

# The Repercussions of Dance Experiences in People with Visual Impairment

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**Abstract:** *Dance has been relevant throughout history, and among the countless issues involved in recording it is its meaningful role in reaching emotions. In this context, movement incentive might enable immersion in the emotions and their display in reality, therefore providing better adaptation resources. This bibliography review project aims at understanding the repercussions of dance experiences in visually-impaired people. By approaching the benefits of such experience, the processes involved in developing new perceptions will be shown, as well as the adaptation and socialization processes. Among the main findings are how meaningful these experiences can be - unique and singular - for the person dancing, in which the sensory elements are identified, named and transformed with new meanings, therefore providing several benefits, such as physical, psychological and socialization ones.*

**Keywords:** dance, visual impairment, proprioception and sensory perception

## 1. Introduction

This project started with the experiences of its first author in dance classes from October/2014 to April/2017. Living this routine, she could watch dance professionals teaching visually-impaired people. In this context, she understood the benefits it can bring to people with visual impairment, their specific impact on other senses, and how much of its deep contact - using movement - may assist them in unknown or not very familiar sensory experiences. It has also been noted immersion in such new dance reality by visually impaired people was initially experimented with fear, slowly turned into pleasure and delivery. Considering this new experience, there were many benefits seen, such as physical, psychological and socialization ones; therefore explaining the motivation to develop and think about the topic. This context can be found in Azevedo, Araújo, Silva, Araújo, Medeiros, Morais, Bittencourt (2015), where dance has a fundamental role in developing countless possibilities, including intellectual and social skills. In this regard, the authors state the body is an instrument used to convey meanings and emotions. Since the beginning of time, humans have used several communication strategies, such as gestures, moaning, expressions and dance" (p.2). They also inform the historical aspects if this reality can be seen in historical files, in rock paintings dated of 4000b.C., portraying the habits of a developing society. The recordings of dance as part of history is vital in the activities involving the development of human race, as well as hunting, the cure for diseases, and how they once handled conflicts. Based on the idea that art could be a tool for visually impaired people to speak, the first assumption was the relationship with dance could assist them in dealing with exterior issues, and therefore in adapting to new processes. Among the infinite issues involved in the dance experience of visually impaired people, it is important to highlight the power of encouraging new experiences and its repercussion on developing proprioception and the naming of sensations felt. The repercussions of this process may contribute to people's adaptation and socialization development, especially for

those people with visual impairment. Here, there are a few stimuli allowing the development of quite meaningful different sensory perceptions, as written by Toniolli and Pagliuca (2003, p.02), that "tactile and hearing intelligence of blind people shows communication skills using other language forms. The skin records valuable messages, beliefs, feelings and the energy of experiences lived since birth. Here, Kastrup (2007, p.69) states that, in impairment cognitive psychology and according to "traditional compensation theories, a blind person can make a better use of other senses, such as touch and hearing, due to the lack of sight". Therefore, dance may be a very significant intervention mean to discover possibilities in human beings. Such reality was confirmed and expanded by Figueiredo, Tavares and Venâncio (1999), stating by experimenting the world as attentive as blind people do, one may acquire insights by using the different sights provided. The authors say this experience is a private universe enjoyed by the other, but which can be seen from different perspectives using the words said by the blind person using their bodies. Likewise, one may understand sight deprivation leads us to consider how many possibilities our body can create in order to readjust to reality demands, and in the case of congenital visual impairment, such reality may be even more enigmatic when its surroundings may be seen and construed differently. The routine of the blind person is fully strategic and the use of other senses, adaptations and new technologies is highly important for the independence of everyday tasks. And in this context, the use of textures as a way to identify objects (such as braille), computers with screen-expansion programs, strategies to display objects to be identified according to category, such as colors, shapes, sizes, among others. Thus, among the topics approached herein are the experience relevance of visually impaired people with dance, and how much it can enhance new and different physical, social and emotional possibilities; as well as how much they can help readapting to realities which are so far construed by some people as limiting. Due to little knowledge and/or lack of information, visually impaired people are often seen as "unable" to develop adaptation

