

THE PLACE AND ROLE OF DANCE IN THE HISTORY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN HUNGARIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS (1868–2024)*

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Abstract

This study explores the changing role of dance in Hungarian physical education from the 1868 Public Education Act to the present. Dance has never held a stable place in school curricula: at times, it served as a key medium of aesthetic education, national identity, and community building, while in other periods it was marginalized in favor of military drills, gymnastics, or fitness trends. Using qualitative and quantitative methods (i.e., historical document analysis, content analysis of pedagogical journals, and systematic examination of curricula and the National Core Curricula), the research reveals how political shifts, cultural priorities, and professional debates have shaped the educational perception of dance. Although dance was repeatedly excluded from official curricula, particularly after 1952, it persisted through extracurricular clubs, teacher initiatives, and alternative programs such as Waldorf education and the Value Mediation Program. Reintroduced into public education by the 1995 National Core Curriculum, its implementation remained limited due to insufficient teacher training. Overall, the findings demonstrate that dance functions both as cultural heritage and as a contemporary pedagogical tool, reflecting enduring tensions between tradition, health, identity, and creativity.

Keywords: dance education, physical education, curriculum history, Hungary, teacher training, National Core Curriculum

1. INTRODUCTION

Our research aligns with a series of pedagogical history studies that use a problem-centered approach to explore the specific characteristics of the history of education related to a particular subject or its specific aspects. An excellent example of this is Natasa Fizel's study, which examines the role and content of health education across several types of schools (Fizel, 2023). Changes in the content of physical education reflect the historical development of Hungarian public education and the educational

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goals of society. Within this process, the role of dance is particularly interesting, as it is linked to national traditions, community education, and the demands of modern movement culture. While institutional physical education began in the 19th century with the introduction of compulsory physical exercise, dance initially appeared only as a supplementary form of movement, offered as a recommendation. Over time, however, it has alternately come to the fore or been pushed into the background, which raises the question: what has actually determined the place of dance within physical education?

The aim of this study is to explore the historical arc of dance education from the 1868 Compulsory Education Act to the most recent National Core Curriculum (NCC). It not only seeks to provide a chronological overview but also attempts to understand the educational and social factors that led to different interpretations of dance. The study is organized around three fundamental questions:

1. What role did educational thinkers and curriculum guidelines assign to dance in physical education? Did they emphasize its aesthetic, health-related, community-building, or national identity-strengthening functions?
2. What factors influenced the strengthening or weakening of dance education? Historical sources show that political and social changes, the state of teacher training, and international trends all shaped the process.
3. How did dance appear in modern curriculum regulations, especially in the NCC? An important question concerns the weight it was given among the optional or compulsory elements and the challenges teachers faced in its practical implementation.

During the period under review, dance was never clearly classified, at times being interpreted as part of physical education, while at other times being viewed as an artistic and cultural practice. This duality explains why it has occupied both the foreground and the background of school education at different points in time. The question remains relevant today: should 21st-century schools approach dance from the perspective of athletic performance, cultural education, or creative self-expression?

The introductory question draws attention to the fact that the history of dance education is not only of pedagogical interest but also reflects the dilemmas of national culture, identity, and modern education. In the following chapters, we therefore not only trace changes in the curriculum but also examine how the pedagogical interpretation of dance has evolved and how this evolution has affected physical education as a whole.

2. THE MATERIAL AND METHODS

The primary goal of this research was not to summarize theoretical discourses related to dance education but to conduct a long-term, historical analysis of curriculum and regulatory documents and to explore contemporary professional debates. Previous works related to the topic, particularly those on folk dance pedagogy (Antal, 2002, 2010), the institutional history of dance artist training (Bolvári-Takács, 2014; Lenkei, 2007), and curriculum theory approaches (Ballér, 1996; Hamar, 2016), served as a guiding background. However, the present research applies a source-based,

empirical approach in which qualitative content analysis and comparative tables are based on the examination of primary documents.

We chose a mixed-methods approach for this study, achieving our results through the application of both qualitative and quantitative methods. It is particularly noteworthy that we employed methodological tools characteristic of several scientific fields, including classical historical source and document analysis as well as software-based content analysis commonly used in the social sciences.

During the document analysis, we examined contemporary press publications that reflect the contemporary interpretations of physical education pedagogy and the educational role of dance. The selection of the journals *Néptanítók Lapja* (1868–1914) and *Herkules* (1884–1914) was justified by the fact that these two publications provided the most continuous coverage of pedagogy and physical education from the late 19th century until the First World War, the period when a domestic framework for institutional physical education and teacher training was finally established. The chosen time frame thus aimed to explore how dance appeared in the early days of modern physical education and how its perception evolved in the pedagogical debates at the turn of the century. Based on a comprehensive keyword search (dance and its variants) of the digitally available issues, we categorized the relevant texts by topic, author, year of publication, and type of school. Most of the hits were from the 1880s and 1890s and mainly related to girls' physical education, teacher training content, and the aesthetic or national role of dance.

The results of the analysis contributed to our understanding of when and in what pedagogical framework dance was incorporated into public education. This press analysis was followed by an examination of pedagogical content regulations, curricula, and instructions, with particular emphasis on the interwar period and the curricular changes after 1945, which made it possible to map the role of dance diachronically.

The third stage of the study involved a qualitative content analysis of the National Core Curricula following the change of regime. To this end, we used MAXQDA 2022 software and in vivo coding to identify segments that specifically referred to dance or dance-related movement. The content identified in this way was compared with the framework plans corresponding to each National Core Curriculum, after which comparative tables were prepared.

These procedures revealed the periods in which folk dance was more prominent, when aesthetic sports appeared, and how they were later replaced by aerobics or rhythmic gymnastics.

The methodological strength of the study is that, beyond merely describing the content, it also revealed the differences between regulations and practical implementation. Based on the sources, it could be seen that the role of dance often depended not on the regulations established in official documents, but on the personnel and material conditions of the institution in question. For this reason, the study also addresses issues of teacher training in several instances, as the teachability of dance was closely linked to the expertise of teachers.

