

Social-Emotional Aspects of the Biodanza Space in Kindergarten

Gila Cohen Zilka¹

¹ Achva Academic College, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Correspondence: Gila Cohen Zilka, Achva Academic College, Bar-Ilan University, Israel.

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Abstract

This study examined the implementation of a biodanza program in a kindergarten for five-year-olds. The purpose of the project was to understand the contribution of biodanza to social-emotional learning (SEL) of kindergarten children. The exposure of children to biodanza made it possible to stimulate a social-emotional aspects of children's development: to promote closeness and a sense of belonging to a group, and to encourage children to open up, express themselves, and show initiative. This was a qualitative case study carried out in 2017-2019 in Israel. The findings of this study suggest that the introduction of biodanza into kindergarten encouraged coping closeness, emotional and social expression, and social initiative. Biodanza created social situations that aroused the children's curiosity to discover many and varied points of view and to cultivate empathy and acceptance. The data have revealed that collective games should be integrated into vivencias, to offer activities that allow the formation of spontaneous connections between the children, in the form of games. In time, the vivencia space was filled with the children's laughter, and positive gestures multiplied.

Keywords: social emotional learning (SEL), interaction, wellbeing, dance, body work, empathy, affectivity, contact and caresses

1. Introduction

Kindergarten is considered a period in which children establish their development and understanding in various areas. During the first years of life, children learn at a faster rate than at any other time in their lives, and develop cognitive, emotional, and social skills that underpin their achievements in childhood and adulthood (Early Childhood OECD, 2021; Phillips et al., 1987; Vygotsky & Luria, 1994).

Five-year-olds explore their environment and learn to express their feelings and sensations. Many of them still have difficulty regulating behavior, are easily distracted, have difficulty concentrating, and display outbursts of anger, sadness, and rage. They are increasingly independent in eating and dressing, but they still need a great deal of mediation in emotional and social aspects. In recent years, there has been an increasing understanding worldwide of the importance of the years from birth to age eight as a period of life critical to human development (Early Childhood OECD, 2021). Various factors have been found to contribute to the optimal development of children in various fields and to their success, such as affectivity, belonging, interaction, creativity, space for personal expression, pleasure, motor and rhythmic development, development of esthetic sense, and fostering social and group skills. The experiences and processes undergone by children in early childhood form the basis for their development (Early Childhood OECD, 2021; Phillips et al., 1987; Vygotsky & Luria, 1994; Zilka, 2021, 2022).

Engaging children in biodanza (Giannelli et al., 2016; Jeong et al., 2005; Stueck, 2011; Stueck et al., 2009, 2013, 2016; Stueck & Tofts, 2016; Stueck & Villegas, 2013; Zilka, 2022) provides many and varied opportunities for development. These include free, playful and non-playful activities, cognitive nurturing, and development of creativity. These activities are consistent with the children's development, they cultivate a positive emotional climate, and offer many ways to express feelings such as joy, frustration, anger, and insult.

This study examined the introduction of biodanza to kindergarten for five-year-olds to understand the contribution of biodanza to the development of kindergarten children's social-emotional aspects. It investigated how the introduction of biodanza in the kindergarten made it possible to stimulate a social-emotional process for developing closeness and a sense of group, and encourage children to open up, express themselves, and display initiative. The study focused on the effect of biodanza in kindergarten, on kindergarten children's socio-emotional aspects, eye contact, caress, touch, and closeness.

1.1 Biodanza

Biodanza (Stueck, 2011; Stueck & Villegas, 2012; Toro, 2010), dance of life (bio = life, danza = movement, dance) is based on encounters with others that stimulate the person and that enhance affectivity, pleasure, vitality, joy of life, health, and quality of life. Biodanza founder, Rolando Toro Araneda, is a teacher, educator, anthropologist, scientist, poet, and intellectual who sought a way to create affectionate communication between human beings. He found that the integration of music, movement, and encounters creates a sense of affectivity, connection, closeness, understanding, and listening, and may allow for a better communication process. The seven strengths of biodanza are: vivencia, music, movement, caress, regression and transcendentalism, expansion of consciousness, and the group. Biodanza encourages emotional and affectionate integration that takes place on three levels (Stueck, 2011; Stueck & Villegas, 2012; Toro, 2010):

- 1) Personal integration between the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of the person, uniting the body and mind.
- 2) Interpersonal integration with the other.
- 3) Integration with the universe, connection to nature, and the human being as part of the whole.

