

TEACHING GREEK TRADITIONAL DANCE AND LIFE SKILLS IN NEW HIGH SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

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Abstract

The aim of this study is an overview of the “Greek Traditional Dance” as a separate unit in high school PE syllabus, according to the recent curriculum, and its relation to the concept of life skills, these being defined as a collection of abilities that empower individuals to effectively deal with the demands and complexities of daily life. Considering that PE advocates a holistic approach to students’ health and well-being, the Greek Traditional Dance can substantially contribute to this as it fosters motor, cognitive, and emotional learning all at once. This is also supported by the literature review, which has so far shown that the Greek traditional dance could be unarguably seen as a gateway to holistic learning. On the other hand, life skills that are taught in physical education classes also aim to greatly assist students develop holistically. It is a fact that physical education serves as a foundation for imparting life skills, while school-based physical education creates the ideal environment for nurturing them. This reality paves the way for fresh research perspectives on the Greek traditional dance in the context of life skills.

Key Words: *Greek traditional dance, life skills, holistic approach, holistic learning, physical education, school physical education*

Introduction

In the new curriculum for high schools, which will be implemented at the dawn of the next academic year, the main purpose of Physical Education (PE) is defined as ‘Lifelong exercise for health and quality of life’. This main purpose of physical education is to act as the hub which is surrounded by four general axes that correspond to different theme modules. These axes are related to motor skill development, cognitive development, behavioral development, and moral/emotional/social development. Accordingly, each one of the theme modules includes two theme-related sections. The physical education new curriculum in high school is student centered (I.E.P., 2022) thus promoting a holistic approach to students’ health and well-being. The Greek traditional dance constitutes a theme-related section under the axis of motor skill development in primary education (Ministerial Decree 33484/D1 Government Gazette Issue 2155/3-4-2023) as well as in secondary education (Ministerial Decree 4293/D2 Government Gazette Issue 203/19-1-2023 . Ministerial Decree 33184/D2 Government Gazette Issue 2051/31-3-2023)

Material & methods

The methodological framework of this study is based on the bibliographic research method, which involves the analysis, evaluation, and integration of relevant published literature (Thomas & Nelson, 2003). This specific research process aims to highlight the importance of a holistic approach in physical education within the context of the new curriculum. It also emphasizes the integration of life skills in physical education and explores how the teaching of Greek traditional dance can foster holistic learning.

Results

Greek Traditional Dance

As mentioned above, the Greek traditional dance constitutes a theme-related section under the axis of motor skill development whose main aim underlines the importance of students being capable of having an

array of sports and motor skills which are considered beneficial for their lifelong exercising so that they can conduct a healthy and good quality lifestyle. (I.E.P., 2022).

More specifically, the Greek traditional dance is specified as a basic theme-related section within the module on motor skill in the new curriculum for physical education in upper high school (I.E.P., 2022). This specific section is titled 'Dances and Rhythm' and emphasizes the development of rhythm and dance skills. Additionally, it underlines the importance of dance as a way of expression, communication, social interaction, entertainment, and physical activity, whereas both the organisation and participation in dance events, performances and celebrations in a school environment are highly recommended. (I.E.P., 2022).

Regarding the content, specific dances are not prescribed. Instead, educators are free to choose based on their knowledge and the motor skills they have themselves. However, it is essential that the dances taught can be transferred to the adolescent's daily life outside of school. This way, students will be able to participate in dances that satisfy their need for self-expression and enjoyment (I.E.P., 2022).

