

# Thoughts on the Study of Dance Education at Brigham Young University

Bo Tan

Xi'an Physical Education University, Shanxi Province, Xi'an, 710068

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**Abstract.** Brigham Young University is a comprehensive university class church, its artistic concept of education leading reputation in the art world. Through exchanges with American universities, I found multiple effects in different embodiments, as well as different educational concepts and teaching methods proper Sino-US educational philosophy and teaching methods for students to produce qualitatively and effectively absorbing the best part of American dance education, thus reflection malpractice Chinese art education, and promote the healthy development of Chinese Universities dance education.

There have been three times art exchanges with Brigham Young University and each time I was impressed. The amiable face of the teacher Huang Jiamin still existed in my mind. She, the ethnic Chinese, has been evaluated as a lifelong associate professor was still never tired of the journey between Sino-US for the bridge of artistic exchanges between the two countries. She brought advanced educational philosophy back to China and transmitted the profound Chinese culture to the American students.

In the process of the exchange and study with the students from Chinese and the US, I was surprised to find that the American students were more active in studying new knowledge and they had a strong desire of explosion. In the discussion of teacher's questions, the American students would think positively and discuss enthusiastically. On the contrary, Chinese students were silent with a few students answering the questions. In the process of doing exercises, the American students showed greater creativity, free personality and cheerful mental state, so that they could digest what they have learned for the use of themselves. The performance of American students was obviously more creative and initiative with individual consciousness. Thus, I have to rethink the difference of the art education between China and the US.

The Dance Department in Brigham Young University has not only the largest scale, but also the most complete specialized categories. It should the duties in two fields of general education and elite education, and especially, the art education is the prominent it the US. The students here can study the major courses such as ballet, modern dance, national dance and international folk dance. Meanwhile, the courses, competitions and performances have also been set up, such as jazz, tap dance, aerobics, clogs, square dancing and sports cheerleading. The power of Dance Department is strong with five excellent dance troupes, including ballet troupe, national standard dance troupe, modern dance troupe, sports club cheerleading and international folk dance troupe, as well as world advanced soft and hard equipment. They have ever visited 31 states in the US and performed in 35 countries on invitation with the footprint all over the world. They enjoyed great popularity on the international art and dance stages. Although the Chinese and American national conditions, beauty-appreciation and culture are all different, through the comparison of Chinese and American art education, we can also pry about the disadvantages of Chinese art education and study the excellent educational philosophy and methods.

## People-Oriented Open Educational Philosophy

The United States Federal Government launched the *National Standard for Art Education* in 1992, which firstly explicitly stipulated the function, scope and content, etc. of art. It was the product of American government who directly interfere the education for the first time in the form of legislation. The main idea was. "The education with no art education is not complete."

In the *American National Standard for Art Education*, art was identified as an important basic educational "core subjects" as English, mathematics, geography, history and other courses for the

first time. The establishment of this standard built up the core position of art education in the education. The American art education stressed the integral, balanced and sustainable development of human, proposed that the students' mentality, physiology, knowledge, skills and morality could get integral elevation and progress. Art cannot only be the single method in cultivation. Or we cannot only care the teaching of professional knowledge. We should cultivate and increase students' aesthetic consciousness and ability based on the educational philosophy of "people oriented". Develop students' innovative spirit, consciousness and ability to help them improve the quality and meaning of life, form good humane accomplishment and improve comprehensive quality and such quality-oriented education.

The educational philosophy of "people oriented" has gain a consensus in higher dance education in the US, which focused on that many colleges paid much attention to students' health, avoiding the hurt of students in sports. Therefore, it provided services and powerful protection from the researches to the courses.

The essence of art education is inseparable from the humanities and dance art is an artistic form exploring the human body and spirit deeply. The educational purpose of Dance Department in Brigham Young University is to cultivate the dance performing artists, producer directors, educators and theoretical researchers with pioneering spirit. Just as what Pro. Gabor said in Brigham Young University, what the university cultivated was not simply the performing tools, but the integrated man with benefit to the society. However, Chinese art education is now becoming more and more technical, skillful and utilitarian, which increasingly deviated from the essence of art education. The level of performance and competition has become the standard of measuring the level and even the education of dance. The number of trophy and the ranking in competition has become the lever to measure the power of running a school. If the education only cares about the present gold medal, but ignores the sustainable development of artists, the results will be woefully. Therefore, the art education must return to humanity which should be restored for the sustainable development of people.

### **Inducing-mode Teaching Based on the Teaching Subject of Students**

The American students always call their teacher's names directly, which is not acceptable for Pro. Huang Jiamin when she was firstly reaching the US. However, the respect and admiration are never lack from the students to the teachers. The equal exchange and communication can be achieved between them, which related to the cultural environment of democracy, equality and human rights that the US proposed. In the classroom teaching, the students and teachers sitting on the ground, the teachers will positively guide and cooperate with students and the students will devote themselves in the class. The classroom climate is enjoyable. In American dance class, the students are the teaching subject, while the teachers are acting as the guider. The teaching methods that teachers use are almost teacher's guidance, exchange, discussion, questioning and viewing, etc.. The teachers will never give absolute standard answers, while they will lead the students to positively think. The teaching methods are flexible and changeable, so that the students can give response in time and are able to make more creations.

