

EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALITY OF LIFE AND DANCE: A DIFFERENT APPROACH

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Review paper

Abstract

This paper presents research data upon the relationship between Dance and Quality of Life (QoL), as well as upon the multiple benefits that dance provides concerning the participants' physical, mental, psychological and emotional health, as well as their social and communication skills. The aim of this study was: (a) to analyze the epistemological assumptions based on which relevant research has been so far conducted, and (b) to propose a different assumption about QoL and Dance in general, as well as QoL and Traditional Dance in particular. As a form of physical activity, dance and, by extension, the Greek traditional dance, have highly beneficial impact on communication and interaction skills, provide satisfaction and positive feelings, promote physical and mental health, and generally improve many domains of the participants' QoL regardless of age.

Key words: dance, traditional dance, quality of life (QoL).

Introduction

Every empirical study is based on epistemological assumptions aiming at providing answers to the following question: Is the knowledge we acquire subjective or objective? (Isaris & Pourkos, 2015). According to these assumptions, every person selects specific ways to perceive reality while rejecting others. There are quite many empirical studies investigating the relationship between Quality of Life (QoL) and Dance in general, as well as between QoL and the Traditional Dance in particular that have led to specific epistemological assumptions. The aim of this study was: (a) to analyze the epistemological assumptions on the basis of which the so far relevant research was conducted, and (b) to propose a different assumption about the relationship of QoL with Dance and with Traditional Dance. This different assumption may lead research to different paths.

Review of empirical research

Among the first research trials investigating the relationship between QoL and Dance were a survey conducted by Birkel et al. (1998) demonstrating a positive effect of dance on the elderly ability to relax and concentrate, and by Shigematsu et al. (2002) revealing beneficial impact on the participants' perceptual functionality. Sandel et al. (2005) carried out a study investigating the effect of a dance intervention on the QoL of thirty-five (35) female breast cancer survivors in two Cancer Centers in Connecticut who showed improvement in the degree of well-being and satisfaction with life. There is also research evidence indicating that dance provides the elderly with benefits similar to those of other forms of exercise, helping them improve their balance and avoid falls (Federici, Bellagamba & Rocchi, 2005). According to a study by Haboush et al. (2006), a dance intervention implemented in adults with depression improved their self-efficacy and mood, reduced feelings of

despair and helplessness, and offered them pleasant experiences. Quin, Frazer & Redding (2007) have demonstrated that active young people are more likely to remain active as adults, and that dance is an excellent vehicle for bringing people into a lifelong healthier and more active lifestyle. According to Yan & Zhoo (2009), dance activity promotes mental health in the elderly, while Kanning & Schlicht (2010) showed that dance improves the elderly's general mood. Furthermore, it seems that benefits deriving from traditional dance are associated not only with the elderly's physical fitness but also with their social and communication skills. By participating in a dance group, they come in contact with many people and this helps them create social relationships, foster and cultivate a collective spirit, and as a result unfold their personality while developing a social attitude and behavior (Malkogeorgos, Zaggelidou & Georgescu, 2011). Serrano-Guzmán et al. (2016) investigated whether a dance program improves sleep and blood pressure in a population of sixty-seven (67) middle-aged pre-hypertensive and hypertensive women. According to the study results, the intervention group presented significant improvement in blood pressure, sleep quality and QoL, as compared to the control group (Serrano-Guzmán, et al., 2016). According to Pitsi et al. (2008), the Greek traditional dance seems to be particularly beneficial for both physical and mental well-being, since it was found to be a form of exercise similar to a routine aerobic physical activity in terms of intensity. Kaltsatou, Mameletzi and Douka (2010) have shown that an intervention with Greek traditional dance in breast cancer patients has contributed to improving their physical functioning and satisfaction with life, as well as reducing symptoms of depression. According to a study by Papaioannou, Mavrovouniotis & Argiriadou (2005), a Greek traditional dance intervention

helped the participants reduce their transient stress and improve their general mood. Bougiesi et al. (2011, 2014) implemented a dance intervention and showed that individuals participating in dance activities have fun, socialize and improve their physical and mental health. There are also studies in older adults revealing that the Greek traditional dance has positive effects such as: promotion of movement functionality and balance control (Sofianidis et al., 2009); improvement of mental health and satisfaction with life (Kostantinidou, Harahousou & Kabitsis 2002); increase of mental well-being and reduction of stress and depression (Mavrovouniotis & Argiriadou 2010; Zisi, et al., 2014). In addition, Greek traditional dance contributes significantly to promoting women's communication and social skills, expressiveness, physical and mental health, thus improving their overall QoL (Lykesas & Tyrovola, 2012; Lykesas, Tsapakidou & Tsompanaki, 2014).

The Greek traditional dance has also been found to improve lipidaemic and glycaemic control in patients with Diabetes Mellitus II (Ermidou, Mameletzi, Lykesas & Kouidi, 2016). Lastly, it has been demonstrated that Greek traditional dance improves perceived physical and mental Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQoL) (Theocharidou, 2017; Lykesas, et al., 2018).