The traditional dance is a joyful activity that helps the participants not only express their feelings, but also develop interpersonal relationships (Likesas et al., 2018). Besides, dancing activities can help the individual to develop and improve their co operational skills with their classmates as well as members of the community they belong to (Likesas, 1995). Movement education is said to help in the problem-solving process through the clever use of creativity. (Likesas, 2002)

The traditional dance consists of three elements: movement, music and speech. According to Gfeller (1988, citation in Likesas & Zachopoulou 2006), music can facilitate creative thinking. An individual's creativity can be easily developed and expressed in a traditional dance (Likesas, 2002) as long as the dance itself proves to be the perfect field for practical application. (Likesas & Koutsoumpa, 2008). The teaching of the traditional dance, which incorporates the learning of music and movement, is utterly essential for encouraging students to express their creativity might they be in primary school (Likesas & Zachopoulou, 2006) or in secondary school (Likesas et al, 2009). It is important, though, that the teaching of music and movement is conducted on the grounds of a creative teaching approach which promotes exploration, communication, creativity, imagination, imitation and improvisation. Apparently, this idea can be applied either on its own or in combination with individual or team dancing and musical activities (Likesas & Zachopoulou, 2006).

In conclusion, the traditional dance can contribute to the holistic development of the individual since all their senses are activated. This way there's a dramatic improvement in their kinesthetic, social, and emotional development, whereas their creativity and communication skills are equally benefited. (Likesas et al., 2018)

Traditional dance is a multidimensional experience that significantly contributes to a child's holistic development. Traditional dance also educates by integrating feelings and emotions with logic and motor skills (Sanderson, 1988). The Greek traditional dance, as a separate unit of physical education, can contribute substantially to the holistic development of the student as it contributes to motor, cognitive and emotional learning (Koutsouba, 2014).

According to Fouris and Zbainos in 2018 there are no systematic and comprehensive studies that document the holistic approach to the teaching of Greek traditional dance. This is the reason why the forementioned researchers presented this educational model as a holistic teaching approach that could fill in the existing gap. It also aimed to promote and facilitate the process of teaching the Greek traditional dance. Hopefully, it could also help the decision making of the ones who are responsible for designing, organising, delivering and the assessing the educational act.

In another situation, Topatsi et al (2022a) decided to study the holistic approach while teaching / instructing a specific Greek traditional dance called "Enteka". What was originally done was to divide the class into a control group and an experimental group. On the one hand, and with reference to the kinetic part of the dance, the movement, the results were similar in both groups, as both groups learned how to dance "Enteka". On the other hand, the experimental group had to delve further into the ritual that is related to this dance. It's called "Fanoi" and takes place in Kozani on Carnival Sunday. Following the holistic approach, the students had to work collaboratively in groups, and they had to do research and collect information about the ritual of "Fanoi" as well as separate elements connected to Folk Culture, such as traditional costumes and traditional instruments, the region of Kozani being the central reference point. The students' research was mainly based on data collected from web quests on the internet and the findings had to be presented to the class plenary. Then, after being instructed the kinetic part of the dance "Enteka", the students had to do an experiential enactment of the ritual "Fanoi", thus intertwining the traditional dance

with the ritual. In other words, the students didn't simply perform the traditional dance, they also revived the history lying in the background. As a follow up of the theoretical knowledge concerning a traditional dance according to a holistic approach of teaching, Topatsi et al (2022b) created a mind map for the students to complete. At this stage, the researchers concluded that the participants managed to learn plethora of Folk Culture concepts and beliefs, developed their linguistic competence and greatly improved their interactions and cooperation. Obviously, the holistic approach in teaching the Greek traditional dance brought about a far better learning outcome than that of a more traditional teaching method.

Apart from the above-mentioned studies, which were conducted within the holistic framework of teaching, there have been studies according to which the teaching of the traditional dance is based upon the cross curricular approach. Likewise, the students familiarize themselves with elements of folk art and tradition, such as traditional costumes, music, songs, musical instruments and related folk and cultural activities and rituals. The goals are achieved through research, as well as compilation and recording of the corresponding material. (Karfis & Ziaka, 2009). Ms Stivaktaki (2011) states that the use and application of cross curricular programs can cultivate and promote holistic learning, thus improving the process of teaching and at the same time playing a beneficially influential role in the emotional, cognitive and behavioral development of the students.

