STUDYING DANCE AT GERMAN UNIVERSITIES – A RESEARCH AND LECTURING AREA
CAUGHT IN BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Rolf Kretschmann

Department of Sport and Exercise Science, University of Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany

Review paper

Abstract

Being interested in studying dance in Germany at a university, inevitably leads to a department of sport science. Thus, dance (often coupled with rhythmic gymnastics to fuse into one subject) is obligatory within the studies of sport science. Taking a closer look at the practical dance seminars, one can easily identify inconsistencies in the conceptually intended interlinking of theory, research and practice. However, the subject dance at German universities is factually constrained with the enforced aim of exercising students in dance techniques and skills, and therefore disregarding the scientific claims of a predominant amount of theoretical and scientific theory and reflection.

Key words: dance education; curriculum; higher education; sport science; dance research; dance practice

Dance as a subject within German universities

Studies in dance do not loom large within German universities. Unfortunately, there are no majors (undergraduate studies) in dance or dance pedagogy at German universities at all.² Dance as a subject only exists as a peripheral area within majors in theatre science, social sciences, and cultural studies. Thus, one can sadly state that dance is not important within German higher education. Regarding other educational areas, vocational schools and conservatories offer programs related to dance.

For example, the Palucca School² offers two vocational training programs: professional dancer, and dance educator for professionals. Moreover, dance is integrated into conservatory programs of conservatories for music and – self-evidently - conservatories for dance. Due to the fact that vocational schools and conservatories do not belong to higher education, their degrees are of lower status compared to higher education degrees (Kretschmann & Mathis-Masury, 2009).

Dance within Departments of Sport Science in Germany

As already stated, there are rare programs for solely studying dance in German higher education. Therefore, interest in studying dance in Germany at a university inevitably leads to a department of sport science, because dance as a subject is obligatory within the studies of sport science. But it is mostly coupled with rhythmic gymnastics to fuse into one subject. Studying sport science in Germany means studying two different faces of this scientific discipline. On the one hand there are the studies of certain sports (e.g. track and field, basketball, swimming, dance, etc.) (Bräutigam & Brettschneider, 1996; Kuhlmann, 2003; Thierer, 2003). These are being taught at the gym, the natatorium, or the stadium. Within those “practical seminars” students are enforced to be physically active. They have to get exercise and learn about the theoretical background of the specific sport in question (Haag, 1996, p. 69). Furthermore, a didactical focus is the conceptual basis of such practical seminars. The main focus is on teaching techniques. The examination at the end of the “dance-semester” consists of a written test and a practical examination (bodily movement). The practical examination guidelines normally are very strict, depending on studying and examination regulations interlinked to the degree aimed for, being hardly changeable by the lecturer. Students usually have to perform selected dance techniques, a given choreography, and/ or an improvisation part. Practical test content depends on the current study conditions by the particular university. However, status, content, and didactical/ curricular position concerning the relationship between the theoretical and the practical section within sport science studies in Germany is not clear. In addition, the theory-and-practice relationship within practical seminars focuses similar constraints. In sum, dance is part of the so called “praxis” section among other sports and therefore features inherent problems within sport science studies: theory vs. practice (“praxis”).

Problem Areas of Dance Education within Departments of Sport Science in Germany

Taking a closer look at those practical seminars within dance in reality, and beyond that ideal concept, one can easily identify inconsistencies in the intended interlinking of theory, research and practice (as physical and exercise practice or experience) (Kretschmann, 2008).
Heterogeneity is obvious; Students aim for different degrees (Staatsexamen for becoming a physical education teacher, Diplom, Bachelor/ Master), attending with different skill levels, prior experiences and knowledge, due to missing standardized quality of dance education within school and (obligatory) qualifying examination for the studies of sport science. Hence, the ontological issue, whether dance is a sport, an art, or something in between, is systematically disregarded. Lectures normally do not know the professional reality outside university, what leads to the absence of an interexchange of dance education at universities and dance education in professional training and institutions. The practical section within German sport science studies seems to be a closed world, not interaction with other entities. Moreover, internationalization still needs to come. Striking international literature is not covered and is even not cited within German scientific literature of dance and dance education.

The subject of dance primarily reduces on didactical methods of motor learning, by the way not differentiating between different individuals being taught (e.g. students in physical education class or athletes in professional clubs), and not involving theories from sport-scientific sub-disciplines. Thus, a German textbook for dance and dance education and a coherent standardized concept for the subject of dance within sport science are still missing. Regarding modernity, the question arises which kind of dance should be sealed within the higher education curriculum. Should it be Ballet, Jazz, Modern, Hip-Hop, or even Tinikling? Furthermore, the question of canon can also be asked for dance as a part in the studies of sport science. Can or should dance be substituted? Is dance of same worth as basketball, volleyball, etc.? (Kuhlmann, 1999).

