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A Theoretical Approach to the Relationship between Art and Well-being

Anna MUNDET-BOLOS¹, Nuria FUENTES-PELAEZ², Crescencia PASTOR³

Abstract

The aim of this review was to explore, through a systematic search of the literature, the relationship between art and well-being and the key elements involved. A relevant conclusion drawn from our findings is that participation in an artistic activity encourages personal well-being because it permits a direct and sincere connection with the individual's emotions. Such a process implies a three-dimensional strengthening: social (I am in a relationship); emotional (I am well); and cognitive (positive thinking). Another conclusion is that whilst many of the studies are relatively recent, the positive relationship between art and well-being is well supported by the literature. Further research is required, however, to provide greater validity to our findings.

Keywords: well-being, artistic languages, social sciences, positive relationship, happiness.

Introduction

The last couple of decades have seen an increasing interest in the relationship between art and well-being (Faught, Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2011; Harrison & Narayan, 2003; Lindblad, Hogmark & Theorell, 2007; Starkey & Orme, 2001). Moreover, the literature from the perspective of humanistic psychology concurs in that personal well-being lies in fundamentally feeling good about oneself and experiencing happiness, as reflected in the following six dimensions (Cuadra & Florenzano, 2003; Ryff & Keyes, 1995): (1) Positive self-appreciation; (2) The capacity to manage the environment and one's own life in an affective way; (3) High quality personal relationships; (4) The

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belief that life has a purpose and significance; (5) Sentiments that grow and develop during one's lifetime; (6) The feeling of self-determination.

Experiencing one of these six situations results in a feeling of well-being and, as a consequence, the sensation of positive emotions (Bisquerra *et al.*, 2006). We can go one step further and, taking into consideration that well-being implies a personal and positive evaluation of one's own life, include a social dimension (I am in a relationship), an emotional and affective one (I am well), and a cognitive one (I think in a positive and optimistic way) (Cuadra & Florenzano, 2003; Diaz & Sanchez, 2002; Hernandez-Guanir, 2009).

What role does art play in the development of positive emotions? The facets of artistic languages applied to human development are diverse, yet all of them serve as means of personal expression. Piirto (2002) considered that a variety of categories (for instance, writing a poem or a song, painting, and sculpting) was beneficial because it led to the empowerment and expression of individuals so they felt better with themselves (Chambon, 2009). It can, therefore, be assumed that art and personal well-being are related; the former being an efficacious way of facilitating positive processes of feeling better (Chambon, 2009; Moreno, 2010; Vaquero, Mundet, Urrea, 2015) as it is an effective manner to express sentiments, sensations and experiences whilst providing an educational opportunity for personal development (Cyrulnik, 2009; Mundet, Beltran & Moreno, 2015). In this regard, art becomes a facilitator and not just a means to an end as it leads to individuals becoming producers of art as opposed to mere consumers (Chambon 2012; Moreno, 2010). As a consequence, more than the acquisition of artistic techniques and procedures, emphasis is placed on the personal development that artistic education gives rise to (Gardner, 1994; Eisner, 1995; Arnheim, 1993; Lowenfeld, 1961).

The relationship that has been established between art and well-being has not always been reflected in the literature, and there is as yet insufficient evidence on its benefits. Due to this, the objective of this article is to review the subject area corresponding to this void, and provide elements to construct a theoretical and methodological framework for future research in the social sciences.

Methodology

Our theoretical approach to the relationship between art and well-being included 21 references to publications which explore this issue. In first place, a systematic revision of the most important data bases in the field of social and human sciences (*ERIC, SCOPUS, Dialnet and Psycinfo*) was performed in order to identify any contributions linked to the relationship between artistic language and well-being.

Table 1. Results of the bibliographical exploration with respect to search engine and associated concept.

Search engine	Research concept	Results
ERIC	Art & Well-being	165
	& Social Sciences	11
Dialnet	Art	25,969
	& Well-being	66
	& Social Sciences	11
Psycinfo/ PscyNET	Art & Well-being	145
	& Resilience	14
SCOPUS	Art & Well-being	512
	& Social Sciences	11
	& Promotion of Well-being	7
Web of Science	Art & Well-being	276
	& Social Sciences	11

Twenty-one papers were included following homogenized relevance criteria: (1) Terminology employed: art and well-being, and social sciences; (2) Papers in community settings; (3) The performance of all kinds of artistic languages (music, drama, dance, and linguistics); (4) Interventions inside and outside the usual curriculum; (5) Papers reporting outcomes and exploring impacts relating to well-being as a result of interventions; (6) Published in English and Spanish; (7) All kinds of educative contexts with the exception of mental health; (8) Social sciences as a research domain.

