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Contraction and release: relation movements between students - parents – teachers

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Περίληψη

Στο παρόν άρθρο παρουσιάζονται τα πρώτα ευρήματα μιας ποιοτικής έρευνας σε εξέλιξη, σκοπός της οποίας είναι η ανάδειξη του ρόλου των σχέσεων που αναπτύσσονται μεταξύ εκπαιδευτικών, γονέων και μαθητών, ως παράγοντα που επηρεάζει τη μετάβαση των μαθητών σε ένα ανώτερο στάδιο εξέλιξης της προσωπικότητάς τους. Ως μέσα συλλογής δεδομένων αξιοποιούνται γραπτά τεκμήρια από δραστηριότητες κριτικής και δημιουργικής προσέγγισης χορευτικών έργων τέχνης σε βιωματικά εργαστήρια στα οποία συμμετέχουν ομάδες εκπαιδευτικών και γονέων και ερωτηματολόγια αναστοχασμού των συμμετεχόντων. Το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο της έρευνας στηρίζεται στον συνδυασμό των θεωρήσεων των Robert Kegan, Jack Mezirow, Carl Rogers και στην επεξεργασία χορευτικών έργων τέχνης μέσω δραστηριοτήτων δημιουργικής γραφής. Από τα μέχρι στιγμής ευρήματα, αναδεικνύεται ότι ο τρόπος που ο χώρος, ο χρόνος και ο ρυθμός που συντελείται η άτυπη μάθηση εντός του οικογενειακού περιβάλλοντος, επηρεάζουν τη μετάβαση των παιδιών σε ανώτερα στάδια συνειδητοποίησης, τη διαμόρφωση της ταυτότητάς τους και εμμέσως τη στάση τους απέναντι στον σχολικό θεσμό. Παράλληλα, αναδεικνύεται η σημασία αξιοποίησης της τέχνης του χορού ως μέσο ενεργοποίησης δυνάμεων συστολής ή απελευθέρωσης από ενδεχόμενες δυσλειτουργικές παραδοχές αναφορικά με τον τρόπο που ο γονεϊκός ή ο εκπαιδευτικός ρόλος επηρεάζουν τη στάση των παιδιών απέναντι στον σχολικό θεσμό.

Abstract

This article presents the initial findings of an ongoing qualitative study, the aim of which is to highlight the role of the relationships that develop among teachers, parents, and students as a factor influencing students' transition to a higher stage of consciousness. Data collection tools include written documents from activities involving critical and creative approaches to dance artworks in experiential workshops attended by groups of teachers and parents, as well as reflection questionnaires completed by the participants.

The theoretical framework of the research is based on a synthesis of the perspectives of Robert Kegan, Jack Mezirow, and Carl Rogers, along with the exploration of dance artworks through creative writing activities. From the findings so far it becomes apparent that the way in which space, time, and rhythm shape informal learning within the family environment influences children's transition to higher levels of consciousness, the formation of their identity, and indirectly their attitude toward the school institution. At the same time, the importance of utilizing the art of dance is highlighted as a means of activating forces of contraction or release from potentially dysfunctional assumptions regarding how parental or educational roles influence children's attitude toward the school institution.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: σχέσεις γονέων – μαθητών – εκπαιδευτικών, βιωματικό εργαστήριο, χορευτικό έργο τέχνης, χωροχρόνος και ρυθμός άτυπης μάθησης

Key words- relationships between parents-students-teachers, experiential workshop, dance artwork, space-time and rhythm of informal learning.

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1. Introduction

In a rapidly changing society, mainly due to the evolution of science and technology, there are many challenges an individual is expected to face during their transition from one developmental stage to the next, i.e. from infancy to childhood, adolescence and adulthood, until they develop a self-reliant and emancipatory way of thinking. These transitions often coincide with those encountered in an educational context, e.g. from kindergarten to primary school, secondary and then higher education, which are characterized by similar challenges.

