. Everyone cheered and he danced like he had never danced before. He had a big smile on his face. The affirmation he received from the audience had an enormous positive affect on his self-confidence. This is the reward dancers receive for putting themselves out there to be viewed, and possibly judged by an audience.

After the show was over, all the kids lined up behind their teachers and were going back to their classrooms. I was packing up my things when I felt something hit me hard on my leg. I looked down and noticed that David had run to me and hugged my leg very hard. He looked up at me with a big smile on his face and said "Did you see me!" I told him that I did see him, and that he did a great job and I was proud of him. He then ran back to his class line and followed the teacher back to the classroom.

Afterwards, I stopped by all the classrooms to say good-bye to the kids. The teachers always put together a compilation of the kids' thank you notes/drawings. I was struck by David's drawing. The drawing showed me and him. I was in bright colours and he was in dark colours. He was saying "I can't do it" with a drawing of a sad face next to the words. And I was saying "Yes you can". Next to the image he had written "Thank you!"

It was clear to me that this moment had been significant in David's life, and that it could have gone a completely different direction had I made a different choice in dealing with the issue. I am grateful that the dance classes and the performance provided the opportunity to foster a transformation in David's perspective and behaviour.

What if

Imagine if I had reprimanded the two boys for not participating and reminded David that his group had to make sure they are ready for the performance, and thus giving the performance priority over the students' experience. The pressure would have driven David's anxiety over the edge. He most likely would have refused to participate and would have regarded the entire dance experience a disaster and a failure. Not only would he have a negative view of dancing and performing, he would also consider himself as a failure with regard to this particular project. He would not have performed at the show and would not have received the cheers and affirmation from his peers and parents. His self-confidence would not be where it is today.

behaviour or hesitation to avoid the unpleasant feeling. Sometimes, these traits are at risk of being overgeneralised and rationalised by dysfunctional forms of perfectionism (Bond and Stinson, 2007; Sagar and Stoeber, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial for a teacher to implement a pedagogy that encompasses teaching tactics to address this problem by recognizing the students' emotional needs and

addressing them. This may include instant modification of lessons and restoring the supportive, non-judgemental class environment when needed, in order to aid in perfectionism management (Nordin-Bates, 2020). Dance classes provide opportunities for teachers to do so. Studies have shown that mindfulness-based therapies can play a vital role in this regard by teaching how to detect and handle negative thoughts or feelings, and develop self-compassion and kindness towards the self (James and Rimes, 2018; Flett et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be suggested that attending mindfulness courses can be beneficial for teachers not only personally but also professionally as they can implement the very basic strategies in their classroom where students are struggling with self-criticism and fear of failure. For instance, they can encourage students to concentrate on the present and on the sense of their body and to ignore what happens outside (*inward attention*) (Hindi, 2012) (“focusing on his *dance while ignoring distractors such as the boys who did not care and were not following directions*”) and enjoy the moment regardless of the output (“*I told them to just dance and have a good time, no matter how the movements turn out*”). This can constitute an important part of dance practice (Moyle, 2016).

Taken together, perfectionism management and mindful teaching practice can lead to the students’ sense of personal growth and self-actualisation (Justo et al., 2014; Beitel et al., 2014), and it helps the student build positive attitudes towards the self and others (Xiao et al., 2017) (“*he danced like he had never danced before and everyone cheered. He had a big smile on his face, and I was proud of him*”). This fosters prosocial behaviours and communication skills (Barton, 2011).

Example 2 “in a dance class”

The second example is by Shahrzad Khorsandi, about a dance class. See Box 10.2.

Dance movements can be taught using different methods. In this example, Mary might have been a previous victim of old-school strategies, which consider amateur learners as an “empty vessel” into which knowledge is poured by a master teacher (Freire, 1970) (she felt that “*all of her movements were “wrong”, so she had sought me as her teacher to correct and perfect her movement*”). This method requiring students to rely entirely on the teacher to make progress is highly criticised today (Alam, 2013), as it prevents the students from realising their personal potential (Kipling Brown, 2014). As a result, students are inhibited and experience difficulties in adapting to different expectations and approaches to learning (Schupp and Clemente, 2010).

