

2011

# Dance in primary education: a comparison between Greece and England

Reppa, Glykeria

The Cyprus Journal of Sciences

---

<http://hdl.handle.net/11728/11863>

*Downloaded from HEPHAESTUS Repository, Neapolis University institutional repository*

## DANCE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: A COMPARISON BETWEEN GREECE AND ENGLAND

GLYKERIA P. REPPA\*

### ABSTRACT

*In this study there is an attempt to present the similarities and the differences between Greek and British curriculum for dance. Moreover a second question is whether dance lessons in Greek schools can provide all the advantages that this activity offers to children. For this purpose there is bibliography reference, followed by an analysis and comparison of the two curricula. Moreover, the advantages of dance lessons are presented, and an examination whether the Greek curriculum for dance can provide all these advantages is presented. Finally, there are some suggestions as for what should be done as a conclusion to this analysis.*

*Keywords: dance education, Greek curriculum for dance, British curriculum for dance, comparison*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Ancient Greeks had realized the value and the opportunities that dance has as a mean of education, that is why dance had a primary role in their education. They believed that the person who did not know how to dance was uneducated and the person who knew how to dance was educated and cultured. Plato in “Nomous” and “Politeia” mentions the advantages of dance and he believes that every young woman and man should be educated through similar exercises and music. He also believes that dance is an instinct, the wish of the person to be exteriorized and his/her speech to be expounded by body (Zikos & Panagiotopoulou, 1990). Dancing is part of the history of human movement, part of the history of human culture and human communication (Brinson, 1991).

In recent years dancing is part of the national curriculum in both Britain and Greece. But it is not as a subject on its own right, but as a part of physical education in both countries. In this study there is an attempt to present the similarities and the differences between Greek and British curriculum for dance. Moreover, a second question is whether dance lessons in Greek schools can provide all the advantages that this activity offers to children.

---

\* Teacher of Physical Education

## 2. METHODOLOGY

For this purpose there is bibliography analysis. First of all, there is a reference to the special characteristics that dance has. Then the Greek and the English curriculum for dance are presented. This is followed by an analysis and comparison of the two curricula and if the Greek curriculum for dance can provide all the advantages that dance can offer. Finally, there are some suggestions as for what should be done, as a conclusion to this analysis.

## 3. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DANCING

It is clear that with dance, pupils learn about their body and how it can move. The Kinesthetic ability and intelligence can be developed, though, through dance. Pupils can find different and many ways that the body can do and develop them. There are unlimited ways in which the body can move. Dance is a subject that can promote the enrichment of movements, movement creativity and kinesthetic ability.

Rhythmic development can occur through dancing. According to Dalcroze the source of the musical rhythms is in the rhythms of the vital actions of the human body (Bourneli, Koutsouki, Zografou, Maridaki, Xatzopoulos, Agalianou, 2006: 101). He also pointed out that the human listens the rhythm with all his/ her body, and he/ she realizes it by gaining a rhythm muscle sensitivity (Bourneli et.al., 2006: 101). It is obvious that pupils who learn dance and do similar lessons have the advantage of developing their personal rhythmic and of course the understanding and the distinction of the different rhythms.

Dance uses body language to communicate, it is a non-verbal communication. Communication is vital to all beings. Every being finds ways to communicate with its own kind. The development of the human mind helped humans to discover a new way to communicate, which is speech. This discovery has disadvantage, other ways of communication to decline. Brinson (1991) says that: *“each is basic to human rationality by which we communicate to others our ideas and feelings about the world. Not all of these communications require words. There are whole areas of feelings, senses and emotion actually which cannot be expressed in words. Dance is a powerful example of this kind of non-verbal communication”*.

This special characteristic of dancing is very important to the development of the multi-cultural sense. The child that is not a good speaker of the spoken language of the country will not feel backseated in dance lessons because there is no need of words to communicate. The only things that are needed are observation and movement. As Zervas (1993) said these two characteristics are in the nature of the child. Therefore, there is an indirect positive development of children’s self-esteem, self-confidence, and trust of their selves, since they realize that there are other ways, for communication beside speech.

