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**CREATIVITY AS AN APPROACH AND TEACHING METHOD OF TRADITIONAL
GREEK DANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Key words: creative teaching methods, Greek traditional dance, creativity, secondary education, physical activity, setting approach, youth.

ABSTRACT

Education should always incorporate children's creative and free expression at a general level and this should also apply at the level of movement. Creativity can be cultivated, developed and expressed within an environment of acceptance, freedom and communication as long as appropriate qualitative and quantitative stimuli are provided. This is the reason why pedagogues should be seriously concerned with the types of tasks introduced at schools, student's cognitive preparation and teaching procedures. Different studies show that although children's creative ability is steadily developing since early infancy, it falls into decline during their school initiation. During their school life students are forced to inhibit their creative and innovative expression and yield to the process of "mechanical memorizing" oriented towards imitation and reproduction. The aim of this paper is to investigate creativity as an approach and teaching method of traditional Greek dance in secondary schools. More specifically, a comparison was made between two teaching methods: "teacher-centric" versus "guided discovery" or "guided reinvention style" in combination with the "divergent production style" in a Greek middle school. A six-month pilot study was carried out in the A and B grades of two middle schools of the Prefecture Department of Thessaloniki. The study sample consisted of 200 middle school students, 82 boys (N=82) and 118 girls (N=118). The data was collected with the use of a questionnaire. The evaluation results showed that when the creative teaching methods were implemented (i.e. the "guided discovery" or "guided reinvention style" in combination with the "divergent production style"), triggering of students' experiential learning process rendered the lesson more effective and successful, and raised the students' level of active participation in traditional Greek dance lessons in school. The success of this creative teaching curriculum makes a great contribution to the preservation and continuation of our cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The development and expression of creativity seem to be promoted within a teaching context that adopts more divergent rather than convergent thinking, providing children with the potential to experiment and explore, compose and synthesize, express themselves spontaneously and

without restrictions [34]. However, Lownfeld and Brittain (1975) state that creativity means conceptual flexibility or innovation of an idea or even the ability to think in a different way from other people; while Piaget (1960) and Torrance (1965) tend to define creativity as each individual's skill or original way of problem-solving. Creativity can be cultivated, developed and expressed within

an environment of acceptance, freedom and communication with the provision of the appropriate qualitative and quantitative stimuli. For this reason, pedagogues have to be seriously concerned with the kind of tasks introduced in schools, the cognitive preparation of students and the teaching practice procedures. As for teaching mechanisms, these should be guided through: a) the teacher, as a triggering factor for the child's creative forces and guarantor for the free movement of ideas; b) the curriculum, as a flexible framework and guide for these manipulations and methods; c) the teaching method, as a process of coordination bringing close together teacher, student, knowledge and reality [15]. According to Lee et al (1987) and Torrance (1965), even though the children's creative ability is developing since early infancy, it presents a first decline during the period of their initiation to school life. These "ups-and-downs" are attributed to the child's effort to adjust to the new way of thinking and working at school [9].

Piaget (1969) supports the spontaneous and relatively autonomous aspects of mental structures developed. Piaget considers highly important the selection of the proper educational methods and underlines that the truth is assimilated as a truth when and only when "re-discovered" through an appropriate activity. To Piaget, learning is a process of creative reinvention and discovery. True knowledge is the knowledge that comes out of the child itself. Children build up cognitive structures through the assimilation and adjustment of information they receive from their environment. The school should find ways to stimulate the child's interest in learning instead of imposing this learning. It should not limit students' freedom and dictate what forces and how these will be exerted upon them. Such an approach leads them to denying their personal way of reacting to stimuli and, thus, adopting attitudes that are actually foreign to them. It is essential that the school should ensure teaching situations where problem-solving is the prevailing element and students are asked to seek and find their own way to solve the problem. In "real" education, focus is placed upon the initial experience where kids perceive reality in a spontaneous, healthy and creative way, using their own senses.

Maslow (1973) supports that non-verbal learning is highly significant for the development of creativity. Children have an innate predisposition to express themselves through artistic activities, such

as music, painting, dancing. Rogers (1969) considered the establishment of a climate of freedom particularly important in education and focused more on the facilitation of learning (i.e. how, why and when the student learns and in which way this learning is intrinsically experienced), rather than on teaching itself. According to Rogers (1969), it is imperative to offer students the opportunity of liberating their curiosity, exploring and realizing that everything goes through a process of change and evolution. The skill of executing an original simple or dancing movement is the child's effort to produce different kinetic patterns, as responses to stimuli or as solutions to problems, and this effort includes elements of critical thought and movement creativity. Irrespective of abilities, experiences and performance, every student gains the right to participate and discover new aspects of him/herself and the world around him/her, without the fear of rejection, failure, criticism and judgment.

