

online AIPOB Seminar – 11/18 July 2020  
“Biodanza between education and therapy”  
Marcelo Mur

**Questions and Answers – Comments - Contributions**

**Question from Gianni De Lucia:** If Biodanza is an activity that also has a therapeutic value, I want to ask your opinion on a substantial aspect for an activity with therapeutic contents: do you not find in the lived experience, that the involvement of the teacher in the dynamic student-group-teacher, is something to think about more carefully? I mean I'm not talking about the affective 'containment' or of the empathic relationship but of the 'erotic fusional' that develops in the participant-group-teacher dynamic in the classrooms. All the more reason, if we understand Biodanza as an activity that is also therapeutic, how do we justify/manage this?

**Response from Marcelo Mur:** In my opinion, the erotic fusion of the teacher with the student should be avoided. As indicated in the Methodologies, that the operator must not participate in the Compact Group that he/she is conducting, I believe that this indication must be extended to all other situations created by the work relationship. The student needs to feel accompanied, protected, contained, and not in an erotic fusion with the operator. This is true in the context of Biodanza, which is essentially pedagogical. Of course, even more so when the participant perceives this activity as a therapy. Rolando Toro expressed himself in this way: "It was observed that the manifest preference of the teacher for a particular student modifies the relationship of the latter with the group, in the sense that it limits their freedom and their natural options for participation with other students, disturbing his growth process. The active presence of the teacher is always very stimulating during the rounds of communion, dances of creativity and vitality, in the exemplification of the exercises, in the embrace of the final greeting. However, the teacher should be extremely careful in exercises that require greater emotional compromise and contact. Without a doubt, there is nothing reprehensible in the attraction or preference that a teacher may have for one of their students. These attentions are only suggested because, according to our experience, a more intense involvement of the teacher frequently causes more disturbances than development within the group".

**Question from Gianni De Lucia:** If Biodanza goes "from emotion to words", don't you find that more and more often, in the conduct of the operator (where I include myself as well) that too much space is given to words before the experience can happen? What I mean, what I observe, is that in the conduction, the explanations are full of elaborate concepts that belong to the operator and that are not meanings of the student's *vivencial* experience which, having yet to happen, runs the risk of being conditioned rather than being free and authentically their own.

Reply from Marcelo Mur: This question reminds me of my early days in Biodanza, when I asked Rolando: "Can I speak?" I felt there were so many words he put into his speeches, sometimes too many for me. Over time I got reasoned: Rolando was the tip of the spear who had to enter the world, so it was okay. But for us second, fifth and tenth generation operators, it would be desirable to be aware that if we fill the pupil's head with our own meanings, we leave no room for them to discover their own meanings, those that make sense for them, for everyone. So, my proposal is to be a bit drier both in theory and in delivery, aware that it is necessary to awaken the meaning that the student has to discover in them self. It is true that Biodanza awakens new motivations for living and this it should, at least in part, with the operator's speech, with their explanations, but being careful not to go further. And then, we are not Rolando Toro, and today Biodanza is sufficiently widespread in the world. In my opinion, our aim is to clarify the instrument and the message.

**Commentary by Moreyba Santana Rodriguez:** I believe that the answer, to avoid the emotional discomfort during sessions that you mentioned, and also to recover safely after isolation, is clear: progressiveness and maintaining the patterns of methodologies. Don't invent anything new. Because Rolando has already given us the answer. It is one of the topics being investigated in LIB 2: how to apply progressivity. It is now important for leaving the confinement, do not forget the progressiveness in all its forms.

