

## **Impact of conscious pedagogy**

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### **Abstract**

In order to try to capture the positive elements that ensure the success of arts education, this paper looks at evaluations of Dance Education programs in New Orleans over a six-year period and analyzes the role of the teacher during this evaluation period. Focusing on the successful elements of arts education necessitates a focus on teaching. These evaluations revealed that the strength of teaching is integral to the success of these dance education programs.

The New Orleans Ballet Association (NOBA) contributes free in-school and after-school dance education to the greater New Orleans community. An analysis of these accumulated qualitative and quantitative evaluations demonstrates change over time and reveals some aspect of teacher preparation and how it impacts the programs.

*Keywords:* dance education, pedagogy, evaluation, teacher education

It is important to try to capture the positive elements that ensure the success of arts education (Anttila, 2007; Bond & Stinson, 2001-2002; Eisner, 1994; Greene, 1995, 2001; Hanna, 2008). From a global perspective, dance education either is not valued (as evidenced by its placement in after-school, rather than in-school activities) or cut when financial issues are threatening. This can be seen very clearly from the downturn in the world financial situation in 2008. With an individual focus, the trends become more personal, as it is easy to follow when students have access to quality dance education and when they do not. So, promotion of the positive elements can be used when there are specific discussions about where, or if, dance belongs in the curriculum, and if so, what the value is for students.

On a more individual level, dance in New Orleans was included in schools until they were closed due to Hurricane Katrina. Once schools reopened following Katrina, dance did not return as a subject. Though this paper is not undertaking to answer why this occurred, the data collected for evaluating both in-school and out-of-school dance education programs in New Orleans can help to describe the situation for arts education, specifically dance education, in this community and help to reinforce its strengths. This paper looks at evaluations of dance education programs in New Orleans over a six-year period and analyzes the role of the teacher during this evaluation period. Focusing on the successful elements of arts education necessitates a focus on teaching. These evaluations revealed that the strength of teaching is integral to the success of these dance education programs.

The New Orleans Ballet Association (NOBA) contributes free in-school and after-school dance education to the greater New Orleans community. All these classes are taught by teaching artists who are employed part-time. The backgrounds of all the artists vary widely and there is no consistency to their preparation. An analysis of these accumulated evaluations demonstrates change over time and reveals some aspect of teacher preparation and how it impacts the programs. The evaluations have included qualitative and quantitative data. Prior to Katrina, there was one in-school program that entered elementary school classrooms for a 12-week period once a year. There were also two after-school programs. One took place in community rooms of housing projects, and one was a combined program with recreation centers throughout the city. After Katrina, only one of these three programs survived: in the recreation centers. (The housing projects were demolished, so that program will never return.) If the in-school programs are to be initiated again, then this is the time to clearly focus on the strengths of this program before it is discontinued.

The perspective of this paper is evaluative and considered through the theories of Elliot Eisner (1991), as well as general theories of arts assessment (Taylor, 2006). The evaluation data is both qualitative and quantitative, and includes observations, surveys (with qualitative and quantitative responses), student grades, and both programmatic and state documents. All data were collected with informed consent for the purpose of program development and evaluation. All students were minors. During the evaluations, all students and parents were considered stakeholders, and their responses were requested in that light (Stringer, 2007).

The evaluations begin in the 2003-2004 academic year. The In-Motion program (school-based) was in three schools with a different teaching artist in each school. The evaluations of these three schools showed one with little success, and two with varying degrees of success. The two successful schools each had a teaching artist who had a pedagogy focus in their undergraduate dance degree. The weak school had a teaching artist with no pedagogy in her background. The observations of the recreation program classes demonstrated a consistent inability to implement and follow a syllabus. None of these teaching artists had a pedagogy background.