Overall, the methodological approach offers a novel contribution by presenting the analysis of historical and contemporary documents within a unified framework, thereby enabling an overview of long-term processes. Qualitative coding and

comparative tables together reveal not only the development of content but also that dance in physical education represented both cultural heritage and an opportunity for modernization.

3. CHANGES IN DANCE CONTENT WITHIN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In this chapter, we present a diachronic overview of changes in dance content in physical education.

3.1 The period between 1868 and 1952

Act XXXVIII of 1868 was the first to provide for the establishment of state elementary schools. It defined compulsory schooling, the length of the school year, and class sizes. Physical exercise, with particular emphasis on military drills, was included among the compulsory subjects in elementary schools. The law treated boys and girls separately in higher public schools and civic schools, where physical education was not yet included in the curriculum for girls. It also provided for the establishment of 20 teacher training colleges, where those over the age of 15 could apply and become teachers within three years. Physical education was included in their curriculum. Girls over the age of 14 could attend teacher training college and obtain a certificate in three years; however, physical education was not yet included in the curriculum at that time. We know from the *Néptanítók Lapja* (People's Teachers' Journal) that teachers lacked the knowledge necessary to teach physical education, as this was not taught in training colleges before the 1868 law (Csaszin, 1868).

Dance was not part of the elementary school curriculum, but in 1884 it was proposed as a tool for teaching aesthetic movements from an educational perspective. For children aged 8 to 10, dance was a regulated social game that built upon dance steps. For those aged 10 to 13, these steps were developed into dances, preferably ballroom dances. In schools where boys and girls were not separated, they were able to dance together (Bihari, 1884). In 1886, Lajos Porzsolt recommended teaching spins, quick changes of position, and jumps during gymnastics from the age of eight, as these prepared children to execute dance movements (Porzsolt, 1886). The *Herkules testgyakorlati közlöny* (Herkules Physical Exercise Gazette, 1892–94) reported in several issues that in winter, students attended 20 dance lessons in two stages (e.g., Ferenc József Educational Institute, July 15, 1893). In 1894, Albert Berzeviczy emphasized that dance could be practiced in winter because it promoted good posture and enhanced flexible and agility. He considered Hungarian dance more suitable for physical exercise than waltzes (Berzeviczy, 1894).

The physical education of girls was also an important professional topic. *Népiskolai tanügy* (Public School Education) wrote that every school should provide physical exercise for women, appropriate to the female gender. Dancing and skating were considered suitable for this purpose (Szőke, 1892). In 1909, the debate focused on whether physical education for women was necessary, which exercises were appropriate, how effectively dance could be incorporated into

it, whether it should be compulsory, and how many hours per week should be devoted to it (Sztankovits & Gerentsér, 1909). Earlier, in 1879, the newsletter of a girls' school wrote that "women's gymnastics is not a compulsory subject at any educational institution in our country; however, there are a number of institutions where gymnastics has been included in the curriculum for female students" (Bánfi, János, 1879, p. 4). According to the author, it was common to substitute dance for women's gymnastics, but this was not sufficient for all-round development.

Dance was also often included in foreign examples as part of physical education. In the early 1910s, dance, singing, and music were already considered necessary components of Hungarian physical education for developing a sense of rhythm (Kmettykó, 1915, cited by Antal, 2010). Between the two world wars, the curricula of Mihály Bély and János Kmettykó emphasized the development of emotions, attention, and aesthetic awareness. In their 1919 draft, they expanded the movement repertoire for girls to include folk dance and movement art exercises (Szabó, 2005). After the Treaty of Trianon, the main objectives became physical training and skill development, with dance serving as one of the tools for achieving these goals (Ballér, 1989). In 1922, Minister Kunó Klebelsberg included dance among the forms of movement that contributed to complex development (Molnár, 2023).

In 1925, a decree stipulated the qualifications required to teach physical exercise. From 1926, it became possible to obtain such qualifications through a six-month course at the *National Dance Teacher Training College*. In 1928, it was decreed that physical exercise could only be taught by teachers holding both physical education and dance teaching certificates (Bolvári-Takács, 2014). There had been earlier examples of this: the first teacher of physical education at the humanities high school in Eger in 1856, Ferenc Burkay, was also a dance teacher (Seres, 2008). Dance was included among the subjects taught at the College of Physical Education (Takács, 1975), and the 1925 elementary school curriculum classified it as a general social exercise. The year 1925 and the founding of the *Hungarian Royal College of Physical Education* marked a significant turning point in this regard, as prior to this, Hungary lacked formal training for physical education teachers. Thus, changes in legislation and infrastructure created a new context for dance education. *Tables 1 and 2* present the state of dance education between the two world wars using two typical school types as examples.

Table 1. Dance as part of the physical education curriculum, under the subheading of social

exercises; based on the 1938 high school curriculum (Curriculum for secondary schools and girls' secondary schools, 1938)

Grade	High school I–VII: 4 hours per week, VIII: 3 hours per week	Girls' secondary school I–VII: 3 hours per week, VIII: 2 hours per week
I	dance steps, Hungarian dances	dance steps, Hungarian and folk dances; rhythmic exercises
II	a, steps	
III	b, Hungarian clapping dance	
IV	a, steps, whip, swinging bell b, Hungarian clapping dance	
V	a, steps, whip, four-point star, lightning, swinging bell b, walking dance	
VI	a, steps, cradle, spindle, fancy, ankle kick b, scout recruitment	
VII	a, steps, big bell, fancy, stamping, ankle kick with spin b, verbunkos	
VIII	a, steps learned in grades I–VII b, repetition of scout recruitment and verbunkos dance	

Table 2. Chapters on dance in the 8-year physical education curriculum for elementary schools (Curriculum and guidelines for eight-grade folk schools, Decree No. 55000/1941. V., 1941)

Grade	8-year elementary school Boys	8-year elementary school Girls
I	<i>Preparatory movements.</i> Bends; walking with rhythm changes, then combined with clapping and stamping; skipping; alternating walking and skipping. The movements listed can be performed in a circle to the right, left, forward, and backward. <i>Playful dances.</i> Washing clothes <i>Hungarian Dance Steps.</i> Hands on hips; holding the skirt; holding the partner by the shoulders or waist; bouncing; single-step <i>Csárdás</i>; double-step <i>Csárdás</i>; individual turn with four steps. <i>Hungarian Dances: Csárdás</i> (first part). The <i>Csárdás</i> is a traditional Hungarian couple dance characterized by alternating slow and fast sections, lively improvisation, and expressive movements, often performed to folk music in duple rhythm.	

