

## DANCE CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD IN A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

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The article argues the need for a curriculum choreography for young children early (ECD), fixed the reference object, argues the theoretical and practical foundations of a choreography curriculum for schools in Israel Hemed. Proposed curriculum focuses on three aspects: matter choreographic content, specific religious community, early child peculiarities. These issues are analyzed in detail in the review article.

**Keywords:** *dance education, early childhood, tradition, curriculum, action research, early education, religious community.*

### PROIECTAREA CURRICULUMULUI COREGRAFIC PENTRU COPII DE VÂRSTĂ TIMPURIE DIN PERSPECTIVA UNEI COMUNITĂȚI RELIGIOASE

Autorii argumentează necesitatea elaborării unui curriculum de coregrafie pentru copiii de vârstă timpurie (educație timpurie), stabilesc obiectul de referință, argumentează bazele teoretice și aplicative ale unui curriculum de coregrafie pentru școlile Hemed din Israel. Curriculumul propus se axează pe trei aspecte: conținutul materiei coregrafice, specificul comunității religioase, particularitățile copiilor de vârstă timpurie. Aceste aspecte pe larg sunt analizate în articolul de față.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *educație coregrafică, copilărie timpurie, tradiție, curriculum, cercetare-acțiune, educație timpurie, comunitate religioasă.*

Dance education provides students with opportunities to experience, understand, and value the language and art of dance. It provides a context for understanding the world, contributes to learning cultures and provides an impetus for learning in other curricular areas [3,4,10,11,12,16]. Since a dance curriculum has not yet been formed by the dance teaching inspectorate at the Ministry of Education of Israel, each teacher develops a curriculum for the purposes of her own pupils that fit the cultural views of the community within which she works.

The Dance program for early childhood at the Orot Israel Religious College of Education (Orot), of which I am responsible, was laid out around age-appropriate elements of dance teaching. It is based on the basic topics of early childhood dance teaching but not specifically catered cultural ideology of religious teachers and schools.

The classical Jewish ethos was shaped by the dichotomy between spirituality and physicality, and the body-soul dichotomy is embedded within the NRC; therefore, the arts pose a difficulty, and particularly so the art of dance which is essentially physical. I was presented with the problem of training religious students in a discipline that may be in conflict with their cultural values, and was aware of the complexity facing my students, who are committed to living by the Jewish faith. Religious dance teachers must come to terms with dilemmas that might theoretically restrict their creativeness. This curriculum was the impetus for my doctoral research on how graduates of the program reconcile dance and tradition in their teaching.

In my observations of dance classes taught by graduates of the Orot College, I have identified some drawbacks; namely, the fact that, in structuring the early childhood dance course I did not take into account the religious community's cultural and traditional uniqueness, and the HeMeD's particular requirements. To meet these requirements, I have drawn up a curriculum for use in teacher training programs, which will reconcile the dilemma and which the teachers would, in turn, implement in their classes. Having received the teachers' feedback, I have revised the curriculum and adjusted it, in order to facilitate its implementation.

The curriculum suggested in this article caters to the traditional, cultural views of the NRC. Alongside its physical and creative goals, the proposed curriculum serves the purpose of imparting the culture and values of a religiously observant community.

### The Research Model

For my research I chose the method of Action Research in which participants examine their own educational practice, and use the techniques of research with the intent to inform and change his/her practices in the future [1,13]. This essay reports about the curriculum that I have designed and tested. It is an art-based Action Research [9, p.2] project in several stages: observations, curriculum design and teacher training, teachers' and pedagogical instructors' feedback and evaluation; the final stage was drawing up a *Teacher's manual*.

Observation - The curriculum is based on data collected during the course of observations of 14 dance teachers who teach in HeMeD schools. The teachers are all graduates of the Orot dance program. The observations were performed throughout the school years 2012/13. My goals were to find how the teachers adjusted dance subject matter to HeMeD schools, and organize these adjustments into a coherent curriculum. The classes observed were unrelated and extensive work was done to take the ideas from these teachers and the knowledge they have created, and organized it into a coherent curriculum adjusted to age, society, culture, dance and Jewish tradition.

Curriculum design – based on these observations, I came up with a curriculum that was taught to my students in their methodology and didactics courses. Unlike other models of curriculum planning that target specific goals, the methodological emphasis in the present curriculum is the modification of practices in accordance with an educational ideal.

Implementation - The curriculum was implemented by the teachers in training at a HeMeD school during the school year 2014/2015, in 6 groups of Grade 1.

In the next stage and as Bron offers that we need to involve our students in curriculum design [2, p.125] the teachers gave feedback accordingly I set out the curriculum as a *Teacher's manual*

The curriculum presented below is the curriculum modified after it was implemented and reflected by the teachers in training

### Theoretical basis

Dance is a kinesthetic art form that organizes physical energy within time and space, and where imagination, ideas, and meaning are translated into movement. It acts like a text and can be contextualized through historical, societal, cultural, and personal circumstances.

