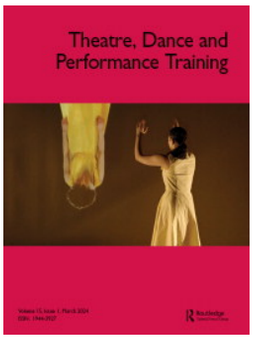

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Constructing codes of behaviour: the 'doxic agreement' as a force for agency in contemporary dance technique training

Rachel Rimmer-Piekarczyk

Utilising Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'doxa', this article proposes the notion of a 'doxic agreement', exploring its relationship with agency in the context of contemporary dance technique training. The discussion draws on the data gathered from two cycles of action research, which the author conducted in an undergraduate dance training setting in a British university. During this research, a 'reflexive-dialogical' (RD) approach to dance technique training was developed; this approach subverts dominant training structures by allowing dialogue and critical reflection to occur alongside physical dance practice. Data analysis reveals that the environment constructed through the application of the RD approach created a doxic agreement, a mutually negotiated structure that determined a code of behaviour in the training setting. Positioning the doxic agreement as a flexible structure that disrupted the recursive reproduction (Giddens1984) of the dominant training structures, the author examines the extent to which the agreement facilitated agency, leading to an expanded understanding of how agency is developed and displayed through the body-minds of undergraduate dance students.

***Keywords*:** Dance training, structure, agency, doxa

Introduction

Dance is often perceived as a freeing art form and as a way for individuals to express themselves, yet this freedom is only ever possible within the constraints of the structures that stabilise the profession, be it the dance techniques themselves, the training methods used to transmit them, or the broader ideological structures of educational institutions. As Nelson (2022, 9) remarks, 'Agency, even that of artists, is ineluctably located in

socio-political structures' and the same could be said for the agency of dance teachers and students who are operating within the dominant training structures of Euro-American dance techniques. In view of these ideas, this article explores the extent to which undergraduate dance students in a British university setting were able to exercise agency within the constraints of a 'doxic agreement',[1] a co-constructed form of structure that emerged through the application of a 'reflexive-dialogical' (RD) approach to teaching contemporary dance technique. The RD approach was developed in collaboration with the undergraduate dance students who participated in two iterative cycles of action research between 2014 and 2016.

The aim of this action research was to explore the extent to which critical reflection, facilitated through dialogue,[2] allowed undergraduate dance students to develop and exercise agency in the dance technique training setting. This is an idea that radically subverts dominant western notions of how dance training should operate, as discussed later. The first action research cycle took place over a period of eleven release-based dance technique sessions and the second took place over a period of nine sessions; the sessions were part of the BA Honours Dance programme that I was teaching on at the time and were located within the students' weekly technique classes on a Level Four[3] unit of study called *Dance Practices One*. Each cycle included a focus group interview that I conducted with a sample of students who had participated in the practical sessions.

Although the research took place during the students' regular timetabled classes, they were not obliged to participate in the study and I sought their individual consent prior to commencing the project. However, at this point in the study, it would be fair to say that I had not fully appreciated the power dynamics at play as a result of being both the lead researcher in the project as well as the teacher of the participating students. The complexities of this power-based relationship and its impact upon the students' ability to exercise agency are unpacked throughout this article by examining the data gathered during both cycles of action research. This includes video footage of dance technique classes that were recorded during the action research,[4] my own reflective journal entries that I wrote after each technique class and transcriptions of the focus group interviews.

Know-how, know-what, know-that: positioning critical reflection amongst the dominant training structures

The prevailing training practices for codified dance techniques are constructed around the notion of the dancer embodying visual examples of movement that are other to her own body-mind (Roche 2011; Parviainen 2023). This approach originates from a genealogy of training belonging to the traditions of the British dance conservatoire, which has historically offered a professionally orientated training that foregrounds performance as the dominant career pathway (Smith-Autard 2002). In 1975, dance emerged as a discipline within the broader higher education system in

1 This is an original concept that I have developed as evident in previous research – see Rimmer (2017) and Rimmer-Piekarczyk (2021).

2 When using the term dialogue, I am including verbal dialogue, as well as other forms of physical dialogue that may occur in a dance training environment, as discussed later on. This conception of dialogue is informed by the work of dance scholar Eeva Anttila (2007).

