

# Dance improvisation and the elderly: reflections on compositional and educational aspects<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, we share reflections from the practices developed in my Ph.D. research (in progress), with 50+ adults, whose theme is improvisation in dance. The research is characterized by an artistic-pedagogical investigation, with a qualitative and exploratory approach. This cut that I present aims to present reflections on the impacts of studies on perception, attention and listening in the knowledge construction experienced in studies on improvisation in dance. In this sense, we present a general contextualization about improvisation in dance, then we discuss the three guides - perception, attention and listening - and their impacts on improvisation, then we bring arguments about improvisation as an educational experience. Finally, we make considerations about the power of the study of improvisation as a means to learn to experience the immediate present in a creative way, aware that the improviser (of any age) is the composer of experiences, of the decisions that impact the construction of the artistic and life scene.

**KEYWORDS:** Dance Improvisation; Perception; Attention; Listening; Education.

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*A improvisação em dança e a pessoa idosa: reflexões sobre aspectos compositivos e educativos*

**RESUMO**

Neste artigo compartilhamos reflexões oriundas das práticas desenvolvidas na pesquisa de doutorado (em andamento), com adultos (55+), cuja temática é a improvisação em dança. A pesquisa caracteriza-se pela investigação artístico-pedagógica, de abordagem qualitativa e exploratória. Este recorte tem por objetivo refletir sobre os impactos dos saberes sobre percepção, atenção e escuta nas construções de conhecimento vivenciadas nos estudos sobre improvisação em dança. Neste sentido, apresentamos a contextualização geral sobre a improvisação em dança, a seguir discorreremos sobre os três norteadores – percepção, atenção e escuta – e seus impactos na improvisação, depois trazemos argumentações sobre a improvisação como experiência educativa. Finalmente, fazemos considerações sobre a potência do estudo da improvisação como um meio para se vivenciar o presente imediato de maneira criativa, consciente de que o improvisador – de qualquer idade – é o compositor das experiências, das decisões portadoras de significados que impactam na construção da cena artística e da vida.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Improvisação em dança; Percepção; Atenção; Escuta; Educação.

*Improvisación de danza y personas mayores: reflexiones sobre aspectos compositivos y educativos*

**RESUMEN**

En este artículo, compartimos reflexiones surgidas de prácticas desarrolladas en investigación doctoral (en curso), con adultos mayores de 50 años, cuyo tema es la improvisación en la danza. La investigación se caracteriza por una investigación artístico-pedagógica, con un enfoque cualitativo y exploratorio. Este fragmento tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre los impactos de los estudios sobre la percepción, la atención y la escucha en la construcción del conocimiento experimentado en los estudios sobre improvisación en danza. En este sentido, presentamos una contextualización general

sobre la improvisación en la danza, luego discutimos los tres principios rectores - percepción, atención y escucha - y sus impactos en la improvisación, luego traemos argumentos sobre la improvisación como una experiencia educativa. Finalmente, consideramos el impacto de estudiar la improvisación como un medio para aprender a experimentar el presente inmediato de manera creativa, consciente de que el improvisador (de cualquier edad) es el compositor de experiencias, de decisiones que cargan significados que impactan en la construcción de escena del arte y la vida.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Improvisación em danza; Percepção; Atenção; Escucha; Educação.

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## Introduction

In this article, we share reflections arising from the practices developed in doctoral research at the Postgraduate Program in Education, PPGED/UFU, currently entitled *The elderly dancer-creator: relationships between processes of creation/composition in dance and self-educational processes*. The research is being carried out with adults aged fifty and over, and its main objective is to analyze the possible interlocutions between the constructions of knowledge arising from the processes of creation and composition in dance, through improvisation, and the processes of self-education of the participating subjects.

The doctoral research meetings propose ways of experiencing educational experiences in the context of artistic research with individuals aged 55 and over who continue to believe in lifelong learning; subjects who have chosen to nurture freshness and curiosity about the relationships to be established with the world. Thus, the research actions, in their processes of organization and realization, unfold through aesthetic, sensitive, creative and compositional experiences; giving visibility to stories that are often invisible and underestimated in our social context.

