

The Art of Harmony in...

Motion as Experience

Abstract

This paper describes the process of implementing a different educational approach; an approach that is about a way of learning without judgment or evaluation, without approval or disapproval, without the feelings of rejection, disappointment and doubt that tend to lead a student to passivity. A primary goal of this approach was to reverse some of the negative consequences of the common way of learning which consists of the enforcement of doing “the right thing”, following the same paths and mimicking others. Firstly is attempted a short description of the philosophy, the various influences and the schools of thought that formed and guided the author towards the need of a different approach to physical (and not only) activities. Then, a specific example of this approach is analyzed in more detail: a physical education program -a series of lessons- followed by a group of students under the guidance of the author, in the Aristotle University Sports Centre. The content of the lessons and the steps followed are explained, in order to show how this approach can be applied to many fields, shedding light to the harmonic coexistence of dualisms and conflicts between body-mind and the microcosm of the ‘self’ with the macrocosm of ‘others’. The theoretical discussion that follows supports the general hypothesis that, aiming to the harmonic balance of a self-moving organism, the approach that was applied in this specific case has a place in many other activities; both physical and theoretical - in short, everything that involves human communication. It is all about a way to awaken our “inner intelligence”.

1. Short introduction

“...a light, bouncy, demonic thing, that cannot create unless it is excited, and falls into ecstasy and loses all logic” (Plato for Art, author’s translation)

Every one of us has different experiences, knowledge, memories; and there are many - quantitative and qualitative- variables that can affect (and, in many cases, determine) our actions and the way in which we experience things. All these variables, consciously or unconsciously, pass through the funnel of the senses of the body and the procedures of conception of the brain and thought, in order to be filtered and later, produce the behaviours of the person.

The person, as an integrated part of the whole, or, better, as its microcosm, plays an important part to the defining of behaviour and function of a community. The smooth and harmonic coexistence is affected by each separate person, as an integrated part of the whole, and is defined by the way that this person thinks and expresses him or herself.

2. A blending of various approaches

On July 2013 I published a research under the title “Harmony in motion”, in the 35th World Congress of Dance Research under the auspices of UNESCO. The paper “The art of harmony...” is the follow up of that research (which was asked for and presented in the next conference, in Russia).

The research suggested a different educational approach which focuses on learning as a rewarding experience by itself. The paper concluded with a study on the perspectives of the participants in the project which was part of the programs of the Aristotle University Research

Committee, under the general title “Design, implementation and evaluation of sports and entertainment programs” and took place in A.U.Th. Sports center.

During the course of my learning and teaching career, I came into contact with many kinds of theoretical and practical activities, methods and techniques; and I had the opportunity to combine, mix or merge them and experiment with different teaching approaches.

This educational approach was based on my personal research and on the detailed description of the mechanism of the infinite circle between ‘Experience – Knowledge – Memory – Thought – Actions’ and the negative consequences of all its cogs (in the process of learning) made by Krishnamurti¹ in his book ‘The Network of Thought (1970). More specifically, a brief description of my personal understandings based on this book is, apart from the existence of the infinite time and the reminding that:

- ✓The already acquired knowledge is something that we cannot depend on.
- ✓Because of our short life, we are limited; as are our experiences.
- ✓Our memories are based on our experiences and knowledge, just like our thoughts.
- ✓Our desires and expectations are the products of thoughts, and so are our actions (motions)”. (Monachas, 2013)

There follows a description of the objectives and aspirations of the program, as well as an account of what actually took place inside the class.

Some goals and aspirations of the project “Harmony in Motion”

Our primary goals were:

- ✓to become our own physical educator
- ✓ To be able to listen, trust and follow our inner impulses throughout new paths
- ✓To enhance the experiences of the body by imprinting new physical memories, habits and behaviors
- ✓To activate all our senses, to be able to share creatively with others
- ✓To continue our own aware development throughout life, and become sensitive to the existence of “present” into the harmonic consonance of the “whole”.

Content of the lessons

The flow of the lessons could change even from their beginning and follow its own paths. We always began from the first step, which was the contact with ourselves, with others; in the present, as part of an organic whole (ensemble). The practical applications and the course of the lessons were always unpredictable, and the phenomenon of disorder was part of the dualistic harmony.

¹ Krishnamurti (1895-1986): an Indian modern meditation thinker with global high level awareness. Krishnamurti wrote and spoke on philosophical and spiritual issues including psychological revolution. He described the natural way of self education, meditation, human relationships, and tried to bring positive social change. He was chosen from his very early age to become the new Messiah. As a young man he repudiated these claims and declared himself unbound by any tradition or philosophy. He spent the rest of his life presenting a uniquely expressed philosophy of life around the world in talks, discussions, and writings.

