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Incorporating Dance into Primary School Music Education: A Perspective on China's New Curriculum Standards

Rui Wu^{1,2}

1. The Primary School Attached to Southwest University, Chongqing, China

2. Southwest University, Chongqing, China

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8330-5111>

Email: 5456764@qq.com

Abstract: Under the “New Curriculum Standards”, the teaching of music and dance in primary schools urgently needs reform. As a new teaching method, module teaching is very suitable for the teaching of music and dance in primary schools under the background of “New Curriculum Standards”. It is conducive to enriching students’ artistic experience and to highlighting their learning initiative. The application strategies of module teaching in primary school music and dance mainly include: overall design of teaching modules; stimulating students’ independent learning with interest; encouraging students to communicate and cooperate to consolidate learning results and expand innovation, and making teaching life-oriented.

Keywords: New Curriculum Standards; primary school; music education; dance education; module teaching

1.Introduction

1.1 Module Teaching

Module teaching, a valuable approach in various educational settings that offers structured and focused instruction on specific topics, has been a significant focus in educational research, particularly in the development of e-modules for various subjects. A resource for teaching teamwork skills using the Solomon-Felder Index of Learning Styles is provided (Sharp, 2003), suggesting in-class activities and homework assignments for instructors to construct their own module. Similarly, a module on drug development for medical students is described (Stanley et. al., 2005), which is assessed through a written dissertation and critical appraisal of a drug advertisement. In the healthcare field, a pilot study to test the satisfaction and feasibility of a computer-based teaching module in the neonatal intensive care unit was conducted (Gibbins et. al., 2007). The study highlighted the need for further research to examine the effectiveness of this teaching method on patient outcomes such as pain management. Additionally, a twelve-week module on teaching and learning for family physician trainees was evaluated (Villiers et. al., 2014), reporting on the influence of the module on graduates after six years through qualitative interviews. In the context of language teaching, an attempt to develop a higher order thinking skills module for weak ESL learners was made (Singh et. al., 2021), utilizing a qualitative research paradigm to validate the module. An integrated approach combining theoretical frameworks with virtual clinical environments to enhance understanding of radiation therapy planning concepts was proposed (Leong et. al., 2018). Focus on developing an integrated e-module for high school students on acids and bases using a problem-based learning model was given (Yani et. al., 2020), while the effectiveness of an Introduction to Nuclear Physics E-Module as a teaching material during the COVID-19 pandemic was explored (Misbah et. al., 2021). Moreover, the development of a new online and offline blended teaching system for college English based on computer Internet technology was discussed (Li et. al., 2021), emphasizing the importance of multimedia teaching platforms for sharing excellent teaching resources and enhancing education and teaching practices.

1.2 China's New Curriculum Standards

The literature on China's new curriculum standards reflects a significant shift towards learner-centered approaches and meeting individual student needs. The guiding principles for the design of the new senior high school English curriculum are discussed (Wang et. al., 2012), emphasizing a common foundation for all students and a focus on personal interests and learning potentials. The alignment between the national High School Biology Curriculum Standard and the High School Exit Exam in four provinces is explored (Lu et. al., 2012), highlighting the importance of curriculum coherence. The latest characteristics of mathematics education reform in China are analyzed (Guo et. al., 2018), focusing on curriculum objectives and problem-solving skills. Music education is also a key focus of curriculum reform, as evidenced by the investigation into how music teachers implement the new Curriculum Standards (Yu et. al., 2019). Insight into the reconstruction of the Chemistry Curriculum Standards in the era of core competencies is provided (Wei, 2019), emphasizing the importance of aligning curriculum with national education visions.

