

**DANCING THE "DAY OF ATONEMENT".  
THE USE OF VISUAL TEXTS FOR TEACHING CHOREOGRAPHIC PRINCIPLES  
AND IMPARTING JEWISH VALUES**

*Sari Katz ZICHRONY*

*Orot Israel – Academic College of Education*

In the given article proposing ways to implement visual tests in the dance teaching and learning, focusing on a system of traditional and cultural values of some religious communities.

We propose concrete examples and educational activities based on picture, presenting dance as a means of promoting tradition.

**Keywords:** *dance education, choreography, composition, early childhood, visual art, tradition.*

**DANSUL "ZIUA ISPĂȘIRII". APLICAREA TEXTELOR VIZUALE ÎN PROCESUL EDUCAȚIEI COREGRAFICE A COPIILOR**

În articol sunt propuse modalități de aplicare a textelor vizuale în procesul de predare-învățare a dansului, axate pe un sistem de valori tradiționale și culturale ale unei comunități religioase.

Autorul aduce exemple și activități concrete educaționale în baza unor picturi, prezentând dansul ca un mijloc de promovare a tradiției.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *educație coregrafică, coregrafie, compoziție, copilărie timpurie, arte vizuale, tradiție.*

This paper is part of a larger study that set out to explore the pedagogical tools used by religious teachers in order to convey – through dance – traditional messages which cultivate a sense of communal belonging and shape the identity of the student, thereby bridging the tension between dance and the way it is perceived by traditional religious Judaism. I will analyze one class in which the teacher used visual art to weave choreographic principles into the learning of tradition and show how the visual text serves as a cultural message around which the teacher structures a dance piece, simultaneously creating and conveying dance content knowledge and knowledge of the tradition.

"Using visual art, analyzing and interpreting art works enable children to develop a solid identity as individuals on the one hand, and to view themselves as members of their socio-cultural group on the other hand" [13]. This viewpoint, presented by art educators and the Israeli ministry of education - with an edge - was adopted by the religious education in Israel who drew on the philosophy of Rav Kook who said that the pinnacle of art and aesthetics is found in sanctity; thus, the pursuit of art ought to be integral to sanctity, and artistic works, which convey emotional experiences, are not the objective per se but, rather, are used for embellishing the values of sanctity [1, p.215].

With this view of art in mind, it is not surprising that, over the past decade there has been a significant rise in the demand for dance classes in early-childhood education from within the National Religious Community. Yet there is no written curriculum for dance teaching in early- childhood; each teacher develops practices for the purposes of her own pupils, and explores adequate methods and pedagogy that are congruent with the cultural views of the community within which she works.

This ethnographic research was designed to fill that gap. The research is based on ethnography in schools as institutions engaged in imparting culture and passing it down to their constituencies [3, p.198]. The researcher's goal was to explore how dance is taught at religious schools, how dance education represents and reflects national religious society and culture. From my observations I also obtained a picture of the choreographic practices teachers create using visual art and how these practices create or reproduce tradition.

I will analyze a choreographic composition created for girls studying in a religious elementary school. The composition was inspired by the painting "Jews at Prayer in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur" by Maurycy Gottlieb. The presentation of this composition created in class conveys insights that I have come by throughout my research and represents a broader phenomenon. The study seeks to shed light on the meeting point

between two poles: teaching choreographic principles and imparting Jewish values thus, the understanding of an individual instance illustrates a recurring teaching practice in use in this cultural context of dance teaching in a Jewish religious setting.

#### Art as a mode of knowledge

Machter, regards visual text as a source of meaning and reality rather than an artwork [11, p.271]. Dewey pointed out that [Art] quickens us from the slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms [5, p.110] The power of the arts then beside increasing cognitive ability, critical thinking, and emotional feelings of the individual, forge social bonds and community cohesion.

In the field of education scholars consider the arts as key educational agents for learning through experience and integrating physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of learning [6, 7, 9]. Vygotsky maintain that any cultural tool can be internalized and used by children as a tool for behavioral self-regulation [2]. Shalita emphasizes the contribution of visual art to the development of aesthetic appreciation, to socio-cultural worldviews, and to achieve moral values [15, p.28-29].

