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“WAITING RELATING & CO-ORDINATING”

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My Journey to become a Biodanza Teacher and the Creation and Launch of Danzability

What is Dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia, a form of developmental coordination disorder (DCD), is a common disorder affecting fine and gross skills and/or speech in children and adults of both genders. It is distinct from other motor disorders such as Cerebral Palsy and stroke and occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. Dyspraxia presents a range of difficulties that can vary according to each individual. These difficulties may change over time depending on environmental demands and life experiences.

An individual's coordination difficulties may affect participation and functioning of everyday life skills in education and employment as well as difficulties with self-care, writing, typing, riding a bike, driving a car, DIY and ball games. There are also serious negative impacts of co-occurring difficulties including social and emotional problems and problems with time management, planning and personal organisation. Many people with DCD also experience difficulties with memory, perception and processing information.

What Causes Dyspraxia

Although the exact cause is unknown, it is thought to be caused by a disruption in the way messages from the brain are transmitted to the body. This affects the person's ability to carry out movements in the right order and to perform movements in a smooth, coordinated way.

The Cerebellum

The Cerebellum is an organ located behind the brain that regulates the mechanisms related to sensory motor coordination, synergism and balance.

The Cerebellum is associated, through the cortex, with controlled movements and is also related with the tone of the muscles affecting posture and with the more automatic locomotion. This cauliflower shaped section of the brain not only manages our walking and balance, but studies show it is also important for attention, reading and perception of time. Damage to the Cerebellum can lead to impairments such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, Alzheimer's and other neurological disorders as well as a drunken appearance that is difficult to control. (*Human Movement*)

Symptoms of Dyspraxia

Gross Motor Coordination (Large Movements)

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| Poor balance - | difficulties riding, going up and down hills, standing on one leg. |
| Poor posture and fatigue - | difficulties standing for a long time due to weak muscle tone, floppiness, unstable around the joint. May have flat feet. |

Poor integration of the two sides of the body - difficulty with sports, jumping, cycling.

Poor hand – eye coordination - difficulty with team sports especially those which involve catching or batting a ball.

Lack of rhythm when dancing or doing aerobics – gait is clumsy and movement is difficult when changing direction or stopping and starting actions.

Exaggerated ‘accessory movements’ such as flapping arms when running.

Tendency to fall, trip or bump into things and people.

Fine Motor Coordination (Small Movements)

Lack of manual dexterity - poor at two handed tasks causing problems with using cutlery, cleaning, cooking, ironing, craftwork and playing musical instruments.

Poor manipulative skills - difficulties with typing, hand writing and drawing. May have poor pen grip, press too hard when writing and have difficulty when writing along a line.

Inadequate grasp - difficulty using tools and domestic implements, locks and keys.

Difficulties with self-care - dressing and grooming activities such as putting on make-up, shaving, doing hair, fastening clothes and tying laces.

Speech and Language

- May talk continuously and repeat themselves and/or struggle with conversations.
- Difficulty with organising the content and sequence of language.
- May have unclear speech and be unable to pronounce some words.
- Speech may have uncontrolled pitch, volume and rate.

Eye Movements

Tracking - difficulty in following a moving object smoothly with eyes without moving head excessively. Tendency to lose the place while reading.

Poor relocating - cannot look quickly and effectively from one object to another, for example crossing roads or looking from the TV to a magazine.

Perception (Interpretation of the different senses)

- Poor visual perception.
- Over sensitive to light.

- Difficulty in distinguishing sounds from background noise. Tendency to be over sensitive to noise.
- Over or under sensitive to touch – can result in a dislike of being touched and/or aversion to over loose or tight clothing – tactile defensiveness.
- Over or under sensitive to smell or taste, temperature and pain.
- Lack of awareness of body position in space and spatial relationships. This can result in bumping into and tripping over things and people and also dropping and spilling things.
- Little sense of time, speed, distance or weight leading to difficulties in driving and cooking.
- Inadequate sense of direction – difficulty distinguishing right from left and map reading skills are poor.

Learning, Thought and Memory

- Difficulty planning and organising thought.
- Poor memory – especially short-term. May forget and lose things.
- Unfocused and erratic – can be messy and cluttered.
- Poor sequencing – problems with maths, spelling, reading and writing reports.
- Accuracy problems – difficulty in copying sound.
- Difficulty with copying, writing, movements, proof reading.
- Difficulty with concentration – may be easily distracted.
- Difficulty following instructions, especially more than one at a time.
- May only do one thing at a time properly, though may try to do many things at once.
- Slow to finish a task – may daydream and wander about aimlessly.

