

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Insights on Performing Arts in Education in Greece

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## Abstract

Although the positive value of performing arts in education has been recognized globally several years ago, education policy-makers do not seem to favor long-term programs for schools. The present study collected and analyzed information from papers/presentations and a round-table from a symposium in Greece to present the current situation and related challenges of the use of performing arts in education. The local case studies reported positive experiences. The safeguard of the artistic nature of the result while aiming for the student wellbeing and social inclusion was discussed as the main general challenge. However, trivial issues such as the lack of long-term programs that will allow reiteration of the activities and improvement are yet not resolved.

**Keywords:** Performing Arts, Education, Policy, Student Wellbeing, Social Inclusion.

## 1. Introduction

Although Arts Education has been recognized by UNESCO (2006) as a universal human right and an early study even presents possible advancements on the art practice at schools through the knowledge of art professionals (Karkou and Glasman, 2004), the inclusion of arts in school curricula tends to decrease especially during times of economic crisis (Jindal-Snape et al., 2018).

Many studies were already conducted before 2004 that show benefits such as increase in personal wellbeing and social inclusion for school students when arts were used in education (Karkou and Glasman, 2004). Art projects received particularly positive feedback from both teachers and students.

This is true for studies conducted by policy makers and researchers throughout the world (Wright, 1994; NCERT, 2006; Bamford and Wimmer, 2012; Cabeto-Mas et al., 2017). Actually Bamford and Wimmer (2012) trace this idea back to 1793 and present a historic continuity since 1900's as well as current influences.

Two recent studies published in the same journal and the same year, one is a literature review and the other is a primary-data research, still recommend art as a positive tool for education and both agree that government policies throughout the world should reassess the inclusion of performing arts in education (Jindal-Snape et al., 2018; Clarke and Basilio, 2018).

Performing arts include well-defined arts such as drama, dance, and music (Clarke and Basilio, 2018) but even more complicated arts such as Rudolf Von Laban's free and expressive dance and Miguel Demuynck's creative drama and role-playing (Nagy et al., 2013).

All studies agree that inclusion of performing arts in education is positive for student wellbeing and social inclusion. Peace building, diversity, and intercultural understanding are modern terms recently introduced to everyday life and performing arts in education can successfully promote them among students.

Initiatives building on these values exist mainly from committed educators without necessarily being recognized and supported by educational policy makers (Cabeto-Mas et al., 2017).

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Research has been identified as fundamental to provide evidence that will persuade educational authorities to provide more funding or more school time for performing arts in the curriculum (Jindal-Snape et al., 2018).

However, providing evidence is not easy when describing aesthetic and emotive activities and their effect on students. As discussed above there are several benefits from such programs and even the experience of participation can be one of them but increased academic achievement seems to be the most influential for policy makers.

The presentation of any related evidence that point to benefit of students from their participation in such programs should be promoted. The aim of the present study is to provide insights on the incorporation of performing arts in educational policy in Greece.

The objectives of the present study are a) to determine the current situation related to performing arts in education and b) to determine the challenges and steps needed for the educators and administrators to incorporate performing arts in education.

This study is an overview that can be valuable for audiences of teachers and education policy experts in Greece itself, but the themes and challenges explored are certainly relevant and familiar to other national contexts.

**Table 1.** *Symposium topics and related comments*

Symposium Topic	Comments
Motion – dance in education	as a means of communication, meeting, cocreation, pleasure and acceptance of others
Dancetheatre in education	as a cooperation of creative dance and rhythmic and theatre game as a means of exploring the forms of the other and as consolation
Music-kinetic education	rhythm, song, soundscapes
Theatre in education	as an education possession and a means to decode the meaning of otherness
Performance	as ceremonial completion of artistic action and body; a way of social intervention and activation of urban or natural landscape
Writing	text creation for stage performance and text conception from stage action
Performing arts in special education	as pedagogical and therapeutic tool
Performing arts and environmental education actions	cultivation of aesthetic education in humans as an important tool for addressing environmental problems

## 2. Methodology

To test the objectives of this study a symposium was organized. The above objectives were set before the symposium and were tested against (a) the presentations along with the papers submitted and (b) the expert round table discussion that took place during the symposium.

