

A Study on the Path Differences between Dance Aesthetic Education and Dance Therapy

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the core differences between dance aesthetic education and dance therapy. The research focuses on a central question: although both are related to dance, what are the fundamental differences in their goals and practical approaches? Through analysis and comparison, this study identifies a clear distinction in their paths. Dance aesthetic education is mainly an "outward" path, emphasizing the shaping of individual body forms, the enhancement of artistic skills and aesthetic abilities through normative physical training and the study of classic works. Its core lies in the social construction of aesthetic values and cultural inheritance. In contrast, dance therapy is an "inward" path. It does not pursue standard and aesthetically pleasing movements but uses improvisational and spontaneous body movements to help individuals explore their inner world and express genuine emotions. Its core is to achieve personalized emotional guidance and psychological integration. Clarifying this "outward" and "inward" distinction is crucial for the professional practice of both. A clear demarcation helps avoid goal confusion in practice and ensures the effective realization of their respective functions. At the same time, understanding their complementarity also provides new ideas for promoting the all-round development of individuals under the concept of "holistic education" in the future.

Keywords

Dance Therapy; Dance Education; Aesthetic Education Mental health

1. Preface

However, beneath the grand spectacle, a fundamental problem has gradually emerged: People often confuse "dance aesthetic education" aimed at cultivating aesthetic sentiments with "dance therapy" focused on mental health. In the current society, with the promotion of "universal aesthetic education" and the enhancement of public awareness of mental health, the value of dance, as an activity that integrates body and mind, is increasingly valued. Whether in schools, communities or private dance institutions, activities using dance as a medium are emerging in abundance. This ambiguity in concepts and the crossing of boundaries may not only lead to deviations in practical directions (for example, imposing strict movement standards on participants seeking emotional release, or replacing necessary artistic norms with unconditional emotional venting) but also hinder the deepening and development of the professionalism of these two fields. However, beneath the grand spectacle, a fundamental problem has gradually emerged: People often confuse "dance aesthetic education" aimed at cultivating aesthetic sentiments with "dance therapy" focused on mental health. This ambiguity in concepts and the

crossing of boundaries may not only lead to deviations in practical directions (for example, imposing strict movement standards on participants seeking emotional release, or replacing necessary artistic norms with unconditional emotional venting) but also hinder the deepening and development of the professionalism of these two fields.

Reviewing the existing research, the academic community has focused on different aspects of dance aesthetic education and dance therapy. The former mainly concentrates on its positive effects on students' aesthetic ability, creativity, and cultural inheritance; the latter focuses on its efficacy in regulating emotions and promoting psychological rehabilitation for specific groups (such as patients with anxiety disorders, special children). However, most of these studies are conducted independently on their respective tracks. Although a few discussions touch upon the relationship between the two, they generally lack a systematic and core-practice-focused comparative perspective. Particularly, there is no clear organization and explanation of the fundamental differences in the specific implementation "paths" of the two.

Therefore, this article aims to clarify this key issue. In this study, "dance aesthetic education" mainly refers

to the process of education carried out through the art of dance, with its core goal being to shape people's aesthetic perception, expression and creative abilities, and to inherit culture. Its disciplinary category should be an interdisciplinary field combining art studies and education studies; while "dance therapy" refers to the conscious use of dance movements to promote the integration of emotions, cognition and the body, in order to achieve the goal of mental health. In this study, "dance aesthetic education" mainly refers to the process of education carried out through the a Its disciplinary category should be an interdisciplinary field combining art studies and psychology.rt of dance, and its core objective is to shape people's aesthetic perception, expression and creative abilities, as well as to inherit culture. The discipline category it belongs to should be an interdisciplinary field of art studies and education; while "dance therapy" refers to the conscious use of dance movements to promote the integration of emotions, cognition and the body, in order to achieve the goal of mental health. The "path" discussed in this article refers to the specific practical orientation, methods and processes relied upon to achieve the above goals.

Its discipline category should be an interdisciplinary field of art studies and psychology.To this end, the author proposes an analytical framework of "outward" aesthetic construction and "inward" emotional guidance to examine and compare the fundamental differences between dance aesthetic education and dance therapy. The "path" discussed in this article refers to the specific practical orientation, methods and processes relied upon to achieve the above goals.

