

Friends of HTH Community in Israel

New Book

Pedagogy in the Spirit of Jazz

Friends of HTH Community in Israel

(Inspired by the HTH Network, San Diego)

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Background

Following the inspiration of a trip to the HTH Network, San Diego, and a deepening inquiry into how its principles are adopted and implemented within the Friends of HTH Community in Israel, the author formulated a new educational-pedagogical concept: pedagogy in the spirit of jazz.

It became clear to him that this approach could respond to the sense of urgency prevalent in the education system, offering a vision and an alternative model for addressing current realities in schools and classrooms.

Vision

The main goal of the proposed vision is to encourage and cultivate a **jazz culture** within the education system – across schools and classrooms. Jazz, as a cultural creation, emphasizes the sovereignty of the individual and embodies the creative tension between personal self-expression and collaboration within an ensemble. It balances the right to express oneself and act independently with the responsibility to respect others and work together toward a common goal.

Jazz challenges the self to accept the decisions of others: sometimes you lead, sometimes you follow, and sometimes you accompany ("comping") others on their path. It is an art of negotiating change, where the purpose of performing jazz is to **be and create together in the moment – in place and time.**

The vision seeks to establish a deeper understanding grounded in conceptual ideas that have the potential to release human potential – broad in scope and profound in meaning – transcending boundaries and defined fields of knowledge to touch the essence of human being-experience itself.

These conceptual ideas are drawn from what John Dewey called a "struggle" against defined circumstances, as we strive forward.

In the spirit of the HTH Network, San Diego, and aligned with the unique emphases of the Friends of HTH Community in Israel, the leading conceptual focus centers on **establishing relationships and connections** – interpersonal, group, community, organizational, and institutional – and striving to build a **collaborative democracy**, based on justice and equality. This framework enables "design thinking" and original work that is both personalized and supported by a community based on affinity.

Such concepts may **provide both a moral compass and a powerful engine** for action and change. They offer more than a theory of education; they articulate and embody an **educational philosophy** intended to become an innovative and creative way of life.

The core of the book is formulated as a **manifesto** that challenges the current reality of the education system – its schools and classrooms – and lays the foundations for a new structure and function of schooling.

Model

The model proposed in the book – attentive to the hardships and aspirations of a broad public of both young and old who yearn for freedom and liberation from oppressive structures, and who seek renewed hope – offers a motivational call for direction. It provides pathways for approaching the lived reality of schools and classrooms through the deliberate adoption of diverse options, addressing the complexities of choice and challenge that teaching and learning present in the 21st century.

The book examines metaphors such as "the school as a laboratory" (John Dewey) and "the school as a design studio" (Donald Schön). Building on the experience of the HTH Network, San Diego, and the Friends of HTH Community in Israel, discussed in detail as both a starting point and inspiration for the author and readers alike – the book proposes a model of **pedagogy in the spirit of jazz**.

Within this model, the phenomenon of improvisation occupies a central role. Importantly, improvisation is not to be equated with a situation where "anything goes." Rather, with its inherent complexity, improvisation emphasizes the profound meaning of **balancing order and disorder**. The fundamental claim at the heart of jazz culture is that these two states can coexist.

Improvisation is a **partially ordered activity**: while it involves deviation from established rules, the very existence of those rules is a necessary condition for such deviation. Deviation does not presuppose rules but, paradoxically, often creates and emerges from them – testing their hidden potential while remaining aware of their constraints and the contradictions they provoke.

This delicate balance, embodied in the practice of the **jazz ensemble** (the educational equivalent of a small, flexible, and dynamic classroom), is expressed through a minimal structure. **Minimal structure** creates the necessary common denominator for the life of the organization, group, and individual by valuing ambiguity over rigidity. It preserves interdependence and paradox while preventing over-closure – seeking a **fragile equilibrium between freedom and constraint, flexibility and control, autonomy and interdependence**.

The metaphor of improvisation in education begins with the recognition that too much of school life – and the teaching and learning that occur within it – has become routine, rigid, and overly structured. As in any professional practice, education requires a balance between **structure and creativity**. The tension between these two forces is inescapable and essential to schooling in an age defined not merely by data and information but by knowledge and wisdom.

The inspiration drawn from improvisation in general, and from jazz improvisation in particular, invites us to envision and design our schools, classrooms, and lessons as **spaces of vitality and spontaneous interaction**. When the improvisational approach of "yes, and..." (in which participants accept and build upon each other's contributions) is adopted in the classroom, it creates a positive learning environment that encourages student engagement and enables the emergence of "teachable moments."

