

## **Biodanza and Community Psychology – the importance of the vivencia**

This is a heavily edited, partial rough translation by P. Jardim of an [article](#) originally published in the Psychology Magazine of the Federal University of Ceará (Aletheia no.30 in Dec 2009 ISSN 1413-0394), written by Ana Maria Melo de Pinho, Geísa Sombra de Castro, Verônica Morais Ximenes, Carolina Pinheiro Moreira and Gabriela Pimentel Barreto.

This article hopes to legitimize the history of community psychology in Brazil and its epistemological dialogue with Biodanza from the complexity and transdisciplinarity paradigms. This dialogue emerged from the search for new ways of dealing with the subjectivity of human reality. Thus, the legitimacy of this process needs to highlight the reasons why Biodanza and community psychology can meet and complement each other.

The first School of Biodanza in Ceará was created in the 80's, precisely at the same time as the Community Psychology movement was starting in Ceará. Both movements relied on the presence of Prof. Cezar Wagner de Lima Góis and educator Ruth Cavalcante. From that moment on there was a theoretical and methodological integration and collaboration between the two approaches, which strongly influenced each other. On the one hand, Biodanza came to represent a key conceptual and instrumental basis that influenced the practice of those who went to the peripheral neighbourhoods, the rural localities and the favelas with the intention of practicing critical psychology. At the same time, the Biodanza School of Ceará became deeply committed to social action.

It was in the search for more effective responses to the challenges of integrating affective aspects (emotions, feelings, motivations, and needs) in social work that Biodanza came to represent a distinctive approach in the history of community psychology. Biodanza was used to promote the development of personal identity, since in addition to its reflective and intellectual tools it involves the body, emotions, aesthetic expression, and the human encounter in its process of facilitating learning and growth.

It was Biodanza that inspired Góis to propose a concept of identity beyond its representational, intellectual and socio-historical aspects, manifested as changing roles, characters, meanings, and self-image. According to Góis, the concept of identity must embrace the biological basis, and be understood as a developing fundamental scheme that belongs to all living beings. Being-in-the-world as presence, aesthetic dimension, and lived corporeity would then be its most original expression.

In this way, the identity's evolutionary challenge of overcoming the oppressed character presupposes the challenge of its expression and emergence from the original sources of psychic life, which lie on the emotional, corporal and aesthetic soil prior to reflective activity and are therefore found in the lived-experience.

Wilhelm Dilthey inaugurated the concept of lived-experience as a fact of consciousness, a psychic experience forged from the living and concrete conditions of the real world and the psychic reality, which keeps the totality of its empirical and transcendental aspects. Therefore, the lived experience is the

principle of the totality of the psychic life, the true symbol of its full experience formed by the unity between thoughts, feelings, and desires.

This concept expands the psychological view of the emotional reality to its biological, historical and concrete basis within an evolutionary perspective, justifying an inseparable and integrated psychic functional structure. For Dilthey, the true nature of the psyche lies in this integrity. In this way, humans are understood as living beings, and psychic life corresponds to a fundamental original scheme shared by all living beings.

When developing the Biodanza system, Toro based it on this concept. However, he developed a conceptual understanding of lived-experience which community psychology is also based on. According to Toro, the lived-experience is the intense perception of being alive in the here and now - a moment of life capable of harmoniously shaking the entire human system. In Biodanza, the starting point is life and not conceptual thought.

Recovering the lived-experience represents an epistemological inversion. The facilitation process in Biodanza goes from the lived-experience to meaning because facts exist as pre-reflexive, bodily and cenesthetic experience before being represented by the mind.

Rescuing the lived-experience as a method of facilitation implies a new understanding of the world, in which reality is no longer seen through the lens of the rational paradigm. The purely rationalist view dichotomizes man (body-mind split), relationships (anthropocentrism), and science (Cartesianism) because of its ideal of neutrality, objectivity and technicality. On the contrary, the biocentric view places life at the centre, perceiving reality in a complex and integrated way, valuing all forms of relation and knowledge, and bringing with it new proposals of thought, relationship and cultural organisation.