In addition to the above-mentioned research criteria, there was some descriptive information of interest, for instance: (1) Year of publication: ranging from 1986 to 2012 with the majority of references published between 2000 and 2012 (89%); (2) Geographical context: both national and international (Spain 5, United Kingdom 6, United States 9, Canada 1, and China 1); (3) Research methodology: qualitative and quantitative methodologies were applied (58% and 42%, respectively); (4) Scientific validation: the publications included had been systematically validated and scientifically proven; (5) Publication type: all kinds of publications were accepted.

Results

As previously stated, our aim was to examine the way in which artistic languages improve general well-being in terms of social (I am in a relationship - *improved communication and autonomy*), emotional (I am well - *improved affection and emotional management*), and cognitive dimensions (positive thinking-*sense of life*) (American Art Therapy Association, 2009; Brown & Sax, 2013; Barragan & Brown, 2004; Canadian Art Therapy Association 2012; Marx, 2009a; Navarro 2006, 2009).

The social dimension takes into account the development and practice of skills which permit the individual to confront in a competent manner life, group, and communicative situations. It is the dimension concerned with performance (i.e. doing). The emotional dimension is related to all the aspects of life. It deals with the individual way of living and understanding life through emotional experiences (i.e. feeling). The cognitive dimension is related to the process of meta-cognition and reflection about the emotions we feel and experience. It is related to the process of deliberating and reflecting in order to pause and grow as a person (i.e. thinking) (Amoros *et al.* 2005, 2011; Brown and Sax, 2013; Mateos, 2011).

All three are considered fundamental for positive growth (Amoros & Ayerbe, 2000; Balsells & Alsinet, 2000; Balsells, Lea Belliveau, Wager and Beck, 2011; Tizio, 2003; Vaquero, Urrea, Mundet, 2013) and the construction of a strong personality, aspects that allow individuals to feel good with themselves and be happy.

Social Dimension (I am in a relationship)

We have verified that, despite being an innovative and controversial subject, the publications on the benefits of art in social development are scarce. Nevertheless, there are a few authors that have demonstrated a strong relationship between the use of artistic languages and a better social development. They have shown that the former situate the individual within a context of relating to others, that is to say, making social connections and creating networks arising from involvement in groups, classes, and community settings (Titus & Sinacore, 2013).

With respect to specific forms of artistic language, in a qualitative study with adolescents Mark (1986) examined how rock music enabled them to gain insight into their dependency on mood-altering substances. Selected drug-related songs with transcribed lyrics were recorded, and a chart illustrating addiction progression was used to demonstrate how the songs paralleled the different phases. Through the lyrics the adolescents increased their understanding of such issues as the search for relief, increased dependence, loss of control, and physical deterioration. Guided discussion provided alternative ways of coping with daily

pressure other than withdrawal from or aggression to society, two types of behavior frequently observed in young people. The study demonstrated that rock music promoted group interaction and communication and, consequently, personal well-being.

Douglas *et al.* (2000) carried out an evaluation of the Theatre in Education (TIE) project involving 19 young people of African and African-Caribbean descent in inner-city London. The objectives included the development of social skills (communication and relationship with the environment), performing arts skills, and opportunities to learn about relevant health topics. Contextual factors and stakeholder expectations encouraged the development of an innovative evaluation workshop method which culminated in performances at a local theatre. The authors' findings suggested that the intervention was largely successful, with participants reporting opportunities to learn about and discuss relevant health-related topics in terms of social skills. It was concluded that actively involving young people, addressing their concerns, and using activities that engage them in productive group work processes, can be usefully applied wherever the resources available.

Qualitative research with five- and six-year old children in 28 primary schools from a deprived area in England (Bristol) was performed by Orme *et al.* (2002). They employed *Hello, Craig*: a child protection drama project aimed at encouraging pupils to develop communication strategies in order to deal with appropriate and inappropriate touch in a variety of social settings. The project resulted in an increase in the children's knowledge and skills concerning this issue. The authors concluded that dramatic expression is an extremely effective vehicle to facilitate interpersonal communication, particularly when dealing with young people at social risk.