1.2 Vivencia

Vivencia from the root *vivir*, in Spanish “to live” (Stueck & Villegas, 2012; Toro, 2010), refers to an intense experience of “here and now” that can produce in a person emotional and kinesthetic effect of great strength. Vivencia is the main methodology of biodanza. The five lines of vivencia are vitality, creativity, affectivity, sexuality and pleasure, and transcendence. Vivencia may affect a person along all or some of the five vivencia lines. Toro (2010) described the characteristics of vivencia. These are *subjectivity*, stemming from the identity of each person, as each person experiences it uniquely, at different intensities; *power*, experienced differently by each person; *awareness* of what the person is experiencing, which can appear during the vivencia or at a later phase; and *temporality*, as vivencia appears here and now, and each vivencia has its own unique character.

1.3 Meetings, Social and Emotional Skills of Kindergarten Children

The first research question was how introducing biodanza into kindergarten would stimulate an emotional-social process to promote closeness and a sense of group, and encourage children to open up, express themselves, and show initiative.

Researchers (Bassett et al., 2012; Denham et al., 2012; Newton & Jenvey, 2011) have argued that social and emotional skills contribute to the quality of children’s experiences and interactions with others, and that the two areas are connected: the nature of social connections depends on the expression of emotions, their interpretation, and the ability to regulate emotions. Understanding emotions helps children establish social interactions with their peers and understand interactions in general. Social and emotional skills comprise self-awareness of learners and their awareness of the other, caring, responsibility and involvement, social awareness, and relationship management skills (<https://casel.org/>; <https://artsedssel.org/>).

Researchers (Greaves et al., 2016; Stueck et al., 2013) found that biodanza led to a statistically significant improvement in children’s emotion regulation, behavioral regulation, and pro-social behavior, compared with the control group, where children did not experience biodanza. Researchers found significant differences between groups in children’s social competence after experiencing biodanza.

Emotional skills. Researchers (Liu et al., 2008; Saarni et al., 2006; Wellman, 2012) have argued that the ability to identify emotions is a basic emotional skill. Children learn to gradually identify their own feelings and those of others. The ability to understand the feelings of others according to the verbal and non-verbal cues provided by others is considered a more complex skill than the basic identification of emotions. It attests to children’s ability to understand feedback from those around them and the connections between certain situations and children’s emotions. A high level of understanding is expressed in the ability to describe the reasons behind the feelings of self and others, and the emotional understanding that others may feel differently from one in the same situation.

Empathy (Hoffman, 1984, 1991, 2000; Strayer, 1989) is defined as the ability to experience the feelings of others and react with an emotional response appropriate to the other person’s situation. Researchers have stated that empathy is the product of interaction between emotional factors (identifying and expressing emotions) and cognitive ones (the ability to understand the emotions of others). Hoffman (1984, 1991, 2000) wrote that empathy develops in early childhood, and continues to develop throughout life. Kindergarten children develop the understanding that others have “their own feelings,” as well as the ability to understand the reasons for their feelings and the behavior that is the result of emotions.

Social competence. Researchers (Collie et al., 2017; Coie, 1990; Katz, 1997; Waters & Sroufe, 1983; McKown,

2017; Zilka, 2015, 2022) referred to social competence as a person's ability to create meaningful interactions with those around, adapt to the environment, develop appropriate skills and flexibility in interaction with others, build social connections and discern opportunities that arise as a result of interactions with others. Social competence is a pool of verbal and non-verbal behaviors used by the individual in interaction with others, understanding and appreciating the results of such interactions. Children are thought to have high social competence when they conduct meaningful interactions, participate in social activities with peers, initiate social activities, manage to express themselves clearly and understand others, and succeed in expressing emotions and feelings and in accepting rules and boundaries (Blandon et al., 2010; Thompson, 2006; Zilka, 2015). Proper pro-social behavior allows children to interact meaningfully with other children and adults alike. Such interaction requires several skills, such as cooperation, expression of empathy, helping others, ability to share, and ability to solve social problems (Marion, 2003). Social behavior affects acceptance or rejection by the peer group, sharing and helping encourage acceptance and friendship, whereas aggressive behavior encourages rejection (Hay, 2005; Hay et al., 2004, 2018). Newton and Jenvey (2011) found that there is a connection between children's social skills and the frequency of their interactions with other children.

1.4 Eye Contact, Caress, Touch, Closeness

The second research question concerned the effect of biodanza in kindergarten on children's social-emotional aspects, eye contact, caress, touch, and closeness.

