

THE PRACTICE OF CORPORAL EXPRESSION AND DANCE IN OUTDOOR SPACES IN TEACHER TRAINING

LA PRÁCTICA DE EXPRESIÓN CORPORAL Y DANZA EN ESPACIOS EXTERIORES EN LA FORMACIÓN DE FORMADORES

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Abstract

This study reflects on space as a didactic resource in the practice of corporal expression in the university context. The aim is to identify the advantages, disadvantages and relevant aspects of the use of outdoor spaces surrounding the classroom, in the teaching-learning of the subject Expresión Corporal y Danza of the Degree in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences. Over the course of one academic year, indoor and outdoor practices were combined, and students were asked to write systematically in a diary. In general, they perceived collective practice outdoors as motivating, both in imitation tasks and in improvisation and exploration of the body in the environment: they considered that the outdoors stimulates creativity and increases freedom of movement. However, they indicated some difficulties associated with inhibition in the face of external observers, as well as the need to organize spatial, temporal and material aspects, highlighting attention to the floor. The observation of the analyzed categories reveals the importance of adaptation to the paradoxical conditions of risk and stimulation of the outdoors and leads us to the transitional proposition of conditioned intermediate spaces, as well as the combined indoor-outdoor use.

Keywords: Movement, creativity, inhibition, observers, open air.

Resumen

En este estudio se reflexiona sobre el espacio como recurso didáctico en las prácticas de expresión corporal en el contexto universitario. El objetivo es identificar las ventajas, inconvenientes y aspectos relevantes del uso de espacios exteriores, circundantes al aula, en la enseñanza-aprendizaje de la materia de Expresión Corporal y Danza del Grado en Ciencias de la Actividad Física y del Deporte. A lo largo de un curso se combinaron prácticas en espacio interior y exterior y se solicitó a los estudiantes la escritura sistemática a través de un diario. En general percibieron como motivante la práctica colectiva en el exterior, tanto en tareas de imitación, como de improvisación y exploración del cuerpo en el entorno: consideraron que el exterior estimula la creatividad y aumenta la libertad de movimiento. No obstante, indicaron algunas dificultades asociadas con la inhibición ante observadores externos, así como la necesidad de organizar aspectos espaciales, temporales y materiales destacando la atención al suelo. La observación de las categorías analizadas revela la importancia de la adaptación a las condiciones paradójicas de riesgo y estimulación de los exteriores y nos lleva a la proposición transitoria de espacios intermedios condicionados, así como del uso combinado interior-exterior.

Palabras Clave: Movimiento, creatividad, inhibición, observadores, aire libre.

Introduction

Today's society is in a complicated process of change that affects different areas, such as the way we work, relate to each other or learn. This change is visibly reflected in the school, as the institution responsible for citizenship education (Marcelo, 2001). Particularly relevant is the transformation of ways of educating in uncertain situations (García, 2019). An extreme case of school adaptation has been witnessed during the pandemic caused by COVID 19, which has led to the greatest social and educational change in recent decades (Hortigüela-Alcalá et al., 2021). In this sense, Physical Education teachers should manage uncertainty, adapting their actions and reconstructing their professional identity, while respecting pedagogical objectives (Backman & Barker, 2020).

The pandemic caused by COVID 19 brought with it, temporarily, the mandatory use of safety distance in the school context, having negative effects derived from the decrease in contact and communication. For this reason, Physical Education teachers have been forced to seek a balance between safety and quality (Troya, 2021), finding positive resources such as the use of outdoor spaces and the desire to continue using them in this search. Thus, in 2020 the University of León launched the project of an extension course called Dance with stones, trees and clouds, which is still maintained (<https://blogs.unileon.es/danzaule/improvisacion-en-contacto-danza-con-piedras-arboles-y-nubes/>).

