

uniwell

Physical and Mental Awareness for University Students



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Editors

Tan Temel, YTU, Türkiye
Tuba Ugras, YTU, Türkiye
Yıldız Erdoğanoğlu, ABU, Türkiye
Paula Lebre, U Lisbon, Portugal
Dominique Persona Adorno, UNIPA, Italy

Authors

Sernaz Demirel, YTU, Türkiye
Yıldız Erdoğanoğlu, ABU, Türkiye
Sinem Asena Sel, ABU, Türkiye
Paula Lebre, U Lisbon, Portugal
Elisabete Monteiro, U Lisbon, Portugal
Tuba Ugras, YTU, Türkiye

Graphic Design

Ezgican Akgün, Eu&Pro, Czechia
Cevat Ucuncuoglu, Eu&Pro, Czechia

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Project Coordinator

Yıldız Technical University, YTU
Türkiye



Project Partners

Antalya Bilim University, ABU
Türkiye



University of Lisbon, U Lisbon
Portugal



University of Palermo, UNIPA
Italy



Coachmotion
Türkiye



Eu&Pro
Czechia



Technovias
Estonia





Physical and Mental Awareness for University Students

The project aims to enhance the mental wellness of university students by fostering cross-border collaboration and promoting holistic educational methodologies. Recognizing the unique stressors faced by today's students, we're committed to crafting resources that address emotional, psychological, and social well-being. By integrating traditional and digital tools, we seek to provide supportive environments, resources, and practices, empowering students to thrive academically and personally.

We anticipate the project to yield a comprehensive app packed with resources on mental wellness tailored for university students. The interactive content, from videos to e-books and podcasts, will foster improved mental health awareness and practices. As a result, students will gain enhanced coping strategies, resilience, and emotional intelligence.

Preface

Welcome to the UniWell E-Book, a resource developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ KA220-HED project UNIWELL: Physical and Mental Awareness for University Students, designed to support university students in navigating the challenges of academic life in the digital age. Higher education today offers incredible opportunities for learning, growth, and connection, yet it also presents new forms of stress and pressure. The increasing digitization of education and social life has transformed how we study, communicate, and develop our personal and social identities. While these changes create exciting possibilities, they also bring specific challenges: cognitive overload, digital fatigue, sedentary routines, social comparison, and the blurring of boundaries between academic responsibilities and personal life.

The UniWell E-Book has been created with these challenges in mind. Its purpose is not only to inform but also to provide practical, evidence-based tools and strategies that can help you maintain your physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Each chapter has been carefully designed to guide you through actionable steps, reflection prompts, and exercises that you can immediately apply to your daily life. The resource takes a holistic approach, combining textual explanations, visual summaries, infographics, multimedia content, and self-reflective activities, ensuring that students,

with diverse learning preferences can engage meaningfully with the material.

The UniWell E-Book is organized to provide both structured learning pathways and flexible consultation options. You can read it sequentially or focus on specific modules according to your needs. Its main goals include:

1. Supporting Physical and Mental Well-Being
2. The chapters provide actionable insights to strengthen resilience, regulate emotions, and maintain healthy routines. Students will find guidance on managing stress, balancing screen time, fostering mindful technology use, and integrating physical activity into their daily lives.
3. Providing Coping Strategies for the Digital Age
4. Each chapter combines theory with practice, offering practical roadmaps for stress management, relaxation techniques, and strategies to prevent burnout. Whether you are looking for quick exercises to reset during a busy study day or more in-depth approaches to understanding your personal well-being, the e-book provides resources for all levels.
5. Serving as a Resource for Universities and Support Services
6. Beyond personal use, the e-book has been designed as a ready-to-use educational tool for university staff. Modules can be integrated into curricular activities, student support services, counseling programs, or digital self-help platforms, ensuring that its impact extends across institutional strategies for student well-being.