**Question from Cristina Canino:** First of all, I thank you for your courage, for your ethical correctness, for your great knowledge of the field of the human soul. I was very impressed when you read that Biodanza, unlike dance therapy, is for the healthy and for the unhealthy. But who is healthy today? We know that many of the people, with many neuroses, difficulties, with emotional dysregulation, arrive in Biodanza not recognizing the disorder (from which they suffer). What happened to me? Since the *vivencia* we know is deflagrating, let's imagine our student returning home after our *vivencia* (session), how can we know what goes on inside? You have rightly quoted Lacan, who tells us that the unconscious is structured like a language. So we have two ways: an unconscious way and a conscious way, which in my opinion is not specified. My question is this: how can we help what happens to our pupil unconsciously? I have always wondered this, because I have seen so many resistances to change, so many *acting outs*, so many dissociations; I myself have made many mistakes because I did not have, how to say, really therapeutic tools. I conclude by saying that we must no longer be afraid of the term therapy, it is still a taboo, we are in 2020, therapy means care, where care is care for the body, as Rolando and others teach us, and for the mind. So, the instinct, the *vivencia*, the emotion, the feeling, the thought are okay, but it takes verbalization, awareness and action.

**Response from Marcelo Mur:** I repeat what I have already proposed, suggested: supporting and stimulating verbalization. Regarding the question of how can we help what happens to our pupil on an unconscious level? I'll reply that the operator can help being aware that they are handling an instrument created for therapeutic purposes. Therefore, applying it with careful progressiveness and favoring the verbalization of the lived experience.

Now I'll open a parenthesis, maybe I'll make you laugh, or take your hair in your hands. I held my hair in my hands every time I did a supervision and the trainee student shouted "don't talk!" to some pupils who talked to each other while dancing the rhythmic synchronization in pairs. I would tell the intern: you are stimulating their expression. If you ask her, or worse, yell at her, to not speak, you are asking her to dissociate her self-expression. The beginner speaks during the *vivencias*, especially during those with rhythmic music; let them speak, let them express themselves. If, on the other hand, they speak during the regression exercises, you can intervene in a delicate way, asking not to disturb the *vivencia* of their companions. For the other moments, I suggest letting them express themselves. The time will come when the student will feel satisfied with expressing his or herself only with their body and no longer also with the word during the dances. Otherwise we will pass the message that in Biodanza we do not speak, or as happens to read in some brochures "Biodanza is for feeling and not thinking". I find it a damaging statement for our profession. We humans cannot help but think and speak. Rolando Toro said: "My interest is that you can think with your own head". During deep *vivencias* we can have the perception of not thinking, of silence in the mind. However, later thought returns to manifest itself, consciousness is rekindled. I believe that these deep experiences of eventual and momentary silence of the mind are very personal and difficult to communicate, so they should not be anticipated. I believe it is enough to communicate that the Biodanza method stimulates the joy of living and the pleasure of feeling intensely alive and experiencing the bonds with others in the here and now of the session, and little by little also in daily life and in the long term.

**Commentary by Francesca Iovino:** I can relate with you regarding what you said about the importance of the word, and move my resistance up to a level that I now use the word with the students. You told us that human beings cannot do without words and that it is useful to make inner conflicts conscious. That it is important to give space to the word of the student, not only in the sharing of the *vivencia* but also possibly before or after the session or, I imagine, even at another time. I have always had resistance to creating extra moments in addition to the sharing, with the student, for my fear of interpreting. I feel the need to train myself in communication; in the formation of Biodanza I did not find this space dedicated to the word.

**Response by Marcelo Mur:** What I said is that Lacan, going beyond Freud and his hypothesis of making unconscious conflicts conscious, affirmed, I say it in my own words, that the human beings cannot do without words. So I repeat, the word in Biodanza is not intended to make unconscious conflicts conscious. Rather, the

sharing of the vivencia is intended to put words to the experience lived in the Biodanza sessions. Furthermore, I proposed, not to create other moments to talk, but to support the spontaneous speech of your students before and after the sessions, in the space where you propose Biodanza, from your role as a teacher, of authority who is there to accompany and take care of the growth process that your students take. You are the reference figure of this context. Now I have a very important thing to add: You feel resistance; I suggest that you listen to yourself and guide yourself from this perception; you don't have to force yourself to do something with you don't want. Do you want to train in communication? Just do it. I add: we human beings are more or less empathic. Therefore, not all Biodanza operators feel the need to train as counselors or psychologists, or to undertake psychotherapy courses to deepen the relationship with themselves and with each other. Yes, I have had need, and others too. Some, however, come to train in Biodanza with their own empathic skills, which they put at the service of this profession. This I is what I seem to understand.