Another special characteristic of dancing is the socialization and the culture of cooperation, friendship and moral, that is developed. In a dance lesson pupils have to cooperate, communicate, respect and trust each other. So the development of the above values is being done indirectly, unforced and easily, by attending a dance class.

Dancing as an art form, offers direct ways of exploring values, of raising questions of personal, moral and aesthetic value and discussing the ideas and perceptions to which they relate. The aesthetic development, which is provided by dancing (and the other forms of art), helps deepening the sensitivities of young people to the formal qualities of the arts and extending the range of their aesthetic experience and values. Moreover, the experience of success in achievement, and of enjoyment in learning and working with others raises immeasurably the self-esteem and social confidence of young people (Brinson, 1991: 70).

Another important issue that is provided especially by dancing, is cultural education. According to Brinson (1991) “*cultural education helps people to recognize and analyze their own cultural values and assumptions; brings them into contact with the attitudes, values and institutions of other cultures; enables them to relate contemporary values to the historical forces which molded them; and alerts them to the evolutionary nature of the culture and the potential for change*”. The important roles that dance has for the development of multicultural sensitivity, if it is taught properly, are obvious here too.

How appropriate to offering all the above values and characteristics, though, are the dance lessons that are being provided by national education in Greece and England? Further down there is a reference to the national curricula for dancing of both countries.

#### 4. THE GREEK NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR DANCING

Dancing in the Greek national curriculum is being taught in the frame of physical education (PE). The only kind of dance that is being taught in Greek schools is the Greek traditional dancing. There is no other kind of dance that is scheduled by the national curriculum. Here is a reference to the aims of this lesson and how many hours are scheduled, in primary school, according to the national curriculum.

According to the national curriculum (2006) the aims of the subject of dancing in primary school are:

1. The connection of physical education with the Greek traditional dancing and civilization.
2. The understanding of the richness of the Greek traditional dancing.
3. The realization that dancing is a symbolic mean of expression and communication.
4. The development of the cognitive, emotional and psychokinetic sections of pupils through dance.

5. The understanding of rhythm.
6. The development of creativity and the participation in performances that are related to Greek tradition.
7. The understanding that dancing is a way of living.

The hours in every class that is scheduled by the curriculum are:

**TABLE 1: HOURS OF DANCING IN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Grades	Hours of dance	Hours of PE
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup>	12	62
3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup>	15	62
5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup>	12	64

As it is obvious the hours of dancing that are scheduled per grade are: 12 hours from 62 hours of PE for first and second class of primary school; 15 hours from 62 hours of PE for third and fourth class of primary school; and 12 hours from 64 hours of PE for fifth and sixth class of primary school. It is pointed again, that in all these hours pupils are taught only Greek traditional dances (Zounxia, 1998).

## 5. THE ENGLISH NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR DANCING

In England dancing is also being taught under the frame of physical education. The difference from Greece is that in dance lessons are not taught only English traditional dances.

According to the English national curriculum for key stages 1 and 2 the subjects that are taught in every year are:

*Year 1:*

*In this unit children explore basic body actions, eg jumping and turning, and use different parts of their body to make movements. They create and repeat short dances inspired by themes such as clowns, penguins and folk dance.*

*Year 2:*

*In this unit children focus on creating and performing short dances that communicate different moods, feelings and ideas. Their work is inspired by a range of subjects, including some based on different times and cultures.*

*Year 3:*

*In this unit children perform dances, focusing on creating, adapting and linking a range of dance actions. These are inspired by a variety of subjects, including some traditional, social and/or historical dances. They work with a partner and in small groups.*

*Year 4:*

*In this unit children focus on creating characters and narrative through movement and gesture. They gain inspiration from a range of subjects, and work in pairs and small groups.*

*Year 5:*

*In this unit children learn different styles of dance and focus on dancing with other people. They create, perform and watch dances in a range of styles, working with partners and groups.*

*Year 6:*

*In this unit children learn different styles of dance and focus on dancing with other people. They create, perform and watch dances in a range of styles, working with partners and groups.*

