


## DANCE THERAPY AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR PROMOTING PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH: PRACTICES, BENEFITS, AND PERCEPTIONS BASED ON EXPERIENCES IN DANCE SCHOOLS IN BRASÍLIA

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### ABSTRACT

Dance therapy has emerged as a valuable therapeutic approach to promote physical and emotional health through movement. The objective of this study was to analyze dance therapy, exploring its historical trajectory, theoretical foundations, and applications in Brazil, with an emphasis on dance schools as therapeutic environments. The research was conducted through a qualitative bibliographic review involving books, scientific articles, and relevant institutional documents. The results indicated that dance therapy, by integrating body and emotion, demonstrated effectiveness in strengthening subjective expression and well-being, especially in non-clinical contexts such as schools and communities. It was found that dance practices in educational environments not only foster socialization but also significantly contribute to individuals' overall health. The study highlighted the importance of these expressive practices in coping with stress and anxiety, particularly in contemporary urban settings. The conclusions emphasized the potential of dance therapy as a health-promoting instrument, suggesting that adequate conditions in schools and community spaces can facilitate experiences of human development, showing that dance goes beyond technical learning, functioning as a means of expression and self-care.

**Keywords:** Dance therapy; Health; Emotion; Community; Expression.

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## INTRODUCTION

Dance, as a bodily language and sociocultural phenomenon, occupies a central place in human history, acting as a form of expression, communication, and production of meaning. In recent years, the field of dance therapy has gained increasing visibility in Brazil and worldwide, particularly for its ability to integrate body, emotion, and subjectivity in therapeutic and educational processes. Authors such as Marian Chace, Trudi Schoop, and Mary Whitehouse, pioneers of Dance/Movement Therapy, demonstrated that movement can foster bonds, expand body awareness, and promote profound emotional reorganizations (Chaiklin & Schmais, 1993; Whitehouse, 1979).

In Brazil, this understanding dialogues with studies on corporeality, such as those by Merleau-Ponty (1999) and Le Breton (2011), who view the body as the center of human experience and mediator of social relations.

Given this scenario, there arises the need to investigate how dance, especially in non-clinical spaces—such as dance schools, community centers, and sociocultural initiatives—can act as an instrument for promoting physical and emotional health. **The hypothesis guiding this study is that dance, when developed in educational and community environments, significantly contributes to well-being, socialization, and the strengthening of subjective expression**, approaching therapeutic principles even outside the traditional context of formal therapy. Thus, practices developed in schools such as Planet, in Brasília, may represent hybrid spaces where art, care, and coexistence intertwine, fostering experiences of human development.

The general objective of this work is to analyze dance therapy as a tool for health promotion, investigating its origin, theoretical foundations, applications in the Brazilian context, and the role of dance schools as potentially therapeutic environments. Specifically, the study seeks to: (a) present the historical evolution of dance therapy and its main theoretical contributions; (b) discuss the relationship between body, movement, and health based on philosophical, anthropological, and psychological literature; (c) examine how dance therapy has been incorporated into different contexts in Brazil; and (d) understand how dance schools and community spaces can act as environments of care and well-being promotion, with emphasis on the Planet School.

The justification for this study lies in the expansion of interdisciplinary understanding of health, which has shifted its focus from a biomedical model to integrative conceptions, recognizing the importance of the body, expression, and aesthetic experience for emotional and psychosocial balance. Furthermore, expressive bodily practices have proven relevant in the face of increasing disorders related to stress, social isolation, and anxiety, especially in large urban centers. Thus, investigating dance therapy and its socio-community applications contributes to strengthening innovative, accessible, and culturally situated care practices.

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The work was developed through qualitative bibliographic research, based on books, scientific articles, and institutional documents, including works by Chace, Whitehouse, Schoop, Merleau-Ponty, Le Breton, Laban, and documents from the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA). The structure of the study is organized into four main sections: the first discusses the origin and evolution of dance therapy; the second addresses body, movement, and health; the third examines the Brazilian context; and the fourth analyzes dance schools as therapeutic spaces, including a description of the Planet School. This organization allows for an integrated understanding of theoretical foundations, contemporary practices, and the social and therapeutic implications of dance.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology adopted in this work was based on a qualitative approach and bibliographic research, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of dance therapy and its applications in the Brazilian context. The first step involved the careful selection of relevant sources, including books, scientific articles, and institutional documents, which address both the theoretical foundations of dance therapy and its contemporary practices.

