

Research on the Development of Dance Aesthetic Education Curriculum in Rural Schools

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Abstract: *With the increasing emphasis on aesthetic education by the government and participation from various sectors of society, the development of dance aesthetic education in rural schools has begun to gain momentum. This thesis analyzes the main issues encountered by rural schools in implementing dance aesthetic education, such as misconceptions in ideological understanding, insufficient funding, inadequate teacher training, and incomplete textbook systems, and proposes a series of recommendations to promote the development of dance aesthetic education in rural schools. These recommendations include enhancing awareness of the importance of dance aesthetic education, increasing investment to improve the educational environment, strengthening teacher training, and improving the textbook system. This thesis aims to provide theoretical and practical support for the promotion and implementation of dance aesthetic education in rural schools, with the expectation that dance education can gain wider recognition and application in rural schools, thereby enhancing the comprehensive development of students.*

Keywords: *Rural Schools; Dance Aesthetic Education; Educational Challenges; Development Strategies*

1. Introduction

In 2015, China issued the Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Comprehensive School Aesthetic Education, which clearly stated: “By 2018, all primary schools nationwide will offer complete aesthetic education courses, and by 2020, a comprehensive, high-quality, and targeted art education system with Chinese characteristics will be established.^[1]” Within China’s education system, traditional subjects such as language, mathematics, and foreign languages have always been the core of primary education. In order to promote the widespread popularization of music and art education, relevant education departments in China have established clear curriculum standards. However, dance education has not received sufficient attention for a long time. Nevertheless, with the passage of time, the value of dance aesthetic education in promoting social and individual development has gradually been recognized by the public, and the “Higher Institutions’ Participation in Primary Schools (Beijing universities, social forces participating in primary school physical education and aesthetic education development)” event was successfully held in Beijing, China. In recent years, the status of dance aesthetic education in China has continued to rise, and under the leadership of Mr. Lyu Yisheng, dance aesthetic education activities that emphasize both theory and practice have begun to be gradually promoted nationwide in China. However, the implementation of dance aesthetic education in rural primary schools still faces challenges, and research on how to effectively carry out dance aesthetic education in these schools not only has theoretical value but also practical significance.

2. Explanation of Basic Concepts

2.1. Aesthetic Education

As a form of education that cultivates individual aesthetic abilities, aesthetic interests, and creative abilities, aesthetic education is also known as aesthetic sense education or aesthetic education, which is a key link in promoting the comprehensive development of individuals. Schiller proposed in his work *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* that the core of aesthetic education lies in “placing the experience of beauty at the center and promoting the comprehensive growth of individuals as the goal.” Du Wei elaborated on aesthetic education as a form of emotional education in *Three Meanings of Aesthetic Education*, aiming to promote the all-round development of individuals through the harmonious unity

of emotion and reason^[2]. Aesthetic education not only involves the cultivation of personal emotions but also focuses on the overall growth of personality. Confucian thought emphasizes the internalization of virtues through deep experience and practice, demonstrating a consistent view of aesthetic education. At the same time, aesthetic education is seen as an innovative form of education that inspires people's passion for life and promotes the development of innovative thinking and creativity. Although there is no unified definition of aesthetic education in academia, it is generally recognized that aesthetic education aims to "cultivate individuals' ability to perceive and create beauty."

2.2. Dance Aesthetic Education

Dance aesthetic education introduces the art of dance into the educational domain as a means and content for cultivating students' aesthetic perception, appreciation, and creativity. Zhang Haiyang proposed in Dance Education that "dance aesthetic education, through the form and content of dance, nurtures students' positive emotional attitudes and values, which holds profound significance for both individual and societal cultural development^[3]." Dance, as an art form that utilizes human movement and posture to express emotions and thoughts, not only enhances students' physical fitness but also deepens their perception and understanding of the surrounding world through dance teaching. Meng Xianshi believes that dance education should transcend the boundaries of the classroom, integrate into the community and social life, aiming to enhance people's aesthetic literacy and artistic cultivation. Dance aesthetic education is committed to promoting the development of students' aesthetic sensitivity and aesthetic ability through dance learning and experience, thereby achieving the ultimate goal of aesthetic education.

