

**When young people meet dance: A case study from the Life Pulse course for teenagers
at the Cloud Gate Dance School**

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Abstract

As they move through adolescence, teenagers experience changes in their bodies and minds. They develop an increasing sense of self, and become curious about, and sensitive to, their bodies. At this time, dance can be a vehicle to help young people understand their bodies and identify themselves. Dance allows them a channel through which they can confidently express their emotions, while encouraging creativity and cultivating an appreciation for the arts.

We have been working with young people in the Life Pulse course at the Cloud Gate Dance School once a week for many years. In this paper, we start by considering young people's participation in dance in Taiwan. In lives that are full of the stresses of school and modern life, we ask, "Besides hip-hop and vocational training programs in high school, what other opportunities are there for [students] to participate in and learn about dance?" We then look at the educational philosophy and curriculum framework of the School's Life Pulse program for teenagers, and explore the young people's motivation and learning process in research based on observation, interviews, and questionnaires. We hope the study will help establish new points of view and a new focus for dance education for young people in Taiwan.

Keywords: Cloud Gate Dance School, Life Pulse, teenagers, dance education, creativity

***"Young people enjoy dancing. They enjoy learning and perfecting new skills.
Creating and performing their own dance and being a member of a group."***

(Susan Hoyle in Brinson, 1991, p. 183)

Adolescents in Taiwan suffer much educational pressure from parents who take the traditional view that a good diploma should be at least the primary, and often the only, aim of education. They are frequently asked by their family or others to attend only academic learning activities; the desire to explore body movement or art is abandoned. Yet, through dance education, adolescents can grow physically and mentally. It allows them to confidently express their views

of the world, get recognition from others, and show their emotions. It inspires their creativity and their sensibility to art. In a study of young dancers, Susan Hoyle, Director of Dance of Arts Council England, observes that adolescents naturally enjoy dancing and learning something new. They also like to create and perform their own dances and be part of a dance group (Brinson, 1991).

In Taiwan, most dance education is focused on the acquisition of professional skills. Adolescents with dance potential are selected to participate in programs at specific elementary and high schools that allow the development of these skills. Private dance studios promote specified skills to help young people gain admission to their selected public school. Elsewhere, in the past decade, street dance and music video (MV) dance has attracted more attention from young eyes. In 2001, there was a reform of regular education in Taiwan, which established a new Arts and Humanities course in the Grade 1-9 Curriculum, which includes dance. However, there has been a problem with insufficient qualified teachers to support this program.

The Cloud Gate Dance School (CGDS) was founded in 1998 with the simple concept that every human being deserves to find joy from body movement. At the same time, dance assists people in understanding the body (Wen, 2011, p. 22). In the past decade, thousands of students at the School have enjoyed moving their bodies and listening to their inner voices. In classes, they are encouraged to explore creativity and themselves through their bodies. These children are not trained to be professional dancers, yet they enjoy dancing as much as professionals.

Through research and study, the School sought to discover the effect of dance on adolescents engaged in it. We looked into how “youth classes” impact the growing generations at the School. The methodology is one of observation and feedback from the students themselves.

Taiwan dance education status quo

Chang defines adolescence as that period when children become aware of gender difference and acquire a maturity of mind. Generally, female adolescence occurs between ages 12 and 21, and male adolescence between ages 13 and 22 (Chang, 1995). For the purposes of this research, adolescents were defined as all boys and girls aged 13 to 18, equating all in junior and senior high school.

Adolescence is a time between childhood and adulthood; it is a time when everything suddenly changes and young people look for corresponding fulfillment physically, psychologically, emotionally, and socially. During this time, teenagers become sensitive to rapid growth in appearance, including height, weight, muscles and bones, and sexual characteristics.

During such a transitional period in their internal mindset and external appearance, teenagers tend to care much about peer interaction. They expect to be noticed and easily come up with an imaginary audience with which to practice social interaction. Sometimes they exaggerate their behaviors or thoughts to fulfill a personal dream. In this transitional period, it is key for them to remain comfortable with their growing bodies (Wang & Ke, 1999).

