

"DANCE RHYMES" AS A PEDAGOGICAL METHOD FOR FOSTERING BODY SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE OF CULTURAL TRADITION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DANCE EDUCATION IN ISRAEL

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Teaching dance in early childhood education in the National-Religious community is a relatively new phenomenon in Israeli society. This article describes one teaching practice "*Dance Rhymes*". The research is based on ethnographic observation of dance classes in schools. Through analysis of the rhyming method, this article illustrates how traditional dance teachers have formed a unique method of "dance rhyming" that is used to foster body skills and bridge the divide between Jewish tradition and dance.

Keywords: *dance education, early-childhood, tradition, rhyming, rhythm, pedagogical practice.*

"DANCE RHYMES" CA METODĂ DE FORMARE A COMPETENȚELOR MOTRICE ȘI VALORIFICARE A TRADIȚIILOR CULTURALE LA ETAPA EDUCAȚIEI TIMPURIÎ ÎN ISRAEL

Predarea dansului la etapa educației timpurii în comunități religioase este un fenomen relativ nou pentru societatea israeliană. "Dance Rhymes" este descris din perspectiva practicii educaționale: valorificarea demersului etnografic și a demersului metodologic privind "Dance Rhymes" ca metodă de formare a competențelor motrice (coregrafice) și reducerea discrepanței dintre tradiția evreiască și arta coregrafică.

Cuvinte-cheie: *educație coregrafică, copilărie timpurie, tradiție, rimă, ritm, practică pedagogică.*

Introduction

A survey of current literature on current dance education suggests that dance education was traditionally based on fixed technique classes where physical skills and developing psychomotor skills were the main goal of the practice, alongside the learning of general movement principles and specific dance styles, especially ballet and modern dance (Graham, Cunningham, Limon). The prevailing teaching method of dance classes is the direct teaching method, where the teacher demonstrates tasks which students replicate, while in the creative part of the lesson students are asked to explore and solve the assignments. Criticism of such authoritarian pedagogy in technique classes has recently been voiced by Lakes [1, p.18]. At present, there is a shift towards a more open discourse concerning knowledge of dance styles, as well as growth of creativity, which is a "midway model" between process pedagogy and a product model [2, p.9-12]. This is especially relevant in early childhood, where it is most important to teach the meanings associated with movements, and encouraging children to explore their abilities and create meaning [3,2]. In addition to developing physical skills, students are encouraged to develop features related to personality, society and culture, reflect on their learning and increase their critical thinking skills. This article will show how dance rhymes are used to foster body skills and tradition and bridge the divide between Jewish tradition and dance.

This article is based on data collected as part of an *Ethnochoreology* (ethnology of dance) research in schools, which explores dance as a component of contemporary cultures and as a representation and reflection of society, its culture and behavior [4-6]. The observations and interviews of 14 early childhood dance teachers took place throughout the school years 2012-2013.

The goals were to find out the practices implemented by the teachers in order to instill body skills and tradition, and organize these into a coherent method. In the observation, I have identified the fact that the teachers use rhymes in order to foster physical and creative goals alongside imparting the culture and values of a religiously observant community.

Concept and methodology

Based on these findings, I would like to propose a teaching method "Dance Rhymes" which uses rhyming as part of the teaching model suggested by Fitts and Posner, and addresses the proposals of other scholars regarding problem-solving and creativity growth as significant elements in early childhood pedagogy. Besides a direct teaching method, literature suggests using an open-ended problem-solving method and collaborative

methods [7, p.228]. Hanna adds that early childhood dance education has visual models, oral commentary, metaphors, and students' kinesthetic imagination aid learning [8, p.11]. Fitts and Posner suggested a 3-phase teaching model.

The first stage is a cognitive-verbal phase, where the teacher explains to the learner what the principles of the skill are; demonstrates the correct way to perform it, and describes possible pitfalls. At this stage the learner listens, is focused on the demonstration and tries to absorb information and process it in order to understand the basic principles for performing; therefore, this phase is called cognitive-verbal. In the second phase the information which has been visually and verbally perceived is being physically felt. At this stage, the main task is choosing the suitable exercise and adapting it to the learner, whose movements will become more efficient through practice. In the final phase of the model the learner is capable of turning his/her attention elsewhere, i.e., is capable of performing two tasks concurrently, the motor task plus another, cognitive or physical task [9]. To make the task of dance, the learner has to understand what is required of him and build up a picture of movement. Learner's major systems that should be related at this point are the systems connected to the absorption of information, systems with the bodily senses: sight, hearing, feeling and the memory. Using dance rhymes contains those senses and so helps the children to identify the referenced commandment, memorize it and embody the information.

Here is an example demonstrating how the teacher uses rhyme to warm-up the spinal cord at the beginning of the dance class while at the same time instilling a Jewish value into her students: Baseline posture: sitting with crossed legs, hands crossed lying on knees, head bowed and the back bending forward.