However, it wasn't about the participants doing what they want, but about finding a harmonic, pleasurable way of doing what they set as goals and to re-define, alter, innovate them playing as a team. It was a way which gave permission to participants to observe the talkative body-mind both in accelerated and decelerated motions, and also in stillness (Britton, 2007). In the term "talkative" body-mind I include the unnecessary tension and movements.

My role corresponded more to that of a coordinator and facilitator of the procedure, rather than to a leading, concentrating presence, that preserves, possesses and distributes knowledge, using the pretext of "authority". We decided all together the development and the course of the whole procedure, with each and every one of us sensitizing themselves and following their inner impulses. By setting team and personal goals of attention focusins, we explored the elements that were missing in any given moment.

We did not aim to accumulate new skills or to eradicate wrong habits; we rather had as our goal to become aware of the barriers they usually create. It was a playful interactive process which harmonically led us to the embodiment of the experience of the constantly altering self/ensemble (Britton, 2010). It was a way of doing what we want, finding active pleasure in what ourselves, as our own educators required of us. It was a procedure of constant growing, exploring, innovating and daring practice.

We conversed with impulsive, reflective, instinctive and automatic movements and bridged "the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse was already an outer reaction. Impulse and action are concurrent: the body-mind vanishes, and the spectator inner-self sees only a series of visible impulses" (Grotowski 1968:16) (2008, p. 82).

We used practices and exercises inspired from body and movement awareness, improvisation, physical theatre and meditation at a personal and a team level.

The influence of these fields and arts to my personal quest as a participant created the need to analyze the lessons where this approach was implemented.

This led to the formation of three basic axes:

1. The First Contact
2. Mindless Flowing
3. Reflections.

And five basic steps:

1. Observing the Inner Silence
2. Flirting with the Unknown
3. Spontaneous Play
4. Creative Metamorphoses
5. Inner Reflections (Back to the beginning)

Below, I am going to give a brief description of the process step by step.

2.1. The First Contact

Step 1: Observing the Inner Silence

We always need to start from that basic step. The most important thing is the observation of thoughts, of body posture and inner impulses of the deeper self's in this specific environment, in this specific moment, as time unravels, in contact with the others as an integrated part of the ensemble. This is a phase of awareness of the unnecessary movements (both visible/invisible and external/internal). It concerns the moments of observation and interaction between body and mind, together with the others, as a single, active organism.

It is an expanded attention of the "whole". It is not something personal. It does not have limits. It does not have a centre. This attention is a lucid action, free from thought. It is an interactive game of natural flow into a constantly changing environment. It is the observation of the internal and external influences on us, in the apparent "chaos" of parallel movements.

Step 2: Flirting with the Unknown

In this internal observation of 'chaos' if we are open to flirt with the unknown; if we let ourselves to leave the safe 'port' of the familiar and get into the deeper waters of unknown, if we put aside our inexcusable defences and free ourselves from the internal and external conflicts, we then have the possibility to taste with all our senses the merging of the "whole"; the feeling of love without the object of desire, the feeling of the "eternal" included into the person - the feeling of the deeper, limitless existence (Krishnamurti 1969&1970). This step harmonically leads to the next chapter.

2.2 Mindless Flowing

Step 3: Spontaneous Play

However, an "e-motion" stops being harmonic when one tries to acquire a clear and precise picture of it. So, independently of how good the previous steps or the previous day were, the mindless flowing is a playful way of learning 'Beyond Violence' (Krishnamurti 1973).

These are the moments of giving up the sense of individuality, as well as the immediate involvement and mixing with the others, in a constantly changing milieu. It is a game of quest for the pure pleasure! It is the art of the improvised game; being in present and playing like a child. It's the 'Beginnings of Learning' (Krishnamurti 1975) through physical activity.

Step 4: Creative Metamorphoses

This is the step of the poetic metamorphoses; the spontaneous expression of the creative irregularities hidden deep into each and every one's roots of existence. For if we forget just for a while the roles and the masks with which, consciously or unconsciously, have burdened ourselves, then we may find ourselves into a "poetic place" (Mourellos, 1996) - perhaps a place reminding Alice's Wonderland.

2.3 Reflections

Step 5: Back to the beginning

It is the peace after the storm. It is the sweet sensation which, once you try to put into words, sinks under their sheer weight.

This step is the return to the first step. It is the inner silence of the deeper existence. It is a more energetic meditation, aiming to the investigation of the sensitive empirical prints and the awakening of the deeper existence. It is the awakening of the inner intelligence of the ensemble.

