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**HOW THE CONNECTIVISM THEORY IS EXPRESSED IN THE  
"TIKTOK" PHENOMENON?**

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**Abstract**

Nowadays, we face a fascinating cultural and social phenomenon, in which children from various places learn dance movements on their own, by imitating what they see on the internet, filming themselves teaching the dance movements, and posting it online. The significance of this is that alongside the official dance classes in school, an independent self-produced and updated learning zone is developing, going on in the digital and virtual media, in which children are actively involved, learn, teach, create and perform dance movements. This phenomenon can be called a "TikTok" phenomenon, due to the popular use of the "TikTok" app (an online video-sharing platform) among children. This paper seeks to review these non-formal independent learning-teaching processes in Dance education among children using the media and explain it via the principles of Connectivism. A major principle of the Connectivism theory claims that the capacity to learn is more important to investigate than what is currently learned, and that the knowledge is distributed across networks. Learning occurs through navigating these networks and understanding the connections between them. This paper concludes that the independent learning-teaching phenomenon in dance reflects the characteristics of Connectivism. The children make connections online voluntarily, learn and teach others, and offer their knowledge as community property. The contribution of this paper is manifested by exposure to the voluntary learning-teaching processes in dance education, used by children, which allows examining their application in other domains.

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## **1. Introduction**

Non-formal Independent Learning is a significant part of our learning experience. Formal education no longer constitutes a major part of our learning, which occurs in a variety of ways, such as communities of practice and personal networks (Siemens, 2005). Social media offer opportunities for learning that suit the world of children (Ravenscroft, 2009). This paper elaborates on the subject of non-formal independent learning in dance education. The concept of dance education, as will be discussed above, refers to "dance for everybody," allowing everyone to participate and take part in it. Dance education can be classified as formal learning, as opposed to non-formal independent learning, which is the subject of this article. Nowadays, we face a fascinating cultural and social phenomenon, in which children from different places learn dance movements on their own by imitating what they see on the internet, filming themselves teaching the dance movements, and posting it online.

The significance of this is that alongside the official dance classes taught at school, an independent self-produced and updated learning zone is developing in the digital and virtual media, in which children are actively involved as they learn, teach, create and perform dance movements. The children create peer instruction and use social media for self-representation. Since the children are also using YouTube and Fortnite (an online game on the web), the article calls this phenomenon the "TFY phenomenon" - TikTok, Fortnite, and YouTube. The explanations for this phenomenon are rooted in the Connectivism and Social-Emotional Learning theories.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature review expresses non-formal independent learning and engages with the 21st Century Skills, which essential for students in the digital age and with the influence of technology on learning. It presents two theoretical frameworks, the Connectivism that is compatible with the non-formal independent learning processes of children and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), which explains the inside processes that motivate children to dance voluntarily. Finally, it exposes previous studies of the motivations behind media use among children.

### **2.1. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills**

The American Organization Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2016) argues that 21<sup>st</sup> century students must acquire new learning skills and distinguish between three kinds: skills of creativity and innovation: skills of critical thinking and problem solving: and skills of communication and collaboration. The organization argues that it is necessary to acquire these learning skills and that their acquisition separates the students prepared for today's complicated life and work environment from ones who are not. Present-day learning, they argue, demands a system of support for the learners that involves them in order to make learning relevant, personal, and fascinating. The theory of Connectivism can illuminate the learning skills and tasks needed for learners to flourish in a digital era (Harasim, 2012).

## **2.2. The Influence of Technology on Learning**

Siemens (2005) argues that the theories of Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism were developed at a time when learning was not impacted by technology. According to him, technology has reorganized how we live, communicate and learn, and enabled access to a lot of information, ideas, and content. Ito et al. (2008) and others argue that the vast use of media stems from the children's fields of interest and everyday social communication, in which their peers become an essential incentive for learning. For these scholars, the children feel free to create and appreciate the knowledge, contribute content on their own, comment on others' materials, become role models, and be aware that they have no authority over others. In this way, the children develop their identity through social networks by using a system of connections and contexts that fit the Connectivism concept.

This article recognizes three social environments where children learn and teach dance movements. The first social environment is TikTok, a new social media based on videos created by users when the content is expressed in the form of challenges (Ahlse et al., 2020). The second social environment is YouTube, a popular website of the media that is a popular platform for producing videos created by users (Burgess & Green, 2009). The third social environment is Fortnite, an online game where social interaction occurs in virtual worlds, which have social media characteristics. For example, Holloway et al. (2013) claim that the number of children entering virtual worlds is increasing, mostly among 3-11-year-olds who play and communicate with each other through avatars. The extensive use of social environments, such as those presented, indicates the need for a new learning theory that addresses 21<sup>st</sup> century needs and opportunities.

