

## **(Re) Bonding with Life: The path of Biodanza**

*If our cultural and socio-economic conditions are anti-life, we intend to change this system, not with the help of an ideology, but by re-establishing, in each instant of our lives, the conditions which nourish life.*

Rolando Toro de Araneda

### **Professional background**

The title of the monography could be a short description of what it has been my own transformative journey through Biodanza. I have had profound experiences of containment, nourishment, unconditional love, support, acceptance, and the celebration of who I am. Exactly what I needed to be able to fully own my place in life and in the world.

I am a qualified social pedagogue, with almost twenty years of experience in working with individuals and groups in educational and social settings, by supporting their growth and development. Social Pedagogy is an academic discipline *'based on the belief, understanding and knowledge that one can positively change or influence disadvantaged situations through educational methods'* (Perez, V & Johr, S. 2018, pag.2). As a social pedagogue my aim is to *'work in a strength-based manner, which empowers the client, and uses a holistic approach, which considers the whole person as well as the system around them'*. Social pedagogues *'would have mutual respect, trust, unconditional appreciation, believing that all human beings are equal with rich and extraordinary potential and consider them competent, resourceful and active agents. There is an awareness of the wider system and culture we are in, and we see the work in interdependence with society'* (Perez, V & Johr, S. 2018, pag.2). Thus, Biodanza fits perfectly within the ethos and mind-set of my professional practice.

There are many commonalities between Social Pedagogy and Biodanza. The fact that both emphasise working with the strengths and resources of individuals and groups, building up on them as a way of helping people to help themselves. The relevance of social action in Biodanza coincides with the social and political elements of social pedagogy's value base, which aims to influence social conditions for human betterment.

In my experience with children, adolescences and families, one of the theoretical frameworks I have used as a reference it has been *'Attachment theory'*. When I started to practice Biodanza and to train into the theoretical model I could soon identify many connections between attachment theory and key components of Biodanza.

## Attachment Theory and Biodanza

Attachment theory in psychology originates with the work of John Bowlby (1958). Bowlby defined attachment as a *'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings'* (McLeod, S. A. 2009). The theory of attachment suggests that children come into the world biologically pre-programmed to form attachments with others, because this will help them to survive. The infant produces innate behaviours such as crying and smiling that stimulate innate caregiving responses from adults. The determinant of attachment is not food, but care and responsiveness. *"Attachment theory showed that loving care is the primary need, before being fed"* (Carpentier, A. 2011, pag.13).

Bowlby proposed that attachment is adaptive as it enhances the infant's chance of survival. In parenting (or child development) it generally refers to the relationship that develops first between the infant/child and his primary caregiver (often the mother). The quality of this attachment impacts the child's physical, emotional, psychological and cognitive development, it shapes the children's basic ability to trust and how positively or negatively they view the world, themselves and others. The quality of this first attachment impacts all other relationships.

When an infant experiences consistent care where his/her needs are met, he/she internalises three things: **I am safe, I am heard, I am valuable.**

These three elements could be described in terms of objectives to achieve in a Biodanza class or within a Biodanza group:

Attachment theory	Biodanza
I am safe	The group has to become a safe container for each of the participants, it's necessary to create an environment where everyone feels safe and looked after
I am heard	Every participant should feel listened to and respected, we do this by being in 'feedback' with each other, understanding that 'my freedom ends where the other's limits are'
I am valuable	We aim to support everyone's feeling loved and valued for who they are, to celebrate every person's uniqueness

A child or an adult can develop other healthy relationships if he/she has integrated the above as core beliefs about him/herself. The child's brain actually develops (connections between neurones are created) since birth onward, through inter-subjective experiences, such as sharing affect and focus of attention. Throughout life, inter-subjective emotional relatedness will allow repairing past relational traumas and broken attachment bonds and new neural connections will be created in the process. This is confirmed by recent research in neurobiology (Shore, A. 2000).

*"Through the bodily based affective communication between the baby and primary caregiver, a secure attachment bond can be built; the sense of self develops in this*

*body-to-body communication, as well as trust in the other and self-confidence”*  
(Carpentier, A. 2011, pag. 18).