The epistemological assumption about quality of life
In order to understand the assumption about Quality of Life and Dance, it is essential to analyze the various ways in which these two concepts are defined. The concept of QoL is characterized by semantic polysemy and ambiguity as it has many different definitions (Theofilou, 2013). Yet, this cannot prevent us from analyzing, clarifying and understanding its significance and multiple dimensions. The concept of 'quality' can be perceived in two distinct ways. First, quality can be defined as the higher degree or level that discriminates A from B; for example, we say that this product is of a better quality than another. Secondly, when we say that a product is "of high quality", it means that it has some specific high level features.

The concept of 'quality' is usually inherent to the concept of grading/ ranking (ranging from high to low, from the best to the worst). Thus, in the first example with the product that is "higher in quality" than the other product, there is some grading/ranking concerning the two products, whereas the second example with the "high quality" product concerns the product itself in relation to another potential state of its own. In the case of "Quality of Life", the second approach is adopted; more specifically, life is graded compared to another potential state which is life without health and happiness. The first indirect discussions about Quality of Life are found in the Ancient Greek Literature, and more particularly in Aristotle, who determines the pursuit and cultivation of virtues as the central purpose of human life, identifying it with the concept of eudaimonia (well-being, flourishing).

According to Aristotle's teleological theory, every human being has the final end, goal or purpose to achieve eudaimonia by practicing moral virtues and striving for goodness. These virtues are numerous and can be acquired by performing appropriate actions. Every virtue can become the means to achieve another virtue, and this sequence of virtues leads to the supreme good which is eudaimonia (Nagel, 1972). To Aristotle, the three pillars of ethics are: phronêsis (practical or moral wisdom), arête (excellence or virtue), and eudaimonia (well-being, flourishing). Epicurus added another hedonistic dimension to eudaimonia, saying that that the ultimate goal of humans is to attain a hedonistic state in life characterized by aponia (absence of physical pain) and ataraxia (tranquility of mind, freedom from fear).

The philosophy of Epicurus influenced the Western Utilitarian Philosophers who spoke about the notion of happiness instead of eudaimonia. Among the first ones to talk about happiness was Immanuel Kant in his work "Critique of Pure Reason", where he defined happiness as "the satisfaction of all our inclinations; extensively, as regards their multiplicity; intensively, as regards their degree; and protensively, as regards their duration" (Kant, 2006). This modern hedonistic approach to happiness refers to the satisfaction that is subjectively experienced and perceived by the individual and is often identified with the concept of well-being. According to Aristotle's view, though, the notion of eudaimonia does not have to do with personal prosperity based on the possession or deprivation of material goods; neither can it be achieved simply by having the knowledge of virtue, as Plato claimed. Eudaimonia can be acquired only by practicing virtuous acts and living the life of moral virtue (Johnson, 2006).

The historical origin of the concept of QoL in the contemporary era should be sought in the post-war period in the Western world, that is when several Western societies began seeking psychological integration, happiness, satisfaction and well-being for their members. According to Flanagan (1982), the first attempts to understand QoL were made in the USA along with the first survey on QoL (Gurin, Veroff & Feld, 1960). As Campbell, Converse & Rodgers characteristically say (1976), there are economic social and personal-subjective indicators being used. The ontological basis of economic and social indicators is that QoL is a concept comprising: (a) a set of external domains (socio-economic indicators), and (b) a set of the individual responses to these external domains (indicators related to physical or psychological state). This modern Western approach points to the assumption of a reality that can be perceived through our senses. This is the answer provided by Realism, claiming that a reality of material things and facts exists as objects of knowledge independently of our conceptual scheme, no matter whether these are perceived through our senses (Realism of Properties) or understood with the use of our mind (Critical Realism) (Kostaras, 1998).

The Epistemological Assumption about Dance

According to Dalcroze, "Dance is the combination of rhythm and movement, a play between music and motion" (1967). Dance helps individuals gain the autonomy of free expression, effortless development of intelligence and awareness of proper teamwork (Haselbach, 1979). Dance is a kinesthetic form of art where imagination, ideas and meaning are interpreted into movement. Dance movements act as words. Just like a sequence of selected words creates sentences, a sequence of selected movements creates movement phrases, and a sequence of selected movement phrases creates dance (Sanderson, 2001). The primary and prevailing material in the language of dance is human movement. For this reason, dance is considered to be an integral part of the human existence and therefore is met in a wide variety of rituals and feasts (Koutsouba, 2010).

However, dance movement is differentiated from everyday movement-although the first may refer to the second (Hanna, 2008). As a form of thought, the skillful dance movement constitutes a manifestation of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence organized in sequences and forms of message and meaning (Tyrovola, 2010). Gardner (1983) claims that dance offers people the opportunity to express their feelings, communicate their emotions and feel liberated. Dance is not just an intentional movement that responds to sound (music); it is definitely something much deeper and more versatile.

