



Rights Moves

An Exercise Set for Transformative Human Rights Education

About the “Performing Empowerment” Project

The “Performing Empowerment” project (2016-2018) was run by VisAbility (a non-profit, German-Sri Lankan association), the Centre for Dance Research (Coventry University, UK), and Dundee Law School (University of Dundee, UK). Funding was generously provided by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council (through a PaCCS/GCRF grant) and the German Federal Foreign Office.

Credits

Concept: Lars Waldorf, Hetty Blades, and VisAbility

Text: Lars Waldorf with Vipavinee Artpradid and Hetty Blades

Tamil translation: Raveendran Sivatharsini

Sinhala translation: Gayathri Gamage

Design: Vina Puspita

Photos: Sebastian Potthof

Coordination: Vipavinee Artpradid

Helpful advice and encouragement along the way:

Tiffany Fairey, Nilanjana Premaratna, Dinesha Samararatne, Mahesh E. Umagiliya, and Nirmi Vitarana

Earlier versions of this Exercise Set were initially tried out in workshops run by VisAbility (with Hetty Blades and Lars Waldorf) in August 2018. Those workshops were held at Miani Technical Institute (Batticaloa), Nuffield School for the Deaf and Blind (Jaffna), and the Meranga Fine Arts Ensemble Studio (Wattala).

Get in touch!

Please let us know how you use the cards so we can share good practices with other users – and so we can revise this exercise set to be more responsive to your local needs. Our email is: rightsmoves@gmail.com

Rights Moves: An Exercise Set for Transformative Human Rights Education

1) Overview

This exercise set aims to spur creative discussions between rights advocates and dance practitioners about how they might link rights awareness and dance to help empower people in their communities.

This booklet presents generalisable suggestions that come out of “Performing Empowerment,” a collaborative research project in Sri Lanka that combined disability rights and inclusive/mixed-able dance. The project ran workshops that brought together people with a range of abilities and disabilities to dance together and learn about the rights of persons with disabilities under domestic and international law. The suggestions made here will obviously need to be adapted for different political, cultural, and legal contexts, as well as for the specific participants and the specific rights at issue.

It is also important to say what this booklet is not. It is not meant as a stand-alone manual to teach dance or rights to people who are unfamiliar with these practices. It will not provide the initial skills to run rights-awareness or dance sessions. It is also no substitute for local knowledge and local expertise. Instead, our hope is that this booklet may encourage more practitioners to consider using rights-based dance practices to empower people – or to simply use it as a creative tool for designing programs that build in elements of dance/rights education.

2) Connecting Human Rights and Dance

What Are Human Rights?

Human rights provide a universal language for individuals and marginalised groups to mobilise for greater political, social, cultural, and legal inclusion, and to demand entitlements from governments. There are several core human rights principles, which are often contained in domestic constitutions and laws, as well as international treaties (agreements):

- Dignity
- Equality
- Fairness
- Independence
- Respect

These core principles underscore more specific rights such as:

- Non-discrimination and equality
- Participation in political, social, cultural, and legal life
- Free association with others and peaceful assembly
- Access to information

Human rights treaties give people useful tools to pressure their governments into respecting, protecting, and fulfilling their rights. For example, if governments do not keep their agreed commitments under human rights treaties, then people and their organisations can raise concerns not only with their governments but also with the United Nations Human Rights Council and relevant United Nations human rights treaty bodies.

What Is Human Rights Education?

The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011) commits all countries to promote education *about*, *through*, and *for* human rights. Education *for* human rights means “empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others” (UN Declaration, 2011). Human rights education is for everyone. It involves both state and civil society actors. It happens inside and outside formal schools.

Some scholars and practitioners have pushed for what is called “transformative human rights education.” This focuses less on the promises of international agreements and more on local, lived experiences of rights. Rather than top-down teaching, it involves bottom-up, participatory, and experiential learning. Through transformative human rights education, people acquire knowledge and skills that enable them to be more informed, self-confident, and active citizens – and thus to be better positioned to assert their rights (individually and collectively) and challenge unjust social structures. Overall, transformative human rights education seeks to transform individuals (both psychologically and intellectually) and give them practical tools to transform their societies.

