

Seeing Dance Through a Different Lens

The benefits of interdisciplinary practice include enhancing your dance creativity and adding to your skill set for other careers

by Colleen David

As dance majors, we often are told by others to have a “back up plan.” That way when our dance careers fail, as many assume they will, we have something to fall back on to provide us a steady income. I went along with this idea as I started to plan my college education. I had been interested in photography since the beginning of high school, so figured if I was going to study dance in college, I might as well major in both areas of interest. It was not until the end of my senior year that I realized that my “back up plan” could actually become something that correlated with dance. As I studied, I made connections between the concepts of the photography pieces I produced and the concepts I utilized in dance. Through seeing individuals around me inform their practices using other interests, I realized the benefits and possibilities of being interdisciplinary.

Interdisciplinary practice involves the study of two different disciplines in order to facilitate comprehensive understanding of both subjects. It integrates modes of thinking and knowledge from two or more disciplines. In *Teaching and Learning in Interdisciplinary Higher Education: A Systematic Review*, boundary-crossing skills are cited as a skill developed by interdisciplinary thinking. The article states that these skills are “the ability to change perspectives, to synthesize knowledge of different disciplines, and to cope with complexity” (Spelt 366). It was discovered that through studying various disciplines, cognitive advantages could be gained by expanding into different modes of thinking. It was also found that the sub-skills of interdisciplinary thinking include “...the ability to change disciplinary perspectives and create meaningful connections across disciplines” (Spelt 366). By exploring interests in different lines of education, one gains the capacity to create new ways of engaging with their work. This can be beneficial in problem-solving and enhancing communication abilities, both of which are skills key to becoming a versatile dancer as well as in other lines of work.

By taking an interdisciplinary approach to art, you can utilize skills accumulated from other practices to help inform your work. For instance, many dancers and choreographers have used several mediums to communicate their message more clearly to a wider audience. These people took their interest in two different subjects and fused them together to create a more intricate body of work. J. Ulbricht mentions that the need for interdisciplinary education has reemerged because of the progression in education towards specialization in a specific discipline. The ability to look at a subject from a different perspective has become a sought-after resource. As stated in *Interdisciplinary Art Education Reconsidered*, interdisciplinary practices improve one’s skills because “...each element is enhanced by the others and new understandings are developed as a result of the connections” (Ulbricht 16).

Interdisciplinary studies not only have cognitive benefits but also practical uses for cultivating creativity and providing alternative outlets for dancers. It can lead to opportunities in other venues connected to dance because of an increased skill set. This

not only increases a dancer's income opportunities but also creates opportunity for alternative outlets of creativity. You could bring your interest in business and dance into a career of arts management for instance. In my interdisciplinary arts practice, I find that I use concepts of movement that originated in dance as inspiration for photographs. I also enjoy photographing dance itself to bring my perspective to its form. These uses of interdisciplinary studying can be of great value to a dancer seeking to expand their view on their medium.

This mode of interdisciplinary study can be accomplished in a college setting. By double majoring or adding a minor in a different area from your degree, you can explore your other interests while simultaneously continuing studies in dance. You can also take this approach in classes you are required to take outside of the dance department, seeing what correlations you can find. If you have interests outside of dance, college can be a valuable resource to discover them. Even if you do not end up double majoring, you may find new ideas to inspire your dancing or choreography by seeing dance through a different lens. I found that studying photography gave me inspiration in dance and also provided another creative outlet when I needed to take a break. It allowed my conceptual artwork in photography to flourish, and gave me the ability to commercially photograph dance.

Interdisciplinary practice in relation to dance has many possibilities still to be discovered. I encourage you to utilize the resources around you to explore them.

Works Cited:

Spelt, Elisabeth J. H., et al. "Teaching and Learning in Interdisciplinary Higher Education: A Systematic Review." *Educational Psychology Review*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2009, pp. 365–378., www.jstor.org/stable/23361570.

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