The aim of this article is to present reflections on the impact of studies on perception, attention and listening on the construction of knowledge experienced in studies on dance improvisation, and to discuss the possibility of these experiences leaving traces in people's ways of relating to the world. To this end, we present a brief contextualization of dance improvisation, then we discuss the three guiding principles - perception, attention and listening - in an attempt to understand the impact that kinaesthetic perception, the cultivation of attention - focal or expanded - and sensitive listening to oneself and one's surroundings have - or not - on the study of dance improvisation; finally, we try to reflect on the potential of improvisation games in people's self-educational process.

### **The field of dance improvisation**

The action of dancing freely to the sound of music, sonority or the desire to move can be identified as a dance that arises through improvisation, because there are no *a priori* decisions about how the person will move; there may be cultural (repertoires of movements experienced in each cultural group) and sound (repertoires of movements associated with certain musical genres) interferences; however, the dance arises from the interaction established between the person and the environment in real time. In this sense, in a more generalized way, we can say that dancing based on a direct relationship with a piece of music, a place, a sensation or a cult of worship to a certain deity has been experienced by human beings from primitive times to the present day.

However, the field of improvisation has been extensively researched by those who have adopted dance as a profession and field of research for artistic production. The number of professionals interested in improvisation as a field of study for their artistic and pedagogical practices has increased; we can see this by checking the thesis and

dissertation databases of national public and private higher education institutions, proving the quantity and variety of research (theses, dissertations and monographs) on this subject. We can also see and follow the production of artistic works, circulating nationally and internationally, whose compositional process is guided by improvisation.

The artist and researcher Zilá Muniz (2004), in her dissertation *Improvisation as a process of composition in contemporary dance*, reflects on the historical perspective from which the research developed by dance artists is drawn; these artists consider improvisation as an experience capable of being structured to give rise to instant compositions. The author points out that improvisation in American post-modern dance developed from the experiences of Ana Halprin, Trisha Brown, Ivone Rainer and Lucinda Childs, as well as the appropriation of jazz music composition structures.

Muniz (2004) points out that improvisation in dance, as a performative action, is a very recent concept, since it gained more significant diffusion and adherence among dance artists in the early 1990s. The author explains that for dance professionals who work with improvisation as an instant composition, this way of creating artistic works encompasses both the investigation of movements and the commitment to composition during the scene. The author states that many of these professionals work with some of the concepts adopted in choreographic compositions, such as: structure, order, spatial and temporal relationships, scenic materials, among others.

Mara Guerrero (2008), in her dissertation entitled *Sobre as restrições compositivas implicadas na improvisação em dança*, reflects on the concerns of those who dedicate themselves to the practice of composition, through improvisation, and points out the affirmation of these dance professionals that only "with training it is possible to be able to make decisions in real time, with due attention and perception for the composition, consciously and premeditatedly contributing to such

an exercise" (GUERRERO, 2008, p.24). After citing exponents of various nationalities who have developed particular ways of investigating the field of improvisation as a composition that takes place in the instant of the scene, the author explains how each one, in their own way, has sought to problematize the concepts of composition, choreography, improvisation, dance, movement, scene, among others.

Marina Elias (2015), in her article *Improvisation as a possibility for reinventing dance and the dancer*, proposes that we think about the relationship between the dancer and improvised movement from four contexts: "1) Improvisation as a procedure for the technical/poetic development of the dancer. 2) Improvisation as a pedagogical procedure for teaching dance. 3) Improvisation as a procedure for choreographic composition. 4) Improvisation as a spectacular language" (ELIAS, 2015, p.174). The author goes on to say: "it is corporeality that improvises, with all the idea of integration that the word presupposes" (ELIAS, 2015, p.174), in the exercise of uncovering the visibilities, invisibilities and relationships that run through improvisers. This statement by Elias refers to everything that the improviser accesses in the act of composing in real time, whether related to their appetites for movement, improvisation scripts, intuitions, sensations, feelings, etc.

The considerations of the aforementioned authors allow us to point out that improvisation in dance is a complex and diverse field of knowledge, and therefore requires a lot of study in order to understand its artistic aspects and educational particularities. During the research, we worked with the four approaches cited by Elias (2015) and realized how much these four contexts interpenetrate in the practices of studying improvisation. The reflections raised in this article focus specifically on items "2) Improvisation as a pedagogical procedure for teaching dance" and "4) Improvisation as a spectacular language".

Based on these clarifications, we point out that some professionals who work with improvisation in dance, as a way of composing on stage, seek

to adopt open and sensitive ways of relating to their surroundings, making it possible to create artistic works. In this type of situation, when people are invited to improvise, they need to be open to the experience, to the mutual affectations that can arise in the improvisational game. The openness we are referring to is guided by ways of investigating and developing sensitive perceptions of oneself and one's surroundings.