Because as Heracleitus said **“The beginning and the end are the same thing”**

Below is an extract with some conclusions drawn from a study on the views of the participants in the project, more analytically presented and explained in the article “Harmony in Motion” (Monachas, 2013). The original study data were taken from questionnaires handed out to the students after the end of the classes. At the end of the data analysis, a story or unifying concept about this approach had formed; a story through the eyes of Aristotle University students:

“We can firstly observe that learning in its traditional sense (that of the accumulation of new knowledge) was not among the things mentioned by the participants. This should not be interpreted as an absence of a learning procedure, but rather as the existence of something so different, that it does not really correspond to this term. The participants certainly learned things, but these things did not consist of new information passed on to them by some authority or the embracing of a new theory or the correction of acquired habits. We could assume that they learned things about themselves, about others and how they can relate and coexist with them; and that they learned them in their own pace and way, according to their different needs and characters, in an atmosphere of respect and freedom. Free from the oppression of doing the right thing and the fear of being judged, each of them discovered something new, that consciously or unconsciously could be applied to everyday life.

It is interesting how some of them mentioned that the things they learned helped them in stressful situations, such as university examinations, indicating that the positive effects of the program can be extended outside of the classroom.”
(Monachas, 2013).

3. A theoretical framework

John Curtis Franklin, analysing the ideas of harmony in greek and indo-iranian civilisations, explains that harmony is not considered as the absence of conflict, but its neutralisation and the subsequent reconciliation. A harmonic balance is achieved by the combination of both conflict and reconciliation, which form a single unity. In ancient Greece, the ideas of harmony were greatly applied to the body. Pythagoreans, especially, believed that “the mind or soul is simply the ‘attunement’ of the body” (Curtis Franklin, 2002, pg. 4). The body itself was considered to be by nature balanced and proportioned. The ideas of duality and balance are attested in the four humour theory, where each of the four elements is viewed as a polar duality, whose constant variation and final balance induces harmony for the body.

There are quite a few contemporary scientific approaches and traditions that indicate the need of further analysis and deepening of some parameters, and help to determine some key terms. Athletic Psychology and psychophysical training dedicate a big part of their modern research trying to maximize the performance of the athletes and apply the principles of psychology to social sports. They focus on goal determination, relaxation techniques, mental visualization, self-dialogue, self-confidence, anxiousness, stress, stimulation, attention, concentration, techniques of dealing with stressful situations, injuries and other anomalies, practice and evaluation of psychological skills, reinforcement, punishment and internal urging, urging and achievement, leading in sports, principles of communication, violence and aggressiveness. (Theodorakis, Goudas & Papaioannou, 2009).

Human communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008) is explored by many traditions that try to research the relationships and interactions between various parameters such as ‘the communicator’, ‘the message’, ‘the discussion’, ‘the relationship’, ‘the group’, ‘the media’, ‘the culture and society’. The ‘communicator’ as person, in my analysis, entails the qualities of ‘thought’ (mind), ‘body’, and the ‘inner self’.

In the ‘inner self’ I include the non-expressed, “the subconscious” part of the self. This part is influenced, among others, by ‘the message’, ‘the group’, ‘the media’, ‘the culture and the society’, as these are analyzed by Littlejohn and Foss in their book “Theories of Human Communication”. I unite all these concepts under the single term: the ‘others’ and I name the concepts of ‘discussion’ and ‘relationship’, as ‘in contact’. All of us are influenced by all these parameters and analyze our experiences through the paths of thought. Whether we want it or not, the whole structure of our existence is based on that.

The harmonic balance of all these parameters is the first contact with being an ‘ensemble’. Ensemble is the connection of all these parameters as an organic tissue that makes us breathe as one and move with a profound awareness of the “whole”. It is a function of motivation, coexistence and communication through actions that apparently separate us but deep down indicate to us that we are part of the “whole”. All the above are important for the smooth function of an ‘active self-movement organism’ and they urge us to use more than the already known ‘senses’ in order to awaken the feeling of “whole” in a harmonic way.

Grotowski, in personal discussions, describes “ensemble” as a single body comprising distinct but interdependent vital organs with brain, heart, anus etc. He also believed that the roles among the body, brain, heart and soul of the ensemble, were not fixed. One of these parameters might be the brain one day, another one the next (Britton, 2010). Other theories are formulated; theories like those of Wilhelm Reich, based on the unifying function of the organism, his follower, Alexander Lowen, founder of the bioenergy (Tsilimigra, 1999), or the latest discoveries of quantum physics. “Because space-time and energy, in all the forms it can take, form an unbreakable whole” (Mourellos, 1996).