The term "contact" in biodanza (from biodanza unit 10) refers to the coming together of two or more people to allow the flow of information between them. In touch biodanza, within a framework that is inclusive, sensitive, delicate, and attentive to others, there is the power to connect people, therefore, caress is not just a touch, but a connection. Touch may create an empathic connection between people, improve their ability to express themselves, and improve their self-esteem. The quality of the touch, the duration, the intensity, and the circumstances should be considered a complex matrix. Individuals have the innate ability to interpret emotions based on mere touch. Eight dominant emotions emerge in touching: love, gratitude, sympathy, joy, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust. Studies (Canales-Lacruz & Arizcuren-Balsco, 2019; Davis, 1999; Kosierb & Bilodeau, 2020; Stötter, 2013; Westland, 2011) have shown that many people shy away from caress and touch, but despite fear of contact, they are able to send and receive emotional signal by means of touch. Touch and caress are a language, and a person instinctively knows how to use this language.

At the time of caressing, oxytocin levels increase and the heart rate decreases. The psychological benefits of caressing apply both to the person doing and to the one experiencing the caressing. The person caressing experiences a significant decrease in stress hormone levels, no less than the person receiving the caress. The contact with another person is not one-way even with respect to the transmitted signals. The touch sends a message to another person and reveals a lot of information about one's mood: is the individual calm or tense? open to touch or not? This can be felt through muscle tension. This kind of information can guide our behavior with this person; it affects the nature of our thoughts and the way we perceive what it transmits to us. When there is reciprocity, people tend to match their touch to that of their partner. But when there is no reciprocity, people who tend to touch others may be perceived as harassing, and physical contact can be frightening. The person's readiness to receive a caress or return a caress is very important, and the process must not be accelerated, because otherwise it may cause revulsion toward the person who tried to touch the other. It should be remembered that different cultures and people have different thresholds of tolerance for touching. In the biodanza sessions (from biodanza unit 10), participants determine the level of closeness they want to receive through gestures and signs. In this way, no one is supposed to invade the other's boundaries beyond what the other allows. When people feel that their boundaries have been invaded, they must set clear limits through gestures of exclusion to communicate them to the invader. The reciprocal contact is called "getting closer with feedback."

This study examined the introduction of biodanza to a kindergarten for five-year-olds to understand the contribution of biodanza to the social-emotional aspects of kindergarten children.

Relative to previous studies, the innovation in the present study is that it took place within a formal kindergarten for 5-year-olds and used a qualitative research method, to reflect the complexity and subtlety of the change that developed in the vivencia space in the kindergarten.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1) How did the introduction of biodanza to kindergarten make it possible to stimulate social-emotional processes to create closeness and a group feeling, to encourage children to open up and express themselves, and to show initiative?

- 2) What is the effect of biodanza in kindergarten on children's social-emotional aspects, eye contact, caress, touch, and closeness.

2. Method

This is a qualitative case study (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gerring, 2007; Thomas, 2021; Yin, 2012). The researcher is a biodanza facilitator certified by The International Biodanza Federation. The International Biodanza Federation is the world federation of national associations of the Rolando Toro System Biodanza Schools. Over three years, the researcher conducted the vivencias in a kindergarten, watching and analyzing audio recordings after each session. The sessions were held once a week, on a set day (Thursday), throughout the entire period.

The duration of each activity was about two hours, divided into three parts: (a) arriving at the kindergarten about half an hour before beginning vivencia, connecting with the children, and setting up for vivencia; (b) vivencia (about 45 min); and (c) creative activity following vivencia.

2.1 Sample

The activities took place in a kindergarten for five-year-olds. They were held regularly for three school years. Every year, the kindergarten children practiced biodanza throughout the school year. Each year new children participated in the program, but the kindergarten teacher and assistants remained the same throughout the three-year period.

In the first year of the study there were 30 children in the kindergarten, in the second year 28 children, and in the third year 30 children, about evenly divided by gender.

The parents of all the kindergarten children agreed that their children would participate in the study, and all the kindergarten staff. The data were collected in Israel in the years 2017-2019.

2.2 Data Processing

Data were processed following the method of Bernard and Ryan (2010) and Fletcher-Watson (2013). The vivencias were audio-recorded. After each vivencia, I conducted content analysis and extracted statements, events, and situations. Next, significant recurring anchors and codes were identified, followed by grouping several of them into concepts and sorting the concepts by categories (Galletta, 2013). The process followed a spiral path, where the nuclear elements identified at the beginning of the study became increasingly condensed into a picture that reflects the process of introducing biodanza into the kindergarten (Glaser & Strauss, 2012).

Over time, clear trends were identified that kept reappearing in the different vivencias within the same group, and with the groups that changed each year these trends became stronger.

