Comprehensively strengthening and improving aesthetic education in a new era: An examination of the dance education major at the Beijing dance academy

Jin Jin¹ and Barbara Snook²

Abstract
China has a proud history of dance excellence. Historically, dance education has focused on performance skills, therefore it is difficult for most people, to grasp that a dance education pedagogy can lead students in a creative and inclusive manner, where technically well performed ‘steps’ are not as important as the process. China is currently developing a modern system of dance education in schools, with a focus on the creative process while maintaining its highly valued Chinese characteristics. Western countries where dance education has long been included in their curricula, can still struggle with understanding that educational dance is much more than technically well performed steps. Change is complex, especially when dance is viewed by many as a performance only. This article outlines the difficulties in implementing a radically different dance curriculum to what has gone before. The Beijing Dance Academy provides the dance education major that other Universities look to when preparing dance education teachers in China. Our focus is therefore upon the dance education major offered there. We begin by outlining the history of dance education in China and continue by discussing the context and the complexity of change, before outlining the change and difficulties themselves.

¹Dance Education, Beijing Dance Academy, China
²Dance Studies Programme, University of Auckland, New Zealand

Corresponding Author:
Barbara Snook, Dance Studies Programme, University of Auckland, Building 113/G11, 5 Symonds Street, Auckland 1010, New Zealand.
Email: b.snook@auckland.ac.nz

Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage).
Keywords
China, dance education, curriculum, teaching, creative communication, critical thinking

Received 14 June 2022; accepted 2 September 2022

A short history of dance education in China

Although the major of dance education is now included as a first-class discipline by the Ministry of Education, dance education first emerged at the founding of the People’s Republic of China where dance was temporarily incorporated into the drama department for overall management (Liang, 2021; Wang & Long, 1999). According to Liang (2021), at the request of the Ministry of Culture in 1951, the Central Academy of Drama, organised a ‘Dance Movement Cardre training class’ and a ‘Dance Movement Cardre Research class’. These classes are well known in the history of modern Chinese dance. Dance training tended to cultivate comprehensive and versatile dance students, that is, not only dance performance students but also students in dance education, choreography, and dance theory.

In 1980, the Beijing Dance Academy, (BDA) having been upgraded to a university status, established the Department of Chinese Folk-Dance Education, which included ‘Chinese Classical Dance Education’ and ‘Chinese Folk-Dance Education’. Recruitment began for the first batch of undergraduate students who would explore the mode and method of training students for professional dance education. The ‘Element Teaching Pedagogy’ born in this period is still playing a vital role in the teaching of Chinese folk dance. In the 1990s, with the reform of the country’s economic system, performing arts groups faced great challenges to survive. In the face of the changing social demand, the Beijing Dance Academy set up an integrated class of performance and education in the performance major to seek directions and possibilities for the training of performance students. In 1997, the Department of Chinese Folk Dance set up an undergraduate class of ‘integration of performance and education’ to explore the teaching and research of ‘Chinese folk dance’. The intention was that the multiple comprehensive classes in folk and classical dance would enhance the students’ practical ability. However, it is worth noting that the exploration of dance education, especially the education of dance teachers, did not become an important direction for extension and breakthroughs in the construction of the dance discipline. It is possibly because of the particularity of dance that it is commonly viewed as performance. Even those who understand the importance and differences of dance education as opposed to dance performance, may often find themselves falling back into old and established ways of valuing dance (Koff, 2000).

Influenced heavily by the Soviet conservatory training model, tertiary dance education in China still holds strongly to philosophies of professional conservatoire dance training. According to Guo (2012), the current president of the Beijing Dance Academy, dance education is focused on three main points, “cultivating specialised talents [students] as a final purpose, taking content [movements] as the centre of all learning, and retaining ‘oral teaching and physical instruction’ as the preferred classroom teaching method” (p. 3). As a BDA dance education specialist teacher, author one can confirm Guo’s observations. These three features directly represent the professional dance training philosophies employed within BDA and have led to a variety of issues, such as the excessive highlighting of dance technique, a single pedagogical approach used in the class, and the homogenisation of the talent that is cultivated.