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To this end, the author proposes an analytical framework of "outward" aesthetic construction and "inward" emotional guidance to examine and compare the fundamental differences between dance aesthetic education and dance therapy. The research will systematically analyze the different paths of the two in terms of target orientation, practical methods and evaluation standards, striving to delineate a clear theoretical and practical boundary. This work not only helps practitioners clarify their own positions in practice and avoid functional confusion, but also provides a solid theoretical foundation for the professional development and positive collaboration of the two fields in the future, ultimately enabling the social function of dance to more accurately and effectively serve the all-round development of people in the fields of education and health. This work not only helps practitioners clarify their own positioning in practice and avoid functional confusion, but also provides a solid theoretical foundation for the professional development and positive collaboration of the two fields in the future, ultimately enabling the social function of dance to more accurately and effectively serve the all-round development of people in the fields of education and health.

2. "Outward" Path: The Aesthetic Construction of Dance Education

The fundamental mission of dance education lies in guiding learners to face the vast external cultural and aesthetic world. Through systematic physical practice, it aims to achieve the aesthetic shaping of individual socialization. This "outward" path is designed to integrate individuals into a shared and universally standard aesthetic community. The entire process revolves around the cognition, imitation, internalization, and presentation of beauty.

2.1 It is dedicated to the inheritance of national culture.Objective: The inheritance of social culture and the shaping of individual aesthetic ability

The primary goal of dance aesthetic education is highly

outward-oriented.

Firstly, it is dedicated to the inheritance of national culture. Dance is regarded as the "living" cultural genes of a nation or a certain era, carrying specific emotional patterns, etiquette customs and philosophical thoughts. Dance is regarded as the "living" cultural genes of a nation or a certain era, carrying specific emotional patterns, etiquette norms and philosophical thoughts. For instance, the body language in Chinese classical dance, derived from opera, is not merely superficial dance movements, but also an understanding and transmission of the traditional Chinese aesthetic spirit such as "harmony and balance" and "body and spirit in harmony"; while the "opening, straightening and standing upright" required in Western ballet inevitably comes into contact with the body etiquette and aesthetic ideals of European court culture behind it. For instance, the body language in Chinese classical dance, derived from opera, is not merely superficial dance movements, but also an understanding and transmission of the traditional Chinese aesthetic spirit such as "harmony and balance" and "body and spirit in harmony"; while the "opening, straightening and standing upright" required in Western ballet inevitably comes into contact with the body etiquette and aesthetic ideals of European court culture behind it.

Secondly, it focuses on the systematic shaping of individual aesthetic ability. Secondly, it focuses on the systematic shaping of individual aesthetic ability. This includes cultivating learners' acute perception of rhythm, composition, lines and strength, as well as the ability to use the body for creative expression. This includes cultivating learners' acute perception of rhythm, composition, lines and strength, as well as the ability to use the body for creative expression. Ultimately, dance aesthetic education aims to cultivate social individuals who can appreciate beauty, judge beauty and create beauty, and possess good artistic literacy. Ultimately, dance aesthetic education aims to cultivate social individuals who can appreciate beauty, judge beauty and create beauty, and possess good artistic literacy.

2.2 Core of Practice: Physical Training, Skill Acquisition, and Imitation and Reproduction of Classic Works

To achieve the aforementioned goals, the core of the practice in dance aesthetic education is based on the standardization of physical training and the study of classic aesthetic paradigms. To achieve the aforementioned goals, the core of the practice in dance aesthetic education is based on the standardization of physical training and the study of classic aesthetic paradigms. "Physical training" is the foundation, which requires learners' bodies to conform to specific aesthetic standards: the "open, straight, and upright" posture in ballet and the "twist, tilt, roundness, and

sequence of beginning, continuation, transition, and conclusion" in Chinese classical dance. This process itself is an implantation of an aesthetic concept. "Physical training" is the foundation, which requires learners' bodies to conform to specific aesthetic standards: the "open, straight, and upright" posture in ballet and the "twist, tilt, roundness, and sequence of beginning, continuation, transition, and conclusion" in Chinese classical dance. Following this is the systematic "skill acquisition", ranging from the most basic hand positions and foot positions to complex jumps and rotations, which are the "finishing touches. This process itself is an implantation of an aesthetic concept." for more advanced aesthetic expressions. Ultimately, all of this serves the imitation and reproduction of "classic works".

Following this is the systematic "skill acquisition", ranging from the most basic hand positions and foot positions to complex jumps and rotations, which are the "finishing touches" for more advanced aesthetic expressions. Students repeatedly rehearse dance segments from classic plays, not only replicating the action sequences, but also personally practicing and experiencing what constitutes "classic" and "mast Ultimately, all of this serves the imitation and reproduction of "classic works".

Learning students repeatedly rehearse the dance segments in classic plays. This is not merely about replicating the action sequences, but also about personally experiencing and understanding the recognized standards of what constitutes "classics" and "masterpieces", thereby gradually internalizing the external aesthetic models into their own physical memory and artistic judgment.

