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How and why I became involved as Consultant and Senior Moderator on the Subject of Dance to the International Baccalaureate (IB) Organization: a ten years summary

You can read the published article in Hebrew here:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55969b4be4b02838d128fe95/t/5e2da1866db1421c54827693/1580048775014/Dance+Today_Building+the+IBO+Dance+Program_HEBREW.pdf

How it all started - Initial planning:

In summer 1998 I met Jonathan Levy, the main Theater consultant to the IB Theater wing at a committee assembled by Harvard University Office of the Arts to advise their selection of a new director for Dance. Levy, a professor of theater and a key player in the leadership for the IB Theater Subject and whom I found to be a wonderfully kind and a wise old soul, asked me to assemble a committee to help the IB construct a curriculum for dance. Dance, along with Film, was to become a new subject for their High School Diploma Program following the already established disciplines of Theater, Visual Arts and Music. With view towards serving an international body of students in schools from around the globe, I was asked to assemble a committee of professional artists educators and scholars representing international aesthetics and viewpoints. For Jonathan Levy - the joy of learning and the thrill of discovery was paramount in art education. His vision stayed with me throughout the last ten years as a guiding principle.

In March 1999 the selected members of the Steering Committee, all professors in higher education as well as practicing artists: two Americans, one Canadian, two US citizens who were also Israeli of a Jewish Yemenite minority (myself) and an East Indian of a Zoroastrian minority assembled in a mid- town Manhattan hotel conference room with Mike Clarke, the IB representative and specialist in the Theory of Knowledge, for a three intensive day conference for what was to become an ongoing challenge in constructing and monitoring an international curriculum and assessment criteria for dance designed for junior and senior high school students. Little did we know that our involvement in this initial conference would become an ongoing commitment lasting many years.

Mike Clarke knew little about dance but he knew a lot about the educational philosophy and system of the IB and its complex structure. On the first day, after introductions were made, the five of us kept staring at Mike with bewilderment and some anxiety as he wrote on a large white board the word; **DANCE**. His initial mandate was a debate amongst ourselves on "what should a course in dance for the 21st century contain for bright international 16 -19years old students".

Where to start? How were we going to construct a guidebook that will be respectful of and accommodating to the international movement languages and aesthetics of dance with as little

hierarchical preference as possible? How could we build a curriculum for dance in context of liberal arts education that could be enriching to the general student body as well as to those who aspired a serious career in dance? How could we find common denominators for excellence? Are there such global denominators? Would we be imposing our western values on others?

As a member of a minority culture growing in 1940's and 50's Israel, where the educational system of the time mostly ignored the history and culture of nonwestern students,

These questions resonated deeply and at the center of my being both as artist and a person gearing towards a new Millennium and the global society we were aspiring to be.

Between March 1999 and Dec.'01, the Steering Committee met in various NYC hotel conference rooms for intense three days work. These were the most intellectually and emotionally demanding for us: moments of clarity, insight and agreement were off balanced by intense debates where, on occasion, tempers flared to produce tears and even anger. Our hope that the program of study will facilitate students' learning of "the other" as well as new understandings of themselves was already experienced right there in the conference room and amongst ourselves from the beginning. Many personal issues of resolved and unresolved cultural issues and identity became evident.

Example: " why should a child of a minority origin, educated in, for instance, a colonialist system, have to write a comparative final paper on two cultures: one close and the other far from his experience, instead of being given the opportunity to investigate in depth his own culture which was mostly ignored in an elitist educational system." The question thus arises: is "the other" really oneself? This question came up from the East Indian member of the committee.

While we all agreed that the subject of dance as taught in context of liberal education, i.e. - not in context of conservatory/professional training should be divided to three areas of study:

Performance; Composition and Analysis and **Dance Investigation**, it took a long time of intense and often furious debate to arrive at a curriculum and assessment criteria that would be specific in its requirements yet - open enough for global traditions that were different than what was familiar and acceptable to us.

In Dance Composition for instance, It was hard for most of us to accept the idea that students of some dance traditions might not be allowed to create new works nor make new arrangements to existing dances.(Few centuries- old traditions in the East and the West, only permit new creations or changes to existing practice after great mastery has been achieved; a high school student studying dance taught in context of the IB system who could start their dance training in their 11th grade has no chance, generally speaking, of arriving at such mastery.) That the freedom to create and to strive towards finding one's individual expression and discovering fresh movement material so inherent to Modern and Contemporary Dance traditions were not shared by all - was hard to swallow.

This problem, though rare in a potential IB context, was solved by giving such students an option to either make new arrangements of traditional dances (spatial and rhythmic variations as well as no.of dancers used and their arrangement in time and space) or choreograph in a different dance tradition familiar to them where this practice is allowed.

In the Performance section of the Curriculum – questions in assessment and grading came to play: can the same standards in grading of a student choosing the High Level (HL) track and who only started formal training during their junior year at High School be applied to a student with many years of training? Similar questions arose in considering grading students who chose the Standard Level (SL) track, which could include the experienced, and the beginning student as well.