Jazz pedagogy is an invitation to playfulness, enthusiasm for change, and the development of the ability to engage with the unexpected. It fosters a comprehensive perspective, a spiritual acceptance of necessary contrasts, and a deep optimism. Beyond self-expression, jazz teaches us to refine the shared endeavor in every field – clarifying the intentions of both self and collective. Above all, it teaches **respect and trust**.

Outline

The outline of the proposed model is presented briefly below. Further elaboration, deepening, and illustration can be found in the book.

Metaphorical Structure: The model offers a metaphorical transition from a symphony orchestra (of institutionalized rationality, which characterizes contemporary schools) to jazz ensembles (of a creative capacity for independent action, which will characterize the school of the future). In such an ensemble, **a group of performers creates together, simultaneously, and contributes – with deep listening and involvement – to a synergetic whole**.

Teaching–learning environment: aims to create a delicate balance, designed to bring people to work together to create a better entirety of life, based on the assumption that full utilization of the potential inherent in the self, need not come at the expense of full utilization of that inherent in the collective.

Learning spaces: Teaching–learning will take place in spaces that allow partners to step outside themselves, to some extent, to help create the required space. Learning

spaces will be conceived as a place where it is possible to slow down and live fully. Such spaces will allow for the patience required to bring about significant change.

Art schools: All schools should be, at least in some respects, "art schools" (more precisely, "littoral art schools" – characterized by public, community-based art with political-value foundations), where teachers act as facilitators and enablers; students learn to be curious, experimental, self-reliant, resourceful, and entrepreneurial.

School organization and management: School leaders engage in constant dialogue and negotiation, creating shared spaces for decision-making based on expertise, innovation, and creativity. Prominent leadership skills will include improvisation: the art of flexible adaptation, trial-and-error learning, responding to particular issues, and discovering as they go. Leadership will be fluid and collaborative. Leaders will strive to bring about the personal development of the team, allowing their partners the opportunity to learn by doing, while taking risks and feeling comfortable about the results of their performance.

Organizing rationale: In accordance with the proposed model – in light of the largely required dismantling of traditional frameworks (curriculum, subjects, lessons, learning methods, etc.), and with an increasing emphasis on learning over teaching – it is proposed to go a step further in the direction of the teachers hands being less on the wheel, with students leading many of the processes themselves, while largely avoiding the creation of predetermined social positions and rigid organizational hierarchy.

Motivation: In jazz-inspired pedagogy, responsibility for learning will largely shift from the teacher to the student. The teacher's challenge will be to enable the transfer of this responsibility throughout the entire teaching–learning process.

Curriculum: In line with John Dewey's vision, the central subject of study in the school will be "human life" itself. The democratic process of education will be emphasized, rather than dictating specific content in advance. The program will not be composed of topics of study as we know them today, but will be structured according

to a broad, interdisciplinary approach (for example, a central topic such as "change" may be studied broadly and exhaustively in history, geography, mathematics, physics, biology, literature, scripture, languages, art, music, and so on). Textbooks will be used only rarely, as they fail to provide sufficient insight into the types of problems that students are required to examine. The use of various sources, including essential source documents, will increase. The structure of the lesson will be mostly improvised. The program will generally be perceived as a personal investigation or as a student's journey in a community of learners, based on inquiry.

Teaching–learning: will be improvised and will show respect for freedom and autonomy. It will be characterized by a low level of formality, be based on experience, favor activity over tolerance, encourage open and direct communication, and generate a shared spirit – public and declared – in which students learn to accept personal responsibility, take initiative, and lead, while integrating others and enthusiastically believing in their own and others' human potential. The aspiration will be to instill a teaching–learning spirit of independence, aimed at opening new horizons of human creativity while maintaining processes and mechanisms of interpersonal and group inclusiveness, and an atmosphere that allows for constant organizing – above and beyond any given structure and organization.

The classroom: The jazz-inspired classroom will express a real form of active community life, rather than a distinct place where lessons are taught. Within its framework, teachers will acquire a deep understanding of their students' interests, needs, and abilities and create active learning opportunities to involve students in the development of tentative knowledge. Teachers will be active partners at every step of the way. They will be responsible for inviting their students to new possibilities and experiences – allowing them to discover their preferences, examine their tendencies, strengths, and limitations, and be involved in a constant cycle of experiences in which deep and meaningful learning leads to further learning. Partners will exchange ideas freely and without constraints, as a kind of game, make no judgments, and take risks while offering considerable space for error and failure, with mutual openness and a willingness to be challenged. The goal will be to enable partners to actively explore possibilities – with alertness, awareness, and listening to language and practice – to

integrate existing information and to innovate in real time in the face of an unexpected challenges, at the interface between planning and execution.

Lesson

The lesson in the spirit of jazz will be **free**. It will be perceived as **a process, a performance, a living event – unfolding, emerging, dynamic, flexible, fresh, elusive, interwoven, and vital**. It will be based on experience – always a real-life experience of specific individuals who are partners in the process.