Podlozny (2000) carried out seven meta-analyses of 80 experimental studies to examine the impact of in-school drama instruction on at least one of seven identified measurements of verbal achievement: story understanding (oral and written), reading achievement, reading readiness, oral language development, vocabulary, and writing. A strong correlation between dramatic instruction and verbal communication abilities was observed.

In a Spanish context, Navarro (2007) examined how dramatic expression contributed to children's emotional education. The study highlighted the development of social intelligence and coexistence such as empathy, group work, and participation.

Civit *et al.* (2008) demonstrated that plastic activity is a form of knowledge that encourages the development of communicative strategies.

Table 2 is a summary of the main benefits derived from each artistic language within the context of a social environment. It is based on the results from our theoretical approach to the subject.

Table 2. Summary of the social benefits found in the literature

		Drama	Music	Plastics	Corporal
Social benefits	Relationship with the environment	Douglas, Warwick, Aggleton & Whitty, 2000		Civit & Colell, 2004	Molina, Pastor Violant, 2009
	Interpersonal communication	Douglas, Warwick, Aggleton & Whitty, 2000	Mark, 1986		
		Orme and Salmon, 2000	Civit & Colell, 2004		
		Podlozny, 2000			
	Social Interaction	Douglas, Warwick, Aggleton & Whitty, 2000			
			Mark, 1986		

As can be observed in *Table 2*, a number of researchers have studied how different artistic languages (dramatic, musical, plastic, and corporal expression) can encourage an individual’s social dimension by recognizing the importance of relationships with the environment, and providing the opportunity to improve communication and social interaction strategies. All these aspects favour the individual’s well-being because they provide tools to live in society in a positive manner.

Emotional Dimension (I am well)

It is well-known that there is more research linking emotional benefits to the use of artistic languages than social ones. Several studies have found a favourable relationship between the artistic process and welfare in terms of positive emotions such as joy, humor, calmness, and relaxation (Reynolds & Prior, 2003; Reynolds, 1997, 2000; Sinacore, 2013; Titus & Timmons & MacDonald, 2008).

Artistic experience involves creating an unreal space into which reality is introduced (Mato, 2006). Whilst this may be an attempt to project and represent part of daily life it always stems from the imagination, and the individual is conscious that whatever happens it will have no consequence on real life (Mallika, 2000). The first step to building these imagined spaces is the implication of personal feelings, imagination, and affection (Winston, 2000; Zillman, 1994). Once this space has been created and the experience lived, individuals will have a greater number of tools to feel better about themselves. In addition, the process of wellness will have been encouraged because it implies a deepened self-knowledge and increased communication with oneself (Bassols & Oliveras, 1993). Thus the artistic process has become a dimension in which, through imagination, we can contemplate life, express emotions, and imagine alternatives for the reality

around us. At the same time, it can be stated that producing art permits individuals to explore and express complex emotions related to their life experiences and to discover personal sources to manage life in a positive way (Collie, Bottorff & Long, 2006; Reynolds & Vivat, 2006; Reynolds, Vivat & Prior, 2008; Singh, 2011; Titus & Sinacore, 2013).

Although the context is imaginary, the emotions that introduced are real and provide recognizable clues as to how they can be managed and expressed (Cruz *et al.* 2013). Artistic expression can be considered as a stimulant to gain knowledge with respect to identity, and a proposal to encourage dialogue and communication through all the senses.

Catteral *et al.* (1999) performed a quantitative and longitudinal study exploring interactions between the arts and human development and, in consequence, well-being. For four years the authors worked with control and experimental groups composed of 25,000 high school American students. From data collected prior to the study, whilst it was being carried out, and at follow-up their research enabled them to demonstrate that young people in contact with performing arts improved their verbal expression, empathy, self-esteem, and tolerance. The first phase of the research examined the young people's general involvement in the arts and positive academic developments were observed. The second phase focused on the potential importance of sustained involvement in single disciplines, in this case, music and theatre. It was observed that students who reported consistently high levels of involvement in music also showed significantly good marks in mathematics. In addition, sustained involvement in theatre arts was associated with improvements in reading, self-concept, motivation, and greater levels of tolerance for others.