## **2.3. The Theory of Connectivism**

Connectivism (Siemens, 2008; Downes, 2010; Harasim, 2012) is a new learning theory for the digital age that addresses 21<sup>st</sup> century needs and opportunities, also known as Online Collaborative Learning (OCL). This theory combines relevant elements of many learning theories, social structures, and technology based on interaction, sharing, creation, and participation (Siemens, 2008). According to Connectivism, knowledge consists of a network of connections formed from experience and interactions with a knowing community (Downes, 2010), both face-to-face interactions and online network interactions, mediated by technology (Siemens, 2008).

Connectivism has two primary principles. The first concerns the capacity to learn, which, according to this theory, is more important than what is currently learned (Abhari, 2017). The second principle is connecting and feeding information into a learning community, which, the theory argues, constitutes the true meaning of the learning (Kop & Hill, 2008). The principles are expressed in the way the child learns the dance movements from the internet, voluntarily. In the TikTok app, for example, the child chooses which dance to learn, the "teacher" from whom to learn it (the specific popular "celeb kid"), and how to learn it (for instance, by using the split-screen or slow-motion features). The child can then upload dance-videos and dance-tutorial videos, develop expertise by uploading new material, and transfer the knowledge forward.

## **2.4. Social Emotional Learning**

The non-formal independent learning of children in the "TFY phenomenon," is based on social and emotional aspects. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a process of integrating cognition, emotion, and behavior into teaching and learning (Brackett et al., 2019). Through this process, children and adults learn and apply a set of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and needs, requiring to deal with themselves and their relationships. Through these skills and needs, they succeed in schooling, in the workplace, and citizenship, effectively (Schonert-Reichl, 2019). They recognize, understand, and manage emotions, and develop caring and empathy as they care for others. Additionally, they are also determined and achieve positive goals, establish and maintain positive relationships, make informed and responsible decisions, and deal with challenging situations (Weissberg et al., 2015; Schonert-Reichl & Rowcliffe, 2017).

The CASEL model (CASEL, 2018), a significant SEL framework, identified a set of five core intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competencies that are reflected in the "TFY phenomenon": (1) Self-awareness, the ability to correctly recognize emotions and thoughts and their influence on various behaviors. In the process of learning the dance moves, the children experience success and lack of success. In this way, they learn about themselves, assess their strengths and limitations, learn to handle them, and develop a sense of trust. (2) Self-management, the ability to regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. Children spontaneously invested enormous energy in dance and motivated to dance willingly. They work toward achieving success with the dance movement. They also become efficient when they are getting to be a teacher themselves while teaching others. This way, they elaborate on the knowledge acquired independently, gaining more confidence and feel significant. (3) Social awareness: The ability to see the perspective of others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and to discover empathy. In the learning process of the children, they learn from other children. In this way, they are exposed to children from various cultures and backgrounds and communicate with them. (4) Relationship skills- The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with different individuals and groups. The children's dance learning and teaching process include communication, cooperation, and collaboration. (5) Responsible decision-making: The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions per ethical standards and social norms. Understanding the consequences of actions, and well-being of self and others are also Skills achieve through the learning and teaching process of voluntary learning in dance.

## **2.5. Previous Studies of the Motivations Behind Media Use**

Previous studies by Dunne et al. (2010), Lee and Ma (2012), and Park et al. (2009) examined motivations behind media use. They illustrate that central motivations the children are related to satisfaction from 'Entertainment,' 'Information Seeking,' 'Status,' and 'Socializing.' Florenthal (2015) and Hunt et al. (2012) identified 'Self-expression' as an additional motive for social media use. Another study by Ahlse et al. (2020), examined what motivates Gen Z users to participate in challenges on TikTok. Their findings included seven categories: 'Entertainment,' 'Socializing,' 'Personal Identity,' 'Information Seeking,' 'Convenience,' 'Status' and 'Structure,' with 'Entertainment' being the main motive, as also shown in studies by Berthon et al. (2008) and Muntinga et al. (2011).

Research by Arnseth and Silseth (2015) demonstrates that children have different motives for participating in social media communities. According to their study, the reasons are related to the impact on the children's reputation and status. It constitutes their self-representation in social media. Another study, by Wernholm and Reneland-Forsman (2019), also dealt with how children, 6–11 years of age, represent themselves when performing in social media communities. His findings show that the children are reflexive in their identity work, and have found ways to use social media to support each other and care for each other's mental wellbeing.