How This E-Book Can Support You

A Holistic and Engaging Learning Experience

The E-book's multimodal approach combines clear textual explanations with infographics, visual syntheses, multimedia content, and reflective exercises. This design ensures that students of different learning styles can interact with the material in a meaningful way. Importantly, the E-Book encourages active participation and self-reflection, helping students translate knowledge into actionable daily practices.

Advanced chapters (Chapters 10-12) are included for those who wish to deepen their understanding beyond foundational strategies. These sections offer more detailed scientific explanations and embodied approaches, providing enrichment for students and institutions that integrate the e-book into elective or extended modules. At the same time, the core content remains accessible and immediately applicable, ensuring that all students can benefit regardless of their prior experience with stress-management or wellness strategies.

A distinguishing feature of this E-Book is the rigorous expert evaluation that underpins its content. A dedicated Expert Review Board, composed of highly qualified academics and practitioners, has assessed the quality, relevance, and scientific grounding of all materials. Through their detailed qualitative feedback, iterative reviews, and guidance, the E-Book has been refined to ensure that it is both scientifically robust and pedagogically accessible. The result is a resource that is not only scientifically grounded but also engaging, actionable, and adaptable to diverse student needs. By bridging research and practice, the UniWell E-Book supports students in developing sustainable habits for well-being, resilience, and success in an increasingly digital academic environment. Students can be confident that the strategies and practices presented are research-informed, effective, and relevant to contemporary academic life.

Expertise Review Board

Name	Expertise	Country
Dr. Sonia Sicilia	<i>Student Support and Inclusion Expert, Functional Psychologist</i>	Italy
Dr. Calin Rus	<i>PhD in Social Psychology and Senior Expert for the Council of Europe at the Intercultural Institute of Timișoara</i>	Romania
Dr. Maria Kyriakidou	<i>Chair of the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences at ACT, American College of Thessaloniki</i>	Greece
Prof. Dr. Dominique Persano Adorno	<i>Associate Professor of Applied Physics at the University of Palermo and expert in Educational Innovation, Student-Centred Learning, and Higher Education Transformation</i>	Italy

Closing Remarks

We hope that you will use this E-Book as a trusted companion on your university journey—a guide to understanding and managing the unique challenges of contemporary student life. By exploring its chapters, engaging with its exercises, and reflecting on your own experiences, you will gain tools and strategies that can positively impact your health, learning, and personal growth. The UniWell Comprehensive E-Book represents a unique synthesis of scientific rigor, pedagogical innovation, and practical applicability, and it stands as a testament to what collaborative European projects can achieve in supporting student well-being. Welcome, explore, and take the first steps toward a more balanced, resilient, and empowered university experience.

The Editors

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CHAPTER 10

Authentic Movement within Body, Space, Time, and Energy Awareness

Sernaz Demirel



Abstract

This chapter examines the integration of authentic movement with body, space, time, and energy awareness within movement-based educational practices drawing on contemporary dance and somatic approaches. The text serves as a guide for students to deepen their understanding before and after practice. The initial sections define authentic movement, outline its historical roots, and discuss its educational contributions, while space, time, and energy dynamics are presented under separate headings. Drawing on Laban's movement analysis and effort factors, the work illustrates the quality and expressive possibilities of movement. In addition, under the section titled "Practical Part," a step-by-step exercise is provided for students to practice independently. This exercise aims to integrate inner impulses with spatial, temporal, and energetic elements. This chapter aims to support students in developing creative expression and embodied awareness.

Focused Problems

- Limited body awareness
- Difficulty in understanding what authentic movement means
- Lack of skills to develop a personal movement language, creativity, self-confidence, and expressive power
- Limited experience in perceiving the relationship between the body and space
- Challenges in sensing time as a bodily experience
- Struggles in connecting the central guiding questions

1. Introduction

Dance is not merely composed of specific techniques or prearranged steps; it is also a way of knowing, sensing, and expressing. Within contemporary dance and somatic practices, the concept of authentic movement has therefore become increasingly significant. Authentic movement does not simply mean seeking originality, but rather attunement: carefully listening to the body, recognizing inner impulses, and allowing them to take shape in space and time. This approach aims not only to develop physical skills but also to enhance sensory, emotional, and creative capacities.