Illeris (2007), quoting Piaget's work, highlights the importance of adaptive learning, which is linked to a qualitative change in an individual's way of thinking during their transition to a higher developmental stage. In this case, suitable support as well as a challenge are required, in order for an individual to develop relevant abilities leading to a qualitative change in their way of thinking and behavior, such as self-awareness, empathy, effective emotion management, communication, active listening, critical reflection. Through a qualitative change in their way of thinking, the foundations are laid for individuals to transition to a higher stage of awareness and consequently to be able to make meaning of reality by reconstructing their existing mental framework (Kegan, 1994). This type of learning is characterized as transformative. Mezirow, founder of Transformative Theory, defines Transformative learning as

> the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7-8).

The individual's engagement in transformative learning processes is a demanding and often painful procedure, characterized by intense feelings of contraction when one is confronted with their established beliefs, as well as by feelings of release when the so-called qualitative change in the way one makes meaning of their everyday life is ultimately achieved (Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 2022).

Each type of learning is influenced by various factors, e.g. the place where it happens, the time provided by the learning institution, the personal time invested, the personal pace of learning, the emotions, views, actions of learners (Alhadeff-Jones, 2019).

Another factor which seems to affect learning at a personal and educational level, especially during an individual's transition to a higher level of learning, are the relationships developing between parents, students and teachers.

This article presents the initial findings of an ongoing qualitative study, which aims to highlight the role of relationships among parents, students, and teachers in supporting students' transition to a higher stage of personality development. This research is carried out by means of experiential workshops attended by groups of teachers and parents. Selected excerpts from dance works of art are used as stimuli to foster the participants' critical reflection on the issue under study.

The structure of the article is as follows: initially, a brief reference is made to the theoretical framework exploring the role of relationships which develop between family members, as well as between parents, students and teachers. Then the article goes on to highlight the importance of using the art of dance to prompt critical reflection on issues relating to the role of emotions, place and time, as factors influencing any form of learning, followed by the rationale for the research and the structure of the experiential workshops. The results of hands-on workshops, conducted online as part of the research in November and December 2024, are then presented. Finally, the first findings of the research linked to the theoretical framework are discussed.

2. Theoretical framework
2.1. The role of relationships developing within the family

Relationships developing within the family have been a constant field of research and study for many theorists, as they influence the evolution of an individual's personality, through the formation of specific views, attitudes and behaviors. Family members, mainly parents and children, develop relationships with each other, adopt specific roles (e.g. parent/spouse/professional or

child/student/friend), are required to set boundaries and maintain functional dividing lines, as well as to meet the demands of the broader modern social environment regarding their roles (Kegan, 1982).

More specifically, modern society expects individuals in parental roles to shoulder family responsibilities by creating and pursuing a family vision, providing appropriate support to growing family members, acknowledging the fact that they are becoming older, and setting boundaries for children, relatives, external influences, and themselves—while protecting both the fragility of childhood and the couple's relationship within the family. Parents are expected to communicate closely with their spouses and support their professional and personal development while maintaining their independence. They must establish a direct, fair and effective communication style, while remaining aware that, to an extent, their personal stories determine their choices (Kegan, 1994). The question is whether parents have the necessary skills to be able to cope with the above expectations. It is no coincidence that, as Gordon (2000) points out, parents are often blamed, yet they are not trained. How easy is it to set boundaries for young family members, especially when they are going through a developmental leap or adolescence? What does effective child support mean? How can parents set limits on themselves? Self-awareness, active listening, empathy, self-control, reflection, are but a few of the skills that are necessary to have developed to a satisfactory degree, and they are all based on the development of essential relationships (Goleman, 1995). If parents find it difficult to set boundaries, if they downplay their own needs for the benefit of others or uncritically adopt values and beliefs of the wider social environment (their own parent-instilled values, religion, social class, ethnicity, etc.), it is very likely that they might feel the pressure of being expected to deal with the aforementioned issues. They need to transition to a higher stage of consciousness on a personal and interpersonal level, by developing a more self-reliant way of thinking and behaving (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

For this to happen they must challenge deep-seated beliefs about their parental role. In our case, when parents hold dysfunctional or limiting beliefs that hinder their ability to adapt to an ever-changing social reality, it is important to support them in critically reevaluating these beliefs, potentially leading to their transformation (Mezirow, 1991).