II.	• <i>Preparatory movements</i>: Walking with one-sided torso turns and various arm movements. • <i>Playful dances</i>. Swedish clap dance • <i>Hungarian dance steps</i>. Pair spinning steps • <i>Hungarian dances</i>: Hungarian clap dance (first part)	
III.	• <i>Preparatory movements</i>: Bends with steps; jumping forward and backward with leg swings; connecting steps and jumps; jumping turns with various arm movements (e.g., ball-playing, archery-imitating movements). • <i>Playful dances</i>. Fast mail • <i>Folk dances</i>. Norwegian couple dance. Swedish double • <i>Hungarian dance steps</i>. <i>Bokázó</i> (with spurs and ladies' <i>bokázó</i>); hesitant; swaying. The <i>Bokázó</i> ("heel-clicking step") is a dynamic foot movement characteristic of Hungarian folk dances, performed by striking the heels together rhythmically while maintaining balance and posture. • <i>Hungarian dances</i>. (First three parts of the <i>Csárdás</i>). Hungarian double	
IV.	• <i>Preparatory movements</i>. Balance exercises • <i>Playful dances</i>. Maid dance • <i>Folk dances</i>. Tyrolean dance • <i>Hungarian dance steps</i>. <i>Andalgó</i>; kisharang The <i>Andalgó</i> ("strolling" or "ambling") is a slow, graceful walking step often used as an introductory or connecting movement in Hungarian folk dances. The <i>Kisharang</i> ("little bell") is a light, rhythmic step distinguished by its gentle, swinging motion, evoking the sound or movement of a small bell. Both are characteristic elements of traditional Hungarian dance vocabulary and are frequently incorporated into the <i>csárdás</i> and other regional dance forms. • <i>Hungarian dances</i>. Hungarian clapping dance (in its entirety)	
V.	• <i>Hungarian dance steps</i>: rising; descending; recruitment dance; crossing; cutting out; four-star; spindle; fancy; private spinning with a stamp; sulking; pair spinning with a descent. • <i>Hungarian dances</i>: <i>Csárdás</i> (in its entirety). The <i>Sétapalotás</i> ("promenade palotás") represents a stately, processional version of the <i>Palotás</i>, historically associated with the Hungarian nobility and ballroom culture of the 19th century. The <i>Cserkésztohorzó</i> ("scout recruitment dance") emerged in the early 20th century as a youth-oriented choreographic form promoting physical culture and national spirit.	• Bows on the spot; walks with different rhythms; triple step (<i>chassé</i>) with triple and double rhythms; skipping with arm swings; walks with straight one-sided torso turns and straight arm positions; circle dance composed of rhythmic movements; clothes washing; walking <i>pol</i> • <i>Hungarian dance steps</i>. <i>Bokázó</i>; <i>Csárdás</i> steps; hesitating dance; with cut-out hold; private turn; pair turn • <i>Hungarian dance</i>. <i>Csárdás</i> formations

VI.	• rising; swaying, small bell; with a cutting hold; private turn with a stamp. • <i>Hungarian dance</i>: Hungarian double	• Bows with backward steps; walking and chassé combined; triple step (chassé) with turn; combining skipping and walking with arm movements; running forwards, backwards, in small circles to the side, with different leg and arm positions; turning walk; chain dance composed of rhythmic movements; skating dance; Swedish clapping dance • <i>Hungarian dance steps</i>. rising; swaying, small bell; sloping; private spinning with a clap; pair spinning with a slope; Hungarian couple dances
VII.	• Spurred kick; <i>Verbunkos</i> (a traditional Hungarian men's recruiting dance from the late 18th and 19th centuries, characterized by dignified gestures, improvisational variations, and alternating slow and fast tempos); sideways slide; private turn with slide; pair turn with slide. • Hungarian dance: <i>Levente</i> dance	• Bends to the side and backward steps; walking combined with kneeling, arm movements or hand movements; ball exercises without a ball, walking and jumping; connecting straight-line rhythmic movements to a march • <i>Folk dance</i>. Norwegian mountain climber; Tyrolean dance • <i>Hungarian dance steps</i>. <i>Four-step star</i>; <i>Toborzó</i>; <i>Keresztező</i>; <i>Closing Andalgó</i>; solo spinning dance with a dip; Hungarian clapping dance • The <i>Four-step star</i> is a circular formation in which four dancers perform synchronized steps, creating a rotating star pattern characteristic of Hungarian group dances. The <i>Toborzó</i> ("recruiting steps") derives from the verbunkos tradition and features a proud posture, measured stamping, and deliberate pacing reminiscent of military recruitment displays. The <i>keresztező</i> ("crossing step") involves alternating leg movements that cross in front of or behind the supporting leg, producing a dynamic visual rhythm. The <i>Closing Andalgó</i> ("closing stroll") serves as a concluding movement based on the <i>Andalgó</i>, characterized by gentle and graceful walking gestures.