Why Use Performing Arts in Human Rights Education?

The UN Declaration encourages using the arts to raise human rights awareness. Similarly, transformative human rights education emphasises playful, participatory methods: “laughing, playing, singing, and dancing together ... helps participants experience common human feelings, going beyond the social categories that divide them” (Bajaj, Cislaghi & Mackie 2016).

Some research suggests that learning with and through the body (“embodied learning”) can lead to a greater understanding of concepts and ideas. There is also some evidence that performance, and the repetition involved in rehearsing and performing can be an effective means of active learning.

Why Dance?

Dance is a way for people to express themselves using their bodies. It can help people communicate thoughts and emotions they may find hard to say verbally. Dance can improve mobility, strength, fitness, flexibility, coordination, and self-confidence.

Dance is most often a social activity that brings different people together, whether in a religious festival or a flash mob. A choreographed dance requires individuals to work together as a team so that their individual movements make up a larger whole. It gives people a sense of collective purpose and can improve their trust in others.

Because dance involves working closely with our own and other people’s bodies, it draws attention to the way in which each body is unique. Through dance, people may develop more respect and tolerance for the way other bodies look and move. For example, disabled and non-disabled people dancing together can lead to increased acceptance and understanding of difference, helping to overcome social stigma.

Dance has been used to teach, perform, and raise awareness for human rights. Perhaps the most well-known example is the One Billion Rising campaign around violence against women. Over time, that campaign has gone from promoting the dance anthem “Break the Chain” to encouraging local variations and new choreographies in countries like India, Taiwan, and Germany: <https://www.onebillionrising.org/about/dance/>. As Eve Ensler, the founder of One Billion Rising, says, “Dancing insists we take up space and ... we go there together.”

3) How to Use this Exercise Set

This exercise set can be used by you to design workshops that connect dance and rights. There is no right or wrong way to use it. Rather, the set is meant to stimulate creative thinking about how to link dance and rights together. In this section, we discuss a few ways the set may be used but these are meant to be illustrative, not prescriptive.

The exercise box contains 4 sets (or decks) of cards:

- Obstacles
- Empowerment/ Skill
- Rights
- Dance Movements/Task

You can use all four sets or just those that you find most helpful. Similarly, within each set, you can use as many or as few cards as you like. Three sets also contain blank cards so you can write in different obstacles, rights, and dance movements that are most relevant to your workshop participants.

One way to work is to select an obstacle, such as discrimination, that your workshop participants face and then to think about what type of empowerment, such as self-confidence, they might need to address that obstacle.

Next, you can decide which individual or collective rights, such as free expression, will help the participants achieve that type of empowerment.

Finally, those rights can be “exercised” to produce some embodied action that the participants want, such as a public performance. For each of those stages, you can use the cards to help select a relevant dance movement or task.

For example:

- Obstacle: discrimination → Movement: Obstacle course

You might select the ‘Obstacle: Discrimination’ card and then might choose the ‘Movement/Task: Obstacle course’ where the obstacles represent experiences of discrimination. Participants then find ways to move that engage with and overcome the obstacles.

- Empowerment: Self-confidence → Movement: Autobiography

Next, you might pick the ‘Empowerment: Self-confidence’ card. You then decide to pair it with the ‘Movement: Autobiography’ card. Participants would then use movement to ‘perform self-confidence’ by telling a story about themselves being confident.