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resources to outside demands which are as or more functional than those set forth by society. In light of that, the main purpose of this research is to understand the repercussions of dance in visually impaired people and the issues involved in this process. Besides explaining socially pre-conceived terms, it can also help understanding highly relevant new processes and psychotherapeutic actions for blind people. First, the general aspects of dance will be developed, followed by statistics and details related to the visual impairment development process. Finally, the importance of encouraging dance to work with visually impaired people and how much this process - anytime identified and listed - can contribute for more functional possibilities related to adaptation, socialization, transportation, coordination and for family, social and other relationships.

## 2. Method

This bibliographic research may be construed by Lakatos and Marconi (1996, p.66) as follows:

The research of bibliography or secondary sources comprehends all public literature about the topic studied, from isolated articles, notes, journals, magazines, books, research, thesis, cartographic materials, etc., to oral communication media: radio, magnetic tape records, and audiovisuals: movies and television. Its purpose is to make the researcher face all written, spoken or recorded materials on the topic, including conferences followed by debates transcribed, either published or recorded.

First, the aspects possibly related to the topic were exhaustively debated, and the main pillars of the research were found by using the keywords supporting the literature search: a) Dance, b) Visual impairment, c) Proprioception and d) Sensory perception. After this, the following inclusion criteria were set: a) selection of articles dated from 1997 to 2007, and b) material research in relevant research scientific platforms, such as Scielo and Google Acadêmico, Lilac, BVS geral and Pepsic. In this database, 47 scientific articles were selected through titles in accordance with the main topic of this research. Each of them was systemically managed, added to an Excel spreadsheet with the following info: article name, year, authors, hyperlink, database and reason for inclusion or exclusion based on the purpose of the present research. It moved on to reading the abstracts of the pre-selected articles and a new ranking with the criteria used for adding or removing them. In this step, the total selected was of 16 articles, 4 websites and 2 books. To read the materials selected and start raising data, they were split into five groups with the following aspects: a) Dance, its different meanings and contributions, b) Psychosocial aspects related to visual disability, c) Experience with dance and its implications. After reading the articles in each group, there were weekly debates about the materials, aiming to understand and identify the main interest contexts assisting data raising and arguments to support this project.

### Dance, its different meanings and contributions

By looking into the etymology of dance, there are studies setting it as one of the first forms of expression recorded by

human beings, its communication representation and the being awareness in the world, as well as of his space. In Magalhães (2005), pre-historical was seen as "predator", and the maintenance of the species was ensured by hunting, fishing and harvesting. At this point of development, the species observed and currently seen as "human being" had an uncertain date, and animals were almost invincible, though used as survival elements by providing food, clothes - with their skin - and instruments made by their horns. Here, the execution of human activities aimed at the animals, and it is in this context that dance is portrayed. There are historical records of about 100 years with dancing ancestors in images found in cave walls, where dance was performed as a ritual. An example of this can be seen in the image found in a cave in Gabillou, Dordogne, close to Mussidan, in France, thus the representation of the first forms of communication and expression of feelings recorded in human life. Magalhães (2005) also state that in Greece, dance was much present in all aspects, especially in religion, where God cults were carried out with different dances, each of them with its particularities. Such context is present in Fátima (2001), showing that during the Paleolithic period, dance was used for practical purposes, such as for good huntings and to stop storms. In the Neolithic period, the author confirms the starts of a time when symbols were created alongside religion, and dance was a core element in the ritual. Also, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Egyptian and Hebrew cultures have records saying dance spread to social and religious rituals, helping reinforce these peoples' culture. Another example of this context provided by the researcher is the dance from Crete, in Greece, which became more intense and comprehensive due to its link with art and classic philosophy. Throughout the time, dance was construed with different meanings, and associated to the cultural discovery and expression process for many peoples. Emotionally, this process also has a very significant resource for this study, in which understanding the sensations is related to a named expression, therefore very close to the resignification and preparation of many internal elements.