**Contribution by Dario Martelli:** I have been doing both verbal psychotherapy and Biodanza groups for many years. In principle, I absolutely agree with everything you have said, even on the significant power of the word. What I would like to add, to give my contribution, from my point of view, is that certainly Biodanza has therapeutic effects. I often care for people who maybe do Biodanza with other teachers and do psychotherapy with me. I feel I can distinguish between therapeutic effects and purposes. When I'm in the office doing verbal psychotherapy, the people who come to me have a specific therapy question. The difference between a therapy and a growth path, as we said, is this: the difference between those who are ill and those who are well. Having done both activities for a long time, what seems different to me is that the people who come to me in the Biodanza group arrive with needs of all kinds. Generally, those who come to the psychotherapy office arrive with a fairly precise request for help. A term that may be useful to add, from my point of view, is that of *setting*. In the sense that verbal therapy has its own specific *setting*. The therapy works, or can work, also thanks to this *setting*. Setting means the invariable elements that are part of the therapy: the timetable, a series of rules that the therapist proposes. Starting from the person's questions and moving on to the rules, practically the therapeutic path begins. Biodanza has its own *setting*, in my opinion, but to this day it is not therapeutic. So, as I said before, Biodanza has great therapeutic effects. But it has this difference, in my opinion. One of my great curiosities, which however I have never satisfied so far, is to try to create a real therapeutic group of Biodanza, announcing it from the beginning, saying that it is on an experimental basis.

**Intervention by Marcelo Mur:** I translate the term *setting* as context. In the Methodology handouts there are indications that form part of the Biodanza *setting/context*: The place, the day and the time are fundamental elements. I and many other colleagues had the experience of having to change the place and/or the day and/or the time, and the group broke up. Another element is the teacher: it has happened, and will happen again, that I ask a colleague to replace me for one or more

sessions, because I have to travel or I'm sick. In the session led by another, inevitably some pupils are missing, who want to do the session with their teacher. Other elements: The commitment required of the pupil and the rules to be respected. Rolando Toro writes in Methodology 5: "When enrolling in a Weekly Course, it is advisable for the participant to be aware of the fact that they are choosing one possibility, among many others, to start a personal development process together with a Biodanza teacher and his/her group (the underlines are mine). On this occasion, the teacher must give the following information to the new participant: ... (4 rules follow). In relation to points 3 and 4, I would like to redeem the concept of "mourning", used in group psychology to describe the feeling of emptiness that the unexpected absence of one of the participants leaves in their companions. The evolutionary development in Biodanza foresees the progressive overcoming of the defense mechanisms that are activated in the face of the fear of being oneself and of expressing one's identity through the 5 Lines of *Vivencia*. The tendency or inner need to frequently change the group or teacher, in general, reveals an unconscious choice of escape in the face of difficulties in dealing with one's own defense mechanisms in order to overcome them. In this sense, changing group or teacher means returning to the starting point in the path of personal growth ... The Biodanza System is not a proposal for recreation for free time ... The process of personal growth through Biodanza requires a serious and profound commitment to their will to evolve, and therefore a commitment with themselves, with the teacher they trust and with the group. The importance of carrying out the two levels of the Weekly Course (Initiation and Deepening and Radicalization of the *vivencia*) with the same teacher is **not an obligation, however it is the orientation to obtain the best results.**"

There is a clear difference between the psychotherapeutic *setting* and that of Biodanza: The explicit request for help from one of the parties in the psychotherapeutic *setting*. Element that is missing in many of the participants in the Biodanza groups. However, as I have already written in the Seminar, I believe that those looking for Biodanza manifest the need to be accompanied, so I assume that it comes with an unconscious request for help. Rolando Toro proposes to that the candidate who joins a weekly Biodanza course, be aware that a personal development process is about to begin together with a teacher and their group. And here we can indicate another difference: while in the psychotherapeutic *setting* we work to solve a problem, in the Biodanza *setting* we work to develop individual potentials.

However, I propose to reread carefully what Rolando Toro writes (text transcribed above): "the evolutionary development of Biodanza foresees the progressive overcoming of the defense mechanisms": psychoanalytic concept, psychological language!