VIII.	• <i>Closing Andalgó; Toborzó; keresztező; Kívágó without hold; Double Serpent</i> • The <i>Kívágó without hold</i> refers to a cutting-out or turning movement performed without maintaining physical contact with a partner, typically used as a transitional or stylistic variation. The <i>Double Serpent (kettős kígyó)</i> is a group formation in which pairs or lines of dancers weave in and out in opposite directions, creating an intertwining, serpentine pattern characteristic of Hungarian collective dances • Hungarian clapping dance	• Jumping turns combined with walking and arm movements; canonical straight-line and arrow-like movements combined with walking, jumping, and kneeling; turns from a flat position; rhythmic ball exercises with a ball; rhythmic dance composed of learned movements • <i>Folk dances. ländler; Swedish double</i> • <i>Hungarian dance steps. Villám, Toborzó; Kígyó; Cifra; Duzzogó; Bokaverő; Sétapalotás</i> • The <i>Villám</i> ("lightning") is a fast, energetic step sequence characterized by sharp, sudden movements that evoke the flashing motion of lightning. The <i>Kígyó</i> ("snake") is a winding group formation in which dancers move in serpentine lines, symbolizing unity and flow within Hungarian folk choreography. The <i>Cifra</i> ("ornamented steps") refers to a decorative, improvisational movement used primarily in men's dances to display individual skill and virtuosity. The <i>Duzzogó</i> ("pouting step") is performed with restrained, hesitant gestures, often expressing playful defiance or rhythmic contrast within the choreography. The <i>Bokaverő</i> ("ankle-clicking step") involves striking the ankles or heels together in rhythmic succession, producing a percussive effect typical of lively male dances.
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The tables clearly show that the curriculum included not only Hungarian folk dances but also folk-inspired artistic dances and even dances from neighboring countries. The curriculum was initially divided into playful dances and later into Hungarian dance steps. At that time, Bartók and Kodály were already actively researching Hungarian folk music, which reinforced the idea that Hungarian dances should be cultivated rather than imitating those of other nations (Kmettykó, 1915, cited by Antal, 2010).

Dance education was emphasized in schools, with 10-15 minutes per week allocated to it in one of the physical education classes. This remained the case in elementary schools, teacher training, and physical education teacher training until the early 1950s (Antal, 2002). It continued to play a prominent role in the 1946 curriculum (gymnastics, games, athletics, Hungarian dance, sports; Nagy, 1974). However, the Kmettykó-based curriculum was eventually abandoned in favor one focused on more practical subjects, including folk dance. The term "gymnastics class" was replaced by "physical education", and the title "dance and gymnastics teacher" was replaced by "physical education teacher".

According to Júlia Lenkei, Alice Madzsar had already made notes on movement-based physical education in 1919. In 1946, the introduction of movement arts in schools was proposed, with teacher training to be provided by the *College of Physical*

Education. There was debate regarding the establishment of a dance department and its requirements: Ferenc Hepp advocated for joint training for the first two years, followed by specialization, while Olga Szentpál opposed this approach, arguing that certain sports overworked the muscles.

From 1949, strong centralization took place, and physical education adopted a Marxist-Leninist orientation. The dance program was discontinued, and it was no longer possible to apply for admission. As such, no new dance teacher diplomas were issued, only physical education teacher diplomas. Following the Soviet model, “artistic gymnastics” was introduced, replacing dance gymnastics and sports dance, and was assessed together with gymnastics. Thus, dance was effectively removed from public education (Lenkei, 2007).

According to documents, the number of physical education classes was reduced, with the main goal being to prepare students for socialist construction work (Hamar, 2016). During the Cold War era, sport and physical education became propaganda tools, serving military rather than aesthetic or educational purposes (Gortva, 2025). It is therefore unsurprising that dance was also relegated to the background at this time.

3.1 The period between 1952 and 1995

Klára Szentpéteri (1992) lamented that the 1952 curriculum no longer mentioned dance, meaning that for 40 years, students received no organized dance education at school. Before the introduction of the first NCC, she therefore emphasized that dance should once again be given a place in the curriculum alongside the basic sports. To support her argument, she cited the 1918 curriculum, which stated that dance teaches light, graceful, and polite movement, promotes good posture, lifts the spirits, aids in the expression of emotions, and has a beneficial effect on physiological processes. Hungarian folk dance, it added, is also suitable for fostering national spirit (Curriculum and Instructions for Physical Education in Elementary Schools, 1918). It is important to note, however, that contrary to Szentpéteri’s interpretation, dance did not entirely disappear from schools.

From the 1950s onwards, attempts were made to keep folk dance in public education. Keszler (1987) writes that, on the initiative of Elemér Muhari and Kodály, folk dance was introduced in 1953 in a progressive system, which was adopted by many schools with music departments, with two hours per week allocated to it. A curriculum was also developed, but it was abolished by Directive 107/1967, and folk dance was relegated to extracurricular clubs. In 1975, another attempt was made to incorporate it into physical education with an increased number of hours, but the initiative was discontinued in 1977 due to a lack of support. Dance was unable to be effectively incorporated into music and singing classes due to personnel and material constraints. It was therefore proposed that the same teacher should teach both physical education and folk dance, and that physical education students should take a course on teaching children’s dance (Farkas, 1977).

In the 1980s, József Zsolnai and his colleagues launched the *Value-Mediation and Skill-Development Program* (ÉKP), a full-day school that covered more areas of education than the traditional curriculum. Folk dance was included as a separate

subject. In 1992, with the development of physical education and sports culture, the goal became to make physical education a daily activity: the mandatory three hours followed the traditional program, with one to two hours per week of mandatory elective subjects, including dance, and one hour per week of freely elective sports (Zsolnai, 1992). The program operated in 104 schools and reached its peak before the introduction of the NCC; however, after 2020, no school requested its implementation (Túrós, 2023).

Another experiment was launched in 1987, which was joined by 50 schools and an eight-grade secondary school in 1991. Their methods were compiled from the programs of alternative schools. Dance was included in the curriculum at all grade levels, not as part of physical education, but within the subject *Singing–Music–Dance*, taught twice a week (Füstné Kólyi & Bartal, 1992).

Dance was also important in *Waldorf* schools, with eurythmy, the aim of which was to make speech visible through movement, being one of the cornerstones. In Hungary, they operated from 1926 to 1933, and then again from 1988 (waldorf.hu). Most alternative schools were established between 1945 and 1989 (Pukánszky & Németh, 1996).