The text recited	Instructions
We raise our heads in prayer and pleading	head goes up and at the same time the back straightens up
Hands go up diagonal to the ceiling	
Slowly, crossed they return to the knees	the back remains upright
Bow our heads with humility and pleas	The head alone is bowed and only then the back bends forward

Breaking down and analyzing the movement phrase we can see that the instructions for the exercise were given using meter, rhythm and rhyme, preceding the musical accompaniment which was only added later. Instructions for the exercise were given with varying emphases, paces, flow, and intensity. Thus the verbal directions conveyed both the essence of the action (what to do) and its quality (how to do it). In addition to stressing their movement content, the words included names of body parts, concepts of spatial directions, heights and trajectories, as well as concepts associated with the local cultural tradition.

Where instructions such as "lift your arms" are given using several different verbs (such as lift/raise/heighten), or where synonyms are used for one and the same concept, the children expand their vocabulary. This stage of teaching follows Fitts & Posner cognitive verbal phase. After hearing and following the instructions several times, the children were requested to repeat the words of the instructions while performing them and this physicality felt state [9] reinforced their understanding. When the teacher repeated the words of the instructions, she also changed the quality of the performance: fast-slow, powerful-mild, continuous-interrupted flow, large-small movements. For example, "Let's raise our heads slowly". Varying the quality of the exercise was associated with the meaning conveyed (Some exercises are not suitable for the whole range of variations). At first, the variation options were suggested by the teacher, and then by the students.

These performance variations imparted to the children the concepts of time, space and intensity which, together with the body, are the fundamentals of movement. Some exercises can be infused with emotion, such as joyfulness, sadness, anger, weariness, and a sense of blessing. For example: "Let's raise our heads with joy/tenderly". This variation of physical exercises and their qualities enable the children to discharge their emotions, experience a variety of moods and to reach the final stage of Fitts & Posner's model of turning attention elsewhere beside the physical knowledge. Some of the exercises were accompanied by metaphors of human figures, animals, forces of nature and the world of plants. This provided an opportunity for make-believe game playing, essential for the child's development according to Piaget, with the children taking on a variety of identities [10].

The teachers reported that they composed the rhymes in preparation for the holidays, the basis of all Jewish tradition. Here is an example for a basic warm-up exercise for the back, followed by a table showing the modifications made to the verbal text according to the coinciding holidays.

Basic Rhymed text	Instructions	Rhymes transferred in preparation for use in the holidays (In Hebrew the above text is rhymed)		
		Lag BaOmer	Tu-Bishvat	Hanukkah
Hello, back!	Straighten your spine	Hello, back	Hello, back!	Hello, back!
Lift hands straight		Straight as the central candle!	Upright as a huge cypress tree,	Burning like a golden flame
Now you're tired	Put your hands down along the sides of your body	Now you are burning bright,	Now you're tired,	But the bonfire Subsides, almost into the ground.
Bend very slowly	Bend down your back and let your forehead touch your knees	Melting so slowly,	The trunk bends over.	
You'd like to go far	4 "steps" forward with you palms leading all the way down to your feet	into a liquid puddle on the floor	Branches bend earthwards,	Children rush around
Returning now,	Go 4 "steps" back	Let's gather up the wax,	Quickly gathering	Finding more branches
And once again curving	Roll your back until you sit up straight	Let's gather up the wax,	And once again, Straightening up.	With some dry wood
the back is straightening		Honoring the festival of Hannukah.		We can't wait to see sparks.
sideways the head is bending	Bend you head towards your shoulder, and continue until your back bends sideways	The light bends sideways,	A branch sways in the wind,	The flame sways To the right
upwards its erecting	Get up and sit up straight	then back, and back again,	Returns to the treetop	Sparks rise up to the sky
Now to the other side		Now to the other side,	Now to the other side	Now to the other side,
Going to the ceiling		Rising up towards the ceiling,	The wind sings, as it Blows through the leaves.	The wind blows toward a cloud
Rotating and returning	Rotate your spine to the right and return to the front	Rounding the spine, Like a Hannukah candle,	The leaves circle around	Then we look back.
Clap, clap and stop!	Clap your hands twice Put your palms on your thighs	Clap, clap and stop	Clap, clap and stop	It's very late.
Rotate the other side,	Rotate to the left and return to the front	Rotate the other side,	Among the branches.	But look, among the coals
And clap, clap and halt!		And clap, clap and halt!	And clap, clap and halt!	I see a backed potato

According to Fitts and Posner movement skill instruction does not start with practicing acts but with cognitive activity designed to develop knowledge, understanding, and an action plan strategies through which the teacher tries to achieve the desired result. This movement exercise draws on the connection between the mundane (the body) and the holy (knowledge of the commandments); it combines movement, rhymes and information about tradition (the holidays). Proper exercise movement through rhyming connects the physical movement of knowledge, practices and traditional knowledge.

The teacher added that "the rhymed text expressed verbally the body's concurrent movements. The rhymes in this case were simple and lively, and the use of rhymes enabled the children to absorb information not only through my modelling but also through the musical rhythm of the rhymes and through the conveyed verbal instructions". This is an example of knowledge imparted through multiple intelligences [11, p.158-187].

