**Dancing from policy to pedagogy in China: Transgressions, surveillance and resistance from students, teachers and institutional leaders**

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**Abstract:**

This article investigates the challenges that tertiary educators face when seeking to implement education policy reforms in China. Our qualitative study presents the narratives of tertiary dance educators from eight universities, who have actively sought to shift their pedagogical practices as acts of transgression. Their stories reveal the ways that teachers experience pressure to perpetuate authoritarian teaching practices, from their students, from other teachers, and from their institutional leaders. Viewing this learning culture through a Foucauldian lens, we critically question how an authoritarian discourse pervades the tertiary dance education system. Through this we identify how surveillance and a continual sense of comparison (between students, teachers and institutions), sustains authoritarian pedagogies and inhibits individual teachers' approaches to educational reform.

**Key words:**
Dance, Education, Authority, Hierarchy, Foucault, China

## From policy to practice

Arts education in China is changing, in response to national policy shifts associated with internationalization, education and innovation. Governmental directives such as the *Opening Up Policy* of 1978 (Xianshun, 2003), the *Enrolment Expansion Policy* of 1998 (Wan, 2006), the *Suggestion on Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education* of 2015 (Peng, 2016), and the *Belt and Road* strategic initiative (Reeves, 2018) have broadened and redirected the function of arts education, to greater connect with the creative knowledge economies of the 21st century. Along with broader reforms to promote 'quality education' (Dello-Iacovo, 2009), these governmental directives have prompted tertiary dance institutions in China to increasingly engage with international scholars and theories to develop alternatives to the traditional, conservatoire model of dance education (Jin & Martin, 2019). Such a transformation is by no means straightforward. China currently has the largest tertiary dance education system in the history of the world, with 260 tertiary institutions offering a standardized dance curriculum to tens of thousands of students each year (China Education Online, 2019). Implementing significant policy changes within this system is therefore a complex endeavour, challenging the practices, mindsets and expectations of dance students, teachers and institutional leaders.

This article therefore investigates the challenges that tertiary dance educators face when seeking to implement policy shifts and transition away from authoritarian pedagogies within dance education in China. As dance educators ourselves, the authors of this article have taught within tertiary institutions in China for more than ten years, exploring ways of implementing educational policy changes. Amongst other colleagues who have sought to implement non-authoritarian teaching strategies within dance classrooms in China, we recognize that dance education's entrenched culture of authoritarian power and rigid hierarchy can inhibit such attempts at change. Viewing this educational culture from a Foucauldian lens, we consider such

power to be a constructed phenomenon, institutionalised and maintained by all involved and by the discourse that pervades the education system.

We explore this phenomenon through a qualitative, narrative enquiry that gathers the stories of tertiary dance educators from eight universities in China who have actively sought to implement student-centred pedagogical practices within their institutes. We examine how they experience pressure to perpetuate authoritarian teaching practices, from the discourse presented by their students, other teachers, and their institutional leaders. By deconstructing this discourse, we reveal the complexity of the challenge facing teachers who seek to transcend authoritarian pedagogic practices in dance education in China. This evidences the need for broader strategies that may engage all stakeholders in the process of educational reform.

**Authoritarian pedagogy in dance education in China as a 'discourse'**

The Beijing Dance Academy (BDA), established in 1954 as a conservatory for training professional dancers in China, began China's first tertiary dance programme in 1978 (Jin, 2017). A teacher-student hierarchy was promoted within the BDA, in which an ideal student was described as an empty bag that could be filled with all of the teacher's knowledge, which could then be carried to the next generation (Zhao, 1989). This 'banking' approach to education challenged the concept that students might bring valuable knowledge and perspectives into their education (Freire, 1970). To achieve this authoritarian teaching approach, learning predominantly involved demonstration by teachers and imitation by learners (Lv, 2000). Dance education at the BDA also involved extensive physical and emotional abuse and exclusion by teachers towards students (Xiong, 2008; Jin, 2009; Wang, 2014). Such practices have also been noted within similar critiques of authoritarian dance pedagogies in Europe and North America (see Fay, 1997; Green, 1999; Lakes, 2005; Alterowitz, 2014). While these dance teaching practices might be considered a European pedagogic legacy, passed on via the Soviet Union which helped establish the BDA (Deng & Yang, 2013), such authoritarian pedagogies also draw on the influence of Confucianism, which position the teacher as an authoritative source of knowledge in the classroom (Biggs & Watkins, 1996).

