



Shine in the spotlight of ballet, grow through the education of love — Taking the path of ballet at Beijing Caoqiao Primary School as an example

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Abstract. In the process of ballet education for primary school students, we have consistently adhered to a student-centered teaching approach, actively promoting the comprehensive development of students through quality and artistic education, ensuring their well-rounded growth. Based on the three-dimensional objectives of ballet education for primary school students, this article aims to comprehensively promote ballet education in primary schools and nurture talented ballet dancers for the future.

Keywords: Ballet; Love Education; Strawbridge Elementary School

1 Introduction

Ballet, as an ancient Western classical art form with the reputation of being the "crown jewel" of the arts[1], begs the question: what captivates children's hearts and souls so deeply in this seemingly rigorous dance? For students with zero ballet foundation, adherence to the tradition of observing formalities between teachers and students in every posture training class is paramount. Then, gradually introducing new content, such as basic ballet postures, hand and foot positions, directions, etc., evolves from single movements to combination[2], eventually leading to solo or partnered dances[3], or even group performances[4]. These tasks may seem daunting for energetic elementary students, especially mischievous boys, but teachers at the Central Ballet of China have mastered the art.

2 Case Study on Teaching Ballet

2.1 Case study on Teaching Ballet

Combining the characteristics of elementary students with a professional and efficient work attitude, the Central Ballet of China has outlined the following curriculum objectives for primary school students:

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The first year focuses on basic posture training (on the ground) and simple dance steps. In the second year, coordination between boys and girls is introduced along with intermediate posture training. The third year introduces courtship duets. By the fourth year, group dances and leading roles are introduced. In the fifth year, girls start pointe shoe training. The sixth year culminates in the performance of an independent act from a ballet. It's essential to note that all courses build upon the foundation of posture training. Quantifiable assessment objectives have been established from cognitive, skill, and emotional perspectives. The starting point of the curriculum is to familiarize students with ballet, instill admiration, draw them closer, and eventually, make them fall in love with it.

The primary focus in creating the curriculum for elementary ballet students is accessibility. The creators have appropriately lowered the difficulty of movements and reduced demands on muscle endurance and body flexibility without compromising quality. Additionally, teachers tailor their teaching to each student's circumstances, not only achieving the ultimate training goals but also providing opportunities to embody various characters, enhancing students' engagement, boosting their confidence in learning ballet, and making education accessible. Simultaneously, ballet teachers pay special attention to making the learning process enjoyable, all while organizing the study of ballet's basic knowledge based on subject and psychological logic.

Ballet is an art form known for its strict discipline[5], with each movement meticulously analyzed in teaching methods. However, for elementary students with no prior experience, these nuances may not be fully grasped. Take the action of turning out the legs, for example; students often struggle to comprehend. In such cases, teachers creatively guide students by likening their legs to screws turning outward, thus injecting fun into the teaching process. Moreover, teachers capitalize on the lively and energetic nature of elementary students by organizing innovative activities, such as mimicking ballet mime gestures, to enhance classroom engagement while maintaining an active yet orderly atmosphere to achieve educational objectives. "Leading by example" is an indispensable method in ballet teaching (Figure 1). The fascinating aspect of dance instruction lies in teachers personally demonstrating correct movements and contrasting them with students' incorrect ones, fostering a unique interactive dynamic specific to ballet classrooms that plays a pivotal role in the teaching process.



Fig. 1. Photographs of ballet classroom lessons

In the course, a chubby boy once left a profound impression on me (pictured in Figure 2, the third boy from the right). Many would assume that boys don't enjoy learning ballet, especially not chubby ones. However, I encountered a self-conscious little boy who used to hide in the corner of the classroom, yet his posture was remarkably straight. I noticed and praised him immediately, bringing him to the front of the class to demonstrate. Since that moment of praise, he approached every ballet class with great seriousness, gradually finding confidence in himself in the classroom, eventually becoming a representative for ballet classes. Over time, his performance improved, and his personality became much brighter. Upon his graduation, he wrote me a letter saying, "Ballet has changed me a lot, and I've gained a lot." When he handed me the letter, he requested a photo together and humorously remarked, "Teacher, you've changed your hairstyle, haven't you? Looks beautiful, looks young." It was at that moment I realized that a teacher's seemingly insignificant act could potentially change a child's life.



Fig. 2. Photographs of specific cases of ballet teaching

2.2 Exam Setting for Ballet Teaching

Upon the conclusion of the trial semester for ballet at Beijing Caoqiao Primary School, assessments covered 30% of ballet foundational knowledge, completion of basic training courses, participation in dance dramas, and performance abilities. Due to the unique nature of ballet courses, final exams are conducted in the form of theatrical presentations rather than written tests.

Each grade is allocated two ballet classes per week, covering basic ballet postures, courtesy, and mime gestures. The school collaborates with the Central Ballet of China to implement diverse teaching methods:

1. Inviting ballet masters from the Central Ballet of China to conduct ballet lectures for students.

2. Regularly taking students to watch performances by the Central Ballet of China, including classic ballets like "Giselle" and "La Sylphide", as well as Chinese classics like "The Red Detachment of Women" and "Dunhuang", along with children's ballets such as "Chinese New Year" and "Nine-Colored Deer". This exposure allows students to learn ballet etiquette from attending theaters and experience the charm of art.

3. Hosting an annual open day ballet performance where every student has the opportunity to perform on stage, enhancing their motivation, while also experiencing the perseverance and hardships of "a minute on stage, ten years of practice offstage". Teachers also explain the excellent ideas conveyed by the characters in the plays, such as the revolutionary unity depicted in "The Red Detachment of Women" and the mutual respect in "Swan Lake".

