The Transformations of College Dance Students
In Dance Teaching Practicum

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Introduction

Since the announcement of the Grade 1-9 Curriculum in Taiwan in 1999, Dance, which became part of the new area of the Arts and Humanities, has formally entered the school curriculum. Private dance education institutes have also encountered the necessity of re-orientation due to fewer newborns and the global economic crisis (Chang, 2009). Whether in school or in private institutes, the contents and quality of dance education in Taiwan need to be further developed in both depth and breadth (Change, 2007), which suggested a higher accountability for dance teachers. However, related studies on dance teacher education are rare. Facing the demands of a quality teacher education program in dance, the researchers of the present study have been endeavoring to develop a supervised internship mechanism that is incorporated in a dance teaching course required as part of the graduation qualification for college dance students at Taipei Physical Education College (TPEC) in Taiwan. This paper will present the process and findings of the initial stage of a bigger research project.

Rationale: A Message that Never Went Through

One of the researchers of the present study, Yi-jung Wu, has been teaching the course “Dance Teaching Practicum” since she became a full-time faculty member of TPEC in 2007. In the past three years, she tailored the course objectives, contents, and teaching strategies every year to meet students’ needs. In addition, she developed cooperative relationships with schools nearby by sending her students to teach classes of creative dance or stylized dance from pre-school to college.
Although most students gained benefits from the opportunity of real-life teaching internships, she found difficulties that could hardly be overcome, particularly in students’ mis-conceptions about teaching creative dance. Despite her detailed instructions, it seemed to them that teaching creative dance meant to ask learners to ‘do whatever you want to the music.’

It seemed that some important information had not been transmitted to students. It made Yi-jung wonder what caused the barrier between her students and herself. By systematically documenting the learning process of 41 TPEC junior dance students during dance teaching internships in fall 2009, she tried to reveal how the meanings of dance education changed for the interns during the process. In particular, she looked for:

1. the students’ beliefs of dance education that were expressed before, during, and after internships; and
2. the pitfalls the students encountered and resolved when teaching creative dance during the internship.

Although it is inappropriate to generalize the research findings that will be discussed below, as the contexts and students’ learning styles vary in different educational situations, it is hoped that the findings may present useful hints for teachers or institutions that conduct dance teacher training programs.

The Application of Internship in Dance Teacher Education

Before formally discussing the research findings, it is helpful to know the significances of internship experiences for prospective teachers that have been discussed in literature, and what information is accessible to dance teachers who are willing to enhance their dance teaching knowledge or skills.

The Role of Internship in Education

As jobs become more difficult to find, having the knowledge and ability that can directly apply to a real work situation becomes crucial for
college graduates, and internships are a means that make the transition from academia to vocation smooth (Donofrio, 2002). Heffernan (2001) defines an internship as an experience that “focuses on providing students with hands-on experience to enhance learning relevant to an area of study” (p. 10). Neuman (1999) emphasizes the functions of internships, considering it an opportunity in which students are arranged into temporary work situations to get real work experience in their areas of interest. In terms of teaching internships, student benefits include opportunities “to put course content (teaching methods and techniques) into practice within authentic teaching situations;” to “prepare authentic lessons that provide choices for the diverse students’ learning styles, strategies and interests;” and to “develop a sense of responsibility to their community” (Gascoigne Lally, 2001, p. 58). Internships provided a more holistic learning experience in the aspects of cognition, emotion, skill, society, and ethnicity.

For student interns with an education background, internship sites are usually pre-university schools in the community. Although intern teachers may have insufficient teaching experiences, Gascoigne Lally (2001) found that school students, educational institutions, and the larger community still benefit from the engagement of prospective professional educators. To support student interns while protecting internship providers, an effective supporting system, including training, counseling service, supervision, feedback, and self-reflection, should be arranged before, during, and after internships. This is the long-term goal that the researchers of the present study have been trying to achieve: developing an internship platform that can fully support prospective dance teachers.