3 In the British higher education system, Level Four refers to first year undergraduate level learning.

4 This includes both practical dance work and reflective exercises.

Britain (Bannon 2010). Predominantly situated in universities, this provision has, to a certain extent, challenged the conservatoire model by providing an education in dance that employs practical, critical and reflective forms of learning that according to dance scholar Fiona Bannon (2010, 50) integrates 'our physical, intellectual and emotional selves'. While it can be argued that this holistic education opens up other possible career pathways beyond performance, like conservatoires, dance programmes in higher education have foregrounded a focus on performing within the curriculum, supporting this with technique classes in modern and contemporary dance techniques, which are situated in a British and North American post-modern paradigm.[5] This approach to training for dance performance has become a topic of discussion in recent years, with many dance scholars questioning the potentially oppressive nature of the dominant training models that originate from this colonialised training paradigm (Colin, Seago, and Stamp 2023).

5 This was the case at the institution where I conducted my action research and at several other institutions where I carried out fieldwork relating to this research, including Middlesex University London, University of Roehampton and The Laban Centre. I have also observed this during my experience as an External Examiner for undergraduate dance provision in the UK.

This focus on the acquisition of skills for dance technique and performance demonstrates that there are areas of commonality between the university and conservatoire settings; although these educational routes are often viewed as distinct from each other, over recent years, there has arguably been increased convergence and there are many factors that may have affected this. For example, it could be said that the 2012 rise in university tuition fees has created a customer orientated culture in which performing arts courses are competing with conservatoires to recruit students. Since then, there has been an abundance of university dance degree programme closures in Britain, a situation that has been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This situation has significantly impacted the professional performing arts landscape, thus resulting in reduced job opportunities. To navigate this turbulent landscape, it is essential to equip dance students with an agile body-mind that is capable of responding to a range of situations in an ethical way (Colin 2023); as such, this puts equal pressure on British dance conservatoires and university providers to supply a well-rounded education that incorporates technical, performative, creative, reflective and critical dimensions. Despite this complex backdrop, my data analysis demonstrates that the students who participated in this action research study deemed their engagement with dance technique as being of great importance. This was evident in their focus group comments, which indicate that they perceived technique classes as a professionally orientated space where verbal discussion should be minimised; these are findings that I will come back to later but could be viewed as reinforcing the sense of convergence between the 'vocational' conservatoire offering and the 'holistic' university offering.

Within the dominant training structures for dance technique, the dancer is 'trained through a relationship with a projected 'ideal body'' (Roche 2011, 106) that is synonymous with a particular technique or system of movement; this is an idea that exists in tension with the broader ideological structures of a university dance education, which foregrounds the notion of the individual (Bannon 2010). For example, the physical aesthetic striven for within many post-modern release-based dance techniques is an effortlessly articulate, water-like body that flows sequentially through movement that carries the

dancer in and out of the floor. Melanie Bales (2008, 157–158) proposes that in release-based techniques, 'the body's relationship with gravity is examined on and off the vertical axis' in a way that alleviates 'unnecessary muscular holding so the body is open to possibility'. Consequently, such techniques are often assumed to be more freeing than some of their modern-dance era counterparts. However, the methods used to train dancers in a particular technique are grounded within value systems that determine how the desired aesthetic should be achieved and release-based techniques are not immune to this phenomenon. Even if the underlying value system is constructed around the idea of emancipating the dancer from the constraints of codified techniques that strive for a muscularly bound aesthetic, it is a system all the same and one that contributes towards sustaining the illusio (Bourdieu 2000) that governs the sites of dance training, as discussed later. Situating this phenomenon in the frame of structure and agency, dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster takes the Foucauldian view that the dancing body is structured by the 'discourses or practices that *instruct* it' (1997, 235), yet the degree to which dancers exercise agency in this process of social construction remains contested.

Informed by Robin Nelson's (2022) work on practice-as-research, the RD approach challenges the ideas inherent within the dominant training structures for dance technique by employing critical reflection, facilitated through dialogue, as a training method. Within Nelson's (2022) work on arts practice-as-research, 'praxis' refers to an informed use of critical reflection, 'as a key strategy in establishing research insights and making the tacit of *know-how* more explicit and shareable' (Nelson 2022, 45). Here, it is important to state that in this action research, critical reflection and dialogue occurred alongside physical dance practice, during technique classes in the dance studio; the purpose of this is to enable a praxical relationship between dancing and reflecting on the act of dancing, two activities that do not always exist in harmony, as explored in this article.