Emotion and Behaviour

- Difficulty in listening to people, especially in large groups.
- Can be tactless, interrupt frequently and have problems with team work.
- Difficulty picking up non-verbal signals or in judging tone or pitch of voice in themselves and in others. Tendency to take things literally and may listen but not understand.
- Slow to adapt to new or unpredictable situations. Sometimes avoids them altogether.
- Impulsive – tendency to be easily frustrated, wanting immediate gratification.

- Tendency to be erratic and have good and bad days.
- Tendency to opt out of the things that are too hard.

Emotions as a result of difficulties experienced

- Tend to get stressed, depressed and anxious.
- May have difficulty sleeping.
- Prone to low self-esteem, emotional outbursts, phobias, fears, obsessions, compulsions and addictive behaviour.

Ars Magna

Biodanza is the ultimate work, the supreme art that leads to healing and the art of living. In contrast with most modern medicine, Biodanza works to bring out the wellness within us instead of focusing on the symptoms and illness. When our identity is expanded our health, joy of living and new forms of affective communication are generated. It is an effective treatment for psycho-somatic illness, e.g., stress and anxiety, because it acts on the Integrative-Adaptive-Limbic-Hypothalamic System creating new motivations to live. (*Ars Magna*)

WAITING

Identity and Integration

Identity has its roots in our genetic structure. How we perceive others and ourselves will influence how we connect with the world around us. There exists a consciousness of self where we are firstly, aware of our own body (a source of pain/pleasure) and secondly, aware of being different (our thoughts shaping our self-image). The question 'Who Am I?' and some self-esteem issues were contributory factors in my decision to wait. (*Identity and Integration*)

Biodanza and Expansion of Identity

Through the exercises of Biodanza we can be ourselves in an environment where we are respected, valued, loved and accepted. Biodanza activates the two poles of Identity and Regression, within which the process of identity is recycled. Through being in communication we discover our capacity for community love. At the same time, through the activation of the line of vitality and expression of our potentials creatively, we reach a sufficiently integrated identity and thus a cosmic state of consciousness. (*Identity and Integration*)

MY WAITING JOURNEY

Aside from the fact that Biodanza has helped me become more patient and tolerant, there are three main reasons as to why I chose to wait until now to present my final piece of work.

1) Being aware of my body and its limitations meant that I needed time to gain confidence as a teacher. My initial concern was that I would be judged negatively because of the different way that I present and demonstrate some exercises.

2) While my eagerness to grab an opportunity with both hands coupled with the determination to prove myself capable initially drove me to start teaching, my instinct was to proceed with caution having observed how quickly a class can start and then fold again. I needed time to grow my experience, time to build my class and time to develop my profile so that I would have something interesting to offer and say when the moment came for me to present.

3) From the moment I was born, the 'being different' label took me down a road of rebellion and I took pride in having a disability that allowed me the freedom to do things my way. By not feeling pressured to follow the norm (teach weekly classes, qualify after two years of being a SUS etc) and waiting and doing what felt right for me, I have developed as a person as well as a teacher.

RELATING

Affectivity

Affectivity is a state of deep affinity towards others, capable of originating feelings of love, friendship, altruism, maternity, paternity and companionship. However, opposing feelings such as anger, jealousy, insecurity and envy can also be considered components of affectivity. It is one of the five lines of vivencia (along with vitality, creativity, sexuality and transcendence) and through it we identify ourselves with other people. We are capable of understanding them, loving them, protecting them but also rejecting and attacking them.

Affectivity embraces all the passions of the spirit, especially love, affection and hate (Ortega Y Gasset). It can have the dimensions of "differentiated love", directed at one person and of "undifferentiated love", directed to humanity. Affectivity is an expression of identity and people who have a weak identity are unable to love. They are afraid of diversity and their bonds with other people are defensive. (*Affectivity*)

Friendship

Friendship is one of the deepest feelings of human beings combining affectivity, aesthetic feelings, the loyalty and sympathy of consciousness. When the Scottish psychiatrist, Ronald Laing, was asked "what is a sick man?", his reply was, a man who doesn't have friends. There is no jealousy in friendship, only deep respect and a feeling that allows the other to be free. Friendship is essentially creative, a wonderful gift of existence. (*Affectivity*)

Integrating Affectivity and the Embrace

When our affectivity is integrated, our bio cosmic intelligence is awakened. The capacity to feel the other as part of oneself, understand and tolerate difference, give oneself for the well-being of others and bond with the other, are key factors in this integration process. Biodanza is known as the poetry of the human encounter with the embrace being an act of oneself with the other via a reciprocal fusion. The healing energy of affectivity that each of us provides multiplies in the embrace, hence the perfect human encounter is a sacred ceremony of expansion of consciousness. (*Affectivity*)