Regarding the therapeutic alliance in psychotherapeutic practice, consisting of three components: (1) the explicit sharing of objectives by the patient and therapist; (2) the clear definition of reciprocal tasks at the beginning of the treatment; (3) the type of

emotional bond that is formed between the two, characterized by trust and respect: what substantial differences does it have with what Rolando Toro wrote on page 9 of *Methodology 5* under the title *Participation in the weekly group and overcoming the mechanisms of defense*, much of which I transcribed above?

In short, I don't see these important differences between a psychotherapeutic *setting* and a Biodanza *setting*, except that those who enroll in Biodanza do it to start a process of personal development and not a therapy. You will say: but the difference is significant. I answer that: from a certain point of view it is, in the sense that the Biodanza student does not make an explicit request for help to solve a problem. However, they are incorporated into a personal development process characterized by the expression of *vivencia*, emotions and feelings, led by a teacher who will accompany them for 3 years! Furthermore, I suggest you add what I have been talking about throughout the Seminar: Biodanza is a powerful tool for the transformation of the human being, born with therapeutic purposes, and the only way I see to apply it while avoiding the perception of practicing a therapy is to do it with accurate progressiveness and to favor putting words to the lived experience.

**Question from Cristina Canino:** It pains me very much to know that I work on the *vivencia*, therefore on the here and now, and then to know that many stop at that moment without knowing that it reveals many things. So, what is the *vivencia* for you and how can it be integrated into our life?

**Response from Marcelo Mur:** I find this a very important question. We work on the here and now, but we project ourselves, we expect a result: that this *vivencia* is incorporated, that the person becomes aware of this and therefore their psychology is restructured. "Biodanza acts as a therapy/aid promoting health" (Rolando Toro). In *Methodology 5* under the title *Relationship between the microcosm of the group and the social macrocosm* we read: "Many students experience the strong difference between what happens within the session and what they then experience in everyday reality. It is difficult for them to establish a clear relationship between the two environments. In some, this fact assumes almost dissociative characteristics: the experience affectivity, joy, creativity, mutual respect, tenderness, etc. within the session. In returning to their ordinary life they find aggression, depression, monotony ... The process of maturation in Biodanza implies that the student draws strength from this difference in vital quality and transforms himself into a health agent within the environment in which he lives. . The Biodanza procedures must be applied progressively in one's family relationships, at work and in the social environment in general ". I have reflected at length on Rolando Toro's words. Because I struggled a lot, with effort, trying to become, an agent of health, and then obviously getting depressed when I couldn't. Until I came to the perception that, once the student is able to put words to their lived experience, their psychology is restructured, they recover their health, expresses their potential, strengthens their identity. The student must not make any effort outside the session in the name of Biodanza. Once health

and integrity are restored, it integrates more effectively into their daily environments. The student becomes a health agent spontaneously. I see an effort that the student can make within the session, in the Biodanza *setting*, if they wish to fulfill the commitment made with their will to evolve, trying to express their potential as fully as possible, both with movement and with word. In my opinion, the profound, stable change begins when the student stops perceiving the Biodanza session as a happy island, and instead experiences it as a moment of growth.

Between 11 and 18 July I received a question and some commentaries, which I insert here:

Question from Annalisa Risoli: What consequences (of your intervention)?

Response from Marcelo Mur: I hope that a consequence of my intervention is the increase of awareness in the operators, and therefore that they talk about it freely and seriously among themselves, amongst us. Another consequence could be that I receive requests from AIPOB, BIOITA and the Training Schools to deepen this topic in a 2-day workshop.

Commentary by Moreyba Santana Rodriguez: I find the emphasis you put on the fact that we become aware that the work we do as Biodanza teachers is both pedagogical and therapeutic very important. And this is why it becomes particularly necessary to respect the methodology proposed by the Biodanza System both in its exercises, in the construction of the curve, and in the words we use to define it, in the explanations, etc.