Following Nelson, the RD approach seeks to allow dance teachers and students to uncover tacit knowledge acquired through the process of embodying dance techniques. By uncovering the *know-how* of the tacit, I argue that dancers can obtain *know-what*, which in this context relates to the cognitive process of making knowledge that usually resides on a bodily level explicit and shareable. Importantly, Nelson (2022) asserts that *know-what* should not be viewed as a replacement or be privileged over the tacit nature of *know-how* in a Cartesian sense, but rather perceived as an alternative mode of knowing that exists on a spectrum with other modes of knowing. Informed critical reflection can also lead to the acquisition of *know-that;* in the dance training setting, *know-that* can be considered as an awareness of oneself as a subject of the dominant training structures and an ability to reflect on the mental and physical behaviours that are incorporated through repeated participation in the social world of the training setting.[6] It is by reflecting on the 'entangled dynamism' (Nelson 2022, 45) between these different modes of knowing that the dancer can begin to perceive herself as an active agent who is both impacted upon, and who impacts directly, on the world around her; it is

6 This kind of knowing may also be informed by theoretical perspectives from the field of dance studies and beyond.

this interface between structure and human agency that sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984) speaks of in his theory of structuration, as discussed later.

Departing from the dominant perception that the acquisition of technique is something that the dancer works on autonomously, with guidance from an expert teacher, following Leigh Foster (1997), the RD approach views the individual dancer as being structured in dialogue with the conditions of the social world, which imprint upon her body-mind; in this study, one of these social conditions is the presence of critical reflection and dialogue in the dance studio. As demonstrated in later analysis, my findings show that even a reflective approach to dance training is capable of structuring the dancer in a particular way, a discovery that has led me to question the presumed empowering nature of the RD approach. With that said, what is certain is that the RD approach to training breaks the conventions of the dominant 'doxa' (Bourdieu 1977) by placing equal value on the acquisition of different forms of capital; Pierre Bourdieu's notion of doxa refers to the rules of engagement that govern social fields, rules that are often unspoken but evident through the thoughts and actions of participants in the field. In the pursuit of 'embodied capital'[7] (Bourdieu 1986), the dominant doxa in dance technique training relies on the idea that the dancer will achieve virtuosity, or capital, through engaging in a process of discipline and physical rigour, thus giving her physical power in the field. The RD approach destabilises this idea by viewing the acquisition of cognitive capital as synonymous with attaining embodied capital, allowing both forms of capital to work in tandem to enable a more nuanced embodiment of agency to emerge.

7 Bourdieu's (1986) notion of embodied capital refers to the mastery of physical skills that allows an individual to exercise a greater level of power than other individuals in a given social field.

Drawing upon key concepts from the sociological research of Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1990, 2000) and Giddens (1984), I propose that my use of dialogue and critical reflection in the university dance training space, and the underlying pedagogical values that these emancipatory approaches are grounded in, created a training environment that subscribed to an alternative doxa. Although this doxa was rooted in a different value system to the dominant training structures, I discovered that it led to the construction of a doxic agreement between the students and me, that is, a mutually negotiated yet unspoken set of social rules that we all conformed to. Exploring how the doxic agreement constructed a code of behaviour, I position it as a form of structure that was recursively reproduced (Giddens 1984) through the collective actions of our body-minds. This leads me to propose an expanded understanding of how agency is developed and exercised by participants in the social world of contemporary dance technique training.

Sustaining the illusio in dance technique training: unreflexive reproduction

The doxic conventions of dance technique training perpetuate notions of imitation and repetition, acts that are not generally considered to be conducive with agency. Imitation and repetition are evident in the methods

that dance teachers use to transmit techniques to their students, reinforcing the notion of the dominant ideal that Roche (2011) speaks of. For example, in the focus group interview that I conducted in 2016, one of the participants stated, 'whenever I get taught something I try and do it exactly like the choreographer, because I feel like it's their work, I should execute it the way they want'. This comment highlights the extent to which dancers strive to incorporate, through imitation, visual examples that are demonstrated by other bodies, most commonly the teacher or an assistant who demonstrates on the teacher's behalf. Visual demonstrations are usually accompanied by verbal instructions or prompts that depict a certain image or evoke a particular quality, assisting the dancer in executing the desired movement. Dancer's body-minds are also shaped by observing and imitating their colleagues who are training alongside them, meaning that they take influence from several visual and auditory sources. Repetition of this visual information not only allows the dancer to embody the general shape of the movement sequences being taught, but to refine elements such as movement quality, dynamic, direction and speed, details that allow her to develop a nuanced performance of the material. Not only is repetition evident in the methods that are used to transmit technical knowledge, but the methods themselves are also passed on from one generation of dancers to the next, leading to perpetual reinforcement of the dominant training structures.