From a movement-based educational perspective, authentic movement supports students in developing their own movement language.

Working with movements that arise from personal experience strengthens expressive power, builds confidence, and nourishes creativity. In this process, space, time, and energy emerge as fundamental parameters.

“Dance is not merely composed of specific techniques or prearranged steps; it is also a way of knowing, sensing, and expressing.”

The use of space allows the body to relate to the environment;; time organizes rhythm and flow of movements; and energy diversifies the quality and expressiveness of their physical actions.

This section will address two central questions:

- What is authentic movement?
- How are space, time, and energy utilized in dance practices?

2. Theoretical Framework

Part I – What is Authentic Movement?

The concept of authentic movement emerged as a core value with the birth of modern dance. Isadora Duncan’s approach, inspired by nature and inner impulses [1], Mary Wigman emphasized that dance must arise from the expression of the individual’s inner spirit and emotional necessity [2], and Rudolf Laban’s explorations of improvisation to discover a personal movement language [3], all brought forward a search for expression that was distant from codified forms and rooted in individuality and spontaneity. During this period, authenticity became a central notion in both the artistic and pedagogical dimensions of dance.

Building upon this historical background, American dancer and therapist Mary Starks Whitehouse developed the method of Authentic Movement, drawing on C. G. Jung’s concept of active imagination. Whitehouse systematized the practice of moving with eyes closed in response to inner impulses, observed and reflected by a “witness.” Through this approach, authentic movement evolved into a creative exploration that supports deeper self-awareness and embodied insight [4,5].

From the 1960s onward, postmodern dance and improvisation-based approaches enriched the idea of authentic movement with new dimensions.

The Judson Dance Theater artists' inclusion of everyday movements in dance [6], Yvonne Rainer's embrace of minimalism and ordinariness [7], and Steve Paxton's Contact Improvisation, which emphasized the authenticity arising from the interaction of two bodies [8], all demonstrated that authentic movement could be understood not only as an inner, individual experience but also as a social, relational, and spontaneous creative process. Thus, authentic movement has persisted across a broad historical context, spanning from the aesthetic foundations of modern dance to somatic therapeutic methods and improvisation-based creative practices.

Within this perspective, while Authentic Movement continues to exist as a defined method, the concept of authenticity in movement has taken on meaning within different approaches in dance and movement practices. In this way, "authentic movement" can be understood both as a specific, structured method and as a broader conceptual framework.



Figure 10.1. Authentic Movement Beyond Technique: The Iceberg Form Evokes Natural Power, Depth, and Individuality (AI-generated image)

Authentic movement can be understood as a practice that emerges from inner impulses rather than external form, emphasizing listening, awareness, and integration (Figure 10.1).

Its core principles and educational value can be summarized as follows:

Core Principles

- Inner Listening – the body leads, the mind follows.
- Non-Judgment – movements are accepted as they are.
- Witnessing – presence of self or others supports deeper reflection.
- Integration – authentic movement bridges body, mind, and emotion.

Educational Value

In movement-based learning environments, authentic movement supports the development of:

- Body awareness – perceiving subtle shifts in tone, balance, and breath.
- Creativity – movements become discoveries rather than reproductions.
- Confidence – trust in impulses builds expressive autonomy.
- Reflective practice – journaling and discussion integrate embodied knowledge.

Part II – Spatial Awareness in Movement

In movement practices, “space” can be understood as the invisible field in which movement unfolds. The body gains meaning not only within its own boundaries but also through its relationship with the surrounding environment.

“Authentic movement does not simply mean seeking originality, but rather attunement: carefully listening to the body.”

As Rudolf Laban emphasized, every action is spatially oriented, and this orientation defines the expression of movement [3].

Exploring different spatial levels (low, middle, high) and directions (forward, backward, sideways, diagonal) helps learners develop not only physical coordination but also environmental awareness.

