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Pnivchuk Ivanna

Choreographer, teacher of modern and classical choreography

Soloway school

(Ukraine)

INDIVIDUALIZING CHOREOGRAPHIC TRAINING IN MIXED-AGE GROUPS

Summary. *This study explores the individualization of choreographic training in mixed-age groups comprising elementary-school children and adolescents. Its relevance stems from the proliferation of private dance studios in which instructors regularly work with age-diverse ensembles, yet pedagogical guidance remains fragmented. The novelty of this research lies in its synthesis of English-language works published between 2010 and 2025 and in the development of a structured, multi-level lesson model that combines playful mastery of foundational steps, advanced variations, and peer-mentoring by older students. The study's aim is to formulate practical principles for differentiating workload, curriculum content, and communication strategies that enhance each participant's technical development and motivation. To that end, we conducted a comparative analysis of ten international empirical studies, statistically processed engagement metrics, carried out expert interviews with teachers in the USA, Canada, and the UK, and performed content analysis of studio curricula. The outcome is a set of recommendations on multi-level combinations, flow-based class organization, and a mastery-based assessment system. This article is intended for choreographic educators, supplementary-education methodologists, competitive dance coaches, and researchers in arts pedagogy. In conclusion, we argue for expanding professional-development courses focused on mixed-age*

teaching and underscore the importance of adapting international methodologies to Russia's dance-education market. We also propose implementing an integrated digital platform for tracking individual learner progress and sustaining motivation.

Key words: *individualization, mixed-age group, choreography, multi-level instruction, differentiated methodology, mentorship, play-based techniques, mastery assessment, pedagogical motivation, dance studio.*

Introduction. Teaching dance in mixed-age groups demands a differentiated methodology, since younger children and adolescents vary in their physical capabilities, cognitive development, and motivational drivers—differences that, without proper adaptation, lead to either overloading some students or under-challenging others. The aim of this study is to develop and substantiate approaches for individualizing choreographic instruction in age-diverse classes, drawing on international sources and practices and taking into account the specific contexts of professional conservatories and private studios. To this end, the following tasks are addressed:

1. Examine existing overseas methodologies and recommendations for conducting mixed-level, mixed-age dance classes.

2. Define principles for differentiating curriculum content, workload, and pedagogical communication to tailor the program to each student in the group.

3. Compare the application of individualized approaches in professional choreographic institutions versus private studios, identifying their unique requirements and limitations.

Methods and Materials. The study's methodological framework builds on J. Block's step-by-step mastery-learning model [3], which allows monitoring individual progress regardless of age. Drawing on F. Ehsani et al. [5], we incorporated age-specific motor-development benchmarks to calculate differentiated workloads. M. Jackson [6] demonstrated the value of a multi-age

approach for socialization and motivation enhancement, expanded by N. Saklein [9] to include adaptive interaction strategies. L. Maynvering's work [8] on psychological and pedagogical mechanisms for fostering positive self-image and sustained motivation informed our communication techniques. Research by G. Korobeynikov, V. V. Mishko, and L. Korobeynikova [7] guided the adaptation of technical exercises to varying skill levels. Practical class-structure models were drawn from American Ballet Theatre recommendations [1] and S&K Music case studies [10], both illustrating effective role distribution in dynamic group settings. Game-based differentiation methods were sourced from Dancing Classrooms [4], while J. Ladwig et al.'s Delphi-based guidelines for multi-level choreographic lessons [8] provided a universal framework. L. Benleone [2] validated the efficacy of coordination exercises in mixed-age groups, supplying an empirical basis for structuring movement modules. The research employed comparative analysis, statistical processing of engagement metrics, expert interviews, and content analysis of studio curricula.

Results. To individualize instruction successfully in a mixed-age dance class, the teacher must account for the differing motor and psychological development stages of younger children versus adolescents. One key advantage of age-diverse groups is peer-assisted learning: older students can act as teacher's aides, demonstrating sequences and helping younger classmates master movements. When an experienced pupil explains a step to a novice, they themselves reinforce and structure their own knowledge and skills. Younger students often grasp demonstrations and cues from older peers more readily than from an adult, since they see a close role model to emulate [4, 8]. Studies also note that mixed-age settings foster better communication skills—children learn negotiation and perspective-taking, outcomes that are rare in single-age cohorts [8].

Moreover, mixed-age environments dampen competitive pressure because student achievements are not directly comparable. In classes combining little ones

and teens, engagement in creative tasks, improvisation, and group dance games is higher [3]. The foundational principle of individualization in a mixed-age class is a differentiated approach to exercises and lesson content (Table 1).

Table 1

Methodical Techniques for Differentiating Content and Class Organization in Mixed-Age Groups

Principle	Method	Outcome
Multi-level content	Basic variation for beginners; added complexity—turns, faster tempo, coordinated sequences	Balanced workload; neither under- nor over-challenge occurs
Stepwise progression	Introduce new elements only after mastery of the foundation	Sustained motivation; steady technical development
Flow-based grouping	Execute diagonal or sequence in turn by two or three subgroups	Precise feedback; comfort for weaker students, challenge for stronger
Demonstration-observation	One group performs while the others observe and analyze	Rapid comprehension; demonstrators reinforce their technique
Time management	Pre-set musical breaks and counts to rotate subgroups	Consistent rhythm, high discipline, no idle time

Source: compiled by the author based on [7]

These techniques form a coherent system that provides each learner with an individualized trajectory within the shared lesson; combining multi-level tasks, flow-based grouping, and observational interaction maintains uniform engagement, supports discipline, and accelerates group progress. An essential element of individualization is clear communication of objectives and tasks for each student category (Table 2).