The pedagogical value of outdoor spaces has been recognized since the beginning of the twentieth century, with the quality of the space being compared to the quality of teaching (Pía & Mayorga, 2017). In fact, education in contact with nature is a hallmark of the pioneering proposals of the New Schools (Luzuriaga, 1923) that was also reflected in some gymnastic currents such as Austrian Natural Gymnastics (Langlade, 1983). In the eighties, Denis (1980) called for a pedagogy of the environment for corporal education focused on stimulating spaces. Recently, Navarro-Martínez (2017) establishes as benefits of the use of outdoor space, improved health, increased empathy or the development of social learning. On the other hand, Rebolo and Ascenso (2019) point out that outdoor learning is usually more rewarding and long-lasting.

The importance of space in teaching is fundamental, becoming according to Laorden and Pérez (2002) a didactic factor that helps to define teaching-learning and to create stimulating environments. In this sense, Campos and Cuenca (2017) establish an indissoluble connection between teaching and physical space. Lund (2013) indicates how, depending on the pedagogical possibilities of the space assumed by the teacher, the role of the teacher will be different. In the area of Physical Education, the gym and the playground are usually established as their own spaces (Miragem & Almeida, 2021). However, when we approach the term space from the content or subject of Body Expression, in addition to talking about the place or place for the practices that are carried out in it, the body takes on particular importance, because through it space is delimited, constructed and understood (Milstein & Mendes, 1999). Space as a didactic resource in the training of trainers had already been pointed out together with objects, text or music (Brozas, 1996). However, the use of this has hardly been specifically discussed; despite this, what has been exposed so far highlights how the observation and use of outdoor space can enrich school practices and in particular those of Body Expression and Dance.

In the field of modern and postmodern dance, there are precedents in the use of natural spaces, pioneers being Isadora Duncan (Duncan et al., 1993) and Anna Halprin (Ross, 2007): from the 60s onwards, staging in the street was developed, with experimentation in both urban and natural spaces (Pérez, 2008). In the case of contact improvisation, the current expansion in the number and variety of places in relation to both choreographic trends and social movements stands out (Brozas, 2017). The possibilities of space in corporal practices are also observed in theater: street theater occupies urban space and invades the sites of the city (Carreira & Vargas, 2010). The terms street theatre and street arts are used to refer to the manifestations that use open and public spaces in urban centres for body creation (Chaudoir, 2000). It should also be remembered that there has always been a constructive dialogue between performance art and public space (Perea, 2012).

In the educational context, the need for the use of outdoor space is observed from kindergarten to university education: it seems that a limited use of outdoor space in childhood affects development (Navarro-Martínez, 2017); for their part, European universities recommend reviewing academic places by articulating the interior and exterior in order to transform the classroom (Campos & Cuenca, 2017). There is also recognition of the pedagogical potential of outdoor spaces among professionals and families (Bento & Portugal, 2016).

Despite this recognition, there is still reluctance related to tolerance to inclement weather, uncertainty or the irregularity of the land; it is outdoors where basic aspects such as acoustics, temperature, cleanliness, lighting, etc. are more difficult to control (González et al., 2018). Along these lines, Bento and Portugal (2016), after carrying out an intervention with infant students to assess the potential of outdoor space, point out that most teachers express feeling insecurity and experiencing greater difficulties in changing their mentality about the use of outdoor space.

Likewise, when addressing the contents of Body Expression, some teachers consider the facilities an aspect directly related to the difficulty in teaching the practices (Lafuente, 2021). In addition, according to Lafuente and Hortigüela (2021), teachers relate shyness and embarrassment to the main fears of those who carry out Body Expression activities, which could lead to blockages (Canales, 2007). Both the difficulties and the benefits of Body Expression activities could be emphasized with the use of outdoor spaces or on the contrary attenuated; therefore, specific didactic research is essential.

The main contribution of the study presented below is the exhaustive analysis of the use of outdoor spaces on the Campus in the subject of Expresión Corporal y Danza (ECD) in the Degree in Ciencias de la Actividad Física y del Deporte (CAFD). A qualitative methodology is used through the analysis of the diaries of the participants in the training, which show data that allow for deeper reflection on spatial resources. To this end, three objectives are proposed: a) To analyse which aspects of the space are most relevant for the students of Body Expression; b) To reflect on the advantages of Body Expression work in outer space; c) To know possible disadvantages for students of carrying out corporal practices in outdoor space.