This relationship with space enriches the dynamic structure of dance, directly shaping the quality, aesthetics, and emotional impact of movement (Figure 10.2). In this sense, space should not be viewed as a passive background but as an active partner in the creative process [3,9,10].



Figure 10.2. Spatial Awareness and Body-Environment Relationship
(AI-generated image)

Spatial Awareness

Spatial awareness involves perceiving the body in relation to:

- Self – proprioception, body parts in relation to each other.
- Environment – floor, walls, objects, props, etc.
- Others – proximity, direction, and group formations.

Spatial Shaping and Pathways

- Levels – high, middle, low.
- Directions – forward, backward, sideways, diagonal.
- Pathways – straight, curved, spiral.
- Formations – solo, duet, ensemble patterns.

Creative Exploration

Using props expands imagination. Group tasks foster collective awareness, cooperation, and creativity.

Part III – Time in Movement

In movement, “time” shapes rhythm, structure, and emotional contour. Time is not only measured through external beats but is also experienced through the body’s own tempo, the flow of breath, and the natural continuity of movement. Students’ engagement with fast, slow, or variable tempos, and with different rhythmic structures, enriches the emotional tone of their movement. This relationship with time allows them to discover an inner rhythm not only when accompanied by music but also in silence. Thus, time ceases to be an abstract measure shaping dance; instead, it becomes the carrier of bodily experience, emotional intensity, and expressive diversity [3,11,12].

Dimensions of Time

- Duration – short, sustained, extended.
- Tempo – fast, slow, variable.
- Rhythm – regular, irregular, syncopated.
- Phrasing – grouping and sequencing of movements.

“Space should not be viewed as a passive background but as an active partner in the creative process.”

Experiencing Time

Breath awareness is central: inhalation often expands and rises, exhalation grounds and releases. Improvisation with or without music allows students to explore how time influences expression.

Part IV – Energy and Qualities of Movement

“Energy” is the invisible force that shapes the quality and expressiveness of movement, giving the body emotional depth and dynamic character. Rudolf Laban conceptualized energy through four Effort factors: Weight (strong or light), Time (sudden or sustained), Space (direct or indirect), and Flow (bound or free) [3]. These factors are not independent but constantly interact, creating a rich palette of possibilities for movement expression.

For example, shifting between strong and light weight, or moving from bound to free flow, offers individuals the opportunity to experience contrasts that expand their expressive range [9]. In practice, strategies such as tasks comparing heavy and floating qualities, designing transitions from bound to free, or improvisations that require rapid directional changes help participants internalize these principles [13]. Through such explorations, individuals not only develop technical versatility but also gain an embodied awareness of how energy shapes meaning in movement [12].



Figure 10.3. Elements of Dance (AI-generated image)

Laban described this through Effort factors (Figure 10.3):

- Weight – strong/light
- Time – sudden/sustained
- Space – direct/indirect
- Flow – bound/free

Pedagogical Strategies

- Contrasting tasks – heavy vs. floating.
- Transitions – bound to free.
- Improvisations – agility through rapid directional changes.

3. Practical Framework

Part V – Integrating Authentic Movement with Space, Time, and Energy

Authentic movement is not limited to the expression of inner impulses alone. When combined with awareness of space, time, and energy, it transforms into a deeper and multidimensional experience (Figure 10.4). This integration enables students to merge bodily intuition with spatial awareness, rhythmic structures, and dynamic diversity.

Body + Space: Inner impulses take form across different directions, levels, and pathways. This process reveals that space is not merely a backdrop but an active partner in creative movement [3,9].

“Time ceases to be an abstract measure shaping dance; instead, it becomes the carrier of bodily experience, emotional intensity, and expressive diversity.”

Body + Time: Movements unfold slowly and then accelerate or shift rhythmically, enhancing their dramatic power [3]. The connection with breath highlights the inner dimension of time [11]. In other words, time is not only tempo or rhythm; it is something felt in the body.