2.3 Teacher-student relationship: The teaching model of demonstration - imitation, guidance - correction-Teacher-student relationship

In the model of dance where the learning and inheritance of expression through the body is the core, the teacher-student relationship presents a typical dynamic cycle of "modeling - imitation, guidance - correction". In the model of dance where the learning and inheritance of expression through the body is the core, the teacher-student relationship presents a typical dynamic cycle of "demonstration - imitation, guidance - correction". The teacher assumes the roles of "role model" and "authority", and their body serves as a vivid example of aesthetic standards. The teacher assumes the roles of "model" and "authority", and their body serves as a vivid example of aesthetic standards. Through the standards and precise movements they have learned from their predecessors, they provide a clear and intuitive imitation object for the students. Through the standards and precise movements they have learned from predecessors, they provide a clear and intuitive imitation object for the students. During

the imitation process, the teacher continuously observes, prompts and corrects. This relationship ensures that aesthetic standards and skills can be accurately and efficiently transmitted. This relationship ensures that aesthetic standards and skills can be accurately and efficiently transmitted. Its essence is to pass on the cultural and aesthetic capital that has been tested by history through physical practice, from one generation to the next. Its essence is to pass on the cultural and aesthetic capital that has been tested by history through physical practice, from one generation to the next.

2.4 Evaluation criteria: Formality of the structure, artistic expression ability, and the completion degree of the work-Evaluation criteria.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of dance aesthetic education is also closely centered around its outwardly constructed goals, forming a set of observable and measurable indicator systems. The normativity of form is the primary criterion, that is, the accuracy of the movements and the quality of the skill execution whether they conform to the established aesthetic norms. The expressiveness of art is a higher-level requirement, which examines whether learners can go beyond mechanical imitation and endow the movements with appropriate emotions and styles, demonstrating their understanding of the connotation of the work. Ultimately, all of this is condensed in the completion of the work - whether it is a classroom presentation or a complete stage play, the overall fluency, collaboration, and artistic appeal are the ultimate benchmarks for measuring the aesthetic construction results. This evaluation system jointly ensures the quality and credibility of dance aesthetic education as a standardized educational activity.

3. "Inward" path: Emotional counseling through dance therapy

Unlike the "outward" construction path of dance aesthetic education, the journey of dance therapy is an inward exploration. It does not aim to shape individuals into dancers who conform to external aesthetic standards, but rather guides them to return to themselves, listen to the inner voice of the body, use the body as a bridge to the inner world, and ultimately achieve the goals of emotional counseling and psychological integration.

3.1 Objective: To promote the integration of individual psychology and enhance physical and mental health.

The fundamental goal of dance therapy is to promote an individual's psychological well-being and inner harmony. The fundamental goal of dance therapy is to promote an individual's psychological well-being

and inner harmony. It is based on the principle of "the unity of body and mind", believing that the body's posture, movement patterns, and tension states are closely related to an individual's emotional state, psychological trauma, and personality structure. It is based on the principle of "the unity of body and mind", believing that the body's posture, movement patterns, and tension states are closely related to an individual's emotional state, psychological trauma, and personality structure. Therefore, its objective is not performance or competition, but to release repressed emotions, handle unresolved psychological conflicts, and enhance an individual's self-identity and psychological resilience through the action process. Therefore, its objective is not performance or competition, but to release repressed emotions, handle unresolved psychological conflicts, and enhance an individual's self-identity and psychological resilience through the action process. For example, it can help people with long-term anxiety build inner security through rhythmic and stable movements; or help an individual who has experienced loss express anger and sadness through powerful movements, thereby completing the process of healing the soul. For example, it can help people with long-term anxiety build inner security through rhythmic and stable movements; or help an individual who has experienced loss express anger and sadness through powerful movements, thereby completing the process of healing the soul. Its ultimate aim is the reconstruction of the individual's inner world order and the improvement of their health status. Its ultimate aim is the reconstruction of the individual's inner world order and the improvement of their health status.

