

Teaching Project for Inclusive Dance

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Abstract.

Art schools are not exempt of the phenomena that involve the entire society; they play a larger role in the community if they meet the social needs and influence the quality of life of people. The educational art projects arise from the need to address people interested in approaches to art, in this case to dance.

Dance education in Mexico faces new challenges as the inclusion of sectors of people who "normally" have been isolated from it. Thus, dance teachers face a problem when working with heterogeneous groups with little or no preparation, lack of an appropriate methodology to prepare and engage students, and low culture about disability.

In order to address this situation, The National School of Dance in Mexico developed the Teaching Project for inclusive Dance: a teachers training infrastructure, with students of all ability levels, where future teachers can learn, practice, assist and teach.

This paper describes the Teaching Project for Inclusive Dance from the background to the project description.

Concluding, educative art projects must not lose sight of the needs of society and close to the standards of dance for a few. Learning how to teach dance is a process that needs clarity. Dance teachers need tools and practice to develop with any kind of group. This educative-artistic project has been developed over the last six years under an innovative and integrative model, incorporating proposals, and methodologies to facilitate better results and improving quality dance education.

Key Words: Teaching project for inclusive dance; project design, methodology, strategies

Teaching Project for Inclusive Dance

In last decades, the dance has been stereotyped as an art performed by a particular elite of people "perfect bodies, slim, slender and endowed with extensive skills and physical abilities", directed to another particular elite "who understands dance", turning the dance just for a few.

However, the dance meets, among others, an important social function: to be an artistic activity that provides the human power of expression, which satisfies the desire to move, to interact with yourself and with others and to develop a creative activity. The practice of dance should not be segregated or restricted to the practice of just a few, it should not exclude anyone. The dance should seek to grow, expand its borders, integrate, involve the whole community considering all its members, their interests and needs.

The dance and its education in Mexico face several challenges that require new proposals for learning, practice and production of dance, as well as an approach that appeals to the various stakeholders to promote and enable the development of dance act.

Dance teachers, considering their work in the historic moment they live, take on a greater commitment to society by requiring proper training to strengthen their work. Some teachers have little experience with diversity and the unknown scare them, so it is important a guide, a direction of how to include people from different abilities into dance groups, without excluding or segregating anyone.

Art-educative projects require more than a good intention; require a good planning to allow an effective development. The Teaching Project for Inclusive Dance at the National School of Dance in Mexico, considers a proposal in three

phases to contribute future teachers training to improve their understanding of nature of mixed groups, apply the know ledges, solve problems, use the values, understand and appreciate diversity. This paper describes the background, project description and parameters for implementation of this proposal.

Background

The National School of Dance "Nellie and Gloria Campobello", founded in 1932 in Mexico City is a dance teacher training school, an institutional option that meets the needs of society in artistic matters in the country, through dance education that allows a solid technical and pedagogical training within each of the specialties that are offered (folk dance, contemporary dance and Spanish dance) responding to social, artistic and educational expectations inherent in the present moment. (CONACULTA, 2006)

In 1995 starts the curriculum of Professional career in Dance Education and in 2006 begins the Bachelor of Dance Education. These proposals consider a solid pedagogical, psychological, and artistic technique to implement the teaching and learning of dance as well as the systematic analysis of the methods and techniques of dance, its process and outcome.

Concerns prior to introduce the project:

In 2000, after the second generation of graduates, there was a specific problem: Graduates worked as dance teachers giving classes to groups not covered by the curriculum: elderly, abused children, people with limited mobility and preschoolers.

There was carried out a survey (Peñaloza, 2000) to know about the preparation and interests of students to work with "special" groups. It was made an evaluation of the curriculum and a study of available labor camps and preferences of the graduates.

Conclusions of previous study:

From the analysis of the documentation done: review of the curriculum; questionnaire to teachers: focus of their classes and interview the person responsible for educational practices, it was concluded that:

Although the curriculum includes courses within some certain basics about working with people: preschoolers, seniors, abused children and people with physical limitations, neither the curriculum nor the subjects, nor the teachers classes were oriented on this direction, so the students were unprepared to teach these groups.

On the other hand, the field of work for the professional dance educator is limited, so they must be self-employed and or look for new opportunities considering among others the field of special education.

As a result, classes of students focused on “special” populations had a low performance.

