

“Movement Doesn’t Lie”: Teachers’ Practice Choreutical Analysis

Serafina Pastore^{1,*}, Monica Pentassuglia²

¹Department of Education Science, Psychology, Communication, University of Bari, Italy

²Department of Philosophy, Education and Psychology, University of Verona, Italy

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Abstract Identify and describe teaching practice is not an easy task. Current educational research aims at explain teachers’ work focusing on the concept of practice. Teachers’ practical knowledge is a sensitive and tacit knowledge, produced, and effused by the body. In this perspective, the teachers’ work can be considered as an expressive activity. Starting from the view of teachers’ work as a performance, this article tries to illustrate a conceptual way of analysing the teaching practice. The paper reports first results of two case studies involving three primary school teachers and two middle school teachers, respectively. Data collection includes non-participant observation with field-notes, videotaping, and R. Laban’s notation system (Labanotation). The present paper draws attention to a particular category of analysis, the dance. Research results highlight how it is possible to interpret teaching as dance. The authors attempt to interpret teaching as dance. Emphasizing the role of body and movements, research results highlight how it is possible to interpret teaching as dance. Suggestions are discussed for future educational research

Keywords Teaching, Performance, Body, Dance, Ethnographic Research

1. Introduction and Research Objectives

Educational literature and research on teaching practice have highlighted how body and movement are important [28, 29, 4-7]. The concepts of practice and performance have been considered with a new interest by the art-based research [21, 3].

In the practice-based perspective, the article first provides some trends around the concepts of body, movement, and performance. Then, it presents some results of two case-studies aimed at analysing teaching as a practical and situated activity. Following Yin [32], researchers have used case-study as a research strategy because “[it] is preferred when the inquirer seek new answers to how or why questions,

when inquirer has little control over events being studied, when the object of study is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, when boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear, and when it is desirable to use multiple sources of evidence” (Schwandt 2007, p. 28).

The aim of this study is not to evaluate the efficacy of teaching practice, but to define and validate a research protocol for future investigations on teachers’ work. For this reason, interaction and interrelations between teachers and students were not the main research topic. This study does not focus on students’ learning outcomes or teaching quality.

In this study we have tried to:

- Consider teaching as a practical experience;
- Analyse how teachers use their body at work and manage space in the classroom context;
- Identify main characteristics of their practice.

2. Warm-up (A Theoretical Framework)

Technological, social, and scientific innovations have significantly changed the concept of work and modified how we think and live it. More specifically, abandoning traditional interpretative categories, the sociology of work has tried to find new research itineraries marked out by the strong influence of symbolic interactionism and by ethnomethodology [8].

Work activities are structured by roles, jargons, and rules. These elements have a collective and social dimension and for this reason work is mediated by social objects, language, and body.

In the *workplace studies* perspective, work is considered as a set of learning modalities, as a process of situated knowledge emerging through the workers’ interactions. Professional knowledge is coupled to the material world and this knowledge is distributed in objects, facts, and in the workplace. The body, in the workplace, has an important role because through it professional knowledge is preserved and transmitted.

The body learns at work, but at the same time, the body is a resource for learning. We learn to perceive the phenomena and identify standards of knowledge in a specific work environment [26, 27, 22, 14]. In this framework, the body adapts and learns through practice. Performance is directly influenced by competence. As an immediate practical action, professional performance develops in space and time: it is a fluid and dynamic process always ready and responsive to stimuli and feedback.

P. Dirksmeier and I. Helbrecht [10], in their Non-Representational Theory, have defined performance as a product staged by the body. Actions and events are defined in their immanence, and as a result, their theory focuses on how people know and learn in an intuitive way. Dirksmeier and Helbrecht analyse everyday practices as an embodiment. They seek to strengthen the creativity of performative methods. The attention paid to body and to practical knowledge leads us to use the concepts of performance and choreography. In this context, dance becomes a pertinent category of analysis to gather information and define interpretation paths for teachers' work. However, dance is not limited to the expression of emotions and feelings. We refer to the cultural and ideological dimension of performance itself. Moreover, the social character of dance allows us to distinguish among different choreographic styles and teachers' performances.

3. Arabesque (Body and Performance)

Anthropologists, historians, philosophers, psychologists, educators, and dancers have all tried to understand and define the concept of dance. The movement itself has an ancestral connection with human nature, although it is difficult to give a comprehensive definition of dance as well as re-enact its history [17].