**Preparation for Dance Teachers To-be**

Dance as part of education has had a long tradition in both Western and Eastern worlds (Wang, 1991; Kraus, Hilsendager, & Dixon, 1997). In modern time, the importance of dance in education was stressed by dance education pioneers such as Margaret H'Doubler, Gertrude Colby, Bird Larson, and Rudolf von Laban (Kraus, Hilsendager, & Dixon, 1997; Chang, 2007), who argued for dance education for the whole person and brought dance into formal education. To them, dance is an essential
learning experience that helps everyone understand him-/herself; obtain the union of body and mind; and enhance the harmony of self, the others, and the environment (Chang, 2007). Based on the foundation of the pioneers’ effort, more and more dance educators continued promoting educational dance for all children. Terms such as creative dance, movement education, creative movement activities, etc. are used in an interchangeable way to represent an explorative approach in which students communicate their inner-self through movement under the teacher’s guidance (Joyce, 1994).

There have been many publications about how to teach creative dance appearing in both English and Chinese worlds, such as Cone and Cone (2005), Lloyd (1998), Overby, Post, and Newman (2005), Willis (2004), National Taiwan Arts Education Institute (1998a; 1998b; 1998c), Liu (2000), Chang (2007), etc. Their contents are generally about the importance of dance education; the definition of creative dance; the objectives, movement elements, related educational theories, developmental patterns, principles of dance curriculum design; the structure of a dance lesson; suggestions on creative dance activities; teaching tips; and recommendations for music, storybooks, and extensive readings. The contents above had been introduced to the research participants of this case study before their internships.

The Case Studied: ‘Dance Teaching Practicum’

As qualitative research methodologists, many scholars acknowledge the value of Case Study for questioning and exploration (Pan, 2003). Thus, the present study adopted Case Study as a research method to conduct a microscopic investigation of student interns’ learning processes.

Research Participants and Contexts

The research participants were 41 junior students from TPEC Department of Dance. Before entering TPEC, most of them had gone through the Dance Talented Program² for 7–10 years, receiving the training of stylized dance as well as improvisation and creation. Before the internship, about half of them had not had dance teaching
experiences at all. Only two students had taught dance for more than two years (See Table 1 below for their basic information).

Table 1. Basic Information and Background of Research Participants (Unit: person; N = 41)

| Previous Education       | Dance Talented Class (Grade 4~12): 35 |
|                         | Regular program: Before college: 4 |
|                         | Before high school: 2 |
| Dance Major             | Chinese Dance: 14       |
|                         | Ballet: 11             |
|                         | Modern Dance: 16       |
| Dance Teaching Experience| Yes: 13 -- Over two years: 2 |
|                         | Less than two years: 11 |
|                         | No: 23                |
|                         | No response: 5        |
| Classes Taught          | Ballet, modern dance, Chinese Dance, yoga, street dance, and gymnastics |
| Teaching Contexts       | Mostly private dance studios |

In Fall 2009, the students registered for the required course ‘Dance Teaching Practicum’ that was instructed by Yi-jung Wu and assisted by Yu-ting Huang. All the students signed the consent form, which acknowledged both researchers’ right to collect information and analyze their writings and the video-recordings that had been produced for this course. The researchers assured them the protection of privacy (i.e., the use of pseudo names in the formal paper) and their right to withdraw without any negative consequences.

Before taking this course, all the students had gained the theoretical foundation of dance education by taking another required course, ‘Dance Education in School’, in Spring 2009. Their mid-term writings for this course were also included in the present research to understand what beliefs and knowledge they had carried into their internships.

‘Dance Teaching Practicum’ required four-hours of course work every week. Under Yi-jung’s guidance, the 41 research participants formed 12 co-teaching groups, in which the group members had to design and co-teach three creative dance lessons in an elementary school and a junior high school, respectively, in six weeks. After the completion of the six-week internships, all the research participants returned to TPEC to present their self-assessments of internship experiences (See Table 2

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for the course’s weekly learning themes).

In terms of the research sites, before the internship it was the TPEC classroom and dance studio where the theoretical introduction, peer review, and class discussion took place and students’ performances were observed. During the internships, the research sites shifted to an elementary school and two junior high schools providing internship opportunities.

The students designed their own creative dance lessons depending on each internship school’s situation. For the elementary school, the students designed lessons that provided the explorative experience of basic movement elements, including body, space, time, effort, etc. The learning themes were based on the interests of young students, such as animals, rhythmic games, movement games, etc. For Junior High School A, in which the host teacher was a performing arts teacher, the students were asked to lead the experiential classes about creative variations of *Four Little Swans* after the introductory part of the history of Western theatrical dance. The host teacher of School B was a visual art teacher. She allowed the student interns to lead the experiential classes after her introduction to Surrealism.