Body + Energy: Through contrasting qualities (strong/light, bound/free, sudden/sustained), emotions and thoughts are embodied. These energetic contrasts expand expressive range [3,12]..In other words, as the quality of movement changes, so does the emotion and meaning it conveys.

Practical Part – Applied Exercise

This section helps students embody the concepts through self-practice (Figure 10.5). It is recommended to keep a journal or voice recording of observations.



Figure 10.4 Laban's Spatial Pathways and Planes (AI-generated image)



Figure 10.5. Energy Qualities (AI-generated image)

Exercise: From Inner Impulse to External Dynamic

Preparation

- Choose a quiet space.
- Wear comfortable clothes.
- Ensure free movement area.

Step 1: Body Listening (2–3 min)

- Close eyes, notice breath, muscle tone.
- Wait for the first small impulse (finger move, head tilt).

Step 2: Dialogue with Space (3–4 min)

- Expand movement to other body parts.
- Explore directions: forward, back, side, diagonal.
- Change levels: low, middle, high.

Step 3: Exploring Time (3–4 min)

- Perform slowly, then fast.
- Repeat with regular rhythm, then disrupt.

Step 4: Energy Qualities (5 min)

- Try strong vs. light.
- Shift from bound to free flow.
- Start/stop suddenly.

Step 5: Creative Integration (5 min)

- Combine inner impulses with space, time, energy.
- Optionally use music.
- Avoid striving for 'beauty'; just explore.

Closure & Reflection (2–3 min)

- Return to breath.
- Note: What impulses arose? What challenges? How did integration feel?

How to Integrate into Daily Life?

- Take a few deep breaths when you wake up in the morning and gently stretch your body.
- Notice the rhythm of your steps while walking, try changing your pace and explore different tempos.
- Observe your posture while sitting at a desk and make small adjustments.
- Take short breaks during the day, close your eyes, listen to an inner movement impulse, and follow it.
- When you are in a space, look around and sense its height, directions, and the empty spaces around you.
- Use your energy in different ways, for example perform one task with strength and another with softness.
- Focus on your breath in a quiet moment and align your movements with it.
- At the end of the day, do a few minutes of free movement improvisation and note how you feel afterward.

Conclusion

Authentic movement is an approach that deepens self-awareness, nurtures creativity, and enhances expressive capacity. When the body listens to its inner impulses and this process is integrated with awareness of space, time, and energy, dance becomes a multidimensional experience. Space reveals the body's relationship with its environment; time organizes the flow of movement through rhythm, tempo, and phrasing; and energy diversifies expression through contrasting qualities. Thus, authentic movement emerges as a holistic practice that supports both learning and sustainable artistic creativity within dance pedagogy.

"Energy is the invisible force that shapes the quality and expressiveness of movement, giving the body emotional depth and dynamic character."

For more information, visit the UniWell website.

<https://uniwellproject.com>

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Recommended Resources

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Glossary

- **Authentic Movement:** A practice emerging from inner impulses rather than external form; it privileges listening, awareness, and integration over mere originality.
- **Attunement:** The stance of carefully listening to the body, recognizing inner impulses, and allowing them to take shape in space and time.
- **Witness / Witnessing:** An observing presence (self or other) that supports deeper reflection within the movement process.
- **Personal Movement Language:** A learner's own vocabulary of movement arising from personal experience, strengthening expressive power, confidence, and creativity.
- **Spatial Awareness:** Perceiving the body in relation to self (proprioception), environment (floor, walls, objects), and others (proximity, formations). Includes levels (high/middle/low), directions (forward/back/side/diagonal), and pathways (straight/curved/spiral).
- **Energy / Effort Qualities (Laban):** The dynamic character of movement across four Effort factors: Weight (strong/light), Time (sudden/sustained), Space (direct/indirect), Flow (bound/free). These interact to create expressive nuances.
- **Movement Quality:** The “invisible force” shaping expressiveness and emotional depth; how energy qualities are combined determines the felt meaning of movement.

Project Coordinator

Yıldız Technical University, YTU
Türkiye



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