Salmon *et al.* (2012) performed a qualitative study with ten young people in care. Through the development of a musical exploring life in the care system the participants examined their experiences and involvement. The project was viewed as successful in a number of ways: involving young people who had not previously taken part in drama, developing skills, confidence and resilience, and improving feelings of social connectedness. Extending their research into participatory art approaches, the authors identified the factors that influence young people's ability to maintain involvement and the implications for the carers and professionals helping them. It was observed that those in contact with art could achieve a greater overall development of their facilities, with better mental health, and strengthened individual resilience due to the development of self-esteem and self-confidence, and improved intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, all of which contribute to enhanced well-being.

Keyes *et al.* (2000) performed a qualitative study employing rap music to enable the deconstruction and reconstruction of black female identity. Since the emergence of hip-hop in the early 1980s, African-American women's sexuality

and its correlation to their search for self-identity and self-control have been at the forefront of the discourse of this genre. Using a multidisciplinary theoretical framework (objectification theory, scripting theory, and Black feminist epistemologies), the authors explored the fashion aesthetics, imagery, and celebrity culture of two major African-American female hip-hop megastars, Nicki Minaj and Missy Elliott. They looked at the way in which the styles and professional choices that fashioned these women's careers in hip-hop media, and the extent to which they refuted, or submitted, to the distorted view of African-American female sexuality, had contributed to their objectification or empowerment. As an example, the authors cited a lyric from *Goodie Mob* that enhances well-being through perseverance, resistance, resilience, and spirituality (Tysson 2002).

"Lord, it's so hard, this life living in constant Struggle EACH and every day. Some wonder why I'd rather die, than ... continue this way".

Research on therapeutic writing indicates that it can offer a range of physical and psychological benefits; there is no consensus, however, on how these benefits are achieved. To address this question Kerner *et al.* (2007) have suggested that linguistic expression, with all its facets, can promote positive life changes. The authors propose a matrix framework with emotional-cognitive change processes (which can be activated) along its horizontal dimension, and an abstract-concrete structure (how the processes are activated) along its vertical one. On the horizontal dimension, writing can encourage individuals who are distanced from their emotional world to approach or to modulate emotional intensity, and to create meaning and coherence. Along the vertical dimension, these processes can be activated through tasks that vary in structure, including programmed writing, diaries, journals, autobiography, storytelling, and poetry. Finally, the authors considered constraints on writing that apply to particular groups. The matrix framework is meant to encourage clinicians to use therapeutic writing, and to assist researchers in framing questions, in order to advance knowledge of writing as a therapeutic practice. In this regard, it is understood that art permits individuals to approach their emotional worlds and learn how to modulate emotional experience.

Although the role of language and private speech in the development of behavioral self-regulation has been previously studied, relationships between behavioral self-regulation and children's experiences with other symbolic systems, such as music, have yet to be explored. Winsler *et al.* (2011) demonstrated that musical activities encourage self-control. Eighty-nine 3- and 4-year-old children (42 of whom had been enrolled in Kindermusik music and movement classes; and 47 demographically similar children who had not experienced structured early childhood music classes) were recruited. They completed a battery of laboratory self-regulation tasks and a selective attention task during which their private speech was reliably transcribed and categorized. Those currently enrolled in Kindermusik classes showed better self-regulation than those who were not ($d=0.41$). In addition, the former also used more relevant private speech during the

selective attention task ($d=0.57$), a verbal strategy that was positively related to performance. Children exposed to the music programme were also more likely to engage in the facilitative strategy of singing (humming) to themselves during a waiting period in which they had to inhibit their desire to examine a gift; and they were less likely to call out socially to the experimenter, a strategy negatively associated with performance and self-regulation. The authors consider that music is beneficial due to the fact that it allows individuals to employ strategies to move fast versus slowly or sing strongly versus softly, for example.

Ross (2000) investigated how dance as corporal language could affect self, self-esteem, and social development in teenagers at social risk. Sixty at-risk and incarcerated adolescents participated in jazz and hip-hop dance classes for ten weeks. College students with dance experience engaged in participant/observation research, that is to say, they observed, danced with, and interviewed the young people. The principal researcher gathered data weekly from three sources produced by student researchers: reflection journals, in-class discussions, and written syntheses building toward the students' final portrait. Based on these data, hypotheses were put forward as to why dance may be a medium particularly well suited to fostering positive self-perception for disenfranchised adolescents. It was also suggested that the compatibility of a dance programme (providing data to the prison administration on its effectiveness) and research (placing college dance students in a social/therapeutic context) is an effective tool for advancing the students' understanding about the use of dance and reflection about the research method used. The authors concluded that dance is an important tool to improve personal areas, especially tolerance, persistence, and confidence, allowing emotional growth and progress in the social environment.