Table 2. The Learning Themes of ‘Dance Teaching Practicum,’ Fall 2009

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Learning Theme</th>
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<th>Learning Theme</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Creative dance lesson plan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dance teaching internship: Lesson 1, elementary school</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Educational psychology: Theories of Physical, cognitive, &amp; Ethical Development</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dance teaching internship: Lesson 2, elementary school</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conceptual dance teaching method</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dance teaching internship: Lesson 3, elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Designing school lesson plan integrated with creative dance</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dance teaching internship: Lesson 1, junior high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Co-teaching groups 1-3 (Peer review)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Dance teaching internship: Lesson 2, junior high school</td>
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Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative data were collected mainly during the course, “Dance Teaching Practicum,” supplemented by the research participants’ writings and group interviews collected before and after the course. To capture “descriptive realism” (Denzin, 2001) of the internships, the researchers collected data from diverse sources (See Table 3).

Table 3. The Types and Sources of Data

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<th>Types of Data</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic Data</td>
<td>Video-recordings of dance teaching internships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students’ Opinions</td>
<td>Mid-term/final papers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dance lesson plans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teaching logs</td>
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<td>Peer evaluations</td>
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<td>Self-assessment</td>
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<td>Questionnaire</td>
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<td>Informal conversations</td>
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<td>Teacher’s opinions</td>
<td>Lesson plans, handouts, slides</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reflective journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Researchers’/classroom teachers’ opinions</td>
<td>Observation sheets</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussions &amp; conversations</td>
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In terms of data analysis, this study adopted the postpositivist paradigm of reflective practice research, which means no particular theoretical framework predetermines criteria for data analysis (Green & Stinson, 1999). The researchers developed a coding system based on the
“selective reading approach” (van Manen, 1990, p. 93), selecting and highlighting essential themes or key events out of the complex phenomena that were represented in the data. To ensure the reliability of research findings, the researchers acknowledged the “crystallization” (Richardson, 2000) of multiple realities that were reflected in the diverse sources of data, endeavoring to look for the meanings embedded in the rich phenomena of dance teaching internships.

Students’ Changes during Internships

By analyzing the data, the researchers found the following changes in terms of students’ meanings of dance education throughout the internship experience.

Expanding the Views of Dance Education

Before the internships, most of the students considered dance education more in the professional scope with an enhancing awareness of dance education for the general population. Taking their most memorable teachers as role models, which was Yi-jung’s strategy of encouraging the student interns to become aware of a teacher’s beliefs of dance education, some students asserted that a good dance teacher must be full of patience and love, being able to take care of every student; while others believed that high discipline was beneficial for dance students to really learn something. For instance, Shin wrote, “My belief in dance education is that I should give my students a solid basic training. It’s like one of my high school teachers. Although she was very tough, I feel it’s the way for students to really learn something.” Many students believed that a dance teacher should teach not only dance technique but also proper personality traits, interpersonal relationships, or views of life. Lacking practical teaching experience, most of the students expressed their beliefs in dance education from a more conceptual perspective.

After the internships, most of the students gained a wider view in terms of their beliefs in dance education. Their views also turned from conceptual to concrete perspectives. Instead of words on pages, the theories of dance education for them turned into real-life experiences. In
an after-internship questionnaire, for example, Yang wrote,

After internship, I realized dance education is not only technique training or movement mimicking. It requires students to think. Dance education is very broad. Dance teachers have to design curriculum, know how to interact with students, and understand what students are thinking.

**Understanding Young Learners Better**

Before the internships, most of the student interns had realized that they were unclear about their students’ abilities and developmental stages. Therefore, some of them felt very nervous when first encountering the learners, as Min acclaimed, “I don’t know what to say so that they can understand.” After teaching in an elementary school, however, their teaching logs often expressed surprise as shown in Yu’s writing: “At the beginning I was worried that the kids might have been too shy to express themselves. But I was surprised that everybody spoke up.” These expressions echoed Fraser’s (1991) analysis regarding an inexperienced dance teacher’s lack of understanding about the meanings of dance to children.

Based on Yi-jung’s observations, the theories of educational development had been one of the most difficult parts for college dance students to comprehend before their internships. After encountering real children through the mechanism of internship, however, the student interns seemed to begin understanding the meanings embedded in the theories. When looking back, some recalled their students’ wild laughter, and both intern teachers and students enjoyed the learning process that was full of creativity.