Current concepts regarding dance education widely recognize the fact that dance teaching in schools is about much more than just mastery of steps or an art form; it involves movement concepts within social and cultural contexts [3,4,10,11]. These perceptions are based on Vygotsky's theory, namely that learning and understanding can be achieved through different kinds of communication, including the arts of music and dance as media of communication [19, p.56, 179]. The above perceptions are also influenced by Dewey, who maintained that children learn concepts not through lectures but rather through experiential education: "learning by doing or learning through experience" [18, p.10]. Piaget's developmental theory generated the understanding that movement capabilities are age-related [17] while Gardner's multiple intelligences theory [7,8] legitimized the incorporation of mandatory art courses into school curricula. In dance education, students should learn the terminology used for comprehending dance; have a clear sense of embodying dance; discover the expressive elements of dance; and be able to reflect, critique, and connect personal and communal experience to dance [10,11,16]. The above-mentioned elements were milestones in building the curriculum.

The proposed curriculum sets forth from Shulman's theory which claims that in addition to being versed in the content knowledge, the curriculum writer should be knowledgeable of the social context, and should know the school staff and student body [19,20], or as presented by Tyler's model, the three important elements for designing a curriculum are: the students' needs, society's needs, and the scientific subject matter [21].

In choosing the appropriate movement themes I considered the findings of psychological studies that deal with the child's maturity and developmental stages, and particularly Piaget's developmental theory [17]. Therefore, the dance and movement themes included in the curriculum are based on content taken from the children's own world and their immediate surroundings. Recommended themes are, for example, Me and My Body, The Family, Me and My Environment, Seasons, Holidays, My Nation and the World (Sari, 32).

The traditional content knowledge of this curriculum is structured based on the cultural views of the NRC, and that it outlines the values of this community [5, p.34]. The above is in line with the Israeli Ministry of Education guideline which requires meaningful learning and the teaching of values and skills which bear relevance to the students' life.

The teacher's manual for NRC dance curriculum - In weaving the two threads of dance and tradition the curriculum reflects the HEMED's needs that "faith and tradition should be imparted through all academic disciplines, not only through the teaching of Jewish studies" [5, p.39]. Complying with this directive, the curriculum provides an opportunity for dealing with religious observance through artistic means.

Written in the form of a *Teacher's Manual*, I lay out a multilayer structure arranged around: (1) a significant class pattern (2) dance subject matters (3) traditional themes (4) thematic organization of the school year (5) the teacher role.

### **(1) Significant Class Pattern**

Through my observations I found that the teachers incorporated values of Jewish tradition into the dance activities. This led me to organize the curriculum around a class pattern that I have noticed. The curriculum therefore is based on the structure of "*Midrash Dance*" which is a dance class that adapted and followed the basic structure of a modern dance class with the addition of a *Midrash story* (a canonical story from Jewish texts). The "Midrash Dance" suggests placing a "Midrash Story" at the end of the traditional technique part of the lesson, so that it serves as a connection between a movement theme and leads to the "Creating and Performing" part of each dance lesson. This addition changes the nature of the class that combines religious, traditional and moral values, turning it into a unique structure that follows the values education requirements laid down by the HeMeD. According to these guidelines, from a socio-cultural perspective, the content taught in early childhood programs should bring into play the values of the community to which the children belong, and these should be imparted through various means, including **various forms of art** (emphasis added) [14].

### **(2) Dance subject matter**

The movement and dance themes for Early childhood are grouped under the following interrelated curriculum organizers:

- A. My body and I: parts of the body; joints; forms; direction; relationship; movement capacity; bases
- B. Elements of Dance:
  - 1. body skills: postural stability; equilibrium; coordination; Regulation of force;
  - 2. components of space: Personal space & Shared space; directions; Pathways; Height levels;
  - 3. time element: Rhythm; Intensity – dynamics; Patterns.
- C. Creating and Performing: Improvisation; Composition & Choreography

### **(3) Traditional themes**

The curriculum suggested offers that, alongside its physical and creative goals, dance education will serve the purpose of imparting the values of a religiously observant community; therefore the dance teaching will be focused as well on:

- (a) Teaching of Jewish scriptures and literature;
- (b) Teaching about the Jewish holidays and festivals in accordance with the Hebrew calendar;
- (c) Teaching Jewish life cycle ceremonies and rituals.

### **(4) Thematic organization of the school year**

The basic assumption was that the Hebrew calendar provides insights into the supra-system of Jewish culture.[6] Accordingly I chose the linear model, its guideline being the Hebrew calendar and the Jewish holidays and festivals. The HeMeD curriculum guidelines require teachers to reinforce religious faith through experiential, hands-on activities that arise from the children's own world in their day-to-day life. Teachers are expected to embed the prayers and blessings in the children's routine repertory, and introduce the children to protagonists of Torah stories and to the Jewish Sages and other Jewish spiritual leaders, both past and present. The students' identification with these figures, it is hoped, would result in the merging of emotion, conduct and knowledge [5, p.42].