## 3. The Symposium

The 1st Symposium on Performing Arts in Education: Collectivity and Consolation took place in Patras, Greece, on May 17th 2016 and was successfully completed.

The aim of the symposium was to promote dialogue and research on the contemporary art practice related to performing arts in education. The objectives of the symposium were to promote dialogue on each of the topics related to performing arts including dance, theater, dance theater, performance, music, opera, and music theater.

The topics refer to creativity, experimentation, communication, collective action and solidarity, good practices, interdisciplinarity, and in general the recent trends in pedagogy and teaching of aesthetic education. The topics of the symposium are summarized in Table 1.

## 4. Methodological Tools

The papers submitted by the symposium presenters were reviewed and all symposium presentations and the expert round table were attended. Maximum two main conclusions were drafted from each paper/presentation that related to the objectives of the present study.

Each paper/presentation was considered to have equal weight. These draft conclusions were analyzed by adopting some of the steps used by Jindal-Snape et al. (2018). The conclusions were then evaluated by both authors for quality and relevance to the general topic, similar ones were grouped, and were mapped based on their relevance to each of the two objectives

## 5. Results

It was common conception that the symposium raised discussions on the above topics through 14 oral presentations, 6 poster presentations (see summaries in Table 2), a round table discussion with 6 experts (Table 3), and 3 workshops.

There were 87 Greek and international participants registered in the symposium. Most of them were educators and university students with specialties

such as primary school education, theater, language, architecture, environment, and writing.

The participants included educators involved in teaching and in administration and art professionals from the Municipal and Regional Theater of Patras and DERIDAncetheatre Ensemble, as well as educators trained and joint in a “Performing Arts in Education” network called NetDAS.

The outcome of the symposium was a 175-page volume symposium proceedings, mostly in Greek (Galani, 2016). Most of the papers presented case studies that evaluated the application of international practices at local scale. They are summarized in Table 2 providing an overview of the current practice.

It is obvious from Table 2, that most studies and case studies are initiated by university professors or the educators themselves and both large- and small-scale projects in terms of student numbers are presented.

Educational administration is not pro-active on this topic. Most of the case studies engage younger students. High-school students are considered too busy to participate in such activities.

**Table 2.** *Studies presented in the Symposium*

Study Title	Performing Art	Project Initiated by	Education Level	Number of Students Participated
DAS, Proposal for the introduction of a dancetheatre program for the compulsory education	Dancetheatre	University professor	Primary and Junior High	2,867
Arts and School: 7 points for the formulation of a proposal	Dance, theatre, music	Regional Educational Administration	Primary, Junior High and High-school	73,700
The effect of music-motion education on phonological awareness of preschool children	Music-motion	University professor	Pre-school	74
Animating the literary text: how a literary text is initiating an unwrapping of feelings, techniques and creativity	Theatre	Educator	Primary	160
From literature to acting to directing	Video	Educator	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	25
Training experiential seminars in primary education with the aid of performing arts	Animation	Educator	Primary	(800 educators)
Valorizing gypsy culture through performing arts	Dancetheatre	University professor	Primary	15
THE ACTOR and his role at the Art integrity of the theatrical spectacle	Theatre	University professor	Primary, Junior High and High-school	NA
The dynamics of devised theatre in education: collaboration processes and self-expression	Devised theatre	University professor	Primary and Junior High	50
Greek traditional dance and improvisation	Dance	Educator	Adults	15

Contact points between performing arts and environmental actions	Role playing, Music	Educator	Primary	18
Climate art	Dance, theatre, music	University professor	Adults	NA
The chat of sciences, technology and arts at the museum of science and technology of up	Dance, theatre, music	University museum	Primary, Junior High and High-school	42,000/year
DAS PROJECT: supervising and writing down the facts of the Achaia teachers' intensive training on dancetheatre.	Dancetheatre	University professor	Adults (educators)	46
Due to art acts	Drama games and educational drama	Educator	Primary	25
The game of art and time	Dance	Educator	Primary	50
The interdisciplinary approach of Greek folksy dance in teaching process: development of teaching designs	Dance	Educator	Primary	120
Fine arts and music as psycho-social tools for approaching and supporting children refugees	Music	Non-governmental organization	Primary	90
Theatre activities as a means for preventing and treating racial behaviors in a primary school	Theatre	University professor	Primary	36
Influence of performing art actions on effective presentation of environmental programs by junior high school students to primary school students	Theatre, video	Educator	Junior high	22