On this basis, dance in education should be continuously connected with children's creative and free movement expression. Creativity based on children's spontaneity is induced by stimuli which lead them to such internal tension that has to be expressed through dancing [19]. According to Guilford (1967), creativity covers the most characteristic aspects of creative people, determining the extent to which the individual can express a creative behavior manifested with inventiveness, synthesis and improvisation. Guilford et al, in their effort to prove the independence of creative thinking from compatible intelligence, carried out a three-dimensional classification of primary mental abilities, known as the theoretical model for the structure of intelligence. From this model by Guilford, it derives that divergent thinking constitutes the nucleus of creative production, while at the same time a clear distinction is set between convergent and divergent thinking: convergent (critical) thinking concerns the mental process which sets data, information or memorized material into a logical structure, with the aim of seeking the one and only correct solution or conclusion. On the contrary, divergent (creative) thinking – even though the starting point still being information processing – is oriented towards seeking all possible solutions and answers. In this way children's imagination develops and alternative ideas and solutions are found.

The main factors influencing children's creativity are intelligence, imagination, personality and environment. The co-existence of all these factors ensures the optimal ground for the development and expression of creativity [14]. Creativity can be cultivated, developed and expressed within an environment of acceptance, freedom and communication with the appropriate qualitative and quantitative stimuli [16]. Students learn not to have restrictions in their movements, how to move freely within the space and use their body to express a number of feelings and ideas. Various stimuli can be used, such as kinetic games, rhythm patterns, musical instruments and traditional dances. When asked to create, students have to combine the amount of their technical knowledge, use their imagination and improvise spontaneous and innovative movements. They may select any kind of music piece or compose their own music or even use only sounds. They are also free not to use any musical accompaniment, if they wish so. This process has to be a continuous personal and innovative movement composition, unique as for the time and place it takes place. Creativity can be either free, with stimuli provided to the child, or guided, when something specific is carried out. Time duration in free movement creativity can be short with the peak of interest in the beginning and end. Creativity based on the child's spontaneity is evoked by stimuli which lead the child to such an internal tension and excitement that has to be expressed through dance [16].

The traditional Greek dance within the PE context can become a unique tool for creativity cultivation, by constructively using the elements of music, movement and speech. Not only can the traditional Greek dance become an instrument to cultivate creativity, but at the same time, it can also constitute a field for practical application of creativity [36]. In this case, a PE lesson is usually based on imagination, spontaneity, knowledge, experiences, emotional expression and creative exploitation of the "coincidental" [16]. This improvisation is the creative movement of a specific instant, which may be personal or collective and which merges creativity with execution, as the child simultaneously composes and performs movements and kinetic patterns without any preliminary rehearsal; it is simply composing and performing at the same time. Creative movement is based on Laban's theory (1948), who was the first to introduce the conceptual framework of creative

movement. According to Laban (1948), movement has flow and "wholeness", as a means of communication and personal expression. The fundamental principle of "Laban's Movement Theory" or "Effort System" (1948) is the spontaneous effort, i.e. the intrinsic motivation and impulsivity of the human being, which is required for the execution of any kind of movement [10]. Efforts can be distinguished thanks to the combination of components included. These components, such as Body, Space, Dynamics and Relationship are essential for the execution of every movement. Factors attributing dynamic quality to spontaneous movements are Weight, Space, Time and Flow [11].

The traditional dance continues to occupy one of the last positions with regard to the number of hours and teaching methods, while the relative instructions about the new analytical curricula mainly have to do with contemporary planning and teaching styles [5]. In the centre of the teaching and learning process remains the Physical Education Teacher as "the master of the game". At the same time, the traditional dance approach method mainly used so far by most Physical Education Teachers is the so-called "teacher-centric" or "direct" approach [16]. In this Greek traditional dance teaching style, the central role is played by the Physical Education Teacher, since he is the one who selects the dances to be taught, indicates the specific movement patterns, demands attention, absolute imitation and discipline. In this way, the pupil becomes a passive recipient of knowledge and information, where improvisation, imagination, initiative and personal judgement are restricted [27, 23].

