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Dance as a tool for creativity with young people

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Nov 2013



Art is an ever-changing mixture of the intellectual and the emotional, the physical and the spiritual, which makes a virtue of subjectivity.

Art is an ever-changing mixture of the intellectual and the emotional, the physical and the spiritual, which makes a virtue of subjectivity. It offers a unique means by which we can explore ourselves and our position in the wider world and is a way to exchange with other people about what we see and feel and think and sense. Art is a way of opening dialogue within and between individuals and communities.

Dance is a fully-fledged art form, belonging to the 'performing arts', a goal in itself and a means of allowing a human being to express his inner feelings, thoughts and experiences. Dance is a natural form of self-expression: the body expresses itself naturally and so therefore does the spirit. We are all free willed beings, no matter what our personal situation may be. Through dance, our body expresses how free we actually are, while also highlighting the restrictions our minds impose on it.

Dance is the art form in which human movement becomes the medium for sensing, understanding, and communicating ideas, feelings, and experiences. Dance has its own content, vocabulary, skills, and techniques, which must be understood and applied to be proficient in the art. The elements of

dance are the fundamental concepts and vocabulary for developing movement skills as well as understanding dance as an art form. All these elements are simultaneously present in a dance or even in a short movement phrase.

But is this the only 'use' of the art forms? Their "higher expression" in the performing arena? Or is it the time to reconnect ourselves to our bodies and come back to dance as an integral part of our life?

In ancient times, people used to constantly dance, since dance has always been one of the intrinsic expressions of human beings. Natural events, community gatherings, family moments, war and peace, the seasons of the year... – all these were moments and events to be expressed through collective, family and individual dances. Dance is still present in many people's daily life, especially in rural areas.

To what extent is dance present in formal and non-formal educational systems? To what extent is dance a tool in the hands of practitioners? Is it legitimate to 'use' dance not as an art form or as a way to express oneself but rather as an educational tool? Dance provides a way of learning, one that develops communication abilities, problem-solving techniques, and creative and critical thinking skills along with kinaesthetic abilities. At its core, the goal of dance education is to engage students in artistic experiences through the processes of creation, performance and response. Dance, as a rich modality for learning, can be utilized not as a goal in itself but as a means and/or a tool in formal and non-formal education, for developing individual and group problem-solving skills, learning concepts and understanding subjects, linking movement activities to academic themes enabling practitioners to draw upon young people's deep-rooted bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence.

Dance activities allow participants to tackle a wide variety of theme-based subjects, (possibly all of them) as well as being effective for dealing with all kinds of human behaviours. Guided explorations can be transformed into concrete forms. Dance education offers a vehicle for holistic teaching that cultivates the human characteristics needed for society. Dance integrates mental, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of education. Dance has a life impact.

The EuroMed Center for cross-cultural dialogue creativity, active participation, self-directed learning, equal partnership, initiative as the principles of non-formal education. Many curricula define space, body, time, dynamics, relationships and actions as the principles of dance. Can all the above principles be combined logically? Can dance be de-contextualized from the performing arts and utilized as a tool in youth work? The answer is a resounding YES!

The Community Outreach Project in Sweden utilized Hip Hop to provide the foundation and method to create local meeting places that stimulate creativity. This process encouraged individuals and gave them opportunities to make positive changes in their lives. The aim was to prevent discrimination and alienation, to promote learning, diversity, participation and community involvement.

By using non formal participatory education, young people were given an arena to develop themselves and their interests. Hip Hop provided an opportunity for them to channel their energy and creativity and by so doing to influence their own situation in a positive way. Hip Hop culture was used to encourage young people to make changes in their own lives and in society.

In 2005, as part of my training in the Training Course TATEM – Training Active Trainers in Euro-Mediterranean Youth Work (organized within the framework of the Partnership on Youth between the Council of Europe and the European Commission and in cooperation with the SALTO EuroMed Resource Centre), I had the opportunity, along with colleagues from Italy, the Palestinian Authority and Portugal, to develop and implement the Training Course "Arts in Human Rights Education", which was held in Ermesinde, Portugal.

This TC used art and performing arts workshops, group dynamics, discussions, experience sharing and creative learning to guide participants into discovering the HR Declaration and the path to find and develop new ways, tools and methods to implement HR Education. The TC concluded in a creation (through the arts) of a campaign (on HR) that was implemented in the city.

I had the opportunity to present and share some of the tools during Tool Fair V, in Venice (Italy). The aim for the trainers was to learn how to utilize dance and movement within the context of a theme, in this case, Human Rights Education; to introduce the Human Rights Declaration to young people in an experiential way.

Dance education is a profession; the current situation, in which literally anyone can hire a studio and accept students, does not reflect what is in fact a rigorous profession. Past experience as a dancer, no matter how accomplished, may not provide a guarantee of good teaching skills and the 'how' of teaching deserves as much attention as 'what' is being taught.

The danger of misuse has to be taken in account: as we enter the second decade of the XXI century, western society is overwhelmed by digital media, a world of free access to information and tutorials on every subject. Not 'everyone can do everything'. Knowledge and experience in dance, as well as knowledge and experience in education are a must. The use of a tool requires proficiency.

Dance needs to be brought back into our daily life, as well as being included, along with other art forms and sports, as an integral part in both formal and non-formal education systems.

We need to focus on the on-going development of creativity in children, young people and adults, in every moment of our lives. We are all 'creative' and practitioners hold the key to releasing that creativity.

"Any organized and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education. Non-formal education may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions, and cater to persons of all ages. Depending on country contexts, it may cover educational programmes to impart adult literacy, basic education for out-of-school children, life-skills, work-skills, and general culture. Non-formal education programmes do not necessarily follow the 'ladder' system, and may have differing duration."

UNESCO, 1997

"We should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once."

Friedrich Nietzsche

"Dance, when you're broken open. Dance, if you've torn the bandage off. Dance in the middle of the fighting. Dance in your blood. Dance when you're perfectly free."

Rumi

“Dance is the hidden language of the soul.”

Martha Graham

“It has taken me years of struggle, hard work, and research to learn to make one simple gesture, and I know enough about the art of writing to realize that it would take as many years of concentrated effort to write one simple, beautiful sentence.”

Isadora Duncan

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