

Dance competitions and children

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Competitions are a common part of children's lives in Taiwan. They compete with each other in many ways, from academic performance at school to leisure activities in their private lives. Dance competitions is one example of this. Of the various dance competitions held each year, the National Student Dance Competition is a popular event among children at all age levels. Supervised by the Ministry of Education, this two-stage competition involves enormous annual human and financial resources to organize, and although local dance educators have differing opinions about the value of dance competitions in general, most are willing to participate as training instructors or judges for this particular competition due to its high credibility and status. The goal of this dialogue is to discuss the positive and negative effects of dance competitions for children, and due to its placement among local dance competitions, the National Student Dance Competition will be examined to highlight the overt and covert forces that shape values in Taiwan's dance pedagogy. The discussion herein also seeks to establish a dialogue with dance scholars from different regions and to collect suggestions that may modify the problematic issues in the competition. Thus for the purpose of direct feedback, this research is presented in the “project dialogues” section. In that light, my discussions focus on questions and responses for stimulating, more in-depth thoughts on dance competitions for children. The goal is to encourage more studies in the related areas.

My observation of the National Student Dance Competition brings to light certain aspects of dance competitions in general. First, children's motivation for participating in the dance competition is often not only coming from their own volition but also from their instructors' or parents'. Second, the training process has affected the children's social development in terms of disposition, values, and practice in dance. Third, the contestants' creative development may be hindered, as they often practice the same choreography. My previous research (Tai, 2013a, 2013b, 2014) shows that many children become reluctant to explore their creativity as they

practice the same choreography for competition repetitively year after year and often intentionally or unintentionally imitate their instructors during their training.

In conclusion, I would like to propose a few suggestions. First, dance competition can be a good domain for children to build confidence and self-awareness but should not be viewed as the testing ground for children's dance talent. Second, the training process for a dance competition can be helpful for children to strengthen their physical ability, but acrobatic skills should not be over-emphasized. Third, winning an award can be seen as an honor but should not to be regarded as the primary way to judge children's ability in dance. On the same thought, the result of a dance competition is not a ruler for judging children's dance talent and should be considered one of the ways for children to express themselves.

Keywords: dance competition, dance creativity, dance education, dance identity

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