After the change of regime, dance appeared in the NAT as a sub-area of training and, with the introduction of daily physical education, it was once again included in the subject content.

3.2 From the introduction of the NCC to the spring 2024 school-leaving examination

After the change of regime in the mid-1990s, the NCC introduced dance into public education as a compulsory subject. Within the arts, it appeared as a sub-area under dance and drama. Although the curriculum was set, the conditions for its implementation were uncertain. Due to a lack of qualified teachers, it was primarily Hungarian, singing, and physical education teachers who took on the classes. Within the physical education subject, Rhythmic Gymnastics (RG) and aerobics were included in the girls' gymnastics program in the 8th grade. By the end of 10th grade, aerobics had become part of gymnastics, and RG movements, walking types, jumps, trunk and hand exercises, and combinations of these could be learned in these classes.

When developing the NCC 2003, Ladányi proposed that dance should be included not only in the arts curriculum in connection with literature (*Dance and Drama*), but also in physical education and singing (Ladányi, 2003). Teacher training institutions launched specialized continuing education programs for teachers. The role of dance in physical education thus became most prominent in the NCC 2003, as illustrated in *Figure 1*.

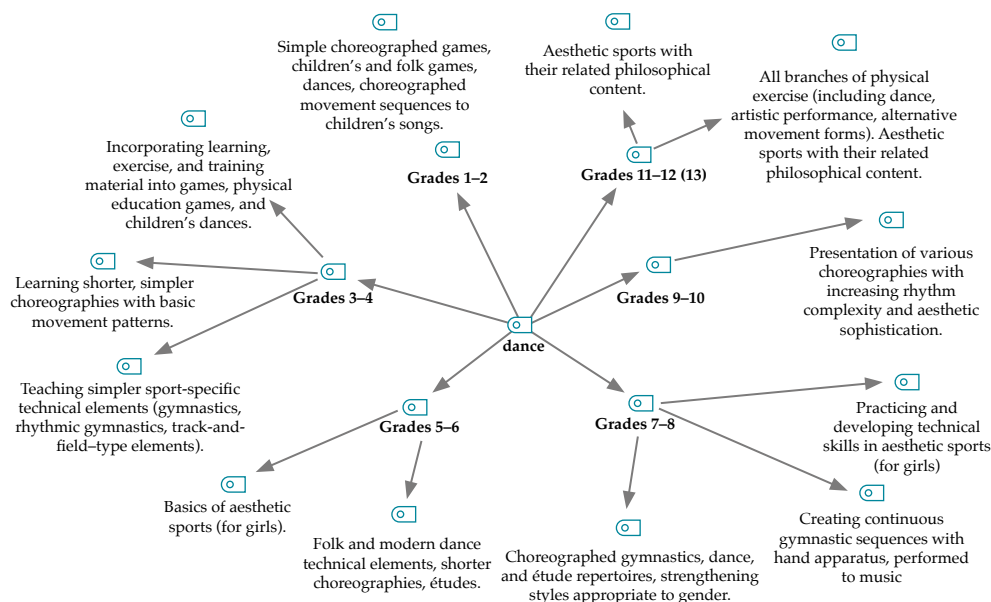


Figure 1. Music and dance movement content in the NCC 2003 in the field of physical education and sports

The NCC revised in 2008 did not change compared to the 2003 version. The qualitative content analysis of NCC 2012 and NCC 2020 was performed using MAXQDA 2022 software with in vivo coding, focusing on identifying and comparing the definitions and keywords related to dance content.

The NCC 2012, with the introduction of daily physical education and alternative curriculum frameworks, provided an opportunity to introduce a wider variety of sports. The *Hungarian School Sport Federation* (HSSF) supported the professional development of physical education teachers with free publications and further training; however, no accredited teacher training was launched for the creative dance publication (Pignitzkyné & Lévai, 2014). On a positive note, dance was given a more prominent role in everyday physical education across all 12 grades.

In addition to the framework curricula, a separate alternative dance framework curriculum supported the preparation of lesson plans. In the lower grades, folk dance was found under the headings “Children’s Dances” and “Folk Children’s Games,” while in upper grades, other dance activities appeared alongside the preservation of traditions. The creation of artistic products was introduced only at the high school level, including ballroom dancing, historical dances, and alternative forms of movement.

The guidelines of the NCC and the framework curricula greatly assisted schools in preparing the choreography for carnivals, graduation balls, mushroom-picking festivals, and other events, making it easier for students to learn the performances during physical education classes. At the University of Eger, special emphasis was placed on teaching teachers the fundamentals of ballroom dancing. The dance content of NCC 2012 is illustrated in Figure 2.

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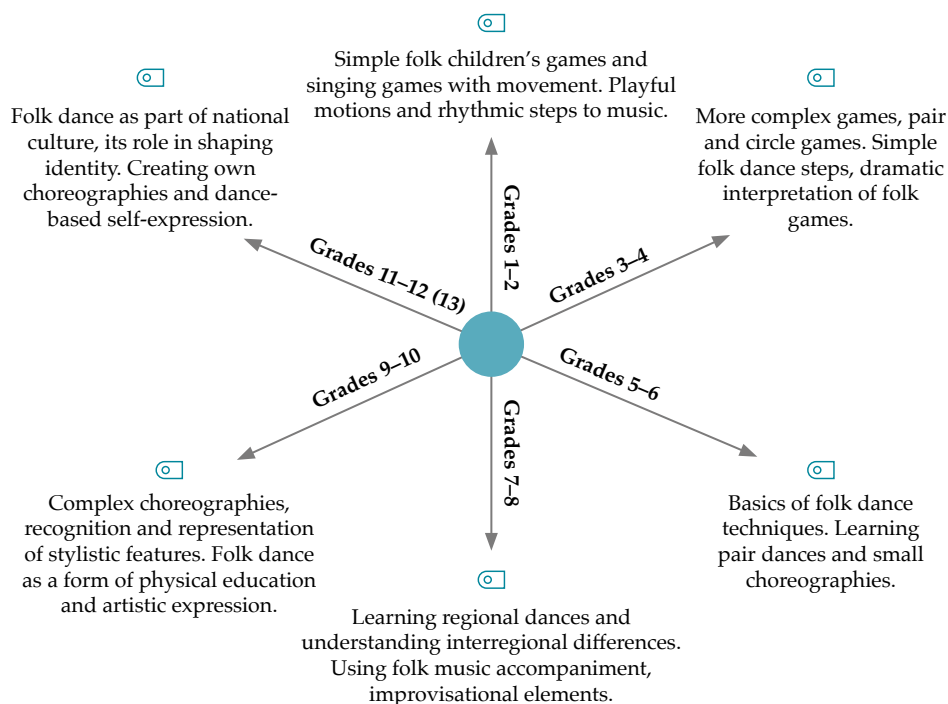


