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Closing the social divide through ballet classes

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Students of Parikrma Centre for Learning performed with 400 other children from 'mainstream' schools, in Bengaluru on Saturday.— Photo: G.P. Sampath Kumar

Thursday mornings for the last three years have brought a lot of happiness for Monica and Tejas, both aged 10. That is when they learn, with 60 other students, to discipline their bodies into learning the difficult dance moves of a ballet dancer.

Monica's mother is a cook, and her father a driver. And, Tejas is looked after by his grandmother, a domestic worker, and they both attend the Parikrma Centre for learning.

"I love it, it is difficult but nice. No one screams at me and everyone is friendly. I was excited and not nervous during our performance on Saturday," says Monica. Her first public performance was with 400 other children from 'mainstream' schools, who pay for classes, unlike the duo.

The Lewis Foundation, a performing arts non-governmental organisation, has been sponsoring ballet classes taught through interactive games and creative modules by choreographer Yana Lewis.

"During the first year, creative movements and the basics of ballet were taught. Many techniques such as point and flex, arm lines and stretching postures were taught through rhymes and stories. Lessons in self-awareness, decision-making and music interpretations were the main focus," she says.

Parents are excited and proud when they see their children on stage dancing. "But, we also notice that these children are more focussed, more driven. There is no wasted energy and of course, all those who attend the classes usually love it," says Latha, head of Parikrma Centre for Learning from where the children of domestic workers, drivers and labourers from classes five to seven get to learn ballet.

The discipline of any art form can usually help children develop coordination of mind and body, focus, confidence and self-respect. To enable a long-term change in these children, the Parikrma Foundation decided to invest time in longer programmes rather than conducting short workshops.

The ballet production, 'The Spectacular Circus' was held on Saturday evening with many parents in attendance.