Materials and Methods

Participants

The sample is made up of 70 students who took the subject of Expresión Corporal y Danza in the Degree in Ciencias de la Actividad Física y del Deporte of the Universidad de León. It is an annual and compulsory subject in the second year that

was taught by two teachers: the tenured professor has more than 20 years of experience taught 14.70 credits of the subject and another professor with three years as a university professor who taught 7.80 credits.

Desing

The research was carried out in three phases.

Phase 1

Delimitation and Design of the Data Collection Instrument. First, the objectives of the study and the methodology were specified, and the instruments were designed. Given that the researchers taught in the BED subject, in the first session the students were explained how the research will be carried out, the form and time in which they must carry out the diary and they were consulted on their consent to participate. The study obtained the approval of the ethics committee of the Universidad de León (ETICA-ULE-006-2022).

Phase 2

Information Intervention, Development and Analysis. To carry out the study, the teachers selected various contents to be carried out in outer space, due to their adaptability to it. They were taught in several practical sessions selected according to the objective, artistic discipline or common elements, carried out through games, techniques, tasks and collective dynamics. The two semesters were used: in the first semester popular dances, postmodern dance, performance from 12 to 14 at a time slot common to all groups. In the second dramatic play, gaze and percussion from 9 to 14 at a different time each group, but only in the gaze session were they all able to go outside. The sessions were held at the Vegazana Campus in the city of León. In this phase, the data were recorded and analyzed was carried out.

Phase 3

Categorization of Information and in-Depth Analysis of Results. The information that was obtained from the students' diaries was analyzed by the researchers independently. Conclusions were then drawn and avenues for improvement were identified for further studies.

Instruments

The instrument used is the student's diary. After the practice, the students recorded those aspects that are most relevant to the areas of study. As can be seen in table 1, a structure provided by the teachers was proposed for the realization of the diary, where the students answer the questions posed in an open manner.

Table 1
Student Diary Questions

What aspects related to space do you consider most important in practice?
How has the exterior or interior space (as appropriate) influenced the expressive work carried out?
What advantages or disadvantages have arisen from working in space?

Procedure

A qualitative methodology of deductive cohort has been carried out, carrying out the content analysis through the review of the information collected in the students' diaries through the use of coinciding cross-patterns, which favour the coding and counting of the text extracts generated (Saldaña, 2009). It consists of an exploratory study that analyses the perceptions of students of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences about the use of outdoor space in Body Expression and Dance. The results were organized into three categories, according to an open, axial and selective coding process. Saturation was previously used to select the information, favouring the accounting of the text extracts and the presentation of the most significant ones. The three categories that were proposed to structure the results, which arise from the topic of study and the objectives of the research, were the following:

Aspects of the outdoor space to be taken into account in ECD: it includes the type of outdoor facilities, weather conditions, preferential working hours, number of students, materials used, music used.

Benefits of working in outdoor space in ECD: it analyses what is related to motivation, social relationships established with students and with outsiders, more appropriate content, creativity and imagination.

Possible problems or inconveniences in the use of outdoor space in ECD: information regarding emotional aspects related to embarrassment and shyness, execution difficulties, problems of perception and attention to content.

The information contained in each of these categories is directly related to the questions that were proposed in the data collection instruments used, thus guaranteeing the objectivity and linearity of the research (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006).

Each category also collected information related to different topics, which were structured into subtopics in the results section. This structuring favors the triangulation and saturation of the data obtained (Tortorella et al., 2015). To avoid bias and ensure independence in the assignment of results to categories, an independent analysis was carried out by each investigator, then inputs were made that were agreed upon for final consignment.

Results

All the information extracted from the students' diaries is presented below, grouped into the categories proposed in the study.

Benefits of Practicing BED in Outdoor Space

In the students' comments, when working outside, one word often appears: "freedom". For the students of the CAFD degree, working abroad is a break with the usual work in the classroom or sports center: "It has been very satisfactory (...), for this reason I consider that the exit has been advantageous and I would like to go outside again for some exercise of another practice" (TF). "We are not locked up for so long and it is more pleasant to do it outdoors" (RN).

