

The Implications of Contemporary American Comprehensive University Dance Education for Educational Reform in China

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Abstract: *The educational philosophy of dance education in comprehensive universities in the United States emphasizes cultivating students' comprehensive abilities so that they can succeed in different fields and make positive contributions to society. The construction and curriculum of dance disciplines in different universities have different characteristics, focusing on cultivating students' independent thinking and independent learning abilities, and emphasizing practical experience. For the cultivation of comprehensive talents in dance education in China's comprehensive universities today, how to change the concept of higher education in dance, how to set up professional courses, and how to solve the obstacles of teachers are important issues that contemporary dance educators are striving to explore.*

Keywords: *American dance education; Comprehensive dance talents; Comprehensive universities; Educational reform*

1. Introduction

In 2023, the author had the status of public visiting scholar to study at the University of Oklahoma in the United States, a more comprehensive study of the United States in recent years, dance education and teaching in the construction of disciplines, curriculum, creation and performance, teaching management, faculty status, student employment and performance of the operation of the market, and gained a more cutting-edge first-hand information. During the visit, the author focused on the construction of American dance higher education and curriculum system, visited the University of Oklahoma Dance Department, the University of Washington Dance Department, Temple University Dance Department, and the New York University Dance Department of these comprehensive universities, visited the Dallas Museum of Art, the Seattle Museum of Modern Art, the Tulsa Museum of Art, and so on, and observed training classes such as Ballet, Pilates, Martha Grimes Technique, Cunningham Technique, Linmont Technique, Trisha Brown Technique, and other training classes. We watched the ballet gala "The Nutcracker", the Oklahoma BFA 4th grade students' creative work show "103.5", the musical "Chicago" and other exciting evenings. Through abundant visits, lectures, and observations, the author has a more comprehensive understanding of dance higher education in the U.S., and a more in-depth understanding of the mode of operation, educational philosophy, discipline construction, curriculum, internship performances, teaching management and performance operation of dance majors in American comprehensive universities; at the same time, he also gave some thoughts on the reform of higher dance education in China, hoping that it can promote the At the same time, it also gives some thoughts on the reform of China's higher dance education, hoping to promote the development of China's dance higher education.

2. An Overview of Contemporary Dance Education at U.S. Comprehensive Universities

2.1. About Educational Philosophy

The educational philosophies of U.S. universities vary depending on the type of school, cultural tradition, geographic location, etc. However, some universal educational values and philosophies are shared by many U.S. universities, such as Holistic Education, Freedom and Diversity, Experiential Learning, Research, and Innovation, etc., which emphasize on cultivating the comprehensive abilities of the students to enable them to be successful in different fields and to make positive contributions to the society. Dance in the curriculum provides a fundamental aspect of education that is not present in any other form.^[1]Taking Temple University as an example, as a research university, the Department of Dance

at Temple University pays great attention to the training of comprehensive dance talents, aiming to cultivate artistic directors, choreographers, dance educators and therapists, entrepreneurs, dance administrators dance writers, etc. It emphasizes the all-round development of the students, which includes the development of academics, socialization, culture, and career.

2.2. About Discipline Building and Curriculum

The construction and curriculum of dance disciplines vary from university to university and from program to program. New York University's dance department, for example, seeks to nurture and develop fully realized dance artists as critical thinkers, fearless leaders, and fluent performers. The Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Dance program at New York University emphasizes technique in ballet and contemporary dance, with equal emphasis on performance and choreography, and unlike at other universities, students earn their degree through a three-year plus two-summer intensive program. The first-year program focuses on learning dance most efficiently and healthily possible, with courses in dance composition, anatomy, and music theory, to name a few; the second-year program focuses on choreography through the study of dance history, performance, improvisation, music literature, and an advanced dance composition course; and the third year focuses on the incorporation of what has been learned in the first two years into stage performances, choreographies performed either in collaboration with faculty and guest choreographers or independently, the professional practice. The University of Washington's Department of Dance focuses more on comprehensive talent development and supports each individual in pursuing a career that meets his or her unique interests. Courses offered include Choreography, Production, Dance Science, Academic Dance, Dance Education, and Arts Administration, and offer techniques in more than 15 genres of dance, including Contemporary Ballet, Contemporary-Modern, Street Style, West African Dance, and Social Dance, etc. It is worth noting that 80% of the students in the Department of Dance at UW are choreographers and dancers. Department of Dance has 80% of its students double majoring to take advantage of the flexibility offered by the program.

2.3. On elective courses and student-independent learning

Dance higher education in the United States emphasizes the development of students' ability to think independently and learn on their own, and are all fully credit-bearing. Dance programs usually offer a range of required and elective courses to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education in technical training, theoretical study, and creative performance. To present accessible courses of dance study blending inquiry and practice that prepare students to be imaginative and innovative leaders for improving people's lives and social circumstances through dance education and related professions.^[2]For example, the University of Oklahoma has a 76:50 ratio of required courses to electives, totaling 126 credits. The number of credits varies from program to program and is typically 3 credits. Most students take 5 classes a semester, 2 of which they choose to take on their own, rather than being mandatory. Students may choose elective courses that deepen their abilities in specific dance styles or techniques. This may include advanced courses in different styles of dance (modern, jazz, classical ballet, etc.) or dance technique, as well as courses related to choreography, creative expression, and dance composition to develop their creative and independent thinking skills. Students' self-directed learning in the dance program helps them develop creative thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to conduct projects and research independently. This self-directed learning experience also provides students with strong support for their future careers.

