

Youth and dance: Relation of university students with different types of dance

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In this paper, we present the results of a study examining the expectations of students beginning an undergraduate degree in dance and their relation to different types and activities in dance. In order to do this, we employed a specifically created questionnaire. We found that the dance students had already accumulated a significant amount of dance practice. Around half the group had practiced an average of seven years of ballet, while almost another half had practiced mainly street dances, though not for so many years. There are also other dance forms that had been practiced at some point by many of the subjects. Though they do not show much experience in other art forms, around one half had had some training in acting. More than a third of the group had worked as dancers, and a few as dance teachers. Expectations about the degree were mainly related to developing their performing qualities, showing little interest for the importance of theoretical studies. This is certainly related to the social lack of recognition of the necessity of higher education for teaching dance, since many teachers are previous dancers with little education in teaching.

Keywords: dance; types of dance; dance practice; dancer; dance teacher

When teaching in the area of performance, it is important to understand the student's motivations for the area (Buckroyd 1989, Stinson *et al.* 1990, Alter 1990, Macara 2003, 2006). With so many aesthetic currents (Agamben 1992), performing techniques, and teaching methods, it is fundamental for teachers to know how to adapt to the student's interests and how to approach each subject matter (Batalha 2004). In this paper, we present the results of a study examining the expectations of students beginning a university undergraduate degree in dance and their relation to different types of dance and a future as professionals

METHOD

Participants

For the purpose of the study we had one group of participants composed of students beginning the undergraduate degree in dance in the Faculty of Human Kinetics at the Technical University of Lisbon. We had a total of 14 students, representing almost 61% of the total number of students beginning the first year. Since we needed to administer the questionnaire on the first day of classes before the students had become acquainted with the school, we had to leave out many students who only entered the school later for administration reasons. The age average of the sample was 19.14 years. All participants were female.

Materials

For this investigation, we employed a specifically created questionnaire addressed to the respective group. This was complemented by individual interviews to help interpret the data.

To understand the situation of the students when entering the dance course, the specific questionnaire was created to address what types of dance they had practiced before, for how long, occupations related to dance and other arts, and expectations for the future.

The questions were closed or semi-closed, leaving space to add more responses than those requested in the questionnaire.

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to all students present during the first day of classes. They were self-completed, in a classroom, and the researcher was present in case there were any questions or queries. After collecting all the questionnaires, descriptive analysis was applied to the data, the results of which were compared with the interviews with the students.

RESULTS

After analyzing the answers to the questionnaire, we found out about the types of dance practiced by the subjects before entering the university. As can be seen in Table 1, ballet was the most frequently practiced dance form, followed by hip-hop and jazz dance. Though there are a variety of different dance forms practiced by some of the students, we can see that the group is

Table 1. Dance forms previously practiced and mean years of practice.

<i>Type of dance</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents involved</i>	<i>Years</i>
Ballet	57.1	7
Capoeira	7.1	4
Contemporary	21.4	4
Creative dance	7.1	1
Jazz dance	28.6	2
African dances	14.3	2
Brazilian dances	7.1	4
Latin dance	7.1	2
Rhythmic gymnastics	7.1	14
Hip hop	42.9	2
Ragga jam	7.1	2

Table 2. Experience in other art forms.

<i>Art form</i>	<i>Number of respondents (%)</i>
Circus arts	1 (7.1)
Dance in basic school	1 (7.1)
Dance group	1 (7.1)
Music/voice	1 (7.1)
Theatre	7 (50.0)

almost divided in two: one trained in ballet and the other based on street-dance.

Regarding years of practice, they seem quite significant. For ballet, the average years of practice is seven, for contemporary dance and *capoeira*, it comes down to four years, but for all other dance forms the number of years of practice is much lower, with the exception of one subject with 14 years of practice in gymnastics. This seems coherent, in the sense that it is relatively in accordance with the number of years necessary to be able to dance in each different dance form.

With regards to experience in other art forms, the most representative is theater, practiced at one time or another by half of the students (Table 2).

Several subjects had professional experiences in the area of dance. More specifically 35.7% worked as dancers, and 14.3% taught dance classes or participated in theater projects (Table 3).

Table 3. Work experiences related to dance.

<i>Professional activity</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents</i>
Dancer	35.7
Dance teaching	14.3
Theatre projects	14.3
Circus activities	7.1

Regarding their expectations in relation to the dance degree they were undertaking, the responses were varied (see Table 4). Most of them were expecting a good practical education, such as learning to dance, gaining a better knowledge about the body, getting acquainted with new dance forms, and learning techniques. Good theoretical education was mentioned much less, which may suggest that the students held low expectations concerning the theoretical demands of the degree. This may be related to the widely disseminated idea that one just needs to be a good dancer to become a good dance teacher. This is certainly related to the problem of lack of regulations for teaching dance in any context of Portuguese society. Even in the school system, the qualifications to teach dance are still not clear and do not demand a university degree.

DISCUSSION

In general we found that, though they were quite young, the dance students beginning the university degree had already accumulated quite a significant amount of dance training. Around half of the group had an average of seven years of ballet training, while almost another half had had training in mainly street dances, though not for so many years. There were also other dance forms that many of the subjects had been involved with at some point. Though they did not show much experience in other art forms, around one half had had some training in acting.

More than a third of the group had worked as dancers, and a few as dance teachers. This is only possible because in Portugal there are no regulations concerning teaching dance, so an academic degree is useful mainly for personal development. Maybe for this reason, expectations about the degree related mainly to the development of their performing qualities, while little interest for the importance of theoretical studies was expressed. This is certainly related to the lack of social recognition surrounding the necessity of higher education for teaching dance, since many teachers are previous dancers with little education in teaching. This is certainly a problem to be

Table 5. Expectations in relation to the dance degree.

<i>Expectations</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
Good practical education	5
Good theoretical education	3
Learn how to dance correctly	2
Learn to know the body	2
Become a teacher	2
Try new dance forms	2
Positive Expectations	2
Understand all the components of dance	1
Become a dancer	1
Learn new techniques	1
Gain knowledge to succeed in the performance world	1
Active, dynamic and creative practical classes	1
To contribute positively to the evolution of society	1

solved in this country, in order to develop the progress of this art form and its educational potential.

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