The Chinese Government's Enrollment Expansion policy of 1998 led to the rapid expansion of tertiary dance programmes in China, as universities across the country sought diverse ways of accommodating a massive influx of new students. These institutions ostensibly followed three models for dance education: conservatory programmes training future professional dancers, comprehensive universities integrating dance into an arts curriculum and normal (or teacher-training) universities that sought to teach future dance educators (Zou, 2014). In practice all of the universities maintained a curriculum format that was based on the conservatory model established by the BDA: the development of technical and artistic dance skills relevant to a performance career (Wang, 2014). This might be attributed to the prestige of the BDA, and that most of the teachers employed to develop the dance programmes within the new institutions were graduates of the BDA drawing on their own learning experiences (Tong, 2012). The authoritarian pedagogic method of the BDA thus spread across China's tertiary dance programmes (Lv, 2014). Competitiveness was a central feature of this pedagogic philosophy, as student successes in national and international performance competitions consolidated the reputation of particular tertiary institutions (Jin, 2017). While this authoritarian pedagogy has been critiqued by scholars within China, particularly for inhibiting the creative development of students (Lv, 2014), it remains deeply entrenched within the culture of tertiary dance education in China (Wang, 2014).

The authoritarian culture of tertiary dance in China, its hierarchies and the ways in which it operates can be recognized as 'discourses' (Foucault, 1971). Foucault's use of 'discourse' extends beyond the linguistic concept and into how language can be a system of representation, including both what we say *and* what we do. These discourses are produced by the established

systems, institutions and hierarchies within a society, and maintained by all who participate within those systems. In this sense, transforming away from an authoritarian dance pedagogy relies upon multiple stakeholders, and is not simply under the control of individual teachers. Foucault (1971) proposes that discourse, through certain periods of history, environments and institutions (such as tertiary dance education in China in the 21st century), 'normalizes' behaviour. That is, discourses present underlying conditions of truth that determine what is and is not acceptable. These conditions are perpetuated through discursive practices, which, within dance education regimes, can involve routinized actions of physical punishment, humiliation and exclusion (Martin, 2008; Ang, 2019). As the following pages explore, these discursive practices present powerful norms of behaviour and maintain rigid hierarchies within dance training in China, stymying attempts to transform power relationships in education. Questioning the discourse of how authoritarian dance pedagogies are sustained within tertiary education in China therefore requires questioning the actions of all involved in the learning environment, and the content of the learning itself.

Extending upon this, Foucault (1977a) proposes that power and knowledge cannot be separated, within everything that we learn and teach. Of particular relevance to dance pedagogy, this includes the ways in which physical bodies are 'disciplined' to become docile or submissive to particular knowledge regimes (Green, 1999). This disciplining includes both what an individual learns and how they learn it, suggesting that an authoritarian dance knowledge system is maintained by an authoritarian dance pedagogic system, and vice versa (Warburton, 2008). Attempts to escape the hegemony of both the knowledge and the pedagogy can involve acts of "transgression" (Foucault, 1977b: 73): while aligned with wider governmental policies, these teaching actions subvert the predominant authoritarian teaching discourse. Such transgressive acts are not seeking to compete with the established norms, but instead aim to provide "moments of freedom or otherness" (Allan, 2007: 93). The friction emerging from transgression notably contrasts with the tension that might emerge between competing hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses in dance education (Rowe, 2008), and instead provides spaces for non-authoritarian pedagogies to emerge.

As our study reveals however, the "art of surveillance" (Foucault, 1977b: 172) seeks to maintain docile bodies, and thereby inhibits the emergence of non-authoritarian pedagogies. As Foucault describes, such surveillance can rely upon three factors: A) hierarchical and pan-optic supervision of everyone within the learning environment, B) clearly defined standards that seek to homogenize behaviour, and C) processes of examination that can reinforce these behavioural standards. This study therefore explores how teachers who are engaged in such acts of transgression can experience pressure to maintain the discursive practices of authoritarian teaching: from students, teachers and institutional leaders.