The power of art in educating is accentuated by Dewey who suggests that learning through art contributes to learning in other disciplines and that 'Aesthetic experience is to be defined as a mode of knowledge' [5, p.119, 290]. Gardner's idea of multiple intelligences has influenced the recognition of various learning styles explaining that adding visual and movement aspects to verbal learning may deepen the understanding of the learning process in many content areas [7, 8]. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization declared that the "learning through the arts/culture" demonstrates how we can utilize artistic expressions and cultural resources and practices, contemporary and traditional, as a learning tool [16].

In this article I will look at how religious teachers use art to brings out tacit knowledge of tradition and through dance embody tradition, communicate with the religious collective, and the communal values, and how meaningful visual art facilitates dance knowledge as well as facilitates dance as a medium for religious expression.

#### Dancing the art, dancing tradition

##### (1) The Painting

Maurycy Gottlieb was born in Poland in 1856. He was raised in a traditional Jewish home, verging on the orthodox but receptive to the ideas of the Jewish Enlightenment. He studied art in the academy of Vienna and later in Krakow and Munich. Although he died at the early age of 23, he managed to paint more than 300 paintings, his paintings portray various Jewish topics and the most famous of which is "Jews at Prayer in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur" (1878) [12, p.28-47].



*"Jews at Prayer in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur"*

[http://www.zazzle.com/jews\\_praying\\_by\\_maurycy\\_gottlieb\\_circa\\_1878\\_poster-228401784155602457](http://www.zazzle.com/jews_praying_by_maurycy_gottlieb_circa_1878_poster-228401784155602457)

The painting of Jews praying on Yom Kippur served the choreography as crutches, so to speak. Without a narrative theme but rather through abstraction, the teacher-choreographer found forms and postures adaptable to illustrating the theme of prayer and the asking for pardon. She forged compositions that served the purpose of enhancing the communal value.

(2) The Music

Gardner referred to music as the most important partner in dance. He pointed out that the structure of a musical composition will strongly affect the dance. He also related how young children can connect music and body movement naturally [7, 8] and in fact, the music chosen to accompany this dance composition is a traditional prayer with a modern musical arrangement, which was adequate in terms of both the movement and the idea that it conveyed. In addition the prayer melodies inspired the feeling that the class was united in the bond of faith in the Almighty as required by the rationale of the religious schools [4, p.141]. The verbal aspect emphasizes and shapes the message conveyed by the prayer; The tune of the prayer is a concrete symbol of the inner spiritual world, that of tradition.

(3) Movement and Choreographic Components

The dance was directed by the teacher and performed by girls aged 6-7 years old following their teacher's content composition conveyed throughout the lessons.

In the studio, 15 girls were facing a reproduction which was hung on the wall. The teacher explained: "The main theme of the dance is repentance, prayer and the yearning for God. The dance should spring from a close bond with prayer".

She continued: "We can see in the painting three elevation levels, which is important to note since we drew on them in structuring the choreography. On the lowest level of the painting we see the boys who are not yet 13 years old [13 is the coming of age of Jewish boys, their transition from childhood to adulthood]. The mid-level shows the men who are Torah scholars. The women, who are separated from the men, appear nonetheless on the highest level of the painting".

The teacher opens the creative part of the class with a statuesque design performed by 6 girl-dancers in the center of the room, positioned at *low, medium and height levels* on the vertical plane. When the teacher refers to these levels, she uses terms of the Eschol-Wachman Movement Notation System, which she taught in earlier classes. The choice of 6 dancers for the opening part was inspired by the painting's composition, in which 6 central figures are in the forefront. The teacher explained that "the posture of each girl is at a different height level, and they symbolize prayer and yearning", and indeed, the three levels shown in the painting were reflected in the postures.

A few bars into the accompanying melody, the teacher says: "four bars for your posture and four bars to improvise praying movements [...] move between the level postures and shape your body in a prayer posture". In this opening scene, the teacher exposed the first choreographic theme of *posture and movement*, introduced – the theme of *transition between postures*, and the element of *body shape* – the configuration of the students torso and limbs into positions that change over time.

