

# An Empirical Study on the Curriculum Design for Dance Teachers in China

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the employment situation of dance teachers after undergraduate study to reflect the curriculum design and training philosophy of dance teacher education in higher education in China. This study further suggests a dance education model that focuses on popularizing dancing, in another word, "an education through dancing". Through this, this study also discusses "dancing lessons for quality education", a new educational ideal and model proposed by department of education in China.

**Keywords:** Curriculum design, Teacher education in dancing.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of last century and the beginning of this century, due to the cultivation and guidance of college students' artistic literacy, many colleges and universities in China have successively established dance teaching and research offices, dance departments or music and dance colleges. In a short time, from admission to employment, from the training program to the curriculum setting, dancing education is becoming a popular phenomenon. With empirical data, this paper reflects on the curriculum setting and training concept of dance from the perspective of the employment status of dance teachers' education graduates, and further discusses a model of "an education through dancing" in basic education.

### *1.1. Statistics and Analysis of Employment Status of Dance Teacher Education Graduates*

In order to truly understand the employment status of dance major graduates, the author sampled the data from five undergraduate graduates classes from the Dance Department of Music College of Shaanxi Normal University from 2012 to 2016 (as a university directly under the Ministry of Education, its dance major was founded in 1997). In 2012, 45 people (teacher education major), 2013 session of 48 (teacher education major), 2014 session of 55 people (teacher education major), the class of 2015 36 people (teacher education major 16

people, non-teacher education major 20 people), a 2016 graduate class of 35 people (not teacher education major), aggregate the total number of 219 people. Among them, 212 people are included in this research sample (teacher education major 157, non- teacher education major, 55). 203 people yield effective data. Data collection is mainly for their employment status and the courses they teach, as shown in Table [1] and Table [2].

From Table 1, we can see that the employment status of dance graduates can be divided into two directions -- educational work and non-educational work. Employment in education mainly focuses on pre-school education, basic education and vocational education, accounting for the vast majority of the total, including 30 graduates in pre-school students, 49 graduates in primary school students, 69 graduates in secondary school students and 18 graduates in vocational students. There are 166 of them, accounting for 81.77% of the total. The non-education employment is mainly distributed in public institutions with 6 graduates, enterprises with 8 graduates, 3 graduates starting their own businesses, and other 20 graduates, such as taking the postgraduate entrance examination, going abroad and waiting to be determined, totaling 37 graduates, accounting for 18.22% of the total. Through the comparison, it is found that the employment of dance teacher education graduates is in school education, especially basic education.

**Table 1.** Employment status for dance graduates from 2012 to 2016

Level of school	Pre-school	elementary	Middle-high school	Vocational education	Public institutions	other
Dancing (teacher education major)						
2012	13	7	16	4	0	0
2013	4	10	23	7	0	0
2014	6	20	20	3	2	0
2015	4	7	5	0	0	0
Dancing (non-teacher education major)						
2015	2	2	3	2	3	5
2016	1	3	2	2	1	15
Total	30	49	69	18	6	20

**Table 2.** Courses taught by 2012-2015 graduates

Courses	Dancing	Music and dancing	Music	Pre-school	Specialty class	administrative	Other courses
Number of people	29	20	43	10	6	5	28

According to Table 2, we know the specific courses that the graduates are responsible for. In terms of teaching Music class, there are 43 students at most. "Dance Class" or "Music dance Class" was taught by 29 and 20 people; the other 21 are engaged in preschool education, art classes, specialty students and administrative work. 28 people are responsible for non-art courses, such as geography, history, nature, etc. Another 7 people are responsible for invalid course sampling. Among them, 148 are engaged in basic education, and 92 of them are on the frontline of music class or dance class, accounting for 62.16% of the total. Based on the above two tables, we can draw a conclusion that the main way for dance teacher education graduates to make a living is through working as music and dance teachers in basic education.

**1.2. Employment Advantages and Difficulties of Dance Teacher Education Graduate**

Dance teachers graduated from teacher education programs have three advantages. The first is a system of teacher education curriculum cultivation and guidance during the undergraduate study, such as pedagogical courses, psychological courses, legal basis of education, a mandarin language certificate and student teaching. As soon as they graduate, student teachers are ready to become qualified teachers. The second is the systematic professional courses, from the history of ballet and modern dance, classical, folk, and introduction to dance, to dance teaching, choreographer, play rehearsals, etc. Professional curriculum provides wholesome experiences, and often have all kinds of stage art practice and activities. The students can acquire theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and rich

professional literacy. The third is other kinds of art courses, which can help students to put themselves into art classes or artistic activities in primary and secondary schools as soon as possible, such as vocal music, solfeggio, piano, etc. These are the advantages of graduates in the field of teacher education, and also one of the reasons why many employers choose normal university students in graduation season.