With regard to children as family members, they undergo a continuous process of transitioning through developmental stages from birth to adulthood. This ongoing progression places them in a state of constant learning—acquiring facts, skills, and attitudes—that contributes to the formation of their identity (Kegan, 1986, 1994) A particularly critical period in a person's life is the period between 11 and 20 years of age, which is considered a period of gradual transformation of thinking, behavior and emotions (Simonsen & Illeris, 2014). Young people of this age transition from pre-adolescence to adolescence and early adulthood. This period in their lives is considered particularly critical, as it is when they gradually shape their personality—by incorporating new behavioral elements, transforming dysfunctional aspects, or rejecting previously unquestioned habits (Kegan, 1994).

However, parents require adolescents to possess a heightened degree of empathy instead of only thinking about their own needs. Pre-teens are expected to be trustworthy, to understand and share parents' worries, to make concessions, but at the same time to have a strong and independent personality (Kegan, 1994). However, their relationships with their parents—from birth through this developmental stage—significantly influence how they learn, behave, and develop specific conceptual understandings. More specifically, rules and parental prohibitions which mainly aim at the safety of minors are generally useful and desirable. However, when minors associate parental prohibitions with the threat of withdrawn parental love—often through emotionally charged incidents—the sense of prohibition becomes deeply internalized, affecting their emotions and social interactions and giving rise to anxiety that may manifest in various forms, even into adulthood. Moreover, parental expectations that children conform from an early age to specific roles, social norms, and cultural codes—each carrying implicit values and behavioral expectations—can, over time, lead to distorted conceptualizations of the child's social role and identity (Mezirow, 2022).

How often, Alice Miller (1997) wonders, haven't our parents—or even ourselves towards our own children—unknowingly caused acute, deep and prolonged hurt to a tender child self that was about to blossom, citing the example of Ingmar Bergman, who spoke with regret about not being able to realize what Nazism meant before 1945, even though he regularly visited Germany as a teenager. Miller attributed this blindness to a familiar atmosphere of cruelty in the household where the Swedish

director grew up. As a result, Bergman could not grasp the cruelty and contempt others suffered (Miller, 1997).

The aforementioned formed the basis for the structure and content of the experiential workshop presented later in the article.

2.2.   *The Role of Teacher–Parent–Student Relationships*

Family and school are foundational institutions in the life of a child or adolescent life, sharing a common point of contact: an interest in developing their personality and suitably preparing them to integrate into wider society as active citizens. Pupils and adolescent students develop relationships with their peers and teachers which are crucial in developing and shaping their personality.

First of all, teachers' recognition of students' personality is a factor of crucial importance, as it helps create an appropriate emotional climate during the educational practice, which in turn enables students to feel safe to express their opinions, express their objections, share their concerns, listen to others' opinions, and hold a democratic dialogue. In the opposite case, when students experience rejection from their family and school, they develop negative emotions and manifest anger, disrespect, aggressive behavior and hatred, all inhibiting factors to the development of their personality (Fleming, 2014).

On the other hand, teachers today primarily expect adolescents to behave and think more maturely and laterally—not merely to serve their individual interests, but to effectively utilize and synthesize prior knowledge in order to resolve problems, by examining alternative solutions, selecting the most beneficial approach, developing empathy, and applying critical thinking when engaging with a topic (Kegan, 1994). In short, similarly to parents, adolescents are not merely expected to adopt a series of specific behaviors that will satisfy the expectations of their social and family environment, but to undergo a qualitative change in the way they perceive their life and make meaning of it.

Nowadays, however, as is also the case with parents, teachers' expectations—especially of adolescents—focus on the adoption of a set of specific behaviors that meet the expectations of their social and family environment and also on a qualitative change in the way they come to know and make sense of their lives. Nevertheless, this change in the way they make meaning of their experiences requires developing essential social skills based on building relationships with significant others (parents, classmates, friends, teachers) (Goleman, 1995).

Another factor that affects teacher-student relationships is time. In the context of transformative lifelong education, it is important for teachers to manage their teaching time effectively, recognizing that time is irreversible and cannot be understood as linear (Alhadeff-Jones, 2019). Nowadays, education time is significantly sped up due to digital reality entering the classroom, without this meaning that more time is allocated to building meaningful relationships between teachers and students (Schmidt-Lauff, 2023).

