

# The Importance of Breathing Training in Folk Dance Teaching

Xiaowei Sun\*

Southwest University Academy of Music, Chongqing 400715, China

\*Corresponding author: Xiaowei Sun, maomao123\_3@sina.com

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**Abstract:** The importance of breathing training in dance teaching is reflected in the two aspects of enhancing the quality of dance movements and sublimating the connotation of dance movements. For example, high-quality breathing can help performers complete the dance movements and improve the coordination of the movements; at the same time, the unique body rhythm formed by breathing can strengthen the visual effect of the performance and convey its spirit and soul to the audience. This requires folk dance teachers to carry out relevant training and teaching activities based on the categories and skills of dance breathing, such as changing students' ideological cognition, developing periodic breathing training courses, providing personalized guidance to students, and allowing students to adjust their learning and practice methods in the evaluation.

**Keywords:** Folk dance teaching; Breathing training; Importance; Training methods

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## 1. Introduction

Breathing is the most basic activity for human survival. Different volumes, lengths, and depths of breathing will bring varying sights and feelings to people. This determines that to complete complex and smooth dance movements, dancers need to be able to use breathing correctly and flexibly so that breathing and body movements are integrated. However, many dance majors tend to ignore the importance of breathing and focus only on learning dance techniques. Therefore, teachers of folk dance and other majors should let students recognize the importance of breathing and breathing training, and learn to breathe through high-quality breathing training.

## 2. Categorization and techniques of breathing in dance teaching

### 2.1. Categories of breathing

In dance teaching, breathing, an innate ability of human beings, is differentiated based on the needs of movement and form shaping and expression. It can be categorized into long, medium, and short breathing

according to the length of the movement; deep breathing and shallow breathing according to the expression of the dance performance; internal and external breathing according to the form of the dance movement; and straight, curved, and circular breathing according to the path of breathing <sup>[1]</sup>. Each kind of breathing has its own function and different ways of breathing: taking short and medium breathing as an example, it is usually used to distinguish multiple dance movements within a beat, and it can also be used to make these fast-changing movements more elastic and energetic through short breathing so that the section of the dance shows a stronger sense of speed.

## **2.2. Techniques of breathing**

Although humans instinctively breathe in daily life, there are various breathing techniques in dance teaching, allowing breathing and dance movements to adapt to each other. Instead of focusing on the rhythm of one breath, students focus on the posture and movement of the dance, consciously contracting the breath or stabilizing the breath with the chest according to the demand of the movement <sup>[2]</sup>. For example, when controlling the muscles and contracting for a dance movement, powerful contracted breaths are synchronized to resist the body's reaction force and relax the inhalation. However, controlling the force on the neck and chest is avoided as it prevents oxygen from entering the brain, leading to dizziness and affecting the quality of the completion of the dance movement. Secondly, breathing can be synchronized during the imagery dance movements, i.e. breathing while imagining. For example, one can imagine breathing as the pressure of water, moving in and out with water waves; or imagine breathing as an umbrella action: open the umbrella upward and extend the umbrella to all sides, the rhythm of breathing should be in accordance with the umbrella shaft stretching; and imagine the angle and force of the umbrella when one breathes in. Breathing hard is like releasing the hand that controls the strength of the umbrella when it reaches its "peak" <sup>[3]</sup>.

## **3. Importance of breathing training in folk dance teaching**

### **3.1. Enhancing the texture of the dance movement**

#### **3.1.1. Ensuring the integrity of movement**

The interpretation of a dance performance is completed by relying on a small movement. Every gesture and expression constitutes an important factor of the dance unit. Only when the dance movement is complete, can it have the possibility of transmitting the connotation of the dance performance. The completion of the movement needs to be supported by strength and requires the dancer to effectively control the muscles and bones, and the prerequisite for this is breathing. For example, a series of larger movements require sufficient oxygen for support, so that the dancers can make strong movements, with alternate muscle contraction and relaxation, resulting in movements resembling flowing water.

Teachers in the daily teaching of folk dance emphasize breathing training so that students can develop the habit of controlling the intensity of breathing according to the amplitude of the dance movement and the size of the strength. If they are holding props to push them slowly in the eight o'clock direction and need to quickly retract the movement, students will be accustomed to finding the breathing nodes, opening their chests with the extension of the movement, and tilting the point of breathing to the eight o'clock direction according to the strength of their movements <sup>[4]</sup>. Although one is in an eccentric state in this process and the body weight is constantly changing, the actor's breathing force is also increasing, which will deliver the oxygen needed to complete the action. With the support of breathing, the actor will be able to adjust tension and control muscles, pull the body back, and perform the follow-up movements, so that the entire movement presents a perfect, tightly articulated state.

