

**"TO GROW AND DEVELOP AS A HUMAN BEING":
PERCEPTIONS AND POSITIONS OF DANCE TEACHERS TOWARDS THE
CONTRIBUTION OF DANCE EDUCATION TO PUPILS AS PART OF THE FORMAL
CURRICULUM AT SCHOOL**

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This paper deals with perceptions and positions of observant dance teachers towards the contribution of dance education to pupils as part of the formal curriculum at school. The research tool is interviews that were analyzed according to the grounded theory approach [11], accompanied by Brinson's model [2]. It was found that the main theme that emerges from the interviews is that dance education contributes to the personal and social growth of the pupil. This research is pioneering in the field.

Keywords: *dance, education, educational dance, creativity, multiple intelligences, body language.*

**„SĂ CREASCĂ ȘI SĂ SE DEZVOLTE CA O FIINȚĂ UMANĂ”:
POZIȚIA ȘI PERCEPȚIA PROFESORILOR DE DANS FAȚĂ DE CONTRIBUȚIA EDUCAȚIEI PRIN
DANS A ELEVILOR LA ȘCOALĂ, CA PARTE A CURRICULUMULUI FORMAL**

În lucrare sunt tratate percepțiile și pozițiile profesorilor de dans față de contribuția educației prin dans a elevilor, ca parte din curriculumul formal la școală. Instrumentele de cercetare sunt interviurile care au fost analizate în conformitate cu abodarea teoriei fundamentale după modelul Brison [11]. S-a constatat că tema principală care se desprinde din aceste interviuri este că educația prin dans contribuie la dezvoltarea personală și socială a elevului. Această cercetare este de pionerat în domeniu.

Cuvinte-cheie: *dans, educație, educație prin dans, creativitate, inteligențe multiple, limbaj corporal.*

Theoretical background and the context of the research

The importance of the arts in education

Theoreticians of education [4,5,8,12,] claim that the objective of art education in school-based programs is to promote aesthetic education to all pupils, as part of their basic curriculum. They claim that art education develop cognitive abilities, deepens understanding and sensitivity, expands the world of knowledge and serves towards the learning of new concepts.

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences [7], which claims that human intelligence is not a uniform cognitive being, but rather an aggregation of several intelligences, reinforces this approach. To present, Gardner [7] had identified eight distinct intelligences, of equal importance: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Each one has a distinct location in the brain and unique mechanisms of processing and expressing information. Gardner [7] claims that every pupil is intelligent in their own way, and hence that they all deserve teaching that is adapted to their skills and inclination, such that will allow them to discover their strengths, to develop and to find expression not only in the various artistic fields, but through these to become stronger in all other fields as well. This position is contradictory to the popular view that the arts are marginal to the main task of education, since they do not develop the intellect. This opinion is based on the positivist perception, according to which "to know" means to make empirical claims about the world; claims that may be proved or disproved. The result of this perception is the promotion of a hierarchy of knowledge, which crowns scientific knowledge and distances the arts from their proper place in the development of the cognition [5].

A hierarchical structure of knowledge, which characterizes the positivist perception, is found in the foundations of the policy of the Israeli Ministry of Education in the last decade. This policy creates a distinction between core studies and accompanying studies. The attribution of art lessons to enrichment studies imparts on them an inferior status, which does not allow the pupil to enjoy the various ways in which each of the art subjects contributes to the development of the individual.

The contribution of dance education to the formal curriculum in school

The dance curriculum in schools is called educational dance (in the Israeli education system – Dance for All). McCutchen [12] claims that the basic curriculum in dance was not intended to turn all of the diverse pupils in the regular classroom into professional dancers, but rather to extend their educational horizons through a broad curriculum in dance.

The contribution of dance education to the school curriculum as part of formal education was classified by Brinson [2] into the following six categories:

1. **Contribution to artistic and aesthetic education** – according to McCutchen [12], education in dance imparts a different form of knowledge and understanding, which includes two aspects: theoretical knowledge such as concepts and history; and practical knowledge, such as a movement "vocabulary", rules for constructing a dance, acquaintance with the body and developing a sensitivity to the significances expressed by the body. This knowledge gives pupils tools to discover, understand and express the logic of their inner world and that of the world surrounding them.

2. **Contribution to cultural education** – works of dance reflect the aesthetic perception and the historical, political and economic background of the period in which they were created. Exposure to them broadens the cultural world of the pupils.

3. **Contribution to personal and social education** – Anderson [1] claims that when pupils express themselves through processes of creation taking place in individual and group work as part of dance studies, they develop interpersonal skills while planning and making decisions together, and enhancing their sense of self-confidence and group pride.

4. **Contribution to physical development** – according to Brinson [2], there are overlapping points between the contribution of physical education and that of dance education to the development of physical ability, such as perfecting the body, coordination, perseverance, self-discipline, and more. But the uses, the values and the emphases are different. In physical education the connection between body and soul has an objective of achievement, which is acquired through a variety of skills and challenges. In comparison, in dance education the connection between body and soul creates an artistic expression, which allows for the organization and expression of individual worldviews.