The aim of this study is to identify the decisive role of creativity in traditional Greek dance teaching in middle schools. More specifically, it aims at evaluating creativity and its usage within a teaching method, as this is conformed in the new analytical curricula [6]. However, according to the new analytical curricula suggestions, new teaching styles have been developed which actively involve students in the decision-making process for the conduction of the lesson [24]. The guided discovery or reinvention style, in combination with the divergent production style, promotes students' creativity. The teacher plans and creates the appropriate conditions that activate the student and introduce him/her to the process of reinvention – discovery or creativity [27, 24].

With this creative method, children respond to various stimuli and participate in cognitive procedures, such as comparison, hypothesis, synthesis, composition, analysis, creation and execution [8]. In addition, they cultivate their creative skills by making positive use of their imagination, accentuate their perceptual ability in physical activities, gain aesthetic awareness and consciousness. They experience the joy of discovery and creation that offers them great enthusiasm and feel satisfaction and pride in their achievements. In this way, their psycho-emotional development is enhanced [21]. Also, a good relationship of co-operation and communication is being established both among students themselves and between them and the teacher [24]. The use of the new suggested creative teaching method for the activation of junior high school students, shows that students learn traditional Greek dances in a pleasant, creative and productive way. The pedagogic significance of the “learning by doing” creative process is particularly high. The educational teaching model offers the student the potential to deal with an expressive occupation, such as the traditional Greek dance, based on the experiential learning approach. By frequently going deep into a topic, a wide field opens up so as to expand later on to more goals, offering students new knowledge and experiences and keeping their interest alive. In this teaching method, it is the active participation of schoolchildren that primarily matters. Children retain their autonomy while actively participating in the lesson, irrespective of their physical abilities, but according to their level of skills and experiences [30, 21].

METHODS

Sample and procedure

The intervention curriculum was implemented at the A and B grades of two (2) middle schools of the District of Kato Toumba in Thessaloniki and, more specifically, at the 4th High School and 2nd Experimental High School. 200 students (N=200) participated in the study, including 82 boys (N=82) and 118 girls (N=118). The intervention traditional dance teaching curriculum was implemented for a period of six months (October 2007-March 2008). The teaching method which was applied in the first phase to all students (boys and girls) of the specific schools for a three-

month period was the teacher-centric or guided or direct teaching method [23]. Later on, in the second three-month phase, the creative teaching method was used, which was the teaching method suggested by the new curriculum of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Pedagogical Institute [5].

Measurement instrument

Within the framework of this study, a questionnaire was distributed addressed to the students of the above mentioned middle schools. The questionnaire consisted of sixteen close-ended questions. The study concerned the recording and evaluation of students’ attitude towards the lesson of Greek traditional dance at the middle school A and B grades. The questionnaire was specially formulated for middle school students and was based on the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) [32, 24], as this has been formulated for dance in groups of adults [1]. Before the implementation of the intervention curriculum, the overall reliability score (Cronbach’s α) for the 16-item scale was $\alpha = 0.93$. However, following the implementation of the curriculum, the reliability co-efficient (Cronbach’s α) became $\alpha = 0.96$. For every group (both experimental and control), there were twenty-two (N=22) teaching hours of Greek traditional dances. Traditional dance lessons were provided twice a week, each lesson lasting one teaching hour (45 min.) for every class. The dances selected were the ones suggested by the analytical curriculum of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (2007), along with some other local dances which did not present any dancing difficulty with regard to their kinetic forms.

Experimental procedure

During the experimental procedure, two teaching methods were implemented: a) the creative method, where the guided discovery or reinvention style was chosen in combination with the divergent production style; and b) the teacher-centric or direct method. In the creative method, the Physical Education Teacher provides a variety of incentives (audio-visual-verbal-kinetic-real or imaginary) to stimulate the children’s’ interest and enhance their participation in musical-kinetic activities, with the aim of teaching-learning traditional Greek dances [26, 22]. Then, the PE teacher moves to the elaboration and expansion of the thematic material always securing the personal

style of each member of the group. In the end the PE teacher provides feedback to the children through discussion by encouraging the expression of their viewpoints and feelings. The spontaneous creative expression reveals elements of the child's personality. The active observation of the Physical Education Teacher and his/her qualitative and quantitative intervention aim at creating potential for evolution of the child's personality.