Innovative high school English teaching models aligned with core competencies are explored (Lü, 2019), highlighting the importance of online and blended learning approaches. Policy reviews, such as the one that analyzes the key features of curriculum change in China and the implications for students' future competencies, are conducted (Wang, 2019). The significance of alignment between textbooks and curriculum standards in China and Japan for ensuring quality education is emphasized (Sun et. al., 2021). Additionally, the adaptation process of teachers to new standards in senior high school Chinese textbooks in Indonesia, focusing on vocabulary development, is examined (Wiratikusuma et. al., 2022). Overall, the literature review on China's new curriculum standards underscores the importance of learner-centered approaches, alignment between curriculum and assessments, and the integration of core competencies into teaching practices. The focus on individual student needs, innovative teaching models, and policy implications highlights the ongoing efforts to enhance education quality and student outcomes in China.

1.3 Dance education in primary schools

Dance education in primary schools has been a topic of interest in the field of arts education. The National Curriculum has been a significant factor in shaping the arts education landscape, including dance education in primary schools (King et al., 1993; Holt, 1997). Research has shown that incorporating dance into music education can enhance student engagement and creativity (Stinson, 1997; Mellor, 2007). For example, (Mellor, 2007) conducted a study on computer-based music composition using the CD Rom Dance eJay and found that creativity occurred within all composing responses, regardless of participants' musical backgrounds. Furthermore, the role of indigenous songs in education has been explored as a way to incorporate cultural elements into the curriculum (Nompula, 2011). In countries like Zimbabwe, traditional African dance education has been seen as a way to reimagine the curriculum and reclaim the nation's heritage (Gonye et. al., 2015). Additionally, technology has been increasingly used in dance education, as seen in studies on the use of technology in dance education for prospective primary teacher students (Anasta et. al., 2021). Moreover, peer-to-peer health education programs have utilized music, dance, poetry, art, and drama to convey health information to vulnerable children in Uganda (Falk et. al., 2016). This interdisciplinary approach highlights the potential for integrating different art forms, including dance, into primary school education. Additionally, studies have examined the effects of individualized ICT-based music education programs on primary students' musical competence and grades (Hernández-Bravo et. al., 2016). In conclusion, the literature suggests that incorporating dance into primary school music education can enhance student engagement, creativity, and cultural understanding. By utilizing technology, traditional dance forms, and interdisciplinary approaches, educators can create a rich and diverse arts education experience for primary school students.

2. Research Background

2.1 The integration of art education has become an educational trend

Cai Yuanpei, the advocate of modern aesthetic education in China, repeatedly stressed that “cultural movements should not forget aesthetic education.” (Cai, 1983) He “was the first to put forward that moral education, intellectual education, physical education and aesthetic education are equally important in the national educational policy”, after which aesthetic education took root in Chinese culture and education. (Liang, 2021) In recent years, China has gradually attached importance to the development of aesthetic education in schools. As an important part of aesthetic education in schools, music teaching has also gradually received attention. However, for a long time, teaching by subject in the field of art education has resulted in unobvious results in aesthetic education at school and insufficient improvement in students’ aesthetic literacy. Especially, music education has problems such as unitary teaching method and unsatisfactory teaching results (Wang, 2024).

From the practice of Western modern art education, developed countries represented by the United States attach great importance to art education, which have already explored integrated curriculum in their basic education; relevant educational institutions have also written curriculum integration into educational documents as a policy of educational reform. For example, the United States first identified art education as a core subject of basic education in 1994, with the same important status as English, mathematics, history, citizenship and politics, geography, science and foreign languages (He, 2016). In the same year, the United States promulgated the National Standards for Arts Education, which divided art education into four categories: music, dance, drama and visual arts, with special emphasis on the connections among various art disciplines and between art and other disciplines, to realize the curriculum synthesis in the holistic education. (Liu, 1998) The official promulgation of the “Art Curriculum Standards for Art Education (2022 edition)” (hereinafter referred to as the “New Curriculum Standards”) has brought various new changes to the development of art education in China. The most obvious revision is the integration and optimization of the art curriculum setting: Grades 1 to 7 focus on music and fine art, integrating dance, drama, film and television, etc; Grades 8 to 9 offer separate options, making the previous “Music” and “Fine Art” combined into “Arts” in the form of a course, which covers a variety of art categories such as music, fine art, dance, drama (including opera), film and television (including multimedia) in teaching content. (Peng, Tong & Hong, 2024) The close relationship between music and dance has long been self-evident in the academic world. “Music is the soul of dance, and dance is the echo of music” is a famous saying popular in the academic world that vividly reveals the relationship between music and dance. However, this close relationship was often reflected more in art criticism, appreciation and academic research in the past. (Long, 2020) This curriculum reform integrates the teaching of music and dance in primary school into one curriculum, emphasizing the connection among various art disciplines, which is conducive to the overall improvement of students’ aesthetic education.