Among the issues noted above, the most significant concern is that within the present model of professional dance training, dance teachers’ education is often viewed as an appendage to the training that dominates Chinese tertiary dance education programmes. Dance teacher preparation
in China is still focused on learning specific techniques and movement content, rather than gaining in-depth training in pedagogical theories, strategies, and experiences. This was echoed in author one’s learning experience at BDA. During the integration of performance and education at the Beijing Dance Academy, the only difference between this class and other performing classes in the same department was that there was an extra ‘teaching pedagogy’ course. This teaching pedagogy, however, was not a concept of teaching theory in the context of pedagogy. It focused more on the teaching of steps in dance combinations and the analysis of dance movements (Jin, 2017; Jin & Martin, 2019). All classes were focused on dance performance as teachers lacked the experience or understanding of teaching for creative dance pedagogies in schools. There was no construction of a whole concept and system of dance teaching in the context of pedagogy. An interviewee who graduated from the Ballet department of BDA stated,

Teachers at BDA usually focus on transmitting their dance skills to the students via an authoritarian pedagogy. Students rarely had other opportunities to learn how to teach in any other method. In other words, for these BDA students, their preparation to be a teacher was quite limited, because what they learned within their training was more about dance skills with no pedagogical skills for working with different people in different teaching contexts (Personal interview, July, 2020).

Dance education remained quite closed and specifically focused on performance skill. Much could have been learned from other arts disciplines, especially drama and music, but knowledge and content rarely infiltrated the walls between disciplines.

With the independence of the major of ‘Dance Education’, China must pay close attention to and promote the complex turn in direction in the face of a new demand for the teaching of dance education students in a new age. There is currently a strong promotion for the construction of ‘new liberal arts’ in the Chinese tertiary education arena (Fan, 2019; Zhou, 2020).

A global dance education context

To situate the current change within Chinese dance education, we refer to a western context where the importance of creativity and critical thinking within the curriculum is recognised and acknowledged. The New Zealand and Australian curricula encourage generalist teachers in primary schools to offer their students activities that encourage creativity where students work together to problem solve and create their own movement responses. At a High School level, specialist teachers are employed to continue a focus on an all-round education in dance.

Dance is expressive movement that has intent, purpose, and form. In dance education, students integrate thinking, moving, and feeling. They explore and use dance elements, vocabularies, processes, and technologies to express personal, group, and cultural identities, to convey and interpret artistic ideas, and to strengthen social interaction. Students develop literacy in dance as they learn about, and develop skills in, performing, choreographing, and responding to a variety of genres from a range of historical and contemporary contexts, (New Zealand Curriculum 2022).

North America, the United Kingdom and many other countries follow a similar pathway in dance education where, particularly in primary school, students are encouraged to explore the processes involved with making dance as an inclusive activity where there is no right or wrong answer. While research emphasises the benefits of creative and critical learning through dance (Buck, 2006; Chappell, 2007; Craft, 2005; Shapiro, 1998; Snook, 2012), many countries are still working through some of the associated problems. In examining the dilemma of teaching for creativity. Chappell (2007) acknowledges,
At more advanced educational levels, in secondary and tertiary institutions, questions are being raised as to how to successfully identify and develop the creativity of talented future choreographers and dance artists without succumbing to the potential strictures of performativity focused assessment procedures (p. 54).

Despite many years of development, dance education is not widely understood and therefore when countries such as India and China, make decisions to develop more critical and creative thinking in their curricula, the way ahead is not easy. The Government of India’s (2020) recently introduced curriculum states that the curriculum should be, “Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable and Engaging” (p. 1). Their introduction to the National Education Policy (2020) states,

It is becoming increasingly critical that children not only learn, but more importantly, learn how to learn. Education thus, must move forward toward less content, and more towards learning how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt and absorb new material in novel and changing fields (p. 3).

The way ahead may be long, and for dance education in China, it is important to examine what the Beijing Dance Academy are offering in their dance education major, as it is their lead that is followed by other Universities and teacher training institutions in China.

The complexity of change in educational dance

Understanding and implementing a dance education major is a complex undertaking. The study of complexity arose in the late 20th century when French philosopher and sociologist, Edgar Morin, made a significant contribution to the study of complexity (Zhao, 2021). Morin coined the term ‘complexity paradigm’ that applies across several fields of study including education (Rescher, 1998; Zhang, 2013). He advocated that the concept of unity and diversification should be used to enrich the traditional cognitive methodology. As a deep generative theory to explain the development of things, complexity science emphasised the return of the ontological complexity of things themselves and then advocated complex thinking modes such as “dynamic openness, rational, nonlinear, and attuning to process” (Zhang, 2013, p. 104). Such methods point to the development of things as having non-linear characteristics of uncertainty and unpredictability. In addition, the theory advocates that seemingly contradictory ideas, such as ‘order and disorder’, ‘rationality and irrationality’ or ‘separation and connection’, are not mutually contradictory, but are ‘contrary and complementary’. Such thought opposes the traditional cognitive processes of content learning and regurgitation.