- Rights: Free Expression → Movement: Breaking Away

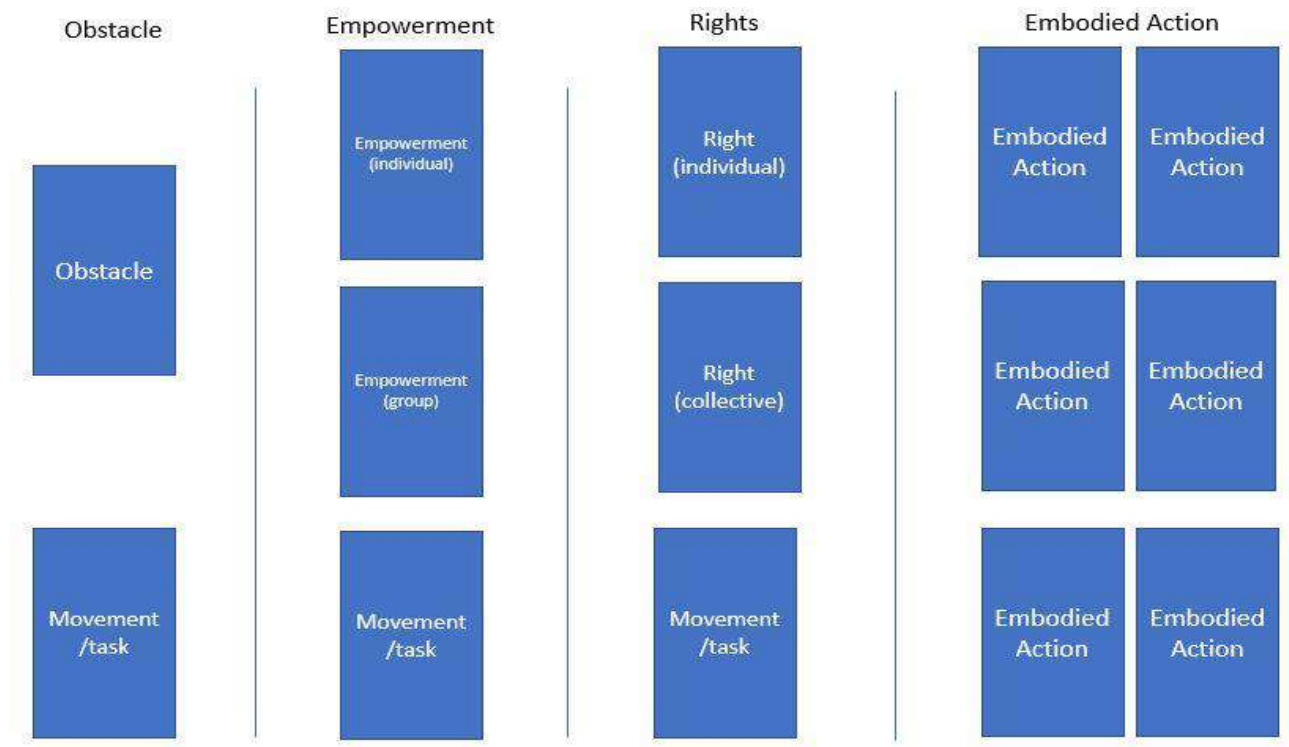
Next, you pick the ‘Rights: Free Expression’ card. You then may decide that free expression can be represented by the ‘Movement: Breaking Away’ card. Participants then move away from other participants or obstacles as a self-confident demonstration of expressing themselves freely.

Finally, the embodied action, here a performance, can then be choreographed by weaving together the different dance movements (Obstacle course, Autobiography, and Breaking Away) of the individual participants.