**Redefining the Role of Dance Educator**

Before the internships, the student interns had high expectations and even demands for dance teachers in terms of personality, e.g., patience and love. After the internships, however, the student interns realized that, in addition to personality, a dance teacher needed to be equipped with knowledge of education, professional abilities (e.g., classroom management skills, problem-solving abilities, etc.), and educational
beliefs. In her teaching log, Yue teased about the poor classroom management skills of her group by saying, “After our first lesson, I just have to say that being an elementary school teacher is really not easy. We had to yield for the entire class and felt almost dying afterwards. What happened?” Internships made the student interns see the uneasy parts to being a dance teacher and, thus, they learned to respect the profession.

**Student Interns’ Pitfalls**

**Pitfalls due to the External Reasons**

A particular difficulty occurred when Junior High School B required a final showing of the school’s visual art curriculum after the three-week dance classes. The host teacher’s classes were brought into the showing, which was not about surrealism at all to begin with. Having gone through a long process of lesson plan revision, the student interns had to adapt their lesson plans to fit into the showing. It seemed that the school took advantage of the teaching interns and treated them as rehearsal assistants. Xiang complained,

In fact, we were really helpless. The process of revising our lesson plans was like endless. We not only discussed with Yi-jung but also had our group meetings…. But at the end all the lesson plans became useless. I felt it was just wasting of time.

Having students without dance backgrounds perform after three classes placed great pressure on both young learners and student interns. As a result, the classroom teacher became too anxious about the showing and thus over-interrupted the student interns’ teaching. As Ping reflected after her teaching,

The showing is coming up next week. The teacher interrupted our teaching very much because she hoped that we could finish our teaching and leave more time for rehearsal. This made me feel no good because our teaching was often interrupted. I even don’t know who’s the teacher.

Not authorized to have enough power to execute classroom
management, the student interns could not win respect from the young learners. As Fang wrote, “When students wouldn’t move, what could we do? To them, we are just intern teachers. We will see them only once or twice. They don’t care what we want them to do.” In addition, the insufficient understanding of creative dance made the classroom teacher look forward to and even demand constant physical demonstration of the student interns, which to the student interns was contradictory to the guiding principles of creative dance. As Feng questioned,

The classroom teacher wanted us to demonstrate more movements for students to mimic. However, what we were teaching was creative dance. The basic concept is guiding and exploration. We should allow children to create freely. These two kinds of method to me are totally different.

The appropriateness of the creative dance teachers’ physical demonstration had been a contradictory issue debated among scholars (Wu, 2005). Although Yi-jung never restricted the student interns’ bodily participation in teaching, she asserted that the function of the teacher’s movement was guiding rather than demonstrating. However, it was too easy for the student interns, who had been silent dancers since childhood, to lead the class by physical demonstration. Their highly polished movement often represented the model to mimic to non-dancers. Internship provided them a challenge to use an unfamiliar way of expression, i.e., speaking. Nevertheless, the classroom teacher’s request for physical demonstration could push the student interns back to the original point.

Pitfalls due to the Internal Reasons

In addition to insufficient oral expression, the student interns also encountered the following pitfalls due to their professional dance background:

1. Sitting and Waiting for learners to enter the dance studio instead of coming up to greet and orient them;
2. Not knowing what to say or do (e.g., assigning spatial formations, initiating learning motivation, setting up class rules, etc.) to prepare
learners for the class;
3. Not knowing how to perform classroom management skills;
4. Not actually seeing the learners’ performance.

In terms of guiding strategies and classroom management skills, Yi-jung had provided the student interns theories and practical strategies in detail before the internship. However, they seemed to have difficulties in fully applying the theories to practice. Not until a group interview that was conducted after the internship, did the researchers realize a strong connection between the student interns’ educational experiences and their teaching. According to the student interns, the learning experiences that were provided by their high school teachers of improvisation and creation could be categorized into three types:

1. Heavily emphasizing the exploration of movement elements;
2. Playing music and asking students to perform whatever they liked;
3. Telling stories and asking students to dance the stories.

Except for the first element above, numbers two and three lack clear steps of guidance. The researchers realized that most of the student interns had repeated their teachers’ teaching styles, disregarding theories and strategies introduced by Yi-jung. For instance, students of Group 3 began their lesson plan by writing, “By Q&A, let students understand the relationships between wave size and speed. Teachers demonstrate first. Then call three students to express quick, medium, and slow waves with their bodies.” It was not articulated how they would guide learners through Q&A, and how they would provide further guidance after learners’ initial improvisation.