### **3. Research Method**

The method for this theoretical article is a scientific analysis of the current literature on this subject, including many and diverse perspectives and vantage points.

### **4. Analyses and Findings**

This article describes a fascinating cultural and social phenomenon, in which children in different places (specifically in Israel and the US) learn dance moves and perform them on their own volition. They learn by imitating what they see on social media, film themselves performing or teaching those moves, and then share the film online. Thus, an independent, evolving learning zone develops in social media, in which children are proactively engaged, learning, teaching, creating, and performing dance moves. The article refers to this as the “TFY phenomenon” because of the extensive use of three particular social media platforms: TikTok, Fortnite, and YouTube. This phenomenon demonstrates independent, non-formal learning, that constitutes a significant part of this day and age, in which technology offers new learning opportunities. The children who dance and teach dance moves experience skills such as creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and collaboration, skills which the American Organization Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2016) has found essential for students. This is in line with the findings of Ito et al. (2008), who have argued that children feel free to create and appreciate the knowledge, contribute their own content, comment on others' materials, and become role models, fully aware that they have no authority over their peers. All of those skills are manifested in the learning processes in this phenomenon and are reflected in the phenomenon of Connectivism which, according to Siemens (2008), is based on interaction, sharing, creation, and participation. According to Siemens (2008) and Downes (2010), Connectivism is a learning theory in which knowledge is comprised of a network of connections made out of experiences and interactions with a community of information, both face to face and online, mediated by technology. The phenomenon at hand refers to networks, which children create by learning dance moves from other children and by teaching others. The main principles of Connectivism are the capacity to learn, which is more important than what is currently learned (Abhari, 2017), and the feeding of information into a learning community, which constitutes the true meaning of learning (Kop & Hill, 2008). The processes of learning the dance moves include familiarity with the network, navigating through it, choosing the learning methods, and the distribution of the learned information by uploading videos or even in offline encounters.

The examined phenomenon also looks at the emotional and social aspects. According to Schonert-Reichl (2019), this process involves the learning and implementation of a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and needs that are required to cope with life's challenges and to maintain relationships. Much like the aforementioned 21<sup>st</sup> century skill set, these are also a part of the children's' learning and teaching processes. The CASEL model (CASEL, 2018) identified five core interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive reflected in the TFY phenomenon: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible decision-making. The learning processes reflected in Social Emotion Learning, including experiencing success and failure, investing energy in voluntary learning, efficiency, exposure to multiculturalism, and making decisions. The motives behind this, according to Ahlse et al. (2020), involve seven categories: 'Entertainment,' 'Socializing,' 'Personal Identity,' 'Information Seeking,' 'Convenience,' 'Status' and 'Structure,' with 'Entertainment' being the main motive. These motives point to the children's' fields of interest, such as entertainment, as ones that can lead to independent and meaningful learning, as reflected in the TFY phenomenon. Other motives involve social aspects. According to Arnseth and Silseth (2015), the reasons for the children's' participation (or lack thereof) have to do with their self-representation on social media. Because children need reflections and mutual support from their peers, they develop their identity through the use of social media. These are all expressions of online independent learning, reflected in Connectivism and its social aspects.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper concludes that the non-formal independent learning-teaching phenomenon in dance education, which is manifested in the fact that children learn and teach dance movements, reflects the characteristics of connectivism and Social Emotional Learning. The children make connections online voluntarily, learn and teach others, and offer their knowledge as community property. The contribution of this paper is the exposure to the voluntary learning-teaching processes in dance education used by children, which allows examining their application in other domains.

This phenomenon of Independent Learning-Teaching highlights the process of Meaningful Learning. The independent learners may become helpful teachers who can provide insights on effective learning. The empirical evidence of this phenomenon is scarce, as it is a relatively new phenomenon. The dance-videos distributed on social networks, in which children perform and teach entire dances and specific dance moves, are extremely rich in potentially meaningful teaching strategies. However, no systematic investigation of these strategies has been made so far.

This paper is a part of a Ph.D. research on "Non-formal Independent learning-teaching in Dance education among children using the media." The research aims to reduce the gap of knowledge and to construct a theoretical model from which practical tools may be derived. The research applies a methodology in which the data comprises authentic "home-made" dance-videos produced by children aged 8-12, and the methodological approach is mixed-methods. The Research population consists of 100 dance-videos produced by children from the US and Israel that are ubiquitous on the net, particularly on YouTube and TikTok, and 20 Israeli children participating in focus groups.

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