In 2011, Stivaktaki tried out an cross curricular program of teaching the Greek traditional dance with high school students. More specifically, the researcher carried out the program following a number of teaching methods (mere instructions, peer teaching, divergent comprehension, allowing students to take the initiative themselves). The results of the research showed that the teaching of the traditional dance in PE in an cross curricular framework positively influences students' attitude and beliefs about the traditional dance.

However, the method of teaching Greek traditional dance should be such as to contribute to the holistic approach. In 2021, Fountzoulas wanted to study the effect of the morphological teaching method on dance performance and on dance literacy. According to Fountzoulas (2021), the morphological teaching method of Greek traditional dance is a holistic process in which, the student is perceived as an individual who feels, thinks and acts

Let's get understand the morphological method better. The morphological approach to teaching Greek traditional dance aims to focuses on the dance, that is on dance structure and style. This approach allows dancers to analyze the fundamental elements of the dance and understand how it is constructed as a whole work (Tyrovola & Koutsouba, 2006). This method classifies dances on the basis of two fundamental dance patterns: the pattern called dance 'sta tria' and pattern called dance 'sta duo' (Koutsouba, 2014). Through this approach, students can explore the dance structure, movement patterns, transitions, and emotional character (Fountzoulas et al., 2021).

The morphological method of teaching a traditional dance doesn't refer to the mere reproduction of the movement patterns. On the contrary, it aims at rendering the students aware of how the Greek traditional dance laid its foundations and evolved over the years. This specific method categorizes the dance in relation to the corresponding linguistic and the musical element and gives the students the chance to do the same through composing and recomposing the dance (Koutsouba, 2016). Overall, this teaching method develops critical thinking skills and helps dancers acquaint to a holistic experience of the dance (Karfis, 2018· Fountzoulas, 2021).

Life skills in Physical Education

Over the last two decades there has been immense interest in incorporating and promoting life skills through PE. Gould and Carson (2008) define life skills as follows:

Life skills are those inner personal trends, the characteristics and the skills like goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work full of ethos, skills which can be developed more easily through athletics, but they can also be transferred in non-sports environments.

Reviewing the literature related to this subject, it is obvious that life skills can unarguably be promoted in Physical Education (Gould & Carson, 2008), which actually offers us the opportunity to have access to almost all student bodies. The sports usually instructed in PE sessions constitute a very popular and joyful activity (Cronin & Allen, 2017) with which a great number of students deal systematically. Besides, athletic and motor skills are nothing more than the hands-on practice of life skills while attending Physical Education at schools. (Goudas et al, 2015). In conclusion, PE, which embraces physical activity (Jenny & Rhodes, 2017), can be considered as a fruitful field for the development of life skills (Goudas et al., 2015· Cronin & Alen, 2017).

It is worth noting that in the new curriculum for education there is extensive reference to the importance of life skills and the ideal subject to cultivate and develop them, which is PE. Students can definitely apply them in their adult life afterwards. In the teacher's guidebooks emphasis is placed on the way there should be a connection between Physical Education and life skills. Last, there is reference to the benefits the students can get if life skills are properly developed in schools. In their attempt to offer practical guidelines to the instructors, the authors of the teacher's guidebooks present an eight-hour lesson plan for last year of upper high school.

There have been studies about applying life skills in Physical Education in Greece since 2000 (Papacharisis, 2004; Goudas et al., 2006; Kolovelonis et al., 2006; Papacharisis et al., 2007; Goudas & Gianoudis, 2008; Gianoudis, 2010; Goudas & Gianoudis, 2010; Kolovelonis et al., 2010; Simos, 2012; Koutelidas et al., 2019; Goudas, 2022; Koutelidas, 2022; Zetou, 2022). The programs in those studies are Goal (GOAL) and Sports United Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER) by Danish (Danish et al., 2004) as well as Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPRS) by Hellison (2011).