The processing of the data into themes took place in three stages (Galletta, 2013):

- 1) Open coding, which started with the beginning of vivencias in kindergarten. In this process, the concepts in the collected material were located and defined.
- 2) Axial coding. At this stage the concepts were associated with categories by a process of merging and separating, and identifying connections between the concepts.
- 3) Selective coding. At this stage, themes were formulated and all the data that did not converge into the formulated themes were extracted.

Over three years, an extensive amount of data was collected. From the overall data were extracted particular items with a focus on the research questions. Because of the length of the study and the vast data collected, a careful attempt was made to explain the data, to some extent arrive at generalizations, and define working principles for practicing biodanza in kindergartens.

Vivencia in the kindergarten is divided into several parts (Biodanza Catalog, 2018, 2012; Stueck & Villegas, 2012; Toro, 2010):

- Get-together and short sharing. Exposing the subject of vivencia and stimulating motivation using background materials and illustration.
- Phase 1. Beginning, opening circle, group integration. Walking and dancing for motor and affectivity-motor integration.
- Phase 2. Adrenergic, rhythmic integration; walking; physiological or synergistic integration; rhythmic motor integration, games, jumping, dancing; accepting the body, opening up to new movements, and opening movements that have been closed. Dances from the vitality and creativity lines were usually incorporated in this phase.

- Phase 3. Transition, gradual slowing down (bridge). Reduction in sympathetic activation and transition to parasympathetic, segmental expansion and flow.
- Phase 4. Cholinergic. Accepting the body, opening up to new movements, and opening movements that have been closed. Parasympathetic activity. Dances from the affectivity, pleasure, and transcendence lines were usually incorporated in this phase.
- Phase 5. Final activation, gradual ascent (bridge) from the parasympathetic phase, activation dances, and ending circle.
- Short sharing and creative activity.

2.3 Glossary

Biodanza:	The dance of life (bio = life, danza = movement, dance). Biodanza is based on movement, music, and encounters with others https://www.biodanza.org/en/home-5/
Vivencias:	A space that offers experiential engagement in movement, music, and meetings.
Eutony:	Eutony exercises are aimed at light contact between the children when dancing, slow dance with small steps that contribute to lightness, usually in pairs, possibly in threes and in a circle. Eutony of the palms is practiced by joining the children's palms, eutony of the fingers, by joining the children's index fingers, and eutony of the feet by joining their feet.
Rhythmic and melodic synchronization:	Two children stand facing each other, holding hands and moving to the rhythm of the music.
Dance elements:	Earth dance, basic movements, stability; fire dance, vital movements, spreading; water dance, flow, circumventing obstacles; air dance, lightness, freedom, imagination.

3. Results

This section presents the findings in relation to research questions.

3.1 Social-Emotional Aspects in the Biodanza Space in Kindergarten

The first research question related to how introducing biodanza into a kindergarten could stimulate social-emotional processes to encourage closeness, a sense of group belonging, make children open up, express themselves, and show initiative? The data showed that over time, from vivencia to vivencia, the quality and quantity of interactions between children increased, including between children who did not initially interact with each other. In time, the quality of communication between children improved regarding things that "I like" or "I don't like," as did the understanding of other children's feelings based on non-verbal cues provided by them. For example, when a child held another child's hand tightly, the partner signaled with a glance and by squeezing his palm, and the child changed the grip. Children at this age have different body tone and different strengths, some have a large body structure and others a small one, some are agile and fast and others are awkward and slow. The child's attention to the sensitivity exhibited by another child led to a change in the nature of the interactions in the vivencia space.

In the beginning, some children had difficulty dancing in pairs, and they pulled the arms and the palms of their partners. But gradually, more and more children demonstrated the ability to adapt their movements to the child dancing with them.

In small group dances children eventually learned to cooperate, consider another child's ability, empathize with the difficulty or desire expressed by another child, wait patiently for others to express themselves, and solve social problems that arose during the activity. Children preferred to dance with friends of their choice and expressed pleasure when they could choose with whom to dance. Eventually, they learned to enjoy random choices, but this took time and was the outcome of a process of stimulating and nurturing interactions in the kindergarten. When they danced in pairs with whomever they chose, the connection between the children was a pleasant one, but when they danced with someone they did not want to dance with, it happened that they would push each other, pull arms, or squeeze the partner's hand too strongly. Therefore, children should not be forced to dance with "whomever it happens to be," but through the enjoyment of the dance, they should be allowed to gradually open up to more and more children.