In this study, we looked at adolescents’ dance experiences inside and outside of regular education.

Within regular education

A special dance program in regular education for talented students began in 1984. The Gifted and Talented Program for Dance operates at 43 elementary, junior, and senior high schools throughout Taiwan. Students have to audition and show potential to gain admittance. Essentially, the objective is to give a thorough grounding for later university-level vocational training.

Outside the talented student program, but still in regular education, consultants recommended that the Taiwanese government upgrade arts and humanities subjects in the Grade 1-9 Curriculum in January 2001. This was a major educational change in Taiwan. Visual arts, music, and performing arts are three of the majors in the new arts and humanities area.

Visual arts includes the study of sculpture, installation art, and historic masterpieces, with the intent to broaden adolescents' artistic vision. Music typically involves singing or playing an instrument. Performing arts includes music, dance, and drama. The new curriculum has proved difficult to implement because most schools can only afford one specialist teacher at a time, not dance, music, and drama teachers simultaneously. Music and drama teachers find it difficult to easily teach dance, which results in the sacrifice of adolescents' primary opportunities to learn dance (Liao, 2010). At the CGDS, we believe that dance can be a positive influence on junior high school students' learning. It also encourages self-confidence, willingness to work with peers in a team, and strength in interpersonal relationships (Peng, 2010).

Some teenagers also have the opportunity to participate in dance at regular schools through attendance at school clubs. Sessions are generally provided once a week, although dance is not available at all schools. The covered dance styles range from hip hop to modern and folk dance.

Outside regular education. In MRT stations, the Taipei Main Station shopping mall, or any other public space in downtown Taipei, it is a common sight to see adolescents grouping together to practice dance. They get together, play popular music on a portable player, and practice different styles of street dance, cheerleading, or even new styles that they have created. They are not inhibited or embarrassed to show their bodies moving to music in public. Yen & Lee (2011) describe it as something that shapes youth culture. As a result of this trend, some private dance schools and studios have started to offer courses in pop dance for youths.

There are also some other dance programs that are designed to help teenagers with special needs, particularly those with autism. These programs help drive their body movement; they help them feel better about personal interaction, which in turn improves their communication, emotional control, social skills, sensitivity, attentiveness, problem solving skills, and creativity.

Teenagers face huge changes in their bodies and minds. They get emotional and energetic. They become isolated from their parents and family as they seek to explore the world, which switches from parents to peers. Having a positive understanding of the body can help adolescents strengthen their ego and self-worth, peer relationships, parental relationships, and further educational study.

Body movement is a form of language; it is a choice beyond words. Dance courses in regular schools, free street dance groups, and classes in private schools allow teenagers more choices to get close to dancing. Through such courses, it is expected that they will become more confident in interacting with others and expressing their viewpoints or emotions. In addition, by experiencing body movement, they will become sensitive to their own physical and mental conditions. With this experience, they can further listen to their inner voice and find their own identity and ego.

Cloud Gate Dance School. Today, the Cloud Gate Dance School has 20 studios nationwide. The School’s primary objective is not necessarily promoting dance, but encouraging, developing, and helping people enjoy body movement. Courses are designed so that children learn from moving, find their creativity and imagination inspired, and day by day stay close to and listen to their bodies. Eventually, it is hoped, they will care for and appreciate their bodies as they would a friend.

There are three programs in the CGDS, as shown in Figure 1 below:

Curriculum



Figure 1: Cloud Gate Dance School Curriculum Framework (July 2012)

1. Life Pulse Program

This program welcomes people aged 3-88 in courses at six levels, including adults and seniors. Each level lasts between one and six years. Life Pulse is designed around daily life activities. By connecting daily experiences and movement, people are expected to sense body rhythm and to be content and happy.