These feelings of freedom, rupture and disconnection are mainly attributed to contact with nature and good weather conditions: "(...) producing a feeling of freedom and enjoyment of green spaces" (CF). "The outdoor space has allowed us to carry out the class with greater freedom of movement and in contact with nature" (PM).

It is also observed that the allusions to freedom are not only referring to good weather or enjoyment in nature. The students perceive the spaciousness of the outdoor space, with more possibilities for movement: "in the outdoor space there could be more space, you could have more freedom of movement and body expression" (PB). "(...) outside the classroom building to have more space and freedom of movement" (MS).

In turn, this greater freedom of movement was perceived by the students as an aid to increase creativity: "The outside has been the ideal place, where we have been able to look at all the things around us and be more imaginative" (CI).

This increase in creativity is not only attributed to a larger space with which greater freedom of movement was obtained, but also to the greater number of stimuli that can increase the imagination to create: "being able to go out today has also enhanced expressive work much more due to the greater number of stimuli and opportunities available outside a classroom" (TF).

All this increases the motivation of the students in the work of ECD in the sessions carried out in outer space: "We have gone outside, and this has been a great conditioning factor in my motivation" (IGC). "Going outside motivates us, we feel greater freedom and we are able to improvise and express ourselves more easily" (ES).

Finally, many students comment on how on one occasion when they went outside a person who was watching them joined them to do the class. For them this was very positive: "At one point a spontaneous person who seemed to know a student joined the practice, it was opportune to welcome him because he created a good dynamic" (LP).

Potential Issues or Drawbacks in the use of Outdoor Space in ECD

When referring to the disadvantages of working outside, there is a recurring idea: the perception of greater exposure and an increase in shame. Some students who felt insecure in ECD work by going outside and increasing the number of observers may also feel more self-conscious: "The main drawback, at least for me, has been outside, because of the pressure of someone watching you, which could cause you to stop expressing yourself" (IT). "In the practical session held abroad, I was not able to express myself as I wanted due to the embarrassment I felt when other people saw me dance" (PVU).

Outdoor practice, with the increase in the number of observers, not only had consequences in relation to inhibition, but also increased the distraction of the students. Many pointed out that when there were greater stimuli outside, losing concentration was easier: "As an inconvenience I find that when people passing by who were looking at us passed by, we could be distracted" (PM).

In some tasks, for some students, the increase in spatial dimensions, as well as the increase in stimuli, was a problem. Because it was more difficult for them to organize, they found it more difficult to follow the creations of their classmates:

I think the use of space was too unlimited and I think the activity would have been more profitable if the space was more limited in such a way that all the work groups could see in situ the representations of our colleagues (JR).

Another disadvantage mentioned relates to the use of sound and voice. The greater number of noises could have made it difficult to understand the instructions through the voice: "(...) having performed sung dances, I consider that voices can be heard better (in the classroom) than in an outdoor space (...) there are no external noises that can distract anyone" (PB).

Finally, the students pointed out the weather as a negative aspect; being changeable, it is a variable that could disrupt the class. Additionally, the students commented that being too cold or too hot can affect staying outside: "it would have been better to go outside to play the speed game, but on a bad day we couldn't" (DAS)". "On Thursday it was very sunny, at first we enjoyed it, but in the end, it became bothersome," (IMC).

Aspects of Outdoor Space to Consider at ECD

The students of the CAFD Degree pointed out, in general, as positive the carrying out of activities first in the indoor space and then in the outdoor space, which seemed to increase confidence: "The fact of working first in the classroom, an already known interior space, made us feel more comfortable so that we could then progress and work in the outdoor space" (ER).