Initially, some of the children who failed to dance with the partner they wanted left the space. Gradually, the number of children leaving the vivencia space decreased. Children learned to notice the options available to them, even if they failed to dance with the child they originally wanted to partner with. The children's choice with whom to dance was limited at first, and they chose to dance with three or four regular friends. But over time they accepted more and more children as partners, including children with a different body structure and body tone.

As children felt increasingly confident in the vivencia space that they would be able to dance their own dance, the conflicts between the children greatly diminished. Behaviors resulting from rejection and a sense of exclusion were reduced, as were aggressive behaviors and outbursts of anger and violence. Passive behaviors such as quiet crying and leaving the room quietly without attracting attention also diminished.

The data show that changes in the children's behavior occurred as a result of performing exercises that encourage communication between the children and reciprocity— exercises such as the circle of voices and transferring motion by lightly touching the child standing next, allowing the children to choose who stands next to them, granting them time to think about sound and movement. More complex exercises can be introduced later, for example, eutony of the palms performed by joining the palms of two children, eutony of the fingers by joining of the index fingers of two children, dancing slowly with small steps that contribute to lightness, first preferably in pairs and in time in threes and in small groups. It turned out that most children loved eutony and that it put a smile on their faces every time. They treated finger eutony, hand eutony, back-to-back eutony, circle eutony, and eutony of the feet (lying on the floor and touching their feet at a distance that allows movement) as a challenging game. To promote group contact, eutony exercises were incorporated in different ways.

Rhythmic and melodic synchronization exercises were also practiced: two children standing in front of each other, holding hands and looking into each other's eyes, and making rhythmic movements to the sounds of music. Collective games and active exercises can be combined with relaxing and harmonious ones, and with activities that allow for the emergence of spontaneous connections between children.

3.2 Eye Contact, Caress, Touch, Closeness

The second research question concerns the effect of biodanza on kindergarten children's socio-emotional aspects, eye contact, caress, touch, and closeness. In the first vivencias in kindergarten, the instruction was to "join hands" in the opening circle and the closing circle, and during the vivencia in various exercises, such as rhythmic synchronization and eutony in pairs. Gradually they were asked to caress themselves, gently and delicately, in a way that would be pleasing to themselves; the instruction was "to spread love on our body." Children were asked to gently massage themselves: one time to massage their legs, another time their arms and hands, abdomen, and back area. At one point, they were told to massage an area of the body that they feel needed caressing and massaging. The massage increases blood flow and releases blockages, allowing the muscles to move more freely. Most of the children enjoyed self-caressing and self-massaging. Massage can release restrained energies and cause bursts of crying, laughter, or aggression, and at times it may bring about reminiscing about the episode when the energy was imprisoned. Children need careful containment and calming down.

Self-caressing is a door to caressing the other. Eventually children were asked to caress a kindergarten friend, only with the palms of their hands and only stroking. The transition from stroking and personal massage to stroking another child was slow and gradual, to allow children to learn to express pleasure and set boundaries.

At first, the instruction was to caress the other's hand gently and sensitively. Not all children wanted to caress others, but gradual change occurred as a result of an in-depth process. In some of the children the change was significant from the first lessons, when they were asked to caress another child's hand, to the later lessons, when children did it and hugged without being told.

For example, before an exercise that involved caressing the hand of another child, an instruction was given to start free dancing and during the chorus of the song to caress the hand of a friend, and in the next chorus to caress another friend's hand. One of the boys touched other children in a way that was unpleasant to them. He touched them as if they were in the shower and he soaped their body, touching different areas of their body: the belly, the back, and especially the hair and face. During the next chorus, I positioned myself in front of him, stroking his hand gently and nicely, and he responded gently and nicely. At the end of the vivencia I talked to him about "things that are pleasant for us... and things that are not pleasant for us..." He said that this is what he likes and demonstrated head massage. He said that he does not understand why others do not enjoy when he does it to them, and then massaged his face.

Some of the children had difficulty hugging others, and they wanted to hug only a certain friend, for various reasons such as "once this child hit me," "this child insulted me," and so on. A child who does not want to hug

another one does not have to hug that child. In the course of the vivencia, communication may take a form of a look and a smile, physical contact is not required. When this togetherness was too difficult for some children, they escaped to another corner of the kindergarten. When children distrust other children, they will not want to join hands or get close to these children or to those who had attacked them in the past. These feelings are legitimate, and it is up to us to explain that it is alright to feel uncomfortable with someone else, that it does not mean that one is not sociable or that one does not accept those who are different. Making such claims means not accepting the difference of the child and not respecting the child's difficulties and limitations.