Figure 2. The dance-related content of the NCC 2012 within the subject of Physical Education

This development was interrupted by NCC 2020, as ballroom dancing and historical dances no longer appear even as headings in the related framework curricula, while aerobics and rhythmic gymnastics have been given a greater prominence in Grades 5–12. The curriculum also mentions dance and aerobic forms of movement without specifying them, meaning that any form of dance can be included into the teaching material, as well as any fitness trend that can be performed to music, such as Zumba, video games, and Tabata training. Movement coordination exercises performed to music are also becoming increasingly common using coordination ladders. *Figure 3* clearly illustrates the dance content included in NCC 2020.

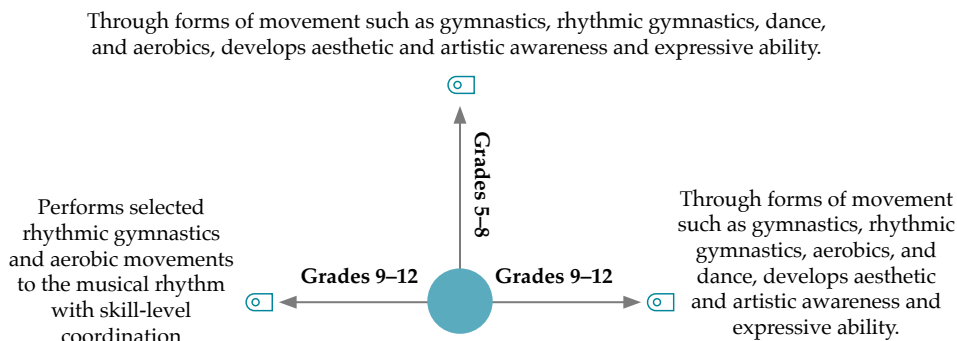


Figure 3. The dance-related content of the NCC 2020 within the subject of Physical Education

Curriculum frameworks related to NCC 2020 (Content regulations aligned with NCC 2020, 2023), which review the possibilities for implementing dance and other movement activities in lower grades, such as the *LippoZoo* (Kovács, 2021) teaching aid used at our university, are illustrated in Figure 4.¹ Several elements of the *Így tedd rá!* (Do it this way!) methodological toolkit can also be incorporated (Balatoni, 2016a, 2016b).

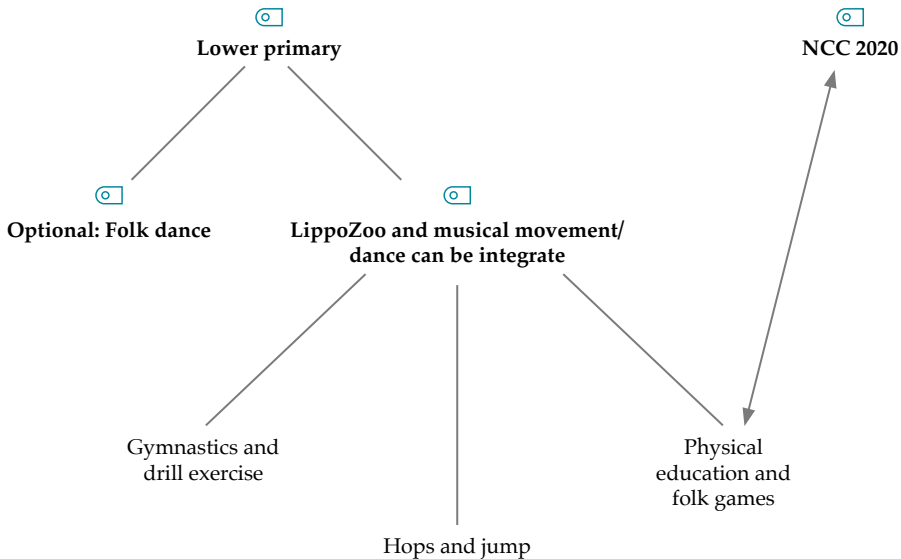


Figure 4. NCC 2020 and the Relationship System of Physical Education and Dance in Lower Grades

Based on this, it is clear that the freely selectable thematic unit is folk dance. Its content is precisely defined, requiring teachers to have several years of experience in folk dance, as well as a qualification in folk dance instruction.²

Teachers who do not choose folk dance can use the *LippoZoo* methodological tool across several thematic units, including preparatory, introductory, conditioning, and coordination skill development exercises that combine music and movement. It can also be used in athletics, gymnastics, gymnastics-type activities, and in the 10% timeframe that institutions can freely allocate. According to the NCC and the framework plans, *LippoZoo* and other forms of dance movement can be incorporated into the content listed in Table 3.

¹ For detailed information on the teaching methodology tool, see: Kovács, H. (2021). Description of the LippoZoo teaching methodology tool. *Acta Universitatis de Carolo Eszterházy Nominatae. Sectio Sport*, 48, 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.33040/ActaUnivEszterhazySport.2020.1.47>

² Due to space limitations, it is not possible to provide a detailed description of the movement elements to be taught. However, Éva Láng's doctoral thesis on a similar topic contains detailed information on these elements (Láng, 2025).

