

Action Research on the Effect of Improvisational Dance on Improving the Dance Creativity of Preschool Students

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Abstract

As a dance form with free expression and creative exploration at its core, Improvisational Dance is characterized by openness, situational and flexible, and adaptability. This study adopted the action research method to conduct an 8-week teaching practice. Through case analysis, classroom observation and teaching reflection, the study found that Improvisational Dance can effectively improve the physical expression, sense of rhythm, creative ability and cooperative choreography awareness of preschool education students, while also provide an effective teaching solution for the problem of students finding it difficult to create in children's dance creation. While affirming the effectiveness of Improvisational Dance teaching, this study also proposed directions for subsequent research, hoping to promote the deepening and systematic development of Improvisational Dance in the field of Dance Art.

Keywords: Improvisational Dance, Children's Dance Choreography, Dance Creativity

Introduction

Dance courses occupy an important position in preschool education, and their teaching is divided into three sections: the first is basic skills training courses; the second is dance choreography training courses; and the third is dance theory and education theory learning. The "Guidelines for Kindergarten Education" mention that preschool education students need to have dance creativity to guide children's aesthetic and creative thinking. Children's dance creation is an aesthetic creation activity of dance. It must follow the rules of dance creation and conform to the physical and mental development characteristics of children. In children's dance creation, kindergarten teachers should have the skills to create children's dance and the ability to inspire children to create dance. The concept of dance course training in preschool education is to cultivate students into talents with basic dance skills and the ability

to master children's dance choreography skills, thereby making necessary preparations for future children's dance education.

Improvisational Dance is a mode of dance that breaks the fixed pattern of traditional choreography through intuition, spontaneity and dynamic adjustment, stimulating students' creativity. It plays a certain role in the process of preschool education for students in the creation of children's dance. However, current dance teaching tends to imitate traditional dance, resulting in a weak choreography ability among students. This study will use the Improvisational Dance movement mode in the "Children's Dance Creation" course in colleges and universities, aiming to improve the dance creation ability of preschool education students so that they can better cultivate children's creative thinking in their future teaching work.

Literature Review

Core Characteristics of Improvisational Dance

As a form of dance that is not rehearsed in advance, Improvisational Dance allows students to create directly according to the teacher's instructions or music. This teaching method can release constraints, relieve students' stress, and stimulate their imagination and creativity (Li, 2024). In the teaching of Improvisational Dance, the knowledge and artistry of the subject should be effectively integrated, and teaching plans and tasks should be set based on the artistry of Improvisational Dance (Zhao, 2023). Qi & Lai (2023) learned through a 6-month field survey in a children's dance ethnography study that children can express themselves, explore freely, and create through Improvisational Dance. Teachers should encourage and guide children to understand the world and express life through artistic and aesthetic perspectives and ways of thinking. Children's Improvisational Dance is different from the improvisational creations of professional colleges. Improvisational Dance should focus on releasing children's nature. Its core lies in the interaction between movement, perception and imagination. Its internal cause is the process of children processing and reorganizing existing information in their own way and then reproducing their feelings and understanding of the external environment in the form of dance. It does not require young children to master standardized and unified movements, but allows them to perform and express themselves freely based on their life instincts, enabling the development of children's minds to keep pace with their physical development (Dong & Wang, 2022). Therefore, when teaching Improvisational Dance to students majoring in preschool education, more consideration should be given to their future teaching objects, and the course design should be carried out under the two-way combination of adults and children.

Concept of Children's Dance Creation

Shi & Yu (2021) stated in "Children's Dance Creation" that when creating, kindergarten teachers should consider the selection of themes, ideas, structure, music and other aspects from the perspective of children's thinking, which should be in line with children's aesthetic pursuits and physical and mental characteristics, and be full of innocence and childlike fun. Chen (2023) mentioned that children's dance creation courses should combine theory and practice. Basic dance theory and creation theory knowledge can allow students to understand the characteristics, history, culture, style, etc. of dance. In order to truly achieve "improvisation" in dance choreography and make "improvisation" play its full role, this requires dancers to fully mobilize their own senses, such as hearing, seeing, and smelling in the process of choreography; They should listen to the rhythm of live music, feel the external

environment, music and the atmosphere of the scene from the heart, and create dance through inspiration and ideas (Liang, 2022). Stürmer, Seidel, & Holzberger, (2016) mentioned that the ability of children's dance creation is a basic skill necessary for preschool students to engage in children's dance education. Children's dance writers need to have extensive and profound dance knowledge and various basic dance skills. Children's dance vocabulary can be extracted from classical dance, folk dance, ballet, modern dance and children's daily movements. As a kindergarten teacher, they should be good at guiding students to find movement elements suitable for children's dance works from children's daily life, traditional dance skills, sports, etc. (Chun, 2019). Children's dance creation is an effective course to develop students' creativity, which is beneficial to both kindergarten teachers and children. "Improvisational Dance" is only a way to create children's dance, but it is a teaching model worthy of application in preschool education.

