

Interdisciplinary Vision in Dance Education Practice

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Abstract: "The compulsory education art curriculum standards" promulgated by the state in 2022 are based on the development requirements of core literacy, requiring the establishment of interdisciplinary thematic learning activities to strengthen the interconnection between disciplines and promote the integration of art curriculum. As an indispensable discipline in the field of arts, dance education practitioners need to build an "integrative and common" dance education system, explore the commonalities and intersections between the dance discipline and other disciplines, and integrate teaching philosophies and contents in the field of dance discipline for interdisciplinary teaching. Based on interdisciplinary learning activities to cultivate dance talents aligns with the educational orientation of "educating through aesthetics," implements the educational policy of "developing multiple intelligences simultaneously," and meets the objective needs of promoting art curriculum reform. It is also an important approach to enhance the dance literacy of the entire population and cultivate comprehensive and innovative talents in the field of dance. Grasping the development direction of dance education from an interdisciplinary perspective guides students to explore the boundless and charming world of dance art.

Keywords: Dance Education; Interdisciplinary; Aesthetic Education; Project-based Learning.

1. Introduction

In recent years, China's Ministry of Education has placed increasing emphasis on aesthetic education, issuing several relevant educational policies. Aesthetic education and arts education influence and interact with one another. Aesthetic education guides students through aesthetic activities, while arts education serves as the primary means of engaging in such activities. This highlights that the arts, as academic disciplines, and arts education are the most concentrated expressions and forms of aesthetic education. Therefore, dance, often regarded as the "mother of the arts," is an important tool for deepening aesthetic education. The development of dance education contributes to fulfilling the requirements of nurturing "a new generation with ideals, skills, and a sense of responsibility," and promoting the well-rounded development of students. The Ministry of Education's 2022 release of the "Compulsory education art curriculum standards (2022 edition)" (hereinafter referred to as the new curriculum standards), along with current guiding documents issued by the State Council, have given dance education new vitality. As political and economic development progresses, people's expectations for moral character, cultural literacy, and aesthetic sensibility are also rising. The new curriculum standards explicitly state that the educational philosophy for arts courses is to "emphasize comprehensive curricula, with each art discipline as the main body, strengthening integration with other arts, and placing importance on connections with other subjects, fully leveraging the collaborative function of education". Guided by Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and based on the development requirements of core competencies, the new curriculum standards call for cross-disciplinary learning activities to strengthen the interrelationship between subjects and promote the integration of arts courses. In simple terms, the construction of the arts curriculum system should include a comprehensive approach involving multiple art disciplines such as music, fine arts, drama, dance, and film, as well as the integration of arts disciplines with other subjects. This

approach aims to implement cross-disciplinary learning activities to realize the educational goal of "cultivating well-rounded individuals."

How can interdisciplinary thinking be applied to subject teaching? How can the dance discipline be integrated with other arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences in teaching, and is such integration appropriate? If it is appropriate, from which aspects should it be approached? Based on interdisciplinary thinking, the author proposes the construction of a "fusion and commonality" dance education system. This system explores the commonalities and intersections between the dance discipline and other arts, humanities, and disciplines. By integrating and refining the teaching philosophy, teaching objectives, and teaching content of the dance discipline, this approach provides a reference for the reform and development of contemporary dance education.

2. Interdisciplinary Thinking

2.1. Concept

Interdisciplinary Thinking refers to an innovative way of thinking that combines the theories, perspectives, and thinking patterns of two or more disciplines or fields. The learning and teaching approaches that employ interdisciplinary thinking are referred to as interdisciplinary learning and interdisciplinary teaching. By adopting interdisciplinary learning, students can develop habits of applying knowledge in an integrated manner, enhancing their ability to synthesize knowledge and solve problems. Teachers using interdisciplinary teaching can transform the course structure from monotonous and dull to comprehensive and diverse, stimulating students' interest in learning and catering to their individualized learning needs. Interdisciplinary learning activities enable the interaction and complementarity of knowledge from different disciplines, as well as the cross-application of different research methods and theories. This fosters the development of various disciplines and the formation of new research models. The effects of interdisciplinary thinking can also be reflected in students'

lives, as they can use the thinking patterns of different disciplines as foundational tools. When faced with complex and multifaceted problems, students can apply a variety of tools from multiple perspectives, offering more choices and possibilities for problem-solving.