We believe that these ways of investigating ourselves, which are characteristic of improvisation, are conducive to learning processes that concern ways of relating (to compose dances and to compose lives); they are also ways of feeding a constant appetite to observe the world and learn from it. For this reason, we reflect on how the particularities experienced in artistic experiences enable people to have more aesthetic, poetic and sensitive relationships with the world, enabling creative and compositional experiences of the social being in constant formation.

In order to add other elements to this reflection, in the next section we'll discuss the three guiding principles - perception, attention and listening - taken as reference points for thinking about the potential of improvisation games in people's educational process.

### **Perception, Attention and Listening**

The words used in this session - perception, attention and listening - like most other words in the Portuguese language, have general meanings found in the dictionary. In addition to their denotative meaning, they also have particular meanings related to specific areas of knowledge, depending on how they are used. We therefore present below the parameters used as a reference when choosing the terms referred to throughout the text.

With regard to perception, we have teamed up with neuroscientist Antonio Damásio and philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty to define some points of reference. In our dance improvisation studies, we propose

practices that stimulate active perception within the improviser's own body and in the surroundings (in the environment and with other people). This relationship between what a person can perceive in his or her body and in the environment occurs through the somatosensory system. As proposed by Antonio Damasio (2000), the somatosensory system is a combination of several subsystems that work in parallel and in perfect cooperation to transmit signals about different bodily states to the brain. When discussing what the subsystems do and how they are organized, the author presents three fundamental divisions: a) the internal and visceral (interoceptive) division; b) the vestibular and musculoskeletal (proprioceptive/kinesthetic) division; c) the discriminative touch division.

Even considering the interconnectedness of these subsystems, our focus of observation during the elaboration and development of studies on improvisation turned to two of the three divisions presented by the author. These are: proprioceptive and kinesthetic issues, which both map the body's coordinates in space and communicate to the central nervous system the state of the muscles that join the moving parts of the skeleton (the bones); and discriminative touch, dedicated to the perception of signals generated on the surface of the body (skin). These particularities will become more evident in the discussions presented in the "Improvisation as an educational experience" section of this article. For now, we bring up another author who has collaborated in the composition of other parameters for reflection: Merleau-Ponty.

We therefore rely on some of the philosopher's thoughts on perception: "it is the background on which all acts stand out" (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1999, p.6), or even, "we construct perception with what is perceived" (idem, p.26). According to his thinking, the awareness we have of our body is not a thought that can be broken down or recomposed into a clear idea, but its unity is implicit and confused; the only way to know the human body is by living it, perceiving it. In his words: "External perception

and the perception of one's own body vary together because they are the two faces of the same act" (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1999, p.276). The philosopher goes on to say that perception brings together our sensory experiences into a single world, as a mode of awareness of what we experience in the body, or even an embodied subjectivity.

When we look at Damasio's and Merleau-Ponty's points of view, we see a common perspective between their statements: the relationship between what is perceived in itself and what is perceived around it. Both identify how the process of perceiving is multifaceted, because stimuli come from different sources, but are interconnected in the whole, in other words, in the human being. This assumption was taken into account when drawing up the study proposals developed in the research.

With regard to attention, we take as our reference the considerations of researchers such as Moshe Feldenkrais. Feldenkrais encouraged his students to develop dynamic and differential attention, with the aim of allowing the action of moving to reveal perceptions they had not noticed.

Bardet (2015) points out that the Feldenkrais method works with attention to the small differences present in the tendencies to move, so as to make the person aware, for example, of the ways of touching the ground and being touched by it, of feeling a certain joint when it is mobilized. The author explains that the lessons developed by Feldenkrais lead the student to become attentive to the perceptions and changes occurring in their corporeality throughout the lesson, seeking to develop attention through movement.

Sternberg (2000) defined attention as a phenomenon in which we process a limited amount of information from the amount of information available through the senses, stored memories and other cognitive processes. This author also states that attention highlights the stimuli that interest us, increasing the possibility of responding to them. Supported by Sternberg's definition, we consider attention to be a phenomenon that can

be experienced from different perspectives and qualities, which interfere in the way the individual experiences listening, perception of themselves and their surroundings.