**The stories of teachers**

It might be easy to presume that how a teacher teaches is entirely the responsibility of teachers themselves, and that specific authoritarian acts of bullying and exclusion can be the random result of individual teachers having a grumpy day. As we argue however, this behavior can be systemic to the educational environment and its prevailing discourses. For this reason, we start our investigation into authoritarian pedagogy with the teachers themselves, specifically those teachers who are seeking to transgress authoritarian pedagogies by introducing alternate pedagogic approaches.

Our research engaged in a qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) to identify significant issues for teachers working within the tertiary education landscape, particularly through the meanings that teachers extended from their own experiences. To vividly understand teacher's experiences, we employed a narrative-enquiry methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000),

eliciting anecdotes that evoked a particular issue associated with authoritarian pedagogy. To gather these stories, we engaged in semi-structured interviews (Weiss, 1994) with teachers of tertiary dance programmes in China. We sought interviewees with at least five year's teaching experience from eight tertiary dance programmes across China; specifically teachers who had attempted to implement non-authoritarian pedagogies within their classrooms. These interviewees had predominantly encountered student-centred dance pedagogies though studies and workshops abroad, and sought to introduce these practices into the tertiary dance system on their return to China. These select interviewees were identified through a parallel study with a wider range of interviewees in China, which sought to unpack dance teacher's understandings of authoritarian pedagogy (Rowe & Xiong, in Press).

The interviews were conducted with informed consent in Mandarin and subsequently translated into English. Following the interviews, interviewees were encouraged to reflect further on their experiences and, if they felt like it, to write out any further narratives that they recalled and email these to us. To allow the interviewees to speak frankly about their experiences, their names, the names of third parties referenced within their stories, and the names of their institutions have been kept confidential (in alignment with the protocols of the Human Participants Ethics Committee of an author's institution).

For the following discussion, we have selected key narratives that reveal how teachers engage in acts of transgression and the responses that they provoke. These narratives illustrate how these complex pressures emerge from the expressions and behaviours of all involved in the learning process: students, other teachers, and institutional leaders.

**The influence of students: *She expected me to get angry***

Throughout our interviews, teachers shared stories of student requests for didactic teaching, hierarchical student-teacher relationships and extrinsic forms of motivation such as collective punishment. These stories challenge an assumption that students will automatically embrace non-authoritarian teaching practices, and that students can actively surveil teacher's transgressions from authoritarian discourses.

In the following narrative, a teacher recounts how her students talked to her after watching another group from their year level. The groups had been streamed based on their previous learning experiences, which separated students with intensive pre-professional training from more recreational dance learners:

> After watching Class 16, my students compared their own flexibility, technique levels and achievements with the students from Class 16, and expressed that they were so much worse than those students. Comparing their training backgrounds, one student said, "Naturally, we are worse than them. But we should not take it as the excuse. We should train harder and harder to narrow the gap between the two classes."
>
> I felt that I had totally failed. I had spent a long time trying to tell them that learning dance is not only about improving flexibility and technique. My students also compared two ways of learning in classes. Firstly, students in Class 16 repeat the same movement countless times to get it right. By contrast, my students get to choose their own way to practice a movement. It can be individually, in pairs or in groups. They can practice it by repeating, by watching, or by correcting each other. Secondly, in Class 16, when one student makes a mistake, all students are punished, which keeps the class atmosphere very tense. Everyone has to pay full attention and work extremely hard to avoid getting classmates in trouble. We don't have punishment in our class, so students expressed that everything can be negotiated and there is no pressure to improve. But after observing Class 16, they felt a very strong pressure: they expressed how much they felt behind.

> The students concluded their reflective discussion with me by saying that while the teacher of Class 16 was threatening and the training was horrible (some joked that they would probably die in her class), they believed that it was necessary. So they wanted to be trained harder so that in the final exam they would not lose too much face when compared to Class 16. The next day, when I walked into the studio, my students were being led by the class monitor, repeating a forward walk-over movement as a group, in the way they had seen it done by Class 16.

This narrative illustrates how learners surveil their own progress through comparison to the learning achievements of others. This sense of comparison and competition is particularly accentuated within a curriculum that engages in standardized examination, in which all students face the same examination procedures at the completion of each year level.

From the teacher's perspective, the students' comparative analysis and concern over the standardized examination was underpinned by a fear of collective humiliation; a loss of "face" in which their whole class would appear very poor in contrast to the achievements of Class 16. Their preference for collective punishment over collective humiliation, revealed how embedded concerns over loss of esteem within dance education can contribute to the maintenance of authoritarian teaching structures.