2.2. Necessity

The modern American social psychologist Abraham H. Maslow once said, "To the man who only has a hammer, everything he encounters begins to look like a nail". This reflects the impact of cognitive biases caused by fixed patterns of thinking. The famous American investor Charlie Thomas Munger responded to this by stating that if people have enough tools, they can reduce the cognitive bias brought by the "hammer". Throughout his life, Munger consistently emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary thinking. He taught himself the fundamental theories of various disciplines and combined knowledge from multiple fields to create a unique thinking model. This model is the reason he seldom made mistakes in major decisions. In recent years, the compartmentalization of subjects in China's education system has made the boundaries between disciplines increasingly distinct. As a result, subject knowledge has become fragmented, and students struggle to connect knowledge across different subjects or use the research theories of one discipline to solve problems in another. Ultimately, knowledge remains abstract in students' minds, unable to be applied to their learning or daily lives. This is why China's Ministry of Education has frequently referenced "interdisciplinary" concepts in its guiding documents. The importance of interdisciplinary education to the Ministry and the academic community can be summarized in three key aspects:

2.2.1. Interdisciplinary Learning Helps Cultivate Students' Comprehensive Learning Abilities.

As mentioned above, the current education system in primary and secondary schools overemphasizes subject-centered perspectives, severing the connections between disciplines. In terms of theoretical knowledge, students learn abstract concepts that are systematically organized within a single discipline. However, social life is complex, infinite, and holistic, and students are unable to integrate the theories they have learned across multiple fields. This hinders their ability to creatively solve problems and impedes the development of their core competencies. In terms of practical skills, teachers pass on techniques that students often imitate without reflection, leading to superficial learning that doesn't connect with personal or real-life experiences. Interdisciplinary learning allows students to view problems from different disciplinary perspectives, broadening their knowledge base and continuously cultivating their ability to think critically, solve problems, and integrate knowledge.

2.2.2. Interdisciplinary Learning Meets Students' Learning and Developmental Needs.

Under the new curriculum standards, teachers are required to design their teaching with a focus on all students and respect their individual development. Interdisciplinary teaching, compared to traditional single-subject approaches, better centers on the student's role as an active learner, allowing them to independently choose their perspectives for acquiring knowledge and solving problems. It is easier to capture students' attention with new and unique viewpoints, which can spark their interest and motivate them to engage more actively in classroom learning. Additionally,

interdisciplinary teaching diversifies both the teaching methods used by teachers and the ways in which students learn, creating a more democratic, relaxed, and engaging classroom atmosphere. It also enhances the teacher-student relationship. The new curriculum standards stress the importance of students' unique artistic perceptions and emotional experiences during learning, and interdisciplinary teaching is well-suited to meet these personalized learning and development needs.

2.2.3. Interdisciplinary Learning Helps Cultivate Students' Innovative Awareness and Creative Abilities

In addition to emphasizing aesthetic education, the 20th National Congress report also prioritizes the development of innovation education. Innovation is the driving force behind progress, and cultivating students' innovative awareness and creative abilities is a key requirement for advancing their personal development. For example, in the arts, creative activities are inherently interdisciplinary. By identifying the internal connections between the arts and other subjects, teachers encourage students to think independently and creatively, fostering their imagination and creativity. Moreover, integrating the arts with other disciplines offers a deeper approach to arts education. Adding artistic elements or content to non-arts subjects enhances their richness and vividly presents abstract knowledge to students, helping them understand and apply concepts more effectively, thereby forming a continuous learning loop.

