

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **The contribution of dancing in the socio-emotional development of children at extracurricular activities in a Portuguese primary school**

**Soares, Diana Salgueiro Vinagre<sup>1\*</sup> and Lucena, Sonia Felix Vilas Boas<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Av. General Roçadas, Vila Cândida nº32, 1ºDto. 1170-162 Lisboa, Portugal.

<sup>2</sup>Estrada da Torre, 1396, 7º Esq. 2775-687 Carcavelos, Portugal.

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**Dance encourages independence, initiative and self-esteem and contributes to a substantial enrichment in the teaching-learning process and in the acquisition of cognitive, psychomotor and socio-emotional skills. In this study, 55 students, both genders and various ethnic groups, with ages from 6 to 11 years old were observed. Movement games, Hip Hop and Modern jazz and Portuguese/ international dances were taught. Evaluations were made at the beginning and at the end of 2009/2010 school year. We identified that at the socio-emotional level, there was a significant development of autonomy, cooperation and acceptance of criticism. We were able to verify that there were an improvement in physical activities and acquisition of the concept of space. With respect to body work, there was an increase in balance as well as an improvement in postural alignment. As a part of its goal, school should promote the process of socialization and autonomy. We considered that throughout this project, the school achieved these objectives as well as the feeling of respect for others. Thus, it is extremely important for the articulation of basic education with the various artistic expressions.**

**Key words:** Dance, autonomy, cooperation, primary school.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The pedagogical practice of Physical-Motor/Dance Expression as part of the Curriculum Enrichment Activities (AEC) - Arts Education is in accordance with a Ministry of Education's Decree in which the guiding principles of organization and management of basic education curriculum are established (Decree-Law No. 6, 2001 of January 18). In this Decree, the importance of developing activities which encourage and support families with pre-school children as well as the 1st cycle of basic education curriculum enrichment is enhanced in order to improve children's development and thus future school success.

The Ministry of Education shares with the Local Authorities the responsibility for the development of

Enrichment Activities in schools and considers fundamental the role that these institutions together with parents' associations and charities play in terms of promotion of these activities. Different activities depending on local realities, currently allows many of the 1st cycle schools to be able to provide their students with these kinds of activities. These activities also respond to the urgency of adapting the duration of children's stay in school grounds to the needs of their families. The need to ensure that these times are pedagogically rich and complementary to the learning associated with the acquisition of basic skills is also a goal of this project (National Curriculum. 2001).

The Phenomenon of school violence, either physical

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\*Corresponding author. Email: [soares.diana7@gmail.com](mailto:soares.diana7@gmail.com).

violence or verbal threats, cannot be dissociated from antisocial behavior of students. This can be seen as theft and vandalism (delinquent behavior), dropout due to offenses related to the status / ethnicity of student and delinquency (arriving late to class, leaving school during class period and maintaining a bad behavior inside the classroom (Vettenburg, 2000: 224 to 229). The preventive approach is the one that is more in line with the objectives of education, and therefore the capacity of self-discipline, the fruition of a responsible freedom, as well as the recognition that personal fulfillment would also depend on the commitment of each one in the evolution of one's community (Estrela and Amado, 2000: 258 to 266). Akas (2010) argues that dance provides children with opportunities for social development; through dance section the child can express his problems, wants and dislikes.

According to Yehudi Menuhin (Moura, 2004: 33) it is only in the exercise of art, as a creative development which does not eliminate any gift of a child, but rather it civilizes, that we can together achieve a society that dominates and absorbs its violence. Thus, art can be a mean to understand reality, developing a critical and reflective attitude, and that's why it should be present in the curriculum of our schools (Santos, 2009; Teixeira, 1999: 15 to 21).

Dance as a result of the need for expression is present in humans and so recognizes and fulfills the children's need to communicate and express their feelings and ideas, as well establishes a relationship with themselves, others and with the environment (Amoedo, 2004: 204 to 205; Teixeira, 1999: 15 to 21). Dance as a psychosocial tool for children development, enables children to understand themselves better and also the world in which they live in (Akas: 142).

Thus, dance is considered a universal activity, multifaceted, polysemic and polymorphic, with an eminent social and cultural nature crossed by many factors of various kinds, biological, psychological, cognitive, aesthetic, historic, moral and geographical (Delimbeuf, 1987: 10). Dance as psychosocial tool can be used to arouse interest to learn, from children who before this time have lost interest in education (Akas: 140).