3. The Predicament of Dance Aesthetic Education Curriculum in Rural Schools

3.1. Misconceptions in Ideological Understanding

During the course of implementing dance aesthetic education in rural schools, there exist misconceptions and biases in ideological understanding. These biases stem from differences in concepts among promoters, implementers, and learners of dance aesthetic education, subsequently affecting the correct understanding of dance aesthetic education and quality education, thereby exerting adverse effects on the development of dance aesthetic education in rural schools^[4].

The educational management departments in charge of promoting dance aesthetic education have failed to fully implement the policies regarding the implementation of dance aesthetic education issued by national and educational authorities. In practice, some education administrators have not deeply recognized the role of dance aesthetic education in promoting students' aesthetic abilities and values, nor have they distinguished the uniqueness of dance from other art education subjects (such as music and fine arts). This has led to an overemphasis on music and fine arts in daily teaching, neglecting the importance of dance aesthetic education.

As the implementing body of dance aesthetic education activities, the decision-making level of rural schools lacks understanding of dance aesthetic education. Although national education policies encourage the development of dance aesthetic education, they do not explicitly stipulate the necessity of establishing dance courses, resulting in significant autonomy for schools in deciding whether to offer dance courses. Rural schools face significant differences in educational resources and levels compared to urban areas, resulting in greater educational pressure. They tend to prioritize academic subjects, often sacrificing art courses, especially during important examination periods. Therefore, due to the insufficient awareness of the importance of dance aesthetic education, dance teaching in rural schools often fails to receive the attention and implementation it deserves.

Students are the core group of dance aesthetic education, but their understanding of aesthetic education is often influenced by family beliefs. In rural areas, dance aesthetic education and dance art are rarely clearly distinguished, and many people mistakenly believe that the purpose of learning dance aesthetic education is to pursue an artistic career in the future. As a result, some parents are skeptical of the dance aesthetic education provided by schools. According to our understanding, many parents are not very concerned about their children learning dance at school, and some even oppose their children's participation in dance aesthetic education. This is mainly because they lack a correct understanding of the value and positioning of dance aesthetic education.

3.2. Insufficient Teaching Funds

In rural schools, the shortage of teaching funds significantly affects the development of dance aesthetic education. This funding issue has become a core obstacle restricting the improvement of the quality of dance aesthetic education in rural schools. As economically disadvantaged areas, rural regions have limited local economic support, and educational funds mostly rely on national subsidies, with funds specifically allocated for dance aesthetic education being even scarcer. For instance, art classes require dedicated studios, while music classes rely on instruments and equipment such as pianos and sound amplification devices. Compared to other subjects, dance aesthetic education has more specialized and costly requirements for facilities and equipment. For instance, not only does it require hiring dance teachers with professional backgrounds, but it also necessitates establishing well-equipped dance classrooms. A qualified dance classroom not only demands sufficient space but also requires dance-specific facilities and equipment such as dance floors, full-length mirrors, bars, sound systems, and cushions, which are often challenging to realize in financially constrained rural schools. This scarcity of funds has become a major challenge for dance teaching in rural schools.

3.3. Neglect of Teacher Development

Currently, rural schools in China are facing a severe shortage of dance teachers. Take H primary school as an example, where there are only a few dance teachers, and most of the time, they rely on part-time instructors, which contradicts the efforts made by the country in the field of art education. Although China's art education, especially dance education, has made significant progress in recent years, with many universities and higher education institutions, including the Beijing Dance Academy, the Beijing Film Academy, and the Central Academy of Drama, offering dance majors and training a large number of dance talents. However, these talents are often concentrated in urban areas and universities, leaving rural schools like H primary school still facing a shortage of teaching staff.