Vasconcelos (2009) states: "the change in the quality of attention and the attitude of 'letting go' presupposed by it, is defined by the maintenance of tension between an act of sustained attention and an immediate non-fulfillment" (VASCONCELOS, 2009, p. 132). The situation of being attentive to something unknown is an open attention, which "lets come" possible perceptions and relationships for the immediate moment of experience. We emphasize the importance of the quality of attention for the person perceiving themselves and their surroundings, as well as for the improviser on stage, as it enables composition based on the relationships established in real time.

Sade and Kastrup (2011) say that attention directed towards oneself and away from the world is unusual. We can see this when we invite a group of people to walk around a dance class and, after a while, ask them to stop where they are; we then ask them about the sensation in their neck muscles during the walk. The vast majority - if not all of them - will probably reply that they haven't noticed this detail. However, if we ask them if there were many people in the room while they were walking, they will all be able to answer readily. The fact that attention is easily directed to one's surroundings is something natural in the human species and attention to oneself needs to be developed in practical experience.

Based on these authors' considerations and taking research practices as a parameter, we can say that, in these studies, attention has the character of focusing on something and being open at the same time. In other words, we direct our attention to a certain action or region of the body, but we don't know in advance what will be discovered. Focusing on a place and direction triggers the desire to discover what is there and its connections. We can direct our attention

to the way our feet touch the ground, or are touched by it, and discover how a certain type of support (contact with the ground) causes a sensation in a knee, or in the hip joint, or in the lower back. The focus is on the support of the feet on the ground, but we discover particularities about other body regions and their relationships.

Still in relation to the study of attention, it is possible to perceive the compositional relationships that arise between the movements of two or three improvisers who compose together. If we suggest to a group of people that, for example, they direct their attention to noticing the distance between themselves and others as they move, or whether or not there is a common speed adopted by the majority, we are inviting the participants to identify details about this action, bringing various perceptions to consciousness. In these examples, the compositional relationship would be focused on spatial and/or temporal relationships.

These attention-directing skills can be used to enhance the learning of a particular movement, to check the way in which each person is organized in order to carry out one or more actions, or for compositional processes during an improvisation. This kind of open, curious attention, which allows people to connect more sensitively to themselves and their surroundings, enhances experiences of composition/improvisation, as well as relationships as a human being within a family, social and cultural context, as we will see in the arguments presented in the text below.

As well as activating perceptive and attentive processes, we work on refining Listening. In the areas of dance and theater, this word has been adopted to express an intentional willingness to perceive sensations, situations, relationships, among others, whether in processes of study, creation or composition.

When a teacher invites actors and dancers to refine their listening, they try to emphasize the fact that they are not referring specifically to the ability to listen, but to perceive; they encourage them to be attentive to the way they organize themselves bodily, asking about their supports, their

joint mobility, their availability for movement, their spatial location, the distance they are from people or objects, what is happening in the environment, etc.

Guerrero (2008) points out that, in general, "listening is a term that aims to define the attention that the artist must pay to each moment of the dance composition" (GUERRERO, 2008, p.69). In his/her conception, in the case of improvisation, the artist needs to be attentive to their choices and realize their possibilities of acting in relation to the composition in progress. The author also states that the improviser must "be in connection with all their scene partners, attentive to their actions and compositional decisions, in order to interfere or support what they propose" (GUERRERO, 2008, p.69).

Guerrero (2008) establishes a relationship between listening and attention, but highlights the fact that attentiveness is part of listening, considering the existence of other aspects that make it up, such as the perception of the relationships between the improvisers, compositional decisions, the identification of body signals about the movements of the other people in the scene.

Lima (2012), when talking about the notions of listening, makes an analogy with the way of observing of a "spy looking for new clues" or even "like a host who opens his home to unexpected guests" (LIMA, 2012, p. 06). The author points to listening as a way of thinking, the perception of what challenges us, what calls us, what visits us; this way of thinking makes it possible to pay attention to residues, to the ways of being and relating.

Based on the arguments of the research cited, and on our practice as artists, teachers and researchers, it is possible to conclude that the ability to experience the type of listening mentioned mobilizes a certain state of attentiveness while investigating something. Thus, in some cases it is necessary to mobilize a certain silence, to make oneself available to the perception of what is happening in one's surroundings and in oneself. In

other situations, the sounds chosen can help you access a subtle sensitivity to perceive yourself, the other, the movement.