Therefore, there are a million reasons to recognize that dance has a transcendent destiny, a metaphorical thinking and an intuitive language close to nature (Bruni, 1998: 37). In this paper we analyzed the influence of dance in some social emotional skills such as: Autonomy, acceptance of criticism and respect for other's space.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The target population of this study consisted of 55 students of the 1st cycle of basic education from two schools in the Lisbon area, from both genders and diverse ethnicities with ages ranging from 6 to 11 years old. This study was conducted in the 2009/2010 school

year. These students were considered a very difficult population with social endangered minorities and their social competences were intimately linked with behavior problems. In these schools *bullying* was known to be an existing problem.

The used methods were based on various activities of body expression, movement games, choreographies and dances. As suggested in Batalha (2004: 84 to 87), classes consisted of warm-up, fun activities and small choreographies applying several dance techniques like Hip Hop kids, children's Modern jazz or even Traditional Portuguese and International Dances (Figures 1 and 2) and culminated with stretching and relaxation exercises.

Initial and final evaluations were conducted in accordance with Table 1 (Batalha, 2004: 165 to 174). Results were registered using Films and Photographs. The pedagogical lines followed were those implemented by Rudolf Laban, who was a great teacher and organized dance so that it could be expanded and applied in schools. The basic point of Laban's dance education is to make children aware of different patterns and qualities of movement. He points out that even if it is 'free dance', children should not do whatever they want to (Samuelsson et al., 2009). The main objectives entails the development of: (a) basic locomotors and non-locomotors movements, (b) an intentional language through the body, (c) an aesthetic discourse and critical sense, and (d) a creative imagination in accordance with Dance structural units - body, space, time, dynamics / energy relations.

In the teaching-learning process of dance the transmission of the subject being taught is a key element. Verbal instructions were combined with direct and indirect demonstrations. Samuelsson et al. (2009), emphasize the importance of the teacher giving children verbal feedback, and challenging children to express their ideas in dance and aesthetic movements.

Direct demonstrations were performed by the teacher or by a student, where the reproduction of previously captured images either photographic or videographic was used as indirect demonstrations (Alves, 2007: 84 to 85; Tonello et al., 1998; Rink, 1994: 276 to 277).

## RESULTS

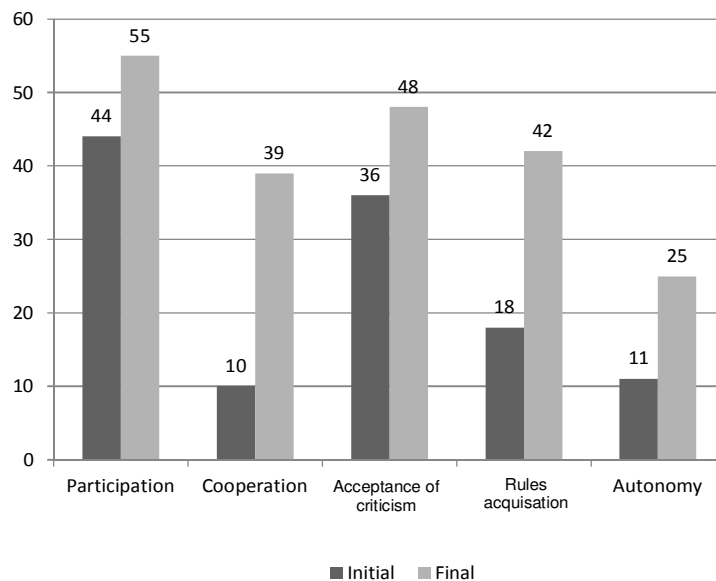
Although with these Artistic Expression activities there was an improvement both at the psycho-motor and cognitive skills level, it was the socio-affective level that saw further progression.

Thus, at the socio-affective level, there was a further progression in the acquisition of rules, acceptance of criticism, autonomy and cooperation (Figure 1). Regarding the structural units of Dance: Body, Space, Time, Dynamics and Relations; we were able to verify that there were an improvement in physical activities and acquisition of the concept of space. With respect to body work, there was an increase in balance as well as an improvement in postural alignment (Figure 2).

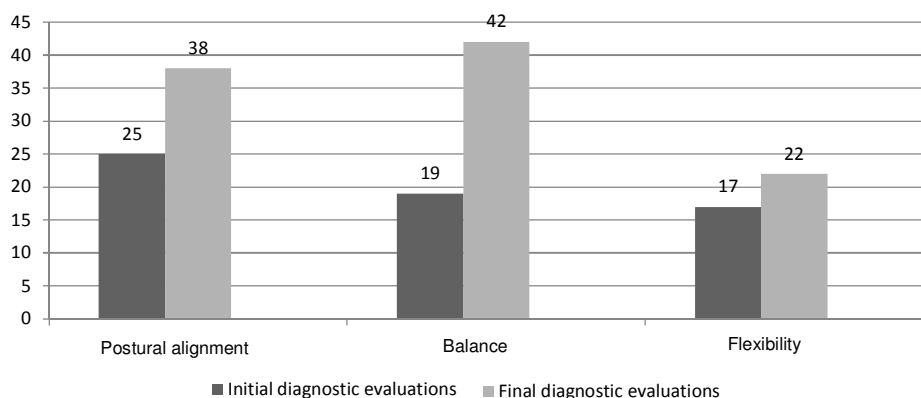
We were also able to verify that respect for others personal space during the execution of choreography grew satisfactorily during the year (Figure 3). Finally, in relation to the structural unit time, it was the synchronization of the movement to a rapid pace that stood out (Figure 4).