In addition to teaching time, teachers are also required to give personal time to parents in order to build trust and promote effective cooperation. This is because, according to Bourdieu, students enter school possessing educational capital transmitted by their family environment, along with a certain ethos—'a system of indirect and deeply internalized values that contributes, among other things, to shaping a child's behavior toward both the educational capital and the school as an institution' (Bourdieu in Frangoudakis, 1985, p. 360). Also, as Dewey points out, there are children who come to school with traumatic experiences which make them vulnerable and passive, hindering any kind of participation in school life, and children who, due to previous experiences, exhibit arrogant, unruly and rebellious behavior. He emphasizes that 'the teacher must deal with these cases individually' and '... must trace the causes which feed these antisocial tendencies.' (Dewey, 1938/1980, pp. 42-43).

All the above help gain a fuller picture of the possible causes leading students to behave in a certain way and need to be taken into account by teachers in their attempt to build a more supportive educational environment for students. According to Rogers (1959, 1980), three conditions must be present in a climate that promotes growth and learning. These include the relationship between therapist and client, parent and child, teacher and student, leader and group, administrator and staff. The conditions apply, in fact, in any situation where personal growth is a goal. The more the counselor's, parent's, teacher's relationship with the other person is genuine—without any professional front or personal façade—, empathetic—by accurately sensing the other person's feelings

and personal meanings and communicating this understanding to the person —, and accepting of whatever the other person is experiencing at that moment, the more conducive it becomes to a climate of safety, thus becoming a facilitating force which brings about change. When people are accepted and prized, they tend to develop a more caring attitude toward themselves, because being heard empathetically makes it possible to listen more accurately to the flow of one's own inner experiences (Rogers, 1962, 1980).

Regarding the ongoing research, it is noted that the experiential workshops—grounded in the aforementioned theoretical frameworks—seek to facilitate participants' critical self-reflection regarding the specific factors that influence the relationship between teachers and students, and to confront any potential stereotypical judgments or deeply rooted perceptions they may hold concerning these factors.

2.3.   *Educational Techniques: Exploiting Dance*

Many educational techniques, especially art, can be used to develop critical thinking on how relationships between parents, children and teachers shape students' perceptions of and attitudes to education during their transition from childhood to pre-adolescence and adolescence. Exploiting art as a means of cultivating critical thinking and challenging deep-seated stereotypical beliefs has been pointed out by important scholars (Dewey, 1934/1980; Freire, 1978; Greene, 2000; Kokkos, 2021; Mezirow, 1990). In this case, classical dance pieces are exploited as a means of developing participants' critical thinking on the above issue.

In recent decades, dance has become an important field of research for many scholars, as body movement enables humans to shape their identity and develop a sense of self. Dance as an art form does not merely focus on perfecting a series of movements to create a specific choreography; it aims to capture aspects of human life, by reflecting different socio-cultural perceptions. It is an art form based on the immediacy of an experience which unfolds in the present but draws meaning from the past and the future (Tsouvala, 2007). The aesthetic objects created through dance express meanings and transmit values which are evaluated by the viewers. Dance is grounded in stimulating spectators' emotions, which arise as they recall personal lived experiences during the performance, making it an effective medium for fostering critical thinking (Tsouvala, 2008). In addition, dance can be used as an educational tool to promote communication, cooperation, creativity, but also moral skills, such as acceptance of diversity, as it is a way of expressing who we are and who we would like to be, without using specific vocabulary. In this way, the barriers of using different communication codes are overridden and a common language of communication which is based on the emergence of emotions is created between dancers and spectators (Shapiro, 1998, 2008). In this sense, dance can function as a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1991), causing those participating in a dance performance or its spectators to mainly use their emotions to confront emerging deep-seated beliefs about topics portrayed in the performance.

However, in Greece dance is not systematically used as an educational tool by the formal education system, so many students are not even familiar with watching dance performances (Kokkos et al., 2024). A relevant study by Panagiotopoulos and Vidali (2019) shows that the audience that attends dance performances has specific characteristics as to their social, family and educational capital, while, generally speaking, watching dance performances is not the most popular choice among viewers compared to films or theatrical plays. However, a study by Tsoukala and Magos (2016) conducted on female students of the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Thessaly in Greece highlights the power of dance as a means of activating university students' disorienting dilemmas, which speaks to the power of this art form.