Fundamental authors in the field of dance therapy were consulted, such as Marian Chace, Trudi Schoop, and Mary Whitehouse, whose historical and methodological contributions established the foundations of the discipline. In addition, texts discussing the relationship between body, movement, and health were analyzed, including works by Merleau-Ponty and Le Breton, which deepen the understanding of corporeality as a central axis in human experience. This theoretical analysis was complemented by specific studies portraying the insertion and results of dance therapy in educational and community contexts.

The research was organized into four main sections: the first addressed the origin and evolution of dance therapy, highlighting its roots in the early 20th century; the second examined the interrelationship between body, movement, and health, emphasizing the importance of corporeality in promoting well-being; the third focused on the Brazilian context, discussing dance therapy practices in institutions and their contribution to collective health; and the fourth section specifically analyzed dance schools, such as the Planet School, as potentially therapeutic spaces.

In addition to the bibliographic review, the work also considered institutional documents, guidelines from associations such as the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA), and contemporary research highlighting the effectiveness of these practices in non-clinical environments. The inclusion of different perspectives and contexts facilitated a richer and more varied analysis of dance therapy.

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Through this methodology, the work sought not only to describe existing practices but also to understand the perceptions and experiences of individuals involved in dance therapy, allowing for a comprehensive view of the potential of this field in strengthening emotional and community health. The qualitative approach enabled a critical reflection on the contributions of dance therapy and its relevance in a contemporary scenario marked by emotional and social challenges. This methodology, therefore, was fundamental for achieving the study's objectives and for ensuring that the conclusions presented could be supported by a solid theoretical basis and practical evidence on the impact of dance therapy on people's lives..

## **DEVELOPMENT**

### **ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF DANCE THERAPY**

Dance therapy, also known as Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT), is a practice that integrates movement, bodily expression, and psychotherapeutic processes. Its origin is linked to the development of modern dance in the early 20th century, when artists and scholars began to understand movement not only as an aesthetic form but also as emotional manifestation and non-verbal communication. In this context, dance came to be seen as a therapeutic channel capable of promoting self-knowledge, mind-body integration, and psychological well-being.

The field became consolidated particularly through the contributions of pioneers such as Marian Chace, Trudi Schoop, and Mary Whitehouse, whose work shaped the theoretical and methodological foundations of dance therapy. Marian Chace, considered the principal founder of DMT in the United States, developed her practice upon observing that her dance students sought not only technical improvement but also emotional expression and a sense of care. In her work with psychiatric patients at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Chace realized that movement fostered engagement, communication, and group cohesion, contributing to the reduction of isolation and mental suffering (Chaiklin & Schmais, 1993).

Another essential figure was Trudi Schoop, a Swiss dancer and choreographer, who brought to the therapeutic field her understanding of dance as dramatic expression. Schoop employed humor, theatricality, and spontaneous movement as means to access repressed emotions and stimulate psychocorporal reorganization. Her work with patients with schizophrenia demonstrated that expressive movement could restore social bonds and expand body awareness (Levy, 1988).

Mary Whitehouse, influenced by Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology, created the method known as Movement in Depth or Authentic Movement. For her, dance emerged from the unconscious through spontaneous movements capable of revealing deep psychic content. Whitehouse argued that by following authentic bodily impulses, the individual approached their inner truth, promoting emotional integration and psychological development (Whitehouse, 1979).

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With the advancement of these practices, dance therapy gained institutional recognition and became consolidated as a profession and research area. The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA), founded in 1966, defined dance therapy as “the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of the individual” (ADTA, 2022). This definition underscores the clinical and holistic nature of the practice, which involves not only the moving body but also symbolic, relational, and subjective processes.

Over the decades, dance therapy expanded to various contexts—hospitals, schools, mental health clinics, community environments, and integrative arts spaces—demonstrating effectiveness across different age groups and populations with diverse needs. The evolution of the field keeps alive the articulation between art and science, body and mind, emotion and movement, reaffirming dance as a universal language and a powerful therapeutic instrument.