Douglas *et al.* (2000) observed that their results also strengthened the individual's emotional sphere. The reason why supports their results is that the dramatic strategies used supposed, for many participants, a new and different opportunity of expression that allowed, at the same time, discovering new facets of the individual personality, exploring new ways to express.

Orme and Salmon (2002) show in their research that theatrical strategies help to improve personal development of these children, emphasizing the fact they build up a more resilient character and being more capable conscience to reject situations of abuse in negligent contexts. One of the research findings is the consideration of dramatic expression as a good tool to improve personal education not only in risky children but also in all kind of population.

Boehm *et al.* (2003) explored dramatic expression empowerment in groups at social risk. They studied the cases of six Israeli women in vulnerable situations who used community theatre as a strategy to promote their personal and social strength. The results confirmed that all the activated individual, group, and community processes contributed to the improvement of self-esteem, self-awareness,

self-control, and autonomy. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews in which the participants were asked about their experience and its impact on their daily life. Visual recording data were also employed to record their participation and involvement.

Reynolds (1997) performed a qualitative study on the written narratives of 35 women, aged 18 to 87 years, who had acquired a disability or chronic illness in adulthood. They shared needlecraft as a common leisure pursuit. The narratives explored the circumstances in which this hobby had been adopted and the personal benefits experienced. Most of them had taken up this activity in adulthood in order to cope with the crisis of illness. Needlework was commonly viewed as a means of managing pain, unstructured time, self-image, and reciprocal social roles. The women's accounts confirm the value of an artistic activity for patients learning to cope with chronic conditions.

Cruz *et al.* (2013) carried out quantitative research (pre/post-test) with the aim of confirming the effects of theatre on expression and the consequent recognition of emotions. The study was performed with 45 primary school children divided into two groups: experimental (n=23) and control (n=22). The intervention consisted of six one-hour sessions dedicated to the recognition and expression of emotions through dramatic exercises. The results obtained demonstrated that the programme significantly improved the students' capacity of recognition and expression.

All of the previously mentioned contributions, as shown in Table 3, demonstrate the role art plays in terms of emotional well-being with further evidence increasingly linking this issue (Daykin, 2007; Daykin *et al.* 2008; Joronen, Rankin & Astedt-Kurki, 2008). A number of authors have highlighted how artistic languages permit feelings, emotions, and interests to be expressed and generate a sense of flow, freedom, and spontaneity. In brief, artistic languages enable individuals to feel better with themselves by facilitating a connection with their personal world and, as a result, enhancing well-being (Boehm and Boehm, 2003; Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010; Kerner and Fitzpatrick, 2007; Orme & Ross, 2000; Salmon, 2002; Salmon and Rickaby, 2012; Titus & Sinacore, 2013; Winsl, Ducenne and Koury, 2011).

Table 3. Summary of the emotional benefits in the literature.

		Dramatic	Musical	Linguistic	Corporal
Emotional benefits	Self-esteem	Cruz, Caballero & Ruiz, 2013			Molina, Pastor Violant, 2009; Ross, 2000
		Catteral, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Douglas, Warwick, Aggleton & Whitty, 2000			
	Intrapersonal communication	Cruz, Caballero & Ruiz, 2013; Orme & Salmon, 2002	Salmon & Rickaby, 2012		Molina, Pastor Violant, 2009
	Empathy	Catteral, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999			Molina, Pastor Violant, 2009
	Self-confidence	Cruz, Caballero & Ruiz, 2013; Keyes, 2000			
	Relaxation				Molina, Pastor Violant, 2009; Reynolds, 1997
	Emotional expression	Cruz, Caballero & Ruiz, 2013; Douglas, Warwick, Aggleton & Whitty, 2000			Molina, Pastor Violant, 2009
	Emotional management	Boehm & Boehm, 2003, 2007		Kerner & Fitzpatrick, 2007	Molina, Pastor Violant, 2009 Ross, 2000
Self-confidence	Catteral, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999 Keyes, 2000	Winsl, Ducenne & Koory, 2011		Molina, Pastor Violant, 2009	

Cognitive dimension (positive thinking)

A review of the evidence that linked artistic languages and cognitive benefits was performed. It was observed that of the three dimensions this relationship had been the most studied, particularly with respect to the benefits on such cognitive processes as critical thinking and complex mathematics.