Summarizing the above, dance is an art taking place in the present, in a specific space, in the "here and now", but it recalls memories, feelings, deep thoughts of the past and often provokes thoughts about the future.

3.   Rationale for the research and experiencial workshop

The impetus for conducting this research through hands-on workshops stemmed from the experience of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting from emergency measures imposed in

Greece and elsewhere. During online lessons, the authors observed that with the disruption of the usual place, time, and pace of the educational process, student behaviors at home—sometimes similar to their aggressive behaviors at school and sometimes not—became more prominent. The emerging concern was parents' difficulty in sharing family issues and cooperating with teachers to effectively deal with problematic behaviors in the child's best interest. This emphasized the need for a critical approach to the way in which student, parent and teacher relationships affect the qualitative change of students' thinking and behaving during their transition to higher stages of personality development. It was therefore deemed important to carry out experiential workshops, in which teachers and parents would participate, given that the space and time in which learning takes place in the school and family environment, together with the relationships built in it, contribute to the creation of specific beliefs which influence the way students' identity is shaped.

3.1. *Context description – Purpose of research – Research sample*

This paper presents the findings of ongoing research, which aims to investigate the role of relationships developed between teachers, parents and students, as a factor influencing students' transition to a higher stage of their personality development. More specifically, it aims to prompt critical thinking among participants through the use of hands-on workshops exploring classical dance pieces, of specific structure and methodology, and a focus on factors affecting these relationships, such as the place, time and pace of learning. It also seeks to highlight the effects of place and time on learning as it unfolds, as well as each individual's learning pace.

The article continues with the findings of experiential workshops attended by Greek teachers and parents, predominantly female, which took place online in November and December 2024. This is a case study with purposive sampling of participants coming from the researchers' professional and social network. This is the main limitation of the present research, as the results obtained cannot be generalized (Cohen et al., 1994). However, they will then form the basis for carrying out similar hands-on workshops for more groups which have already been informed via an open invitation by the researchers.

The workshops exploited a specific extract of a classical dance work. The theoretical framework underpinning the workshop is Mezirow's Theory of Transformation (Mezirow, 2022), Kegan's structural-developmental approach (Kegan, 1982, 1994) and Carl Rogers' person-centered theory (1959,1980). Mezirow and Kegan's views on the importance of meaning-making in daily life and decision making through independent thinking are particularly relevant (Sifakis & Kordia, 2020). Rogers' theory comes to add that 'individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behavior. These resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided.' (Rogers, 1980:115). Part of the 'Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience' method, more specifically stages 3 ('Constructing a Transformational Strategy – Formulating Critical Questions') and 5 ('Exploring the Artworks and Critical Questions') are used to explore the dance piece to prompt critical reflection and re-evaluation of participants' stereotypical assumptions through observation of artworks (Kokkos, 2021), as well as creative writing exercises, which contribute to the discovery of emotions, thoughts and fears, thus leading to an open way of thinking and perceiving, and sometimes even bringing about solutions to difficult situations. Writing allows a person time to reassess the situation, thus contributing to better interpersonal communication, as participants feel more confident and embedded in their opinions (Bolton, 2014).

3.2. *Research Questions*

Based on the general purpose and the specific objectives of the research, the following research questions were formulated:

'How does family and the relationships developing within it affect students' attitude towards education?'

'What are the qualitative characteristics underpinning a facilitative relationship by promoting development and learning of all parties involved?'

3.3.   *Carrying out the workshops – Presentation of activities*

The experiential workshops are entitled: 'Family, Education, Quality of Relationships: Intersecting, Conflicting, Parallel or Fellow-Travelling Paths?'. After the participants got to know each other, they exchanged views on their expectations from the workshop.

3.3.1.   *Activity 1: Recording personal thoughts*

Then, the group members were asked to record their thoughts individually and without sharing them with the group, on the question 'How does family and the relationships developing within it affect students' attitude towards education?'