Table 3. The integration of music-based movement and dance into physical education at the lower grades

	Framework curricula		NCC 2020
	Grades 1–2	Grades 3–4	
	• Gymnastics and physical exercises – prevention, relaxation: 26 hours • Walking and running: 36 hours • Jumping and leaping: 26 hours • Physical education and folk games: 36 hours	• Gymnastics and drill exercises – prevention, relaxation: 26 hours • Walking and running: 36 hours • Jumping and leaping: 26 hours • Physical education and folk games: 32 hours	The student is able to perform basic movements to an externally determined rhythm, at a speed and with dynamics adapted to the movements of peers. Folk (children) games

In Grades 5–8, based on the possibilities offered by NCC 2020 and the framework curricula, dance and other forms of dance movement can appear in three areas (Figure 5).

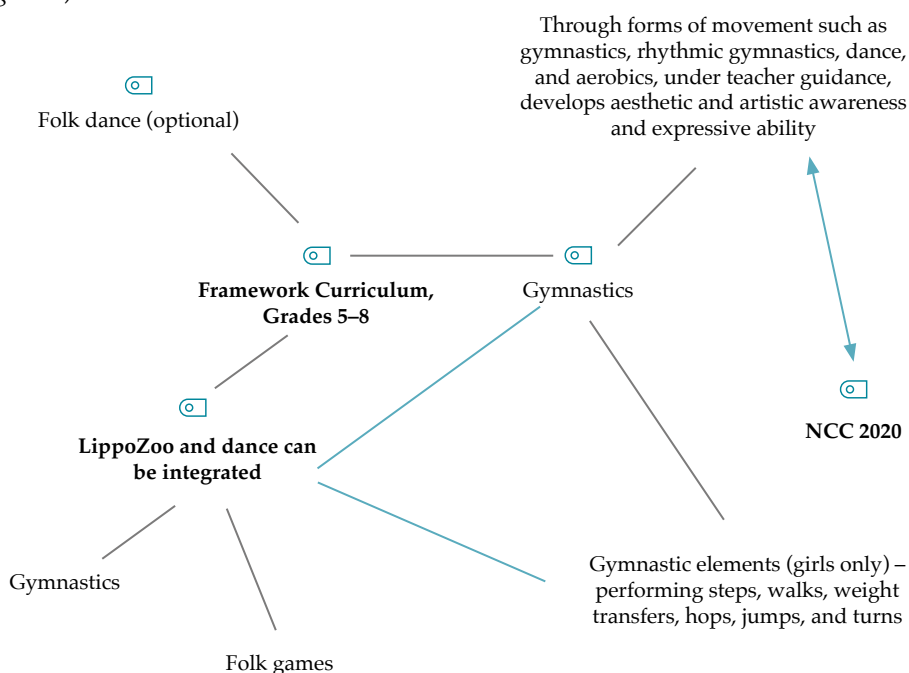


Figure 5. The relationship between the NCC 2020 and the physical education framework curriculum in the upper grades.

The optional folk-dance unit can be taught by dance teachers holding a teaching qualification.

Based on the available possibilities, music and dance content can be incorporated into the gymnastics, drill exercise, and physical education units. According to the regulatory documents (*Table 4*), the common intersection of the framework curriculum and the NCC is physical education, where the definition of “dance-related movement” allows for the inclusion of any form of music and dance movement. Thus, creative dance, video game-assisted movement, aerobics, and rhythmic gymnastics all represent useful tools in the physical education teacher’s toolbox.

Table 4. The integration of music-based movement and dance into physical education at the upper grades

	Framework curricula		NCC 2020
	Grades 5–6	Grades 7–8	
Lesson types and planned number of lessons in which dance can be incorporated	- Gymnastics and physical exercises – prevention, relaxation: 36 hours - Gymnastics-type exercises: 46 hours - Physical education and folk games: 34 hours	- Gymnastics and drill exercises – prevention, relaxation: 36 hours - Gymnastics-type exercises: 46 hours - Physical education and folk games: 34 hours	
Gymnastics	- Through gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, dance, and aerobic-type movements, students develop their aesthetic and artistic awareness and expressiveness under the guidance of a teacher. - Gymnastic elements (girls only). steps, walks, weight transfers, jumps, leaps, turns – execution	The student develops aesthetic and artistic awareness and expressiveness through gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, dance, and aerobic-type movements under the guidance of a teacher.	The student develops aesthetic and artistic awareness and expressiveness through gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, dance, and aerobic-type movements under the guidance of a teacher.

The range of optional content expands in secondary school: in addition to folk dance, rhythmic gymnastics and aerobics are also included. In the final exams, these appear as sub-areas at intermediate and advanced levels, both in the practical exam and in the oral section. In the framework curriculum, the term “dance-like forms of movement” allows for considerable freedom in the choice of style, including creative dance, modern improvisation, and other approaches. In gymnastics, the music and dance content consists of warm-ups compiled with the help of teachers in Grades 9–10 and independent compositions in Grades 11–12. This relationship is illustrated in *Figure 6*.