*Year 6/7:*

*In this unit children focus on popular dance styles of different eras. They explore a range of dances, using step and gesture patterns, body shapes, contact work, and contrasts in dynamic and rhythmic patterning. They learn more about both dance style and music.*

*In dance as a whole, children think about how to use movement to explore and communicate ideas and issues, and their own feelings and thoughts. As they work, they develop an awareness of the historical and cultural origins of different dances.*

*These units are divided into sections. Each section contains a sequence of activities with related objectives and outcomes. There is a mention to the section above, but without analysis to each of it, because such an analysis is irrelative to this project. The sections are:*

- 1. Acquiring and developing skills.*
- 2. Selecting and applying skills, tactics and compositional ideas.*
- 3. Knowledge and understanding of fitness and health.*
- 4. Evaluating and improving performance*

*(<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk>, last accessed 29/03/08)*

## 6. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The obvious similarity is the fact that dancing is part of the physical education and not a subject on its own, in both curricula. According to Maurovouniwtis et.al (2001) dancing can be characterised as a game. This is, as Maurovouniwtis et.al (2001) says, because dancing is reported to us as a form of standard, elements of game and it can be included in physical activity and physical education since dancing is a social, educational institution from ancient years. Moreover Almond (1997), by referring to the national curriculum of England for physical education, made an interesting point. The national curriculum states that *dance is an art form as such is an essential part of*

*a balanced physical education programme. As well as the development of the artistic and aesthetic elements dance is also concerned with acquiring control, co-ordination and versatility in the use of the body, and helps flexibility and develop strength.* The interesting point that Almond highlighted for this document is that, it is made clear that dance is considered as an essential part of balanced physical education, although it is an art form. Some argue that dance is an art form and the link with physical education is tenuous.

The next similarity is that traditional dances, traditional history and culture are taught in dancing lessons in both countries. This is essential for cultural education. Children develop their intra-cultural awareness through this kind of lessons. They learn about the history and about the manners and customs of the country they live in. There is a referring only to intra-cultural awareness because in Greece only Greek traditional dances are taught.

The above is the most important difference that Greek and English curricula have. In England students develop an awareness of the historical and cultural origins of different dances on different times and cultures. Thus, they develop their intercultural understanding, which is one of the most important issues of multiculturalism. They can make comparisons of different civilisations in different times or comparisons of different cultures in recent times. Through these comparisons they can understand more the other cultures and find similarities among cultures, from which their schoolmates might belong to.

According to Essinger (in Markou, 1966b) there are four vital principles for multicultural education:

1. Education for empathy. This means that we learn to understand the others, seeing their problems through our eyes and put our selves to their positions.
2. Education for solidarity. It is assumed to be a basic aim for the education in a human society.
3. Education for a multicultural respect. This respect can become a reality only if we open our minds and see the other cultures without fear and invite others to see our culture without fear, too.
4. Education against a nationalistic way of thinking. This means an extinction of nationalistic stereotypes and prejudices and opening dialog and communication with other ethnicities.

The question is how this multicultural awareness and multicultural education can occur in an educational system that offers teaching only in traditional dances of the host country. This educational system develops nationalistic thinking more than the multicultural one. It does not offer the chance to pupils to meet and learn about other cultures. Children do not have the opportunity to compare and find differences and similarities between their and other cultures. My opinion is that in a multicultural society there must be a space for other cultures to be introduced. This means that on the one hand, there must be a presentation and teaching for traditional dances of the

host country, but on the other hand there should be a reasonable time to introduce dances of other cultures and especially from countries that many pupils might come from. In this frame children can make comparisons and find that every culture has its own unity, but it also has similarities with other cultures. Children indirectly understand to accept others (schoolmates from other countries) and develop a multicultural awareness.