At the same time, dance teacher education graduates also face three dilemmas in their positions. Is the curriculum suitable for their jobs in the end? In the data, we can see that quite a few graduates are in charge of music courses. Although we have learned relevant music knowledge in school, the skills of playing piano, singing and dancing need to be acquired through time and continuous practice. Piano, singing and music theory were among the factors that frustrated dance students during their first three years of teaching Music Lessons. This also has to do with the fact that there are no systematic dance textbooks like Music and Art in K-12 education in China. The second is the different nature of teaching. Before the class of 2005, the employment of dance graduates were all in universities or vocational colleges. In view of the scarcity of dance professionals and the lack of popularization of dance master degree programs, many dance disciplines in newly established in colleges and universities, who are also willing to accept dance undergraduates. However, in recent years, everyone has been influenced by the professional education mode, especially the influence of Beijing Dance Academy. Students are used to the training mode of professional dance education. In terms of teaching concepts, modes and methods, there is

friction with the popular dance education needed in K-12 education.

Actually, K-12 education needs professional dance teachers, but besides being professional in dancing, these teachers need something else. However, for a long time, the dancing education in China focused more on the professionalism in dancing rather than popularizing dancing. This education also focused more on the dancers than cultivating consumers, and emphasizes skills rather than a general culture. The third is the problem with the teaching environment. Many schools need to arrange an art program to win awards as marketing strategy; Parents want to see their children playing piano, playing chess, painting, calligraphy and bouncing around the campus. Chinese parents have formed an understanding that the most important thing for education is courses like language art and math; students learn PE and music as side dish, and dancing is barely on the dish. This atmosphere is not conducive to the development of dance teaching activities on campus. In fact, the establishment of dance classes in K-12 education is not to cultivate skilled talents or dancers, but to regard it as "education through dance", a kind of aesthetic education. Dance, as the mother of all arts, should have such innate advantages for the wholesome development of students.

## **2. AN EMPLOYMENT ORIENTED DANCING EDUCATION**

Dance teacher education graduates can have ideal employment status and play a positive role in their jobs. Besides their own efforts, they also need guidance to develop correct ideals about dancing besides development of professional skills. The implementation of teacher training concept in universities is mostly reflected in the curriculum setting. Take the Dance Department of Music College of Shaanxi Normal University as an example. In the four-year undergraduate study of dance (teacher education major), the courses are mainly divided into five sections with a total of 165 credits: "General education, such as politics, Chinese, computer, foreign language, etc., accounting for 28.83%. Basic subjects, such as introduction to art, history of dance, music theory, singing, piano, etc., accounted for 15.34%. Professional courses, such as basic ballet training, Chinese and Foreign folk dance, modern dance, Chinese classical dance, choreography theory and techniques, account for 31.9%. Teacher education, such as psychological foundation, child development, cognition and learning of middle school students, modern educational technology, teacher professional development and professional ethics, dance teaching theory, etc., accounted for 18.18%. Finally, practical teaching, such as art practice, military theory and training, required reading, educational practice, educational probation, educational practice and social

survey, employment guidance for college students, graduation thesis design, etc., accounts for 6.75%.

The comprehensive curriculum ensures the strong growth of students and lays a solid foundation for them to become the backbone force in dance education as soon as possible. In the Outline of The National Medium - and Long-term Plan for Education Reform and Development 2010-2020, it was clearly stated that "promoting student-centered and quality-oriented education are the strategic themes of education reform and development". The overall goal of the development of school art education in 2020 is to comprehensively popularize art education in all schools at all levels and to ensure that all students have the opportunity to receive art education. With the promulgation of national policies, the recent economic development, and the emphasis society placed on education, dance will eventually become an independent course into primary and secondary schools, just like music and art. Then, in the current teacher education and training programs, can we introduce new courses, new contents, new models and new ideas in line with the progress of current social needs and artistic development in China?