Continuing, each dancer performs her movement; each dancer repeats her movement twice and then another dancer takes over performs another movement. While dancing, the teacher asked to repeat the two main movements themes of the piece: the *raising of the arms and the eyes* to heaven in a supplicating prayer, and the various postures of *leaning* on different parts of the body, or on their co-dancers.

The leaning posture appears in the painting in multiple variations: a young boy leans on his forearm; a man in prayer leans on the reading desk; the rabbi leans on the Torah scroll; a young boy leans on his father; a young man leans on his own hand; four pairs of women leaning on one another; a praying female leans her hand on the partition of the women's section of the synagogue. In her instructions, the teacher stressed the leaning posture, transferring the focus from the concrete physical movement to its symbolic spiritual meaning, i.e., the leaning on God for support, and the worship of God: "Look at the supplicating eyes, the gesture of leaning back – we all need to lean on God Almighty, we all need to pray with all our hearts."

The gestures of the six dancers involved the head, the back and the arms, and these movements were gradually increased, all starting from a low level and climbing, with the eyes turned upwards in prayer; The positions and movements are performed on a *small to large scale*, the limbs and torso which are drawn inward, fold and bend move and extend and stretch out to their fullest length.

While moving, all girls rose and stood on their feet in the same posture in a *unison* form. This is a sample of development from simple to complex movements and from individual to group performance. Standing in unison symbolizes, in addition, the community members' commitment to unity. Now each dancer stands still in a gesture of prayer; this full height posture symbolizes the spiritual exultation inspired by the worship of God.

Artistic reference to space is totally different in painting as compared to sculpture, architecture or dance [14, p.51]. In painting, the depiction of space is achieved by the use of perspective. The Yom Kippur painting portrays a façade with background depth; it is structured as a pyramid starting in the head of the praying figure to the left of the canvas, peaks in the cantor's head, and is completed on the right side of the canvas' low level. The teacher uses this perspective to structure the next part of the dance.

Enter another 9 dancers. Now there are 15 dancers, corresponding with the number of figures in the painting's background. The teacher asks them to run and "cross the space in different directions, back and forth, from side to side and diagonally". Crossing the space pursuing various *pathways* is another choreographic theme within the dance. The dancers perform several pathways phrases and along with the teacher instruction they form a symmetric pyramid structure occupying the entire space. A frontal line across the stage, that goes up and down in different prayer postures. This *symmetric pyramid form* looks and feels stable, balanced and resolved – it conveys the group's cohesion.

The dance scene ends with the breaking of the *symmetric* form. The dancers *moving in circles*, evoking an ecstatic spiritual ritual. The dancers revolve in their place with their arms and heads turned upwards; then they merge with the space and become one with the group, unified in their shared tradition, all expressing the value of asking for pardon.

The final scene of the dance picks up the motif of the opening scene: now 15 dancers are positioned in a statuesque design at three height levels, in a gesture of supplication and leaning. The piece has come full circle, the community preserves its character and values. The final scene delineates the borders of the collective. Above all, it symbolizes a possible lever for cultural transformation; located on the seam line between the "real" life and the world of art, it realizes the option of transition between reality and image. The visual text served the purpose of teaching choreographic principles: moving & poising; personal space & shared space; directions; pathways; height levels. Thoughts and feelings were transformed into physical movement activity, aimed at teaching the children about the community's culture and inculcating traditional values.

Art, body, emotion, and community By choosing this painting, the teacher introduced the Jewish ethos, the religious Jew who is devoted to Jewish law. These images were used for proliferating values, education, and presented an ideal model and ideal personages to serve God.

The visual information of the Yom Kippur painting was the basis for teaching elements of choreography besides the commandments of repentance and prayer. Thus, the painting and its symbols created an emotional impact that blended the world of the language of movement and socio-cultural values.