### Psychosocial aspects related to visual disability

According to the Ministry of Education (2000), visual disability may be seen an undernormal sight or poor sight changing functionality, as the relevant lowering of the visual acuity, significant decrease of the visual field, sensitivity to contrasts and restraining of other capacities. Blindness or full sight loss may be acquired or congenital. People who are born seeing and lose sight as life goes keep memories (lights, images, colors), which is very important for readapting, considering those who are born blind can't make a visual memory or reach visual memories. According to the statistics of the World Health Organization - WHO (2011), the number of visually impaired people may reach 285 millions, 39 millions of them are blind, and 246 millions have low sight. The repercussion of this research shows 65% of those visually impaired and 82% of the blind people are over 50 years old, and the main causes for blindness are: a) non-operated cataract 51%, b) glaucoma 8%, c) age-related macular degeneration 5%, d) childhood blindness 4%, e) cornea capacity 4%, and f) uncorrected refractive errors 3%, tracoma 3%, diabetic retinopathy 1%, and undetermined causes 18%. In São Paulo, according to the Municipal Office of Disabled People (2017), there are 2,759,004 people

stating to have some disability, split into: a) resident population with visual disability of 2,274,466; b) those unable to see in any way - 53,068 people; c) those with great obstacles - 292,410 people; and d) with some obstacle - 1,928,988 people. Regardless of the many characteristics provided in the context of visual disability, it is important to highlight that, according to the Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975), "disabled people, whatever the origin, have the same fundamental rights their fellow citizens of the same age, which implies in the right to have a decent life, and the respect for human dignity". By considering these rights applicable to all human conditions, the routine of a disabled person shows some precariousness in complying with these measurements, therefore jeopardizing the development factors and opportunities supposed to apply to all people. According to the World Action Program for Disable People of the United Nations Organization - UNO (1982), experience has proven that, many times, the means set the power of a disability on the everyday life of someone. However, anytime those rights are not fulfilled, the opportunities to these people will be consequently compromised, therefore jeopardizing them in productivity and adaptation. Anytime some of the basic elements for psychic constitution and the inclusion of people in society are at risk and fail, among which are the family life, education, work, housing, economic and personal safety, participation in social and political groups, religious activities, affection and sexual relations, access to public sites, transportation freedom and overall lifestyle, among others, may affect their adaptation process and bring illnesses and suffering. It is also seen, many times in the everyday of visually impaired people, social obstacles such as prejudice and discriminations, in which their ability is still questioned and related to incapacities and stereotypes. In this case of how the matters related to visual disability are produced and reproduced in society, French psychologist Serge Moscovici and his Social Representations theory agree with Crusoé (2004, p.106), basically debating the "interrelation between person and object and how the knowledge construction process happens simultaneously individually and collectively in building Social Representations, a common sense knowledge". After many deep consideration about the topic, it is possible to (re)consider new actions in public policies. Professionals, relatives and people advocating for this cause may provide new understanding of the matters related to the reality of the blind person (re)thinking the processes involved in each step of development. According to Pintanel, Gomes, Xavier, Fonseca (2013), visual impairment limitations may affect the children's functional abilities, harming the conquer of independence. It is extremely important to think about this context, for ignoring them would mean having to deal with the consequences usually affecting those involved. Here, one of the consequences is social isolation, which is an obstacle to build self-esteem, risking the life quality of those involved. Upon considering a development process, such obstacles may be seen since childhood. In this sense, the implication of isolation in the development process may risk several fields, such as cognition - for they are restrict to dependencies -, socialization, among others. Considering these topics, all people around (family and health professionals) may provide spaces to create possibilities for better adaptation to outside demands, therefore facilitating