In order to develop listening, it is necessary to commit to the experience, assuming this commitment without prior expectations, without the need to do or show something specific, to get it right; to awaken the will to open our perceptive channels and become sensitive and porous to sensations and perceptions that are still unknown, to be unveiled in the experience.

Based on these considerations about perception, attention and listening, it is possible to highlight the interconnections between them, in such a way that active perception, of oneself and one's surroundings, is enhanced by the different qualities of attention: dynamic, permeating one's own corporeality and the stimuli of the environment; differential, seeking to identify particularities between different parts of the body and different improvisational situations; open, allowing details of feeling and acting that have not yet been identified to come to consciousness.

In line with the different qualities of attention, listening encompasses attentiveness and perceptive capacities, making it possible to identify the improvisers' bodily signals and the situations put into play, broadening relationships and compositional decisions.

In the next topic, we present reflections on how the knowledge developed in dance improvisation studies can go further and impact on people's relational experiences in other contexts.

### **Improvisation as an educational experience**

The reflection we are making here is based on doctoral research carried out with adults aged 50 and over, enrolled in an extension project at UFU - Dance Course, which involves them attending dance activities. Among the adults taking part in the project, there were none who had studied dance at any stage in their lives - childhood, youth or adulthood -

until they joined the classes offered by the project. Some had danced at balls, or at family and friends' parties; others hadn't even taken part in a quadrille, for example, because their parents wouldn't allow it.

When they started attending the classes offered by the extension project, they were surprised by the various invitations to pay attention to their own movement, to notice their back or feet touching the ground, or even to listen to the space and the movement of other people during the act of moving.

Among the adults aged 55 and over who took part in the doctoral research, there were no individuals who had the opportunity to study dance in childhood, youth or adulthood (until they joined the classes). Some had danced at a ball (carnival, graduation, wedding, etc.), or at family/friend parties; others hadn't even taken part in a quadrille at a school party, because their parents wouldn't allow it. When they started attending classes, they were surprised by the various invitations to pay attention to their own movement, to notice how their back or feet touched the ground, to develop a sense of listening to space and the movement of other people in order to be able to move.

When we started studying creative and compositional processes, the participants were asked, for example, to let the movement emerge from the exploration of their articular capacities, to which they asked if they would be shown how to make the movements. There was an expectation that they would be shown a ready-made model to copy, not that they would be shown a path. It's easy to understand this expectation, because in the educational processes we experience from birth, in family, social and cultural environments, learning by copying is a widely adopted resource, whether consciously and/or unconsciously.

However, in the studies on improvisation to which we are referring, the prerogative is to study paths and not predefined forms. This type of educational movement has been presented in various areas of knowledge and has the power to invite people to become autonomously and actively

involved in the process of building knowledge. Thus, in the studies developed in the doctoral research, the proposals were presented by the researcher, but the investigation processes were generated by the participants, based on a mobilization to learn something, an aesthetic and poetic curiosity about creation and composition, about ways of relating in art and in life.

There is another issue intertwined with studies on improvisation, which concerns understanding what an adult over the age of 50 can and cannot do. From birth, we enter the aging process, but until a certain age we didn't pay attention to it; at a certain point in life, we start to consider it. In Brazilian society, we often come across (in family, social and professional relationships) the dissemination of negative representations, concepts, prejudices and stereotypes about ageing and, consequently, the elderly.

We can cite as an example the understanding that the elderly are fatally affected by illnesses and restrictions of all kinds, physical, emotional and cognitive. Ageist behavior<sup>4</sup> is disseminated by all types of individuals, because it is a structural idea, intrinsic to the behavior of even elderly people. Studies on this subject show that older people experience positive and negative aspects, just like any other individual. In this respect, Fonseca (2014) postulates: "more important than exploring the brighter or darker side of the ageing process is certainly to assume the existence of different ways of ageing and to understand what determines them" (FONSECA, 2014, p. 19).

In this sense, we believe that educational actions are necessary<sup>5</sup> in order to change outdated concepts that simultaneously disrespect and devalue the changes that occur over the years, especially those associated with old age.

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<sup>4</sup> Ageism is a concept coined by Robert Butler in 1969 and reformulated by the same author in 1980. It refers to prejudicial attitudes towards older people and the ageing process, including attitudes held by older people towards themselves; it also concerns political and institutional practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs about older people.