As part of Life Pulse, the Teenagers' Course is designed for teenagers aged 12-18. It aims to develop creative body movements (that come out of Life Pulse experiences) into tangible play. Trainers facilitate students to compose movements from creative tasks. As they learn to structure the play, they also learn to appreciate others' creativity and dance as art.

2. Pre-professional Program

This program gives grounding in dance concepts. It provides fundamental learning for those aiming to be professional dancers or who are interested in vocational training. However, students cannot enroll only in this course; attendance at the Life Pulse course is a pre-requisite. This is because the School believes that all the students have a personal body vocabulary, and that they should be allowed to move naturally and freely: only when they are aware of their natural way of moving should they learn discipline.

3. Martial Arts Program

Cloud Gate is famed for recognizing and valuing culture and the cultural spirit. With globalization, communication is getting easier. Cultural tradition is fading as people pay more attention to modern subjects. The fast tempo of modern life rarely leaves time to look back on the culture of our motherland. People rarely slow down, stay still, feel their bodies, or feel their minds. The Martial Arts program provides a place where teenagers can do this, where they can learn to sense their body as well as their culture, and learn to be brave and modest.

Research method and participants

The observation and analysis focused on the self-learning style of Youth Class (YC) students and revealed the influence of the classes on adolescents' thoughts and lives. From the analysis of questionnaires, interviews, and observations, we hoped to discover more about how young learners are changed by learning dance in YC.

The questionnaires were designed by the research team and sent to 350 people; 260 were returned. Upon receipt of the completed questionnaires, five individuals across a range of learning paths, gender, school, and engagement in other CGDS courses were selected to be personally interviewed. Interviews were semi-structured and under the topic, "What did YC give you?" Additionally, four YC trainers acted as study co-hosts, observing interviewees' learning styles, body skills, and changes in social relationship skills including confidence, organization, and problem solving.

Two hours were allowed for each interview. In the following analysis, interviewees are identified as S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5, and interviewers as T1, T2, T3, and T4. Student, interviewee, and interviewer profiles are shown in Figures 2, 3, and 4 below:

Background	Learning Profile	Number
Gender	1. Male	21
	2. Female	240
Grade	1. Elementary and junior high school grade 4-9	219
	2. Senior High School grade 1-3	40
	3. University	2
School program	1. Ordinary	216
	2. Gifted and Talented Program for Dance	11
	3. Gifted and Talented Program for Music	6
	4. Gifted and Talented Program for Art	10
	5. Others	18
Years in youth classes in Life Pulse	1. Six months	98
	2. One year	44
	3. One and half years	36
	4. Two years	30
	5. Two and half years	16
	6. Three years	23
	7. Three and half years	6
	8. Four years	0
	9. Four and half years	8

Figure 2: Student Profiles

Code	Profile
S1	Girl, 16, Grade 1, senior high school (joined CGDS at 5, from Life Pulse Level 1 to YC at level 7)
S2	Girl, 15, Gifted and Talented Program for Dance, Shuang Yuan Junior High School (joined both pre-professional program course and Life Pulse, now YC level 8)
S3	Girl, 16, Grade 3, junior high school (previously in the Gifted and Talented Program for Dance in Young Le Elementary School; joined CGDS at G7, now YC level 8)
S4	Boy, 17, Grade 2, senior high school (joined from Life Pulse Level 2 to YC as level 6)
S5	Boy, 16, Grade 1, senior high school (joined from Life Pulse Level 5 to YC as level 6)

Figure 3: Interviewee Profiles

Code	Profile
T1	CGDS Trainer, 11 years teaching experience, 5 years YC training experience
T2	CGDS Trainer, 10 years teaching experience, 5 years YC training experience
T3	CGDS Trainer, 14 years teaching experience, 4 years YC training experience
T4	CGDS Trainer, 12 years teaching experience, 5 years YC training experience

Figure 4: Interviewer Profiles

Analysis and conclusions

The data shows a huge discrepancy between the numbers of boys and girls learning dance. The fact that the vast majority of YC participants are in grades 4-9 at elementary or junior high school reflects the fact that YC began in 2007, and with only three classes. As the years pass, more classes are being added, but since almost all new students fall into the grade 4-9 category, this bias is unavoidable. It should reduce with time, however. The figures show that most YC students are in the regular school program with only a few from the gifted and talented programs or elsewhere. This emphasizes the importance and necessity of providing dance class for those ordinary program students.