Communication

Communication among people possesses a telepathic component. If we are able to communicate on a subtle level during the dance, we have managed to break the ice of our relationships. Hall and Eibl-Eibesfeldt studied the levels of closeness among people and realised that gestures can create the context of communication with the smile and the look being keys to the inner bond. The exclusion of

verbal communication within the Biodanza session (which takes the person away from the vivencial experience into levels of disassociation) opens up new possibilities for connection. (*Affectivity*)

MY RELATING JOURNEY

One of the biggest transformations of my personality as a consequence of participating in Biodanza has been in how I relate to people. The fact that I now socialise more and go out and about to different places, is a contributory element as to why I could not put pen to paper to complete my final piece of work. Ironic as it is, the old me would have been shut away indoors reading and writing constantly, and to this day, one of my ambitions is still to have something that I have written published. Even the one-time dreaded technology of social media has played a part in enhancing my communication skills, however not everything has changed because I still have the same mobile phone that I had back then that I can only text or call on.

Some of the things that I have done to help develop my relationships and communication include:

- 1) Putting myself forward to be Student Rep of ABTUK – this role challenged me to socialise and communicate more with my peers and the general public. It led me to taking a more active role in supporting the schools and in outreach at events promoting Biodanza with one of my highlights being able to represent ABTUK at EMBRACE, the European gathering of Biodanza associations.
- 2) Becoming more involved in Disability Arts and training in additional dance formats for disabilities and other medical conditions – this has increased my circle of friends and contact which in turn has opened new doors of opportunity.
- 3) Growing my affectivity and strengthening connection by supporting other Biodanza teachers and the disability dance community with their projects, workshops etc. I am also now more willing to accept and appreciate help from others instead of trying to struggle with things on my own just to prove a point.
- 4) Taking part in female only workshops – a major challenge for somebody who considered herself to be a tomboy in her youth. These days I show the feminine side of me more by wearing dresses and skirts.

COORDINATING

Coordination is the syntony and synchronisation of all movements and general coordination requires perfect harmony of the muscles in rest and in movement. Static coordination (rest) is the balance of action among the antagonistic muscular groups e.g., standing, and allows the voluntary conservation of different positions. Dynamic coordination is the simultaneous action of different muscular groups with the objective of carrying out voluntary movements of varying complexity. Both our coordination and muscular tone are modulated and controlled by the regulatory function of the brain.

The dances of integration are examples of the wonderful coordination of the mechanisms of balance and unity of movement that is possible to reach thanks to Biodanza. In order for this harmony to take place, the brain gives, in the precise moment, the necessary muscular tone to each one of our arms and legs, tensing and relaxing the muscles subtly according to the necessities of the instant. Within the dance there are different levels of neurological commitment that can take place and these are a) the orderly movements from the cortex perfectly controlled by the will and guided by thought

and b) the movements connected with the impulses of the archaic brain and these are impregnated by affectivity and emotion. (*Physiological Aspects of Biodanza*) (*Human Movement*)

Balance

Balance is the capacity to remain dynamic or static, in natural posture without deviations or oscillations. Orientation in space (dynamic equilibrium) largely depends on the receptors of the middle ear, but visual information is also very important. (*Human Movement*)

Coordination with Another

Coordination with another requires coordination of movement at an individual level, i.e., the integration of the different parts of the body within a global harmony. Coordinated movement requires one to feel the other and to guess their impulses, anticipating the actions of the other. (*Human Movement*)

Slow Motion Movements

These movements are induced by emotion and have two important functions, 1) Sensory Motor Integration and 2) the decrease of the force of the ego and the induction of the trance state. Slow motion movement improves kinaesthetic perception and facilitates the vivencias. (*Human Movement*)

MY COORDINATING JOURNEY

As a child I always wanted to attend dance classes and in my teens I longed to go to the local disco, but neither option was possible. My dyspraxia prevented me from feeling comfortable attending any form of dance session and as I was prone to having seizures up until my early twenties, the clubs and discos with their flashing lights were also out of bounds. I came across Biodanza purely by chance, as a consequence of attending another personal development workshop called Aflame. It was there my inner dancer was finally released and it was there I met the man who introduced me to the Dance of Life.

I have been dancing Biodanza for eleven years now, and teaching for six. Both my coordination and balance is better than it was, although there are still some dances that I really struggle with, e.g. Dance of Shiva, where the participant has to stand on one leg while continually moving the other leg and arms. Many of the dances I learned through slowing the movements down and breaking them into manageable segments to practice (as advised by a Biodanza teacher friend of mine). The multi-tasking aspect of the teaching job itself has been an additional hurdle at times but fortunately I have the assistance of my daughter and other friends from my Greenwich group who have been assigned no end of tasks, such as being in charge of the music, signing people in and fetching tea and coffee at events and workshops.