<sup>5</sup> We identify as an educational action any action that takes place in any place or environment that can have an impact on the construction of knowledge and on the attitudes of those who carry it out or witness it.

Thus, we start from the premise that certain types of experiences can help to change various current paradigms, widespread in Brazilian society today, regarding the elderly and the ageing process. We believe in the potential of human beings to build knowledge, learn, teach, know, discover, recognize and know themselves throughout their existence. In this sense, we believe that people are not simply receivers and carriers of culture, but also dynamic agents of cultural preservation and change. For this reason, when human beings are encouraged to reflect on the ways in which they experience the ageing process (customs, ways of thinking, feeling and/or perceiving themselves and others), they may feel the need to review themselves and stop disseminating attitudes and stereotypes.

Having said that, we can say that the processes of building knowledge that make up the body of studies on improvisation developed in this research (based on different ways of directing attention, refining perception and listening) provide both opportunities for learning about the process of creation for the artistic scene, and knowledge about one's own potential as a social being.

During the study meetings, questions often arose: is this knowledge only used by these people during improvisations? If they are able to adopt it in their daily life situations, what impact can it have on their quality of life? On their self-esteem? On their interpersonal relationships? And on society?

For some time now, these questions have moved us in our teaching practice with people of all ages; however, since the beginning of our research with adults aged 55 and over, upon entering the doctorate in Education, we have been thinking about the impact of this knowledge on people who have spent more than half their lives experiencing other logics of the world. The logic of productivity, efficiency, doing better than those you live with, not making mistakes, among others.

In the studies on improvisation developed in the research meetings, situations that could be identified as mistakes are welcomed as ways of

building knowledge, because the action of experimenting allows corporeality to find paths and learn from them. In this sense, if people are studying balance, both balance and imbalance are part of the research process, so looking for different ways of organizing the body leads to broader repertoires of proprioceptive adjustments.

In this context, the identification of their anatomical structure, their muscle tone, their joint mobility, their movement preferences, are discoveries interconnected with the construction of knowledge; what is done in one way today can be done in a more comfortable way tomorrow, because the person has acquired more knowledge about their corporeality and their capacity for action and body organization. In this logic, the other person is observed without competing; no one produces more or less than other people, since everyone is looking for ways to create dances based on the relationships established with each other; a person's production is not given the adjectives of better or worse, but observations are made about which paths were adopted, in this or that improvisational game, to inspire future actions. The studies are based on the aesthetic and poetic relationships built by each person in their practice of self-perception and relationships with their surroundings.

In order to contextualize our position, we associate ourselves with the understanding of aesthetic experience and its impact on the construction of human knowledge, as postulated by John Dewey. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey (2010) begins his philosophical argument about art by proposing two points: what enriches immediate experience to some extent is aesthetic; in the normal processes of living, aesthetic experience is important for the constitution of the human being.

The author states that glancing at something is insufficient for aesthetic perception to take place; it is necessary to look at it attentively and sensitively, to scrutinize it. He adds that aesthetic perception requires relational processes experienced over time. He also points out that the appreciation of nature, of everyday situations, of oneself and of others can

be experienced in such a way as to seek out aesthetic qualities in them. If this perception and search take place, then the person is living an aesthetic experience. Still according to his conception, experience - insofar as *it is* experience - consists of accentuating the vitality of relationships, and means an active and alert exchange with the world, an interpenetration between the self and the world of objects and events. In his words, "experience is art in its germinal state" (DEWEY, 2010, p. 84).

In this sense, we are looking for John Dewey's contributions on the impact of aesthetic experience on people's education, considering his reflections on experience and the categories of continuity and interaction that he proposes. In *Experience and Education* (1979), the author defines criteria for experience and lists two principles: the categories of continuity and interaction.

In the category of continuity, the author states that "each and every experience takes something from past experiences and modifies subsequent experiences in some way" (DEWEY, 1979, p.26). Because of this category, attention must be paid to the quality of the experiences had, as they will leave traces and, in a way, facilitate (or not) the next ones. According to Dewey, "every experience is a force in motion" (DEWEY, 1979, p.29), and this force, in the midst of the educational process, can collaborate in a more positive way towards people's maturation, or it can limit it.

In this sense, if in a study on improvisation the educator presents proposals that lead students to perceive their corporeality, to identify which parts of their body touch the ground, how they distribute their weight in the centers of support, invites them to move from their joints, it is possible that they will experience these activities with a certain perceptive and attentive capacity.