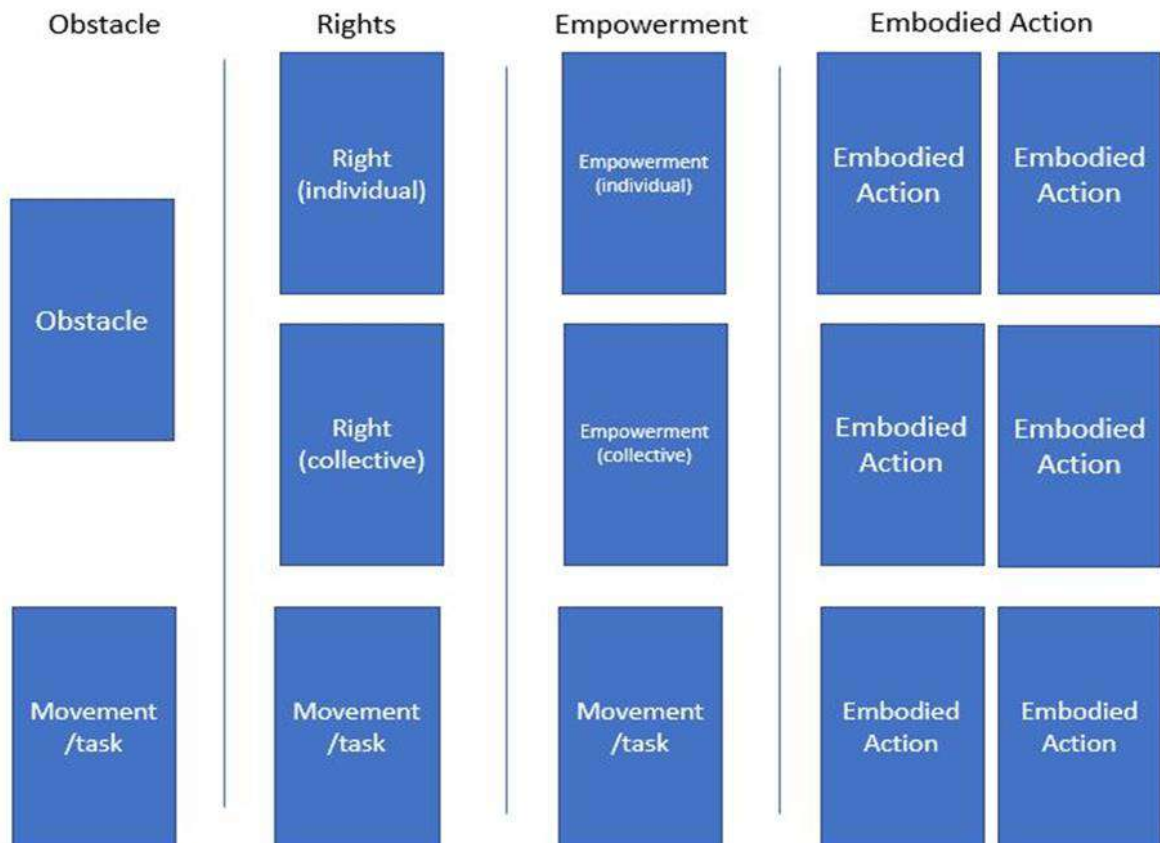
Alternatively, you may decide to use just one dance movement to represent the journey from Obstacle (discrimination) → Empowerment (self-confidence) → Right (free expression). For example, participants may be asked to describe an incident where they faced discrimination and then turn that verbal description into

a dance movement (Autobiography). The individual movements can then be combined, choreographed, and performed publicly as a way of turning the negative experience of discrimination into a positive experience of reclaiming self-confidence.

In the first example, the overall process of using the cards would look something like this:

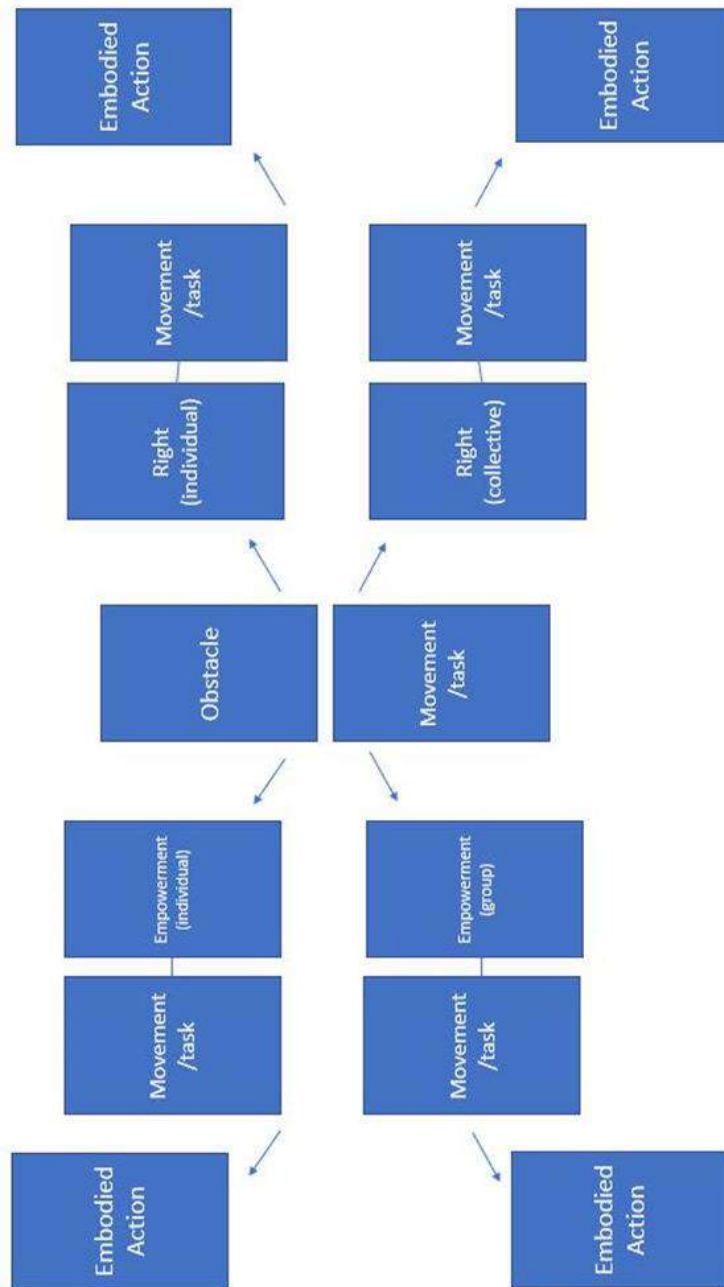


Another approach is to move from obstacles to rights to empowerment and finally to embodied action, associating each with a dance movement or task.



Alternatively, you may prefer a less linear approach. For example, you might start with an obstacle and address it in different directions – through empowerment and rights.

Again, these are just meant to be examples. You can use whatever cards in whatever order you find helpful for planning a single class, a longer workshop, or even a performance.



4) Some Online Resources

Empowerment

John Gaventa, "Reflections on the Uses of the 'Power Cube' Approach for Analyzing the Spaces, Places and Dynamics of Civil Society Participation and Engagement" (Institute of Development Studies 2005).

Lisa Vene Klasen and Valerie Miller, *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation* (World Neighbors & The Asia Foundation 2002).

Human Rights

There are several dictionaries/glossaries that define human rights terms:

- http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-5/6_glossary.htm
- <http://www.msubillings.edu/cas/nams/Taliman/1.30%20Human%20Rights%20Glossary.pdf>

There are various resources for learning about the human rights of specific groups, for example:

- Children: Plan International, "Learn about Your Rights!".
- People with Disabilities: Harvard Law School Project on Disability, "Change Your Life with Human Rights" (2008).

Human Rights Education

Monisha Bajaj, Beniamino Cislighi, and Gerry Mackie, *Advancing Transformative Human Rights Education: Appendix D to the Report of the Global Citizenship Commission* (Open Book Publishers 2016).

United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training* (2011).

Dance

Dana Mills, *Dance & Politics: Moving Beyond Boundaries* (Manchester University Press 2017), "Introduction".

"One Billion Rising".

Anthony Shay, "Dance and Human Rights in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia." In *Dance, Human Rights, and Social Justice: Dignity in Motion*, eds. Naomi Jackson and Toni Shapiro-Phim (Scarecrow Press, 2008), 67-85.



University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester CO4 3SQ
United Kingdom

Cover design:
Vina Puspita

Photos:
VisAbility e.V.

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