2.4. About Student Works and Performances

In the 21st century, the arts will be more important than ever because when the arts suffer, people suffer.^[3]Many U.S. universities emphasize practical experiences such as internships, labs, projects, and community service. This practice-oriented approach helps students apply their theoretical knowledge to real-world problems and prepares them for future careers. Each year the University of Oklahoma Department of Dance hosts a season of performances, such as ballet students performing Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* with children from the area; modern dance students collaborating with lighting design students to present original choreography; and Robert Bartel, Artistic Director of the Ailey American Dance Theater, collaborating with School of Dance faculty in choreographing and creating Oklahoma Contemporary Dance, among others. Students themselves can also organize small performances, and on this visit, I was able to catch a performance of 103.5, an exhibition of work created by fourth-year BFA students, who pull up a curtain in the large classroom, design their posters, choreography, and programs, and invite their friends and family to come and see this small-scale performance. The department is very

supportive of the students' work, and faculty members come dressed up to watch them perform. In the performance, the students fully demonstrated strong physical explosiveness and expressiveness. From the point of view of work creation, students also fully demonstrate a unique creative vision with distinctive personalities. In this process, through the creation and rehearsal of the works, the students can understand the relevant knowledge of stage performance, fully familiarize themselves with the various aspects of the operation of the dance performance, and through the practice train them to become professional dancers, choreographers, and behind-the-scenes personnel of dance-related performance planning.

3. Issues and reflections

3.1. Changes in the concept of dance higher education

The concept of multiculturalism and multi-level education in the U.S. provides a precursor to the cultivation of talents needed by society, and how to change the concept of dance higher education is something we need to think about. Comprehensive university dance education talent cultivation should not be a copy of the movement technology and combination of machines but is committed to cultivating the overall development of people. Such a point of view has been recognized by the majority of educators, but in the actual educational activities, or to the student's participation in the competition results, skill level to evaluate the level of teachers and teaching quality, really committed to the quality of students in the overall training of teachers is still relatively small. It can be seen that the concept of dance education to update the transformation of education evaluation constraints, such as not changing the system of education evaluation and indicators, it will be difficult to put the reform of dance higher education into practice. The real significance of dance higher education lies in training students to become well-rounded dance artists with depth and breadth, which includes cultivating students' awareness of social responsibility. Students should understand the social and cultural impacts of dance and consider how they can make positive contributions to society through the art of dance, thereby constructing a harmonious and democratic society. Especially today, when emphasis is placed on quality education for all, the evaluation criteria for educators can play a crucial role in guiding how dance education can fulfill its unique social and educational function.

3.2. Problems with the curriculum of the dance program at comprehensive universities

One of the central components of a comprehensive university dance program to grow at a higher historical level is curriculum reform. Although there have been some advances in the reform of dance higher education, we are still plagued by several problems. First, too much focus on technical training. The curricula of dance majors in some comprehensive universities emphasize too much on technical training, offering courses in ballet, classical dance, folk dance, modern dance, etc., while neglecting creative expression and theoretical research, which may lead to insufficient comprehensive literacy of students in the field of dance. Second, insufficient interdisciplinary integration. Dance is an interdisciplinary art that is closely related to music, theater, literature, and other fields. If there is insufficient interdisciplinary integration in the curriculum, students may miss the opportunity to integrate different art forms. Third, insufficient practical experience. Dance is a practical art and students need to consolidate their learning through performances and practical experiences. If the curriculum lacks sufficient performance opportunities and practical projects, students may find it difficult to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice. At present, employers such as general colleges and universities, primary and secondary schools, and kindergartens are more interested in multi-talented and comprehensive talents. If the issue of curriculum development of dance majors in comprehensive universities is not taken seriously, it will be difficult to cultivate talents who can meet the needs of social development.

3.3. Impact of Teachers' Impediments on Dance Education Reforms

Dance education reform faces several challenges, including teachers' obstacles. The reasons for teachers' resistance to reforming dance education from their perspectives and interests are complex and varied and include both teachers' factors and external factors. For a long time, the dance For a long time, there has been a strong tradition of "teacher dignity" in the dance field, a safe and risk-free model that dance teachers see as the best way to accomplish their tasks with less effort. Some teachers are rooted in traditional teaching concepts and are skeptical of new teaching methods and ideas, and they may prefer

to maintain the old ways of teaching rather than try out new and innovative educational methods. In addition, dance education itself may face some discipline-specific challenges, such as the need for extensive hands-on training and preparation for performances, which may put pressure on teachers to devote sufficient time and energy to educational reform. New methods and formats are more costly to teach than they were originally. It also cannot play a decisive role in title evaluation, which makes many teachers reluctant to face it and resistant to it.