“Motion”, in physics, is any movement or change in position or time. Moshe Feldenkrais, in his book “Awareness Through Movement” points out the body movements like breathing, eating, talking, digesting, blood circulation; and we could add here the ‘motion of thought’. The motion of thought is a movement in time, from past to future; it is also a spatial movement, from place to place. Krishnamurti in his book **‘The Network of Thought’** describes very well the loquacious movement of thought. In the same way I use the term “the loquacious body” to describe the unnecessary tense and movements. These two ways of wasting energy is the ‘over-talkativeness in motion’.

We can see that the concept of “emotion” entails motion. The same is true for the greek word “syn-kinesis” [=strong feeling, comprised from syn(=together) +kinesis(=motion)]. It is an internal movement in relation with something else, through the senses. In essence, the e +motion is the reflection of the mind on the body. This can be translated into the increasing or decreasing of heart beats, blood pressure, rythm of breathing, perspiration, dry mouth, dizziness, stomach distress, differences to the feeling of heat and cold, etc. In other words, we could say that emotion is the reaction of the body to the thought.

The two extreme reactions of thought-emotion, are those of stress/anxiousness and love. The emotion of love is the feeling of consumation, unification with the divine, the “whole”. This love can be transformed through the experience of the “here and now”. It can exist neither in the past nor in the future created by thought. It is a continuous experience of the present time in the timeless “now”. In this timeless “now”, the space created by thought does not exist. The thought creates space, and it automatically creates its opposite - the non-space. It creates the frame within which it holds some things, at the same time excluding/expelling others. The thought always has a measure or limit, and it cannot include the unmeasured - the space without limits. This division of thought creates tensions, inequalities, conflicts and violence, having as a result the opposite of love: stress/anxiousness. Objectively, there is light and shadow. Psychologically, though, there is only what “is” and not what “should be”. It is about the freedom of “being” in an eternal space, without the technical dimension of time, created by thought (Krishnamurti, 1988).

The process of uniting the imaginary separation (body/mind, motion/emotion, self/others, environment/ensemble and all of them with each other) is the process which, in psychophysical training, is called ‘being in present’: To be in present, with or without consciousness, subconsciousness, body, mind, inner self, in contact with the others, experiencing the unlimited energy that flows freely in the environment as an ensemble. For the moments that we are ‘in’ present, we just are in present and ‘live’. When children are playing, they are just being ‘in’ present. It’s in these moments when they don’t separate themselves from their game. They are the moments in which they are one with the ensemble of their game; and we have a lot to learn from children.

We could try to analyse and describe the beauty of a flower in many details, but the only thing that we would achieve is limiting it and reducing it. Science is basically knowledge confirmed by action. Sterile analyses are lesser compared to the “flower” experience.

4. As a conclusion

During the consumation of the writing and defining of the 5 basic steps that I used in this teaching procedure, and while searching for literature that I had used in the past, I re-discovered the book “The invisible actor”, by Yoshi Oida and Lorna Marshall. This book is included in the list proposed by the “Royal Academy of Dramatic Art” (R.A.D.A.) to its students, as part of the syllabus. In the contents of this book, one can see the chapters 1. Beginning, 2. Moving, 3. Playing, 4. Speaking, 5. Learning - a procedure that somehow includes and is included in the aforementioned process.

This affirmed my belief that the paths and approaches to knowledge are many, and can be narrated and explained in many and different ways. The steps, however, toward knowledge, are and will be “one” at a time. All it takes is to let them happen and follow the circle of birth

- development - maturing - reproduction and evolution, which is the basis of survival. The existence of this natural circle enhances the hypothesis of universality of this approach, and its application in intercultural settings. The circular relation of infinite time between experiences, knowledge, memories, thoughts and actions, and the process of learning without evaluation, without approval or disapproval, is the way which helps to avoid the violence of doing the 'right thing' and leads to the way of "learning as a rewarding experience by itself".

The harmonic coexistence of dualisms and the conflicts between body and mind, the micro-structure of the self and the awareness of the macrocosm of "others" through the feeling of the whole is the way of being in present as an active self-movement organism, using all the sensations for personal and team growth.

This specific teaching approach, except for the students of the Aristotle University, is already being applied in programs of the intercultural center of education and communication of Thessaloniki "Volkhochschule" to children and adults, to theater students, to social dancers and amateur sports. We can extend it into all sectors of education, both in practical fields and in theoretical ones, on every level and grade, as long as we are open to the natural way of learning and development of the human being (Feldenkrais, 1977). The way we discover, communicate and learn our native language while we are infants, through the need to express and communicate, is the natural way of learning.

"Harmony is like food. It nourishes the soul, as food does with the body" (Anonymous). The principles involved in linguistics and verbal communication, are present also in the physical communication and human expressions.

In order to understand the tools that we are working with in education it is required that we study and develop the educational approaches applied. Their practical application constitutes an art.

The **Art of Harmony...** is a higher goal we can set and concerns us all.

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