In view of the development of tertiary education of dance in China, both the discipline structure and the research paradigm are mostly formed with the logic of simple thinking. The original professional directions under the first-level discipline of music and dance, whether it is dance performance, choreography, or dance studies, are based on the ontology of dance art, depending on the necessary knowledge and skills required for a particular aspect or dimension. Therefore, in the previous teacher training process, performing students did not need to understand the knowledge and content of choreography, nor did theoretical students need to be selected and cultivated based on excellent dance skills. The division of subjects and research brings an in-depth subdivision of knowledge. Subject research is becoming increasingly micro and student training is becoming increasingly exquisite. With this comes the formation of disciplinary barriers. Ellenberg (2010) suggests that what makes universities strong, also weakens them and that disciplines are fossilising in a particular way. An important function of disciplines is to protect established boundaries of exploration, and they continue to protect them even as the boundaries become
obscene. The formation of disciplinary barriers excludes dance from valuable communication and integration with other disciplines. This becomes the norm within the various professional directions of dance, each discipline going their own way without interference from each other.

A new cross-disciplinary design for dance education where students are engaged in complex thinking would increase the value of studying dance. Professor Lu (2001), the former president of the Beijing Dance Academy, positioned the research category of ‘dance education’ as a pedagogy as well as a category of dance. He posits that the research object is a special social phenomenon including basic laws of dance education, as well as general educational knowledge, system and structure. In the process of collision and exchange of different types of knowledge, inter-disciplinarity is the most likely to generate creative knowledge with an accumulation of original knowledge.

The cognition of ‘interdisciplinarity’ is very important for the orientation of a dance education major. Dance education is not just a discussion of dance education and teaching in the context of the dance discipline. It is a discipline produced by the combination of ‘dancology’ and ‘pedagogy’, so its discipline construction should focus on the ontological value of the dance discipline and meanwhile follow the general laws of education and teaching research. Within the process of disciplinary integration however, ‘dancology’ and ‘pedagogy’ are not static and separate, nor are they simply superimposed. They belong to the overarching research category of humanities and should therefore follow such development and research rules. It is impossible to study, discuss, or problem solve when relating to dance education, without establishing a close relationship between its discipline construction and current economic trends, political culture, and education in a modern era. To promote the development of dance education, the theoretical basis and research paradigm of other disciplines such as pedagogy, sociology, psychology, and anthropology should be identified and applied for reference, in order to include a comprehensive curriculum with diversity, intersections and openness.

Dance + is currently a popular research topic in Chinese dance education. The character + represents the direction of the interdisciplinary research, this term refers to the dance processes that are to be used in Chinese schools in a new era where students will work collaboratively to problem solve and work creatively. Interdisciplinary research was one of the most highly supported research topics for dance education in the recent round of funding from the National Social Science fund of China for Arts Research Projects (The National Social Science Fund of China, https://xm.npopss-cn.gov.cn).

In order to analyse the professional development of ‘dance education’ from the perspective of complexity, it is necessary to make essential changes in research theories, perspectives and methods caused by the development of high and new technology. New technology is an important area that cannot be avoided in the development of liberal arts. With the overall educational deployment of philosophy and social sciences under the national macro strategy, the proposal of ‘new liberal arts’ is built based on the arrival of a new science and technology era. This emphasises that the emergence of new technology has changed academic research methods and the student training paradigm of traditional liberal arts. Several dance education students from the Beijing Dance Academy who graduated in 2020 and 2021 have researched such topics as; innovative practice of new media dance teaching; application of motion capture technology in dance teaching; and the generation and teaching practice of dance animation. The development of new technology brings about the impact and reconstruction of the original knowledge system and further promotes the diversification of dance education research methods. The value and thinking system will be reshaped with the help of modern science and technology, to better interpret the logical relationship between science and technology and humanities and social sciences. This has become a mission of dance education in China.
China’s aim for dance education