Defining the 'field' as a social, competitive arena, Bourdieu (1990) proposes that through repeated participation in the field, participants embody mental and physical behavioural dispositions, or a 'habitus' (1977) that allows them to 'gain a feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990, 56). The game is sustained by what he calls the 'illusio' (2000), which refers to the phenomenon of individuals being captured by the game through a collective belief that their participation will lead to greater levels of individual success or power. The desire to succeed in the game ensures that individuals conform to the rules – by behaving accordingly, the habitus is structured and sustained. Putting this into the context of contemporary dance technique training, as discussed previously, the dominant perception is that it should enable the dancer to obtain a level of physical virtuosity. As such, dancers arrive to the training setting believing that they should be pushed to their physical limits and view the teacher as responsible for fulfilling this expectation. This idea is evident in several of my own reflective journal entries that I kept during the cycles of action research in which I wrote about feeling pressured to fulfil certain expectations that I perceived the students to have. For example, were my classes technically challenging enough? Was I working the students hard enough? Were they sweating enough at the end of the class? Were the students finding my classes boring, especially when the physical activity was paused for the sake of a reflective discussion? My entry from 24th February 2015 picks up with this idea specifically:

> I worry that my class is clunky and doesn't flow well when moving from one activity to the next. Sometimes it seems as though I lose the students' attention during the reflective moments, especially when writing is involved and I ask them to sit down and turn their attention towards something

> else other than dancing. It seems hard to come back to the body from this.

During the 2016 focus group interview, one participant spoke about her experience of the RD approach stating, 'personally, it doesn't give me the opportunity to stretch myself' and furthermore, 'I would like to be pushed to do something different and be more disciplined'. These comments illustrate the challenge of attempting to facilitate a learning environment that invites students to engage in multiple body-mind states, as opposed to one dominant state, an approach that encourages a shift in the dancer's habitus; this is an idea that is explored in more detail later in relation to psychophysical approaches to performer training. The difficulty in suppressing the force of illusio is evident in these comments, demonstrating the way that it works as a mechanism to sustain the habitus of dance teachers and students, and thus, the doxic conventions. Here, it is worth noting that this action research was conducted nearly ten years ago and the pressures that I experienced teaching dance technique in higher education between 2015 and 2016 might be even more emphasised now, in a post-pandemic world where the generations of learners coming through have been subject to periods of isolation through national lockdowns and remote online training. The impact of these events will have affected dance teachers and students in different ways as they move back towards face-to-face training in the studio, possibly even generating greater levels of pressure for dance teachers to somehow make up for lost time.

The illusio is also compounded by current external pressures within the dance profession[8] such as limited funding, short rehearsal periods and the need to supply the industry with dancers who can learn material quickly so that companies can push new dance work out into the public arena for consumption. The pressure to produce outward facing products, be it dances or dancers, means that it becomes increasingly difficult for teachers to dedicate time towards reflective practice in training sessions and therefore, reflection becomes a luxury that is literally unaffordable. This idea is evident in a comment from a student who participated in the 2016 focus group interview. Discussing her experience of being invited to reflect as part of the RD approach, she stated:

> Sometimes it feels like – I actually appreciate the talking side – but I suppose going back to that kind of mind-set, that sometimes I have it in my mind that – do I have the luxury to talk about it now or do I have the luxury to think about it later and do it now? – because we do have so few dance classes, so to take a question and answer it later is probably more preferable.

Although time is absolutely a factor, it is also possible that the illusio deliberately marginalises reflection since ignorance allows the dominant training structures to stay intact and therefore, to continue serving the interests of the profession. Using the concept of illusio to examine cultures of behaviour in the field of accountancy, Lupu and Empson (2015,

8 Here, I am predominantly referring to touring contemporary dance company models and the commercial dance industry, and not necessarily research-led dance practice that sits outside such commercialised models and may even take a work-in-progress approach to presenting artistic products.

