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Contemporary Approaches to Dance Pedagogy – the Challenges of the 21st Century

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Abstract

This article reports findings from a literature review study that aimed to describe the general development trends and challenges of contemporary dance pedagogy and point out currently the essential aims and teaching methods in dance pedagogy. Based on the literature review, we identified seven main themes that are further discussed in this article: the holistic model of dance teacher education; self-regulation and reflection in learning; somatic approach; dance as an art form in relation to dance pedagogy; forms of co-operation between different art forms, the role of new technology and mass media in dance education; multicultural approach; gender and sexuality.

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Keywords: dance pedagogy; dance education; self-regulation; reflection; somatic approach; holistic model

1. Introduction

Dance is an intellectual, physical and sensorial response to experiences of the world as suggested by Bannon (2010). She argues that the integration of our physical, intellectual and emotional selves that can occur in learning in dance has been advocated by many theorists and practitioners as essential to understanding the holistic benefits of education in and through dance.

The pedagogical practice of dance education has, during the recent decades, changed considerably. Dance pedagogy has traditionally followed a transmission model of teaching, where the students learn by imitating specific movement vocabularies modelled by an expert teacher. This is the way many classroom teachers still feel most comfortable teaching dance, as it is the way they were taught (Bolwell, 1998). It is now widely accepted that transformation of dance content knowledge into knowledge for teaching and learning involves far more than dance technique and control, and that teachers need a wide range of teaching strategies to motivate and engage

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their students (Chappell, 2007; Shapiro, 1998; Smith-Autard, 2002; Sööt & Leijen, 2012). As Shapiro (1998) points out this shift from disembodied knowing to embodied knowing has changed the relationship between the teacher and the learner. Although in the last decade the literature on dance pedagogy has substantially diversified (Bannon, 2010; Bond, 2010; Risner, 2010; Smith-Autard, 2002; Stinson, 2005, 2010), it is still lacking a comparative and analytical common overview. In order to identify certain trends of the pedagogical practices of dance education, we formulated the following research questions:

- What are the general development trends and challenges of contemporary dance pedagogy?
- What are currently the essential aims and teaching methods in dance pedagogy?

In order to answer the research questions a literature review was conducted. The following seven subsections will conclude the more important aspects of dance pedagogy related articles of the last decade.

2. Dance teacher education in the direction of the holistic model

Holistic (dance) teacher sees a person in its whole. Everything is in intercommunication; it is a conscious activity of compiling learner's world view. Holistic approach of contemporary fragmented world should be involved with drawing the whole together - uniting the body and the mind, the teaching and the identity, the curriculum and the community, so that they could address the human as a whole. At the same time, the teacher should take into consideration that the whole is comprised of independent valuable parts, and should be able to identify and make constructive use of the real and possible connections between them.

Holism asserts Miller (2000) that *everything* exists in relationship, in a context of connection and meaning. This maxim is of little practical usefulness on a global or universal level; it is very relevant, however, at the level of the whole person. The whole person is composed of layered elements including, but not limited to the intellectual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, creative, and spiritual. Holistic dance teacher is like a link between the student and the world. She perceives the individual as a whole and is able to put her competency into use in uniting both of the sides together. Andrzejewski (2009) came „to think of teacher knowledge as the collection and intersection of professional orientation, intellectual capacities, and professional knowledge of teachers“ (p. 17). According to Andrzejewski (2009) professional orientation is „the constellation of a teacher's affective traits that gives aim, direction, and focus to educational decision making and practice. These affective traits include: attitudes, values, beliefs, priorities, preferences, positions, and dispositions“ (p. 17). One important component of professional orientation is what Korthagen (2004) refers to as mission. He identified mission as the innermost level of change and describes it as being concerned with such highly personal questions as to what end the teacher wants to do his or her work, or even what he or she sees as his or her personal calling. A well-developed sense of mission and a positive professional orientation focused on helping all students learn should be outcomes of teacher preparation (Korthagen, 2004). Teacher preparation should also be designed to facilitate the growth of teachers' intellectual capacities. „Central to these capacities is the ability to evaluate—analyze and make supported judgments about—teaching practice in terms of student learning and the outcomes of student learning in the classroom, school, community, and society“ (Andrzejewski, 2009, p. 17). Gilbert (2005) stated that dance teachers need to master and apply learning and child development theories, pedagogical knowledge, and classroom management strategies. Teachers need these understandings in addition to dance content including dance techniques, choreographic principles and processes, somatic practices, dance history, cultures, and philosophy (Gilbert, 2005). At this point there is a clear connection between the self-regulation and reflection that was brought out in Chapter Three and the skills of a present-day dance teacher.

Teacher preparation should serve to impart and create professional knowledge regarding teaching which is related to students; schools and school systems; the foundations of education; and curriculum, instruction, and assessment that is enacted in the fields of teaching and learning (Andrzejewski, 2009). Present-day dance teachers have to be active in the curriculum development process originating from the needs of the students. „It is important that dance teachers are responsible for student progress as dancers (technique), as dance-makers

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