Education authorities have recognized this problem and attempted to address the teacher shortage through recruitment. However, due to the widespread issue of teacher shortages in schools, the recruitment of dance teachers is often not prioritized. As a result, even during the recruitment period, positions for dance teachers are often reduced rather than increased.

On the other hand, dance teachers who graduate from prestigious universities or have high academic qualifications are often not very interested in teaching in rural schools. The disadvantages of rural areas, such as poor living and working conditions and lower salaries, make attracting outstanding talents a major challenge. At the same time, rural dance teachers lack effective career development channels and mechanisms for improving their qualifications. The dance aesthetic education programs in rural schools are still in the initial stage, lacking systematic planning and support. This situation not only affects the professional growth of dance teachers but also influences students' learning and understanding of dance art.

3.4. Immaturity in Textbook Development

The curriculum resources for dance aesthetic education in China are currently insufficient. On the one hand, dance aesthetic education has not been included in the compulsory subjects list for primary and secondary schools, resulting in the absence of a nationally unified curriculum for dance education. In China, whether it's core subjects like Chinese, Mathematics, English, or art subjects like Fine Arts and Music, the education authorities provide unified textbooks. However, official textbooks such as those from People's Education Press since 2016, as well as various versions of primary school textbooks from regions across China, including Hunan Education Press and Jiangsu Education Press, do not cover dance subjects. Secondly, rural schools have weak foundations and find it difficult to develop suitable courses on their own. Although in economically better-off areas, schools may be able to purchase dance theory books available on the market or customize school-based courses based on their own circumstances, nationwide, the dance education materials used are either individually compiled or developed by schools themselves, without formal approval or certification from the education authorities, indicating an incomplete dance education textbook system.

4. Strategies for Enhancing Dance Aesthetic Education in Rural Schools

4.1. Enhancing Awareness of the Importance of Dance Aesthetic Education

Strengthening the understanding of the value of dance aesthetic education requires concerted efforts from educational authorities, schools, and families to shift the current trend of excessive focus on exam-oriented education and to provide more attention and support for dance aesthetic education.

In rural areas, the bulk of the schools are under public management, and their operation and development largely depend on the support and regulation of local governments. Therefore, obtaining more support from policies and finances is necessary for rural schools in implementing dance aesthetic education. Educational authorities should actively advocate for and support rural schools in enriching their aesthetic education curriculum through diversified teaching strategies. Moreover, integrating dance teaching into the overall evaluation system of schools should be considered, making it an important component of students' comprehensive education and elevating its priority in the education system.

Schools should proactively explore innovative approaches, update teaching concepts, and implement holistic education. Particularly for rural schools, a shift from an exam-oriented education model to one that emphasizes the comprehensive development of students' moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and practical skills is essential. Faced with challenges such as inadequate facilities and limited teaching and student resources, many rural schools have not paid sufficient attention to students' aesthetic education, which hampers their comprehensive and harmonious development. Rural schools must recognize that contemporary society demands individuals with multifaceted abilities, and the era of solely pursuing academic achievements has ended. Therefore, strengthening students' comprehensive quality education, enhancing their aesthetic appreciation, teamwork, and innovation abilities becomes crucial. For rural schools unable to offer specialized dance courses due to limited conditions, they should delve into and utilize local cultural resources, organize ethnic cultural activities on campus, and invite local artists and performers to teach in schools, thereby improving students' cultural awareness and aesthetic levels.

Parents should actively participate in and support their children's dance aesthetic education. It is of great significance for parents to understand the difference between dance aesthetic education and professional dance training, realizing that the purpose of dance aesthetic education is to enhance children's aesthetic abilities rather than specifically training them to become dancers or artists. Therefore, parents should not worry that dance learning will occupy too much study time or negatively affect their children's academic performance. As an activity that combines labor and rest, dance aesthetic education can enhance children's interest and enthusiasm for learning without interfering with their normal studies, promoting their comprehensive development.