5. **Contribution to overall studies at school** – Krug & Cohen-Evron [11] claim that the integration of the arts with core studies enhances the level of learning, of understanding and of achievements. The integration allows them to create systems of context while using metaphorical and analogical thinking. In their opinion, this integration does not diminish the value of dancing as a distinct field, but rather acknowledges its force and extent.

6. **Contribution to pre-professional education** – McCutchen [12] notes that educational dance lessons allow excelling pupils in the field to connect with their unique skills, and thus to consider a continued training in a pre-professional framework in designated dance schools.

In conclusion, the point of origin of educational dance is that all pupils must be given access to dance as a form of art with all its aspects, since dance in particular, and the arts in general, expand the diversity of the pupils' intellectual abilities, develop creativity, and thus contribute to their personal growth, on the physical, emotional and cognitive aspects.

The following analysis of interviews shall present the perceptions and positions of dance teachers towards the contribution of teaching dance to pupils in schools of the Israeli education system, in light of the theories presented above.

The research method

Population of interviewees: interviews were held with ten observant dance teachers, who had found work teaching in schools of the Israeli education system, with seniority in teaching of 3 to 12 years, aged 27 to 36.

The interviews: the narrative, semi-structured interviews requested the interviewees to tell their story as religious dance teachers. In addition, questions were asked, such as: what, in your opinion, is the contribution of dance education to the pupils, and what were your motivations to choose dance teaching. The interviews were taped, transcribed and analyzed as customary in qualitative research. The methodology that was chosen for understanding and identifying the perceptions and positions of the dance teachers to the contribution of teaching dance to pupils as part of the formal curriculum at school is grounded theory [14, p.12-14].

Findings and interpretation

"Dance allows the pupil **to grow and to develop as a human being**, to bring what they have to the world." This position, expressed by one of the interviewees, represents the spirit of the answers of all inter-

views. There is a general agreement in the answers of the interviewees that the subject of dance has a significant contribution for all pupils. In their view, the uniqueness of the subject is in the fact that it enables the pupil to develop the most basic form of human expression - movement - which reflects their emotions, character traits, thought, desires and beliefs.

1. The contribution of dance education to aesthetic and artistic education:

The interviewees related, in their answers, to three different aspects.

A. **Imparting a knowledge and understanding of body-soul** – Feldenkrais [6] believed that "the image of ourselves is made up of four different parts, which always partake in every action: movement, sensation, feeling and thought" [6, p.19]. In his opinion, the complete sense of self is derived from attention to each of these components, which influence each other and are influenced by the others. This may be seen in the answer of one of the interviewees – "dance lessons are important especially in religious frameworks. Religious girls rarely engage with the body. The subject of dance enables them to understand their body, listen to that which comes from within, learn the strength of their own bodies... this is also in the religious sense, yes, in the spiritual sense of connection to myself, and through the connection to myself to worship the Lord."

B. **Access to a unique expression of significance** – the human body is the main and direct instrument of expression of dance, through which we transmit to others our ideas and feelings about the world [9, p. 493]. As stated by one of the interviewees: "there are very quiet children, who are uncomfortable speaking in front of the group, but suddenly in dance they open up, they are no longer mute, their body speaks, breaks through their own barriers [...], expressing them and their thought."

C. **Developing creative thought and action** – Kraus, Hilsendager & Gottschild [10, p.314] claim that tasks in creation class, alongside tasks related to performance and directing, encourage the pupil to find movement solutions by thinking and using their imagination and ingenuity. Such experience, in their view, makes a vital contribution to the growth of the individual at any age. This outlook finds expression in the words of an interviewee, stating that "to create a dance is basically to learn to solve problems. Which is something very important to the pupils, and they work on it all the time in dance lessons. I give them an exercise to make up a dance or to create a movement phrase according to some regularity we work on during the lesson. Everyone does it. Yes, it works."

2. The contribution of dance education to presenting processes of cultural creation and change:

Learning and executing folk and ethnic dances, claim Kraus et al. [10, p.315], enables pupils to get acquainted with the styles and life circumstances of the local culture, as well as of other cultures. An example for this was provided by an interviewee:

In elementary school I teach folk dances, we call it "folk dances – nostalgia". Yes, it's possible to bring in some nostalgia as well, [...] today's kids have no clue... it's unbelievable, they don't know these songs, they also come from a completely different culture, as the east is distant from the west [...] For me it's amazing to dance folk dances, which is literally the entire people, every Jew in the world knows how to dance these dances."