"Quality Education Dance Course" is a universal dance course suitable for basic education, which is directly commissioned by the Ministry of Education and completed by Lu Yisheng team of Beijing Dance Academy. Guided by quality-oriented education, it regards "dance education as a kind of comprehensive art and culture education, and cultural accomplishment, creativity cultivation and skill training are synchronized." [ 2 ] compared with the traditional dance teaching, "quality education dance course" pays more attention to the teaching process, aesthetic culture and the sentiment education. This new course argues that education should be geared to the needs of all students (rather than a special art class). The education content is given priority to with quality cultivation (rather than to simply skills). This education is student-centered, advocating "respect the principal position of students" teaching system and evaluation standard, encourage interdisciplinary integration and leads to the students' development of multiple intelligences. "Quality-oriented dance course" is in line with the pace of social development, the needs of future talent training, as well as the new curriculum standards of current basic education.

Against this background, "quality-oriented dance course" arises. The quality-oriented dance education presided by Professor Lu Yisheng, former President of Beijing Dance Academy, is a sub-project of the Quality Education and Aesthetic Education Research project commissioned by the Ministry of Education, and also a key project commissioned by The Beijing Municipal Commission of Education. Since the beginning of the 21st century, dance education has followed the

professional education of Beijing Dance Academy from ordinary colleges and universities to primary and secondary schools. There is no uniformed rules in terms of teaching philosophy, content, method and teaching materials. In the face of this situation, teams from some teaching committee, bureau of education, primary and secondary schools, scholars, teachers, and students started a long-term experiment, exploration and research. Some of them visited many primary and secondary schools teaching dance in the United States. With hundred special classes cases (include kindergarten, primary school, middle school) as the axis, the core concept of quality education and dance formed. In 2007, experimental teaching was carried out in all pilot schools nationwide, and some in-service dance and music teachers were trained. In 2014, the first textbook, *Dance for Quality-oriented Education*, was published by Shanghai Music Publishing House. Subsequently, the School of Education of Beijing Dance Academy was also included in the teacher education and training of this system. In Beijing and Xiamen, the education commission issued a document to officially implement the curriculum in primary schools.

### ***2.1. The Backgrounds of “Quality-oriented Dance Course”***

In the 1990s, when quality-oriented education emerged in China, people started to focus on art education. Music and fine arts continued to improve their educational status, and dance education also entered the campus. Although quality education is not equal to art education, art education is an important element of quality education. Therefore, Tsinghua university and Peking University began to try to recruit students with special talent in art. Many colleges and universities also set up second-level art colleges or orchestras and dance troupes. Some middle schools, such as Beijing No. 2 Middle School and Shenzhen High School, also have similar experiments. Such experiments started to influence college entrance examination. At the same time, the Department of Physical Education, Health and Art of the Ministry of Education has organized art exhibitions in primary and secondary schools and universities nationwide, reviewing and displaying students' artistic talent and spirit in every two years. All these have had a positive impact on the art education in ordinary schools, resulting in that the majority of teachers and students have a new understanding of art subjects.

However, the problem then comes. The ordinary campus dance teaching activities started to become decorations of special occasions and focus on winning the competition. The participants of the dance education tend to be few students with interest and "talent". Such education advocates the skill training in professional colleges and universities in terms of teaching mode. The

teaching content is biased towards the professional dance teaching materials of the art college. Actually, starting dance lessons on the campus, especially the primary and secondary schools, does not have to cultivate dancers, but to use dance as a kind of body language and culture. Dancing is equivalent to the language, foreign language, history, art and other subjects of education. "An education through dance" aims to teach aesthetic quality and sentiment of infection of dancing, but not practice all the time.

In the international arena, when the United States and the Soviet Union fought for hegemony in the 1950s, Americans found that the former Soviet Union scientists were not only developed in logical thinking, but also had strong creativity and rich imagination. The reason was that they loved art and even had some artistic creations. In the 1990s, the Federal government of the United States took art education as a breakthrough point to intervene education for the first time. It adopted the goal of the Year 2000: Education Act through legal procedures and launched the development of "National standards of art education". Experts in dance, music, drama, visual art began to develop the curriculum in 1992, which finally published in 1994. The national standard for art education is an event to change the world. The United Nations world conference on art education in 2006 adopted the theme of this curriculum, "art education" as the conference's tenet. According to the National Standards of Art Education, "Education without art is incomplete". Just as science divides the human brain into the left and right hemispheres, if schools educate students in general arts and sciences but not in arts, especially dance, music, drama and visual arts, they will only be able to cultivate "half-brains". The inclusion of art curriculum into the "core" curriculum is to, in essence, development the human brain comprehensively. It is conducive to the cultivation of complete human beings, who will gradually form rich and comprehensive cultural accomplishment in the process of developing intuition, imagination, creation, expression and communication.