3.3.2.   *Activity 2: Viewing and working with a ballet excerpt*

The fourth (4th) scene from the ballet 'Swan Lake' by British choreographer Matthew Bourne was then screened. The work was chosen both for aesthetic reasons and for its theme. Nature and the power of Tchaikovsky's music in the classical Swan Lake ballet (1877) inspired Matthew Bourne (1995) to replace the female dancers usually impersonating swans with male dancers (Britannica, n.d.). The plot unfolds in modern times, the protagonist being a young prince who finds himself trapped in his royal duties, but longs for freedom. The fourth (4th) scene: 'The prince's private quarters' takes place in the prince's personal space and talks about the hero's agonizing attempt to connect with his queen-mother; The duet is emotionally charged.

After watching the three (3)-minute-long scene, the participants shared emerging feelings, thoughts, and associations. Here are some of their answers:

'It was fascinating, unsettling...'

'I could sense the mother's worry and her difficulty in expressing and receiving emotion, the pressure the boy was under, the son's need for connection and how this need was not felt by the mother...'

'The mother didn't want her image to be compromised; she was constantly going to the mirror...'

To further work on the excerpt, the techniques of Artful Thinking: Step inside and Perceive, Know, Care about (Artful Thinking, 2025) were used: a) becoming closely acquainted with the heroes, b) creative writing: monologue (action, collaboration).

The scene was replayed, and the participants were divided into breakout rooms. They were asked to choose one of the two heroes and discuss how this particular hero feels, what he/she perceives to be happening, as well as: what kind of relationship the two heroes have, what expectations the mother has from her son, what the son's needs are concerning his mother.

The small groups then shared their views in the plenary.

Here are some of the participants' opinions: regarding the mother, it was argued that she feels confused, that she finds herself straitjacketed in this 'proper' relationship, that she has to meet both her own expectations and those of society. The relationship with her son is formal, without essence. She expects her son to accept the role prescribed for him.

Regarding the son, it was reported that he is under pressure, that he feels almost obliterated, that he cannot be heard, that he cannot connect with any person in his family, that he cannot breathe within this context. With his actions, he seems to be seeking acceptance, love, connection, recognition, genuine contact and communication.

Afterwards, the members of the group were asked to imagine themselves inside the ballet scene, to choose which person they would like to be and to write their monologue in the first person. After finishing, they were given time to read their piece individually and underline two or three sentences that they liked the most. The overwhelming majority wrote from the son's point of view, and only one wrote from the mother's point of view. They then split into groups in breakout rooms and collaborated on writing a common monologue or dialogue, including the underlined sentences in their piece.

3.3.3. Activity 3: Open discussion

After reading their texts, the members were invited to reflect on the question: "How do parents' expectations, values, opinions influence students' attitude towards school as an institution?", compared with their answers to the initial question: "How does family and the relationships developing within it affect students' attitude towards education?"

The discussion prompted thoughts, realizations, and reflections to arise, such as:

'[parental] relationships are very strong... Parents can act as a role model both positively as reinforcement or negatively as a deterrent in terms of how they themselves view education and teachers...'

Some participants shared their personal experiences: '... On a personal level, I realize that I was always rather mistaken in how I weighed things, I was more interested in who told me something, rather than what they told me... I think maturity came when I gained control over this.'

The last question posed to the group 'What are the qualitative characteristics underpinning a facilitative relationship by promoting development and learning of all parties involved?' received opinions such as:

'… Respect, understanding, acceptance of diversity, empathy, tolerance, they all play a role...'

The shared views were then linked to Mezirow's Theory of Transformation (Mezirow, 2022), Kegan's structural-developmental approach (Kegan, 1982, 1994) and the theoretical framework of Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Approach (1959,1980).

3.4.   *Feedback questionnaire*

After the end of the workshops, a feedback questionnaire was sent to the participants, which they were asked to complete in a period of about two weeks. The questionnaire was based on closed and open-ended questions. The closed questions concerned the time available, the pace of the experiential workshop and whether it met their expectations. For the open-ended question, they were asked to write whether working on the dance extract enabled them to reflect on parent-child relationships and how this was achieved.

They pointed out that they mostly enjoyed exchanging views in smaller groups, which helped enrich their view of the dance piece. They also enjoyed attempting to understand heroes' emotions through body language, interacting with each other and expressing emotions freely.