As discussed, a’ such as teaching steps modern system of dance education in Chinese schools is quite different to China’s historic understanding of dance education. Professor Lu, the former president of the Beijing Dance Academy, was responsible for leading the way, writing a new dance curriculum for schools, known as ‘Quality Dance Education’. In this curriculum, the focus is on students working together cooperatively to problem solve as they creatively construct movement. Students are provided with tasks that require them to think in and through dance. In such an inclusive context, students learn to work cooperatively, “When students work through making and doing, they are gaining knowledge for themselves. They will make decisions, problem solve, and draw on multiple intelligences” (Snook, 2021, p. 16). As this concept is difficult to understand when dance has for so long been a performance technique, we provide here an example of a lesson. A teacher could divide the class into groups of three. She/he might then ask his/her students to create three separate groups shapes, where each member of the group is on a different level in each shape. Once the shapes have been shared with the rest of the class, the teacher could ask the groups to create some floor patterns by travelling around the space using specific types of movement (runs, leaps, turns, jumps etc.). The locomotor movement would be linked to the shapes that had been made earlier with the students would find a way of including the shapes. The students would then have created a short dance. This would be the time to add music for each group to perform to. Such an activity would be conducted in the primary school. While the example is focused on learning the elements of dance, (space, shapes, locomotor movement), such teaching could also use poetry as a stimulus for a dance where the students write down meanings and emotions to use in creating a dance work. There are endless possibilities for creative work through Quality Dance Education. There are opportunities within the curriculum for students to learn steps and perform dances, but this is not the focus. We acknowledge that where an easier option is available, such as teaching steps, it makes the process of changing the thinking about dance education much harder to achieve.

Promoting quality dance education in China – dealing with problems

During the 2018 National Education Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping stated that China should adhere to a socialist education development path, while including Chinese characteristics (Ministry of Education, 2018). In 2020, the General Office of the Communist Part of China (CPC) and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued, Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era. This document, based on General Secretary Xi Jinping’s speech, clarified the direction and importance of aesthetic education, and further stressed that by 2022, school aesthetic education will have made a breakthrough, relevant courses will have been comprehensively offered and remarkable progress will have been made in education and teaching reform. According to the General Office of the CPC; General Office of the State Council, (2020), by 2035, a comprehensive, diversified, and high-quality modern school aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics will be established. To date, with the strong support of these national policies, arts education, specifically dance education, has ushered in unprecedented rapid development programmes, particularly in terms of curriculum. The strengthening of aesthetic education for all Chinese students includes the ‘teaching’ of dance in schools and this presents huge challenges. More than any other subject, dance education seems misunderstood (Jin & Martin, 2019). With the emphasis on a change of direction in teaching, however, the Beijing Dance Academy (BDA) began reworking their courses for dance education, including the training of teachers to go out into schools throughout
China. A dance education major has become an important proposition for the development of dance education in the new era (Chen & Wei, 2021; Yu, 2021).

Behind this push for development, however, are many troubling gaps. Well-trained dance education teachers are vital to the success of dance education in China. While Secretary Jinping emphasised the importance of the development of teaching staff, stating, “Teachers are the engineers of the human soul and the inheritors of human civilization, bearing the responsibility of spreading knowledge and truth, shaping souls and fostering new people” (Ma, 2014, p. 218), there is a severe shortage of teachers in schools. Of those dance teachers in schools, few of them are trained in the specific area of dance education. The substandard resource allocation and severe shortage of dance education teachers has led to an extreme imbalance in the development of dance education in different regions and schools. According to an investigation which was conducted by the Zhabei Education Department of Shanghai in 2014 (Ma, 2014), 75 primary and secondary schools were offering dance courses, but only 5 schools had full-time dance teachers. The other schools used external teachers, or even music teachers who were expected to teach dance courses. “The ratio of dance teachers to students receiving dance education is about 1:240, much higher than 1:81 in public primary and secondary schools in the United States” (Ma, 2014, p. 218). Similarly, The Beijing Municipal Commission (2017) conducted a survey on the development of art education generally, and found that in dance, of the 2000 primary and secondary schools in Beijing only 422 were equipped with professional dance education teachers, quite inadequate to support dance courses in Beijing’s primary and secondary schools (https://www.sohu.com/a/201484654_114988). In such circumstances, schools often feel that they have no choice but to offer dance classes only to after-school interest groups or associations. Instead of delivering inclusive dance education, only technically talented students enroll in the school dance class.

Inclusive dance education is designed to encourage teaching that promotes creativity. (Jin & Wang, 2021). Students can work together collaboratively; problem solve and think creatively. Communicating ideas and expressing abstract feelings and emotion. “We know that to embody knowledge is to experience something live and through the senses, and that embodied learning moves the learner to knowing beyond language” (Martin, et al., 2018, p. 164). By working kinesthetically and collaboratively, students experiment in a way that they may not do as an individual. The teaching of skills may be left to a special class of talented students where the emphasis is on skill development rather than the creative learning that can take place through dance education (Jin & Wang, 2021). At the same time, there is an uneven quality of dance teachers in schools, and therefore most schools are not meeting the necessary standards or quality control. The result is that implementation of the new direction for dance education is impossible to achieve, with most students missing out altogether. With society now expecting a high standard of aesthetic and physical outcomes in the arts, dance educators working in both primary and secondary schools need assistance and support to rethink the function and orientation of dance in schools during the development process.