Animal-themed vivencias included pair games that encourage playful touch, gentle rolling toward each other, and lightly touching each other. No fast or sudden movements are involved.

Touch must be encouraged gradually and playfully, not to provoke opposition on the part of the partner being touched, or reluctance to touching others. There will not necessarily be immediate contact, and at times it happens only after a few months of biodanza in the kindergarten. Children must be allowed to grow used to touching and being touched by others, and at the same time be allowed to learn how to set boundaries by expressing "I don't like this," "I don't feel comfortable." They should be allowed to exchange glances and caresses, and to express affectivity.

The dance of the elements is intended for groups. In the rain dance, children lightly touch the others with the tips of their fingers, as if a light drizzle fell on the body. In the fire dance, the child is a flame that gently touches the flame/another child. The earth dance involves gentle and light compression with a finger.

The air dance involves gentle movements imitating a light breeze. Attention must be paid to blowing, as not all children like to be blown at. It is best not to use the word "blowing," not to demonstrate blowing, and not to ask children to blow because it happens naturally in some groups, whereas some others mimic it. In some groups, this exercise continues, and in others it stops because children do not find it pleasant. Apparently, things flow better when children are in a group with participants they like than in a "random" group that they did not choose. In the first months in kindergarten, it is advisable to allow children to choose friends; eventually, they will start to enjoy random encounters with other children.

Kindergarten staff. Initially, the kindergarten staff was wary of contact and caressing between the children. They said that some children liked to touch others, their hair, their face, and the rest of the body, which annoyed the children being touched, so the instruction in the kindergarten was not to touch each other. Therefore, the process of mutual caressing needs to develop gradually, with emphasis on the freedom of each child to set boundaries. The emphasis was on supporting the children, so that they could choose what they liked and what they did not. Thus, there were reciprocal caresses but not reciprocal massages.

Communication in motion. The dance in pairs and the encounter between the children hinted at the communication between them. In the first encounters between some of the pairs, there was a feeling that the communication between the partners was purely technical. It emerged that when children were allowed to choose their partner, communication evolved into eye contact, smiles, laughter, and synchronous movements, which indicated that the children were listening to each other.

Gradually, the group meeting became, to a different extent for each child, a place that allows children to connect, attach, express themselves freely and without fear of being ridiculed; that invites openness and fosters individual and group development, encourages and stimulates processes of growth, and provides a sense of protection and of sharing. For example, an exercise that allows for the gradual development of a relationship based on the interaction between the pair. A pair of children stand facing each other, covering their eyes and face with their palms. Slowly the fingers are slightly spread. They peek at each other gradually exposing more and more parts of the face, dancing together. In other exercises, children can decide whether they want to join hands with other children, hug them, or look into their eyes. The study shows that children like exercises in small groups, in which they are tigers, puppies, and other animal cubs playing together. In exercises where the children are divided into small groups, it is advisable to allow the children to choose their group. A child may feel comfortable in one group but quite uncomfortable and unhappy in another, and in the blink of an eye a quarrel can break out. Some identify with their friends in the quarrel and therefore join in, others step aside and watch, and others yet run as far away as possible. In a closed group like a kindergarten, everyone belongs, everyone participates, without punishing, without excluding any child from the action taking place in the group. Gradually, children are able to connect with more and more others. It emerged that a biodanza facilitator encourages children to unite, gives everyone a sense that every child is important and helpful to the group, provides positive feedback, gives everyone a sense of being valued, both as an individual and as part of the group; and encourages the expression of emotions. Some children at this age have the ability for empathy and acceptance, whereas others find it difficult to contain the feelings and

sensations of the other.

4. Discussion

This study examined the introduction of biodanza to a kindergarten for five-year-olds to understand the contribution of biodanza to social-emotional aspects of kindergarten children, making it possible to stimulate a social-emotional process to create closeness, a sense of belonging to a group, encourage children to open up, express themselves, and show initiative. The focus was on the effect of biodanza on kindergarten children's socio-emotional aspects, eye contact, caress, touch, and closeness.

The findings of the present study suggest that the introduction of biodanza in kindergartens sets in motion a process that encourages coping with social-emotional issues, with closeness and exposure, and encourages emotional and social expression and social initiative. Biodanza in kindergarten created social situations that stimulated the children's curiosity to identify many and varied points of view while cultivating acceptance and empathy, and a sense of belonging, and developed social-emotional skills.

The findings show that biodanza should include exercises, such as eutony, that promote communication between children, reciprocity, rhythmic and melodic synchronization, exercises in pairs, collective games, and activities that create spontaneous connections between children. Over time the vivencia space was filled with the children's rolling, spontaneous laughter, and positive gestures multiplied.