Another important difference is that children in England can develop their creativity and learn how to express their feelings and thoughts through many ways. As it has already been seen this is one of the characteristics of dance. Comparing the two curricula this is more obvious and easily seen through English dance- lessons than through Greek ones. According to the English curriculum in all years, children create their dances. In first year they are inspired by themes. In the next year they are inspired by exploring and communicate their own feelings, moods and thoughts. In the third year they develop creativity by creating and performing dances by linking a range of dance actions. In the next year creativity is developed by creating characters and narratives. In fifth year children create and perform dances from different styles. In the next year the starting point of their inspiration is a visual image and popular dance styles of different eras. It is clear, though, that there is a range of themes and starting points to help students to develop their creativity and inspire them. This can be used as long life learning, too. As children learn and understand that there are many ways to do something, and they can connect the creativity that they have developed in dance lessons with other aspects of their lives.

On the other hand, this important characteristic of dance is not offered so clearly in dance lessons in Greek schools. Children learn specific dances and they do not have the opportunity to explore their own abilities to other dance styles. Moreover, they do not have the opportunity to explore and create their own dances according to their feelings, thoughts, moods etc. Therefore, I believe that dance in Greek education has lost one of the most important characteristics.

## 7. DO THE DANCE-LESSONS IN GREEK EDUCATION PROVIDE ALL THE ADVANTAGES OF THE ACTIVITY?

At a first glance it is obvious that the aims of dancing, that the national curriculum had targeted, are fulfilled by teaching only Greek traditional dances. Nevertheless with a more careful study it can be said that some of the aims are not satisfied. According to the national curriculum, two of the aims are the development of emotional sections and the development of creativity. A typical dance lesson in Greek education is a presentation of the steps and a repetition of them by the pupils. In such a lesson, where the steps are standard and cannot be changed, how can creativity be developed and how can a student express his/her emotions?



Moreover, as it has been mentioned in this study the characteristics of a dance-lesson are more than the understanding of the traditional dancing and history. Communication and socialization skills can be developed through a dance-lesson. In Greek education the kinds of traditional dances that are taught are, in the majority, all the class together in a circle dancing standard steps. Of course there is a degree of development of social skills but is it enough? Meaning that through other forms of dance these skills might be developed more.

The most important aspect though, is that in recent years one of the main aims of Greek education is the multicultural development. Even though dance is a good mean this development, as it has already been said, of, it is not one of the aims of dancing in Greek education. The question is why Greek education does not take advantage of the power that dance-lessons have in multicultural development. In this point it should be said that there is not any suggestion to stop teaching Greek traditional dances. It is very important for Greece, and for every country, to have and not to forget its roots. Children should learn and understand the history and civilization of their country. On the other hand, it is very important for children to develop multicultural skills. In recent years the population of Greece has changed, so it is essential for the education to change the curriculum and find ways to combine cultural and multicultural development.

## 8. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis it is clear that there should be some changes in the way that dance is taught in schools. First of all, Greece should borrow some tips from the English curriculum. The English curriculum for dance is educated-based and the Greek curriculum for dance is traditional development – based. Moreover, Greece as England should think about the position that dance has in its education and if this position should change, and whether dance should become a subject on its own.

Referring to the first point, Greece has to consider some borrows from England, such as multicultural education and developing creativity through dancing. England has been an import country for many years now, so it has been considering more years about the multicultural society than Greece, which became an import country the last decades, from an export country that was till then. It is understandable the reason why only Greek traditional dances were taught in schools, in the years when Greece was an exporting country. This was done exactly because Greek should have known and protected their culture when they had to move, meaning by that to develop their national identity. We should not forget that Greece has been an independent country for nearly two hundreds years. Thus, the priority of the Greek society was to reinforce the national identity. However, times have changed. Greece has become an exporting country and has many immigrants. Hence, Greece has become a multicultural society.

Therefore, education should change and become multicultural. Children should develop their multicultural awareness without losing of course their national identity.