1312) state that, 'The illusio, created through repeated action and routines, represents an unreflexive commitment to reproducing and enforcing the rules of that game'; it is this unreflexive reproduction that the RD approach aims to disrupt.

Disrupting the illusio

In his theory of structuration, sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984) challenges the dominant idea that human agency is restricted by social structures, instead proposing a more dynamic relationship between structure and agency. According to Giddens, not only are humans shaped by social structures, but they actively reinforce structures through a process he calls recursive reproduction. According to Giddens, structures are internalised in the actions of human beings; when humans comply with social rules, they maintain and stabilise structure, making it a socially constructed entity. Because of the internalised nature of structure, Giddens also points to the possibility for humans to change and adapt structures by acting reflexively, disrupting recursive reproduction from within. Adopting Giddens' view, it could be said that even with the pressure of the illusio, dance teachers and students possess the capacity to disrupt unreflexive reproduction of structure by consciously questioning and altering the actions of their body-minds. In relation to this idea, Carrie Noland (2009, 3) investigates how cultures are embodied through the routinised performance of gestures, suggesting that this produces 'normative behaviour' in a particular context. She proposes a conception of agency that arises from the kinaesthetic experience of the body moving, suggesting that this produces 'deviations from normative behaviour – from slight variation to outright rejection'. Picking up with somatic perspectives on habitual movement patterning, Noland's view of agency appears to be grounded in the idea that by being more aware of the sensation of bodily movements and the social conditions that cause movements to arise, humans can exercise agency through the conscious re-patterning of alternative actions; this idea has been explored in applications of somatic practices in dance training contexts, as noted by Martha Eddy (2009).

This idea is also evident in other perspectives on dance training and choreographic practice more broadly. For example, examining the movement languages that emerge through the use of improvisational dance scores, Bojana Cvejic (2015) explores how the perceived unknown nature of dance improvisation jars with the dominant conventions of dance training. She states, 'Rehearsing a dance implies learning and perfecting movement in repetition' (Cvejic 2015, 156), yet the practice of improvisation is often concerned with deviating from embodied patterns of behaviour in the pursuit of uncovering new movement possibilities, thus, acknowledging the potential for difference within repetition, in a Deleuze (1994) sense. However, applying this philosophy to dance technique training is more complex since it could be said that the point of learning a codified technique is to embody, through repetition, the very patterns that the improviser is perhaps trying to escape; this calls into

question the extent to which repetition in a dance technique training context, be it the repetition of the movements themselves, or the structures within which they exist, can incorporate an agential dimension. These are ideas that were explored through the application of the RD approach, which allowed students to become aware of the habitual movement patterns they had embodied as subjects of the dominant training structures and to exercise agency by uncovering new layers of embodied knowledge and, thus, new possibilities from within.

Dialogue: slipping between states

Critical reflection, supported by dialogue was central to this process of uncovering new layers of knowledge. As noted earlier, when using the term 'dialogue', I intend to encompass the various modes of dialogue that might occur between an individual and the external environment in a dance training setting. This includes:

- Different types of touch (the teacher's touch, the touch of a peer, touching external surfaces), watching (watching other bodies moving, watching one's own reflection in the mirror), listening (external sound, the voices of others and one's own internal sounds/voices).
- Spoken dialogues that arise from the experience of dancing, such as verbal feedback from teacher to student/s, reflective discussions in partners that form part of a broader peer-feedback exercise, small or whole group reflective discussions.

Reflection occurred, both through structured activities that I planned prior to each session, and through spontaneous, discursive dialogue that emerged naturally during the course of each class. The structured reflective activities consisted of group discussions, peer feedback activities and individual journal writing tasks, usually occurring after periods of physical dance practice; this approach to reflection can be likened to the third-order state of awareness that psychophysical theatre practitioner, Phillip Zarrilli (2009) speaks of in his non-hierarchical,[9] three-stage approach to performer training; in the third-order state of awareness, the mind is viewed as coming to the foreground to reflect on the process of embodying a specific technique or movement. Returning to the earlier references to praxis, in the RD approach, a reciprocal relationship between action and reflection is encouraged whereby one process continually informs the other and the dancer slips through a nexus of body-mind states that each foreground the body and/or mind at different moments; this is an idea that Jane Turner and Patrick Campbell (2021, 151) discuss in relation to Third Theatre and psychophysical performer training, observing that the 'constant slippage' between different embodied states and practices results in a 'non-dualistic sense of self' for the performer.