To avoid this, it is suggested following a dialogical process in the classroom where students’ own thinking when learning is considered as important as the teacher’s, resulting in a dynamic balance (Anttila, 2008; Malkogeorgos et al., 2011) (the “*important thing for her would be to be able to recognize the different ways of moving, and to develop the mastery of her body in such a way that she could choose to move either way with awareness*”).

In other words, improvisation with their own movements can help students to express themselves with confidence (Connell, 2009) by exploring their own

Box 10.2**Situation**

Mary (not her real name) was a student who was passionate about dance, but she was under the impression that all of her movements were “wrong”. She turned to me as her teacher for help to correct and perfect her movement. During class I saw that she would repeat my movements slightly (and sometimes very) differently. She was trying very hard but could not emulate the movement exactly the way she saw them.

Strategy

I decided to explain to her that the movement she was doing, although beautiful and correct in its own way, was “different” from what I had just demonstrated. I then went on to demonstrate and compare the two ways of doing the movement (hers and mine), showing the beauty of both ways of moving. I explained that the important thing for her would be to be able to recognize the different ways of moving, and to develop the mastery of her body in such a way that she could choose to move either way with awareness.

Outcome

In the weeks that followed I watched Mary’s transformation from a timid, uncertain dancer to one who was confident and expressive. She was eager to learn, now, without the fear of being “wrong”.

What if

Imagine if I decided to help this student improve her technique by “fixing her mistakes”. She would have continued to be a timid dancer, always trying to copy the “correct” form, not valuing her own “incorrect” way of dancing, and perhaps never trusting or respecting herself enough to be fully expressive.

movements and their expressive qualities, thus deepening the knowledge about their own expressive movement (Chappell, 2007; Lavender, 2009). Meanwhile, the teacher provides feedback, not prescriptions, to create greater synergies within the students’ learning journeys between technique and repertoire learning on the one hand, and the students’ self-actualisation as a dancer, on the other (Dryburgh and Jackson, 2016). During the 1970s, a subdiscipline within dance practice emerged – “somatics” (Hanna, 1995). Somatics teachings highlight the importance of transforming dance pedagogy into a more active and exploratory journey for the student. Here, the experience and attention to physical sensations is much more important than the mirroring and reproduction of perfect (body/movement) forms (Ginot et al., 2010). Similarly, within the realm of ballet teaching, the dance scholar and dance pedagogue Janet Karin, OAM, argues that “*the process of transmitting ballet’s complex technique to young dancers can interfere with the innate processes that give rise to efficient, expressive*

and harmonious movement” (Karin, 2016). It is therefore important in dance classes to support the student so they feel competent and in control of their own goals, and recognize their personal skills and abilities to achieve these (Deci and Ryan, 2000). This helps them gain self-esteem and self-confidence through dance practice (Morejón, 2020). And individuals who experience self-control and self-confidence are more likely to show a heightened engagement in prosocial activities (Gagné, 2003; Li et al., 2007; Lindsay et al., 2014).

Example 3 “in a dance class”

The third example is by Shahrzad Khorsandi, about a dance class. See Box 10.3.

Democratic societies need to educate their children in democratic behaviours. A dance class can readily serve as a small-scale democratic society to provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to become active, responsible and educated people. Here, in the third example, the teacher used a simple system of rotating the lines with a very positive democratic effect. Each student in class was seen as a unique individual, with the same rights (*to stand in the front and in*

Box 10.3

As dance educators, we are often faced with the challenge of teaching a class of students with very different levels of technique.

Situation

In one of my classes, two advanced students stood in the front row at the beginning of each class and stayed in the front row (close to and facing the instructor) the entire time. They would be the first to begin a traveling movement across the floor, and front-and-centre when assembling the movement into a combination. I made a note to think about this situation and deal with it in the next class session.