The next suggestion that can be made for the Greek curriculum is to include the development of creativity in its schedule of dancing lessons. As it has already been mentioned, developing creativity is one of the main characteristics that dance has. This of course does not take place by just teaching children traditional dances. Children should have the opportunity to create and develop their own choreographies. As Brinson (1991) says dance experience is about moving freely. This means not only to learn to move freely but also to learn to see, hear and understand clearly beyond the classroom. It should be understandable that everyone can create a choreography and everyone can dance. In this frame children develop directly their creativity and indirectly their self-esteem, self-confidence, and respect for the others. These values are vital for every human being, and education must give opportunities to every child to develop and reinforce them. These opportunities should be given through an enjoyable and unforced way, because only in this environment these values can flourish (Theodorakou, 2000). Dance is an activity, as already have been mentioned, that provides such an environment. So, the Greek curriculum should involve these kinds of lessons in their dance lessons.

The other point that both countries should consider is whether dance should be a part of physical education or not. Dance is not just a game that has some rules and some techniques (like basketball or football or athletics). To realise fully the contribution of dance in education should consider doing dance, creating dance, learning about dance and seeing dance. All these are very hard to be included only in some hours of physical education. By placing dance within a physical education programme, reduces the time and the opportunities that dancing can offer to pupils.

Dance should be a subject on its own in school curriculum in order to be able to offer all the values that it can offer. Brinson (1991) mentions, including others, that when dance is integrated fully into the school curriculum it can provide the development of artistic appreciation through judging the work of others; the education in personal relationships by working with others and appreciate the ideas of the others for a combined choreography; the better understanding of all cultures through studying and dancing dances from all countries around the world. Moreover, dance can be therapeutic, too (Schott- Billmann, 1997). As Aristotelis said certain forms of dancing (like Bacchanal dances) people could overcome depression crisis. Finally, if dance is a subject on its own, it can provide the opportunities and increase a young person's chances of realising what abilities and possibilities has to continue to dancing career.

Another point is that a physical education teacher does not have the complete education to teach a dance lesson well. Most of the physical educators are interested in sports. There are, also, limited lessons for teaching dance in the departments of physical education and sports in the Greek universities. This problem could be solved

if universities provide more dance lessons and include a direction for physical educators that want to teach dance. However, to achieve this change the state universities, should realise the value of dance and include this activity as a subject on its own to the school curriculum, or give more time to this activity in the frame of physical education.

## 9. SUGGESTIONS

This study is a bibliography comparison and analysis. There should be more experimental studies on this field, as in what degree the values of dance are developed in the Greek curriculum.

As a conclusion I would like to refer to a phrase that Bezar (1980) has said “*the speech separates, the dance unites*”.

## REFERENCES

- Almond, L. (1997). *Physical education in schools*, London, Kogan Page.
- Bezar, M. (1980). *Μια στιγμή στη ζωή κάποιου άλλου*, Athens.
- Bourneli, P., Koutsouki, D., Zografou, M., Maridaki, M., Xatzopoulos, D., Agalianou, D. (2006). *Physical education: National curriculum*, Athens, ΟΕΔΒ.
- Brinson, P. (1991). *Dance as education: towards a national dance culture*, Oxon, RoutledgeFalmer.
- Markou, G. (1996b). *Προσεγγίσεις της Πολυπολιτισμικότητας και η Διαπολιτισμική Εκπαίδευση – Επιμόρφωση των Εκπαιδευτικών*, ΥΠΕΠΘ/ΓΓΛΕ.
- Maurovouniotis, F., Malkogeorgos, A., Argiriadou, E. (2001). *Greek traditional dances*, ISBN 960-90798-0-6, Thessaloniki.
- Schott- Billmann, F. (1997). *Όταν ο χορός θεραπεύει*. Athens, Ellinika grammata.
- The standards site: department for children, schools and families, <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes2/phe/?view=get> , last accessed 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008.
- Theodorakou, K.. (2000). *Δημιουργική γυμναστική*, Athens, Golema.
- Zervas, G. (1993). *Psychology of physical education and sports*, ISBN: 960–90016–1-0, Athens.
- Zikos, G., Panagiotopoulou, A. (1990). *Φαινομενολογία του Ελληνικού Παραδοσιακού Χορού*, Athens, Telethron.
- Zounxia, K. (1998). *Φυσική αγωγή στο δημοτικό σχολείο. Προς τη «δια βίου» άσκηση.*, Athens.