### **5) The teacher role**

I envisaged the teacher as creative artist and with this image in mind, I insisted on the following points:

- a. The curriculum should be rich in teaching material that enables the teacher to link tradition and dance in multiple ways.
- b. The teacher should have autonomous leeway in her decisions on how to implement the curriculum. The teacher should be allowed to adapt the curriculum to specific educational circumstances and to her personal approach, and is welcome to interpret the curriculum and to recreate and restructure it in order to adjust it to her specific target population.

Built on these principals, the teacher's manual allows a two-way flow between the dance themes and tradition: The teacher can select a movement theme and then choose from appropriate suggested Midrash stories or vice versa – the teacher can select a Jewish calendar theme and then choose from suggested movement activities. Thus, children can absorb Jewish values through movement activities, and through tradition they also absorb the world of dance.

Following I'll present ideas and content knowledge in relation to dance and link such topics with Jewish tradition.

The example below demonstrates the two-way flow: how a movement theme related to gait and to various patterns of moving in space is integrated with the learning of the Torah story of Joseph and his brothers; the purpose of the lesson was to impart a moral value: count your blessings and never envy others (Pirkei Avot, Aleph).

Objectives Dance	Midrash story	Tradition Objectives	Evaluation
Acquire locomotion skills, movement across space: walking, running, skipping, capering, hopping, jumping, crawling, rolling.	Why does the falcon walk dancing? Once upon a time, the falcon sighted the dove whose beautiful gait is unrivaled among all other birds. The falcon envied the dove for her delicate style and decided to copy her. With great pains he tried to imitate the dove's strides. The other birds watched the falcon and derided him. The falcon was abashed and decided to regain his original gait. But much as he tried, he failed – he could not remember how he walked in the beginning. And so, dancing he walks to this very day. The Midrash Treasure (Eisenstein), p.35.	Never envy (br)other	The child will be able to maintain body balance while moving in space and will be able to describe the action. The child will learn the value of "Love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus, 19:18).

The Example below demonstrates how the teacher could search for the same dance theme and find an appropriate activity for a certain time of the year

Dance theme	Around the year	Midrash story
Circular pathways with different parts of the body and around the space of the classroom	The month of Tishrei (September)	SIMHAT TORAH – the last day of Sukkot is dedicated to celebrating the completion of yearlong reading of the Torah portions, and the beginning of reading them all over again, from BERESHIT [= the book of Genesis].
	The month of Heshvan (October)	"There was a year in which there was no rain in the Land of Israel. The people of Jerusalem came to Honi and asked him to pray to God for rain, and Honi prayed. But no rain came down [...] Honi drew a circle on the ground, stepped into the circle where he prayed and said: 'I shall not leave this circle until you have mercy for your children and let the rain fall!' [...] Where upon blessed rain started falling." (Mishna Ta'anit, 3:8).
	The month of Tevet (December)	According to Book Two of the Maccabees, the consecration of the Temple altar lasted 8 days, just like the consecration of the Tabernacle. The numeral 8 is in the form of two closed circles
	The month of shvat (March)	"And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food" (Leviticus, 19:23). The circular process of: Seed, plant, tree/flower, seed

After rereading the curriculum, and based on constant analysis of the data which was conducted with personal reflection and collective discussion, using theories to scrutinize data the curriculum was written and arranged along the linear order of the Hebrew calendar. It is suggested that the first part of the dance themes, "Me and My Body" will be linear and will follow the intrinsic logic of dance teaching, as it is important to start with this chapter to make sure that pupils understands the body and its movement. The second part "Elements of Dance" is modular. Every teacher may determine the order of teaching topics such as body skills and the elements of space and time. Every teacher will select materials of her choice and will decide how to use them and how much time will be assigned for each module.

### Conclusion

The curriculum that emerged from my observations of dance classes in HeMeD schools, will hopefully impart to teachers awareness of the tension between the art of dance and Jewish tradition; provide them with tools for dealing with this complexity; and guide them in the creation of high quality dance activities that gain strength from the wealth of Jewish tradition. This model of a dance curriculum offers a peek at some of the underpinning foundations of dance but not at the cost of surrendering the cultural, traditional framework. According to this approach, the dance curriculum should develop students' awareness of values and increase their receptiveness to the ideas implied by both dance works and traditions of life. The curriculum blends the physical space with the Jewish traditional space, converging body and soul, and recharging them with energy: both the pious energy ignited by the joy of serving God, and the physical energy that springs from dancing. The basic lesson in a culturally appropriate form alongside the arrangement both by dance theme and by cultural theme allow the teacher to cater her classes both to furthering education in dance and cultivating community values.

The curriculum which resulted from this research may also be useful for teaching other religious communities about their tradition. Hopefully this will be a flexible model based on dance content knowledge which may be adjusted to the unique socio-cultural features of the community in which it is implemented.

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