Startup Process

In 2003 based on:

- The social need to have inclusive education programs
- The need to expand educational development of dance activities to other populations
- The need for qualified teachers to carry out their professional activity

It was proposed to the Direction to prepare students and graduates interested to work with heterogeneous groups to perform from a practical and appropriate methodology. It was made a review of the work of dance practices with special populations, an analysis of what other professionals had managed to perform with special groups and in January 2004, raised the dance project for mixed-ability groups.

Project Description

Dance Project for mixed-ability groups is a long-term artistic project to promote, disseminate, provide and develop inclusive dance in Mexico by three approaches: Teacher training, practice and production.

The proposal is based on creative dance and improvisation to promote each individual's connection with their body, time and space for creativity and development of individual and collective dance.

The three approaches are the following:

a) Training and updating of dance teachers in creative dance for heterogeneous groups, under slogans of high quality and preparation of instructors. This phase provide a broad range of tools for organizing the movement material, guide the students through their (often first) experience with dance teaching in an informed, confident and well-founded way. The courses are aimed at teachers, students, external lecturers and people with disabilities who are interested in teaching this type of dance.

b) Practice Workshop: open to the public, including people with physical limitations. These classes incorporate people with different levels, needs, ages, looking for a space to enjoy, express and meet. Its aim will be to recruit a large number of students, promote interest and love to dance, to live dance, make it an enjoyable activity with quality, fostering personal development, new insights, encouraging creativity, creation of movement and means to interact with other dancers.

It is also the practical laboratory of the participants of the training course, as classes will be taught by teachers, students, alumni and external professors who took the training course and who are interested to have a practice experiential education in Dance for mixed abilities groups in a controlled environment, supported by other instructors. The students discover a variety of methods of generating and exploring movement material. Various approaches of improvisation are presented at different levels of this workshop.

Students go through several stages: participants (learn by doing), be included, analysis (class reflection), opportunities to experiment, teamwork, support team, teach others, individual teachers

c) Public presentations. Dance is a performing art as such ends or completes the experience when is presented to the public. The presentation of the dance is part of the process. Capturing the attention of both the public and of people interested in dance practice, maintain a relationship with the context to maintain the validity and interest. The goal is to be a channel for the dissemination of inclusive dance, which attracts the public, increase public awareness and enjoyment of creative dance with new approaches considering the inclusion of people with disabilities, seeking the most appropriate ways to present the work and reach the public.

These presentations are given in three formats: open class, didactic function and assembly stage.

The presentations implement the improvisation through movement, gathering people of all diversities.

These presentations are aimed at all audiences, including individuals and institutions interested in knowing the proposal of dance for people with mixed abilities and perhaps is even interested in practicing this type of dance.

Project Aims

- Insist on adequate training of teachers and students
- Keep the link and commitment of the school with the problems and challenges of society
- Consolidate a workplace culture that meets the genuine social interests with high quality education providing a solid support and guidance for teachers

The dance project for mixed-ability groups, is an active project, which has direct application in target populations, and gives future teachers a living experience

to enhance the continuity, consolidation, growth and integrated development of the artistic project.

Putting this project into the social problems of vulnerable groups and their integration alternatives to the rest of society, encourages a discovery and developmental space for the new audience interested in active participation in dance and encourages the performance of future professionals dance with bases in education, knowledge and safety to achieve an artistic work under the premise of personal and professional excellence in each of the activities being carried out.

Dance elements

Laban's ideas are valuable to understand two experiences that emerge when the dance is practiced: the "charm of movement" and the "joy of movement."

According to Laban (1971, cited in Ferreiro 2009) dance, or any artistic expression reaches educational value if it is considered not only from an external perspective, as a movement visible, but from its invisible power. And the invisible power of dance, Laban says, does not lie in the technical domain. The mastery of the great dancers is something as seemingly indescribable, calling it the *charm of the movement* in which to experiment with a wide variety of qualities of movement trigger a multitude of emotions and feelings.

On the other hand, Laban also perceived that the benefits of dance education are not limited to the individual experience, but transcend to experience the pleasure of dancing in a group, experience which he called "joy of movement", a variant of dance that has existed in many forms in the past in many religions. As one of the goals the pleasure of shared movement satisfies a deep need for community. (Bartenieff and Lewis, 1980)

Laban (1989) thought that the individual kinetic possibilities are limitless and that dance education should be directed to develop these opportunities and achieve personal and social harmony. In this project, creative movement

exploration and improvisation are proposed as a way to perceive and understand the elements of dance.

