

The Cultivation Paths for Enhancing Students' Expressiveness in College Dance Education

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Abstract: Dance education in colleges and universities is a key field for cultivating professional dance talents. Students' artistic expressiveness, as the core soul of dance art, directly determines their stage presentation effect and professional development potential. At present, in the stage of cultivating expressiveness in dance education in colleges and universities, there are problems such as weak cultural cognition, insufficient coordination between body and mind, single practical scenarios, and rigid evaluation standards. As a result, although students have a technical foundation, they find it difficult to convey emotions and the connotations of works through their bodies. Based on this article, the cultivation paths for improving students' expressiveness in dance education in colleges and universities are mainly proposed, aiming to provide a reference for relevant educators.

Keywords: University dance education; Student expressiveness; Problem analysis; Cultivation path

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1. Introduction

The essence of dance art is an expressive art that "uses the body as the pen and emotions as the ink," and "expressiveness" is precisely the core link connecting physical skills and emotional transmission. For students majoring in dance in colleges and universities, expressiveness is not only an "bonus" for stage performance, but also a "core indicator" for measuring their professional ability - it encompasses not only precise control of dance movements, but also a deep understanding of the cultural background of the work, and even more so, a vivid interpretation of the emotions of the characters. With the diversification of the cultural industry's demand for dance talents, students who are merely "technically proficient" are no longer able to meet market demands. Compound talents with "strong expressiveness" are gradually becoming the mainstream of the industry.

2. The core issue of cultivating students' expressiveness in college dance education

2.1. Weak cultural cognition: The dance expression lacks the support of connotation

Dance is a concrete manifestation of culture. Each form of dance (such as Chinese classical dance, ethnic and folk dance, and Western modern dance) carries a specific historical background, folk traditions, and aesthetic concepts. At present, there is a significant disconnection between technique and culture in dance education in some colleges and universities: in

teaching, teachers often focus on technical aspects such as the force application skills of movements and the precise control of rhythm, while only briefly mentioning or even ignoring the cultural connotations behind the dance. For instance, when teaching the Mongolian dance shoulder-shaking movement, only the frequency of shoulder shaking should be uniform and the amplitude moderate should be repeatedly emphasized, but no explanation was given to the students that this movement originated from the natural rhythm of the shoulders of Mongolian herdsmen running along with the horse when they were herding on horseback, nor was it expounded on the herdsmen's bold and unrestrained, and love for life national character contained therein^[1]. This leads to the situation where, although students can mechanically imitate movements, they find it difficult to understand the cultural core of the dance. As a result, the dance they present lacks emotional tension and cultural charm, remaining only at the level of "resemblance in form" but "dissimilarity in spirit."

2.2. Insufficient coordination between body and mind: Emotions and actions are disconnected

The core of dance expressiveness lies in the unity of body and mind, that is, precisely conveying inner emotions through body movements, achieving that movements have emotions and emotions have a support. In current dance education in colleges and universities, the separation of body and mind is a key issue that restricts students' expressiveness: on the one hand, some students, due to insufficient body control ability, find it difficult to express complex emotions through body movements. For instance, when depicting the theme of sadness, it can only be presented through simple actions such as lowering the head or lowering the hand, and it is impossible to convey the layers of sadness (such as suppressed sadness or broken sadness) through details like the extent of body contraction, changes in breathing rhythm, or micro-facial expressions. On the other hand, some students, although rich in emotions, cannot transform emotions, resulting in a disconnection between emotions and actions - for instance, when they want to express joy in their hearts, their bodies show stiff jumps, unable to form a smooth connection between emotions and actions^[2].

2.3. Single practical scenarios: Lack of real combat refinement in expressiveness

Stage practice is a crucial link in transforming what is learned in the classroom into actual expressiveness, and it is also an important way for students to adapt to different performance environments and enhance their stage control ability. At present, there are problems such as single scenarios and insufficient frequency in the practical links of dance education in colleges and universities. From the perspective of practical scenarios, over 80% of the practical activities are on-campus performance reports. The performance venues are fixed (mostly in school auditoriums), the audience groups are single (mainly teachers and students), and the performance themes are limited (mainly focusing on the display of course achievements) Students lack practical experience in dealing with different audiences (such as children, the elderly, and professional audiences), different venues (such as outdoor squares, small theaters, and live broadcast cameras), and different themes (such as commercial performances, public welfare performances, and cultural exchange performances). In terms of the frequency of practice, most students majoring in dance in colleges and universities only participate in 1–2 stage practices each semester, and most of them are group performances, with very few opportunities for individual, independent performances.