4. Some recommendations

4.1. Studying the training objectives of dance majors and fostering all-rounded dance talents

American dance higher education attaches importance to the cultivation of horizontal composite talents, dance students enter the community, have a broad knowledge, active thinking, and strong independent thinking ability, can complete a variety of dance work, and have the ability to adapt quickly. This concept fits the current reform direction of dance higher education in China's comprehensive universities. China's dance higher education should establish the concept of whole-person training, promote students' cognitive and affective qualities of comprehensive development and self-realization, to cultivate dance talents with technical, creative, theoretical, and practical abilities. On this basis, it should emphasize the equal importance of cultural cultivation and dance professionalism, introduce diverse elements in teaching practice, and focus on the improvement of comprehensive quality.

4.2. Science-based curricula to enhance multi-disciplinarity

The curriculum of dance higher education aims to expand students' knowledge fields, strengthen multidisciplinary intersections, and enhance students' comprehensive literacy. We can learn from the American comprehensive universities to offer courses on dance theory and philosophy to explore the philosophical basis of dance and gain a deeper understanding of the essence of the art of dance and its significance; to offer courses on culture and global dance to study dance traditions around the world, to understand the evolution and development of dance in different cultures, and to explore the impact of globalization on the culture of dance and the embodiment of cross-cultural exchanges in dance; to offer courses on body sciences and exercise physiology to study body anatomy and exercise physiology, to understand the movement mechanism of the body in dance and to explore how to exercise sciences are used. Body Science and Exercise Physiology is a course that studies body anatomy and exercise physiology to understand how the body moves in dance and how exercise science affects the training and performance of dancers; Dance Technology and Education is a course that analyzes teaching methods and concepts of dance technology, and understands the impact of different teaching strategies on students' development; Digital Dance is a course that examines the use of digital media in dance, including dance image processing, virtual reality and augmented reality technologies, and the use of digital media in dance. The course also explores how digital dance works are created and performed, as well as the innovative impact of digital technology on the art of dance. These courses provide dance students with a wider range of disciplinary backgrounds, broaden their knowledge, and promote interdisciplinary cross-learning, making them more well-rounded and competitive in their future dance careers.

4.3. Focus on the cultivation of students' innovative abilities throughout the teaching process

Cultivating students' creative ability is one of the important goals in dance education. American dance education focuses on cultivating students' sense of innovation and encourages independent learning and independent thinking. A variety of required and elective courses cultivate students' ability to take the initiative to acquire knowledge and stimulate their independent interest in the art of dance; teachers also provide academic resources and materials in the thesis seminars, encouraging students to conduct independent research and academic exploration. American dance education is a great advocate of interdisciplinary collaborative projects, encouraging cooperation with music, theater, visual arts, and other disciplines to create interdisciplinary dance projects, providing a diversity of creative and expressive opportunities, and prompting students to cultivate innovative thinking in an interdisciplinary environment.

We were impressed by the depth of understanding and innovative thinking in the field of dance that we saw in the works created by the American students. Dance education should cultivate students' innovative ability throughout the teaching process, making them more creative and independent thinkers, and fully preparing them for the future dance field.

4.4. Emphasizing teachers' professional training and reforming incentive mechanisms

To meet the challenges posed to dance education by social change, teachers' professional training and artistic exchanges should be strengthened to enhance their professionalism, which will help contribute to the effectiveness of educational and pedagogical reforms. However, training should not be limited to the enhancement of knowledge and experience but should be based on the updating of attitudes and perceptions to trigger intrinsic motivation and achieve real results. For example, the development and implementation of continuing professional development (CPD) programs and support for teachers' participation in academic activities at home and abroad, such as seminars, workshops, and international academic exchanges, can contribute to the renewal of attitudes and perceptions.

Appropriate incentives help put teachers at ease with artistic creativity and provide motivation for teaching reform. In terms of performance evaluation and rewards, a comprehensive performance evaluation system should be designed, with teaching effectiveness, disciplinary research, and innovation ability as the assessment indicators, and incentives such as teaching awards and research achievement awards should be set up to motivate teachers; in terms of the title evaluation system, the title evaluation system should be reformed to emphasize the importance of teaching and innovation achievements, and new titles, such as "Outstanding Teaching Teacher," should be set up. In terms of the title evaluation system, the title evaluation system has been reformed to highlight the importance of teaching and innovative achievements, and new titles such as "excellent teaching teacher" have been established to recognize teachers who have made outstanding contributions to educational innovation. Through these measures, a system conducive to the professional development and motivation of teachers has been established.

5. Conclusions

Critically learning from the concepts and measures of dance education in American comprehensive universities that encourage diversification, socialization, and individualization, and emphasize comprehensiveness, innovation, and practice will help further promote the cultivation of comprehensive dance talents in comprehensive university education in my country, thereby It is conducive to promoting the overall development of dance higher education in my country in the era of globalization.

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