Improvisation is an ongoing process of creation that fosters creativity, helps students move away from standardized movements, promotes new movements, allows variants of movements, explores various forms of symbolic representation through the motion.

As future teachers in inclusive dance, improvisation is vital for teaching proposals: creating search exercises and movement, constant recreation, including a reflective analysis by the students.

Selection and organization of content:

- Ways to move the body
- Ways to use space
- Ways of working in group
- Use of time and energy
- Collective creations

Populations that the project aims

People with disabilities. In this project there is a conducive environment to the use of the body, to explore the possibilities of movement and do it in community, the proposal allows to interact directly with populations from which are normally isolated, finding new friends and developing social skills. Disabled people can also develop in the dance area as participants, performers, support staff and / or teachers.

People without disabilities. Besides the intrinsic benefits of dance practice, inclusive environments promote creativity, the ability to adapt, to innovate, teamwork and a different approach to dance.

Teachers. They learn in active practice to observe, understand, communicate, collaborate, take risks, solve problems creatively

Methodological proposal for the classes:

The proposed methodology for teaching is based on the case method (Mauffette-Leednders, et al., 1997). Where the learning process is composed of three major stages: Individual preparation, Small group work and Large group or class work. The aim is to achieve the best possible results to ensure effective learning.

Classes are proposed in lesson form, each lesson introduces unresolved problems or situations in progress and individual solution, in small groups and large groups with a specific topic in class, solve a practical way through the dance experience.

Although the structure in each class may differ according to the theme to be developed, the class structure is as follows:

- Exercise group integration and concentration;
- Warm up, individual preparation
- Small groups work
- Large Groups work and discussion.
- Final circle, feedback and reflection

With teachers in training a time is devoted to analyze the structure and sequence of the classes and course in general, breakdown of exercises, learning strategies, basic concepts of ethics, potential problems, possible solutions, development of creativity.

Strategies and Considerations at the work with mixed groups

- Observation: Discover the features and capabilities of the particular group
- Confident environment. Maintain a conducive environment to develop the participant's choices, avoiding value judgments and prejudices that inhibit performance.

- Time. Allow time for each group for the generation and completion of their proposal.
- Game Rules: approach to work, suggestions rather than orders
- Motivation
- Box of tools: Flexibility. Offering a wide range of opportunities for various stakeholders, with the ability to adapt quickly and creatively respond to unplanned situations
- Team work: The foundation of this project are the people, there is an interest in people to be involved in all three phases and maintain a culture where all teach, all present and all related to community, where everybody collaborates and learn from each other.
- Importance of the process
- Feedback. The information supports the growth of the project and its participants

Conclusion

Detecting new fields of action for the dance, new audiences and participants is just the beginning, dance must not lose sight of the needs of society and close to the standards of dance for a few. The dance should consider people of all diversities and give them adequate space and quality to practice the dance, incorporating new proposals, new methodologies to provide better results.

Educational art projects arise from the need to address the development of art attending people interested in the approximations of the dance. It is important to recognize as the value of arts education the need to innovate, since the dance can not stay stuck in traditional methods and structures.

A project plan, to help redesign the current instruction can increase access to dance, teaching and raising the quality of it.

Art schools can not bring strong educative programs in isolation. It is important to work to transform the educative model for teachers This project highlights the

importance of not only having teaching courses for mixed groups, but also the need to ensure continuity of relationship to serve vulnerable populations.

Dance teachers need a comprehensive and continuous instruction, in particular those developing with mixed groups.

Learning how to teach is a process, dance teachers need tools and practice to develop with any kind group. It is important an infrastructure to hold an inclusive project where students can be trained having the opportunity to participate with real groups from the different perspectives provided by the program, where they can live the process, understand the procedures, know the implication of a decision, apply the knowledge, have a place for practice, a support team and a feedback.

The Teaching Project for Inclusive Dance has been developed over the last six years in the National School of Dance in Mexico City, under an innovative and integrative model, incorporating new proposals and new methodologies to facilitate better results and improving quality dance education

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