Another story recounts how a teacher's attempt to modify learning content to respond to the students' abilities led to student assumptions that the teacher was too "soft and kind", and lacked a capacity to be disciplined:

> My student said that I was a better friend than teacher. My problem, according to her, was that I was over-nice to the students. She used the phrase "free-range" to describe my teaching style. For example, there was a time when they couldn't remember the order of movements after I taught them three or four times. She expected me to get angry, to give them some punishments, or at least shout, so that they would pay more attention and memorize it. However, I asked them to rearrange the movements in the way that they liked. Their compositional choices formed the final dance piece that they performed. According to my student, the other students should be able to remember the movements, but this "free-range" teaching made them not scared of me at all. As a result, there was no tense atmosphere in the class, so the students paid less attention to remembering the order of movements.

Within this narrative, the teacher feels that their transgression from a more domineering pedagogic role is disdained by students and perceived as a personality trait, rather than a deliberate pedagogic strategy. Like the previous narrative, the students' request for a more hierarchical learning forum, involving punishment and expressions of anger from the teacher, again stemmed from a desire to enhance the collective learning of the class. While not drawing comparison to other teachers and classes, the student felt that a shift away from predetermined content was a disruption to standardized learning; indicative of a failure on the part of the students, and a failure of teaching. Extrinsic motivation, in the form of fear of authority and punishment, was proposed as the logical remedy.

The expectation of extrinsic motivations for learning, such as punishment and prestige, is further extended within the following narrative. Within this story a teacher recounts surprise at seeing a particular student practicing in the studio in the evening, and subsequently talks to her about it. The students' response suggests that, after a semester within the institution, her self-esteem had become so diminished through comparison with other learners that she actively rejected constructive commentary from the teacher:

> I have seen students practice in studio after class, but this girl was different. She seemed very concentrated, not on the figure of herself in the mirror as I have often seen, but on moving itself. The music was quite loud so she didn't notice me. When I realized that the girl was from my Chinese classical dance class, I was quite shocked. This girl was considered a problem student not only because of her physical limitations, but more because of her reluctant attitude towards learning. She was one of the students who would not practice unless compelled to. I had believed that she was forced to come to study dance as a major. Her fluent movement shocked me too. We, the teachers who had taught her, had assumed that she had a coordination problem; "Never together" her ballet teacher had once commented.
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> Several days later, I told the girl that I had seen her dance and it had been great. But she denied it. "I just did some stupid movements", she said, looking embarrassed and annoyed. She told me that she came to the university because she thought that she liked dance and she was good at it. But after a semester, she understood that she was not the right type. "I will never dance in the right way. I always knew that I'm not flexible, but I didn't know flexibility is that important. Those movements are so hard that there is no way for me to manage them. Every time my classmates waited for me to learn or correct the movements in the class, I felt stupid and humiliated. I'm a drag on my class. The main thing is that I gradually found out I don't want to learn and do dance movements in any class". She concluded by saying, "I was so naïve and had deluded myself. I don't like dance, I just liked moving".

This narrative suggests the ways in which a pervasive culture of authoritarian dance pedagogy has prompted the student to reconstruct their understanding of what dance is, their own capabilities as a dancer, and thus their own expectations as a learner of dance. Within a dance learning environment, such prolonged domination can lead to a deeply embodied docility and passive acceptance of authority, even to the extent that an individual's belief systems come to mirror those of the authority (Green, 2003). While students' self-esteem can be diminished in myriad ways within dance classes (Ang, 2019), the teacher's attempts here to redress that degradation faced resistance from the student, who did not seek a return to what she perceived as a 'naïve' former self, believing in her ability to dance.

Amongst other stories that our research gathered, these narratives reveal how students can express an expectation that teachers maintain an authoritarian teaching approach to dance. Through their behaviours and expressions, students can convey to teachers an expectation that their progress is only measured against either universal standards or the comparable abilities of other students, that valued knowledge should remain prescribed and unchangeable, that failure to achieve should result in punishment, and that humiliation is a viable pedagogic strategy. Through such daily interactions with students, teachers can feel inhibited from introducing more student-centred teaching reforms that adapt how they engage with learners.