3.2 Core practice: Body awareness, improvisational expression, and exploration of personal meaning

The practice of dance therapy does not rely on fixed action routines but unfolds around a series of inward processes. The starting point is "body awareness", and art therapy guides the client to feel the present physical sensations, such as tense areas, the depth of breathing, and the distribution of weight, thereby pulling the attention away from chaotic thoughts back to the present physical experience, which is the first step in connecting with the inner self. On this basis, "improvisational expression" becomes the core method. The client is encouraged to follow the inner impulse and allow the body to move freely and spontaneously, regardless of whether the movement is "beautiful" or "ugly", smooth or stuck, all are regarded as valuable expressions. This process is not for performance but for exploring the "personal meaning" behind the movements - a curled-up movement may relate to helplessness, an upward stretching movement may symbolize a desire. Here, the contraction-expansion dance technique of modern dancer Martha Graham can be drawn upon, using breathing to express the tension

and relaxation of the body. In dance therapy, Western countries have been at the forefront of the world. After consulting the official website of the American Dance Therapy Association, it was learned that in the certification system of the American Dance Therapy Association, therapists assist clients in body awareness and emotional expression by guiding them to perform professional techniques such as "mirroring" and "Laban Movement Analysis".

3.3 Therapist-client relationship: Witnessing-and-encouraging, guiding-and-supporting therapeutic alliance-Therapist-client relationship:

In this client-centered model, the therapist's role is not that of a teacher or a doctor, but rather a compassionate "witness", a safe "companion", and a professional "guide". In this client-centered model, the therapist's role is not that of a teacher or a doctor, but rather a compassionate "witness", a secure "companion", and a professional "guide". They do not demonstrate "correct" actions; instead, through total attention and acceptance, they create an absolutely safe and non-judgmental space for the client. They do not demonstrate "correct" actions, but through total attention and acceptance, they create an absolutely safe and non-judgmental space for the client. The relationship is more like an "alliance", where the therapist uses language or actions to guide at appropriate times, but the choice always remains with the client. The relationship is more like an "alliance", where the therapist uses language or actions to guide at appropriate times, but the choice always remains with the client. This "support without dominance, guidance without intervention" relationship aims to empower the client and help them build a sense of control and trust in their own bodies and emotions.

3.4 Evaluation criteria: Participants' subjective

experience, emotional changes, and behavioral improvement

The assessment of the therapeutic effect of dance completely discards the standard, external and uniform aesthetic criteria in the traditional dance aesthetic education, and instead focuses on the positive transformation of the participants' inner world. The primary evaluation basis is "the subjective experience of the participants", whether they feel reduced stress, more pleasant emotions, and clearer self-awareness. Secondly, the observable "emotional changes" are considered. Finally, the efficacy is reflected in "behavior improvement". These internal, individualized growth indicators and mental health levels are the true standards for measuring the success of dance therapy, rather than being based on an absolute and uniform value scale.

4. The crossroads of paths: Core differences and mutual learning possibilities

By separately analyzing the art of dance education and dance therapy, we can clearly see two completely different paths. When they converge at the "crossroads" in practice, it is necessary to have clear path markers to avoid getting lost, and there is also the possibility of mutual learning and enriching each other.

4.1.Core Difference Comparison-Core Difference Comparison

In order to present the fundamental differences between the two more intuitively, the author has systematically summarized them from the following four aspects: In order to present the fundamental differences between the two more intuitively, the author has systematically summarized them from the following four aspects:

Comparison dimension	Dance aesthetic education	Dance Therapy
The foundation of philosophy	Education, aesthetics; pursuit of universal aesthetic ideals and cultural inheritance.	Psychology, medicine; focusing on the integration of the individual's body and mind and mental health.
Function positioning	Education and Development: Targeting the general public, enhancing artistic literacy and aesthetic ability.	Treatment and Rehabilitation: Tailored to specific needs (such as emotional distress, trauma), aimed at facilitating psychological recovery.
Subjectivity	Teacher-led: As the holders of knowledge and standards, teachers guide students towards the exemplary model.	Client-centered approach: The client, as an expert of their own experiences, is assisted by the therapist in exploring these experiences.
Methodology	Standardized teaching: Through imitation, discipline and repeated practice, one acquires the prescribed skills and works.	Guidance: Through awareness, improvisation and symbolism, uncover the personalized meaning and narrative of actions.

4.2 The necessity of analysis

Clearly, these differences are not a pedantic exercise in concepts, but rather an urgent requirement for standardizing practices and ensuring effectiveness. Clear boundaries represent professionalism and a responsible attitude towards participants.

If the boundaries are unclear, it will lead to two risks: First, "Aesthetic therapy", where dance teachers, without the necessary psychological qualifications and ethical training, rashly deal with students' deep psychological traumas. This is not only ineffective but may even cause secondary harm. For example, asking a student who is self-conscious due to low self-esteem to perform a "confident" act will instead exacerbate their psychological pressure. Second, "Healing education tendency", where therapists, like teachers, correct the "inappropriate" movements of the clients, which will completely destroy the necessary safe and accepting atmosphere of the therapy, making the clients feel judged and thus closing the channel for expression.