What is described by Carpentier as ‘bodily based affective communication’ can be considered an equivalent to the importance that physical contact has in the practice of Biodanza. Rolando researched the contemporary knowledge in contact therapy, he was aware of Bowlby’s work (see training manual ‘Contact and Caress’ pag. 16), and acknowledged the many positive effects of contact at physical and psychological levels, as well as existential. Rolando also had a strong sense of how in a highly repressive society, such as ours, many people are afraid of closeness and intimacy; others may have experienced mainly negative expressions of physical contact as abuse or violence. For this reason, he emphasised the need for building up in a slow progression the ability to touch and be touched, by using gentle exercises that stimulate contact in the Biodanza group, to slowly build up the trust that it is needed to be comfortable with physical contact.

### **The concept of Protovivencia**

(Rolando Toro, ‘Definition & Theoretical Model of Biodanza’, ‘The Vivencia’)

The primal bond with the mother has a very important role in the theoretical model. Rolando usually spoke of protovivencias and the process of re-parenting as key transformative processes of the Biodanza system.

Rolando developed the concept of Protovivencia, to describe infant vivencias linked to instinct and the first experiences of life. During the first months of life, the child neurologically initiates the beginnings of patterns of response through experience. The protovivencias are kinaesthetic experiences that the child has in the first six months. During the child’s development he/she enters a double process: cognitive and vivencial. The cognitive involves the learning of the qualities of the world: size, weight, quantity, etc, and the early appearance of language and communication. Vivencial develops in parallel with conceptual learning, is known as vivencial learning. Each of the lines of vivencia comes from ‘protovivencias’, has its origins in organic sensations experienced by a baby in the first years of life.

#### **Protovivencia of Vitality: Movement**

Vitality develops from the protovivencia of movement, from the functions of activity and rest. It takes place when the parents/carers allow the child spontaneous movement, autonomy and games.

#### **Protovivencia of sexuality: Contact**

Sexuality is linked to the protovivencia of contact and the first sensations of pleasure produced by caresses and during the act of breastfeeding. If a child is caressed, a normal sexuality is assured. Parents/carers need to understand that children need

contact, kisses and caresses, in relation to the appropriate expression of affection through pleasure.

Protovivencia of Creativity: Expression and Curiosity.

Creativity is linked to the expressive functions of wellbeing and discomfort, to curiosity, and to changes relative to the environment, to language and art. Creativity develops when a child learns to develop his or her expressiveness in the early stages, and when this development is stimulated without formalised teachings.

Protovivencia of Affectivity: Nourishment

Affectivity is linked to the protovivencia of nutrition. A well fed child feels the act of nourishment with love, receiving containment and security. The initial sensations of having affective containment give the child a sense of safety.

Protovivencia of Transcendence: Harmony in the Environment

Transcendence originates in the protovivencia of plenitude and harmony with the environment. Children benefit from growing in an environment of harmony and in contact with nature.

<b>Protovivencia</b>	<b>Vivencia</b>	<b>Instinct</b>	<b>Emotions</b>	<b>Behavioural effects</b>	<b>Experience</b>
Movement	Vitality	Hunger-Thirst Self-conservation	Happiness Enthusiasm Vital impetus Anger Fear	Activity & Play Fight and flight	Abundance
Caresses	Sexuality	Sexual	Desire Pleasure Voluptuousity	Caresses Search for pleasure	Voluptuousity Orgasmic fusion
Expression	Creativity	Exploration	Creative and Aesthetic Exaltation	Expression of emotions Search for new stimuli Existential innovation	Artistic or scientific creation
Security & food	Affectivity	Nourishment	Tenderness Maternity/ Paternity Solidarity Love	Giving containment Altruistic action Social action	Self-donation Friendship
Harmony	Transcendence	Fusion	Abundance Ecstasy	Search for harmony	Supreme ecstasy Illumination

© Rolando Toro de Araneda

## The implications

*“Love is a cure, and good, nurturing relationships — friendships, love, family relationships, psychotherapeutic relationship and also professional relationships... — can help repair our early pains. And through these relationships, our pattern of attachment can transform into a more secure one.”* (Carpentier, A. 2011, pag.10)

If brain growth actually stops between 20 and 25, our brain continues to transform itself throughout life. Synapses connect and pathways form in the interaction with the external environment, from birth onward. This is called brain plasticity: new neural connections can be created, when learning new tasks, activities, languages, etc. New neural connections are also created within relationships, such as in love, friendships, as well as in therapeutic relationships. In our brain, experience becomes hard-wired and can be transformed; it has an actual literal effect on the structure of the brain. Emotional communication impacts brain circuitry, similarly as the mother-baby relationship does.