Such artistic experiences contribute to the development of children's sense of creative dance and belonging in their community. Perception theory explains the manner in which images [pictures] stimulate the human brain on the emotional and cognitive levels [...], thus enabling it to piece together all parts of an image that, as one whole, create meaning [...]. The images are the medium through which the body or the senses connect with cognition, perceptive comprehension or emotional stimulation" [10, p.13]. Thus, the pictures presented to the pupils can be translated into a language of contents. The visual representation can be used as a trigger for understanding viewpoints and traditions grounded in culture and in broader social connections. In other words, pictures are a subjective phenomenology of a social experience, and therefore a work of art can express social values [10, p.15], and images can express cultural values.

This dance composition reflects the culture and tradition of the community in which the teacher works, as interpreted by her. Movement themes and physical practices are associated with ideological notions of the religious community, and the visual text conveys a cultural message. Thus art becomes a way of life, and life is filled with art.

Using visual art, analyzing and interpreting art works and images enable children to develop a solid identity as individuals on the one hand, and to view themselves as members of their socio-cultural group on the other hand [13, 15]. The dialog between the visual and movement texts is instrumental in leading the pupils to search for new ideas, organize knowledge which has already been acquired, to find new links between ideas, and to embody the knowledge.

The ethnography illustrates the use of Visual Art and symbols to foster an embodiment of values, religious obligations, heritage and identity. The use of visual art brings out tacit knowledge of tradition and through dance embodies tradition while linking choreography as a possible partner, means, in the service of tradition.

The dialogue between the visual and movement texts is instrumental in leading the pupils to search for new ideas, organize knowledge which has already been acquired, and find new links between ideas. The dialogue serves the purpose of teaching principles of choreography and values of religious tradition at the same time; thoughts and feelings are translated into physical movement activity, thus contributing to the structuring of a culture and a community.

I believe that the findings may prove to be adaptable to other cultures which may apply them to integrate dance into their own traditions.

#### **Bibliography:**

1. AVIHAIL, E. Art within Faith. In: *Dasberg and Fisherman* (Eds.), Telalei-Orot. Elkana: Orot Israel College, vol.9, 1999, p.215-224.
2. BODROVA, E., LEONG, D. Learning and Development of Preschool Children from Vygotskian Perspective. In: KOZULIN, A. et al. (Eds.). *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.167-157.
3. CRESWELL, J.W. *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. US: Sage Publications Inc. 2nd ed. 2003. 246 p.
4. DAGAN, M., LEBEL, M. GREENBAUM, N. *Guidelines for the State Religious, Education Policy*. Jerusalem: Ministry of Education Publications, 2008. 64 p.
5. DEWEY, J. *Art as experience*. USA: Berkley Publishing Group. (2005[1934]). 371 p.
6. EISNER, E.W. *Artistry in Teaching: a Response to the "Pedagogy of Making" essay by Elizabeth Coleman* [electronic Version]. Center for Arts and Culture. <http://www.culturalcommons.org/eisner.htm> retrieved 17.8.2014
7. GARDNER, H. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.
8. GARDNER, H. *Brain, Mind and Creativity*. Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapoalim, 1995.
9. HANNA, J.L. A nonverbal language for Imagining and Learning: Dance Education in the K-12 Curriculum. In: *Educational Researcher*, 2008, 37(8), p.491-506.
10. HUSS, E. Introduction. In: KACEN, L., SEGEV, E.(eds) *Creating Research, Researching Creation*. Using Images in Social Research in Israel. Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University, 2010. 284 p.
11. MACHTER, E. (Ed). *Visual Literacy. Research, Study & creativity*. TA: Resling, 2010. 520 p.
12. MENDELSON, E. *Painting a People: Maurycy Gottlieb and Jewish Art*. US: Brandeis.
13. Ministry of Education and Culture Director General's Circular, 2014, no.72/2.
14. MISHORI, E. *Introduction to Art History*. Raanana: Open University, 2000. University Press, 2002, p.275.
15. SHALITA, R., FRIEDMAN, A., HARTEN, R. *Visual Literacy in Action: Education in the Visual Era*. Tel Aviv: Mofet, 2011, p.192.
16. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/creativity/arts-education> (19.04.2015)

*Prezentat la 28.05.2015*