The official website of the American Dance Therapy Association clearly emphasizes in its ethical code that therapists need to clearly define their professional scope, avoid confusion with the role of teachers, and ensure that the rights of the clients are not violated.

4.3 The possibility of mutual learning

However, emphasizing differentiation does not mean that the two will completely avoid contact with each other. On the premise of maintaining their respective core positions, they can mutually inspire each other in terms of methodology and form beneficial supplements.

Dance aesthetic education can draw on the respect for "individual differences" shown by therapy. In group teaching, integrating the guidance of body awareness, acknowledging and accepting students' different physical conditions and personality traits, reducing "one-size-fits-all" harsh criticism, can inject more humanistic care into aesthetic education, making aesthetic education truly become a process that nourishes the soul rather than creating anxiety.

Dance therapy can draw on the attention to "action quality" shown by aesthetic education. Under the premise of ensuring emotional expression, appropriately introducing attention to the clarity of movements, breathing coordination and power efficiency can help the client express more effectively and profoundly through the body, thereby enhancing the depth and efficacy of the therapy process. This borrowing is not about pursuing "beauty", but for "usefulness" - making the body a more precise and powerful expression tool.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

This article systematically analyzes the fundamental

differences between dance aesthetic education and dance therapy in terms of target orientation, practical core, subject relationship, and evaluation criteria, revealing the "double-edged sword" characteristic of dance as a physical and mental practice: it can serve the inheritance of social culture and the improvement of individual qualities through "outward" aesthetic construction, and also promote mental health and individual integration through "inward" emotional guidance.

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After the author's study and research, it has been found that dance aesthetic education, through its standardized training, the inheritance of classic works, and the pursuit of social aesthetic consensus, has established an outward-oriented path. Dance therapy, on the other hand, creates an inward-oriented path through body awareness, improvisational expression, and the exploration of personal meaning. There are essential differences in philosophical foundation, functional positioning, and methodology between the two. Clarifying this difference is not only necessary for academic clarification, but also an urgent requirement for standardizing practice and ensuring the efficacy and ethical boundaries of each. Clarifying this difference is not only an academic clarification need, but also an urgent requirement for standardizing practice and ensuring the efficacy and ethical boundaries of each. For example, if the principle of "no judgment on the beauty or ugliness of movements" in dance therapy is mechanically applied to dance aesthetic education classes, or the standardization assessment of aesthetic education is imposed on the therapy process, it will lead to the failure of the practical goal and even cause potential harm to the participants.

For example, if the principle of "no judgment on the beauty or ugliness of movements" in dance therapy is mechanically applied to dance aesthetic education classes, or the standardization assessment of aesthetic education is imposed on the therapy process, it will lead to the failure of the practical goal and even cause potential harm to the participants.

Therefore, the author advocates a "clear boundaries for better collaboration" development view. Therefore, the author advocates a "clear boundaries for better collaboration" development view. First, in practice, the two should be clearly distinguished and each

should maintain its position. Dance teachers and dance therapists need to clear First, in practice, the two should be clearly distinguished and each should maintain its position. Define their professional roles and responsibility boundaries to avoid confusion of functions. Dance teachers and dance therapists need to clearly define their professional roles and responsibility boundaries to avoid confusion of functions. For example, while Beijing Dance Academy is promoting the popularization of "dance + aesthetic education", its "dance + therapy" practice enters specific scenarios such as hospitals, which is a manifestation of professional division.

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Second, at the methodological level, the two can mutually nourish while maintaining their core independence. Second, at the methodological level, the two can mutually nourish while maintaining their core independence. Dance aesthetic education can draw on therapy's respect for individual differences, integrate more care for physical sensations and emotional states in group teaching, thereby reducing the anxiety that standardized training may bring, and allow aesthetic education to truly nourish the soul. Dance aesthetic education can draw on therapy's respect for individual differences, integrate more care for physical sensations and emotional states in group teaching, thereby reducing the anxiety that standardized training may bring, and truly nourish the soul through aesthetic education. Dance therapy can draw on aesthetic education's attention to movement quality, promote emotional expression while appropriately enhancing the clarity and physical efficacy of movements, making the expression of "body language" more precise and powerful.

Dance therapy can draw on aesthetic education's attention to movement quality, promote emotional expression while appropriately enhancing the clarity and physical efficacy of movements, making the expression of "body language" more precise and powerful.

Ultimately, this "differential" and "mutual learning" coexistence pattern aims to jointly serve the grand goal of "holistic education" - allowing dance art to not only shape our aesthetic eyes to perceive the outside

world, but also settle our hearts to care for the inner self, contributing its unique and complete value to promoting the all-round development of individuals.

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