In addition, regular breathing training can also improve students' abilities in muscle control and body shaping. Whether in solo dancing, duet dancing, trio dancing, or group dancing, breathing can be adjusted according to the performance needs of dance movements in time with the end of the movement, so that breathing becomes a soft connection between movements. Whether it is the beginning or the end of the pose, the dance movements are continuous in a breathing cycle.

### **3.1.2. Improving the coordination of movement**

Dance is an expression of inner emotions, and both of them have rhythm. This rhythm also needs to be supported by breathing, so that there is a high coordination between dance movements and music and dance movements. For instance, the fast rhythm and high-frequency switching notes should have alternating rapid dance movements and powerful dance expression forms. At this time, the dancers are dizzy and weak due to poor breathing, leading to a decline in the performance quality of a single movement.

Breathing training can improve students' respiratory expression ability, dance power control, and molding ability, to solve the problem mentioned above. For example, drawing on the breathing training methods of artistic gymnastics, sports, and other activities to carry out teaching activities, the students' muscle groups can be effectively exercised through the respiratory function, especially the core muscle groups, and the students' muscle proprioception, large and small muscle groups, and the neuromuscular system will be more coordinated<sup>[5]</sup>. The body stability is better, and the articulation, balance, and sense of power between the completed dance movements are up to standard, and naturally, there is a kind of harmony and beauty in movement skills. The addition of emotional exercises in breathing training can make students pay attention to the connection between breathing rhythm, body movement, and artistic emotion, and consciously and continuously adjust their breathing to achieve the effect of human-dance unity, and naturally realize the coordination of dance movement and music background.

## **3.2. Sublimation of the connotation of dance movement**

### **3.2.1. Strengthening the visual effect of the dance**

Dance performances first bring visual enjoyment, and good breathing rhythm and form are an important part of visual art. The visual effect of the dance cannot be achieved if the dancers breathe heavily while performing the dance. On the contrary, through breathing training, students can master the breathing method so that the breathing and breathing-led movements become an effective filler in the dance space, making the entire movements more visually appealing. For example, the stage effect is to present an imaginary and illusory scene through the interaction between the woman and the rose. At this time, the actor and the props are back to back, the actor uses slow inner breathing to stabilize the body and sink downward, at this time the breath-driven movement creates a sense of mystery and stripping in the whole stage space. The respiratory state and movements become part of the shaping of the dance movement, which can bring direct visual impact to the audience and facilitate the audience's understanding of the performance<sup>[6]</sup>.

### **3.2.2. Conveying the spirit and soul of the work**

Dance is a noble art that is not just purely showing techniques and skills, but also conveying emotions, imagination, and inner activities about the art, which requires dancers to have a strong performance power, and this performance cannot be separated from the use of breathing. Folk dance teachers guide students to turn breathing training into one of the habits of daily expression and performance, allowing students to better control the point of force of the breath, and turn the breath into a kind of tangible power<sup>[7]</sup>. For example, it is preset that the dancers gradually enter the stage from the seven o'clock direction at the back half of the stage, at this

time, students imagine that breathing starts from a point in outer space, gradually opening up the rhythm of the breath, allowing the breath to fill the heart. The following is the movement of the foot and the extension of the arm, creating a stronger sense of the story so that the audience can experience the artistic conception of the light radiation or sunlight that the performance wants to present at this stage through the combination of breathing and action. Due to this emotional interaction, every simple but straightforward breath of the dancer will become more profound and meaningful <sup>[8]</sup>.

## **4. Effective methods of breathing training in folk dance teaching**

### **4.1. Changing students' ideological cognition**

Since breathing training has many important roles in folk dance teaching as mentioned above, it is necessary to carry out corresponding training activities. The initial stage of training is to change the students' ideological cognition, so that students can understand the necessary connection between breathing, movement, and emotion, and change the wrong cognition that only emphasizes the learning of dance technique and movement.

This change should be based on unconscious transformation, so that students can independently recognize the importance of breathing and generate the willingness to understand breathing techniques and methods. For example, you can show students two videos of flipping and dancing "The Spirit of the Bird", and after comparing and learning, students will express the version they prefer and are guided to give evaluation from several aspects such as physical expression, movement fluency, coherence, and artistic shaping. Students can carry out group discussions to discover the differences in these areas. The teacher then relates it to the breathing ability of the two dancers, allowing the students to interpret the same set of movements under different breathing patterns and methods, so as to practically experience the importance of controlling and adjusting the dance movements by using breathing skills, and open the new door of students' learning.