For example, when you ask a group of people to walk around the space, they are doing so because of a skill they have learned since childhood. When you suggest to the same group that they direct their

attention to the perception of how their feet touch the ground, or the distance between people as they move and whether or not there is a common speed adopted by the majority, you want to get people to identify details about this action, inviting them to bring various perceptions to consciousness.

During the research meetings, the participants were invited to try stepping on the floor, either heel-to-toe or toe-to-heel, and to see what adjustments occurred in the body in each situation. In the proposals for moving at a medium to fast speed, without getting close to people, the main interest was in creating conditions for investigation that would make it possible to expand the ability to identify previously unnoticed sensations and adjustments. This process of activating perception and attention to the multiple relationships occurring in and through movement can be more targeted - noticing how the foot touches the ground or how far away you are from someone - or more expanded - noticing the body's adjustments to experience different walking speeds - depending on the objectives set for each study.

The skills of directing attention can be used for a variety of purposes: to enhance the learning of a particular movement, to check the way in which each individual is organized in order to carry out one or more actions, for compositional processes during an improvisation. This kind of open and curious attention enhances compositional experiences, because the improviser becomes attentive to what happens during the compositional process, whether it's to accept proposals put into play by someone else, or to present new creative possibilities that redirect the scene to another context.

The second principle pointed out by Dewey is the category of interaction. According to the category of interaction, every experience involves objective conditions, which are external to the individual, and subjective conditions, which are particular to the individual, in other words,

when experiencing a given situation, the person needs to learn to manage the relationships between these two types of conditions.

Dewey (1979) elucidates that the principles of continuity and interaction intersect and unite, as they are longitudinal and transversal aspects of experience; he exemplifies this understanding by pointing out the learning generated in life situations, successive to each other, and which become a reference in understanding and dealing with future situations, due to the principle of continuity. For him, the educator's concern must be limited to the situation in which the interaction takes place, because his attitudes, what he does and how he acts, and the teaching resources adopted will have an impact on the learning process.

Starting from the perspective presented above and associating the principles of continuity and interaction with the study of improvisation in dance, we defend the studies on improvisation to which we dedicate ourselves as poetic and aesthetic means of building knowledge; this knowledge has a profound impact on the continuing education process of those who dedicate themselves to studies on improvisation. The impact is due, in particular, to the fact that the studies demand a type of personal attention and involvement on the part of the participant, which is particular to the perceptions arising from the act of moving and relating sensitively to the environment.

Moving perceptions, senses and sensations. Moving bones, muscles, organs, memories, stories and intelligences. From this point of view, the participant who can't do something today and finds the means to do it tomorrow understands that studies of movement based on feeling are more effective than those based on predetermined references conceived in a universal mold, as if everyone could and wanted to always perform the same movements in the same way.

From this perspective, the idealized references to dance, which involve a cultural understanding of this artistic manifestation that is widely disseminated on telecommunication channels and social media, are being revised. Dance arises, then, from the movement experiences of the subject who, in the act of

researching, dances; this dance is born from the potential of each individual and not from models created in other bodies, in other life stories.

In these cases, the person learns to create their experience, to extract what is meaningful from things and situations. Dewey (2010), when discussing aesthetic perception, states that in the first experiences of creation, what drives us are impulses and that, in the process of overcoming obstacles, blind impulses are transformed into purposes, instinctive tendencies become planned commitments and the attitudes of the self become imbued with meaning. For the group of research participants, the research laboratories were opportunities to mobilize their attention, perception and intention to compose dances. The creative processes were experienced as singular experiences, which could be revisited in a more or less conscious way, as they dedicated themselves weekly to new creations.

We often find it difficult to live singular experiences, because there is distraction and dispersion, so that what we observe and think, what we desire and obtain, disagree with each other. According to Dewey (2010), singular experiences are made up of unique qualities, arising from the interaction between the living being and some aspect, or some aspects, of the world in which they live. Based on these observations, it is possible to consider the link between appreciative perception (sensory satisfaction of the eyes and ears, for example) and the activity of which it is a consequence;

For example, for a professional dancer, the relationships established with the venue of a performance, as well as with the sounds and themes of the work, make them achieve greater or lesser expressive power on stage.

For Dewey (2010, p.130), the artist is not someone simply endowed with the ability to do something, but someone seeking to develop "an unusual sensitivity to the qualities of things", which drives their actions and creations.