### ***2.2. The Difference between “Quality-oriented Dance Course” and Other Dance Courses***

There are three major differences between “Quality-oriented dance course” and other dance courses. First of all, the training objectives are different. It is not for a few people but for all students. It does not take the acquisition of stage practical skills as the premise, but for the infection of aesthetic sentiment as the goal. It is not to cultivate dancers, but the majority of students' comprehensive literacy in dancing. Quality-oriented dance education regards dance as part of a comprehensive and universal education of culture, aesthetics and sentiment, and a kind of "education through dancing".

The second is the difference in teaching content. Quality Education Dance is not a pure skill education, but an education whose main goal is to cultivate the artistic quality that ordinary people should have. It does not take stage performance as its ultimate goal, but to develop the talent potential of all students and cultivate imagination and creativity as its ultimate goal. It regards dance as the spiritual civilization achievement of a nation or a country, and the teaching process is also a kind of cultural inheritance and aesthetic edification.

The third is the difference in teaching methods. Quality oriented dance education no longer takes lectures as the main teaching method, but focuses on games, improvisation, movement reduction and element movement. It teaches, develops and liberates students' body perception and movement experience, and then inspires, guides and encourages students' imagination, initiative and creativity. As is said, "quality oriented dance course" broke the traditional dance education mode, opened the affordable dance education in our country to create a real "for the students" new dance course system and teaching concept, centered around the five ability - "watch's imitation ability, expression ability, communication and cooperation ability, innovation ability and comprehensive ability" [3]. New ideas of education and class design advanced the dance education which was education for a handful of elite to all students.

This course has been implemented in Beijing and Xiamen. Many elementary schools and various universities such as Beijing normal university, Huazhong normal university, Yunnan normal university, Shanghai normal university, Northwest normal university, Guizhou normal university, Xinghai conservatory of music, Fuzhou education institute, Shenzhen education bureau and other units also successively carried out the quality dance education teacher training courses. Such curriculum and education benefit the dance itself, which enables everyone to have the artistic quality of dance and lays a good mass foundation for the development of professional dance. It is beneficial to the majority of students, so that they can learn to appreciate the beauty in k-12 education, and enhance their perception of beauty in life and art. For the benefit of the society, the overall improvement of the spiritual civilization of the common people is a sign of the enhancement of the country's comprehensive national strength and cultural strength, which makes the great rejuvenation of Chinese civilization and the realization of a harmonious society possible.

### **3. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COURSE—TAKE GANSU AS AN EXAMPLE**

As the capital and coastal cities, Beijing and Xiamen participated in the "Quality-oriented Dance Course" of

the Ministry of Education earlier. This paper thus take Gansu Province in northwest China as an example. In May 2016, organized by primary and secondary school art education and research center in Gansu province, northwest normal university invited 15 experts from Beijing dance academy, Beijing normal university, capital normal university, northwest normal university and other colleges and universities to organized a 10 day workshop for teachers in elementary and middle schools in Gansu. In September 2016, the northwest normal university college of seventy-four students and teachers entered 16 laboratory schools to teach for three months, further carry out the implementation of the quality-oriented education dancing lessons. They taught a total of more than seventy classes, a total number of four thousand students.

In 2017, Northwest Normal University added "Dance Teaching and Curriculum Design" to its teaching plan for undergraduate students majoring in dance education, taking dance for quality education as the blueprint. The total class hours are 72. In 2016, dance in Primary and Middle Schools was added to the normal Dance major of Music College of Shaanxi Normal University, with a total class time of 72 hours. The concept, lesson examples and teaching materials are all based on Dance for Quality Education. We firmly believe that in the future development trend of national basic education, dance will be regarded as an independent art course for all students, which is as regular as Chinese, history, physical education and music. Students studying Chinese may not be a writer, learning a foreign language is not necessarily the diplomat, learning sports does not necessarily mean they would take part in the national games, dancing is not necessarily to be a dancer. Dance, as an essential part of child grow up in the road of aesthetic experience and sentiment infection, will be the main trends in the future. As the cradle of teachers, teacher education in the field of dance training can sense, adjust and prepare as early as possible.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

Thus, this study urges that dance education should implement changes, adaptation, and innovation to promote a dance education that is supported in "Quality oriented dance course". Such innovations will produce more qualified dance teachers for the society.

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