Methods

Research Sample

The sample of this study is the sophomores of the Department of Preschool Education, Faculty of Education and Psychological Sciences, Sichuan University of Science and Chemical Technology. The school is a provincial undergraduate university located in Zigong City, Sichuan Province. The school's history can be traced back to 1952, and it is now a high-level applied university. The Faculty of Education and Psychological Sciences is an important humanities teaching and research unit of the school, with two undergraduate majors: Preschool Education and Applied Psychology. The Preschool Education major was established in 2003 and is one of the key construction majors. The major is committed to cultivating high-quality kindergarten teachers, preschool education management talents, and researchers with comprehensive development of morality, intelligence, physical fitness, beauty, and labor. The faculty is equipped with a professional dance training room. "Children's Dance Creation" is an elective course, with a total of 16 sessions in a semester, each lasting 1 hour and 20 minutes. The sophomores who have chosen this course already have three semesters of dance learning experience, and the researchers will collect data during the implementation of this course.

Action Research Steps

The Action Research method is designed to identify topics related to actual work needs, conduct research within the actual work process, and involve both actual workers and researchers (Li, Qi & Xu, 2008), so that the research results can be understood, mastered, and applied by these workers, thereby achieving the goal of solving practical problems and changing social behavior (Pei, 2022). The Action Research method is continuous and flexible, as well as practical and participatory. The steps are "Plan-Action-Observation-Reflection". In the creation of children's dance, the most common problems of faced by students are a lack of expression, difficulty in grasping rhythm, and low participation. Applying the Action Research method to dance teaching is particularly suitable for improving students' comprehensive abilities, enhancing teaching strategies, and optimizing classroom interactions.

Research Design

Planning stage. The researcher established a general plan for the course of this semester and designed the course from the following aspects:

Introduction stage: Use situational teaching to create an improvisational atmosphere.

Imitation training is carried out through the observation of objective things (such as animals, plants, etc.) to expand imagination and liberate limbs.

Train students' musical perception through the sounds of different daily necessities (such as keys, paper bags, etc.), and change the rhythm to strengthen their sense of rhythm.

Group cooperation mode: Carry out collective choreography activities to stimulate creativity and cooperation.

Proposition mode: Use children to give meaning and themes to movements.

Action stage: Put the designed teaching strategy into classroom practice and implement improvement measures as planned.

Observation stage: Collect typical cases in the implementation process through teaching observation, video analysis, student feedback, teacher logs, etc.

Reflection stage: Analyze the teaching results and identify the shortcomings and areas for improvement. For example: Does the situational setting stimulate emotional resonance?

Is the rhythm training accurate? Do students actively participate in the creation?

Results and Findings*Typical cases of students' improvisation*

Case 1	Situational Introduction --- " Washing Clothes "
Teaching Objectives	To guide students in simulating clothing through body shapes and to cultivate their imagination and ability to distinguish characteristic rhythms.
Implementation Process	1. The teacher guides students into the situation: ' Imagine that the classroom is a big washing machine, and you are the clothes being washed.' 2. The teacher plays sound effects: the washing machine is running. 3. The teacher encourages students to try to use their bodies to express the different states of the clothes in the washing machine.
Teaching Analysis	1. Use life situations to stimulate students' observation and associative abilities;

	2. Allow students to freely create movements in a novel environment; 3. Facilitate the development of flexible thinking and potential body movements.
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Case 2	Role-playing --- "Animal World"
Teaching Objectives	To cultivate students' imitation ability and creativity, and to shape their figurative thinking about objective things.
Implementation Process	1. The teacher proposes a task: 'If you are visiting a zoo, please choose an animal you like best.' 2. The teacher asks students to imitate their favorite animals, such as rabbits jumping, turtles crawling, fish swimming, etc. 3. The teacher plays music with a brisk rhythm and encourages students to perform the behavior of animals according to the music.
Teaching Analysis	1. Animal characters can stimulate students' interest in participation; 2. Music and body movements are integrated to promote sensory coordination; 3. Mutual imitation and interaction enhance imitation and learning abilities.

Case 3	Emotional Expression --- "The Ugly Duckling"
Teaching Objectives	To help students recognize and express different emotions and to release various types of emotions through dance stories, guide different students to play various roles to let them experience the concept of collective cooperation.
Implementation Process	1. The teacher tells the students the story of "The Ugly Duckling" in "Andersen's Fairy Tales". 2. The teacher assigns roles to the mother duck, the ducklings, and the ugly duckling. 3. Organize an emotional drama, with the mother duck showing tenderness, the ducklings showing joy and ridicule, and the ugly duckling going from loneliness to elegance after turning into a swan.
Teaching Analysis	1. The combination of emotional expression and dance imagery helps promote students' psychological changes; 2. Diverse role-playing and emotional expression are conducive to stimulating students' emotional thinking. 3. Group creation promotes cooperation and collective dance awareness.