Strategy

I decided to use a system of rotating the lines so that everyone gets to be in all parts of the dance space. This way, regardless of the level of experience, all dancers would have an opportunity to be in the front. There would be no hierarchy between the students. Although there are times when non-hierarchical teaching can include the teacher, it is sometimes necessary for the teacher to lead and for students to follow in order to explore their own creative flow, especially when learning a completely new technique such as a dance style from an unfamiliar culture. By remaining objective and attentive to the students’ creative needs, encouraging them to take creative risks, and allowing them to explore their own variations of the movement given, the teacher can minimize the hierarchical ambience of the class.

Additionally, each dancer would get the opportunity to view the instructor’s movement from different angles, getting a deeper understanding of the movement. At the beginning of the next class, I explained the new system to the students.

Outcome

At first, the two advanced students seemed disappointed. Their shoulders slumped forward and one of them pursed her lips in a frustrated way, lifting her chin in an effort to keep her pride. It was obvious they felt they were being demoted. But the repetitive line rotation soon showed a system at play, one that is more democratic, and by the end of that class, I could tell that they understood the new class dynamics. Gone were the slumped shoulders and pursed lips, and they actually made more eye contact with the other dancers, interacting with them in a respectful way: stepping out of the way to allow them to take their new spots, smiling, etc. I even saw one giving a thumbs-up to a new student for doing a challenging movement correctly. The fact that they let go of their front-and-centre spots easily while genuinely smiling at other dancers, showed me that they had clearly received the message of equality, that they are all there to learn and improve, regardless of their skill level. The other students looked happier and were more fully engaged in learning movement patterns, having received affirmation (from both the teacher and other students) for their efforts, and felt comfortable being in the front because they were simply following the rules of the system, as opposed to being seen as audacious.

What if

I could have allowed the two advanced students to continue to place themselves in the front, sending the message that they are better dancers than the rest of the class and that they should lead the others. These advanced students might have become so engulfed in the hierarchy and their leading positions that they would see themselves at the maximum of their learning limit, and might have concluded that there was no more for them to learn in the class. This is a dangerous mindset, and one that puts a halt to learning. I would never want to foster that kind of mentality in a student.

I could have told the advanced students that they should not be in the front, and should move to another spot in the room. These dancers would feel punished and deflated. Their motivation to lead would dissipate, and they might develop feelings of resentment toward other dancers or me, their teacher.

every position of the classroom), their voice is counted and valued and there is no room for injustice and censorship (Leonard, 2014) (regardless of the level of experience, all dancers would have an opportunity to be in the front. Additionally, each dancer would get the opportunity to view the instructor's movement from different angles, getting a deeper understanding of the movement).

Dance training can develop trust and empathy between people as it creates the sphere where diverse groups of people communicate and form the foundation of a democratic society (Catalano and Leonard, 2016), by sharing experience and empowering interconnections through dance to reach a mutual goal (Daly, 2002). These collaborative relationships can be underpinned if the sources are shared in mutually agreeable ways (Melis et al., 2016), so each individual would gain a sense of respect as a member of the society (*“stepping out of the way to allow them to take their new spots, smiling, etc. I even saw one giving a thumbs-up to a new student for doing a challenging movement correctly [...]. The other students*

looked happier and were more fully engaged in learning movement patterns, having received affirmation (from both the teacher and other students) for their efforts, and felt comfortable being in the front”). In other words, the more positive people’s attitudes towards democracy becomes the more likely they are to achieve self-actualisation (Farahmand et al., 2014).

Example 4 “in a professional dance rehearsal”

The fourth example is by Luisa Sancho Escanero, about a rehearsal situation in a professional dance company. See Box 10.4.

Stigma (Goffman, 1963) is defined as the attribution of difference or unpleasant characteristics to another individual which separates the stigmatised person from the group that is labelling the person, leading to loss of status (Link and Phelan, 2006). Sometimes stigma relates to the appearance or functionality of the person (Roberts, 2016) (“*the boy is accused to be ‘slow’*”), which effects the way people, *themselves*, present themselves to the world (“*he showed poor performance*

Box 10.4

Situation

I was a guest choreographic assistant in a dance company’s production for a world premiere. I had to reset existing choreography for certain passages and assist the creation of new choreography for other parts by the choreographer (a common practice for choreographers consists in reusing their existing material in new creations, it is a sort of continuous study to ameliorate their art). During certain periods of the artistic process, I was alone without the choreographer, but had help from the ballet mistress who worked as a permanent member of the company.