2.4. Solidification of evaluation criteria: Teaching orientation emphasizes skills over performance

The evaluation system serves as the guiding principle for teaching activities, directly influencing teachers' teaching focus and students' learning direction^[3]. At present, there are problems such as rigid standards and single dimensions in the evaluation of students' expressiveness in dance education in colleges and universities. From the perspective of evaluation content, over 70% of the evaluation indicators focus on the technical aspects (such as movement accuracy, rhythm control, and formation uniformity), while the indicators for the expressiveness aspects (such as emotional transmission, cultural interpretation, and individual expression) are poorly designed, and some are not even included in the formal evaluation. From the perspective of evaluation methods, most adopt a one-time assessment at the end of the term, with the completion of designated dance segments as the main form of assessment, lacking dynamic tracking of students' improvement in expressiveness during their daily learning process. From the perspective of the evaluation subjects, teacher evaluation is the

main focus, while the significance of self-evaluation by students, peer evaluation, and audience evaluation is overlooked.

3. Corresponding cultivation paths for enhancing students' expressiveness in college dance education

3.1. Build a cultural immersion teaching system to address the issue of a lack of connotative support

To address the issue of dance expression lacking soul due to weak cultural cognition, it is necessary to break the traditional teaching model that separates technology from culture and build a cultural immersion system that runs through the entire teaching process, making cultural cognition a solid foundation for expressiveness. In terms of the curriculum structure, a three-dimensional model of "technical courses + cultural courses + integrated courses" is adopted to systematically explain the historical origins and aesthetic logics of different dance forms. At the same time, integrated courses such as "Chinese Classical Dance Body Rhythm and Confucian Ritual and Music Culture" and "Tibetan Dance and Snowy Plateau Folk Customs" are offered to deeply bind cultural knowledge with technical training. Take the teaching of Dai ethnic dance as an example. At the beginning of the teaching, the Dai people's living environment of "living by the water" and the cultural tradition of "water worship" are first explained through documentaries and folk stories, guiding students to understand how the dynamic nature of "water" permeates into the "three bends" and "small steps" of the dance. In the middle stage, combined with movement training, let students associate the totem worship of peacocks by the Dai people when practicing the "peacock hand shape," and feel the gentle rhythm like flowing water when adjusting the "breathing rhythm." In the later stage, VR technology can be utilized to recreate the scenes of the Dai Water-Splashing Festival. Students can be organized to conduct on-site research in places like Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, and learn the original ecological Dai dance from local folk artists. Through immersive experiences, students can internalize their cultural understanding. Eventually, the dance movements will not only be precise and standardized but also convey the unique regional cultural temperament, injecting profound connotations into the expressiveness.

3.2. Design a mind-body coupled training program to address the issue of emotional and motor disconnection

To address the issue of "emotion and movement being disconnected" due to insufficient mind-body coordination, it is necessary to design a scientific and systematic mind-body coupling training program, establish a training chain of "emotional perception - movement transformation - deep integration", and achieve seamless connection between emotion and body ^[4]. In the physical training session, the focus is on strengthening the logic of binding movements with emotions: For different emotional types such as joy, sadness, anger and longing, specialized transformation training is designed. For instance, in the sadness emotion training, students are first guided to recall real experiences like the parting of loved ones and the frustration of dreams to evoke emotional resonance. Then, they are instructed to conduct detailed adjustments such as "subtle adjustment of the inward turn of the shoulders," "control of the rhythm of the spine slowly sinking," and "simulation of the state of weak fingertips drooping." Transform the inner sadness into concrete body language. At the same time, mark the emotional orientation for each basic movement. For instance, in Chinese classical dance, "ti" corresponds to the emotions of anticipation and joy, while "Chen" corresponds to the state of loss and contemplation. This enables students to develop a muscle memory and thinking habit of "carrying emotions when performing movements" in their daily training.

In the emotional training session, a step-by-step cultivation strategy is adopted: First, by appreciating musical works such as "Moon Reflected on Second Spring" and "Butterfly Lovers," reading literary classics like "Dream of the Red Chamber," and watching drama performances such as "Teahouse," students are guided to capture the emotional layers in different art forms and enhance their emotional perception sensitivity. Entering the rehearsal stage of the work, role-immersion training is carried out. Students are asked to write a character profile for the role they play, which includes the character's growth background, personality traits, and emotional turning points. They simulate the character's life scenes and psychological activities, and then express the character's emotions through improvisational performances by

independently choosing actions - for example, when depicting “reunion after a long separation.” Encourage students to design the movement sequence of “stiff body - trembling embrace - tears sliding down” based on their own experiences. Teachers then provide targeted guidance from aspects such as movement range, expression management, and rhythm control, helping students adjust the “strength during embrace” and the “warmth in the eyes”, ensuring a high degree of match between emotions and movements, and ultimately achieving a deep integration of body and mind, allowing the dance to express both emotional tension and vitality. It also has a sense of physical beauty.