4.1 Stimulation of Social-Emotional Aspects in the Biodanza Space

The first research question was how introducing biodanza into kindergarten would stimulate an emotional-social process to create closeness, a sense of belonging to a group, encourage children to open up, express themselves and show initiative. The findings reveal that biodanza in kindergarten provided a space for experiences and for dealing with emotional and social aspects. Over time, from one vivencia to the next, the quality and quantity of interactions between children increased, and interactions took place between children who did not initially approach each other, communication between children improved, as did understanding other children's feelings based on non-verbal cues provided by them. The child's attention to the sensitivity exhibited by another child led to a change in the nature of interaction in the vivencia space. The findings of this study reinforce previous findings (Bassett et al., 2012; Denham et al., 2012; Newton & Jenvey, 2011) that emotional and social skills contribute to the quality of children's experiences and interactions with others.

The children's choice with whom to dance was limited at first, as they chose to dance with three or four regular friends. In time, it expanded, and the number of children they wanted to dance with grew. Children expressed pleasure when they could choose with whom to dance, but in time, they learned to enjoy random choices as well. The process of stimulating and nurturing interactions in kindergarten takes time. When children danced in pairs with a partner of their choice, the connection between them was a pleasant one, but when they danced with someone they did not want to dance with, they pushed each other, pulled arms, and squeezed the partner's hand with force. Children should not be made to dance with "whoever happens," but if they enjoy the dance, then slowly they will open up to more and more children in the kindergarten. This study showed that a fun process led to change in interactions between children. These findings support previous ones (Hoffman, 1984, 1991, 2000; Liu et al., 2008; Saarni et al., 2006; Strayer, 1989; Wellman, 2012; Zilka, 2017) showing that social-emotional experiences lead to the development of quality interaction between children. The vivencia space in biodanza summons social-emotional cooperation between children, raises the quality of the interactions, and imparts social-emotional skills. The understanding that others have "their own feelings" strengthens the ability to perceive the reasons behind their feelings and the subsequent behaviors.

In small group dances, the children learned, to varying degrees, to cooperate, share the space with other children, make room for each child, consider other children, express empathy for the difficulty or desire of another child, and solve social problems that arose during the activity. Children felt progressively safer in the vivencia space. Aggressive behaviors, outbursts of anger, and violence decreased, and passive behaviors such as quiet crying and leaving the space quietly without attracting attention diminished as well. Based on researchers' definition of social competence (Collie et al., 2017; Coie, 1990; Katz, 1997; Newton & Jenvey, 2011; Waters & Sroufe, 1983; McKown, 2017; Thompson, 2006; Zilka, 2015), it appeared that there was a marked improvement in children's ability to conduct meaningful interactions. Researchers (Hay, 2005; Hay et al., 2004, 2018) have argued that social behavior affects acceptance or rejection by the peer group, and that sharing and helping encourage acceptance and friendship, whereas aggressive behavior encourages rejection. From this study it emerged that the positive resonance in the kindergarten greatly increased, positive gestures multiplied, and the climate became increasingly affectionate, containing, and cooperative. Negative resonance, outbursts of anger, and quarrels between children were reduced. The findings of this study reinforced those of Newton and Jenvey's (2011), which demonstrate that

children's social skills are related to the frequency of their interactions with other children. The biodanza space allowed for encounters between children and interactions, the quality of which improved over time. Vivencia created an optimal environment for encouraging the development of emotional and behavioral self-regulation, personal expression, enjoyment, and creativity, reinforcing motor and rhythmic development, and cultivating social and group skills. This can be achieved by being patient, containing, and behaving softly and gently, not to cause harm.

The findings of this study reinforce previous findings. Stueck (2011) found that biodanza provides space for emotional training, as well as for organizing and managing behavior, regulating emotions and behavior, reducing feelings of anger, and stimulating a sense of optimism. It also provides a space for the development of social and emotional skills and the acquisition of emotional skills (Jeong et al., 2005; Stueck et al., 2009; Stueck & Tofts, 2016; Stueck & Villegas, 2013). Stueck et al. (2013, 2016) pointed at psychological and physiological effects that biodanza causes children to experience, a short-term positive effect on the regulation ability of 4-6-year-olds. Researchers (Giannelli et al., 2016; Stueck & Tofts, 2016; Stueck & Villegas, 2013) found that biodanza leads to improvement in psychological aspects: higher optimism, calm, self-efficacy, ability to love and show empathy, reduction of anxiety, stress reduction, and a stronger sense of wellbeing.