4.2. Increasing Funding Support and Optimizing Environmental Conditions

Chinese rural schools face numerous obstacles in promoting dance aesthetic education, such as financial difficulties and limited teaching resources. Fan Guorui emphasized in Educational Ecology the direct and indirect impact of school environment, especially classroom environment, on learners' behavior. Therefore, China needs to pay attention to the obstacles encountered by rural schools in implementing dance aesthetic education and consider allocating more education funds to rural areas. Establishing special funds for dance aesthetic education in rural schools is to support the development of dance education in rural areas. Meanwhile, local governments should prioritize the development of educational environments and improve school teaching conditions through appropriate policies and financial support, such as establishing dance classrooms and dedicated dance rehearsal spaces, to facilitate the smooth implementation of dance aesthetic education in rural schools.

4.3. Strengthening Dance Teacher Team Building and Qualification Improvement

Dance teachers are vital roles in terms of classroom teaching and are key to the dissemination of dance art. Addressing the challenges faced by the dance teacher team in rural school dance aesthetic education requires efforts to enhance the cultivation of dance teacher teams and improve teacher qualifications.

In rural schools, efforts should be made to strengthen the training and qualification improvement of dance teachers through diversified strategies. Firstly, local education authorities should ensure an

adequate number of teacher positions and recruit dance teachers through open recruitment and other means. At the same time, schools should explore and utilize existing resources, such as selecting individuals with dance abilities from existing music and fine arts teachers to serve as dance teachers, to alleviate the pressure of teacher shortages. Additionally, encouraging collaboration between rural schools to enable the flow of dance teachers across schools and the sharing of teaching resources.

Furthermore, innovative approaches should be adopted to enhance the professional level of dance teachers in rural schools. On one hand, a comprehensive system should be established for the training and development of dance teachers, including pre-job training, professional skill enhancement, and theoretical knowledge learning, ensuring at least one targeted training session is organized each academic year. On the other hand, a culture of mutual learning among teachers should be promoted to provide opportunities for cross-regional and inter-school exchanges and cooperation, enabling dance teachers in rural schools to learn from teachers in urban schools, collectively improving teaching standards and professional competence.

4.4. Development and Refinement of Dance Education Textbook System

Since the introduction of the Primary School Music Interim Standards (Draft) by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 1950, music education has been formally incorporated into the regular teaching system of primary and secondary schools. Subsequently, the release of the Music Curriculum Standards and Fine Arts Curriculum Standards has played an important guiding role in art education at the compulsory education stage. However, compared to music and fine arts, dance education in China receives relatively less attention. Currently, dance education at the compulsory education stage in China mainly exists in the form of recommendations and advocacy and has not yet become part of the compulsory curriculum. Therefore, to promote the popularization and development of dance aesthetic education, it is necessary to formally incorporate dance education into the school education system, establish its position as part of basic education, and establish unified standards for dance education textbooks at the national level in China. Additionally, schools should be encouraged to actively develop school-based courses that suit their characteristics, incorporating elements of local ethnic dances in China to enhance the cultural connotations and attractiveness of dance courses.

5. Conclusion

In constructing a modern aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics, art education plays an indispensable role^[5]. Therefore, strengthening rural dance aesthetic education is not only a key measure to improve the level of aesthetic education in rural areas but also our responsibility. For those who benefit from dance education, it is particularly important to contribute to the advancement of Chinese dance education and to contribute individual efforts.

Starting from the practical exploration of rural school dance aesthetic education, this thesis discusses how rural schools in China can effectively implement dance aesthetic education. Most rural schools are in the initial stage of dance education and face many challenges such as the lack of professional dance courses, shortage of professional dance teachers, insufficient teaching facilities, and textbooks, resulting in limited effectiveness in promoting dance aesthetic education. Therefore, this thesis proposes targeted suggestions based on the analysis of problems encountered in implementation, hoping to provide references for the development of rural school dance aesthetic education.

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