

“Cultural Relevance and Creative Thinking Through Folk Dancing”

Presented at the Council for Children’s Expanded Physical Education (CCEPE) Conference 2014

by Marita K. Cardinal, Ed.D., Professor
Division of Health and Physical Education
Western Oregon University
Monmouth, OR 97361
cardinm@wou.edu

Description of session:

In this session, participants will learn and perform a variety of folk dances. Some are appropriate for younger elementary levels and others are appropriate for upper elementary, middle, and high school students. Dances will include: *Dance of Greeting*, *Cshebogar*, *Mayim*, and *Buggy Schottische*. Emphasis will be placed on ways to highlight cultural relevance in the dances and the importance of teaching dances with as much cultural sensitivity as possible. This does not preclude teachers from modifying dances for varied student abilities or to increase moderate to vigorous physical activity, but rather to *not* lose important cultural aspects of dances that give them meaning. Dances will be learned in traditional and modified formats. In addition, *Mayim* and *Buggy Schottische* will involve ways in which teachers can incorporate student creativity into the learning process. In small groups, participants will create their own variations on the original dances based on given themes or structures.

What conference participants will learn:

- Several different folk dances, including *Dance of Greeting* and *Cshebogar* (appropriate for younger elementary levels) and *Mayim* and *Buggy Schottische* (appropriate for upper elementary, middle, and high school levels)
- Ways to teach folk dances with an emphasis on their cultural relevance (e.g., symbolism, meaning), as opposed to just teaching “steps”
- Ways to integrate student creativity into the instructional process for learning folk dance
- Teaching progressions for gradual learning and “building” of dances while simultaneously acquiring significant moderate to vigorous physical activity
- Examples of ways to modify dances for different levels/abilities

Introduction:

Recently, I observed a contemporary physical education teacher education training video where the elementary physical education teacher taught a folk dance completely out of context with no cultural connection and used a false name for the dance that trivialized it. Although likely unintentional, the way the dance was taught was both shallow and demeaning. Yes, the students learned the basic steps and accumulated moderate to vigorous physical activity, but without the intended circular formation and story behind the dance, the meaning was lost.¹

One of my physical education teacher education colleagues at WOU, Dr. Gay Timken, states that “games are not sacred, children are.” This refers to an educators’ responsibility to alter games and physical activities so they are developmentally appropriate for children. The same can be said for dances, at least for those that are actually *not* sacred. Certainly, modifications of dance steps, movements, spatial elements (e.g., directions, formations), relationships (e.g., with partners or groups), and more can be done to simplify or make a dance more complex for varied student abilities. Traditional folk dances and classic ballroom dances can also be performed to contemporary music in an attempt to make the dance more relevant and enticing for dancers². Created variations to dances, particularly those generated by students, can also be included to increase student learning and foster creative thinking.

However, teachers should also be sensitive to the cultural and historical foundations of dances and their meanings and purposes. Teachers should research and integrate cognitive information about every dance’s underlying *story*: its cultural, societal, and historical roots; the people who performed the dance and their context and history; the stories being told through movement; the purpose for the dance; and the meaning of specific dance movements, body positions, and group formations. Short videos, pictures, or costumes of dancers performing the dances (with as much authenticity as possible), would help to provide additional context and meaning. Even better, visits from guest dancers representing the culture of a particular dance, and who could perform and involve the students in learning dances, would greatly enrich students’ dance experiences.

Folk dances:

Dance of Greeting (from Denmark)

Purpose: Greeting people; welcoming others with warmth and kindness

Formation: Single circle, all facing toward the center

Counts

Movements

Part A:

<u>1</u> , <u>2</u> , <u>3</u> , 4	Clap, clap, bow (facing person on one side)
<u>5</u> , <u>6</u> , <u>7</u> , 8	Clap, clap, bow (facing person on your other side)
<u>1</u> , 2, <u>3</u> , 4	Stamp, stamp (in place, facing center of circle)
<u>5</u> , <u>6</u> , <u>7</u> , 8	Turn around (3 or 4 steps)

Repeat above (note that accented beats are highlighted with an underline)

Part B:

2-8	Run 16 counts to the left (all hands joined, body aimed toward the L) – recommended: starting on left foot, run 15 steps, holding last step 2 counts to shift weight and give accent
2-8	Run 16 counts to the right (all hands joined, body aimed toward the R) – recommended: starting on right foot, run 15 steps, holding last step 2 counts to shift weight and give accent

Repeat entire dance, alternating part A and part B.

Modifications: Dancers can face in toward the center of the circle for all bows; runs can be replaced with quick walking steps; for younger children, don't worry about which foot they use.

Cshebogar (from Hungary)

Symbolism: This dance dramatizes the gypsy moth as it flies around a flame. The moths circle the campfire, they fly in toward the flame, rejoice at their escape, then try it again. (Lloyd Shaw Foundation, 2014)

Formation: Single circle, hands joined, all facing toward the center; couples stand next to each other

<u>Counts</u>	<u>Movements</u>
1-8	Slide to the left 8 times (actually 7 times plus a step/weight shift left)
1-8	Slide to the right 8 times (actually 7 times plus a step/weight shift right)
1-4	Walk into the center of the circle 4 steps (or 3 steps plus a touch/stamp)
5-8	Walk back out to original place 4 steps (or 3 steps plus a touch/stamp)
1-8	Swing turn with partner for 8 counts (elbow swing, walk around)
1-8	Draw step (step, together/close) slowly 4 times toward the center of the circle (facing partner in butterfly arm position)
1-8	Draw step (step, together/close) slowly 4 times away from the center of the circle and back to original position (facing partner in butterfly arm position)
1-4	Draw step (step, together/close) slowly 2 times toward the center of the circle (facing partner in butterfly arm position)
5-8	Draw step (step, together/close) slowly 2 times away from the center of the circle and back to original position (facing partner in butterfly arm position)
1-8	Swing turn with partner for 8 counts (elbow swing, walk around)

Repeat entire dance from beginning

Modifications: Elbow swings can be replaced with “buzz step”/ball-change turns with right arms around partner's waist and left arms extended upward and outward; draw steps away from the center of the circle can be replaced with backward gallops; for younger children, don't worry about which foot they use.