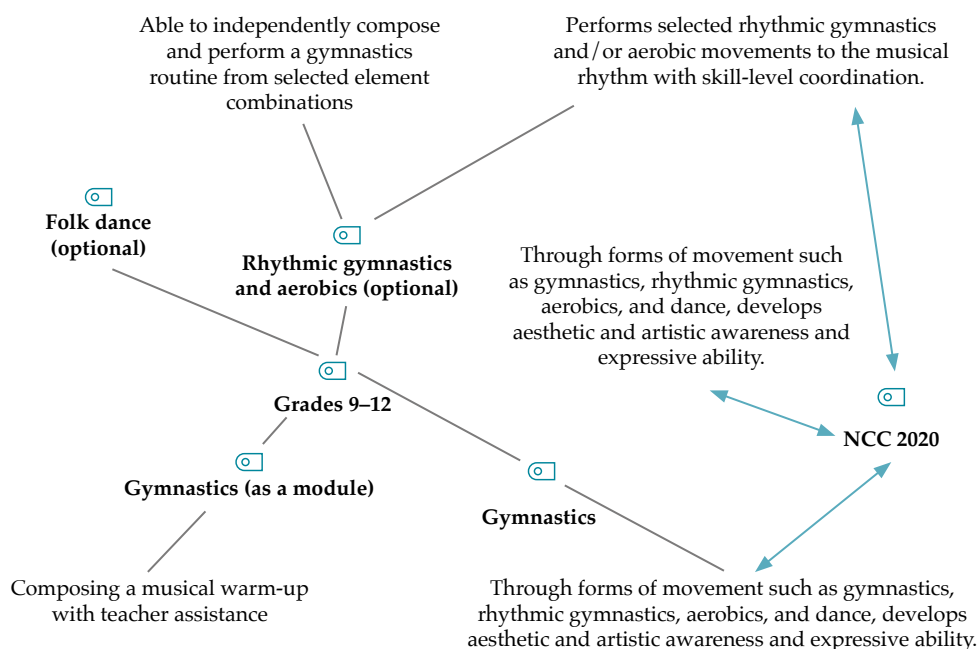


Figure 6. The relationship between NCC 2020 and dance in secondary school physical education

Based on a review of the regulatory documents for physical education in schools and the results of the qualitative analysis, it is clear that the Training and Output Requirements already includes musical and dance forms of movement in teacher training, such as rhythmic gymnastics, dance, and aerobics. In NCC 2020, as students’ progress through the grades, dance content becomes increasingly prominent, especially in gymnastics, while in lower grades, gymnastics, folk games, and aids such as *LippoZoo* or the *Így tedd rá!* program offer opportunities for movement development. Folk dance remains an optional subject in Grades 1–12, but in many schools, the lack of qualified instructors prevents it from being effectively taught. At the secondary school level, aerobics and RG have been added to the curriculum alongside folk dance, but the framework curriculum deliberately

leaves room for creativity, allowing teachers to incorporate creative dance, modern improvisation, or other music-based activities. Among the previous NCCs, the 2003 and 2012 versions gave teachers the greatest freedom of choice, but the 2020 version placed the greatest emphasis on artistic education and the development of creative expression, giving students the opportunity to express themselves and experience their emotions. In high school and secondary school, this can be combined with various modern dances and aerobic fitness trends, such as Zumba, Latin fitness, or Tabata, which not only make classes more varied but also provide students with authentic dance experience.

4. SUMMARY

Dance education in physical education in Hungary has undergone a long and varied development from the 1868 Public Education Act to the present day. This process has been closely linked to social, political, and pedagogical changes, as well as to the professional discourse that has continuously redefined the goals and methods of physical education.

In the second half of the 19th century, with the introduction of compulsory physical exercise, dance initially appeared as a recommended, complementary form of movement. Professional journals and pedagogical debates already recognized its educational, aesthetic, and health-related significance, especially in the physical education of girls. By the 1890s, dance had already become part of the regular practical program of several schools, and the contemporary literature highlighted the benefits of Hungarian dance movements in developing posture, rhythm, and a sense of community. Between the two world wars, the importance of dance in the curriculum further increased, with detailed regulations specifying the steps and dances to be learned in the syllabus for secondary schools and elementary schools. At the same time, dance skills became part of physical education teacher qualification, which also increased the professional recognition of the field.

Until the end of the 1940s, dance played a prominent role in physical education; however, with the curriculum changes of 1952, it virtually disappeared from the compulsory content of public education. It was replaced by artistic and rhythmic gymnastics organized according to the Soviet model, relegating dance to the background for an extended period. Nevertheless, several attempts were made to preserve folk dance, both through extracurricular clubs and in alternative educational programs. Kodály and his followers also considered the community-building and identity-strengthening role of folk dance to be important, although opportunities for its regular inclusion in education remained limited.

Alternative school experiments in the late 1980s, including József Zsolnai's ÉKP program and the emergence of *Waldorf* schools in Hungary, brought the pedagogical significance of dance back to the forefront. Following the change of regime, the NCC 1995 was the first to include dance as a subject within the official framework of public education. However, the conditions for implementation were still lacking at that time, as few specialist teachers possessed the necessary training. In the NCC 2003, dance was given a more prominent role within physical education and singing, while the NCC 2012 expanded opportunities for all age

groups to learn different forms of dance, from children's dances in lower grades to ballroom dancing and historical dances in secondary school.

The NCC 2020 introduced a new approach: folk dance can be included as an optional teaching unit in Grades 1–12, while aerobics and rhythmic gymnastics have become more prominent in the upper grades. The regulations give teachers greater leeway by allowing any musical movement activity to be included in the physical education curriculum under the heading of "dance and aerobic forms of movement." While this provides flexibility, it also poses a challenge, as the majority of physical education teachers do not have the necessary expertise to teach dance.

A historical overview clearly shows that dance education has always extended beyond mere physical exercise: its role in identity formation, community building, and aesthetic and emotional education has been consistently present in pedagogical thinking. At times more prominent, at others pushed into the background, it has remained a recurring element throughout the more than 150-year history of Hungarian public education.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The role of dance in Hungarian public education has changed cyclically, but it has never disappeared completely. This continuity suggests that educators and policymakers periodically rediscover its educational value. From the perspective of 21st-century physical education in schools, the greatest challenge is to ensure professional preparedness and methodological support, as without adequate training, the possibilities offered by the curriculum remain untapped.

At the same time, the NCC 2020 guidelines clearly show that dance can contribute to the achievement of complex educational goals: in addition to physical development, it also contributes to the development of emotional, social, and creative skills. If the necessary personal and professional conditions for education can be established in the future, dance will not remain merely an optional component of physical education but will become a valuable element of public education, one that simultaneously builds national identity and opens up space for modern, experience-centered learning.

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