In her PhD research, Jin (2017) interviewed six dance teachers in China regarding their experience of teaching dance in schools. Two of the chapters are titled, “I would like to become a teacher that students love, and fear at the same time” (p. 84), and “If I change the old model and pedagogy, how long could we play for without the motivation of competition and evaluation?” (p. 107) Both chapters draw attention to the teachers’ need to hold on to the old ways while attempting to move forward. The research cited Principals’ expectations and their demands for results as a factor in continuing to teach technically challenging dance steps. According to interviewee, Li, quality dance education was not popular in her class. She felt she had not been well prepared to teach dance in schools as she had been selected as a dancer and only when she realized that she was not going to make it as a professional performer, she turned to teaching as a second choice. A boy in Li’s class said to her, “I feel disgraced if I cannot dance very well, especially in front of girls, I do
not want to lose face” (P. 81). To move into a different pedagogical framework, even when teachers have had some experience with Quality Dance Education, they need to feel confident about what they are doing and why they are doing it. The new education courses must prepare those going out to Chinese schools in the future and recognize what obstacles they might encounter, and how to handle them.

China’s higher education in dance has not previously recognised (a) modern dance education system, where teachers are trained to go out into schools (Lu, 2019; Xiong, 2009). It is undeniable that traditional dance education pays more attention to the teaching of dance ontology knowledge and skills, with the training of dance teachers seen as an accessory to the training of performers. Where there is inadequate cultivation of school dance teachers, highly trained performers may go out into schools with the ability only to ‘train’ dancers (Jin, 2017). When artists go into schools to train dancers, only the best students can reach high performance standards, and most students lose interest or feel that they are failures. In an equitable education system that caters to all, the focus on performance excellence is removed. Students learn creatively about and through dance (Buck, 2006; Snook, 2021). As Jin and Lu (2021) stated, in the discipline of dance, there has always been the core problem of prioritising skills over literacy. The trainee dance teachers at the BDA and other universities have been chosen for their performance ability, and often their practical skill is better than their theoretical ability. Their perceptual cognition of dance and application of educational concepts needs to be far more than that of the specific techniques of a discipline. In the benign development of the dance art itself, a focus on the development of dance technique is undoubtedly a huge hidden danger. Even where Chinese universities and colleges have set up majors in dance education, dance practitioners continue to graduate with strong skills in dance performance. Choreography is being taught, but without a strong knowledge of dance education through a continuous exploration of educational concepts and teaching models, the development of a dance education discipline will be like water without a source or a tree without roots.

In 2015 against this background, the School of Education at the Beijing Dance Academy was established to improve the country’s basic thinking on the training of dance teachers. The Beijing Dance Academy set out to cultivate dance teachers with moral quality, good artistic accomplishment, a broad international vision, and a unique innovative ability in teaching basic dance education. In 2018, through the efforts of the Beijing Dance Academy, ‘Dance Education’ was included in the admissions programme as a specialty-established major under the first level discipline of music and dance of several general higher institutions through the Ministry of Education.4 (Chen & Wei, 2021). It was not only a breakthrough that the dance discipline was given a prominent place, but it also met the important manifestation of the national cultural development strategy and social needs. The establishment of a dance education major not only expanded another avenue of teacher training, but also made clear the roles and functions of dance in professional colleges and normal universities represented by the Beijing Dance Academy. In 2020, ‘Dance Education’ was included as a provincial first-class undergraduate major. As a sunrise major of a dance discipline, both the national policy and connotative development of dance education itself undertook a reform process with the aim of further improving dance education and teaching quality.