One day, I had to teach a sophisticated group scene to the dancers: many formations, a big number of crosses, many canons¹, many contacts between dancers, visual and musical cues that were to be shared and passed along in between all dancers, etc. The situation required focused attention and awareness from them, not only of one’s own choreography, but also awareness of the other dancers’ choreographed part. I noticed from the beginning that one of the boys of the second group, Federico (not his real name), was always struggling to achieve and complete his part in the choreography. He was getting lost, forgetting his steps, not being able to fulfil the spatial and choreographic relationships with his colleagues, arriving one second too late to the “check points” or, simply not arriving at all. Sometimes he was provoking a traffic jam in the middle of the choreography, so to speak.

I also noticed something else from the very beginning of the rehearsal process: the whole company was treating him as if he was not picking up the movement patterns as fast as others, sometimes even implying he was mentally slow. In a conversation with the ballet mistress, I expressed to her my frustration with the situation and how I didn’t know what to do to put this male dancer on the same level as his colleagues. She told me to not worry about it, that he was “slow” and that was the best I would get out of him. I saw and I felt at that moment how deeply rooted this assumption about Federico was at that company.

Strategy

The breakthrough happened to me and to him whilst I spoke with him in the middle of a chaotic group situation. Paraphrasing my original words, I said: “Federico, imagine you are the only one in your group that knows the choreography, you are the only one responsible for the other five dancers, you have to indicate to them what to do, and they have to understand you while dancing, you are the captain and they must follow you...”. These words had an extraordinary effect on him. In the next few minutes, we did another run-through of the group part, and just to say it simply, a miracle happened. Federico faced the group choreography taking my words literally: he took full responsibility for leading his colleagues through the choreography, giving the music and step cues, arriving on time to all of our marked “check points”, etc. I felt the awe in me, I saw how everyone’s eyes popped out and how some jaws dropped because no one was expecting what was happening in front of us.

Outcome

From that moment on, Federico changed his performance completely. He knew the choreography, he led *certain parts* of the piece *in certain moments* of the piece, he was sharing his leadership with his colleagues, he managed to execute other complex parts of the piece, and the most important reward came to me from him at the end of the process. He thanked me for how I treated him and that I didn’t take for granted that he was “slow”, which meant the world to me, because that was the confirmation that he knew what everybody else thought about him. I thanked him for his effort to overcome his challenge and his progress, but I was honestly thanking him for showing me how we all can flourish and transform ourselves in one second under the right circumstances and right words. I felt an enormous gratitude because I didn’t give up and I didn’t follow the general thought in that situation. We all affect each other with our opinions and judgements, we all buy into them without realizing it, and we all have the power through our clear mind and our commitment to resist making assumptions, transforming ourselves and our lives on the way.

What if

I would have listened to the ballet mistress and accepted the role this dancer was given in the company. I would have supported a toxic status quo at the company about Federico. He would have probably given up and never performed the choreography, and would have continued to accept the general opinion as an established truth not to be challenged.

and low self-esteem during practice”). According to self-verification theory, people have the internalised need of being seen and acknowledged, even if their dignity is devalued (Bosson et al., 2012), but sometimes the stigma overrides the self-concept when the negative attitudes are internalising and repeated (Quinn and Earnshaw, 2013). To tackle this issue, the inaccurate misinformation should be replaced with an authentic one (National Academy of Sciences and Medicine, 2016), but it cannot simply be reached by saying the words. Instead, it should be felt and experienced. Dance classes afford an effective method to help changing

such negative attitudes (Hujala et al., 2015). Here, the choreographic assistant used a choreography they were all working on as a tool to give the dancer a chance to express himself and free himself from any stigmatisation, by balancing the power between dancers (*you are now the captain and they must follow you*). Leadership and followership are both relational processes, mutually constructed, and mutually enabled. Moreover, dance practice can provide implicit insights into our self-concept through bodily and sensory feedback during the very activity of dancing in a group (*by flourishing and transforming ourselves under the right circumstances and right words*) (Matzdorf and Sen, 2016).