Mayim (from Israel)

Purpose and symbolism: Mayim means water in Hebrew. The dancers express happiness in finding water in an arid land and the movements symbolize the motion of waves as they break against the shore. This dance originated in a community in Galilee (Pittman, et al., 2009).

Formation: Single circle, hands joined, all facing toward the center

<u>Counts</u>	<u>Movements</u>
2-8	Grapevine steps to the left for 16 counts (crossing R over L to begin)
1-4	Run/walk forward into the center with 4 steps (arms slowly reach up high)
5-8	Run/walk backward out of the center with 4 steps (arms come back down)
Repeat 1-8: runs in/out of the circle	
1-4	<u>Bridge</u> : Run/walk 4 steps to the left (can shout, “Hey, hey, hey, hey”)
1-8	Hop on right foot while left foot swings back and forth across right foot (and taps the floor (cross touch, side touch, etc. 8 times)
1-8	Hop on left foot while right foot swings back and forth across left foot (and taps the floor (cross touch, side touch, etc. 8 times)

Repeat entire dance

Modifications: Claps can be added as follows: one clap on the first step/count running backward out of the circle; 4 claps (arms, held at chest level, move in and out) on the last 4 hop/cross-touches; dancers can shout, “Mayim, mayim, mayim, mayim” as they run into the center of the circle and “Hai mayim, bee-sa-son” as they run backwards out of the circle; during the 4-count break, dancers could stand in place and shout “Hey, hey, hey, hey” instead of running 4 steps to the left; the hops can be omitted entirely and dancers can just do the cross-touches alone.

Group creations: Small groups of dancers can create their own versions of the dance, symbolizing the different elements of water, earth, wind, and fire; divide class into groups and assign one element/theme per group; then share/perform dance creations.

Sample variation emphasizing *water* theme: wave arms (still holding partners’ hands) during grapevines; make a waterfall with arms during the bridge; swirl arms and/or body like a whirlpool in place of the hopping section. (Green-Gilbert, 2012)

Buggy Schottische (the Schottische is from many countries in Europe and North America; the basic step is used in many different folk dances)

Symbolism: Dance partner formations represent people riding in buggies or horse-drawn carriages.

Formation: Groupings of 2 couples (4 people per group – one couple standing directly behind the other couple) in a large circle facing and traveling counterclockwise. Couples hold hands with their partners with their “inside” hands; couples hold hands with the other couple in their group with their “outside” hands.

<u>Counts</u>	<u>Movements</u>
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Part A:

1, 2, 3, 4 Step right, left, right, hop right (one schottische step: walk 1, 2, 3, hop)
 5, 6, 7, 8 Step left, right, left, hop left (one schottische step: walk 1, 2, 3, hop)

Part B:

1, 2, 3, 4 Step right, hop right, step left, hop left (i.e., step, hop, step, hop)
 5, 6, 7, 8 Step right, hop right, step left, hop left (i.e., step, hop, step, hop)

Repeat entire dance from beginning, alternating part A and part B (note that all “hops” are highlighted with an underline).

Variations: On part B (step hop sequence), dancers can perform one of the following variations:

“*Front to back*”: Front couple releases inside (partners’) hands, travels outside to the rear of the back couple, and rejoins hands with partner (the back couple then becomes the new front couple).

“*Dishrag*”: Back couple forms an arch; front couple backs under; back couple moves to the front, turning under their own arms to “untangle” (without letting go of hands).

Group creations: Groups of 4 dancers each can create their own variations to be performed in place of part A or part B (or both); then share/perform dance creations.

Online resources for additional information:

Danish Dance of Greeting:

<http://lloydshaw.org/Catalogue/CueSheets/Childrens/DanishDanceOfGreeting.htm>

Cshebogar:

<http://lloydshaw.org/Catalogue/CueSheets/Childrens/Cshebogar.htm>

Mayim:

<http://lloydshaw.org/Catalogue/CueSheets/Folk/Mayim.htm>

Schottische and Horse and Buggy Schottische:

<http://lloydshaw.org/Catalogue/CueSheets/Round/Schottische.htm>

Music resource (for purchasing dance music):

<http://lloydshaw.org/Catalogue/CatHome.htm>

References:

Gilbert, A. G. G. (2012, October). Folk dancing in brain-based dance classes. Workshop presented at the National Dance Education Organization conference, Los Angeles, CA.

Lloyd Shaw Foundation. <http://www.lloydshaw.org>

Pittman, A. M., Waller, M. S., & Dark, C. L. (2009). Dance awhile: A handbook for folk, square, contra, and social dance (10th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Footnotes:

¹Depending on the complexity of the dance steps, sometimes it is advantageous to teach a “circle” dance in lines (facing the same direction) or general space at first, until the steps and sequence have been learned. However, if teaching a simple dance with basic steps (usually for younger children), it is best to teach the dance in the circle formation from the beginning.

²I typically do this after the dance has first been performed to the original, traditional music in order to maintain a stronger connection to the cultural foundations or essence of the dance.