Burton *et al.* (2000) identified a relationship between the use of artistic languages and creative thinking, self-awareness, and educational climate. They reported that schools which employed artistic languages had more innovative teachers. Such findings have been confirmed by Moga *et al.* (2000) who examined whether studying the arts led to enhanced creative thinking skills. The authors conducted a comprehensive search of empirical studies that assessed the study of visual art (alone or in combination with other arts) and performance on some measures of creative, critical and higher order-thinking. They concluded that there was a good correlation between studying art and the development of creative thinking.

Minton *et al.* (2000) carried out a study that later became a model for quantitative analysis in this field. For one semester, 286 students (mean age 15 years) enrolled in dance and non-dance courses were evaluated. Both groups of experimental and control subjects were pre- and post-tested on the three Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT). The TTCT are norm-referenced for five factors: originality, abstractness of titles, fluency, elaboration, and resistance to premature closure. The study findings indicated that dance was a valid path for students to develop skills in creative thinking, especially in the categories of originality and abstraction.

An experimental study to determine the relationship between the structured early childhood music curriculum, *Kindermusik*, and cognitive development was performed by Bilhartz *et al.* (2000). Seventy-one children, aged 4-6 years, from Head Start programmes and private pre-schools in Texas were given pre- and post-tests using the *Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale*, fourth edition (SB), and the Young Child Music Skills Assessment (MSA). Approximately one half of the sample participated in a 30-week, 75-minute weekly, parent-involved, music curriculum. The statistical analysis showed significant gains on the MSA and on the SB Bead Memory subtest for participants receiving music instruction. The treatment group also produced higher scores on other SB measurements. The study suggests a correlation between early music instruction and spatial-temporal reasoning abilities.

Horn (1992) conducted a study with 29 inner-city high school drama students from New York. Data were gathered from pre-post test interviews with students (recorded), written statements, student and teacher logs, and tape recordings of student discussions and rehearsals. In addition, pertinent information was obtained from the students' permanent records and report cards (including attendance and reading scores), counsellor records, audience reactions to the production, and feedback from other teachers and the principal. The authors highlighted that not only could dramatic expression enhance the students' commitment to acquiring critical thinking skills, but also the whole process of learning. In addition, Civit *et al.* (2008) demonstrated that plastic expression enabled individuals to broaden the way they understood life and helped them interpret their reality.

Table 4. Summary of the cognitive benefits in the literature

Cognitive Benefits		Dramatic	Musical	Linguistic	Plastic	Corporal
	Flexibility				Civit & Colell, 2004;	
	Creativity thinking		Moga, Burger Winner & Hetland, 2000		Civit & Colell, 2004	Minton (2000)
		Burton, Horowitz and Abeles (2000)				
	Imagination	Alvarez, 2003			Civit i Colell, 2004	
Critical thinking & reasoning abilities	Horn (1992)	Billhartz, Bruhn & Olson, 2000		Civit & Colell, 2004		

It can, therefore, be seen that individuals are able to enhance their well-being through artistic languages due to the fact that they provide tools to construct positive, open, creative, critical, and flexible thinking. All of which results in the sensation of happiness and of feeling good about oneself because it is possible to confront reality in a more assertive manner.

Discussion

The aim of this paper has been to explore the intersection between artistic languages and personal well-being. Our research has led to two interrogatives, the first of which is how active participation in the arts can result in personal well-being. In this regard, we have been able to show that artistic languages signify a means of expression and communication which encourages the acquisition of sensitivity. Art provides the opportunity to create beauty and, to some extent, recuperate the essence of being a human being (Guerrero, 2005) because it connects with the individual’s emotions (Vaquero, Mundet, Urrea, 2015). The second is related to the manner in which the relationship between art and well-being develops in three dimensions: the social (I am in a relationship), the emotional (I am well), and the cognitive (positive thinking). In turn, the three dimensions encourage the six aspects in which well-being lies as initially stated in the introduction. It was observed that the social dimension enhanced the ability to manage life and the environment in an affective manner; the emotional dimension encouraged positive self-appreciation, including self-determination and the quality of personal bonds; and finally, the cognitive one strengthened the belief that the individual’s life had meaning and significance whilst promoting the concept of self-development and growth. Artistic expression permits the expression of the

different languages that accompany individuals and help them in the search for a sense of belonging and purpose.