autonomy and independence. According to Amiralian (2004), making use of personal identity is more and more strong and meaningful with interpersonal relations through the eyes of the others, the achievement of trust in the place strengthens the self and restates the personal abilities which make the ego better. With this circumstance, the human being can live several experiences as his own. The relationship setting with the first social group where the child is, that is, family, may or may not provide confidence and opportunity for him to express emotions and strengthen his identity. They are crucial to develop a healthy emotional structure in which showing the other is not an opponent, but someone who looks after his needs, who will help him develop possibilities for a better adaptation to his internal and external issues. This concept, as mentioned by Batista (1998) may be construed through the importance of care, acceptance, compromise with rules, use of human discipline and encouragement to expressing opinions which feed self-esteem. Group actions may lead to better interrelations and a way of teaching. Family is the first socialization group, an intervention source, and it is up to the professionals to assist and guide towards more efficient understanding about the context they are part of. In this process, many cognitive, emotional and social elements apply, and the perception of the elements involved by the child in his development process can make a difference in the way he relates to himself and to the outside reality. We can understand this better by reading Kozel and Kashiwagi (2001), when they say the perception of places and territories where men live is fully personal. The world is shown and perceived by people with symbols, mental captation happens through meanings, and reason does not decode the images initially seen as cognitive maps, conceptual maps, and later, as brain maps. During development, protection, monitoring and the possibility that this kid goes through multiple experience will be crucial for his physical, psychic and social constitution. In this context, next we'll check the repercussions of this process anytime enjoyed through dance.

### **Dance experience and its implications**

Body experience may be seen in several ways, among which are the discovery of new movements and different sensations, a process taking place since the first moments in life. Mattos and Neira (2007) say this moment is a crucial expression of development and human culture, through which, since birth, kids have more and more control over their body and improve fast, the possibilities of interacting with the world by crawling, walking, handling objects, therefore finding new ways to use their bodies. Through motion, kids express feelings, emotions and thoughts which will allow them to experience several ways of dealing with their own bodies, and consequently with finding out reality. Thus, one may think human movement is more than a body transposition in space, but also a language making it feasible to perform in the outside environment. It is important to state that for this process to be solid, in addition to the matters related to development physical maturity, the child will need psychic stimulus and the help of an extremely attentive caretaker present to encourage and monitor him. If by any chance there are flaws in the process, the development may not be fully functional and as expected. According to Maia, Vágula, Souza, Pereira (2007), "the

relationship between life and human movement creates the perspective that there is no life without movement", adding it is imperative to stimulate through leisure and fun the development of our walking, running, playing and dancing skills. Movement is learned and our skills are improved through stimulation and repetitions. This learning process, according to Fonseca, Vecchi, Gama (2002) will depend on our experiences and the stimulus we get for it. Through the stimulus providing the body relationship of the children with the environment, it will be possible to develop greater repertoire of possibilities involving harmony, rhythm and socializations. Authors show dance, through movement, creates the possibility of moving the body with someone else, syncing the moves by synchronically uniting, a meeting with yourself through the other one. With the information provided by the authors, one can understand shy people with socialization issues may change their behavior by working with music and rhythm, for dance demands union and mutual respect, and cooperation brings wellbeing, joyful moments and contentment with a common goal which, according to the authors, has a motto based on "showing your hands and walking together". The blind person is seen with a preconceived image many times based on the lack of information, and sometimes due to a tendency of only judging the incapacities. We may think about this matter with Saramago (1995), by quoting teenage events in which they probably played "What if I was blind" and concluded, with their eyes closed, that "being blind" is unquestionably a catastrophe. At the same moment, they thought the darkness of blind people meant the lack of light, that what we call blindness was a synonym for a limitation compared to other people and things, causing them to be still behind a black veil. The way by which a blind person accesses such information is unique and personal since, by dealing with feelings and emotions through the way internal and external elements are seen will create a crucial link between body and mind, and consequently the pace of their actions. Through this perspective, dance can provide singular experiences, for it is a physical experience, but also a sensory and interrelational one. It is a space with the chance to explore countless elements, among which are the building of thoughts, creativity and ideas of time and space, improving the maintenance of balance and body posture. The person with different sight has a perception which information processing is also different due to the partial or total lack of sight. In this context, dancing practice for blind people enables the construction of time and space concepts, balance maintenance by posture restructuring through the other senses of the apparatus and the proprioception. According to Mascarenhas (2012), proprioception may be seen as a process related to:

[...] the sense of body sensitivity allowing to know your own body and the body movement, therefore understanding the world, it usually refers to a movement and position sensation, through tact and kinesthesia, of body inside and outside events, including the gravity orientation sense through assisting sensory organs. Humans learn everything we are by moving and listening to our own movement.

Such experiences will allow the person to deeply immerse through body and movement, and will raise new inside possibilities to deal with the demands of outside reality. In this process, the countless experiences lived so far will be identified, assessed and named by the person in a wider and more functional way, therefore helping him to make them more effective in his relationship with reality. About learning from what we are with analytical sensitivity, Freire (1996) gives us the understanding that the disabled person who dances breaks his current status and stands as a thinking and transforming being who will always pursue his own assumption. Dance understanding for a blind person may happen through experiences causing interpersonal relations and contact with the world. All this process - which will provide new and different discoveries and independence to the blind person - will only be possible with the help of someone with the exchange of knowledge and daily experiences to help (re)adapting to everyday life events.

### 3. Conclusion

This project widely studied multiple issues present in the reality of visually impaired people, among which are: a) social cultural, involving the lack of understanding about the context and its consequences on stigma and discrimination; b) matters related to the independence challenges related to the lack of accessibility resources assisting the adaptation processes; and c) facing of stigmas, many times present due to misinformation. Currently, there are 285 million visually impaired people in the world, 39 million of which are blind, and 246 million of which have low sight. Classification of visual disability ranks blindness as the full sight loss or little sight, and low sight after 30% in one of the eyes. It is worth mentioning the rights of disabled people in general are equal to their fellow citizens, restating human dignity and the need to make them enforceable for a full life. When public policies for visually impaired people are not valid and operational, the matters of citizenship, production and adaptation, education, family, religion, work, safety, relationships, freedom, access and so many others are jeopardized, not contributing for their life quality and social insertion, therefore causing great suffering to blind people.

In this context, dance has proven to be a pretty creative possibility, encouraging a redetermination and autonomy process, taking them to acknowledge themselves physically, emotionally and socially, and demand their rights and their access to all social spaces. Dance experience since the beginning of human life, and used with several purposes, has proven to be unique and to integrate many physical, emotional and social aspects. In this process, it has been seen that dance was and still is a highly important mean to express human feelings, and how much it can be related to the representation of our first impressions/sensations about specific internal and external contexts. Through this experience, many psychic elements will be (re)constructed and determined, therefore encouraging a self-knowledge process and a better connection with inside and outside reality. These elements, anytime related to sensory ones, such as tact and hearing, may set new flows with the conscious perception of their possibilities. By being identified and named in the mind, they may be operationalized in more adaptive ways. Through dance,

creativity acts directly in the development of new adaptation possibilities not previously recognized and operationalized, and improves safety and independence of blind people, without mentioning this experience may bring other proprioceptive elements, such as coordination, orientation and space localization and balance improvement, among others.

Thinking about these topics is extremely important for those who live with some sort of sight disability. Isolation and deprivation as a response to the stigma and discrimination do not bring any physical, emotional or social health, therefore far from being a facing strategy, but more of a suffering and exclusion process. This way, the consciousness of this process, in addition to speaking for a silent pain, can make health professionals and family and close relationships to provide proper environment to develop independence for those who are visually impaired. To promote the independence of visually disabled people means claiming there is no life without movement, and other ways of encouraging the other towards skills demands harmony and rhythm. Dancing goes beyond the word itself, for moving your body alongside someone else's creates possibilities, discoveries and redeterminations. For someone blind, dancing means to surpass and change his limits, the elevation of himself by meeting the other.

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