**The influence of other teachers: *Fix your brain!***

The pressure to maintain established pedagogic behaviours extends beyond the expressions of students, and can also be experienced within the community of practice (Wenger, 2010) of fellow teachers. The teachers we interviewed expressed how a sense of belonging within such a professional community was important to them, as it helped validate their professional endeavours. As the following narratives illustrate, teachers can experience diverse 'peer' pressures to conform to the dominant authoritarian teaching model.

As with the pressures from students, rationales from other teachers to maintain an authoritarian teaching practice were entwined with the standardized, competitive models for tertiary dance education in China, in which institutions feel compelled to measure learning in

terms of comparability to elite training institutions like the Beijing Dance Academy. The following narrative suggests how this pressure continues within staff meeting contexts, shutting down explorations of alternate teaching strategies:

> We were having a meeting about course reform, to figure out how to reduce the class time for Basic Technique Training. All of the teachers felt negative about this idea. They felt that the students were already struggling to achieve all the goals in the current time, and that cutting the time would leave our students with no chance to compete with BDA students.
> I suggested that we reduce the *quantity* of particular techniques, so that a good *quality* could be achieved instead. For example, instead of doing 12 walk-overs, we should require students to do only 4 to a high standard. The teachers disagreed, saying that doing 4 walkovers would mean nothing, when compared with the BDA students doing 32 in combination with other techniques, and other universities where students were achieving 24.
> So I suggested that we think about this course in another way; for example, to gain knowledge about this technique, but not to master it as a professional dance performer. All the teachers disagreed with this: "Then, what's the point of majoring in dance?"
> The final result of this meeting was that the class time of Basic Technique Training was not reduced.

As this narrative reveals, comparison to the teaching practices of elite training institutions can dominate teacher discussions. This overwhelming concern can impede the resolution of complex pedagogic issues, and inhibit spaces for alternate, student-centred pedagogies to emerge. It could be argued that until the institutional comparison of such a narrow band of graduate attributes is dis-incentivized at a national level, it will be very hard for individual teachers to introduce teaching innovations that are not focused on such comparisons.

This pressure to maintain established teaching practices can also be expressed by peers within the formal institutional forums that surveil comparability between teaching practices, such as examination boards. In the following narrative, a teacher recounts how her fellow teachers expressed disdain for her pedagogic adaptations that sought to make all of the students feel valued and have a sense of learning purpose. Within this classical technique class, the students had very divergent backgrounds and abilities; some had a high level of classical training, and others had little or no classical training. Motivation was low, and students expressed frustration at how the diverse student abilities affected the pace of the learning. This led the teacher to introduce a task that might motivate students at different levels:

> I put them into small groups to do a task. They could choose two or three key movements in Chinese classical dance to create a small piece of dance, to write a page analyzing the movements and how they made the dance piece, and to do a presentation about their work. I originally planned it just as an activity to get them motivated and together, but the students seemed to like it so it lasted longer than I had expected. At the end, they wanted to show their work in the final examination, so we did.
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> The other teachers at the examination were not so enthusiastic. They commented:
> 1) creating dance should be done in Choreography class;
> 2) students didn't fully apply their choreography skills (because I had insufficient knowledge as a teacher of choreography);
> 3) essay writing should be done in theory courses (eg: Dance Appreciation, Dance History and Chinese Ancient Dance);
> 4) because we wasted much time on unimportant things, students' dance skills didn't improve as much as expected. The gap between the "good" students and the "bad" ones was still huge.

> 5) even though each group focused on only two or three key movements, they still didn't master their chosen movements perfectly.

Within this narrative, the teacher sought to engage learners of different levels by providing a task that allowed them to construct meanings from their learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). While this task was not introduced as an examinable component, the students' desire to present the outcomes of this task at an examination event led to disapproving responses from fellow teachers. The teachers' critique of this teaching innovation was rationalized through reference to historic teaching expectations, and expressed a sense that the teacher had insufficient professional and disciplinary competence to introduce theory and creative practices to this class.