Learning attitude

	I do like to join YC	I am fully engaged in every class and feel happy	I chose this course myself
Strongly Agree	68%	57%	57%
Agree	28%	36%	26%
Neutral	3%	7%	16%
Disagree	1%	0%	1%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%

Figure 5: Learning attitude

The data shows that students really enjoy the classes. Comments from students and teachers indicate that interesting and challenging course design, and the teacher's training style and skills, are also important factors in motivating learning.

Feedback from students and teachers:

- S1 I am very happy to join this class, and I feel fulfilled and satisfied.
- S4 Dancing is great! I feel relaxed and satisfied, as well as more aware about the relationships between my breath and movements.
- T2 There are so many aspects which make students enjoy this course so much. They like the sense of humor of teachers, and find the teachers always full of power and energy. They also enjoy peers' funny moments, and laughing together.
- T3 I found that if students are willing to accept challenge in the class, they feel satisfied when they overcome the hard tasks.

Learning atmosphere.

	I like the way of teaching	I like to share everything with my teacher	I expect to see my friends every week	I like to discuss and create the works with my mates	I look forward to the final showing each term	I like CGDS' environment
Strongly Agree	67%	52%	53%	50%	41%	62%
Agree	27%	29%	32%	32%	30%	31%
Neutral	6%	18%	14%	16%	22%	6%
Disagree	0%	1%	1%	2%	5%	1%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%

Figure 6: Learning Atmosphere

The data indicates that an interactive learning environment positively encourages students' learning motivation. In lessons, teachers facilitate students' thinking and feedback, giving respect by allowing each to learn at his or her personal tempo. Students can work by trial and error to get learning experience. Peer relationships and classroom culture are other key elements to active learning.

Feedback from students and teachers:

- S1 The teachers here are more like facilitators; they guide us, but never ask us to follow their ideas or movements. They encourage us all the time.
- S2 The teachers here are not only teaching dance, but caring for us. Sometimes, I think they understand me more than my mother, so I really like to come here.
- S5 CGDS is my second home. I like the smell here, and it just like my real home. I could be here all day.
- S4, S5 We really expect to see each other every week. We are complementary! Normally, I would contribute the ideas during the class (S4), and he (S5) will try it using his body first. We have an unspoken consensus.

An interesting revelation is that 7% of students do not like the final end-of-semester showing. This negative message poses questions such as, "Do students feel pressured when it is a final showing that is being evaluated in any way?" and "Should all pressure be removed from the dance process?" Teacher T1 agrees that showing puts pressure on dancers to some extent. Teacher T2, however, sees a positive side in that it provides an opportunity to explore personal potential. If we look from a cultural perspective, there is a tendency among East Asian people to keep a low profile physically and psychologically. When that is not possible, confidence falls. Even though most YC students have been taking classes for a few years and thus become accustomed to expressing themselves, it is still a challenge for some to dance in public.

Feedback from students and teachers:

- T1 I am not sure about the showing thing, because when they get mature, they know how they look like when they are dancing; some of them realized that they have weak movement skills, but they do like dance. They would like to dance just for fun, not to show somebody else.
- T2 I think that they enjoy dancing for their parents. I agree that some of them worry about it, but I am also happy to see them to overcome their fear through the showing.

Physical abilities.