There are many similar lesson plans designed according to teaching objectives. Through the above three cases, we can find that Improvisational Dance can enhance the creative ability of preschool students from their own to the collective, and at the same time, it can enhance their teaching practice ability in early childhood dance education in the future.

Students' "Expressiveness"

Most students can express the state of clothing, animal forms, and emotions through their bodies, demonstrating a strong ability for body expression. In "The Ugly Duckling", students can play different roles from familiar fairy tales and clearly express the emotional differences between "joy" and "sadness"; in "Washing Clothes", students use the ground space to express the images of "wet clothes" and "twisted pants". Among them, the male students' movements are more abstract and lack detailed shaping. The "image + intention" training in action design should be strengthened to make the performance more layered.

Students' "Sense of Rhythm"

Most students can adjust their movements according to the rhythm of the music, especially in the "Animal Games", where the rhythm and animal movements are well matched. They can accurately identify fast and slow rhythms and adjust the amplitude of their movements; they have a preliminary ability to correspond to rhythms, such as using fast rhythms for jumping and slow rhythms for crawling. Rhythm sensitivity varies from person to person, and some students are not sensitive to rhythm changes, so they need to strengthen rhythm training through rhythm games, rhythmic imitation and other activities.

Students' "Improvisational" ability

Students actively participated in the improvisation process and had a certain level of creative expression. In "Washing Clothes", students took the initiative to add interesting and spontaneous creative content such as "drying", "rinsing", and "drying"; In "The Ugly Duckling", they were able to arrange formations, assign roles, and change emotions based on the storyline. Improvisational creation may lead to interruptions in logical thinking and confusion in the scene, and teachers need to guide and promote collective creative awareness.

Students' "Cooperative choreography" ability

The group cooperation and creation activities improved students' communication and organizational skills. Most groups had clear division of labor, such as action designers, rhythm masters, and performers; In the group arrangement of "Animal World" and "The Ugly Duckling", they showed good negotiation and integration skills. Some groups lacked the integration of image and music. Teachers should guide students to establish an awareness of "overall work" and encourage them to develop action style consistency and space scheduling strategies.

In short, Improvisational Dance provides students with an open and free performance space, improving their comprehensive quality in dance courses. The case design of this study is close to the lives and perspectives of young children and also meets the needs of college students for future teaching practice. For students majoring in preschool education, the teaching design of dance courses should strengthen the teaching ideas of "Movement-Rhythm-Emotion-Situation", and combine the teaching model of "Improvisation + Cooperation" to cultivate students' ability from individual expression to overall choreography. Advanced content (such as traditional culture, folk customs, handicrafts) can also be introduced to improve the thinking and creativity among college students, thus achieving the purpose of training.

Conclusion

Through in-depth observation and case analysis of Improvisational Dance in the practice of dance teaching for preschool education majors, this study draws the following conclusions:

First, as a dance form with free expression and creative exploration as its core, Improvisational Dance breaks through the fixed pattern of traditional children's dance teaching that focuses only on the completion of movements and single training of certain combinations. Instead, it emphasizes the individual emotional experience, body awareness, and self-expression of students. Practice shows that Improvisational Dance can significantly improve the expressiveness, sense of rhythm, improvisational creation ability and cooperative choreography ability of preschool education majors, providing a foundational teaching approach that is more in line with the laws of children's development for their future engagement in kindergarten dance teaching.

Secondly, Improvisational Dance is highly open and flexible in the organization of teaching content. It requires correct guidance and inspiration from teachers. The researchers set up situational themes close to children's life experiences to allow students to achieve comprehensive development in many aspects through imitation, observation, creation, expression, etc. This teaching structure helps to cultivate students' body language expression ability so that they can more flexibly guide children to carry out artistic creation activities when facing a group of young children.

Finally, Improvisational Dance has promoted the transformation of dance teaching evaluation mechanisms. Improvisational Dance teaching pays more attention to the participation, spontaneity, creativity and cooperation in the learning process, and effectively promotes the synchronous development of students' individuality, aesthetics and thinking. Compared with the traditional evaluation method centered on "completion", "standard", and "fixed", this also provides a new direction for constructing the evaluation orientation of preschool dance courses.

In summary, Improvisational Dance is not only a form of dance expression but also an indispensable teaching method in children's dance teaching. It can truly achieve the educational concept centered on child development. In the curriculum system of preschool education, it has significant teaching value and practical significance. Future research can be further expanded to the following directions: such as on-site application and observation of Improvisational Dance lesson plans in real kindergarten environments; exploring the differences in the reactions of different types of children (such as hyperactive and introverted) during improvisational dance; or developing a systematic "Improvisational Dance + Child Development" curriculum model, etc.

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