## DISCUSSION

Arts as the preferred exercise for personal communication



**Figure 1.** Comparison of initial and final diagnostic evaluations of the socio-affective competences level in students of the 3rd / 4th year (n = 55).

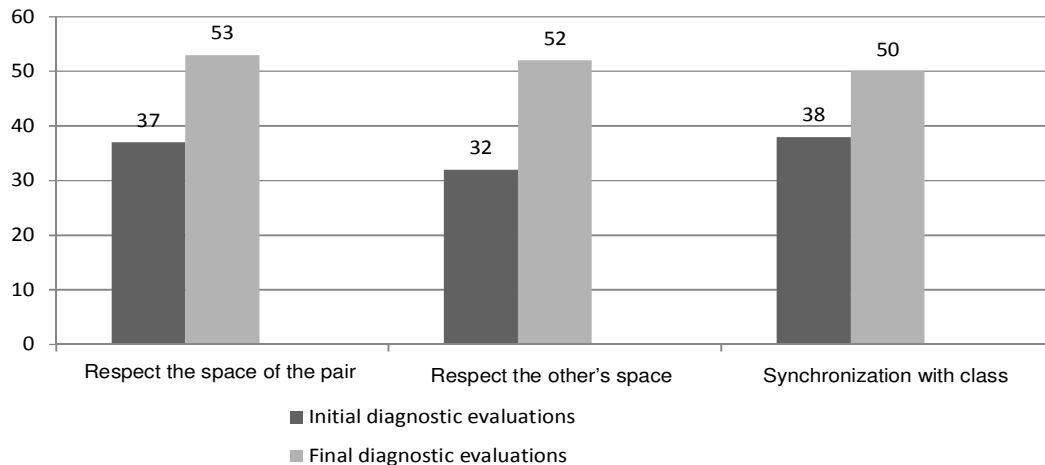


**Figure 2.** Comparison of initial and final diagnostic evaluations of the Body, as structural unit of Dance, in students of the 3rd / 4th year (number of students that achieved that parameter, n = 55).

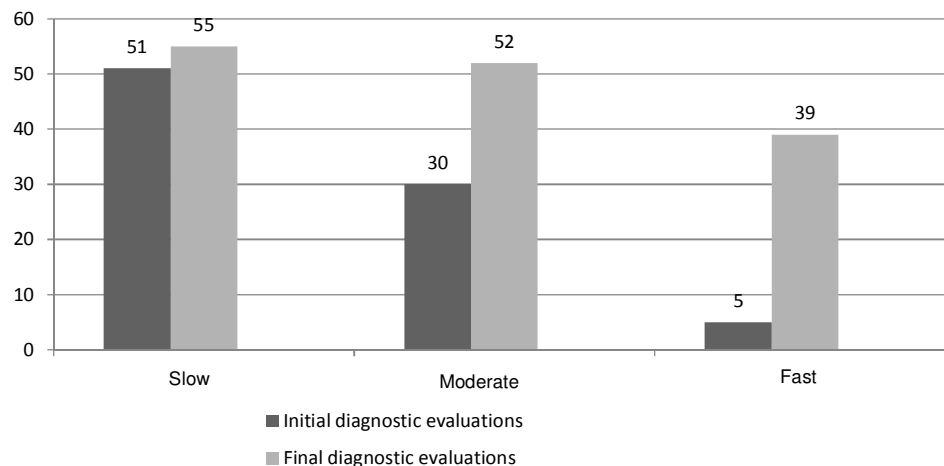
**Table 1.** Diagnosis evaluation (made at the beginning and at the end of 2009/2010 school year).

Dance	Yes	No
Participation/ interest		
Cooperation		
Criticism acceptance		
Rules acquisition		
Autonomy		
Body: Posture, balance, flexibility		
Space: Respect the other's space , synchrony with the class		
Time: Slow, moderate, fast		
Relations: Relationship with the pair and the group		

Socio-affective competences level (participation/interest, cooperation, criticism acceptance, rules acquisition, autonomy) and structural units of Dance: body, space, time and relations.