	Become more healthy	Know more about my body	Improve my movement skill	Improve my coordination	Enrich my body vocabularies	Increase my creative ability
Strongly Agree	72%	64%	71%	72%	64%	64%
Agree	26%	26%	26%	25%	27%	28%
Neutral	2%	10%	3%	3%	9%	8%
Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Figure 7: Physical abilities

The aim of YC is to help students discover their bodies, so the study also asked about students’ awareness of their bodies. The data shows that most of them feel their movement abilities are getting better, that they are more aware of their bodies, and are becoming healthier.

T1 and T3 observed that students have better mobility skills. T2 said that although YC is different from other technique training, it still gives students the basic movement skills and improves strength, stamina, flexibility, etc..

The following is some feedback from students and teachers:

- T3 We give different elements to the class each term, and students gain better coordination by practicing them. We also give some improvisation tasks to help students explore their body and mind. They really like it!
- T2 We do not teach in traditional technique way, but still give many different exercises to help students to gain endurance, strength, jumping power, and ... so on. I am so surprised that they all find their own way to present the movement after practicing. Their bodies have many possibilities now.

To examine the difference in movement skills when students have different learning experiences, we compared students from the Gifted and Talented Program for Dance with those from private dance studios. S2 and S3, students from the Program, said that YC provided a different experience from their other learning. S2 believed that her YC experience would contribute to her performance in her Gifted and Talented classes in school. S3 said hat she found that YC allowed

her more space to develop her own ideas. This suggests that YC meets its objective of presenting a different face of dance, one beyond mere skills coaching: one that helps young people dance in their own way and in their own style. According to several students and teachers:

- S2 The way of teaching is very different between regular school and CGDS. In the Gifted and Talented Program, the training is very strict, and there is a lot of pressure. At the CGDS, I can dance freely and happily. With these experiences, I found that I am able to perform more openly and more bravely in my school.
- S3 I was focusing on technique and accuracy of each movement a lot when I was in Gifted and Talented Program, which made my movement stiff and unnatural. In YC, the emphasis is more about breath and the natural way of moving. Everyone could be the principal dancer here. We create our own pieces and solos.

Cognitive abilities.

	Help me to express my feelings	Become more confident	Improve my interpersonal ability	Improve my organizational ability	Improve my ability of problem solving	Increase dance making skill and transfer abilities to other tasks
Strongly Agree	59%	52%	49%	45%	38%	54%
Agree	29%	32%	33%	36%	37%	34%
Neutral	12%	12%	18%	17%	23%	10%
Disagree	0%	4%	0%	2%	2%	2%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Figure 8: Cognitive abilities

Everyone has their own characteristics and they inherent strong and weak points, such as logical thinking, organizational ability, and capacity for creative thought. In this research, most students found that such abilities increase as they attended class, which is no surprise. It has long been recognized that there is a high correlation between regular participation in sports and adolescents’ mental health and social skills. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the YC program similarly contributes to adolescents building self-confidence, interpersonal skills, organizational ability, problem solving, and creativity. Their feedback included:

- S1 I think that I can catch the point much quicker when I communicate with friends. I am also more sensitive about everything.
- S2 I have an open view of dance. I know dance probably much better than my friends.
- S3 When I was in the Gifted and Talented Program for Dance, I had always had high scores. However, I found I was only trying hard because I wanted the score or an important role. Now, I do not dance for score or get the better role. I simply enjoy dancing, and I find pure happiness when I am dancing.

- S4 I like the course for a simple reason. I have fun, and I get the confidence and satisfaction
- S5 I was a shy girl, but I am more confident and brave after joining YC. I am not afraid to go on stage anymore. I am even doing a lot English speeches on stage in my school now.
- T2 Most students in YC are over 14 years old, and their lives are full of stress of academic study. Having a dance class once a week is actually a good way to help them to release the stress, and refresh their brains.
- T3 Interpersonal skills are very important for everyone. How to communicate with other people in a group and how to respect peers' ideas come to the fore in class. They are not only learning dance here.
- T4 Students can transform their experience to the school event or school club. They sometimes choreograph a small piece for school performance, which is great.

Movement.