In addition, this temporary way of arranging the spaces represents a break with monotony:

The interior space seems very important to me since in this way we concentrate better to understand the purpose and resolution of the practice. But it is very remarkable that the simple fact of going outside motivates us, we feel greater freedom and we are able to improvise and express ourselves more easily. (ES)

Resources and materials are another aspect that the students pointed out; ECD classrooms are usually equipped with mirrors, stereo, lighting, special flooring and various objects that facilitate organization: "In the classroom building, row dances were carried out, in which certain steps had to be learned, so the mirror was an important element" (LLV). "In this practice, the space used was the interior, in which we had the music equipment for the dances that needed it" (AG).

At times, the use of the outdoor space was perceived as more appropriate than the linoleum of the classroom for its maintenance, preventing it from being damaged: "because the chairs can damage the floor" (DS).

Security is also a prominent aspect; In outer space we can find an unsteady, wet floor, ... which can not only hinder, but also increase the risk: "I think the use of linoleum for dances is a suitable type of floor since it has a good grip for the feet and they almost do not slip, so it reduces the risk of injury" (PB). "We have used an indoor space, I think it has been the right thing to do since moving on the floor could not be so easy in an outdoor space" (CI).

This makes a previous review be seen as something important for the students: "The ground was relatively horizontal and regular, we were checking before starting walking and treading with energy" (LP). Table 2 then summarizes the results obtained in the students' diaries.

Table 2
Summary of the Results Obtained in the Students' Diaries

Categories	Ideas/ observations
Benefits of ECD work in outer space	Freedom Contact with nature Possibilities for movement Creativity Variety of stimuli Motivation Observer Participation
Potential issues or drawbacks in using outdoor space in ECD	Shame Distraction Difficulty organizing space Noises Changing weather
Relevant aspects in ECD abroad and specific actions	Temporal organization of spaces Resource organization Security element review

Discussion

Most of the students of the CAFD Degree, after taking the ECD subject, highlighted the temporal organization of the spaces, the adaptation of resources and the review of security elements as relevant aspects in the practices abroad. They pointed to freedom, contact with nature, possibilities for movement, increased creativity and motivation as the main advantages. They also identified the feeling of embarrassment, greater distraction, noise and changing weather as the main problems.

In relation to the first category, benefits of ECD work in outer space, the students mainly highlighted an increase in the feeling of freedom. This can be related, on the one hand, to the size of the space, which offers greater possibilities for movement. In this sense, Von Laban (1978) underlined the importance of freedom of movement in artistic creation. In the current study, the students related the outdoor space with the increase in creativity when making compositions, due to a certain extent to this freedom of movement experienced. On the other hand, this freedom is related to outdoor practice. Laorden and Pérez (2002) pointed out the importance of creating stimulating environments for the development of capacities. These stimuli were seen by the students as an aid to creativity and enjoyment, coinciding with Rebolo and Ascenso (2019) who consider outdoor learning more rewarding.

As for the second category, potential problems or drawbacks in the use of outdoor space in BED, one of the biggest issues pointed out is the increase in feelings of shame. This shame, together with shyness, is one of the main fears of students in school activities of expression, because they may feel judged by the observer. Being in outer space greatly increased the number of unknown observers, thus increasing this feeling of shame, which according to Canales (2007) can lead to blockages.

Students pointed to the increased number of distractions and difficulty in delineating space as other problems in outer space. These problems could be related to two advantages indicated above: the greater number of stimuli and the spaciousness of the spaces. These could be identified by more inexperienced students as a problem, so a greater number of stimuli was perceived as an incentive to increase creativity, but in turn could increase distraction in what they want to do. The same happened when the space increased, which could have allowed greater freedom of movement, but when it exceeded too much of the possibilities of action of the students, it led to a difficulty of location. These results would indicate the need to make progressions with the students, as Gilbert (2018) establishes, both in the stimuli and in the space, to ensure that all students can explore and develop creative work in ECD. In this sense, it is observed how practicing outdoors requires time to adapt to be enjoyed and used in terms of learning.

Finally, the students pointed out the changing weather and noise as two common problems present in outer space and where the teacher can hardly have an impact. Bento and Portugal (2016) pointed out that those contexts, such as those that are less controlled, entail more difficulties and increase insecurity. Hernández and Fernández (2020), in their performative teaching proposal on campus, oppose the safe and controlled territory of the classroom to the public space.