An exploration of modern neuroscience shows how the brain is a living, changing organism shaping itself and constantly developing abilities in contact with the environment. These findings are a pivotal part of the physiological aspects of Biodanza: science has proved that positive eco-factors<sup>1</sup> can motivate changes in the structure of the brain, allowing change and transformation to unfold.

People who were not given the chance to internalise the capacity to regulate their emotions in childhood, through ‘good enough’ interactions and relationships, will try to compensate and resort to other ways to cope with their difficulties: hyperactivity, withdrawal, addictions (Carpentier, A. 2011). Rolando Toro argued that for people who suffered abandonment and lack of love in childhood, ‘re-parenting’ can be induced through caresses, as they are coming out of a state of regression and regaining their perception of the outside world. The return from the trance is characterised by a state of expanded consciousness and a deep feeling of rebirth. There it’s when transformation can take place, and new neuropath ways can be created.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Biodanza ‘ecofactors’ are the elements of the environment that can influence a person wellbeing in a determined time and space.

## Conclusion

*“So we could say that even if there are many predictable stages in our development — and in the human experience of life — we are programmed to be free...”*  
(Carpentier, A. 2011, pag. 30)

We can conclude that Biodanza can be considered a legitimate path for repairing our bond with life. The limitations in our development because of the lack of nurturing environments and relationships in early ages, can be overcome at any stage of life through the transformative and enduring qualities of Biodanza

Biodanza challenges any cultural believe that goes against ‘life’, brings us back to what is our nature: being in connection to others as an instinct of self-preservation. Biodanza is a method that through emotional and affective communication, sensitive touch, and integrative movements, can not just help us to increase general wellbeing, moreover, it gives us the opportunity to heal our primary relationships, which it is the same that repairing our bond with life itself. The nurturing environment anchors the foundations –in our body, our heart and our soul- for a more grounded and purposeful living. From there, we can carry on growing on our identity and developing potentials beyond our imagination.

In order to survive and evolve, humanity has to reclaim ways of living that cherish, respect and honour the world and everything that is alive in it and beyond. In the times we live in this is not just necessary, it is our ethical responsibility.

Verónica Eva Pérez Calvo  
Salisbury, July 2018

## Bibliography

Acharya, S. & Shukla, S. (2012): *Mirror neurons: Enigma of the metaphysical modular brain*. Medical Journal of Natural Sciences Biology. Jul-Dec; 3(2): 118–124. Doi: [10.4103/0976-9668.101878](https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-9668.101878)

Carpentier, A. (2011). *Stages of child development: from conception onward... An overview*. URBAN 1.6.2. PRACTIQUES. Sharing experiences to enhance the quality and impact of development programmes. (Online French version)

*Collective Unconscious*. (n.d.). In Alleydog.com's online glossary. Retrieved from: <https://www.alleydog.com/glossary/definition-cit.php?term=Collective+Unconscious>

International Biocentric Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://www.biodanza.org/en/>

McLeod, S. A. (2007). *Bowlby's attachment theory*. Retrieved from: [www.simplypsychology.org/bowlby.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/bowlby.html)

Perez, V & Johr, S (2018): *Social Pedagogy and Social Work in the UK: The meeting of two cultures as seen from a continental European perspective*. In Revista de Educación Social. 26. Educación Social y Trabajo Social: un encuentro necesario. Retrieved from: <http://www.eduso.net/res/26/articulo/social-pedagogy-and-social-work-in-the-uk->

*Personal Unconscious*. (n.d.). In *Alleydog.com's online glossary*. Retrieved from: <https://www.alleydog.com/glossary/definition-cit.php?term=Personal+Unconscious>

Schore, A. N. (2000). Attachment and the regulation of the right brain. *Attachment & Human Development*, 2(1), 23-47.

Toro, R. 'Definition & Theoretical Model of Biodanza', 'The Vivencia', 'Affectivity', 'Transcendence'. 'The physiological aspects of Biodanza'. Rolando Toro School of Biodanza Bristol, UK. Accredited Training By International Biocentric Foundation.