**Figure 3.** Comparison of initial and final diagnostic evaluations of space, as structural unit of Dance, in students of the 3rd / 4th year (number of students that achieved that parameter, n = 55).



**Figure 4.** Comparison of initial and final diagnostic evaluations of time, as structural unit of Dance, in students of the 3rd / 4th year (number of students that achieved that parameter, n = 55).

and expression or as an exercise in understanding knowledge beyond science (an esthetic enjoyment, feeling of fullness, food of the senses, enhancer of identity, acceptance of difference ...) are considered by several authors essential in formal and informal education. Akas says that the psychosocial effectiveness of dance in child development is obvious in every aspect of their daily activities and that the psychosocial effectiveness of dance is incomparable.

The music, visual art or movement/dance generates a space where people can take risks and experience different modes of action, resulting in a significant enrichment in the teaching-learning process and in the acquisition of cognitive, psychomotor and socio-affective skills, possessing an important role in human beings

socialization (Morais, 2000: 11). Individual differences are better accepted, and tolerance and cooperation among students increases this eliminating fear, aggressions and defensive behavior. In Lobo and Winsler work (2006: 501), the results revealed significantly greater positive gains over the time in the children's social competence. Therefore, dance instruction for at-risk preschoolers appears to be an excellent mechanism for enhancing social competence and improving behavior.

The role of expression of body movements is much better-off than the articulated speech that depends, in large part, on the verbal sense of communications function (Gil, 2001: 88). Thus, it is extremely important for the articulation of basic education with the various artistic expressions. As Samuelsson et al. (2009: 132) referred in

their study “the Arts are foundational constituents of early schooling. They deserve to be taken seriously as forms of knowledge in themselves that children should be given opportunities for developing their knowledge”

The activities of body language / dance lead to an increased repertoire of skills and to an improved teaching-learning process, as students are actively engaged in this dynamic because of its informal environment that provides them with a positive climate (Santos, 2009: 174 to 178). According to Lobo and Winsler (2006: 509 to 510), the children who participated in the dance program had made significantly greater gains from pre test to post test.

Dance encourages the independence and initiative and allows opportunities for self-esteem and success. It also plays an essential role positively affirming individual and group identities and integrating community spirit (Snyder, 2004: 2352 to 36).

In our methodology, we used choreographies of Hip Hop kids, sometimes mixed with children’s Modern Jazz and Traditional/International Dances. Hip Hop can be a valuable way in the assessment of the processes of cultural integration because it corresponds to the reality of public schools, where this form of dance begins to be very popular and can contribute to the development of self-discipline and sense of ethics and aesthetics of the students (Silva, 2007: 140 to 141).

In such internationalized environment traditional dances of different countries can also contribute to promote cultural integration. Tradition constitutes essential element of cultural peculiarity of each population and consequently the differentiation in a wider cultural environment (Giddens, 2001 cit. Goulimaris et al., 2003: 57). Tradition and costumes are the most important elements of life of the majority of people for the bigger part of Humans history (Goulimaris et al., 2003: 57). Lobo and Winsler (2006: 504) suggested that dance may play a role in the development of children’s social competence and prosocial behavior by serving as another cultural tool that can be internalized by the child and used for self-control and self-regulation.

With regard to autonomy, as a quality that distinguishes the success achieved in the various educational components and that can be regarded as a concept that allows us to assess how it is that the various components articulate we believe that there has been a significant evolution with the integration of dance in basic schools. The arts are important in young children’s lives and an integral part of life in a culture. For these reasons, it is important that early year’s education has access to powerful tools in helping young children learn in these domains (Samuelsson et al., 2009: 133).

The cognitive development of students cannot be the only objective of schooling. Schools must also promote the process of socialization and autonomy as well as the feeling of respect for others (Vettenburg, 2000: 243 to 245). The increased awareness of, and respect for others

that comes from dancing in groups, is thought to help children learn about personal space and social space and distance, both of which are important dimensions of effective social interaction (Stinson, 1998). So, we consider that throughout this project, the school has achieved its objectives in promoting the process of socialization and autonomy as well as the acquisition of respect for others. Dance enhanced personal and social opportunities, increased levels of socialization and characteristic behavior (Malkogeorgos et al., 2011). Malkogeorgos et al. (2011) review revealed that a considerable amount of researches has been conducted over the years, revealed positive social-psychological outcomes of dance practice, in a general population. Dance promotes a bond between children through sharing ideas, physical space and accepting individual differences.

According to the coordinator of one of the studied schools “Students who attend extracurricular artistic-expressive activities have greater autonomy and participate more in activities”.

## Conclusions

The contributions of the artistic expressions in the formal curriculum areas are essential to improve the level of socio-affective competencies.

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