4.2 Eye Contact, Caress, Touch, Closeness

The second research question concerned the effect of biodanza in kindergarten on children's social-emotional aspects, eye contact, caress, touch, and closeness. The findings show that at first, some of the children had difficulty joining hands with others in the circle or hugging other children, for various reasons such as a particular child hitting or insulting them at some point. Children should not be forced to be close to those they do not feel comfortable with, have a hard time with, or to those who are unable to respect their difficulties. Slow processes lead to openness and development. Children should feel free to approach whomever they want and stay away from those they do not trust, and feel free to set their boundaries and reevaluate them each time. Children should be given legitimacy. It is important to explain to them that it is alright to feel uncomfortable with someone else, and that it does not mean being unsociable and not accepting those different from oneself.

The dance in pairs and the encounter between the children hint at the communication between them. Gradually, the group meeting became a place that allows the children to connect, express themselves freely and without fear of being ridiculed. It became a place that invites openness and fosters individual and group development, encourages and stimulates processes of growth, and provides a sense of protection and cooperation.

Children like exercises in small groups, in which they can be tigers and other animals, like puppies, playing together. Children should be engaged in exercises that bring about closeness and exposure, at the same time allowing them to choose what is right for them from different options, such as glancing, stroking, joining one's palm with another child's palm, and hugging. For example, some children like tickling and others do not because it makes them uncomfortable. They should not feel obligated to do something they do not want to do; they should all be treated according to their preference, in their own time, at their own pace. Children are sensitive and tend to perceive the events that happen to them as existential. It is difficult for a child to say: "In a minute the song will end, the difficulty will disappear, and something new will begin." Almost every situation at this age is perceived by the child as an existential experience.

The kindergarten staff initially frowned upon contact and caressing between the children. Teachers said that some children do not like to be touched, therefore the instruction in the kindergarten was for children not to touch each other. The process of mutual caressing needs to develop gradually, with emphasis on the freedom of each child to set boundaries. In the present study, the emphasis was on supporting the children so that they could choose what they liked and what they did not. Thus, there were reciprocal caresses but not reciprocal massages. It is advisable not to give up on mutual caressing in kindergarten, but allow it to develop gradually, paying attention to behaviors that harm other children. One should create opportunities to express respect for the other and for the space of the other, emphasize that the touch should be pleasant and gentle, not to cause resistance, gently demonstrating first, then asking to be caressed gently and respectfully. Good communication, mutual respect, and a sense of security may lead to a change in the children's behavior and to their empowerment. Children should progress at their own pace, step by step.

It emerged that a biodanza facilitator should help kindergarten children coalesce into a group, give everyone a sense that every child is important and helpful to the group, provide positive feedback, give everyone a sense of being valued, both as an individual and as part of the group, and encourage the expression of emotions. Some children at this age have ability for empathy and acceptance, but others find it difficult to accept the feelings and sensations of the other. In the present study, at first, the cohesion between the children was relatively low, but with

regular meetings, gradually the cohesion and a sense of solidarity were established.

In conclusion, the introduction of biodanza in kindergartens has contributed to the improvement of social-emotional aspects of kindergarten children's experience. Below are listed some working principles for practicing biodanza in kindergartens that emerged from this study. To deal with social-emotional aspects, with closeness and exposure, emotional and social expression, and social initiative in kindergarten, children should be encouraged to experiment, dare act, and express themselves in movement. Positive gestures and reactions (for example, after a child makes eye contact) that evoke a positive feeling during the encounter should be cultivated. The climate should be accepting, supportive, and cooperative. It is important to use words that bring about closeness rather than remoteness, to speak in short, happy words. Humor (but never cynicism) can be used to evoke joy and interest. Collaboration and the creation of connections and interactions between the children, also on their own initiative, need to be fostered and encouraged. There should be an understanding that children have difficulty perceiving the boundaries between being alone and being together, between autonomy and collaboration, between independence and going with the flow. Children need processes that encourage them to be aware and listen to their own feelings and emotions and to the feedback they receive from others, as it increases the child's desire to live and cope.

5. Research Limitations and Future Studies

Future studies should also examine the effect of biodanza in kindergarten on children's social-emotional aspects because of the great importance of these aspects for development in early childhood. This study examined the issue in a kindergarten for five-year-olds; it is advisable to examine the issue for other ages as well and for shorter intervention periods. This study was conducted over time in the same kindergarten, therefore it is advisable to explore the issue in kindergartens with different characteristics, to examine the effect of biodanza in various settings.

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