3. Interdisciplinary Characteristics of Dance Art

The earliest interdisciplinary feature in dance art emerged through its connection with music. In primitive societies, long before written language or other forms of communication were created, people expressed their emotions, communicated, and recorded daily activities through singing and dancing. For example, the hunting dances, like the "Black Bear Combat Dance" of the Oroqen people, and some agricultural dances, recreated daily life. At that time, these forms of music and dance, which combined valuable experiences and advanced skills, were passed down to future generations, forming a collective memory of the people. This process involved a significant educational component, merging music and dance. The formal integration of music and dance education can be traced back 4,000 years to the Xia Dynasty. During this period, the role of music and dance evolved from a form of entertainment and skill teaching in primitive societies to an artistic form enjoyed by the ruling class. According to the ancient text *Guanzi: Light and Heavy*, "In the time of Jie, there were 30,000 female dancers, and their music could be heard from the three mountain roads. All of them were dressed in embroidered clothes". This illustrates that in the Xia Dynasty, numerous music and dance slaves learned court music and dance to entertain the ruling class, and they continued to create new music and dance forms to reflect the aesthetic preferences of society. For example, the music and dance performance "Dayu," which praised the founding emperor of the Xia Dynasty, was a large-scale performance and a model of ancient elegant dance, known as one of the "Six Dynastic Dances." Music and dance education reached its peak during the Western Zhou Dynasty, becoming a core national subject. However, its importance declined during the Han Dynasty, becoming a specialized skill, and by

the Song and Yuan dynasties, it was absorbed into opera, with independent music and dance education gradually fading away, only preserved for ancestral rituals.

In contemporary times, the fusion of dance with other disciplines did not arise solely from the Ministry of Education's recent directives on integrating art education with other subjects. Some interdisciplinary dance teaching models, such as those blending classical dance education with opera arts, emerged due to the inherent interdisciplinary nature of these forms. Classical dance grew from the soil of opera, nourished by the dance movements within opera, absorbing its essence, and evolving creatively. Traditional steps, techniques, postures, body movements, costumes, and props from opera dance became targets for classical dance to improve upon, allowing classical dance to gradually develop its distinctive style. Consequently, in classical dance training, courses on technical skills, body movements, and props like swords or water sleeves often involve inviting opera experts to teach, as well as viewing classic opera performances for learning. This represents a form of interdisciplinary learning between the fields of opera and dance.

Beyond interdisciplinary teaching models that are specific to certain dance forms due to their unique characteristics, project-based interdisciplinary learning models have recently gained widespread use in dance education. These models are applicable to the teaching of most dance forms.

4. Building an “Integrated and Universal” Dance Education System

In my dance education experience, the curriculum primarily focuses on flexibility training, technical drills, and combinations related to physical fitness and dance techniques. The learning model is largely based on following the teacher's instructions, mimicking movements, and repeating them until muscle memory is formed. This “technique-heavy, artistry-light” teaching approach is widely used in both professional and general dance education.

Here, I raise the following question: beyond the basics of technique and training, what else are students learning from this model? While their physical abilities and technical skills may improve significantly, the impact on students' character, willpower, attitude, and emotional growth remains minimal. Dance, as an essential subject in the arts, is not only an artistic form that uses body language to express emotions and ideas, but also a reflection of human aesthetic taste, cultural literacy, and life attitude. The current “technique-heavy, artistry-light” dance education model neglects dance's aesthetic and educational functions. It isolates dance from everyday life, treating it as a distant, impersonal art form, and cuts off its connection to other arts, humanities, and sciences, turning it into a rigid and difficult physical performance. Under this rigid, formal training model, while students may achieve a “beautiful” physical form, it does not contribute to the advancement and development of dance as an academic discipline. The construction of the dance discipline needs to return to the core mission of education—developing well-rounded individuals. To address this, I propose constructing an “integrated and universal” dance education system. This system would explore the commonalities and intersections between dance and other disciplines—such as art, humanities, and natural sciences—to reshape and enrich dance education. The goal is to shift away from a solely technical focus to a more holistic approach that integrates cognitive and

emotional growth, combining technique with artistry, and connecting dance to broader educational and life experiences. This will foster a more well-rounded development of students, both in terms of their artistic abilities and their personal growth.