The provision of many and various stimuli leads the kid to posing questions, expressing concerns, seeking for solutions, developing the ability of analyzing, synthesizing and cultivating his/her intellectual skills. Main characteristic of this method is the children's dynamic intervention to their education [25]. With the creative teaching and self-guidance, children learn by themselves how to recall their own experiences and express their own personal will. Through this learning process, children interact with their own self and the environment and gradually gain self-knowledge, create a positive self-image, develop a distinct self-perception, self-esteem and dynamic identity [4].

Personal behavior, perceptual skills, personality and adaptability are not the same for all children but vary significantly in each one under different circumstances. It is highly essential for all students to experience the acceptance of their personal effort and action within the school environment. The Physical Education Teacher has to enhance children's efforts and prompt them so that there is a continuous development of a positive self-image. In addition, the PE teacher should encourage students to think first before getting involved in the activity. It is useful for traditional dance lessons to include open-ended activities, so that they promote movement creativity and the children can choose and present their own personal outcome [2]. An important element of the lesson is the Greek folklore song, which indicates the close relationship between poetry and music. The folklore song involves this interweaving between the two components, music and poetry, with various interactions taking place where very often it is the music that plays the primary role in the morphological organization of the song in its whole [33]. Teaching the traditional song to the students is required for teaching them the dancing rhythm, which is included in the melody and is the main factor for the child's kinetic creativity. Creativity in traditional dance is expressed with creative movements, unrehearsed dramatic games, verbal,

rhythmical and kinetic improvisation and the use of musical and self-made instruments. The spontaneous creative movement, integrated in the school curriculum constitutes a motivation medium for students of the first school period but also offers a pleasant and interesting traditional Greek dance lesson.

According to the suggestions in the new analytical curricula, new teaching styles have been developed which actively involve students in the decision-making process for the conduction of the lesson [25]. The guided discovery or reinvention style, in combination with the divergent production style, promotes students' creativity. The teacher plans and creates the appropriate conditions for the student to get activated and enter the procedure of reinvention-discovery or creativity [27, 25]. Within the framework of this creative method, children respond to various stimuli and participate in cognitive procedures such as comparison, hypothesis, synthesis, analysis, creation and execution [8]. Also, they cultivate their creative skills by positively using their imagination, accentuate their perceptual skills in physical activities, gain aesthetic knowledge and consciousness. They experience the joy of discovery and creation, which offers them high enthusiasm and makes them feel satisfaction and pride in their achievements. In this way their psycho-emotional development is enhanced [21]. In addition, a very good relationship of co-operation and communication is established both between the students themselves and between students and their teacher [25]. The use of the new suggested creative teaching style in the lively activation of primary school students, shows that students can learn traditional Greek dances in a pleasant, creative and productive way.

The suggested teaching method of older analytical curricula is the "teacher-centric" or "direct style", which has been so far been followed by the majority of Physical Education teachers [16, 17]. In this teaching style for Greek traditional dance, the central role is played by the PE teacher, since he or she is the one who chooses the dances to be taught, indicates the specific kinetic patterns, demands attention, absolute imitation and discipline. With this teacher-centric method, many students feel their independence and freedom being restricted and as a result develop a negative attitude and aggressive behavior towards the dancing learning process [3, 15]. According to Mosston and Ashworth (1994), the teacher-centric style requires

particular attention, for it may function more as a symbol of power and means of imposing control on the pupil, rather than as a stimulus for more effective teaching and learning. This study attempts to attribute a new dimension to the teaching of Greek traditional dances in Secondary Education. Traditional Greek dance emerges as a new object of interest in the field of School Physical Education in Greece, as it is based on the child-centric and creative learning-teaching method.

RESULTS

The results of the study showed that out of 200 students (boys and girls) of the A and B grade of the two schools, only one hundred and fifteen (N=115) actively participated in the traditional dance class with the application of the teacher-centric teaching method (Figure 1). More specifically, it was recorded that ten (N=10) out of twenty (N=20) students participated in the traditional dance lesson in A1 class (50% participation rate); fourteen (14) out of twenty-four participated in A2 class (58.3%); twelve (N=12) out of twenty-one (N=21) participated in A3 class (57.1%); sixteen (N=16) out of twenty-three (N=23) participated in A4 class (69.1%). The participation rates for the rest of classes were the following: 50% for A5 class, 56% for B1 class, 56.5% for B3 class and 63.1% for B4 class.