Regarding the pace of the workshop, participants responded positively, noting that the flow of activities was well structured. They particularly appreciated the incremental increase in difficulty—from the general atmosphere of the ballet piece, to exploring the characters, to immersing themselves by choosing a role, and finally, to the most challenging task of writing about their feelings in that role. Regarding the available time—3 hours—, almost all participants reported that they needed more time for further work, either to recall personal experiences both as teacher and parent, or to share emotions and reflect further.

Regarding the extent to which they reflected on parent-child relationships, all participants pointed out that they brought themselves to recall their personal experiences, rethink the relationship with their own parents and, on a rudimentary level, recognize instances of how their family still influences their life on a personal and professional level.

4.   Discussion – Conclusions

As mentioned above, the findings that emerged from the workshops cannot be generalized. However, they are the basis for carrying out subsequent workshops on a larger sample of teachers and parents, so that more general results can be extracted. The findings also prompt reflection on the role that relationships between teachers, parents, and children play in facilitating the transition of all parties to a higher level of consciousness, as well as on how these relationships are influenced by the time, place, and pace of learning.

The workshops highlighted the complexity of parent-child relationships and how their quality impacts children's education, prompting participants to reflect—through personal experience—on the interconnectedness of parent, child, and teacher relationships. At a first level, the participants seemed to approach critically and with some distance certain of their own established perceptions regarding their parental or educational role, on the basis of empathy, understanding, and acceptance of the needs

of the individuals with whom they relate on a personal or professional level. Through active participation in the workshop, there were signs that they tried to treat feelings and thoughts that were 'subject' in their order of consciousness as 'object' (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

The presentation of this scene from Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake played a significant role in fostering participants' critical reflection on the issue under study. The workshops clearly highlighted how the place, time, and pace of informal learning within the family affect a child's transition to a higher stage of awareness, their identity formation, and their attitude towards school as an institution. This highlights the importance of using dance as a tool to evoke emotions and prompt critical reflection among viewers (Kokkos, 2021; Shapiro, 2008• Tsoukala & Magos, 2016).

Parent-children relationships took center stage in the workshops, while those between teachers, parents and children were relatively less prominent. A key factor for that was that while the pace of the workshops' activities was good, there was not enough time to discuss in depth how family relationships affect children's attitudes towards school, or how, in addition to relationship building with students, teachers also build relationships with parents, which are, in their turn, affected by various factors. In addition, the dance piece did not offer significant insights into how relationships between parents, children, and teachers influence children's attitudes toward education—one of the most crucial aspects of their lives—which, in turn, directly or indirectly shapes the qualitative changes in their thinking as they transition from one developmental stage to the next (Kegan, 1994).This will be taken into account in future workshops, so that there is more time allotted.

To sum up, the goal today should be to achieve meaningful learning by appropriately combining the time, pace, and place of education—learning that goes beyond a purely cognitive approach and instead engages critical thinking, emotions, and the full range of human senses. It is no coincidence that great educators such as Pestalozzi and Jaques-Dalcroze created entire educational theories based on the above (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017). That is why this ongoing research uses dance pieces: dance is an inspiration-fueled, alternative language of communication, able to elicit empathy as well as emotional transcendence leading to self-awareness and a focus on the emotional quality of the human experience (Mezirow, 2000). The thoughtful study of dance works can serve as a means of 'learning through soul work,' which occurs at the intersection of the socio-emotional and intellectual realms, as noted by Dirkx (1997). In ending this article, we quote the words of great choreographer Pina Bausch, in an interview she gave in 2008 to a Greek journalist about the art of dance:

> *There are many things that are included in dance. Body, space, time, music, everything... All of these may be very different from each other, but they cannot be separated from each other. There is something more in dance. You dance with other people, and in some cases, you can't do anything without them." "Art may help defy time, to an extent. If we think about what lingers on and what the remnants of the past are, we will see that all that remains is art. (*Lalas, 2008).

Just as in dance, where intense movements of contraction are followed by movements of release, so too in children's transition toward higher stages of awareness and maturity, the building of meaningful relationships among parents, students, and teachers—relationships that foster the development of all parties and enable encounters beyond their prescribed roles as individuals—constitutes a decisive factor in critically addressing their emotions or acts of contraction and in the gradual liberation of children from dysfunctional learning environments.

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