4.1. Offering Interdisciplinary Courses

4.1.1. Music Appreciation Course

In dance, most choreographic movements are intricately linked with music, and it is this symbiotic relationship between music and dance that completes and perfects a dance piece. Therefore, including music analysis and appreciation courses in the dance education system can enhance students' musical literacy, help them accumulate a repertoire of musical accompaniments, and better use the characteristics of music to choreograph or interpret dance movements. The focus of a music appreciation course does not need to align with the standards required of music majors at professional music institutions but should instead emphasize the emotional experience and the “conversion” of music into movement.

First, students should be guided to listen to and feel the music attentively, experiencing the emotions and content that the music conveys to its audience. Teachers can provide context such as the historical background of the piece, the style and genre of the composer, and other elements that contribute to understanding the music. This contextual knowledge helps students improve their music appreciation skills and enhances their ability to grasp and control the music. During this stage, there is no need to emphasize dance theory or practice; instead, students should focus on deep emotional engagement with the music, which lays the foundation for the next step: converting it into dance language. Music and dance share a common characteristic as they are both expressive forms of the creator's emotions. In the second stage, based on the students' deep understanding of the music, the teacher can guide them to express their interpretation through their own means—such as breathing, facial expressions, and body movements. These exercises are highly effective in enhancing students' abilities to choreograph to music. As students interpret and transform different emotions and content from various pieces of music, their body awareness develops, and this personal exploration serves as a way for teachers to better understand each student's strengths and characteristics.

4.1.2. Literature Appreciation Course

Although literature is not classified as an art discipline and does not manifest its content as concretely or visually as art forms do, it can still be considered a form of linguistic art, capable of vividly conveying content and shaping lively characters. Language is one of the most universal human activities, and literature encompasses the vast array of human thoughts and emotions. The written word in literature offers readers an unlimited space for imagination, encouraging them to form unique interpretations and perspectives. While dance is expressed directly through bodily movements and literature through written words, both serve as channels for emotional and personal expression, and their shared aesthetic nature allows for mutual enhancement in appreciation.

The goal of introducing a literature appreciation course is to improve students' literary literacy and analytical skills, thereby promoting their ability to appreciate and create dance works, and helping them refine the themes and structures of their choreographies. First, both literature and dance share common elements—telling a story, shaping characters, and expressing emotions. A rich exposure to literary works can

provide students with cultural depth and thematic material for both appreciating and choreographing dance. Many dance works today are based on literature, such as the solo pieces "Likes Lotus Saying" or "The Inlaid Harp" and the dance dramas "A Dream in Red Mansions" and "Sunrise". Expanding literary knowledge will help students better understand and appreciate dance works that share similar themes or historical contexts, ultimately enhancing the expressiveness of their performances. Second, the structural and narrative techniques of literature can be applied to dance. Both fields share similar structures, such as the "beginning, development, climax, and resolution" format, and employ narrative techniques like chronological, flashback, or inserted narratives. Both also use metaphor and symbolism, as well as expressions of emotion through setting. By analyzing the structural frameworks and literary techniques of various texts, students can draw inspiration to improve the structure of their dance works, making them more compelling and emotionally resonant.

4.2. Enhancing Existing Dance Courses

4.2.1. Integrating Music Teaching Methods

In today's art education landscape, there is a growing trend of integrating various teaching philosophies and methods, combining knowledge and approaches from multiple disciplines. As a student of dance education, I have studied both the Dalcroze and Orff teaching methods, which are widely used in music education. The Dalcroze method emphasizes the unification of physical movement and emotional expression, a concept that aligns closely with the core principles of dance. Dance teachers can adopt this approach to guide students in creating movements that express their inner emotions, drawing inspiration from their personal experiences and the natural world. The Orff method, on the other hand, highlights both the holistic and individualized development of students, which is also a fundamental concept in dance education. In this context, dance teachers can assign a common theme to students, encouraging them to explore their bodies and minds in unique ways. Using the Orff method's interactive techniques, such as guided questioning and feedback, students can discover their personal movement pathways and textures, which reflect their inner selves and individuality. Dance, as an art form, is inherently interdisciplinary. To foster its growth as a distinct field of study, dance education must continuously refine its teaching methods, incorporating advanced pedagogies from other arts. Cross-disciplinary approaches provide a platform for learning from successful methodologies in other artistic disciplines and designing curricula that highlight and reinforce the unique qualities of dance as an educational pursuit. This fusion allows for a deeper understanding of both the technical and expressive potential of dance, ensuring a more well-rounded and innovative educational experience for students.