This was one of the more difficult problems to solve.

We resolved this question by deemphasizing one standard of virtuosity in technical skills in favor of values such as clarity of intent and expression served by technical skills, which are appropriate to each student experience. It became crucial, therefore for the student in consultation with their teacher to choose dances that were challenging yet in line with their technical abilities.

I remember, as moderator-watching videos sent from around the world and how moved I was by watching a very simple dance performed with emotional conviction and clarity, where form and content were totally in synch.

In the Dance Investigation comparative research paper – where the words “familiar and unfamiliar” replaced the words “close and far” in comparing two dance cultures, such questions as: what is “far” came to play. Is “far” a geographical location or is it familiarity and knowledge of a particular tradition of what could be one’s close neighbor or even one’s biological and historical heritage often ignored.

The plan in action - schools and teachers take it on.

In 2000 -2001 several schools around the world were willing to take on this Pilot phase of the two year IB Dance Subject following the Guide Book Draft, and prepare their students for final examinations. Meetings with teachers who came from the USA, Canada, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, Taipei - China and later on from Spain, Latin America and Africa, started taking place in the USA and in the IB administrative head quarters at Cardiff, Wales. These meetings included the **Subject committee** of three and Caroline Harman, the IB Diploma Programme subject area manager. Indeed, these meetings provided a much-needed platform for clarifications and adjustments. Together we added few passages to the Guidebook; clarified the language used in the Guidebook and added glossary of terminology often used. We were often divided in small groups to write, clarify and redefine new ideas such as: The International Dimension, Nature of the Subject, Aims, Assessment Objectives and Practice.

Most importantly - we needed to find out by jointly looking at the teachers’ student work as presented on video and in their writings if there was a consensus on common standards in evaluating students’ work in Performance, Composition and research papers (Dance Investigation.) Some of the students’ final work in all these areas were being graded by their teachers while some were graded by external examiners as well as sent for moderation by senior examiners/moderators overlooking both internal and external examiners.

What I remember from these early meetings at Cardiff was the overwhelming anxiety and worry by some of the participating teachers in the first meetings, particularly by those who came from the USA where, unlike public schools in the UK or New Zealand and Australia, there is no common dance curriculum and examination system in place. A lot of effort during

these first meetings was aimed at lessening the prevailing unease: "I am not confident my students are ready to successfully accomplish this curriculum " or " How can I accomplish this with my school's large classes, limited time and resources" or " being the only dance teacher in the school, I do not feel knowledgeable enough to cover all these areas let alone expose my students to several dance styles and cultures" and more boldly: " what you are asking for, while I am in full agreement with, is not in line with our school tradition, I fear students and parents resistance."

We also heard from another teacher who was already teaching a similar program to that of the IB a different view: " IB Dance gives my program credibility because of the rigorous IB academic tradition. This is helpful in an economic climate that threatens the fine arts education in public schools."

Teachers were asked to bring several video samples of student work in **performance** and **choreography** for us to look at together and also their research papers for all of us to read and grade. Heavy clouds of anxiety were present in the room in the first meetings as one by one teachers showed their students' work on video and we jointly attempted to grade their work by referring to the assessment criteria in the Guidebook. This was, indeed, a very tense and uncomfortable session in which teachers felt vulnerable and exposed as we viewed their students' performance and choreography on video.

To our joint surprise, however, we found that our standards for grading were not so different. Often teachers were harsher with their students than the rest of us. This was a source of great relief and an incentive to continue addressing with honesty and clarity areas of weakness. Hilary X, a teacher from Salt lake City whose students' creative work was particularly excellent wrote: " Traveling to Wales and meeting with dance teachers from all over instilled a strong sense of the universality of dance. People were teaching with a wide range of experience and philosophy but when we tried to create viable assessment criteria for Performance and Composition we were able to collaborate and eventually agree."

Another area of difficulty, at the early stages was teachers' lack of confidence in advising students' **Dance Investigation**: a written research paper comparing two particular samples or topics representative of familiar and an unfamiliar dance cultures and traditions. My colleagues on the committee, Sharon Friedler, Director of the Dance Department at Swarthmore college, Pa. and Professor Grant Strate from Canada, were most helpful by either refining the requirement and language used in the Guide book or in our annual meetings - spending at least a good part of a day or two in a University library, assisting teachers in finding literal and audio-visual resources to support dance abstracts they were asked to write as samples for dance research papers. The main directive in this area was to avoid generalities and choose very particular topics as central subject for comparison.

Here are some abstracts teachers suggested and for which they found enough library resources:

The importance of referring to primary resources unique to dance such as live performances, interviews with practitioners or when necessary - the study of performances on videos and film were also discussed.

The most enjoyable part of these meetings were the wonderful dance workshops and discussions by and with world artists including composition workshops conducted by Ze'eva Cohen and our wonderful dinners where tensions and anxieties were dissolved and happily replaced by animated conversation and laughter carried on to the late hours of the night.