3.3. Build a diversified and scenario-based practice platform to address the issue of insufficient practical refinement

In response to the problem that students’ expressiveness is difficult to adapt to different environments due to the single practical scenarios, it is necessary to build a three-dimensional interactive multi-scenario practical platform of “on-campus + off-campus + online,” allowing students to refine the flexibility and adaptability of their expressiveness in rich practical scenarios. In terms of creating on-campus scenes, in addition to regular performance reports, theme-based and high-frequency practical activities will be added: Every month, dance special performances are held around themes such as “Narrative of Youth,” “Nostalgia Memories,” and “Inheritance of Traditional Culture.” Students are required to design the content and emotional expression style of their dances based on these themes. For instance, in the “Nostalgia Memories” special performance, students are guided to express their longing for local customs and loved ones through body language. Set up a “Black Box Small Theater,” organizing 1 to 2 small-scale performances every week. The theater space can only accommodate 50 to 80 people. Students need to control the range of their movements and adjust the details of their expressions to adapt to the close-up viewing scene. At the same time, it is encouraged to try diverse styles such as modern dance and contemporary dance to break the limitations of performance.

In terms of off-campus cooperation, establish stable practice bases: Cooperate with local cultural centers to carry out the “Benefit Performances in Communities” activity, adjust the performance rhythm for middle-aged and elderly audiences, and increase the proportion of folk dances to enhance the entertainment value. Collaborate with children’s educational institutions to create children’s dance dramas, such as adapting stories like “The Little Bear Crossing the Bridge” and “The Forest Concert.” Students need to interact with children through exaggerated body movements and vivid facial expressions to cultivate an affinity for their performances. Jointly establish a “talent cultivation program” with professional dance troupes, allowing students to participate in the rehearsal of dance drama segments and cultural exchange performances, such as joining the troupe in cross-provincial and cross-city dance festivals to learn the stage control skills of professional actors. In the development of online scenarios, a new media practice matrix is established: A short video column titled “Growth of Dance Expressiveness” is set up, requiring students to create 1-3 minute short videos around themes such as “Daily Emotional Expression” and “Innovation in Traditional Dance”, and learn the design of movements and expression management in front of the camera. An online live performance is held once a month, featuring sections such as “Audience Dance Request” and “Real-time Bullet Comment.” If an audience member requests “hoping to see more cheerful ethnic dances,” students need to immediately adjust their dance style and emotional expression methods, optimize performance details based on audience feedback, and enhance their adaptability to expressiveness through continuous practical refinement.

3.4. Establish a dynamic and diversified evaluation mechanism to address the issue of emphasizing technology over performance

To solve the problem of “emphasizing skills over performance” caused by the solidification of evaluation standards, it is necessary to establish a dynamic and diversified evaluation mechanism centered on expressiveness, guiding the teaching focus to shift towards “equal emphasis on technology and expression.” In terms of the design of the evaluation content, a dual-dimensional balanced system of “technique + expressiveness” is adopted: the technique dimension accounts for 50%, which is detailed into quantifiable indicators such as the accuracy of movements, the degree of rhythm control, and the degree of formation coordination, such as the standardization of the “point wrist toss” movement in classical dance

and the rhythm stability of the “kick step” movement in ethnic dance. The expressiveness dimension also accounts for 50%. Evaluation criteria are set from three aspects: the degree of emotional transmission (such as whether the sadness emotion is clearly layered and the joy emotion is infectious), the degree of cultural interpretation (such as whether the Dai dance showcases the characteristics of “water culture” and whether the classical dance conveys the aesthetic of “vitality and charm”), and the degree of individual expression (such as whether there is a unique way of handling movements or expressing emotions). Avoid judging superiority or inferiority merely based on technology. In terms of innovation in evaluation methods, a combined model of “60% process evaluation + 40% terminal evaluation” is implemented: Process evaluation records students’ participation in emotional training and the depth of cultural discussions through the “Classroom Performance Record Form,” collects audience questionnaires and teacher comments for each performance through the “Practical Feedback File,” and sorts out students’ reflections and improvement plans for their own insufficient expressiveness through the “Personal Growth Log”, dynamically tracking the improvement process. The final evaluation adopts the form of “work performance + on-site defense.” After students complete the designated dance segment performance, they need to explain their understanding of the cultural background of the work and the design idea of emotional expression, such as explaining “why slow rotation is used to represent the confusion of the character,” so that the evaluation can more comprehensively reflect the students’ artistic cognition.

4. Conclusion

In college dance education, enhancing students’ expressiveness is the key to breaking the predicament of “emphasizing skills over performance.” Problems such as weak cultural cognition and insufficient mind-body coordination are intertwined and need to be systematically addressed through four major paths: cultural immersion, mind-body coupling, diverse practices, and dynamic evaluation. This is not only an innovation in teaching models, but also a transformation from technical training to artistic education. Only by integrating the cultivation of expressiveness throughout the entire teaching process can students convey emotions through their bodies and forge their souls with culture, growing into versatile dance talents that meet the demands of the industry and injecting lasting vitality into the inheritance and development of dance art.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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