Dicussion

Regarding the GOAL program, it should be noted that, it has not been implemented as a standalone life skills intervention program but in combination with the SUPER program in a customized and concise version (Papacharisis, 2004; Goudas et al., 2006). As for the application of the SUPER program, as mentioned earlier, it was implemented in conjunction with the GOAL program. Regarding Sports United Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER) as an independent program in the field of physical education, studies have observed its use since 2007. However, even in this case, a modified brief format of the specific program is utilized (Papacharisis et al., 2007; Goudas & Gianoudis, 2008; Gianoudis, 2009; Goudas & Gianoudis, 2010). This fact is due to researchers' efforts to integrate these two programs into the physical education curriculum at schools. As for the TPSR model, it has gained interest in recent years (Koutelidas et al., 2019; Koutelidas, 2022).

Beyond studies that explicitly mention the models they are based on, there are also studies where researchers do not specify the model they used to shape their intervention programs. Nevertheless, from the analysis of these studies, it is evident that the intervention programs align with the philosophy of the abbreviated versions of the SUPER and GOAL programs encountered in the aforementioned research (Kolovelonis et al., 2006; Dimitriou et al., 2007; Kolovelonis et al., 2010; Simos, 2012; Zetou, 2022).

In summary, focusing on the categorization of life skills related to physical education in Greece, studies ultimately emphasize life skills related to goal setting, positive thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and responsibility.

Conclusions

The teaching of life skills through physical education can lead to the holistic development of students (Goudas & Kolovelonis, 2022). Education through movement is a modern and innovative philosophy and approach to school physical education. Based on this philosophy, sports, motor skills and sports activities are used as means for the holistic development of students, including the teaching of life skills (Goudas & Kolovelonis, 2022).

Teaching life skills in school physical education is used as a means for the holistic development of students. Life skills refer to a collection of abilities that empower individuals to successfully navigate the demands and complexities of daily life. Holistic approach is the element that could connect physical education with life skills and the Greek traditional dance.

Regarding Greek traditional dance, it is important that the teaching method itself to address the student holistically. This fact constitutes the advantage of the morphological method, which provides participants with the necessary tools to understand, analyze, clarify, and interpret what they did themselves. Consequently, it empowers students to become active participants and treats dance as an embodied process, transforming students into engaged participants (Fundzoulas 2021). The goal is to enrich the practical knowledge acquired during practice and ultimately connect theory with practice (Fountzoulas, 2023). Therefore, it can be inferred that the morphological method offers a dual contribution, serving as an instructional approach for Greek traditional dance that simultaneously embraces holistic teaching. In other words, this specific method operates holistically. Conversely, the educational process that presents the content of traditional dance through interdisciplinary or cross-curriculum approaches leads to holistic engagement due to its interdisciplinary or cross-curriculum nature, rather than being solely determined by

the teaching method applied to traditional dance.

The conclusion is clear that the morphological teaching method of Greek traditional dance contributes to a holistic approach during the teaching process. Especially, it is understood as an active process of constructing meanings and conceptual change, which requires the active participation and engagement of the student throughout the entire process.

Therefore, Teaching life skills in school physical education is used as a means for the holistic development of students. Life skills refer to a collection of abilities that empower individuals to successfully navigate the demands and complexities of daily life. Holistic approach is the element that could connect physical education with life skills and the Greek traditional dance. Consequently, incorporating life skills into a dance class is an example of a holistic approach and plays an important role in the student's dance improvement. Also discovering life skills through dance can help participants improve not only their life skills but also their dance skills (Scrementi, 2015).

Taking into account the position of traditional dance in the new curriculum, which is placed under the theme section 'Dance and Rhythm,' and the interest shown by the new curriculum regarding life skills, we conclude that if we want to holistically approach the teaching of students, then the relationship between the morphological teaching method of Greek traditional dance and life skills is essential.

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