IBO Dance Subject today - what has changed?

Approximately ten years after the initial N.Y. meeting of the Steering Committee with Mike Clarke - 37 schools from 10 countries from all five continents participate in the IBO Dance Diploma Program. The on-going annual three day conference with world teachers reveal much more confidence in their immediate understanding of the IB Dance Subject, its Guidebook and all other procedures of sending their graded students' work for moderation. New questions from teachers about practices and terminologies are quickly and efficiently addressed and it looks like very soon the Guidebook, which we were constantly refining, will move from its draft status to permanence. There usually is, though, a seven-year curriculum review cycle.

In Conclusion:

It is a thrill to hear from teachers whose thoughts on the important contribution the IB program is making towards the acceptance of the Dance Subject into the general education system and its recognition as a serious area of academic and artistic area of study: " I like the IB Dance Curriculum because it is so intelligent. Dance has always been difficult art form to substantiate. The depth of the curriculum reflects the emerging academic tradition in dance." (Hilary)

In looking forward, I am thrilled to continue my work with the IB:

I enjoy the ongoing discussions and debates with my two outstanding colleagues, Sharon Friedler and Grant Strate as well as with the IB administrative staff who constantly challenge us with their demands for fairness, clarity and sensitivity to cultural difference.

As to my on going work as a senior moderator overseeing final student work on videotape shipped from around the world: how gratifying it is to view students' work coming, for instance from China or Kenya where students' final work was graded by their local teacher as well as by an outside examiner coming from Ghana and find out that common standards of excellence, as they are articulated in the Guide book Assessment criteria, can be applied cross culturally. In light of this thought I would love to share with the readers our statement on the nature of the Dance Subject, which took a long time to write, and of which I am particularly fond of:

"Nature of the Subject:

All dance is expressive movement with intent, purpose and form, which communicates through the body and gestures of the dancer. Dance is a vital and integral part of human life. It exists in many forms and styles and is practised in all traditions and cultures, taking place in a range of contexts for various purposes. Dance functions as ritual, as artistic endeavour, as social discourse, as recreation and as education.

Dance is always evolving, as innovations develop alongside or from traditional forms and practices. Dance works may be seen as social and historical texts reflecting the cultures from which they emerge. Often these works may be seen as emerging texts that shape and determine the direction in which culture is moving.

Dance is a unique medium for learning about self and the world. It is one essential component of artistic, aesthetic and cultural education, and develops creative potential through physical, non-verbal expression. In dance, the integration of body, mind and spirit helps participants learn skills that are transferable to other disciplines and to their daily lives.

Consistent with the educational philosophy of the IB, this dance curriculum aims for a holistic approach to dance, and embraces a variety of traditions and dance cultures. Performative, creative and analytic skills are mutually developed and valued whether the students are writing papers or creating/performing dances. The curriculum provides students with an arts and humanities orientation to dance. This orientation facilitates the development of students who may become choreographers, dance scholars and/or performers. The course also welcomes those students who seek life enrichment through dance."

endnotes:

From an IB Informational Brochure

1. "The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is a rigorous pre-university course of studies, leading to examinations, that meets the needs of highly motivated secondary school students between the ages of 16 and 19 years. Designed as a comprehensive two-year curriculum that allows its graduates to fulfill requirements of various national education systems, the diploma model is based on the pattern of no single country but incorporates the best elements of several. The programme is available in English, French and Spanish." (From an IB old brochure)

From the dance Guidebook:

2. "The dance course (syllabus) which outlines three components of study: Performance Composition and analysis and World Dance studies, has an in built flexibility allowing the study of diverse world dance traditions and styles. While in all three components students are required and encouraged to explore dance from cultures and/or traditions distant from their areas of familiarity, they are only examined on the knowledge of a distant tradition in their World Dance Investigation paper."

Few unique features of the IBO Dance philosophy and structure:

3.- Students can choose between two tracks of study: High level (HL). Requiring 240 hours, or Standard level (SL) requiring 150 hours of study. Both the experienced and the beginning student can choose an HL or an SL concentration: "While prior dance experience is not mandatory at SL, it is recommended. At HL it is very strongly recommended."

4.- Teachers are expected to teach and guide their students in their studies of technique, repertory, composition and dance investigation research papers. They are encouraged to supplement their knowledge by getting the necessary support by recommending the acquisition of literary, audio visual materials for their school library, by inviting guest artists to teach master classes and workshops and choreograph for their students as well as participate in three-day meetings/workshops with the Subject Committee and the IB Diploma Programme subject area manager. These three day meetings and workshops were proven to be particularly helpful in clarifying various issues and in creating an ongoing dialogues amongst the participating teachers and the IB leaders.

5.- Final students grading is done by their teachers; samples of students' work is shipped out to be re-examined by outside moderators who also grade students performance and composition work in videotapes and read their Dance investigation papers. The IB headquarters' staff monitors discrepancies between local teachers' and moderators' grading and takes appropriate action.