It will be characterized by flexibility and equal relationships among the partners, all of whom will participate out of the joy of creation in an exploratory and experiential work–play, connected to fundamental and current social issues.

The lesson will rely only minimally on dictated or predetermined learning materials. At its core will lie the recognition that **teachers share with their students not only written materials but also inspiration**. The approach will be distinctly **interdisciplinary** – crossing and fusing fields of knowledge in a fruitful way. **The main effort will be devoted to learning as process**, with continuous openness to experience and assimilation, **instead of emphasis on learning as product**. However, the teacher will be able to intelligently guide the manner of cooperation within the group by using specific discourse strategies – such as requiring students to follow a defined sequence of actions, assigning them defined roles, and so forth.

The Role of the Learning Facilitators

The teachers – or, in the preferred expression, the "learning facilitators" – will be available and present for the learners, listening and responding as an empathetic, curious, and sensitive person.

The challenge faced: finding an appropriate balance between creativity and structure that results in optimal teaching–learning. The learning facilitators will prioritize transforming students into learning partners. They will provide convenient times for initiative and choice and will constantly cultivate the students' motivation to learn. They will create a wide range of opportunities – for individuals and groups – that will

allow them to experience, develop their independence and make decisions on their own. To this end, the facilitators will often prefer minimizing "teaching" and instead fostering a living, dynamic, and organic process. They will often choose silence over speech, free experimentation from below over imposed dictation from above, cultivating an open and unpredictable interpersonal environment over a controlled one, direct and immediate personal connection over mediated and formal interaction, and stepping back to create space for creation rather than supervising the entire field of action.

Teaching, in this sense, will be based on **experiential interpersonal interactions – "I and Thou" dialogue, anchored in "the here and now."**

The Learning Facilitators as Jazz Leader

Operating in a system of segmented and decentralized control, the learning facilitators as leaders will often need to act without an explicit, predetermined plan and without the ability to fully evaluate the results of their actions.

Jazz leadership, as a design activity, involves creating space, providing support, and setting challenges that inspire people to grow on their own. In this context, the leader's role – one who inspires through spirit rather than dictates through centralized, hierarchical authority – is of paramount importance.

Jazz leadership is full of paradoxes: leaders are required to lead without controlling, manage without management. As leaders, they cannot demand creativity – just as than they cannot command a flower to bloom. They must foster an environment that evokes ideas at all levels, as good ideas can spring from anywhere and anybody.

The essential lesson of jazz culture is that the best music arises not from the leader's dictation but from listening to and responding to others. Jazz leadership provides the best means of personal development, offering people extraordinary opportunities to learn by doing, take risks, and feel comfortable with the outcomes of their performance.

The Desired Graduate

The aspiration is for graduates of the education system to restore optimism and a fearless passion for adventure, developing their instinct for inquiry and discovery, creative intuition, and freedom of inspiration. Graduates will excel as individuals with independent thinking, intellectual curiosity, self-confidence, resourcefulness, and a sense that they are ready for the future – to face it and to shape it. They will think and express themselves in an original, vital, clear, simple, and precise manner.

They will uphold the democratic spirit, develop a sense of personal competence, and promote the values of liberty, equality and fraternity. They will be people of good character, capable of making well-considered life decisions; dealing with theabb and flow of life with a sense of security diluted by a healthy sense of humor; warm and compassionate in their relationships; active and responsible citizens, flexible and open to others and to the world around them.

Learning Assessment

Unique criteria will be developed for assessment based on improvisation. It is essential to consider the collective action and the way in which the self contributes to it. Assessment must include the ongoing process and employ dialectical forms that combine self-assessment and peer assessment. It is important to ensure that assessment design supports the development of improvisation rather than hindering it. Evaluation of processes in the spirit of jazz is both possible and applicable. Those who adopt the appropriate culture will also find ways to meet this task, which at first glance may seem difficult to accomplish.

Development and Implementation Stages

The entire project is intended to include three main stages:

Stage One: Distribution of the book and assimilation of its messages.

Stage Two: Working with educators and field practitioners to translate the inspirational book into a work-plan and training-program – practical, detailed, and applicable for principals and teachers in our education system.

Stage Three: Conducting a pilot at multiple levels – classroom, school, municipal, district, and beyond.

Call for Collaboration

We hereby call upon every educator, principal, teacher, academic, and of course student who is interested in promoting the development and implementation of this program (the main points of which appear in the inspirational book available to all) to connect with us – so **together we can ensure a future in which a pedagogy of freedom, liberation, and hope prevails, instead of a pedagogy of rigid subordination, obedience and oppression.**

Anyone interested in taking part in the project is invited to get in touch – to think and act together:

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