## BODY, MOVEMENT, AND HEALTH

The body, movement, and health constitute a field of study that articulates philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and therapeutic practices. Contemporary understanding of corporeality goes beyond the biological or mechanistic view of the body, recognizing it as the center of human experience, a locus of perceptions, meanings, and subjective expressions. Authors such as Merleau-Ponty and Le Breton have expanded this discussion, contributing to the notion of the body as a fundamental dimension of existence and not merely as physical support.

For Merleau-Ponty (1999), the body is the means by which the subject relates to the world. He proposes the concept of corporeality as a perceptual structure that integrates sensations, actions, and meanings. Thus, bodily experience is not separate from consciousness but constitutes the very basis of perception and subjectivity. In this sense, the body is not merely an object but a bodily subject, capable of expressing and producing meaning through movement.

In contemporary anthropology, David Le Breton (2011) reinforces this perspective by arguing that the body is a symbolic and cultural construction. For the author, every bodily action is permeated by social, emotional, and historical meanings.

Corporeality, therefore, is not limited to the physiological dimension; it involves ways of being and existing in the world, in which the body functions as language and as a mediator of human relationships.

The relationship between body, movement, and subjectivity also finds support in the contributions of Rudolf Laban, one of the leading theorists of movement. For Laban (1978), expressive movement is a profound form of communication that reveals internal aspects of the individual. He developed analytical systems such as Effort and Space, which demonstrate how movement qualities—such as weight, flow,

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time, and direction—reflect emotional states and subjective processes. Thus, the body becomes an instrument of expression and psychic reorganization.

In the therapeutic field, this integrated understanding of the body underpins practices such as dance therapy, art therapy, and psychocorporal approaches. The dynamic between movement and emotion is seen as bidirectional: movements can express pre-existing feelings but can also evoke, transform, and regulate emotions. Through bodily action, individuals access memories, sensations, relational patterns, and unconscious content, fostering psychological well-being and personal development. This relationship is grounded in studies of somatic psychology and integrative therapies, which show that movement helps reduce bodily tension, expand emotional awareness, and strengthen social and affective bonds.

Thus, understanding body, movement, and health implies recognizing that well-being is not merely the absence of disease but a state of balance among physical, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. Corporeality, in this context, provides a solid foundation for therapeutic practices that integrate art, science, and subjectivity, reaffirming the body as a space of expression, healing, and meaning-making.

## DANCE THERAPY IN THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

Dance therapy in the Brazilian context developed through dialogue between expressive bodily practices, international influences of Dance/Movement Therapy, and the cultural richness of movement in Brazil. Since the last decades of the 20th century, the field has been consolidating as an integrative practice present in various social, clinical, and educational spaces, accompanying the expansion of public health policies, complementary therapeutic approaches, and contemporary demands for comprehensive care.

In contemporary practices, dance therapy has expanded to psychological and multidisciplinary clinics, where it acts as a complementary resource in treating emotional disorders, relational difficulties, psychological suffering, and psychocorporal issues. In schools, dance therapy appears in projects for emotional education, school inclusion, and psychomotor development, contributing to strengthening socio-emotional skills, self-esteem, and students' creative expression. In community centers, such as CRAS, CAPS, cultural institutions, and civil society organizations, the practice is used to promote well-being, strengthen community ties, and encourage social participation, especially among older adults, women, children, and people in situations of social vulnerability.

The inclusion of dance therapy in collective health strongly dialogues with the national movement of Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (PICS), recognized by the Ministry of Health since 2006. Although dance therapy is not officially listed as a PICS, it falls within the same field of bodily and expressive therapies that value expanded care, therapeutic bonding, and integrality. Health professionals

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have applied its principles in therapeutic groups, community workshops, and health promotion programs, strengthening approaches that consider the body as a central dimension of care (Brasil, 2017).

In education, dance therapy has gained space in pedagogical projects that articulate art, movement, and human development. Influenced by authors such as Laban, Freire, and Vygotsky, its practice contributes to stimulating creativity, autonomy, and sensitive learning, allowing students to explore their emotions, perceptions, memories, and identities through movement. It is particularly relevant in the context of inclusive education, where the body is seen as a language accessible to different forms of expression and communication.