Legitimatization of dance in the higher education curriculum for sport science studies is needed. The examination conditions at the end of a practical seminar are contrary to the vocational fields in which students want to achieve a career. For instance, good teachers have good teaching skills. They do not need to have good skills in motor performance. Therefore, it does not make sense to leave a teaching skills test aside completely. Prospective students of sport science in Germany have to pass an entrance exam. This exam is obligatory and it is a practical exam only. Participants have to pass different motor skills tests in various sports (e.g. track and field, volleyball, soccer, etc.), but dance is only obligatory for women. Furthermore, test conditions vary from university to university. Usually, the required skills in dance do not match most requirements in the studying regulations of the different degree programs. Most lecturers in the praxis section are originally practitioners. Scientific standards, research, and research literature are contradictory to the subjective theories of these lecturers. This leads to a relativization of scientific theory in favor of an individual didactical concept, a so called “praxeology”. Moreover, scientific literature and empirical research results are not noticed by the praxis section. Scientificness therefore is decreased. Unfortunately, the status of the praxis section is regarded much lower than the status of the theory section within German sport science. Normally, associate and full professors do not teach practical seminars. External lecturers are often hired for this “dirty” job. Overbooked courses and decreasing resources are a result of this lower status. Moreover, digital media is not used in practical seminars in general. In sum, study aims are foggy and still not clear. What skills should students have developed at the end of their studies? Motor skills, cognitive and knowledge skills, and didactical and pedagogical skills obviously lead to different directions. An integrative concept for university education within German sport science is still missing.

Conclusion – Research vs. Practice

It seems like the concept of studying dance within the studies of sport science at a German university lacks of coherence concerning with a sophisticated concept of studying-aims of a university itself. The ideal university-course intends students aiming for the abilities of a researcher (e.g. scientific theories, research methods and methodology, research designs and results). However, the subject dance is factually constrained with the enforced aim of exercising students in dance techniques and skills, and therefore disregarding the scientific claims of a predominant amount of theoretical and scientific theory and reflection. The question how to bring theory and practice to a sensible proportion still needs to be solved. At the moment, the notion of theory and practice building opposite poles is set up (Kuhlmann, 1999).

Notes

1. Meanwhile the German Sport University Cologne recently launched a Master-of-Arts program entitled “Tanzkultur” (English translation: dance culture). Additionally, several departments (Performance Studies and Theatre Science) outside sport science have established dance-specific parts within their study program (Sieg mund, 2010).

2. The Palucca school is a famous vocational training school in Dresden, Germany, named after the world-famous dancer Margarethe Paluka.

3. The “Staatsexamen” is a special degree that is needed to become a teacher at a German school. The Staatsexamen can be studied for primary or secondary school. The Staatsexamen for secondary school is equivalent to a Master of Education degree.

4. The “Diplom” is an old-fashioned degree that is equivalent to a Master degree. The German higher education system had to change its degree programs from Diplom to Bachelor/ Master by reason of the Bologna process (1999). The purpose of the Bologna process is to create a European higher education area by making academic degree standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe. Therefore, European countries have to change their degree system to Bachelor/ Master.

5. Tinikling is a traditional Philippine folk dance.
References


STUDIRANJE PLESA NA NJEMAČKIM UNIVERZITETIMA – ISTRAŽIVAČKO I NASTAVNO PODRUČJE ZAROUBLJENO IZMEĐU ISTRAŽIVANJA I PRAKSE

Sažetak
Biti zainteresiran za studiranje plesa na univerzitetima u Njemačkoj neminovno vodi prema odjelu za sportsku znanost. Dakle, ples (češto u sprezu s ritmičkom gimnastikom u jedan sadržaj) je obvezan unutar studiranja sportske znanosti. Detaljniji uvidom u plesne seminare, netko bi mogao otkriti nedosljednosti u konceptualnim namjerama povezivanja teorije, istraživanja i prakse. Međutim, predmet plesa na univerzitetima u Njemačkoj je činjenično ograničen forsiranim ciljem vježbanja studenata u plesnim tehnikama i vještinama, i tako ne uvažava znanstvene ciljeve predominantne količine teorijske i znanstvene teorije i refleksija.

Ključne riječi: plesna edukacija, kurikulum, visoko obrazovanje, sportska znanost, istraživanja, praksa

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Correspondence to:
Rolf Kretschmann, Ph.D.
University of Stuttgart
Department of Sport and Exercise Science
Allmandring 28, 70569 Stuttgart, Germany
Phone: +49 711 685 60455
E-mail: rolf.kretschmann@inspo.uni-stuttgart.de