During the structured reflective activities, the students were invited to view themselves from internal and external perspectives and dialogue was fundamental in this process. The internal perspective focuses on accessing and reflecting on tacit knowledge residing in the body-mind, knowledge that is acquired through the process of embodying dance techniques. This includes reflecting on how a movement feels as it is danced, in a somatic

9 It is worth noting that the perceived ranking of first, second and third-order states of awareness could be seen as problematic since the first and second order states are most associated with the physicality of the body, while the third-order state is associated with the mind. This could, therefore, be viewed as privileging the mind over the body, which in turn may inadvertently undermine the idea of the framework being non-hierarchical.

sense, paying attention to kinesthetic sensation and proprioception. The external perspective focuses on accessing and reflecting on information from external sources that form part of the broader social world, allowing the dancer to develop an understanding of how her practice appears from the outside. This includes verbal prompts offered from the teacher or from a classmate during peer feedback activities, different forms of physical touch, or viewing the image of oneself dancing, such as in the studio mirror or on video. During each activity, the students were encouraged to consider the relationship between the internal and external perspectives and to think about the information offered from each perspective in relation to self.

Each time the dancers participated in a structured reflective activity, they were encouraged to return to their physical dance practice, allowing the new knowledge acquired through reflection to inform the physical work. This reciprocal flowing between dancing and reflecting was usually when further spontaneous reflection would occur in the form of smaller discussions between classmates and larger class discussions. Although this fostered a vibrant and varied learning environment, as illustrated earlier, the reality of facilitating students in moving fluidly between different body-mind states was not without its challenges; not only was it a process that led me to question my abilities as a dance teacher, but my commitment to incorporating a reflective dimension into my classes was something that subjected me to the pressure of the illusio. In addition, there were moments when reflection seemed to interfere with the bodily act of dancing in a negative way; as previously discussed, this was not only something that I picked up on, but also the students, as evident in the following comment from a participant of the 2016 focus group interview:

> I think the best way to do it [train in dance technique] is through movement. I think if we sat down and talked continually, it stops the flow – of being creative. Sometimes when we keep stopping – I'm like I just need to do it, for me, as a dancer, I need to keep doing it and keep doing it rather than, oh let's talk about, because I don't want to talk, I just want to dance.

Returning to Zarrilli's (2009) three-stage framework for psychophysical training, this finding demonstrates that there are occasions within body-based training environments when it is appropriate for the body to come into the foreground as the key conduit for knowledge. According to Zarrilli (2009), this is most apparent in the second-order pre-reflective state during which the body-mind attends to intentional experience and the mind temporarily disappears into the background. The dancer refining her embodiment of a movement sequence through repeated practice would be an example of this state of awareness in action. Here, the dancer is immersed in the flow of the movement and although a period of reflection may follow to make sense of what has occurred on a bodily level, this finding showed me that part of my responsibility as a teacher

was to recognise when it was appropriate to switch between body-mind states, and when it was necessary to stay in a particular state for longer.

Alongside this weaving in and out of physical and cognitive processes, I experimented with incorporating choreographic tasks, something that does not usually occur in a conventional dance technique training setting. For example, the students were regularly invited to create movement sequences in small groups that were based upon technical principles related to the release-based technique being explored. These sequences were often combined with sections of my own choreography, creating extended sequences of movement that could be drawn upon in the context of improvisational games that occurred towards the end of the class. The purpose of this was to establish a more holistic relationship between technique and choreography and to allow the students to apply their technical knowledge in a creative situation.

Constructing codes of behaviour: doxic agreements

Towards the end of each cycle of action research, a sample of students were invited to undertake further reflection on their experience of the RD approach during a focus group interview facilitated by me. During these interviews, discussions naturally segued into talking about the students' broader perceptions of dance technique as a concept, which appeared to be shaped by their dance training experiences prior to university. They also compared experiences with other lecturers on the BA Hons Dance programme that they were undertaking at the time. For example, speaking about his experience of a creative task in one of my technique classes, one participant stated that he 'kind of knew which way to do it' suggesting that his approach would be likely to change depending on 'what class it is and who's teaching it'[10]. Furthermore, another student commented on how she approached different classes 'with kind of different heads on' suggesting that as a team of lecturers, we had 'completely different styles, and you kind of go in with that lecturer's kind of style in you'. This data suggests that the RD approach to training, which I had assumed to be empowering, had in fact constructed a code of behaviour that determined what was acceptable within the context of my technique classes. Although I had never verbally communicated a 'right' or 'wrong' way of responding to the creative and reflective activities, the actions of my body-mind had clearly conveyed rules of engagement that for better or worse, the students seemed to willingly play by. Returning to Bourdieu (2000), the students' admission that they played by different rules depending on who was teaching them suggests that in the pursuit of the illusio, they embodied a habitus that would allow them to acquire the cognitive and physical capital required to succeed in the given field. In this way, my facilitation of the RD approach and the students' resulting behaviour suggests that we entered into a doxic agreement with each other, a mutually negotiated set of rules that we all subscribed to.