The researchers began realizing that the student interns’ professional dance background might be the main source for all the pitfalls as mentioned above. Their professional dance training had made them embody a particular set of behaviors, life styles, and learning habits that distinguished them from people without dance background. Therefore, they knew from the bottom of their hearts where to stand and what to do after entering the dance studio, were ready to dance as the class began, were fully focused on what the teacher said in class, and took care of
themselves in order to compete with the others. When shifting to the role of teacher, of course, most of them did not think about the necessity of orienting learners, initiating learning motivations, executing classroom management strategies, and providing both oral and physical guidance, which were crucial for students with few dance learning experiences to learn.

The student interns’ professional dance background also prohibited them from really understanding learners’ needs and interests, which was the main reason for their nervousness and frustration when facing their students. Most of the student interns realized they had to do a lot of preparation work to make their lesson plans better serve the learners. As Jing wrote:

The students we were facing had no professional dance training. So we spent a lot of time on planning, trying to understand students’ ages, past dancing experience, and the songs they had learned. We tried to communicate with the classroom teacher.

**Conclusions and Suggestions**

This case study is about the change of college dance students’ understandings and the pitfalls that they encountered in terms of creative dance teaching in internship situations. It was found that the research participants, 41 junior students from the Department of Dance at TPEC in Taiwan, had widened their views of dance education and understood the development of young learners better, shifting from the focus of dance technique training and individual care to the acknowledgement of dance education as a comprehensive discipline. Throughout the process of theoretical studies, practical internships, and self-evaluation, most of them experienced a complete learning process and could better combine the theoretical and practical parts of dance teaching into one whole.

The researchers also realized the strong influences of the student interns’ educational background on the transmission of theory to practice. To prevent the pitfalls that were encountered by professionally trained dance students, it is suggested:
1. When interacting with internship providers and related classroom teachers, the teacher of the dance teaching practicum could articulate the purpose of the dance teaching internship, the curriculum objectives, and teaching approaches.

2. Before formally introducing educational theories and strategies to student interns, the teacher needs to be aware of and respect student interns' professional dance background, leading them to observe real children and to reflect what they had taken for granted from their background; and

3. The teacher of the dance teaching practicum could include activities that allow student interns to practice skills in relation to greeting, motivation, class orientation, classroom management, and oral guidance before the internship begins.

The findings and suggestions have been incorporated into the next round of research, which was launched in Spring 2010, to further develop the curriculum of a ‘Dance Teaching Practicum’ that can meet the needs of student interns with professional dance training.

Notes

1. Grade 1-9 Curriculum is a product of the collective efforts that is led by Taiwan’s Ministry of Education for education reform. The purpose is to make a better connection between the elementary and junior high school education, which is compulsory for children of 6-14 years in Taiwan, and to release power and right of decision making to schools. The characteristics of the Grade 1-9 Curriculum include the integration of subjects into learning areas, the emphasis on collaborative teaching and curriculum integration, open up the edition of textbooks, and the emphasis on school-based curriculum development.

2. Dance Talented Program, along with Music Talented Program and Visual Art Talented Program, was founded by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan in 1981. Its purpose is to provide holistic and systematic education to students of grade 4~12 who reveal talent and temperament in relation to dance. In 2010, the program shifted its orientation from special education to arts education, emphasizing students’ development in arts-related knowledge and abilities rather than talent. The program that the research participants of the present study had gone to is still under the umbrella of gifted education.

References


Biographical Information

Yi-jung Wu received her Ph.D. in dance and Emerging Dance Scholar Award from Temple University, USA in 2005 and MA in dance from Columbia University in 1998, focusing on dance education for children, curriculum design, and pedagogy. She is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Dance at Taipei Physical Education College, where she teaches Dance Education in School, Dance Teaching Practicum, Dance Pedagogy, Selected Readings in Dance, and Research in Dance Education.

Yu-Ting Huang holds M.Ed. in Dance from the Graduate Program of Dance Department of Taipei Physical Education College. She currently serves as a teaching/research assistant of Department of Dance at Taipei Physical Education College and a ballet teacher at Bethany Campus of Morrison Academy in Taiepi. She formerly held many different positions, such as reporter, college administrator, editor, and so on. Her professional areas are ballet teaching, dance education and administration, and qualitative research methodology.
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