(...) In an emphatic artistic-aesthetic experience, the relationship is so close that it controls both doing and perception. This vital intimacy of connection cannot be achieved when only the hand and eyes are involved. When both do not act as organs of the total being, there is only a mechanical sequence of sense and movement, as in an automatic gait. The hand and the eye, when the experience is aesthetic, are only instruments through which the whole living creature operates, impelled and active throughout the time. (DEWEY, 2010, p.130-131).

Sensitivity to the qualities of things, cited by Dewey, refers to an action: personal mobilization to experience meaningful relationships, the desire for interaction between particular (subjective) issues and those in the world. From this perspective, the person's mobilization processes are forces in motion that make it possible to perceive the qualities of things and relationships. The experiences of the present talk to those of the past, either to build new paths or to restructure old ones; these experiences are lived in interactive relationships of perception, attention and listening to oneself, to space and to other people. Furthermore, the creative and compositional processes are applied to everything that can be related to them, both in art and in life.

### **Final considerations**

The reflections outlined in this text, which originated from practical research into dance improvisation with people over the age of 55, seek to invite readers to rethink the aging process and reflect on the power of artistic experiences in the process of human constitution. There is an urgent need to understand that the ways in which artistic creations are built have an impact both on the construction of skills related to the sensitive and attentive perception of things and on the

ability to create artistic objects and works, as well as on the ways in which people relate to the world.

The aging process of the human being makes many experiences possible, among them maturation, understood as the building of resilience, emotional maturity, empathy with other living beings, persistence in some moments and renunciation in others; maturing is thus experiencing new learning paths in various situations. Dewey mentions that as an organism increases in complexity, its life projects are expanded and enriched and, with this, space becomes something more than a void to wander through; time ceases to be the endless and successive flow of instantaneous points. In this way, growth as a synonym for maturation is "a varied series of changes between intervals of pause and rest, of conclusions that become the starting points of new processes of development" (DEWEY, 2010, p.90).

We can therefore say that those involved in the research meetings have undergone a certain maturing process, especially in terms of their willingness to accept change and try to deal with limitations and challenges in a creative way. The research made it possible to identify that the participants, as well as learning to experience new corporealities and relationships, began a process of becoming aware of the need to say no to certain expectations and stereotypes established in our society regarding what the elderly can or should do.

Although the doctoral research is still in progress, it is possible to say that during the improvisation studies, people put themselves in situations of growth, in which they had to realize their potential and observe possible limitations. Taking these as invitations to create, they had to deal with habits and new motor coordination, learning to challenge themselves and overcome their prejudices.

In the research meetings, the participants were encouraged to put themselves in states of power in order to experience creative processes. In this sense, their experiences were enriched, as they learned to

explore their kinesthetic perception, to create movements based on the situations and conditions they encountered during the improvisations; they began to dance considering the relationships established with people and the environment, refining qualities of attention and listening; they challenged themselves to establish more aesthetic, poetic and sensitive relationships with the world.

The artists and researchers Muniz, Guerrero and Elias, cited throughout this study, have helped us to shed light on the particularities and complexities investigated by professionals in the field of dance improvisation. In line with the experiences of these artists, our own professional practice and the observations made in the research meetings, we defend the perspective that the field of improvisation, thought of as a compositional process in dance, enables important learning in the process of human formation. It also allows people to perceive themselves and recognize their capacities for action, applying them creatively in various life situations.

The considerations of Damasio and Merleau-Ponty indicate the repercussions of the refinement of perception on the corporeality of human beings. Through the theoretical approaches of Feldenkrais, Bardet, Sternberg, Vasconcelos Sade and Kastrup, we reflected on the different types of attention mobilized during the course of the study meetings. Lima and Guerrero's reflections made it possible to find out about the particularities of listening for artist-creators.

Finally, it is important to emphasize how the research practices elucidated the potential of studying improvisation as an environment for creation, composition and learning that can be inhabited, walked through, felt, enjoyed, etc. This type of compositional process makes it possible to access different types of attention, both to connect to one's own corporeality and to create points of relationship with the environment and transform them into dances. It also allows for listening to desires (of movement and pause, of moving closer and further away, of realizations) and listening to

the world. It enables improvisers (regardless of their age) to live in the immediate present in a creative way, aware that they are the composers of their experiences and that their decisions carry meanings that have a significant impact on the construction of the artistic scene and life.

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