This finding was revelatory to me, leading me to question my perception of myself as an empowering teacher and the extent to which I had unconsciously imposed another system of domination onto the students.

10 I have previously referenced this data in Rimmer (2017) to explore how underlying doxas are created in the dance training environment. However, this analysis is taken further in the present article.

Prior to uncovering these findings, I had not considered the problematic nature of assuming that my training approach would be enough to empower the students, not to mention my presumption that the students wanted to be empowered in the first place. This realisation led me to question whether I was inadvertently reinstating a hierarchy between the students and me, something that ironically, I was actively trying to avoid. The assumption that the educator has the knowledge to free learners has been identified as a common misconception in applications of critical pedagogy (Ellsworth 1989) as it reinforces the implicit power dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. Jaques Rancière's (2009) notion of the ignorant schoolmaster, which subverts traditional conceptions of the teacher as the authoritarian expert, picks up with this idea. Rancière (2009, 1) proposes, 'that one ignoramus could teach another what he himself did not know, asserting the equality of intelligence and opposing intellectual emancipation to popular instruction'. This conundrum highlights the importance of critical reflection as a strategy for demystifying the underlying value systems that are inherent within certain pedagogical approaches, even those that are intended to be empowering. Dance scholar Donna Dragon (2015) explores this in research that investigates the assumed empowering nature of somatic-based pedagogies in western dance education, proposing that when the purpose and value of such approaches remains silently embedded, they inadvertently operate as systems of control.

With that said, the data also indicated that the code of behaviour structured by doxic agreement had an agential dimension. For example, both students cited above were particularly strong dancers; not only were they able to embody the movement sequences demonstrated by me in a way that displayed technical clarity and a nuanced understanding of the principles being explored, but they appeared confident to take ownership of the movement by taking physical risks and imbuing the material with individual inflections, something that I actively encouraged. They offered innovative responses to the creative tasks, developing material that appeared to go beyond the basic imitation of the sequences I had choreographed and demonstrated to the class. Furthermore, both students regularly made insightful contributions to reflective discussions and were often forthcoming in talking about their embodied experiences of dancing, willingly grappling with words in an attempt to verbally articulate the felt sense of their bodies; this was a skill that I was interested in nurturing in the students, not in an attempt to privilege spoken words over the language of the body, but because the act of verbally articulating embodied experiences may be useful in uncovering further layers of knowledge, as suggested by Nelson (2022). However, I also recognise the slippery nature of spoken words, which are sometimes incapable of accurately capturing and communicating phenomenological experience and this was something that both the students and I acknowledged as a continuous struggle during the action research.

In addition, there were several responses in the 2016 focus group interview that supported the idea that the code of behaviour negotiated through the doxic agreement was conducive to agency. For example, one

participant stated, 'I feel this technique explores your body and your little habits and things' while another said, 'it's been more of an exploration of what my body can do, or is doing'[11]. The use of the verb 'explore' appears in both of these responses, leading me to draw a connection between acts of exploration and agency; by exploring the habitual behaviours that arise through the embodiment of dance techniques, perhaps the students were given licence to make different choices, to push physical boundaries and to reflect on the process of doing so, ideas that align with the embodied conception of agency offered by Noland (2009, 1), which includes acts of 'variation, innovation, and resistance'. Although the doxic agreement had arguably structured this code of behaviour, the characteristics I witnessed did not suggest that the students were passively conforming to rules and regulations dictated by me, but rather using the internal structure of their body-minds to challenge the structural conventions of dance technique training; this supports Giddens, (1984) proposal that social structures are recursively reproduced through the body-minds of humans and as such, humans also possess the agency to disrupt reproduction through acts of change.