With respect to some conclusions that may be drawn from this article, it can be stated that, in terms of social benefit, it was observed that art helps improve the individual's relationships with the environment, interpersonal and group communication, and, as a result, social interactions. Such findings concur with the studies performed to date and lead to the concept that artistic strategies serve to improve inter- and intrapersonal, verbal and non-verbal communication, group cohesion, tolerance towards others, and the development of social skills (American Art Therapy Association, 2009; Canadian Art Therapy Association, 2012; Titus, Sinacore, 2013). Another conclusion of interest is that dramatic expression appears to be the artistic language most commonly employed to work with the social dimension and provides benefits particularly in the area of interpersonal communication.

In terms of emotional benefits, it has been shown that artistic strategies help to improve self-esteem, communication with one's self, empathy towards others, self-confidence, expression of emotions and their consequent regulation, and security in oneself. These results are in agreement with other authors who affirm that art is positively related with the development of self-esteem, self (emotional)-control, confidence, empathy, emotional control, autonomy, and self-awareness (Reynolds & Prior, 2003; Reynolds, 1997, 2000; Timmons & MacDonald, 2008;). In order to strengthen these emotional aspects it can be seen that, with the exception of plastic expression, dramatic, musical, linguistic, and corporal expression are all employed in a fairly similar manner. Amongst all the benefited variables it was found that one most enhanced by artistic processes was self-confidence.

In terms of cognitive benefits, our findings indicate that art helps improve the capacity for emotional flexibility and imagination, and creative, critical and reasoned thinking. Amongst the artistic languages employed to enhance cognitive processes, it was been found that plastic expression was the most beneficial and commonly used to strengthen cognitive processes, in particular, creative thinking.

In summary, artistic processes have positive effects on health as they encourage individuals' well-being, contributing to the processes of socialization, management of emotions and positive thinking related to communication, self-esteem, self-knowledge, and the capacity of expression (Del Rio, 2009; Mundet, Beltran & Moreno, 2015; Navajas y Rigo, 2008).

Our second objective was to review in the literature the connection between participation in the arts and well-being, and identify some key elements. One of these was that, up to the present, the most commonly employed study designs to investigate the relationship between art and well-being are qualitative: that is to say, they analyse experiences, carry out interviews, observations, and the like.

The pre-post test method serves to demonstrate whether there have been changes over time and that artistic methodologies are favourable strategies to encourage well-being.

We would like to draw attention to the fact that, until recently, there has been limited research into the relationship between art and well-being, partly due to the difficulty in evaluating and developing validation strategies (Westrhenen & Fritz, 2014). Nevertheless, there is a growing interest in this field and a number of authors, based on the premise that individuals in contact with arts in general have greater possibilities to feel happier about themselves in terms of social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Daykin *et al.* 2008; Lloyd & Lyth, 2003; Tyson, 2002), have carried out studies and published papers on this issue (Knowles & Cole, 2008).

Conclusion

We would like to conclude by summarizing the two main contributions of this theoretical approach to the relationship between art and well-being which should permit the strengthening of a theoretical framework from which one of reference can be constructed. Such a relationship provides the possibility for change despite the obstacles, limits, and difficulties that may occur. Within this context, individuals are seen as active subjects responsible for their own aesthetic experiences; they are capable of analysis, of listening to others, and explaining the present, past, and possible future. Emotional bonds can be forged with others and, through a symbolic and unique capacity, dialogue can take place with the metaphor of the world (Collie, Bottorff & Long, 2006; Reynolds, Vivat & Prior, 2008; Singh, 2011). Indeed, artistic processes facilitate other channels of feelings and emotions beyond the mere word (Carnacea & Lozano, 2011; Laferriere, 1999).

The second conclusion, having analysed the literature, is that art serves as a tool to promote emotional well-being. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that more research is required to endorse the results presented in this review (Westrhenen & Fritz, 2014).

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