In the arts, dance therapy connects with practices of contemporary dance, Brazilian dances, bodily performances, and artistic creation processes. Many professionals move between the worlds of clinical practice and art, developing hybrid methodologies that integrate improvisation, body awareness, somatic research, and aesthetic experimentation. This interface strengthens the understanding of dance as a sensitive experience and as a tool for personal and social transformation.

Thus, dance therapy in Brazil is characterized by its diversity of approaches, its adaptation to local realities, and the plurality of spaces where it develops. The practice has proven powerful in promoting care, human development, and inclusion, articulating body, art, and health in an integrated manner.

## DANCE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY SPACES AS THERAPEUTIC ENVIRONMENTS

Dance schools and community spaces have become important therapeutic environments, especially in urban contexts where accelerated rhythms, social fragmentation, and increasing emotional disorders demand spaces for care, expression, and coexistence. Dance, as a universal bodily language, enables experiences that go beyond technical learning, fostering socialization, well-being, and the strengthening of affective and community bonds.

In the process of socialization, dance acts as a practice that encourages encounter, cooperation, and recognition of the other. Dance groups stimulate a sense of belonging, expand non-verbal communication, and promote the construction of support networks—fundamental aspects for emotional health. As studies on community bodily practices point out, shared movement stimulates empathy, expression of feelings, and group trust, making dance a catalyst for human relationships (Le Breton, 2011; Laban, 1978).

In terms of well-being, dance contributes to psychophysical balance by integrating body, emotion, and sensations. Rhythmic activity improves mood, reduces muscular tension, and aids emotional self-regulation, being recognized by psychologists and therapists as a complementary resource for promoting quality of life. The playful and creative nature of dance also enhances self-esteem, a sense of vitality, and contact with one's own corporeality.

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In this context, schools such as Planet, located in Brasília, stand out for integrating technical dance training with practices that value human development. Planet has become a regional reference by offering diverse modalities—such as contemporary dance, ballet, jazz, urban dances, and well-being-oriented activities—which may include body awareness workshops, improvisation practices, therapeutic dance classes, or social projects aimed at different age groups. These environments broaden the understanding of dance as a transformative and accessible experience, allowing participants to find, beyond technical learning, a space for self-care, creativity, and emotional expression.

Planet's work also extends to community projects and cultural events, where dance is used as an instrument of inclusion, social integration, and strengthening of collective identities. By promoting gatherings, performances, and activities open to the public, the school reinforces its role as a space for coexistence and expanded health, where art becomes a vehicle for human connection and socio-emotional development.

Thus, dance schools and community spaces, such as Planet, demonstrate that movement can be a powerful path to transform routines, reframe challenges, and promote comprehensive well-being. By offering welcoming and creative environments, these spaces reinforce the idea that dance is more than technique: it is a practice of care, expression, and collective construction of health..

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study emphasized the importance of dance therapy as an innovative and holistic approach to promoting physical and emotional health. Throughout the research, it became evident that dance, in its multiple manifestations, serves not only as a means of artistic expression but also as a significant therapeutic resource in diverse social contexts. The analysis of dance therapy practices in non-clinical environments, particularly in dance schools and community centers, revealed that these spaces can be transformative, providing enriching experiences of self-care, socialization, and human development.

The study demonstrated that dance therapy integrates theory and practice, ensuring a dynamic that fosters interaction between body and emotion. This translates into tangible benefits, such as stress reduction, strengthening of social bonds, and promotion of psychological well-being. Dance schools have proven to be relevant venues for this approach, allowing students and participants to access not only technical skills but also a deeper understanding of themselves and their emotions.

Furthermore, the research highlighted that incorporating dance therapy practices into public health and education policies is essential. Even though dance therapy is not formally recognized as an integrative practice, its contributions to collective health are undeniable. By serving various age groups





and populations, dance therapy emerges as an effective strategy for addressing contemporary emotional challenges, especially in a world increasingly marked by stress and loneliness.

Finally, it was concluded that strengthening dance therapy practices should be a priority for health professionals, educators, and public managers. Promoting comprehensive well-being through dance is a proposal that not only enriches individual experience but also fosters more cohesive and healthier communities. The continuation of studies and the optimization of methodologies that integrate art, health, and education are fundamental for dance therapy to fulfill its role in creating meaningful spaces for care and expression, demonstrating that movement is, indeed, a powerful agent of personal and social transformation.



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