Biodanza has given me the confidence to train in new dance formats such as dance for disabilities, dance for Parkinson's, dance for Older People and dance for Early Years. I have also been inspired by other dancers who have disabilities and other teachers who have disabilities and/or medical conditions.

CREATING

Creativity is the path from chaos to order, an integral part of cosmic transformation. The work of creation is always the expressive result of the act of living and creativity itself is a natural function. Biodanza proposes that any creative activity will develop naturally rather than as a function within a type of psychotherapy. The Biodanza approach to creativity is vivencial not formalist and Rolando included creativity as one of the five lines of vivencia because of the vast number of levels where potentially creative people have their creativity repressed. *(Creativity)*

Biodanza and Poetry

There is an area of being in which Poetry and Dance meet. If our life is a movement of meaning, it is also poetry. To make our vivencia a dance is, in reality "Being a Poem". According to the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, 'Humanity is an unfinished poem'.

In her creation "Poetry of the Gesture" Pilar Acuna elaborated the enunciations of Biodanza as 'living poems'. In his book 'The Soul and the Dance', Paul Valery reveals the poetic quality of the dance. The vivencias of Biodanza and poetry have also been integrated by Rolando Toro and Eliane Matuk in a singular creative experience that has developed into an extension. Finally, there is a writing exercise in Biodanza where participants working in pairs are inspired by their companions, the task is titled 'The Poem is You'. *(Creativity)*

Creating Dance

For creative dances in Biodanza, maximum personal freedom is given to the expression of forms and emotions. *(Creativity)*

My Transformation from Carol to Kavina

The name Leela Kavina simply means Playful Poetess and reflects both the creative side of my nature and the poetry of Biodanza. It's a Sannyasa name that I took on as a sign of my connection to the centre where I did my Biodanza training, Osho Leela in Dorset. It has been said that the more we create something, the more we discover about our true selves and this has certainly been the case from the moment that I embraced my new identity. The re-invention of myself as Kavina came at a crucial stage in my journey when I needed to be seen, not as the person that I was, but as the person that I could become.

THE CREATION OF DANZABILITY

The Danzability message is that 'Everybody has the ability to dance and to live life to their full potential'. I have lost count of the number of people who tell me that they can't dance, whenever I am marketing Biodanza, and it always makes me smile. The reason for this is because I can remember being one of those people and yet, here I am today, moving and expressing myself to music. Not only am I dancing Biodanza on a regular basis, I am also teaching Biodanza and I currently have two groups, a mixed ability class in Greenwich and a class for adults with learning difficulties/disabilities, both in South East London.

The idea for Danzability came to me following an encounter in a lift at the Biodanza Congress in Portugal 2014. That first meeting with Guida Gama, an amazing didactic Biodanza teacher with three weekly classes in Portugal, was one of those light bulb moments that will stay with me for eternity.

This confident, independent lady who just happened to have a disability, spoke volumes to me even though she didn't speak very much English and I couldn't speak a word of Portuguese. We continued to meet up with each other and also danced with each other, at various intervals throughout the Congress and we agreed to keep in touch after the Congress had finished as a special bond had formed between us.

It was at my next encounter with Guida, at the social and clinical Forum in Italy 2015, that I invited her to come and teach in the UK. I was by her side at that forum when she presented her work on Resilience (the topic of her monography) and had the pleasure of experiencing, first hand, her teaching of a lovely vivencia – the first time she had taught anything outside of Portugal. Initially her workshop was organised to coincide with my 50th birthday but during one of our conversations, we realised that we could launch Danzability at the same time to make the day – 24th October 2015 -extra special. That event was the seed of a plan that had included her return to the UK and return to Portugal but, like our blossoming friendship, it was sadly cut short by the sudden passing of her life very early on in the following year.

Danzability as a brand, is still developing but one thing I was clear about from the start was that I wanted to create something that wasn't just simply viewed as Biodanza for people with disabilities. Having now trained in a number of different dances for wellbeing formats that includes dance for deaf and disabled people, the vision is to have a package that we can offer via classes, workshops, events, training, motivational speaking etc both in and outside London. As my daughter, Bethany, and I have friends who are dancers with a disability or medical condition and friends who are dance teachers with a disability or medical condition (or teach dance to people who have a disability or medical condition), we wanted to offer something that would be a community-based initiative as well – where everybody involved in the dance and dance therapy movement within the disability/medical condition/wellbeing umbrella could work together and support each other. Our second Danzability event, as a collaboration with Dance Syndrome and the Danzability stand at Move It, both had this ethos, while the Danzability Facebook page and group celebrates the great work that is happening in the disability dance world and brings it to the attention of a wider audience.

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