It is the harmonious relationship among the three forms of human existence and their expressions: movement (expression of body), speech (expression of thought) and sound (expression of emotions) (Kyminou-Printaki, 1998; Mouratidis, 2000). According to Foster (1977), traditional dance is not just a social activity. There is a two-way and mutual relationship between dance movement and emotion: changes at the movement level cause changes at the emotional level and vice-versa (Berroll et al., 1997; Foster, 1977). In other words, dance in general and traditional dance in particular constitute an experience in which man participates as a whole.

As Chace reports (1975), there are very few experiences in which a person can fully participate as a whole, as happens in the dancing act. It is not possible to gain knowledge and understanding of dance as an objective phenomenon that relies on evidence perceived only through our senses or only through our mind; nor can we acquire full dance knowledge as a phenomenological and transcendental idea, as Idealism advocates. We can gain full knowledge of dance by approaching the nature of dance through our senses and the essence of dance by engaging our consciousness. Movement, sound, speech and social contexts can be analyzed through our senses but the essence of dance is captured only by analyzing the way we shift our consciousness towards it. Dance is a living experience overflowing with meaning that is often

subjective in its nature. This phenomenological approach of dance is based on the philosophical tradition developed by Husserl (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018) claiming that knowledge is empirical and acquired through people's experiences. Reviewing empirical research investigating the relation between QoL and Dance in general or Traditional Dance in particular, it becomes evident that relevant studies conducted so far have not been based on epistemological assumptions; on the contrary, they have all implemented a realistic approach. Yet, the question arising is: Could it be possible that the phenomenological assumption is compatible not also with dance-related knowledge but also with QoL-related knowledge?

A Different Epistemological Assumption about the Relationship between Quality of Life and Dance

As a philosophical tradition, Phenomenology does not focus on the phenomenon itself but on what is captured as a conscious experience of the phenomenon. Edmond Husserl (1859 -1938), the first to coin the term Phenomenology, is primarily concerned with the Cartesian quest for a philosophical foundation upon which thought can be based; that is, the quest for absolute certainty of thought.

At the heart of Husserl's philosophy lies the notion of intentionality of consciousness: acts of consciousness are determined not in relation to their object but by their own direction towards something (McIntyre, & Woodruff, 1989; Husserl, 2002). What Husserl wanted to point out was that what reaches our senses is not sufficient to determine what we are perceiving. For example, a dancer and a non-dancer watch a particular dance but, although they see the same dance, they perceive something different. Therefore, every individual composes what they see, and can do so in a variety of ways.

However, what interests Husserl is not the individualized perception of a phenomenon but the common features of the experience of all people living this phenomenon. In other words, Phenomenology is not oriented to the approach of the special experience of those who, for example, dance a traditional dance at a village feast, but rather to the universal traits of the experience of all people dancing a traditional dance at the village feast (Husserl, 2000). Following the same rationale, QoL can be analyzed as a separate experience but can also be analyzed as a set of common traits of people experiencing any level of perceived QoL. This phenomenological epistemological approach to QoL can reveal a variety of QoL patterns. Furthermore, if the phenomenological approach to QoL is combined with the corresponding phenomenological approach to Dance, this can be even more fruitful. For example, it could reveal different QoL patterns associated with specific meanings that people attribute to dancing; it could reveal a connection of QoL with dance experience patterns.

Discussion

This study aimed at providing answers to the two following questions:(a) What is the epistemological assumption of empirical research investigating the relation between QoL and Dance in general and with Traditional Dance in particular?,(b) Which could be a different epistemological assumption? As far as the first question is concerned, it has been shown that research conducted so far has been based on Realism assuming that there is an objective reality which can be objectively explored through our senses. As far as the second question is concerned, we have proposed the phenomenological approach which aims at investigating the living experience of people.

This suggestion is based on the epistemological assumption about dance and traditional dance. Besides elaborating on knowledge, art, morality and truth in his work "The Gay Science", Nietzsche (1996) also refers to the concept of happiness following the Stoic tradition, according to which happiness and misfortune are closely connected one with the other in such a way that, in order to be happy, one has to experience a great amount of suffering and hardship.

Nietzsche cannot be regarded as a Phenomenologist but through this statement he actually formulates an approach to QoL that, on one hand, points out the inter subjectivity of QoL and, on the other hand, poses a challenge to move deeper into the living experience of people.

Conclusion

The review of research studies in literature has led to the conclusion that the benefits of dance are multiple, since they are associated not only with physical fitness but also with mental, psychological and emotional health. Thus, it appears that dance and, by extension, the Greek traditional dance, as a kind of physical activity, greatly improve communication and interaction skills, offer satisfaction and positive feelings, enhancing thus the participants' physical and mental health and improving many dimensions of QoL regardless of age. Therefore, investigating the multiple effects of dance and traditional dance on QoL is highly significant and can offer a great number of practical applications. Dance can be integrated in everyone's lifestyle, as long as it is consciously perceived as something positive and feasible that can improve our Quality of Life.

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