4.2.2. Integrating Performing Arts Methods and Theories

4.2.2.1 Theater Studies

One of the most common ways to integrate theater into teaching is through scenario-based learning. In the early 20th century, a British elementary school teacher named John developed the first structured scenario-based teaching model, which is now regarded as one of the earliest forms of classroom theater instruction. Today, scenario-based teaching is widely used in art education, particularly in dance classes for younger students. By incorporating elements of theater,

this approach not only stimulates students' interest in learning and motivates them to continue, but it also helps them step into roles, feel emotions more deeply, and express themselves confidently in a structured environment. Theater is a comprehensive art form that blends dance, literature, visual arts, and music, making it one of the most interdisciplinary art fields. Stage production is the final form of both theatrical and dance education, which is why understanding stage-related knowledge is essential in dance education. This includes rules of theater etiquette, stage lighting, prop placement, and audience perspective. By integrating theater studies into dance education, students gain a more complete understanding of stagecraft and presentation, which enhances their performance quality.

4.2.2.2 Film Studies

In terms of subject knowledge, film education transforms abstract or didactic concepts into vivid sensory experiences that resonate emotionally with audiences. Film often embodies rich cultural and aesthetic values, making it a powerful tool for developing students' critical thinking, exploration, and discovery skills. Incorporating film appreciation into the curriculum can inspire students and stimulate their creativity and imagination, particularly in dance, where these traits are essential. Using film as a resource in dance teaching helps students explore artistic expression, gain inspiration for choreography, and even engage in artistic comparison. The emotional depth and visual storytelling found in films can enhance students' understanding of abstract dance concepts, leading to a stronger internalization of theoretical ideas. Furthermore, through the analysis and appreciation of film, students can better recognize and evaluate beauty in both art and life.

4.3. Integrating Visual Arts Theory

Visual elements are fundamental components in the composition of dance art, including costumes, makeup, and stage props. These elements enhance the expressive and emotional power of a performance, creating a unique atmosphere that supports character emotions and drives the narrative forward. The relationship between dance and visual arts is therefore inseparable. While static and dynamic forms are essential distinguishing features between visual arts and dance, many visual art pieces convey a sense of motion within stillness, and vice versa. The movements in dance often originate from the rich forms found in visual arts, indicating that both disciplines share an aesthetic synergy that allows them to inform and transform one another. In designing dance appreciation classes, teachers can incorporate principles from visual arts, such as analyzing stage lighting through color theory and exploring costume design using artistic design theories. This approach helps students better grasp, understand, and apply their knowledge. By integrating dance and visual arts through interdisciplinary teaching, educators can create a more holistic and profound learning experience. This approach fosters greater flexibility and transferability in students' knowledge application, while also making dance curriculum more open and systematic. Consequently, students develop comprehensive problem-solving abilities and emerge as versatile, innovative dance professionals, well-equipped for the demands of the field.

5. Conclusion

The rapid pace of societal development has created a new

demand for diverse dance talents, prompting scholars to advocate for the evolution of dance into a more multifaceted form of bodily expression. This expression should embody humanistic essence, aesthetic values, and rational frameworks, serving as a conduit for artistic thought and cultural spirit. However, the innovative development of artistic connotation and form often occurs through the interdisciplinary intersection and fusion of various fields. In light of this, under the guidance of new disciplinary construction concepts and updated curriculum standards, the dance discipline should leverage interdisciplinary thinking to integrate with other fields. This approach allows for the enrichment of dance through humanities and social sciences, while also actively exploring support and collaboration with natural sciences. By preserving the unique characteristics of dance while borrowing and merging with various artistic disciplines, we can construct an “integrated and common” dance education system that cultivates culturally confident contemporary students, thus responding to the demands of innovative development.

As articulated by Wang Weiyan and Zou Jun, we must “approach from a different space, observe from a different angle, think from a different stance, and express in a different way”. By adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, we can navigate the developmental trajectory of dance education, guiding students to explore the endless charm of the dance arts.

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