**Curriculum construction of the dance education specialty in China**

In November 2020, experts from colleges and universities across China gathered at Shandong University (Weihai) to discuss a new path for the development of liberal arts and the cultivation of liberal arts students in the new era. The jointly issued Declaration on the Construction of New Liberal Arts (2020) is composed of three parts: consensus, adherence, and task. This declaration outlines a framework for realising the development of eight disciplines in the new era: literature,
history, philosophy, economics, management, law, education, and art (Ministry of Education, 2020). According to the Declaration (2020), the task section emphasises a core goal to build a new pattern for the development of philosophy and social sciences, centred on education, while continuing to emphasise value guidance. Curriculum, the most basic and key element, will continue to promote the updating of education and teaching content. The latest theories and practical experience of socialist construction with Chinese characteristics will be introduced to classrooms and written into textbooks to be transformed into high-quality teaching resources. While many Chinese Universities are currently employing specialist teachers with global experience and qualifications to teach dance education majors, the number of dance education teachers graduating from universities each year are not enough to fill the urgent need for dance education specialists in China. It will be a long time before an understanding of the difference between dance education and the teaching of steps exists. The community generally views dance as performance and expectations from Principals and parents are often for performance items, placing pressure on teachers. This has long been the case in other countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Textbooks such as Dance for Senior Students and Dance Count Me In (Snook, 2014, 2015) allow teachers unfamiliar with dance education to read clear and simple instructions in lesson plans designed to facilitate students’ learning in and through dance. The textbooks are also helpful for trained dance education teachers who may run out of creative ideas or they may use part of a lesson and add to it in their own way. The ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching dance education for those being charged with doing so can be a complete mystery. While theoretical reading will inform new teachers, unless they have a textbook to get them started, they will revert to what they know, which is teaching steps, favouring some students, and disadvantaging others. Dance education is inclusive when taught with an understanding of its values. It will be necessary in China to have textbooks written with content that meets China’s specific needs according to the recent declaration. Textbooks are but one resource, and it is suggested that education will be necessary, not only for trainee dance education teachers, but for all school communities. If Principals and parents have expectations of brilliant performances that they may use to promote their schools, then the dance education teachers will find themselves unable to teach inclusively or creatively.

The curriculum is an important part of the implementation of the final idea. In existing domestic studies in China, an educational concept based on ‘developing core literacy’ provides an important impetus for the curriculum reform of higher education. In the face of a new educational era, colleges and universities need not only readjust the curriculum setting and curriculum structure, but also transform the value orientation of the curriculum goal from ‘knowledge theory’ to ‘subject education theory’. In this way characteristics of learners are highlighted, and their needs are met. The curriculum will become more structured to accommodate diversification, personalisation and integration.

According to Zhang and Chen (2014), “it is noteworthy that curriculum is not a solid, static and linear existence outside of teachers and students, but a complex network of dialogue, negotiation and integration between teachers and courses, students and courses, and other factors and courses” (p. 6). Curriculum is a continuous generative process. In English, the word ‘curriculum’ is also interpreted as ‘a runway in the making’ (Davis et al., 2008). In moving forward, the curriculum may inspire ongoing projects and possibilities. Zhang and Chen, (2014) suggest that “it’s a way of thinking that focuses on the past without dwelling on it, foresees the future without trying to fix it, and understands life now without preparing for it but becoming part of it” (p. 8). As a new major the whole curriculum construction of dance education should reflect such dynamic, constructive, and pluralistic characteristics.

Aiming at the curriculum construction of the dance education major, the first author of this article interviewed the Vice Director of the Education Faculty of the Beijing Dance Academy,
Associate Professor Zhang Wenhai. He explained the current design on exploring the construction of a ‘2 + C + 4’ curriculum system for undergraduate dance education. According to Zhang’s statement,

‘2’ means adhering to the principle that dance education will be divided into two areas. By making full use of the nearly 70 years of dance education experience and resource advantages of the Beijing Dance Academy, two dimensions of students cultivation will be implemented, that is, high-level professional dance teacher education and high-level universal dance teacher education. The advantages of the dance discipline will be given full play and the new demand of national aesthetic education in the new era will be firmly grasped so that the two directions of talent training interact with each other and make use of their strengths. From the vision of ‘interdisciplinary integration’, “C” (Comprehensive) emphasises the absorption of nutrients from multiple disciplines. Through the integration of dance and music, dance and drama, dance and science and other curriculum content, the goal of ‘dance +’ is realized, to cultivate all-rounded educational students who have knowledge of both dance and culture.

‘4’ means to explore the formation of four curriculum modules, namely, core courses, basic courses, characteristic courses and minor courses. Through the integrated course ‘nutrition recipe’, the goal of training students within a new dance education curriculum will be achieved (Personal Interview, Sept. 2021).

The aim of construction and optimisation of the curriculum is to fully embody the curriculum’s ‘trinity’ functions of knowledge and skills, process, and method as well as emotion, attitude and value in the aspects of curriculum objectives, content standards and assessment standards, so as to complete the transformation from the training value of the previous dance curriculum to the comprehensive quality of the new dance education curriculum.