3 The Significance of Ballet Teaching

The ballet curriculum at Caoqiao Primary School achieves three-dimensional objectives in a true sense. Feng Ying, the director of the Central Ballet of China, remarked, "Every time I come to Caoqiao to watch their performances, I deeply admire the dedication and hard work of the young teachers in the ballet troupe. Over the past five years, Caoqiao has shown a unique spirit distinct from other schools. Therefore, learning etiquette from the beginning is also very beneficial for learning ballet".

Since 2017, hundreds of primary school students from Caoqiao have participated in various performance activities (Figure 3), collaborating with members of the Central Ballet of China in performances such as "The Red Detachment of Women". Caoqiao Primary School has achieved excellent results in the Beijing Student Art Festival multiple times, staging ballets like "The Dream of the Little Duck", "The Little Horse Dance", "Giselle", "The Red Detachment of Women", and "The Grassland Hero Sisters", among others. Their exquisite dance skills and heartfelt dedication deeply moved every audience member present. Due to Caoqiao Primary School's emphasis on ballet since first grade, every student can showcase their talents during open days, with many entries being outstanding performances in pointe shoes, a rarity among children of the same age.



Fig. 3. Contestant students' performance stills

We once conducted a survey among students of each grade at Caoqiao Primary School:

1. "How much do you love ballet"? 85% of students indicated that they loved it very much.
2. "At what grade did you start liking ballet"? Answers showed an increasing trend from first to sixth grade, indicating that even initially indifferent boys gradually fall in love with ballet after six years of exposure.
3. "Tell us about your feelings towards ballet". Over 80% of students mentioned that besides improving their posture and appearance, ballet also helps in building willpower, confidence, and resilience. Some responses included statements like: "Ballet classes have given me the opportunity to perform on stage with professional dancers, which makes me feel immensely excited and proud". Others said: "If you give up learning ballet, you won't be able to step onto that stage, because I know that hard work pays off".

The ballet program at Caoqiao Primary School has been a success. The school actively implements a student-centered education policy:

1. Focus on each student's emotional expression and character development: Teachers pay close attention to students' emotions and handle their behaviors, good or bad, with care. Their rigorous yet compassionate approach to education benefits the children greatly.
2. Emphasize moral qualities and character development: Ballet teachers not only impart knowledge and skills but also instill qualities such as perseverance and excellence. By sharing inspirational stories of ballet stars, they embody the student-centered

education philosophy, which is a crucial aspect of the success of the ballet program at Caoqiao Primary School.

Key experiences from the distinctive ballet program at Caoqiao Primary School include:

1. Student-centered approach: As students found it challenging to concentrate while facing away from the teacher during ballet barre exercises, the teachers decided to eliminate this aspect, leading to unexpectedly faster learning among the students.

2. Practical application: The proportion of practical classes was adjusted based on each grade's needs, fostering students' awareness of the stage and demonstrating the effectiveness of the school's specialized teaching.

3. Enhanced practical performances: To cultivate students' interest in learning dance, Caoqiao Primary School collaborated with the Central Ballet of China for various on-stage and off-stage activities. These events, held two to three times a year, not only reinforce the knowledge learned but also allow students to appreciate the aesthetic beauty of ballet.

4 Conclusion and Prospect

The efforts of the Central Ballet of China in popularizing ballet among elementary school students have opened up a new educational mechanism in collaboration with professional troupes, thereby providing every child with excellent opportunities to engage with the arts and expanding ballet education in China onto a broader stage. During its collaboration with the Central Ballet of China, Caoqiao Primary School has gained access to numerous educational resources, effectively promoting equitable, high-quality education and the holistic development of students' moral, intellectual, and physical faculties. The ballet curriculum injects novelty into the otherwise mundane learning routine of elementary students, allowing them to immerse themselves more effortlessly in their studies. Moreover, it contributes significantly to enhancing the quality of elementary arts education and promoting aesthetic education. China needs the arts, more students with exceptional qualities, and more students with strong willpower, and ballet, despite its modest size, instills many excellent qualities in students simultaneously. Through our relentless efforts, more elementary schools will continue to embrace ballet education, enabling more students to develop a love for ballet, art, and beauty.

Future ballet education should emphasize its applicability in different types of schools, especially in non-arts-focused institutions. Ballet, as a refined art form, may encounter various challenges in its dissemination and teaching process, including resource allocation, teacher expertise, and student engagement. In terms of resource allocation, different schools have varying levels of resources, particularly in remote areas and economically disadvantaged schools. One approach to addressing this challenge is through government and societal support, increasing investment in arts education in these schools, while also introducing modern technologies such as the internet to mitigate resource deficiencies through online courses and distance learning. Furthermore, enhancing teachers' training in ballet pedagogy and child psychology is crucial to improving teaching quality. Collaborating with professional art institutions and ballet

companies to regularly conduct training sessions and workshops can elevate teachers' professional standards and teaching capabilities. Lastly, boosting student engagement is also a major challenge in ballet education. By innovating teaching methods such as gamification and scenario simulations, we can increase the interactivity and appeal of the curriculum, thus sparking students' enthusiasm for learning. The promotion of ballet education not only faces challenges in terms of resources, teacher expertise, and student engagement but also requires concerted efforts from various sectors of society. Through government support, social cooperation, educational innovation, and other initiatives, we can overcome these challenges, enabling more students to appreciate the beauty and charm of ballet art, nurturing more poised and resilient individuals, and further advancing the development of ballet education in China.

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