So how might a broader institutional culture become more engaged in educational reforms that seek to transgress entrenched pedagogic discourses? Even when such cultural changes are directed by the institution, discursive practices do not necessarily change. The following narrative provides an example of how a disdain for educational reform amongst teachers, and their active efforts to undermine such reform, can lead a teacher to question her transgressions from authoritarian teaching. This teacher recounts how teachers had previously scheduled extra classes in Basic Technique, often working students late into the evening, to enhance the technical progress of students. In this case, the institute had forbidden teachers from giving extra training classes, to avoid student injuries from overwork. To encourage a shift to student-guided learning, students were instead encouraged to practice in the studio on their own in the evenings. Within this narrative, a teacher describes how her colleagues had re-established their surveillance of intensive training practice through the use of technology: they continued to observe and comment on student practice time through a video connection to the student monitor's phone in the studio. As one teacher recounted, each evening her colleagues routinely gathered in a café just outside the campus (and therefore not strictly in violation of the rules) and surveilled students through their phones, discussing their classes. She shares a conversation she had with these teachers, when she questioned this practice:

> "How are they going to learn? By themselves?" Jing asked me. "Never expect students to learn with just prompting. Knowing that a teacher is watching, students will pay attention and take their self-training seriously. And you will know if they are practicing in the correct way or not."
> "Even with this, honestly," Xing pointed at her cellphone, "they are still very weak. They're not putting their heart in training. They complained that it is so hard all the time. But they don't understand how much time and effort they should put into practice."
> Jing and Xing were both concerned that I didn't monitor extra classes this way. Jing continued, "that's why your students are always having lower achievements. It's all about the teacher. The stronger the teacher forces students, the harder they work on that subject".
> I argued that I didn't want to force them to learn. "Then, your priority now is to fix your brain!" Jing said in a joking tone. But her words that "my students are always having lower achievements" made me uneasy and I wondered if I was failing to help students achieve the level that they are capable of.

This was a recurrent theme within our interviews: the wider community of practice in dance education surveilled the authoritative teaching pedagogies of other teachers, and derided their transgressions as leading to "lower achievements". This in turn led teachers to both doubt their own teaching competence and fear that they were letting their students "fall behind". As this narrative illustrates, even when the institute supports a shift towards more student-centred practices, teachers can feel compelled to sustain an authoritarian teaching practice. As the following section explores, this institutional culture of comparability, and the authoritarian relationships that it can foster, can also be promoted by institutional leaders.

**The influence of institutional leaders: *Are you going to lie down next time?***

Our interviewees stories suggested how entrenched professional hierarchies remain within tertiary dance education: departmental and faculty leadership can exert an authority towards teachers that is akin to teachers' relationships with students. This leadership practice can emphasize discursive practices across the institution, making it harder for individual teachers to rationalize a non-authoritarian approach to teaching.

As the following narrative suggests, such authoritarian attitudes can be expressed very publicly and brutally. This story comes from the opening of an exhibition space in a new performing arts building, which included a series of performances by students in the foyer of the building. A teacher recounts how, at the conclusion of the performances, the Faculty Dean presented a speech to the staff, students and distinguished visitors present:

> In his speech the Dean was very critical of the building noise around the college during the concert, and people talking in the audience and around the foyer. Then he identified one of the student musical soloists and said she was not properly dressed for the event. He asked her to come back out to the front of the foyer. She came out, with her head bowed down. He then pointed to her dress and showed how it was not properly ironed. She was standing there in tears, with her head bowed and trying to turn away, and he kept talking about how we all need to respect the artform. He noticed she was crying, so he then started saying it was not her fault; that her teachers were wrong to send her out like this and that they should have prepared her better. When his speech was finished, he gathered together his entourage and left the building, as the other speeches went on.

While not directly referencing a classroom context, this narrative illustrates how professional hierarchies can be asserted and authoritarian discourses maintained through institutional surveillance at public events. The teachers we interviewed shared further stories of how their professional managers made them feel humiliated, by expressing disapproval of their attempts to initiate pedagogical transformation. The following narrative captures a moment in which a Head of School surveils a class and repudiates the students for being noisy, unaware that the teacher was present and implementing a game designed to animate the learning of a particular dance:

> I was with a group at the back of the studio when the Head of School walked in. Before I stood up to show myself as the teacher in the class, he said in an angry voice that a studio is a place for studying, not for fun. He asked us to be quiet, and accused the class-monitor of being irresponsible. The class-monitor was supposed to maintain the order during self-training. Before leaving, the Head of School warned us that if we could not do the self-training properly, we should leave the studio.
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> The studio went deadly quiet for two or three minutes after that. I felt discouraged when I saw all the excitement and enthusiasm had disappeared from the students' faces. Some were obviously frightened. I lost the passion to carry on with this game as well. On the other hand, I felt lucky that the principle didn't notice me. Otherwise, the situation might be worse. I couldn't imagine the moment when he realized that I, the teacher, was the creator of the messy, noisy, activity. For a while, I was not sure whether I should continue introducing games into my teaching.