3. The contribution of dance education to personal and social education:

A. **Personal education** – Brinson [2, p.109] and Moorefield-Lang [13, p.10] claim that the arts positively influence young people in various aspects, such as enhancing their self-confidence, their self-discipline, their perseverance and social integration. The contribution of dance to the personal education of pupils was given extensive expression in the answers of the interviewees, for instance:

- *Empowerment of faith* – "dance is an instrument for worshipping the Lord. Through movement it enhances the work of the pupils on their virtues and their awareness to the connection between body and soul within the boundaries of the Halacha [Jewish Laws]... the body suddenly receives different dimensions [...] in the sense of 'All my bones shall say'." (The interviewee quotes here a sentence from the Biblical Book of Psalms (35:10): "All my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee").

- *Enhancing self-confidence and esteem* – "there are girls who are weak in all other subjects, but gifted in dance. so suddenly there is a field within school in which they have this place to stand out as the successful girl, and it really empowers them... the class gives them confidence socially."

- *Education towards perseverance* – "dance teaches the pupils to work on a movement sequence. To start a task from beginning to end, which is something they must have for life as adults in the community."

- *Self-discipline* – "dance encourages thinking! To make an effort! To invest themselves! Because dance is first of all an investment, you can't avoid it, it's a physical effort, and today people don't like to make an

effort. It's also about self-discipline and seeing that when you invest yourself, something happens... and what happened is yours."

B. Social education – the creativity which gives a voice to all partners to the creation process, and which accepts the difference between them as a vital component, is called by Chappell, Craft, Rolfe and Jobbins [3, p.3] 'humanizing creativity'. The description by one of the interviewees demonstrates this:

Dance class develops the pupils' sensitivity for a respect towards the other. For instance, we had a ceremony in memory of [the late prime-minister] Rabin [...] we conducted a creative experience in couples, and the division was random on purpose. The task was to create a duet together. The pupils went through a long process, at the end of which a dance was created, which we performed at the ceremony [...] unlike classes in which pupils talk about being different, these pupils experience what happens when you have to get along with someone else, who has different movement than yourself. It was a real experimentation with the body [...] Before going onstage, I told them that they had an opportunity, through dance, to transmit something to other children. To give something to someone else through this ability they have in movement.

4. The contribution of dance education to physical development:

Brinson [2, p.109] emphasizes that one must distinguish the skills of the body as an objective in the subject of physical education, from the physical skills as a means for artistic and personal expression in the subject of dance. This distinction finds expression in the following quotation: "in dance there is a place of developing the body as an instrument. It requires honing and a listening that is on a completely different level than that of sports lessons, in which you learn to work with the body, but not to say something with the body. Because in dance there is an aspect of creativity, of expression, of being able to bring myself [...] it's something that touches on both that which is beyond, and both here, it's a connection of higher and lower spheres... to me that is the objective."

5. The contribution of dance education to overall studies at school:

There are researchers who believe that the integration of the arts with the core subjects improves the level of learning, understanding and achievements of the pupils, through the use of a variety of learning skills, and the teaching styles that characterize the study of the arts [11]. The following words of one of the interviewees combine her experiences as a pupil and her point of view as a teacher regarding the contribution of this integration:

A dance teacher can promote pupils in other areas. This may not be the most important objective, but for me it is highly significant. It's another way to learn contents studied at class, and it's also a different, experiential way [...] from my experience as a pupil as well. I ask myself what I remember the most, what influenced me the most, and it's those places of ... experiencing something, carrying it out physically, experimenting with it and not just learning it drily "as-is".

6. The contribution of dance education to pre-professional education:

According to McCutchen [12], educational dance lessons allow excelling students to view the subject of dance as an area of pre-professional specialization in a formal educational framework. The following words of an interviewee describe this:

There are pupils who started going to afternoon courses following the lessons at school, and many choose to continue learning dance in junior high, at the arts school. I can see how it grows. I see this revolution of dance in religious schools as a highly blessed thing. The pupils' need is met within, and they do not have to receive it outside. There are so many talented girls, and it's pure luck that dance lessons at school had exposed them to their innate talent.

Summation and conclusions

To conclude, it was found that the main themes that emerged from the interviews coincide with the six categories in Brinson's model. However, the analysis of the interviews raises additional themes, and it is apparent that the interviewees discussed quite broadly the contribution of dance education to pupils in the category of personal and social education. The saying "Dance allows the pupil to grow and to develop as a human being, to bring what they have to the world" aptly represents the perceptions and positions of the teachers towards the contribution of dance education to the personal and social growth of the pupil. Furthermore, they view the personal development of the pupils through dance as an empowerment of their faith.

An additional aspect implied by the interviewees is their perception, that dance education in formal education constitutes 'education for all', which is intended to expand the educational horizons of the pupils and not to train them as professional dancers. The interviewees did not place an emphasis in their responses to the im-

portance of professionalization, which is expressed by the values of desire for achievement, perfection perfection of the body as a main goal, or the glorification of pupils with distinct skills. On the other hand, they did emphasize the specific aspect in which dance education contributes to the development of every student.

This research is a pioneering research, which for the first time echoes the voices of teachers coming from the field, attesting to the importance of dance education for pupils, and thus it should increase the awareness of Israeli educational policy makers to its importance, and contribute to the leveraging of dance in the education system.

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