### **4.2. Developing periodic training programs**

Improvement of breathing ability cannot be accomplished overnight, it requires periodic training. Therefore, teachers should formulate training courses according to the physical quality of the students in the class and the foundation of dance movement, and pay attention to the training results of the students to adjust the training content, intensity, and load at any time <sup>[9]</sup>.

For example, an eight-week systematic respiratory muscle training class could be scheduled with three sessions of training activities each week, with the training becoming progressively more difficult. In the first week, three courses can be arranged respectively: lying position abdominal breathing and chest breathing; lying position, kneeling position abdominal breathing and chest breathing; lying position, kneeling position, standing position abdominal breathing and chest breathing. Each course required students to complete 4, 6, and 6 sets of exercises; each set was to consist of 20 repetitions; and 30 seconds of rest between each set, which could be done without a training load. After the students have mastered the basic training methods and adapted to the training intensity, the exercises of blowing up a balloon in prone, kneeling, and standing abdominal breathing patterns are arranged. The number of exercises and intervals can be kept at the same frequency; however, with the extension of the training cycle, the training load can be increased appropriately by changing each group of exercises per person from a no-load state to 2.2 grams of load.

Teachers should pay attention to the training status of the students, such as placing the palms of both hands lightly below the student's ribcage, with the fingers rushing forward, and judging whether the student is using diaphragmatic breathing by observing whether the fingertips can touch each other. If the student can successfully exhale from the diaphragm, then the teachers observe whether the shoulders and chest are relaxed.

The student's training pattern is adjusted in time so that he or she can master the correct breathing training method.

### **4.3. Individualized breathing instruction**

Breathing training is not only a skill training but also a kind of mind and psychological training. Each student's learning and growing environment differs, and his/her psychological state is naturally different. Therefore, folk dance teachers should also provide students with personalized breathing guidance, so that they can better integrate breathing and dance movements <sup>[10]</sup>.

For example, for students who are more aggressive and prone to anxiety, teachers can instruct them to practice yoga to find the correct breathing rhythm, control muscle relaxation with appropriate postures, and use breathing movements to regulate autonomic nerves and release psychological pressure. The training method can also vary from person to person and is divided into complete breathing and bellows breathing. Complete breathing is to fully exhale the gas with the power of the abdomen, inhale to fill the lower abdomen and chest cavity with air, and then briefly hold the breath, and exhale in a slow rhythm. The time rhythm ratio of inhaling, holding the breath, and then exhaling should be controlled at about 1:4:2. During training, students should be guided to control the node of breath holding in one place and pay attention to the changes of their own muscles and so on. Bellows breathing, as the name suggests, is to exhale and inhale as hard as pulling a bellows. Before training, students can relax their body, then put the second finger of the right hand between the eyebrows and fully inhale. After inhaling fully, the mouth of the cone is blocked with the middle finger, completely holding the breath but without any pain, and then relaxing the finger to exhale slowly. The purpose is to increase the student's lung capacity and improve the respiratory function of the lungs. The length of the bellows breathing exercise should be limited to about 4 minutes and can be alternated with complete breathing exercises.

### **4.4. Combination of teaching, learning, practicing, and evaluation**

In addition to the above breathing training methods, teachers of folk dance should also objectively recognize the students' learning status and deficiencies in learning ability, and combine teaching, learning, practicing, and evaluating.

For example, students should be given a demonstration on how to explore the power of breathing, match their movements with the breathing points, adjust the power of dance movements by controlling the tightness of breathing, and promote the development of the storyline of the dance. After the teaching demonstration, the students engage in imitative learning and practicing, including regulating their own internal breathing rhythms, or forming a practice group of two students to try to work with the music using different types of breathing methods, presenting seemingly different but identical musical moods, and guiding and assisting each other. After practicing, students should be allowed to present the results. All the students in the class can interpret the same set of dance movements, the same rhythm, or the same type of music dance. Students should evaluate themselves as well as each other, while the teacher will make summarized comments, such as whether the rhythmic point of breathing is accurate, whether the strength of the breath is reasonable, and whether the outer state of the breath fits the demands of the current dance expression. Then, the students will take the evaluation as a new starting point and repeat the practice.

## **5. Conclusion**

To summarize, breathing and breathing training have a vital role and significance in the performance and teaching of folk dance. It is necessary for both teachers and professional students of folk dance to pay attention

to breathing. In particular, teachers should let students integrate teaching, learning, practice, and evaluation, master breathing methods in the integration of breathing, movement skills, and emotional expression, and then turn methods and skills into personal dance expression habits.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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