In relation to the third category, aspects of outdoor space to be taken into account in ECD, the students perceived the combination of indoor and outdoor space in a positive way, valuing that work was done first in the indoor space and then outdoors in various activities. This could be in line with the progression work seen earlier with Gilbert (2018) in relation mainly to observers. Thus, the students were able to start the work with few observers focusing on the task, and then in outer space increase the number of observers, the number of stimuli and the spatial amplitude. In addition, Campos and Cuenca (2017) recommend the use of both indoor and outdoor space in order to transform the classroom.

Another important aspect is the organization of resources. There are aspects within outer space that can hardly be controlled, such as weather and noise. However, other resources typical of classroom work such as music or the use of materials can be adapted. It is common for teachers, according to González et al. (2018), to feel rejection of working outside because it is they, individually, who must be in charge of the material and facilities, involving extra work. However, positive experiences and the optimization of the organization of resources could change the vision of teachers. To do this, proposals would be necessary to minimize this workload and make teaching outside the classroom more attractive. Finally, this organization has to consider both the safety of the students and the care of the furniture.

After analysing the study categories, it makes sense to think of a proposal for a combination, based on an intermediate space, between the interior space and the exterior spaces proposed by Navarro-Martínez (2017). Ideally, you should be able to alternate an indoor space, with an intermediate space or "conditioned" outdoor space and a usual outdoor space such as the courtyard, the city or the nearby natural environment.

This conditioned intermediate or outdoor space: (1) It should be an outdoor space to take advantage of benefits such as a sense of freedom, motivation and increased possibilities for movement and creation. But at the same time, it should be a space that is relatively accessible to the view of other people or passers-by. (2) An awning or a row of hedges, trees or other delimiting elements could be used to increase organization and a sense of security. (3) It should be close to the classroom to easily have material resources, as well as offering an entrance and exit to the interior space and also being able to respond quickly to possible changes in the weather.

The diaries of the students, future trainers, reflect how practice in the outdoor space mobilizes didactic reflection and develops the capacities of observation and adaptation, that are so important in the teaching function. In his texts, the positive perception is reflected in detail and also the experience of difficulties and relevant factors.

Certainly, concentration is more difficult and exposure to the gaze is greater, but in the case of the training of trainers, the presence and action outdoors becomes a didactic and experiential exercise that is not only stimulating and motivating

but also profoundly enriching because it is destabilizing: the space not only hosts or situates educational practice, but it is incorporated into the processes of communication and creation of the bodies that interact and modify them.

In each case, each school institution and each teacher and team of teachers must carefully observe the possibilities of expanding the use of specific spaces for teaching, but also other accessible spaces of the center, bordering spaces and nearby spaces that easily allow the mobility of groups of students. Activities during the movements from the classroom, pavilion or gym to other nearby spaces can also be included in the programs. It is necessary to have a constant ability to adapt to the environment that teachers and students can acquire together.

Conclusions

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Certainly, concentration is more difficult and exposure to the gaze is greater, but in the case of the training of trainers, presence and action outdoors becomes a didactic and experiential exercise, not only stimulating and motivating, but also profoundly enriching. The space not only hosts or situates educational practice but is also incorporated into the processes of communication and creation of the bodies that interact and modify them.

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The study has some limitations, such as the use of only one data collection instrument. On the other hand, after observing the benefits of outdoor space in Body Expression as a future prospect, it is proposed to continue studying whether these benefits could also be appreciated with other interventions in Physical Education.

Ethics Committee Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Universidad de León (código de registro ETICA-ULE-006-2022).

Conflict of Interest Statement

The funding bodies or institutions had no influence on the design of the study, the analysis of the data or the interpretation of the results.

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Authors' Contribution

Conceptualization J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Methodology J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Software J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Validation J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Formal Analysis J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Investigation J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Resources J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Data Curation J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Writing– Original Draft J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Writing – Review & Editing J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Visualization J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P.; Supervision J.C.L.F. & M.P.B.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author (lafuentejorge@uniovi.es).

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