2.2 Under the “New Curriculum Standards”, the teaching of music and dance in primary schools is in urgent need of reform

The most important thing in the New Curriculum Standards is to highlight aesthetic education, emphasizing art education as the main way and main channel of aesthetic education. Efforts should be made to make students fully perceive art, experience art and understand art through art education and aesthetic practice. The curriculum concept of the New Art Curriculum Standards is to improve students’ ability to feel, express, appreciate and create beauty. (Zhou, Peng & Zhen, 2024) The most striking highlight is the emphasis on core literacy, i.e., the centralized embodiment of the value of discipline education, referring to “the correct values, essential qualities, and key abilities that meet the lifelong and social development needs of students, which are gradually formed through course learning” (Peng & Xiang, 2022). Focusing on core literacy and integration and optimization of curriculum content is an important principle of the revision of the “New Curriculum Standards”. The “New Curriculum Standards” proposes a four-in-one core competency framework for art courses: “aesthetic perception, artistic expression, creative practice, and cultural understanding.” (Ji, 2024) These four competencies highlight the key content of the development of curriculum elements. “Music and dance aesthetic education is practical and experiential, which emphasizes a life experience that is internalized through physical movement and is pursued consciously by the individual.” (Shi, 2022) The characteristics of this aesthetic education and the cultivation of core literacy proposed in the “New Curriculum Standards” have brought new teaching challenges, new tasks and teaching goals to primary school music and dance teaching.

As a new teaching method, module teaching is very suitable for primary school music and dance teaching under the background of New Curriculum Standards. It improves individual aesthetic ability through the linkage of music hearing experience and body kinesthetic sense, playing a key role in the integration of music and dance teaching (Lin & Yi, 2023). The application of this teaching method in the primary school music and dance has important value and great significance, which is beneficial to the comprehensive improvement of the students’ music and dance literacy.

3. The application value of module teaching in primary school music and dance

3.1 Module teaching concept

Module teaching is a teaching organization form relative to traditional continuous courses, whose core concept is to decompose and reorganize knowledge and skills to form relatively independent but interrelated teaching units or modules. (Long, 2024) According to goal awareness, problem awareness, inquiry awareness, expression awareness and application awareness, module teaching integrates and optimizes the text, reconstructing new learning plates with the goal as the core. It uses learning modules one by one to achieve three-dimensional goals, realizing the transformation from mechanical teaching to creative teaching with textbooks. The main basis of the theory of module teaching comes from the constructivist learning theory, which believes that the construction of students’ learning process is two-way, and it is necessary for students to take the initiative to carry out the process of self-construction of new knowledge through their own exploration and cognition on the basis of their existing knowledge and experience. (Zhao & Zhou, 2024)

The five connotations of module teaching include overall perception to propose problems, independent learning and cooperative inquiry, reporting and exchange, overall harvest, as well as migration, expansion and application. The ideas and sequence are in line with both the laws of human cognition and the concept of the New Curriculum Standards. Carrying out research on module teaching models and methods is an important way and support for implementing the construction of a high-quality education system, practicing the mission of educating people and talents, ensuring the correct direction of development of education, and driving education towards high-quality development. (Tian, Lin & Wang, 2024)