Conclusion

In the process of writing this paper, the authors have paid attention to the Guidance on Further Strengthening and Improving the Examination and Enrollment of Art Majors in Colleges and Universities issued by the Ministry of Education on September 21, 2021, in which further adjustment and deployment have been made in the reform of examination and enrollment of art majors in colleges and universities. It emphasises that art colleges and universities should focus on the selection and training of artistic students with both moral and professional ability, and gradually raise the requirements for the scores of general knowledge courses in college entrance examination and effectively reverse the trend of ‘emphasising professionalism over general knowledge courses’ in the selection of art professionals. The document undoubtedly served as a driving force for the development of art specialties in colleges and universities and proposes higher standards and requirements for the training of art professionals. In this new period, under the background of a construction of new liberal arts, whether regarding the new demand for the teaching of liberal arts students, or the general trend of the professional development of dance education itself, cultural quality and a humanistic connotation should be the core elements of professional training to promote the transformation of art students.

The way is long and hard, as many Western countries have discovered. Many countries understand and implement dance education according to its equitable and creative principles, yet author two has noted a current move toward a focus on the setting up of school dance troupes that train for outside competitions in Australia and New Zealand. Competition can work positively to promote growth; however, dance education loses the ability to cater to all students when competition is involved. While we did not focus on the competition aspect of performance in this article, The Oxford Handbook of dance and competition (2019) devotes a chapter to how the
failures, loss, and resistance to the structures of winning are engendered in competition. Dance education caters to all students. Students can work collaboratively and creatively in a setting where there are no winners or losers. Expression and communication are the keys. Performance should not be absent from dance education, but it is not the focus. We emphasise that there is an important place for professional dance performance training, but it should not be a focus within dance education. It is important to understand the differences if all students are to reap the many advantages that dance education offers. Jin (2017) cites an old Chinese proverb, “education is not about giving a fish, but teaching students to fish” (p. 160). Teaching students how to fish is what dance education is all about. We firmly believe that with the continuous exploration and development of dance education, new academic dance education students with a knowledge of culture and an understanding of the complexities and value of dance education will emerge in China.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Barbara Snook  https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7916-6016

Notes

1. Element Teaching Pedagogy: Raised by Ms. Xu Shuying (1934–2011), it is one of the main teaching pedagogy for teaching Chinese Ethnic and Folk dance within the professional dance teaching system in China. By extracting the most stylized dance movement(element) from the specific ethnic group, and keep practicing them, then let students handle the dance style. In one words, movements is the key during the process of teaching and learning.

2. New Liberal Arts: The New Liberal Arts was proposed by the National Ministry of Education of China in 2018. The proposal of the construction of the New Liberal Arts is an important strategy for the development of the whole national education system. It encourages discipline integration, pays attention to the engagement of new technology into original an art discipline, and highlights the comprehension for students’ cultivation (Jin & Lu, 2021).

3. The Beijing Dance Academy (BDA): Established in 1954 and drawing heavily on dance conservatory models from Russia, Chinese people viewed it as the “cradle of dance artists”. As the University in China with a sole focus on dance, Beijing Dance Academy has become a predominant influence on dance education in East Asia (Rowe, Buck & Martin, p. 184).

4. According to the ministry of education of China, the Music and dance is the first-level discipline which under the category of Arts. Within the music and dance there are four admission dance majors, which is dance performance, dance choreography, dance studies, as well as dance education. Among of these four majors, dance education was recognised as an admission programme in 2018.

References

Buck, R. 2006. Teaching dance in the curriculum. In D. Kirk, D. MacDonald, & M. O’Sullivan (Eds.), The Handbook of physical education (pp. 703–719). Sage Publications.
Chappell, K. 2007. In examining the dilemma of teaching for creativity: Insights from expert specialist dance teachers, *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 2(1), 39–56, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2007.01.001

Chen, X., & Wei, X. Y. 2021. On the core curriculum of the dance education major—taking Anhui flower drum larten dance as an example. *The Journal of Dance*, 65(03): 47–50.

Craft, A., (2005) *Creativity in schools: Tensions and dilemmas*. Routledge.

Davis, B., Sumara, D., & Luc-Kaplere, R. 2008. Engaging minds: Changing teaching in complex time. New York: Routledge.

Ellenberg, R. G. 2010. *University Governance in the United States*. Zhang Tingshu, trans. Beijing: Peking University Press.

Fan, L. M. 2019. Reﬂections on the ‘new liberal arts’, *China Higher Education Research*, 35(10), 10–11.