**Table 3.** Round table panel members

First Degree, Expertise, Professional Position	Main points raised
Choreographer, Rhythm & Dramatic Play in Education, Instructor in the Department of Primary Education	How to safeguard art from art in education as a tool?
Educator, Regional Director of Primary and Secondary Education Western Greece Regional Primary and Secondary Education Regional Directorate	Government needs to act on this topic.
Choreographer, (PhD) Assistant Professor, Department of Theater Studies	It is not clear which is the best approach to start acting on this topic?
Musician, Instructor in the Faculty of Education and Education at the Preschool	There is always positive feedback from such programs.
Environmental Scientist, Environmental Education, Associate Professor at the Department of Chemistry and Instructor in the Department of Primary Education	Collaboration among instructors of different disciplines is necessary for successfully incorporating art in education.
Architect, History of Architecture, Instructor at the School of Fine Arts	New social needs can be addressed through art in education.

## 6. Current Situation and Symposium Conclusions

Most of the participants agreed that it is generally accepted that “the interaction of art and school” is a current topic of concern in Greece. Dance programs that have already been completed at schools demonstrated that students who participated showed an improvement in communication, interest, and solidarity. These programs increased students’ self-confidence and students acceptance for their own bodies.

Music kinetic programs demonstrated better results for students in phonological criteria. Performing arts appear to lead to teamwork that leads to character building. A range of subjects -- with literature being the dominant one -- are looking ways to use performing arts in their teaching. Besides literature, environment, climate, and natural sciences are subjects that can also benefit from teaching utilizing performing arts. In all cases, synergy is required between teachers from different disciplines.

The active action of teachers leads to the creation of many tools, fast, easy, and able to overcome technical problems. Video is such a tool which at the same time can be highly creative.

In addition to the content of the courses to be taught, there are needs at schools for the coexistence of different religions and cultures that require transformation of behaviors and cultures both of the majority and of the minority.

Important points in utilizing performing arts in education include the design of programs, experiential education of teachers, creative participation and involvement of children in creating with joy being the primary goal.

Many different tools were proposed including the use of elements coming from a different culture to increase the acceptance of oneself, of devised theater to develop experience for content and to give freedom for creation, of improvisation in traditional dance to develop interest and team spirit, and of digital art repositories / tanks to reveal new issues.

### 6.1. Challenges and Future Steps

One of the issues identified as very important was that the autonomy of art although it is necessary, it is limited in Greece. Karkou and Glasman (2004) also seem to point this topic as difficult to safeguard.

The engagement of students more with the process than with the outcome and the use of art to communicate, make connections, and meanings without words promote student wellbeing and social inclusion. At the same time, these aspects that are positive for art to be used as a tool in education are also reasons to result in a decreased artistic result in terms of aesthetics.

On the other hand, the points that were raised most during the discussions suggested that other more elementary issues have not yet being resolved. It is not clear from where to start the integration of performing arts in education. Should it start from top to bottom establishing university departments e.g.

Dance higher education school? Or from the bottom up by educating students? Is art a separate subject? Should it be included in every course? Should it be with or without relevant content in the other courses? Are there new premises and new schedules needed?

Is it possible to make art a compulsory subject? In such a case, is the role of art going to be undermined

in other courses? Is it meaningful to evaluate art? A long-term action integrating performing arts in education is needed.

This can only be provided by central administration to assure a continuity that will allow room for adjustments and corrections in the long-run and based on local/national experience.

Jindal-Snape et al. (2018) point to a similar conclusion, i.e. it is important that performing arts programs are provided to students for extended periods to optimize their impact.

## 7. Conclusion

At this moment the interaction of performing arts and education in Greece is a policy topic of concern that is currently not resolved. Experience is limited to local case studies. A long-term national scale initiative integrating specialized knowledge and skills from art professionals is needed.

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