3.2 The application value of module teaching in primary school music and dance

3.2.1 Module teaching is conducive to enriching students' artistic experience

The difficulty of music and dance teaching is neither emotion nor knowledge and skills, but the imagination that is associated from music and dance emotions to corresponding knowledge and skills, or from knowledge and skills to related music and dance emotions. (Liu, 2019) German philosopher Hegel said, "When it comes to skill, the most outstanding artistic skill is imagination." (Hegel, 1979) In traditional teaching, teachers often like to define a good student as one who "sits straight and properly". In music and dance classes, many students keep their bodies straight while enjoying music, dancing or singing. In fact, this interferes with the students' instinctive experience of music and dance. In the context of the New Curriculum Standards, teachers need to pay more attention to the form of students' participation in music and dance. In addition to teaching the necessary knowledge and difficult points in the textbook, more time can be left for students to participate in music and dance. (Tian, 2023) The module teaching method is more inclined to on-the-spot teaching, focusing on improving students' skills and their instinctive experience of music and dance. Therefore, promoting module teaching in primary school music and dance courses can overcome the drawbacks of traditional music and dance teaching. (Zhang, 2020)

3.2.2 Module teaching is beneficial to demonstrating students' learning initiative

In traditional music teaching, some music teachers do not fully realize that students are the main body of classroom teaching. In the actual teaching process, teachers only teach students some theoretical knowledge or let students sing along, but are unable to guide and inspire students effectively. (Huang, 2024) Module teaching emphasizes students' initiative in the process of self-construction of new knowledge. Putting the learning initiative in the hands of students is more helpful to exerting students' enthusiasm and initiative in learning. Meanwhile, in the module teaching, the teacher is no longer the "instructor" of music and dance, but more of a "listener and guide", which can make the communication between teachers and students more diversified and smoother, finally improving the relationship between them. At the same time, information sharing and exchange among children are more conducive to the exchange and integration of knowledge and information among them, so that they can show their own strengths, unite and love each other as well as make progress together.

4. The application strategies of module teaching in music and dance in primary school

4.1 Overall design of teaching module

The present design of music and dance class is very different from the traditional music teaching. In the traditional sense, music teaching mainly focuses on appreciation, lacking good interaction between teachers and students, as well as the cultivation of students' action ability and creative ability. (Tang, 2020) Art education, as the core content and main means of aesthetic education, achieves the purpose of cultivating sentiment and beautifying the soul in both quality education and professional education through the way of touching people with feelings. (Peng, 2022) Therefore, when formulating the module teaching of music and dance in primary schools, we should consider it comprehensively and design it as a whole to ensure that students can develop and improve in many aspects. In the primary school music course, dance should be designed as a whole unit, including systematically teaching basic music knowledge, such as rhythm, melody, pitch, etc.; teaching basic dance movements, focusing on the training of body coordination and flexibility; and helping students consolidate basic skills through repeated practice, etc. The goal should be carried out through the entire teaching module, connecting all links, so that students can gradually understand the theory, consolidate skills, and cultivate a sense of rhythm in the process of dance teaching.

4.2 Stimulating students to study independently with interest

Autonomous learning teaching pattern is a kind of teaching method that mainly reflects the students' main position and improves their independent learning ability, which can give full play to the students' subjective initiative. (Deng, 2023) The New Art Curriculum Standards point out that we should attach importance to students' artistic perception and emotional experience in the learning process, and stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in participating in art activities. Emphasizing art experience means that special attention should be paid to guiding and arranging students' art experience activities in the implementation of art curriculum. (Zhou, Peng & Zhen, 2024) Therefore, this requires that teachers should change most of the class time from the original teacher-led "teaching" to the students' independent "learning" in primary school music and dance teaching, and teachers should change from the original leader to the guide to help students enhance their independence in the process of music and dance learning. For example, teachers can design attractive teaching content, such as introducing music and dance elements through stories, games, etc.; they can guide students to feel the rhythm, melody, emotions, etc. of music, to improve their music appreciation ability; they can teach students to express their emotions through dancing, singing, etc.; and they can encourage students to create simple music and dance works to express their feelings and imagination. Meanwhile, teachers need to establish a scientific evaluation system to comprehensively assess students' performance in all aspects of music and dance, providing timely and specific feedback to help students understand their own strengths and weaknesses, such as testing students' learning achievements through regular assessments and performances. In addition, having learning motivation is the key to students' independent learning. Teachers need to pay attention to the stimulation of students' learning motivation when carrying out teaching work.