	I like the breathing and stretching section	I like combinations	I like travelling exercises	I like dance making
Strongly Agree	54%	56%	61%	67%
Agree	32%	33%	29%	23%
Neutral	13%	11%	10%	10%
Disagree	1%	0%	0%	0%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%

Figure 9: Movement

The YC course is designed and structured only for adolescents. The course stimulates their inner energy and releases it through movement. Different courses attract different students. Feedback from students and T1 showed that students enjoyed practicing and the mini-performances designed jointly with teachers. We know that adolescents like challenging topics where they can work through ideas, figuring things out on their own or with peers.

Feedback from students and teachers:

- S1 It is really nice to create a piece by our own. Sometimes it is hard, but I would keep thinking and trying to overcome any difficult task.
- S4 I love improvisation! I enjoy expressing my idea through my movement. That is fantastic.
- T1 They love travelling and improvisation sections. They enjoy moving in a space and feeling free to express themselves. Sometimes, they ask me to give more travelling or big jumping exercises, even when they are sweaty and tired. I think improvisation is a good way to help students to fulfill their ideas. They like to discuss ideas with peers and work out tasks together. They work so hard and are always fully engaged.

Adolescence is a period when everything changes in personal physiology and psychology. At this time of life, young people need support from their peers, as well as space, to express their ideas and show themselves. YC satisfies the needs of the physical body and the mind. It helps these

young people build on their different abilities, guides them to understand their bodies and, eventually, to accept and appreciate themselves.

Another point of view on dance education in Taiwan

Many of the issues adolescents face in changing physiology, psychology, interpersonal relationship skills, cognition, and emotional development can be attributed to physical and environmental factors. Peer relationships and peer support are especially important.

Where class is not limited to purely dancing, adolescents have opportunities to work collaboratively with peers and learn from each other. With this kind of interpersonal experience, they take on a positive attitude toward their body image, and become more adept at working and communicating with the opposite gender. They learn to appreciate others' strong and weak points, become willing to listen to other points of views, and offer help when needed. At a time when problems of adolescence are reported to be growing, the YC classroom is valued as a space to learn and grow.

The open environment, session, and course structure encourages students to try different roles from those they take in school life. In YC, they find the skills that allow them to take on challenging tasks or leading roles in dance or drama when they go back to regular schools. Sensitivity to dancing can also help develop sensitivity to other arts, such as writing articles, music, or paintings. In summary, we believe regular body exercise contributes to both physical and psychological growth, and in doing so, gives adolescents a head start for their forthcoming adulthood.

Taiwanese dance professionals have tried to systematically incorporate body movement education into adolescents' dance education programs. An outline of such is now in curriculum programs, but there is a long way to go. Dance has been treated poorly for a long time. We hope the CGDS can open a new window for adolescents in Taiwan, a window that allows them to "see" through dance. Body movement can inspire young people in their creative learning and when making friends. This should be emphasized in national education strategy meetings, with physical education and dance given equal recognition as main subjects.

CGDS was founded 14 years ago and its programs are evolving every year. Some of the students in this research have been dancing with us from level 1. We hope to extend this research to study different mindsets and performances, and how they are impacted by different levels of training. We also aim to continue tracking the study interviewees to watch their future progress.

The ultimate aim of this study is to show the education authorities in Taiwan that physical education can play an important role in the curriculum and in educating the whole person. People need to be aware that studying only major subjects may not make our kids healthy and smart. They need more to balance a growing body and mind.

Life is a long journey; none will survive it if they fail to see their inner strength. We believe that if adolescents can be comfortable with their bodies, they surely will have the capability to face and conquer life's many issues and lessons.

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All citations of this paper from this source should include the following information:

In S.W. Stinson, C. Svendler Nielsen & S-Y. Liu (Eds.), *Dance, young people and change: Proceedings of the daCi and WDA Global Dance Summit*. Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan, July 14th – 20th 2012. <http://www.ausdance.org/> [Accessed on xx date]
ISBN 978-1-875255-19-1