In 2004-2005, all three programs were evaluated. The In-Motion program was in four schools with four different teaching artists. The only continuing teacher from the prior year was the weakest teaching artist, who had no pedagogy background. The other three were new to the program and none had a pedagogy background. The weak teacher from the prior year did not improve and was asked not to return. The other three did a passable job, but did not achieve the level of success that these same schools had demonstrated the year prior. Within these two years of evaluations, the dance unit was used as a social studies unit, so the social studies grades for that particular school were analyzed. Success was measured by a statistically significant increase in social studies grades for the unit that included dance. This occurred with the successful teachers in the 2003-2004 academic year. It was not statistically different for the 2004-2005 academic year in any schools, but was slightly elevated in the three schools that I deemed "passable."

The housing project programs were evaluated in the 2004-2005 year only. There were three centers that included dance classes taught by different instructors, none of whom had a pedagogy background. All three courses were observed to have no clear goals, no sense of direction, and the teachers were working without the knowledge of child development, which seemed to undermine their good intentions.

Evaluation of the recreation center included three different locations with a different teacher at each location. Ballet was observed in all three locations. Each teacher presented but did not teach a ballet class. The material was presented in a progressive manner, yet the students did not progress. The material progressed even though the students were unable to execute the basic material. In one center, there was a student working on pointe who did not have the alignment to be successful on pointe.

Hurricane Katrina occurred in 2005 and the programs were suspended for the year. Though some skeletal classes returned in 2006, no programs were evaluated that year. It was a year for program building using the resources that remained.

After Katrina, the recreation program was the only one that returned. The 2007-2008 evaluation was of a much diminished program. In order to get a fuller evaluation picture, both student and parent surveys were included, as well as observations. This program was all extra-curricular. In both student and parent surveys, they did not place value on professionalism of teachers, emphasizing that this was not necessary in the recreational setting.

The analysis shows the context and challenges for arts education and the value of dance education within this community. However, the most significant finding is that regardless of the dance education setting (in-school or after-school), the knowledge of pedagogy (Gibbons, 2007; Kimmerle & Côté-Laurence, 2003) was important to the success of the teacher. Though no cause and effect can be discerned, the classes that were most successful were those taught by teachers with a pedagogy background. Teaching dance is not only about the actual dance material; it must also include pedagogical content (Warburton, 2008). In fact, Warburton has shown that pedagogical content is even more important to student success than dance content.

Pedagogical content can include a variety of elements, including knowledge of student motor development as well as cognitive and emotional development, scaffolding, demonstration, feedback, variation of methods (including verbal and non-verbal), and classroom management. Each of these elements can be a stand-alone course. In addition, it is important to have a well-developed philosophical perspective on teaching and to be clear about the context in which the teaching occurs. A prior performance background, while brimming with dance content, does not provide the pedagogical content. Yet, this is the background that is often sought in order to judge the value of a dance teacher.

The implications for dance education in general, in either formal or informal learning contexts, are clear from this summary of evaluations. We want the best for our children,

but sometimes we do not know what that is. Since dance is often offered in informal settings, a pedagogical background is often not required. When we train licensed teachers, the model comes from the field of education and includes all the pedagogical content knowledge. When we train performers and choreographers, the model of apprenticeship comes from the world of crafts and skills. All other dance careers fall through the cracks, devoid of the formal preparation toward a career. This is where the non-licensed teacher is often over-looked. There is no pedagogical preparation because the teaching is not considered education, but, rather, professional training. So, the bifurcation of the two, education and artistry, ultimately makes the teaching in this type of setting less than educational. Maybe the discussion should be about including artistry in education rather than covering both.

This summary of evaluations from a specific setting, New Orleans, allows a look into one community's values as expressed through programs. The larger portion of dance offerings in an after-school setting is reflective of practices in many US communities. There are conclusions that can apply to other communities. Clear among these is the lack of attention to pedagogical knowledge within the dance education setting. Pedagogical content is taught in only the very narrow setting of dance licensure within the United States. However, this knowledge is of value in every setting in which dance is taught, regardless of the location. The one lesson that can be taken from this summary of evaluations is that pedagogical content is not only valuable, but essential. It does not devalue artistic content. Rather, it supports artistic content and allows it to be available to students.

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