Teachers should also be good at grasping the music classroom, through the guidance and proposing the problems to let students learn, stimulating students' interest in music and dance learning. (Zhang, 2023)

4.3 Encouraging students to communicate and cooperate to consolidate their learning outcomes

The application of module teaching theory in teaching breaks the traditional spoon-feeding way of teaching, providing new ideas and expanding space for the implementation of heuristic teaching. (Hua, Zheng & Zhao, 2014) In the module teaching mode, teachers should respect students and adopt a variety of effective forms to maximize the mobilization of students' thinking, learning enthusiasm and initiative, including improving students' learning interest, encouraging students to give play to their imagination and innovative spirit in music and dance creation, strengthening collaborative learning among students, exchanging learning results, encouraging students to participate in interaction, and cultivating their interest and confidence in music and dance. For example, teachers can form collaborative groups to promote pair-up learning in students. When encountering difficult problems in dance practice, they can first discuss them in groups. Students will have the drive to speak bravely in the group, and students with better performance can help students with learning difficulties. The advantage of doing so is that it not only allows children to take the initiative to learn, but also actively mobilizes the initiative of each student in the group and cultivates their teamwork spirit and collaboration ability, thus achieving common progress among students in the group. Moreover, students can also experience the sense of accomplishment brought by cooperation through collective performances and other forms.

4.4 Expanding innovation and making teaching more life-oriented

The starting point of module teaching is the application of theory to practice, which is to cultivate students to combine classroom learning and daily exercise, developing good sports habits and aesthetic interests. Tao Xingzhi believed that "life is education", i.e., the teaching process should play the educational role of life, connecting education with life, making education take root in real life, and promoting the comprehensive construction of life-oriented classroom. Obviously, teaching based on life conforms to the characteristics of music curriculum and the requirements of modern education concept. (Li & Huang, 2024) Therefore, expanding innovation and making teaching more life-oriented are the development direction of primary school music and dance teaching.

In module teaching, teachers can conduct interdisciplinary teaching and expand thinking in class to carry out more extensive learning of dance as a module unit, such as introducing the music and dance cultures of different countries and regions, letting students feel the charm of diverse cultures, teaching students to understand the characteristics and historical background of music and dance in different cultures, encouraging students to imitate and express the music and dance styles of different cultures, enhancing their sense of cultural exchange and identity, and providing a diversity of dance styles for students to learn like folk dance, modern dance, etc.

In the process of module teaching, the modular organization form and teaching means serve the goal of music and dance learning, i.e., through this teaching mode, students can cultivate a deep understanding of culture, and then accept multi-cultural art forms and enhance the universality of artistic emotions with an inclusive mind, and transmit the values with lofty spirit. (Yang, 2023) Teachers can also combine other subjects such as art, science, and language to enrich the content of music and dance teaching. Through interdisciplinary project-based learning, students can apply their knowledge in practice, and can explore music and dance elements in other subjects to expand their aesthetic vision. In addition, teachers should also focus on guiding students to observe beautiful things and phenomena in daily life. Through arranging music and dance works, teachers can encourage students to put their skills into life practice and enable students to apply their knowledge.

5. Conclusion

In teaching practice, the pioneering teaching method can provide teachers and students with clearer teaching concepts, greatly improving the effectiveness of classroom teaching and the ability to solve problems. (Tang, 2023) Module teaching, a new teaching mode, can promote teachers to change their mindset and establish new teaching concepts. For students, module teaching can also be personalized according to their own knowledge basis and learning ability. Therefore, the development of music and dance education in primary schools requires continuous reform and innovation of traditional teaching models and teaching methods. By using module teaching methods, we can deepen the understanding of the combination of theory and practice, cultivate primary school students' awareness and habits of independent learning, and improve primary school students' music affective cognition and comprehensive quality and ability, thereby promoting their all-round development.

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