Example 5 “in a professional dance rehearsal”

The fifth example is by Luisa Sancho Escanero, about a rehearsal situation in a professional dance company. See Box 10.5.

Box 10.5

Situation

In my first professional experience as choreographic assistant, I was chosen by a choreographer to assist him through the creation process for a world premiere at a prestigious ballet company. I was to work with a heterogeneous group of 6 dancers which included *corp de ballet*² dancers, soloist and “first dancers” or *étoiles*³. At the time of this story, I was still dancing in my company of origin and very close in age to some of the *étoiles* (me being 38, and two of them being 34 and 32).

One of the male *étoile* dancers made clear from the beginning that he didn’t consider my position worthy of respect. My comments, corrections, and artistic inputs were clearly undermined or ignored. We were heading toward a clear conflict in which my position and responsibilities would be challenged. I had to find a way to reassure my position through a valuable solution. I was resolute, but I had no idea how I was supposed to achieve that. Time passed, and the tension escalated.

Strategy

After a Christmas break, the choreographer needed to set new material. One of the blocks that was still left to choreograph was a *pas de deux*⁴ including both senior *étoile* dancers: a female dancer and the male dancer. It was a rehearsal with only four of us: the choreographer, both dancers involved in the *pas de deux* and me as choreographic assistant. As it is customary in the dance world, the choreographer (in this case, male) started creating while dancing the choreography with the female dancer since it had to be a female-male *pas de deux*. Meanwhile, the male dancer was behind them, trying to learn his part alone. Suddenly, I thought the situation was not efficient at all, two of us were behaving as two isolated islands (I was also learning the material alone) instead of joining forces to improve the situation. I went straight to the male dancer and I started learning the *pas de deux* together with him so he could have a female partner from the beginning of the process and practice, instead of waiting for the female dancer and choreographer to finish and tell him what to do in a second round.

From the beginning, I realized that he was using an “old school” way of partnering in which the male does everything for the female and expects no help back. This dancer was suffering his way through the *pas de deux*. Very carefully, I started commenting that he was doing so much, and that I was there to be an active part of the *pas de deux* and that we were together in that. I was also there to help him. The situation should not go only in one direction, I told him. It didn’t matter if I was the female, we were together in the situation and the responsibility and the help should be 50/50. Slowly he realized that I was being committed to everything I was saying, and that through my dancing with him I meant it all. We started having fun together, and even trying the most difficult choreographic combinations.

Outcome

After that rehearsal, while he was partnering the female dancers, he always came to look for my help and for my artistic opinion on how to execute steps if having problems or doubts. If there was a conflictual situation between dancers, he asked me to intervene and to make the necessary decision.

What happened in that rehearsal that provoked such a profound change in him? It was a mix of things that crystalized together in one single moment. My putting myself beside him and not only in front of him, I mean this metaphorically and literally. That gesture allowed me to share my knowledge and the information which he was refusing until then, through the real practice: he could experiment with what I was teaching him using his intelligence and his body. We both let go of our presumptions about each other. We started a new relationship from that moment on. I exerted agency in his success, I was responsible for the rehearsal situation as much as he was, and I solved a problem in an assertive way with respect for myself and him. I could express my empathy for him and the role he was fulfilling as a male partner in a *pas de deux*. Afterwards, he confessed to me he never had the experience of a female dancer treating him the way I did, being active, searching for collaboration in such a way and bringing a physicality that eased the working to the point that he felt freer and could start enjoying the dancing itself. In other words, how we use verbal and non-verbal communication to set-up the situation is essential to achieve the qualities we are talking about. How we behave in front of the dancers, considering each one of them equal of attention and respect, no matter what their ranks in the company are, is a beginning; this means it is crucial to transmit them the necessity of shaping a common group, of an organic structure, which needs each one of them.

In this direction, with this behaviour, we overcome the rigid parameters that are given to us by the structure of the dance company.

We all affect each other in a much more profound way than we may think. Most of the time we do it by accident, but if we are aware, if we bring our consciousness and open the doors of our minds, we could create many more of these transformative possibilities. This is the kind of emotional intelligence I search for in the dance field.