Through the provision of "Dance Rhymes" corresponds to the 3 phases in the model of Pitts and Posner. "Dance Rhymes" in their verbal briefing movement can be organized with the provisions of rhythm and rhyme weight, when words guide the content and quality of movement (first Phase), all while on active demonstration of the teacher and physically felt experience of the students (second phase) and the possibility to express and make changes (third phase).

The use of rhymes is common and acceptable in early childhood dance teaching, and is not unique to the traditional community which was the subject of my research. However, in the classes that I have observed, rhymes were used as a customary teaching tool for bringing the values and traditional customs of the community into the dance classes. Zali Gurevitch in his book, *On Israeli and Jewish Place*, pointed out that dancing and playing activities are a pedagogical method for imparting ideological education in early childhood; it is a method that connects us to our way of life and facilitates our acknowledgement of rules, dignity, and the freedom to acknowledge ourselves. Dance is a basic existential metaphor connecting us with the past, with our environment, with the knowledge of where we come from and amid what and amongst whom we exist. Dancing combines rhythm and simplicity that respond to the principle of ritual – the ritual of the kindergarten's circle, the family circle, and the circle of life [12, p.163-179].

When dance is provided to early childhood it tends to have an interdisciplinary reach. It has context of social and cultural sciences [8, p.11]. Significant to dance as an applied art in early childhood is the ability to transfer knowledge and use it in new situations [8, p.13]. In the rhymed recitals observed, traditional content is implicit.

Summing up, this teaching practice of Dance Rhyme used rhymes to draw on the connection between the mundane, the body skills, and the holy, knowledge of the commandments; it combines movement and information about tradition through facilitating:

- Development of body skills through dance activities.
- Learning the names of body parts, their location and the relationships between them.
- Identifying body parts and activating each one separately.
- Coordination between body parts.
- Developing a sensibility for sound nuances: tones/intensity/rhythm/meter/tempo.
- Concretization of the concept of time: fast-slow, accelerating-slowness, pausing.
- Concretization of the concept of flow: intermittent-continuous-bursting out.
- Concretization of the concepts of weight, forcefulness and intensity: heavy-light, strong-weak, loud-silent.
- Concretization of spatial concepts: spatial directions, sizes, distance ranges, height levels, body postures and trajectories.
- Performing a sequence of verbal instructions.
- Development of problem-solving skills.
- Enrichment of language and verbal skills.
- Improvement of short- and long-term memory.
- Experiencing and controlling various moods.
- Acquiring knowledge of cultural values and traditions.

The power of rhymes in dance lies in the ability to help the children to identify the referenced commandment, memorize it and absorb content knowledge of.

According to Kornei Chukovsky, the great Russian author of children's poetry, the customary meter of rhymes is rooted in the rhythm of walking and breathing [13, p.65-70]. Rhythm in words as in dancing engages kinetic sensibilities. The vibrations move through the floor to the foot organizing the heart beat into a sympathetic pulse, leading the body into the production of words and ideas in rhythmic form [13-15].

The description of dance as a socio-cultural component of a child's education can be traced back as early as religious rituals of tribal societies. The main aim of these dancing rituals was the instruction of young people about knowledge of the environment, the spiritual foundations, and the history of the society [16, p.17-18]. The main function of rhymes is mnemonic and this was initially the function of rhymes in ancient times: a tool for memorizing and rote learning of texts used in religious rituals [17].

Rhyme and rhythm provide a musical accompaniment, and together they provide movement punctuation. The movements' rhythm and tempo are created by the rhyming, and contribute to a sense of familiarity and control within the represented imaginary world of movement, thus helping the children to connect to it quickly and enjoy it [18, p.45-52].

Blending rhymes with rhythm creates unity. The unified use contributes to the sense that the group is greater than the sum of its individual members, pointing to the close connection between individual and group rhythms, and the power of the rhythm as a pedagogical tool, a means of control, and a unifying tool.

Conclusion:

Further to the observations and their analysis, I suggest a general scheme for teaching with the aid of rhymes:

1. Teacher performs the movement phrase while articulating the words, as an initial modelling.
2. Students and teacher perform the movement phrase together.
3. Only the students perform the phrase while articulating the words.
4. Students perform the phrase with music without articulating the words.
5. Teacher asks: "Who can perform this movement phrase differently?"
6. Students experience various postures and learn postures from each other.
7. Teacher alters her tone or other voice qualities, and the students vary their performance accordingly.
8. Students suggest further variation options (altering tempo/trajectories/mood/etc.).

In this study the method of rhyming is used to foster tradition through dance classes.

This is an experiential teaching method that involves the hearing and kinesthetic senses, as well as knowledge of tradition, all presented in harmony between form and meaningful content. This methodology enhances the teaching practice by adding another dimension, but it does not replace or abolish any other teaching methods and points of departure.

This is a hands-on practice, with the participation of all senses: the hearing, visual and kinesthetic senses are in harmony with the meaning of the text. This teaching practice also enables the teacher to incorporate the students' input into the structured content knowledge, thus developing the students' problem-solving capability, as well as their creativeness and imagination.

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