Many times I have come across people commenting on how "good" a teacher is because of how "strong" their sessions are, both in the regression and in the euphoria they awaken at the end of the session (In textual words: "It's more powerful than a Minotaur") and this shows me that most likely neither the participant nor the teacher understand the Biodanza methodology well. It creates, as you say, an excessive emotional commitment and a search (almost an addiction) for strong emotions ... as if Biodanza were a roller coaster.

When you talked about resistance to change in the previous session (of 11/07), many people later commented (I don't know if you were still connected or if you had already run out of battery) that they had experienced it or still have difficulties in the Biodanza sessions. And it seemed very important to me to be able to give a space to put words to that resistance ... because that's what makes us human!

Intervention by Marcelo Mur: I am very grateful to Moreyba for sending her reflections on resistance to change which, you confirm, is much more widespread than you think. I am heartened to know that my observations are shared. In a certain sense it makes me feel less alone by addressing this delicate topic which in my

opinion in the training and then conducting of Biodanza is not adequately explained, observed and managed.

After July 18th I received the following contribution:

**Contribution by Cristina Canino: - Setting: meaning and evolution**

The word *setting*, from English *to set*, means to establish, fix, set, regulate.

In the psychological field, the *setting* defines the context within which a social event takes place.

The concept of *setting* was born in the ecological psychology of Roger Barker, founder of environmental psychology, together with Kurt Lewin psychologist of the German Gestalt current, as a concept of context (Wikipedia).

Lewin, in particular, will focus on the importance of the individual-context relationship which means that the people and environments to which they belong constitute a totality, an indivisible unity, with aspects that influence each other.

We can more easily define the *setting* today as the space-time dimension within which the relationship, experience acts.

Each therapist or operator uses their own *setting* also starting from the **internal *setting***, which is equally important. The internal *setting* is equivalent to the rules, the limits that the therapist gives them self and which they then actualize in the external *setting*, establishing elements that must be more or less stable such as the place, the room, the privacy, closed and clear boundaries, the lights, the payment.

If we think of the *setting*, we cannot help but think of the operator or therapist and their style and the environment they create with the student or patient.

Each era has had and has its context:

1900: In the psychoanalytic *setting*, we use a formal address, we usually meet at least twice a week, so *setting* is also the frequency of the sessions-appointments and the way of relating. The psychoanalysts also use the couch and sit behind the patient. Language is verbal.

Modes of interaction with the patient: the analyst never talks about them self, the center of everything is the patient and one of the principle modalities is transference.

With Jung we go a step further because there is eye contact.

1970: With Carl Rogers and in humanistic psychology the *setting* is again different:



there is no desk, the patient is called a client and there is still verbal language, eye contact, presence, empathy, acceptance unconditional of the other.

1940-1970: In the *setting* of the Gestalt, and according to its founder Fritz Perls, it is important to establish the I-You. The main elements are I-You-Here-Now.

Since the therapeutic relationship (of care) is fundamental for the Gestalt *setting*, the modality of interaction with the patient changes again: there is greater symmetry and closeness, the therapist can talk about him/herself and in group therapies there is also the presence of multiple participants, verbal language and non-verbal language.

1970-2010: The *setting* of Biodanza today: we have a room that must have certain characteristics of amplitude, sound and light. There is a group, the circle is often used as a mode of interaction, there is music, sometimes there are chairs or cushions on the floor, usually parquet or linoleum; verbal language and non-verbal language, semi-structured exercises, individual, in pairs, in groups, the use of contact and caress. The Biodanza operator moves together with his students (no longer patients). There is presence, here and now (*vivencia*), gaze, embrace, possibly a good level of empathy on the part of the operator.

Methods of interaction with the student (no longer patient): closeness, attention to the management of the delicate role that the operator has in managing him/herself and the group, and with the group, between identity and regression.

It is important, in my opinion, that the operator can be *with* the group, but first of all with them self, and give clear limits and boundaries to the group, to avoid phenomena such as addiction or pathological fusionality, which could arise together with the resistance to change, preventing the growth of a free and autonomous individual.

**Contribution from Marcelo Mur:** I am very grateful for your questions, comments and contributions.

I take this Seminar as concluded.

See you at the next meeting opportunity!