What if

Instead of being assertive and exerting agency, I would have tried to impose myself in an authoritarian way? We would have headed right into an open conflict in the studio in which we both had so much to lose. It would have been a very traumatic first professional experience for me and a very negative experience for the male dancer and the group.

A social valuing context is when people actively promote a sense of worthiness. Feeling worth also highlights the preciousness of the self to others (Dutton et al., 2016) (“*he didn’t consider my position worthy of respect*”). In this example, the reason behind the dancer’s behaviour might have been a hidden curriculum that he had gone through (*using an “old school” way of partnering in which the male does everything for the female and expects no help back*). Another possibility is that an unintended gender message was conveyed. Also, this can be changed through a process that begins with awareness and synchrony (Stinson, 2005). Synchrony while dancing encourages social bonding (Tarr et al., 2015, 2016), by blurring the distinction between self and other (Decety and Sommerville, 2003; Tarr et al., 2015), increasing feelings of liking (Hove and Risen, 2009) and cooperation (Reddish et al., 2013) (*It didn’t matter if I was the female, we were together in the situation and the responsibility and the help should be 50/50*). This active collaboration promotes empathic processes, including empathic concern and perspective taking (McGarry and Russo, 2011; Behrends et al., 2012), while social exclusion decreases prosocial helping behaviours (Twenge et al. (2007). These processes play a vital role in social interactions and motivate prosocial behaviours. Dance classes and dance rehearsals, so to speak, provide opportunities for what the character Atticus Finch says in the famous novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee: *You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view [...] until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.*

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have proposed, in line with previous literature, that happy and self-actualised individuals require regular opportunities to experience hedonia, eudemonism and agency. These three components of a happy life are brought about by the self-adjustment of the individual, as much as through the interactions of the individual with others. This highlights the importance of fostering prosocial behaviour in children from early on. We have reviewed literature about how dance classes offer precisely such learning opportunities. In a series of five examples, we have set out real-life situations that show how the above components can be achieved through opportunities that invariably present themselves in a dance class and dance rehearsals. In particular, we have proposed that

- In dance classes and dance rehearsals (whether amateur or professional), the development of autonomy, competence and relatedness can be supported via inspiration and mindful practice by the teacher to manage perfectionism. (Box 10.1.)
- Mindful dancing can lead to the sense of growth and self-actualisation by concentrating on the present and the sense from inner body and ignoring what happens outside. (Box 10.1.)
- Creating positive attitudes towards the self and others during dancing can improve prosocial behaviours and communication skills. (Box 10.1.)

- Teachings should follow a dialogical process emphasizing the importance of the students' own thinking when learning, instead of old-school strategies which consider amateur learners and professional dancers as an "empty vessel" into which knowledge is poured by a master teacher. (Box 10.2.)
- The arts can act as a facilitator in situations where collaboration is encouraged and people care about others to achieve a democratic society. (Box 10.3.)
- A democratic education should be an inseparable part of the society because each individual is respected and valued regardless of their differences and dance can be a powerful means to achieve this, as it develops empathy and trust by sharing experience and empowering interconnections. (Box 10.3.)
- Dance can be a compensatory way to fade the negative effects of stigmatisation as relationships are mutually constructed, breaking down walls of defensiveness and judgement. (Box 10.4.)
- Teaching awareness and synchrony both in the body and in the thinking patterns of students as "together" can help overwrite unhelpful messages that have become engrained in a context previously, fostering empathetic interactions in the future. (Box 10.5.)

Notes

- 1 Dancers use this word with the same meaning as musicians. It defines a compositional structure in which one same choreographic fragment is executed by several dancers who space it out in time (usually with regular intervals).
- 2 Corps de Ballet is a classical ballet term that refers to the dancers in a ballet that dance as a group. It is also a rank within a ballet company's structure
- 3 Étoile is a classical ballet term meaning "star". The term is used as a rank in the Paris Opéra ballet to signify a leading dancer. *Étoile* is considered the same rank as a principal dancer in other companies
- 4 Pas de deux is a classical ballet term meaning "a step for two". It is a duet that is usually performed by a female and male dancer.

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