11 I have previously examined this data in Rimmer-Piekarczyk (2018) to explore the notion of self-somatic authority. However, the present article explores the same data from a different perspective.

Concluding thoughts: doxic 'code switching' and moving identities

The research findings indicate that the students were consciously conforming to the doxic agreement constructed, therefore reinforcing its structural disposition and the broader sense of illusio it conveyed. With that said, the students' recognition that they played by different rules depending on who was teaching them also suggests that they were navigating multiple doxic agreements simultaneously; this switching between different codes of behaviour reveals that the students were astutely attuned to the social rules that they were subject to. Educational researchers Elkins and Hanke (2018, 44) propose that the act of verbal code switching in higher education is one way that students exercise agency in order to 'resist class based systems of oppression and achieve their educational goals'. Applying this as a lens through which to view the practice of undergraduate dance technique students, physical and verbal code switching could be viewed as a strategy through which dance students exercise agency to acquire greater levels of embodied and cognitive capital. This finding is especially interesting when considering the geographical location of the university campus where this action research took place, which was located in a working-class area in the north-west of England and where many individuals were first generation university students. In fact, as a practitioner from a working-class city in the midlands region of England myself, the notion of social code switching is also interesting for me to reflect on in relation to my own sense of agency and my desire to facilitate empowering spaces for others.

By consciously selecting aspects of verbal and physical codes, and incorporating these into the body-mind, it could be said that dance students construct an individual habitus that allows them to effectively navigate multiple training environments. Aligning with this idea, Roche (2011)

proposes that contemporary dancers exercise agency by 'embodying multiplicity' (2011, 105), a process in which they construct an individual moving identity that allows them to participate in multiple choreographic projects over time, each with different movement aesthetics. Similarly, the act of doxic code-switching can be viewed as a strategy through which dancers incorporate such multiplicity and, thus, construct their own individual moving identities. This finding illustrates the importance of allowing dance students to become aware of how their moving identities are shaped by the structures that govern the social world of dance technique training, as well as allowing dance teachers to understand how their actions might be reinforcing such structures and what the repercussions of this might be in relation to agency. Once again, this highlights the need for dialogical critical reflection and healthy scepticism in the dance technique training environment.

During the 2016 focus group interview, one participant spoke about how the RD approach created a training environment where as students, they were 'treated as intelligent dancers and given that opportunity to play and explore'. Another participant stated, 'You let us figure the answer out and that makes us think … we find the answer and that's really good for us and for our career later when we're going to work independently'.[12] These comments indicate that in playing by the 'doxic' rules conveyed by the RD approach, the students experienced different forms of empowerment and also recognised the implications of this on their lives beyond the dance studio. Furthermore, as the behaviour of the students evolved in response to their engagement with the RD approach, the rules of the doxic agreement shifted to accommodate these changes, demonstrating the way that it operated as a flexible structure through which agency emerged. This highlights something paradoxical around the relationship between rules and empowerment suggesting that somehow, the stability provided by rules, or indeed structure, is a necessary requirement for human agency.[13] Returning to Giddens (1984) dynamic conception of the structure-agency relationship, these findings illustrate the degree to which both entities are mutually dependent on one another, even if that dependence is, at times, a source of tension.

Perhaps, then, an expanded understanding of agency for the contemporary dancer involves cultivating an awareness of the self, not only as subject to structure, but as a subject with the potential to frustrate, adapt and change structure from within, through the integrated actions of the body-mind. Although the practical aspects of this action research took place almost a decade ago, recent political movements such as Me Too and Black Lives Matter, which are absolutely bound to notions of individual and collective agency, highlight the increasing need for critical reflection and healthy scepticism within western educational systems. The more that these attributes can be nurtured in the field of undergraduate contemporary dance training, the more effectively individuals can navigate the complexities of the post-pandemic, post-Brexit dance profession, and the ever-changing world beyond.

12 Again, I have previously examined this data in Rimmer-Piekarczyk (2018) to explore the notion of self-somatic authority. However, the present article explores the same data from a different perspective.

13 In July 2023, I presented at a conference hosted by The Performance Research Group at Manchester Metropolitan University, which explored how scores are utilised within contemporary performance practice. During the conference, it became evident that the instruction and sense of constraint provided by scores was somehow necessary for artists to feel liberated, an idea that seems to run parallel with the way that structure functions in relation to agency.

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