General Ofﬁce of the Communist Part of China (CPC) & General Ofﬁce of the State Council. 2020. Opinions on comprehensively strengthening and improving school aesthetic education in the new era. http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/moe_1777/moe_1778/202010/t20201015_494794.html

Guo, L., & Lee, H. K. 2012. The exploration of the reform of the credit based system at Beijing Dance Academy. *The Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, 26(04), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chroma.2012.02.045

Jin, J. 2017. *Stepping out of the ivory tower: Meanings of teaching dance in schools in China*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Auckland, New Zealand: the University of Auckland

Jin, J., & Lu, Y. S. 2021. From the instrumental to the value: Reflection and exploration on the dance discipline construction under the background of New Liberal Arts. *Journal of the Beijing Dance Academy*, 35(03), 127–130.

Jin, J., & Martin, R. 2019. Exploring the past to navigate the future: Examining histories of higher dance education in China in an internationalized context, *Research in Dance Education*, 20(2), 225–240, https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2019.1566304

Jin, J., & Wang, Z. Q. 2021. Reflections and inspirations on the constructivism on the dance teaching in the new century. *Journal of Arts Education*, 43(07), 97–100.

Koff, S. 2000. Toward a definition of dance education. *Childhood Education*, 77(1), 27–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2000.10522134

Li, A. S. 2005. Cui Chengxi and Chinese dance. *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, (4), 16–22.

Liang, Y. K. 2021. *Research on dance Development of central Academy of Drama in the early Period of new China*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Beijing, China: China National Academy of Arts.

Lu, Y. S. 2001. *Dance education*. Shanghai Music Publishing House.

Lu, Y. S. 2019. The core idea of dance teaching methods in quality education, *Journal of Contemporary Research in Dance*, 4(01), 72–79.

Ma, W. Y. 2014. Comparison of dance education in compulsory education between China and the United States. *Popular Literature and Art*, 59(16), 218–219.

Martin, B., Snook, B., & Buck, R. 2018. Creating the dance and dancing creatively: Exploring the liminal space of choreography for emergence, *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 16(1), 162–174.

Ministry of Education, 2018. *General secretary Xi Jinping’s speech on the national education conference*. http://edu.people.com.cn/GB/8216/421254/

Ministry of Education, 2020. *Declaration on the construction of new liberal arts*. http://www.cuc.edu.cn/2020/1104/c1383a175062/pagem.htm

NEP (2020) (1): Policy document released by government of India retrieved from on 3/7/2: https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English.pdf

Rescher, N. 1998. *Complexity: A philosophy overview*. Transaction Publishers.

Shapiro, S. B. (1998). Toward transformative teachers: Critical and feminist perspectives in dance education. In S. B. Shapiro (Ed.), *Dance, power and difference: Critical and feminist perspectives on dance education* (pp. 7–21). Human Kinetics.
Snook, B., (2012) *Someone like us: Meanings and contexts informing the delivery of dance in New Zealand primary classrooms*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Auckland.

Snook, B. 2014. *Dance: Count me in* (2nd ed.). Nelson Cengage Learning.

Snook, B. 2015. *Dance for senior students* (2nd ed.). Nelson Cengage Learning.

Snook, B. 2021. *Using the arts across the curriculum: Integrated lesson plans*, NZCER Press.

The Beijing Municipal Commission. 2017. Dance teaching and research group established in schools of Beijing. https://www.sohu.com/a/201484654_114988

Wang, K. F., & Long, Y. P. 1999. *The history of modern and contemporary dance in China*. Renmin Music Publishing House.

Xiong, X. 2009. *Constructing and Challenging my personal meanings of dance education*. (Unpublished master’s thesis). The University of Auckland.

Yu, X. X. 2021. Research on teaching pedagogy for the major of dance education. *The Journal of Arts Education*, 43(03), 88–91.

Zhang, L. 2013. From simplicity to complexity: On the reconstruction of teaching paradigm in China. *Education research of Tsinghua university*, 34(05), 103–108.

Zhang, L., Chen, Y., Sun, X. Y., Zhang, S. Y., Yao, G. F., Chen, C. X., & Kong, L. M. 2014. On the complexity of western curriculum research. *Global Education Outlook*, 1(5), 3–10, https://doi.org/10.1186/2054-9369-1-3

Zhao, J. J. 2021. The complexity turn of contemporary scientific cognitive paradigms: Based on Moran’s complexity thought. *Journal of System Science*, 29(1), 8–13.

Zhou, X. 2020. Dance cultural literacy within the perspective of the new liberal arts. *Journal of Beijing Dance Academy*, 34(03), 1–6.