The teacher's fear of revealing herself within the classroom during this episode presents a vivid illustration of the hierarchical authority within the institute. She went on to explain how revealing herself and rationalizing the pedagogical activity would have led to an even greater institutional and hierarchical dilemma, through the loss of authority and face to all involved.

The opportunity to rationalize a learning activity does not necessarily transform the authoritarian attitudes exerted by institutional leaders. In the following narrative, a teacher describes a conversation she had with her Head of School, who had walked past a studio class she was teaching the previous day. The teacher had been engaged in a reflective discussion with students from a non-performance stream:

> The head asked, "Why did you have all your students sitting down in your class yesterday? All the time you teachers complain that there is not enough time for class so that students can't have high achievements in training. And then you waste your time sitting there and doing nothing?"
> "We were talking about the problems that they have in their studying. They seemed so not in the mood to take the class," I explained.
> "Mood? When did they have the mood to take classes? And so, you all sat there to create the mood? Are you going to lie down next time?" She asked. "Their job is to study. What do they know? They're dance students. No matter what the major is, training is the key. You are making a mountain out of a molehill! If they can't reach the teacher's expectation, it only means that they're not working hard enough. You are the teacher. You need to take your role and responsibility. How can you be so muddled and manipulated by your students?"

Within this narrative, the Head of School considered the transgressive idea of an educational dialogue as simply an example of lazy students 'manipulating' a dysfunctional teacher. To reinforce the importance of an authoritarian educational discourse, the Head of School emphasized the students lack of self-discipline. For this teacher, a particularly frustrating aspect of the story was the Head of School's disinterest in any rationales for her alternative teaching practices, and his assumption that a teacher would have less understanding of student needs than a Head of School.

As with the expressions from students and teachers, institutional leaders can also reference elite training schools as a rationale for sustaining authoritarian pedagogy. Within the following narrative, a teacher (who had graduated from the BDA and was subsequently teaching at a regional university) describes how her Head of School surveilled and contrasted her teaching practice with another teacher from the BDA:

> She said "I noticed that your class is too messy recently. You may want to go and observe Hai's class. I think that you were classmates in BDA? He's very good at training students. You had same learning experience as he had. How come it became a problem for you to bring all you had learnt in BDA to students here."

When the teacher subsequently tried to explain why she was instead using pedagogic methods that she had learnt abroad, the Head of School again brought a comparison to the BDA. She explains how the Head of School said,

> "What is that? Is anyone in BDA doing that as far as you know? Yes, our students are not as good as BDA. They have all sorts of problems: tall, short, fat, skinny, untrained, well-trained, all mixed together. It makes the teaching difficult. But, that's why we tried so hard to gather all of you, graduates from BDA, to come here. Stick with your dance training. Make the best out of those students."

Within this narrative, a transgression from BDA teaching strategies was expressed by the Head of School as a failure to sustain the broader training standards of the BDA. This sense of comparison was extended, as the Head of School sought to draw attention to the distinct

abilities of this teacher and one of her former classmates. The idea that teachers, as well as students, were being continually surveilled and compared with each other, was a recurrent theme within the interviews. This pervasive sense of comparison might be seen as a significant factor in the maintenance of educational hierarchies and authority within tertiary dance education in China.

**Transgression and surveillance**

For the teachers we interviewed, power is a pervasive issue that inhibits innovative teaching practices within tertiary dance programmes in China. This is a significant issue for educational policies that seek to enhance creative mindsets and the function of the arts in education, but are stifled by underlying conditions of truth can maintain punishment, humiliation and exclusion as norms of pedagogic behavior. A Foucauldian analysis might therefore prompt reflection on two issues. Firstly, how and why might these teacher's interventions be considered transgressions? Secondly, how did students, teachers and institutional leaders engage in surveillance as a discursive practice to inhibit these transgressions?

