



## Should knowledge of classical dance be essential for medical practitioners?

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### Abstract

The medical field is constantly throwing challenges, leading to considerable stress for its practitioners. Medical practitioners are expected to be professional, have up-to-date knowledge and expertise, and the ability to withstand fatigue. Through it all they are expected to remain motivated, respectful and humane, patient and kind, and confident and sensitive. The author demonstrates how learning dance can stimulate creativity, increase motivation and bolster social intelligence in medical practitioners.

**Key words:** Dance; Education, Medical; Humanities

Closely associated with the topic is the question: can learning dance stimulate creativity, increase motivation and bolster social intelligence in medical practitioners? Well let us see.

Stresses and strains, as well as constant interaction with people of all kinds, are part of life. In this process, favourable or unpleasant experiences colour our thoughts, character and behaviour. The medical field is one such that is constantly throwing challenges along the path of its practitioners.

Expectations of patients from medical practitioners are several and diverse. Professionalism, up-to-date knowledge, thoroughness, skills to tackle unforeseen

issues, circumstances requiring pragmatism and resourceful medical handling, ability to withstand fatigue because of long hours of work are natural expectations. Other key expectations include respectful and humane approach, patience and kindness, confidence, and a sensitive forthrightness. Tall order!

In a place like India, patients number in the thousands, and each has a medical problem/issue which is a life-death issue for him/her and the family, yet for the doctor it is just one of many. And this multitude has to be handled – rather waded through – within a few hours, thereby meaning that not more than few minutes can be allotted to a patient. These few minutes are utilized not only to conduct the medical examination, but

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also to explain the disease and treatment to the patient and the family.

More often than not, the patients' family and relatives are unfamiliar with medical terminologies and would like better understanding for which the harassed and time-pressed doctor does not have the time. This can understandably result in a situation where unfavourable impressions are created: a seemingly brusque, impatient, insensitive doctor unwilling to answer clarifications sought by the patients' relatives and on the other hand, for the doctor, a repetitive time-consuming questioning, argumentative, naive, not being able to understand and demanding patients' family.

The issue boils down to human conduct and behaviour, especially under stress. As Daisaku Ikeda, founder of Soka Gakkai, has said: "There are no greater treasures than the highest human qualities such as compassion, courage and hope. Not even tragic accident or disaster can destroy such treasures of the heart".[1] In this context, I have often wondered about the system of education in olden times where emphasis was also placed on the learning of performing arts as part of education. This is quite unlike the colonial system of education that is currently being practised in which performing arts are taken



Figure 1: The emphasis on performing arts as part of education is visible in Indian philosophy

as extracurricular activities. The emphasis on performing arts as part of education is also visible in Indian philosophy where our revered deities are attributed artistic qualities: Lord Shiva as Natraj, the Supreme dancer; Lord Krishna as Natwar Krishna performing the raas and a great flautist. Who can bypass Goddess Saraswati, Goddess of Learning holding a veena (figure 1)?

The reason is not too far to see. Recognizing the existence of positive and negative emotions, it was necessary to maintain equilibrium of mind and body so as to be able to deal with external challenges. The practice of performing arts toned the mind, body and the spirit brought about inner equilibrium and harmony. With inner harmony in place, harmony with surroundings followed automatically. The practice of performing arts helps in stimulating creativity, increasing motivation and bolstering social intelligence. Besides the well-know gains of physical well-being that comes due to good exercise that dance gives, it also contributes to effective body, mind and emotional coordination, leading to a healthy state of mind. No wonder it has been called the highest form of 'yoga'.

One of the most difficult tasks for a being is to recognize and accept one's areas of weaknesses. The practice of performing arts helps in recognizing areas of weaknesses and strengths. It therefore boosts the motivation to improve coordination and tone up ability of weak areas.

The pattern of performance in Hindustani classical music and in Kathak calls for improvisation ie 'upaj' ensuring a probing mind, willingness to learn and constant honing of skills. These attributes drive creativity and innovation. It also ensures quick reflexes and the ability to tackle unforeseen situations and challenges while also helping to develop artistic expression promoting personal expression of ideas, emotions and concepts. This outlet of expression that allows release of stress is necessary especially when surrounded by continuous pressures and strains.

Success in solving problems in the real world, not the virtual or symbolic world, gives most people their deepest joys and passions can be a source of motivation that spreads to a broad range of cognitive challenges. Dance is closely associated with music and therefore its practice helps in improved understanding of the complex spatial and temporal patterns of music which, in turn, leads to improved abilities in abstract spatial reasoning.

Music for dance, and music per se, has been known to help medical practitioners in the fields of cognitive functioning, emotional development, skills that help utilize body functions to proficiently perform goal-oriented task, facilitate interaction with others and therefore improve the quality of life, through music experiences involving free improvisation, singing, listening to, discussing and moving to music, to achieve treatment goals.[2]

Similar to the field of medicine, dance is teamwork and therefore the element of humility and the awareness is always present that each musician is as important as the dancer because together they make a whole.

Thus, all in all, dance closely associated with music, can be a therapy that places accent on the intellectual, emotional, and motor functions of the body and improves social skills as well as relational dynamics (figure 2). But all this can be possible only if the



Figure 2: Training in dance improves attention, cognition, and social and emotional intelligence

medical practitioner is himself aware and sensitive to performing arts. Being a good doctor not only entails medical skills and keeping abreast of developments for what is required is much more than academic and professional excellence. It is also about being aware of own limitations, and of having the right attitude, character, aptitude, commitment and demeanour and above all, a heart that is sensitive, compassionate and understanding! Perhaps the answer lies in revisiting the ancient system of education where emphasis was placed on the knowledge, practice and appreciation of performing arts.

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