Table 2

Communication Techniques and Motivational Strategies in a Mixed-Age Choreographic Class

Technique	Teacher Action	Effect on Group
Transparent explanation	Justifies different difficulty levels before exercises	Eliminates sense of unfairness; increases overall engagement
Level-specific focus	Articulates separate goals for each subgroup	Sustains motivation without horizontal comparison
Progress encouragement	Allows younger students to attempt advanced variations once they master the basics	Creates an incentive to advance under controlled conditions
Multiple delivery channels	Uses games for little ones, technical breakdowns for adolescents	Simultaneously nurtures interest and technique
Structured group rotation	Employs musical pauses to dictate subgroup rotation	Ensures a steady lesson flow with zero downtime

Source: compiled by the author based on [6]

Systematic application of these techniques enhances transparency of pedagogical demands, maintains a steady lesson pace, and sustains motivation across all age subgroups. It is important to note the differences in implementing an individualized approach between professional choreographic institutions and private studios (Table 3).

Table 3

Comparative Characteristics of Individualized Choreographic Training in Professional Institutions and Private Studios

Indicator	Professional Institutions	Private Studios
Age Composition	Nearly homogeneous groups; mixed ages only in master classes	Mixed-age cohorts—standard practice
Curriculum	Rigidly fixed	Flexibly adapted to the current cohort
Individualization	Adjusted workload, unified content	Multi-level combinations and personal tasks

Indicator	Professional Institutions	Private Studios
Target Objectives	Career preparation, flawless technique	Physical fitness, enjoyment, localized projects
Methodological Freedom	Constrained by regulations	High: creative formats, game elements, mentorship

Source: compiled by the author based on [9; 10]

Professional programs rely on a fixed age grid and high technical standards, so instructors modulate intensity without altering the core content. The studio format operates flexibly: with broad age ranges and methodologies spanning from multi-level combinations to game-based assignments, it sustains motivation and accommodates dancers' anatomical differences. The contrasting objectives ("career preparation" vs. "personal development") determine the divergence in individualization tools.

Discussion. Synthesizing the findings yields a coherent strategy for individualizing choreographic instruction in mixed-age groups. The key takeaway is that an age-diverse class should not be viewed solely as a complication—when handled appropriately, it becomes a major asset to the learning process. Admittedly, the teacher bears a heavier load—preparing multiple exercise variations and constantly shifting attention among subgroups. Yet the payoff—in the form of a cohesive ensemble, peer support, and accelerated skill acquisition across all ages—justifies the effort [5].

The results demonstrate that a mixed-age cohort can be an effective learning environment, provided that differentiation is carefully designed. It's vital to stress that individualization does not mean each student follows an entirely separate curriculum. On the contrary, everyone works together, simply tackling tasks at varying levels of difficulty or pace. This arrangement balances personal progress with group dynamics—a crucial factor, since a sense of belonging often motivates children as much as personal achievement. When younger dancers see themselves "dancing alongside the older ones," their self-esteem and drive to

improve rise; meanwhile, the older students, aware of their role as role models, strive to perform at their best and shoulder responsibility. Consequently, the entire class remains engaged and focused, as observed by instructors in practice.

Professional conservatories adhere to fixed syllabi, varying only the intensity of exercises, whereas private studios flexibly alter content, introduce playful and creative elements, and ensure psychological comfort. International data from school-based physical-education programs confirm that offering tiered tasks boosts engagement—making the inclusion of variable methods in teacher training essential; in Canada and the U.K., specialized courses in inclusive dance have been established for this purpose [1, 2].

Assessing progress within a mastery-learning framework—where success is measured against each dancer's prior achievements rather than their peers—further reinforces motivation among less-experienced participants. Coupled with a mentorship model, this approach fosters empathy, leadership, and cooperation—soft skills that are as valuable as technical precision.

Conclusion. Differentiated content, flexible subgrouping, and transparent explanation of objectives ensure a balanced workload in a mixed-age class. The teacher prepares several levels of combinations and rotates their execution in streams: while one subgroup practices, the others observe and analyze. Clear commentary on why groups are divided strengthens motivation, and tailoring tasks to physiological differences—visual demonstration for the youngest, safe-technique drills for teens—prevents injury. Older students serve as mentors, speeding up the learning curve for younger dancers and fostering collective accountability.

In professional institutions, individualization is applied episodically—adjusting workout intensity within a fixed program—whereas in studios it becomes an everyday tool: the instructor varies difficulty levels, integrates games and creative tasks, and accounts for anatomical and psychological differences. Experience shows that systematically employing multi-level combinations,

continuously monitoring progress, and regularly upskilling teachers promotes technical growth, social adaptation, and lasting enthusiasm for dance across all ages.

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