The teachers seeking to implement less authoritarian pedagogic practices actions were in alignment with government policies that seek to reform education in China (Dello-Iacovo, 2009), and yet their actions might be considered transgressions as they challenged the prevailing discourse within their institutional learning environments. Even in the context of teachers being directed by their institutions to stop overseeing so many 'extra' classes, the discursive practice of surveilling students (albeit through digital mediation) prevailed. When the teachers within this study implemented transgressive teaching innovations (that disassembled authoritarian hierarchies), they faced firm rebukes from their students, their peers and their institutional leaders. These rebukes expressed a clear expectation that teachers maintain hierarchical teacher-student relationships through authoritarian pedagogic practices. Within group and individual discussions with students, our interviewees received demands to engage in more authoritarian actions, which the students rationalized as a result of their own failings as students. Within public and private conversations with other teachers, the educational innovations of our interviewees were measured against dominant teaching practices and evaluated as inferior. Through the actions and expressions of their institutional leaders, our interviewee teachers were dismissed as the purveyors of sub-standard practices. Their narratives present evidence as to the pervasive nature of an authoritarian pedagogic discourse, and their attempts to subvert it, within their institutions.

Describing such subversive actions as transgressions can be helpful, as it recognizes that their pedagogic interventions did not seek to establish a competing authority, hierarchy, or new behavioural norm. Extending Foucault's analysis of transgression into inclusive education, Julie Allan describes how transgression "is not antagonistic or aggressive, nor does it involve a contest in which there is a victor; rather, transgression is playful and creative" (2007: 92). In this sense, transgressive acts seek to escape the discursive practices of authoritarian pedagogy, rather than challenge specific people or institutions and establish competing normative standards. Within the narratives presented by the teachers, each of their particular pedagogic interventions sought to provide an alternate space for learning that could allow differences to emerge and be valued.

These transgressive acts were swiftly confronted however, by students, teachers and institutional leaders. Foucault (1997b) provides a useful framework for understanding how surveillance, as a discursive practice, challenged the teachers' transgressive acts. Through the narratives, it is apparent that students were surveilling other students, teachers and (through mirrors) themselves; teachers were surveilling students and other teachers; and institutional leaders were surveilling teachers and students. Their stories provide a sense of how surveillance remains pan-optic within these dance learning environments, and is actively

promoted by students, teachers and institutional leadership as an important means of maintaining the dominant discourse. The pervasiveness of this surveillance was brought into focus through the transgressions, as surveillance generally "functions permanently and largely in silence" (Foucault, 1997b: 177), leading to continual self-censorship. This internalization of surveillance was particularly poignant within the story of the student who determined "I was so naïve and had deluded myself": the normative 'truth' of the institutionalized learning environment had superseded her own tangible, experiential understandings of herself as a dancer.

The surveillance was sustained through a belief in standardized norms and expectations of dance learning achievement, with continual processes of comparison between students, class groups, teachers and institutions. Ultimately, an official measurement of individuals against dominant norms and standards took place through entrenched practices of examination, of which public performance was considered an extension. While the actual examinations may have been intermittent, the spectre of examination remained ever-present within the reasoning of students, teachers and institutional leaders. When challenging the interviewees' transgressions, students, teachers and institutional leaders presented standardized and comparative processes of examination as an irrefutable, underlying condition of truth, thus rationalizing the need for maintaining the discourse of authoritarian pedagogy.

**Moving beyond power**

As governmental policies and scholars within China have noted, there is an urgent need to reconstruct teaching practices so as to cultivate creative talent within the knowledge economies of the 21st century (Han & Yang 2001). A particular challenge to the introduction of such educational reforms in China has been the maintenance of standardized examination practices (Liu & Dunne 2009). As our interviewees suggest, discursive practices of national comparison and competition are associated with the maintenance of authoritarian pedagogies, by all involved in the learning journey. Simply training teachers to integrate new educational approaches without rationalizing these changes more broadly in the educational culture presents those teachers with a deeply alienating task.

Ultimately, more research is required to understand how centralized power structures in tertiary arts education in China might be disassembled, so that individual teachers can have more agency to implement change. Further studies into teachers experiences of transgressions in wider disciplines may also advance broader understandings of educational reform processes in China. Foucauldian concepts might be seen as particularly useful in this regard. Through identifying teaching actions associated with quality education as 'transgressions' that subvert dominant pedagogic discourses, and by revealing how pervasively surveillance practices respond to these transgressions, the kaleidoscopic complexity of paradigmatic shifts in education becomes more vivid.

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