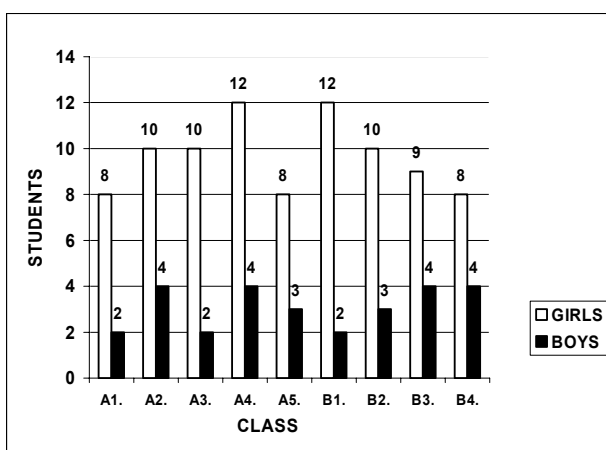


Figure 1. Students' participation in the traditional Greek dance lesson with the teacher-centric teaching style

The application of the creative teaching method in the Greek traditional dance lesson resulted in the universal participation of all students, boys and girls, of the A and B middle school grades (Figure 2). In other words, in all classes of the A and B grades of the two schools, 100% of students participated in the traditional Greek dance lesson when the creative teaching method was applied.

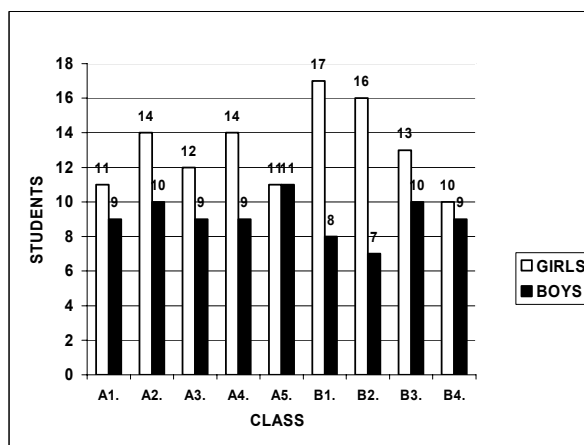


Figure 2. Students' participation in the traditional Greek dance lesson with the guided discovery and divergent production teaching style

As a conclusion, following the application of the creative teaching method, students, of the two middle schools of the District of Kato Toumba in Thessaloniki acquired a much more positive attitude and behavior towards the traditional Greek dance lesson than when the teacher-centric method was applied. With the teacher-centric method, students presented a negative attitude with particular indifference to the lesson and the general learning process of Greek traditional dance. More specifically, when the creative teaching method was implemented, the participation of all A and B middle school grade students was universal.

DISCUSSION

In this study, a comparison was made between two teaching methods of traditional Greek dance in Greek secondary schools, more specifically between the teacher-centric and the creative teaching style. The application of the creative method was found to bring forward more positive results than the teacher-centric method in the

learning process of the specific cognitive object. Thus, it is highly essential that Physical Education teachers adopt and implement the creative method in teaching traditional Greek dance in Secondary Education, in accordance with the instructions of the new analytical programs of the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (2007). In this case, the traditional dance lesson could be carried out following an interdisciplinary and cross-thematic approach in direct connection with aesthetic education (music – theatre – virtual arts) and environmental education, so that it conveys and transfers elements of cultural tradition and heritage, knowledge of history, folklore and geography, significantly enriching the students' cultural spectrum [17].

It is a new intervention method in the teaching process of traditional dance, which brings up to surface the gained knowledge and kinetic experiences of students and enhances their creative skills. It comes in cohesion with the nature of traditional dance, which embodies the concepts of creativity, collectiveness, improvisation, energy, activation and constant transformation [35, 12]. It is through these creative teaching models that the education supports the child's psychokinetic, cognitive, creative, as well as socio-emotional development. These creative programs are a continuous game for children, through which they are entertained in a pleasant, creative and productive way and, at the same time, can discover the elements of their own folklore culture. New exploration paths are revealed before them with regard to their culture and they get to love Greek traditional dance. In this way, the suggested method attributes a new dimension to the teaching of Greek traditional dance in the context of Secondary Education.

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