Saying that in Biodanza one goes from lived-experience to meaning does not imply the exclusion of cognitive functions and symbolic thought. There is merely an emphasis on a different way of learning that involves the organism as a whole with its cognitive, experiential, and visceral levels.

Thus, Biodanza seeks to strengthen and reveal the identity through the original experience of feeling alive. According to Góis, identity as a phenomenon of totality is not encompassed by the conceptual but by the experiential, since identity is constituted not just by subjective processes but also by its cenesthetic, visceral and emotional functions. The lived-experience is formed in the interweaving of our instinctive life with the cultural world, and our identity manifests in the here and now.

From his Biodanza experience, Toro systematized the essential characteristics of the vivencia, which are uniqueness of experience, immediacy, spontaneity, subjectivity (intimacy), variable intensity, temporality (ephemeral), emotionality, kinetic dimension (involving the whole organism), ontological

dimension (perception of being alive) and psychosomatic dimension (mind-body integration).

Using dance as expressive, spontaneous and aesthetic movement, Biodanza seeks to recover human beings' dormant sensitivity, life-driven move toward intimacy, and the impulse to connect with the species. The lived-experience is seen as the key to accessing the vital dimension of the identity.

As Toro proposes, the nature of consciousness is not limited to rational knowledge, thought and verbal language. It also encompasses pre-reflective ethological, mystical and aesthetic aspects. According to his proposal for an epistemological inversion, the cenesthetic lived-experience constitutes a model of exploring the origin of consciousness. In this sense, Toro affirms that the time has come to think again about love, freedom and transcendence not as abstract concepts but as immediate allusions, as bodily experiences, as ways of describing our participation in life.

Therefore, Biodanza's biggest contribution to community psychology is the possibility of its facilitation processes reaching the original dimensions of consciousness and the vital dimensions of the human identity, enabling greater awareness rooted in an instinctive, emotional and intuitive dimension. For Toro, the pathology of the "I" and the western spirit is characterized by the nature-culture split. His approach transgresses the cultural values of oppression and exclusion by reclaiming essential human gestures that restore the original bond of individual human beings with their human species as a biological totality.

On these bases, community psychology has found ways of developing a dialogical and experiential method that 1) follows the biocentric principle of respect to life and its potentialities, and 2) aims to promote community development and healthy lifestyles in order to regain the spontaneous, creative and loving expression of the uniqueness of each individual within their communities beyond fitting in with repressive social norms.

The influence of Biodanza on community psychology has therefore converged on two fundamental planes. On the one hand, Biodanza became a facilitation approach of group processes and personal development, focused especially on emotional and relational aspects. Through regular groups, Biodanza offers an essentially experiential space of an educational and therapeutic nature, from which it seeks to privilege group interaction and the emotional and aesthetic expression of the identity. Since this space is connected to a network of activities that integrate other inclusive modes of community intervention, Biodanza groups have been configured as a strategy for community development by strengthening the lived-experience of community activity.

On the other hand, Biodanza has become a fundamental basis of community work, crossing all the spaces and ways of facilitating community living. Its contribution was reflected in the view of the world, humankind, society and processes of transformation, making it possible to understand society and individuals from their biological potentials. The biocentric principle made it

viable to apply the liberation praxis. In this way, whenever possible and appropriate, experiential dynamics were also used in other group activities such as music, collages, paintings, sculpture and non-verbal integration processes, which also enhanced the cognitive processes of critical reflection and verbal dialogue.

Moreover, Biodanza has helped community psychologists understand that their interventions are in a broad sense eminently marked by co-lived-experiences, and that emotional proximity to community dynamics allows the design of interaction processes that are experienced by all of the involved. Traditional scientific neutrality is replaced by an ethical commitment to care, which requires a loving relationship with reality.

Finally, as a theoretical and methodological framework, by integrating the lived-experience, this approach has offered professionals principles and guidelines in a facilitation model that Góis called *weaving life*, "To weave life is to make daily connections, to work with purpose and pleasure, to be open to meet people and to fight against oppression and exploitation simply because you love others and you love life."

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