In China, the attitude of the students to the teachers is mostly awe-stricken. In the class, duck-stuffing type of teaching method based on the teachers as the center is used habitually. The students will study following what the teachers teach, forming that the teachers teach and the students imitate. The situation has been formed that all are decided by the teachers as the center. Although the teachers are willing to teach the students knowledge and skills without reservation, the students' space to develop is tiny, because the teachers pay no attention to the cultural innovation and meaning back the actions and ignore the function of the students as the study subject. In addition, the students' attention only stops on the actions and combinations, rather than the teaching method and teaching thought of the teachers due to the lack of scientific human motion science curriculum acting as support. Only after a huge amount of practice again and again, the dance skills will be constantly practiced and strengthened. The class is boring, lacking of vitality. The students then will lose their initiative and creativeness and they are leaving further and further from the

original intention of artistic and aesthetic education, even running to the opposite direction.

The real education should cultivate the perfect personality and comprehensive literacy, and maximize the human potential, so that people can achieve to go beyond constantly, rather than the simple pile of knowledge and study. The result of focusing on the skillful actions always leads to the lack of students' strength and spirit and the lack of care and democracy to the actions' innovation and meanings. Dance is a magnificent pearl in the long history and culture. It is not only a skill or tool to make a living, but the civilization and spiritual beliefs accumulated for thousands of years. Study the dance as it is the culture but not the skill, making the study a process of autonomously practice, rather than passive acceptance or imitation. If stopping think, there will be no creation, no physical and spiritual transcendence. Therefore, the teachers should set correct educational view, teach with correct teaching methods, positively guide and enlighten the students, and set the new view to service the students. They should do all for students and for all students. The teachers should also understand what the students need, rather than what the teachers can teach.

### **The creative Teaching Centered by the Respect of Personality Differences**

The professional education of Chinese dance starts from the unified physical standards: three longs and one small, slender limbs and body. It is believed such shape belonging to the dancer. They wear in the unified clothes, unified hair, unified height, uniform size, unified dance actions, unified appearance based on unified dance requirement. It seems that they are carved from the same mould. In the process of dance education, teachers demands the students in a unified standard, even the appearance and emotion should be standardized. I clearly remembered in the ballet basic training class, the reason of the student who did not want to have the class was that she was too fat and it was the insult to ballet when dancing! It seems when she sees the shape of American students, she will have another kind of thought. In all, Chinese dance teachers pay much attention to the consistency of actions, demanding the uniform from the shape to the spirit. And they care more about technology and results than humanity experience and process, so that the students lack of positive and initiative thinking, exploring spirit and corresponding joy in the study of dance. Therefore, the agreement of body, spirit, mind and personality cannot be reached, so that it restricts the profound, integrated and balanced development of human's artistic accomplishment.

The American students coming to visit are all different with features from the shape to appearance. Although some of them are too fat, they can still lightsomely jump, freely rotate and happily dance. When the teacher Huang Jiamin saw there were a cerebral palsy, a dwarf and two disabled dancing in the dance class of Dean Sara Lee, she was shocked. She still remembered what Professor Sara Lee has ever said to her when she was graduated till now that dance should only belong to the minority. Everyone has the right to dance and the teachers have no right to choose who can study and who cannot. The aesthetic standard should be diversified. In Brigham Young University, the teachers should equally treat all the students whatever professional or unprofessional. The conditions of discriminating, scorning or disparaging should all be avoided and the teachers cannot divide the students into various grades and ranks. In the process of teaching, the teachers should pay more attention to the individual differences and teach students in accordance of their aptitude based on scientific and rational use of human movement science.

China and the US cover a "standardized" education and a "personalized" education. In Brigham Young University, the dance teachers have already abandoned the educational idea of "standardization". What the students in Brigham Young University show in the dance report-back performance are abundant and various dance forms, different styles of dance types, personalized dance manifestation and creative dance choreography. They can even easily regroup and recompose the Ansai waist drum as the original ecology dance in Shanxi and complete a dynamic Ansai waist drum dance in the short time without losing its original taste, which surprises all the people on the scene. The educational philosophy of Brigham Young University is fully embodied on the American students, in which they believe the core of art education is aesthetic education, the excavation of imagination and creation, the development of artistic personality and the advocacy of humanity spirit. Therefore, the teachers should respect the personality differences in teaching, hold the

principle of teaching students in accordance of their aptitude, so that the advantages and features of the students can be fully developed.

The book *Learn To Be* published by the UNESCO mentions that whatever the educations are, if the creative desire and enthusiasm are not evoked, while the so-called objective fact is focused to be taught, then the results of education will be failed. In a choreography class, I have ever made my students do the impromptu dance based on the premise of no using learned dance action materials, trying to take off the chains on their bodies and evoking their creativity. However, most of the students were feeling at a loss and did not know how to start dancing, which really gave me deep feelings: The deep professional enthusiasm of the love by Chinese dance education has killed people's creativity. The long term dabbling teaching mode has make the students form mindset. They prefer passive acceptance rather than initiative innovation.

The educational concept, cultivating requirement and goals are all different in Sino-US dance education due to the different height of cognition and degree of emphasis in art education. Because of the used teaching methods, the focus on students is also different, so that the cultivated people are of great different. Chinese dance education should abandon the false teaching ideas and methods and base on integrated sustainable development of human. Converting from the single skill-oriented teaching to the comprehensive development of art quality, the knowledge should be equally and democratically transmitted and receipted between students and teachers. The creative teaching should be encouraged to evoke the students' subject consciousness, so that the dance education can really reach the requirement of quality-oriented education for the establishment of a more scientific, rational and effective art educational system at an early date.

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About the author:

- [13]Tan Bo (1984- ), female, born in Xianyang, Shanxi, works in Xi'an Physical Education

University as a lecturer and graduate student in Xi'an Shanxi, 710068.

[14] Tan Bo, Xi'an Physical Education University, address: No. 65 Hanguang Road, Xi'an. Postcode: 710068. Tel: 18609289359. Email: tanyutaibo@163.com