The concept of dance is usually associated with different aspects of body, sexuality, and gender. Dance has been endowed with a spiritual dimension. It is also a means of contact with other people in various social settings. Dance begins with the body, with the awareness that the body is a tool [1]. For this reason dance has always been characterized by an element of personal history (e.g. many choreographers, such as Matthew Bourne or Dada Masilo, use their personal life experiences as a cue for reflecting on social and political issues related to race and identity). At the same time dance is entwined with social community because it starts from a common experience. In this sense, an analysis of dance as a performance leads researchers to focus on the ways through which bodies are used and shaped [2, 11, 12, 20].

The observation of a single performance highlights how social world uses the body and shapes it. Post-modern studies have interpreted dance as text (choreographies): "choreography can stipulate both the kinds of actions performed and their sequence or progression" [12: 2]. Instead, dance has an immediateness that cannot be found in theoretical discourses nor can it be analysed in a disembodied way. Dance is a bodily experience that

becomes a means, a tangible material through which practices, gestures, movements, ability, and knowledge are made explicit [30-31].

Invalidating the mind-body separation, that is typical of western culture, dance has represented an object of great interest. V. Janesick [15-16], for example, uses categories of dance and choreography for qualitative research. From minuet to improvisation, qualitative research takes shape and consistency through the work of the researcher/choreographer who directs the entire process. Studies and research have, in general, considered dance as a text. Attention has been paid primarily to choreography [29]. Instead, dance as a performance has an aesthetical immediacy that cannot be understood through disembodied discourses and analysis. As S.P. Wainwright and B.S. Turner [31] pointed out, technical skills in dance are combined with a cultural and artistic knowledge of body. From a correlation of dance practices and choreographies they have demonstrated how body movements have a deep cultural matrix.

The main question therefore becomes thus: How can we analyse dance?

Ethnographic work on dance has been particularly concerned with all aspects of the body and its movements, looking at the body as an aesthetic object set within the backdrop of social and cultural processes. From this point of view, there have been several attempts to establish a rigorous and universal system of coding and notation of body movements. The aim to coding dance movements has promoted new research interests to preserve the choreography by the uniqueness of the moment, the arbitrariness of the oral tradition, and the memory of dancers. The *Kinetography Laban*, (or *Labanotation*) is the best-known attempt to write and note dance movements. R. Laban [18-19] tried to develop a philosophy of dance with the aim not only to elevate the discipline to a higher artistic dignity, but also to help people to understand their own existence. According to Laban, the main traits of one's personality can be traced through the observation of his/her movements.

The body, designed as a tool for the art of movement, is different from all those tools that are an extension of the body itself (such as, for example, in painting or sculpture). It is on the basis of this framework that we have tried to identify and describe the peculiar characteristics of teaching practice. As we will try to demonstrate, analysing teaching practice in terms of performance is tantamount to analysing the staging of an improvised choreography. Improvisation is understood as an active response that a performer realizes and not only as a reaction to other performers. It is a specific, contextual, and unique choreography, not repeatable, arisen from the awareness of a responsive body able to react in autonomous and pertinent ways to external stimuli.

4. Assemble (Teaching and Dance)

Starting from the assumption of work as a lived and embodied practice, we try to look at teaching activities through dance. This study, conducted in two schools of the Bari district (in South Italy), aims at exploring teaching practices in an ethnographic perspective. The nature of present research allowed us to choose teachers in order to explore two different levels of school (primary and middle school) and three levels of professional experience (junior, expert, senior). For this reason, the study can not be considered affected by gender bias because it aims to describe and explain teaching practice according to other kind of variables.

Observations were carried-out by following five teachers at work: three primary school teachers and two middle school teachers with different professional experiences. Teachers were observed and filmed during classes.

For data collection three different tools were used: non-participant observation with field-notes, video recordings, and Labanotation.

For the observations, we have used written descriptions and an observation grid of teaching actions (Table 1) where we have marked the presence of the “actions/steps” of a typical lesson.

Table 1. Observation grid of teaching actions

Teacher _____	Dates
Contextualization	
Assessment of previous knowledge	
Learning goals introduction	
Preparation for learning	
Interaction with past teaching processes	
Explanation of main topics	
Call for feedbacks	
Learning organizers management	
Summary	
Class discussion	
Fix learning goals – assessment of learning achievement	
Conclusions	

Each 60-minutes class was divided into two 20-minutes sessions devoted to take notes (written description) and filling in the grid, respectively. This first phase was followed by a 10-minutes videotaping session. The Art-Based Research (ABR) approach lead us to match “teaching practice” with “artistic practice”: so, following the observation grid, taped material has been used for the Labanotation. In this way we have synthesized all the observations. Then we have interpreted teachers’ movements as a dance. Labanotation has allowed us to separate teacher’s movement analysis from the context variables that could have influenced the interpretation (for example the perception of the observer, his/her emotions). To better understand Labanotation (LabanWriter version 4.4) we introduce its main components:

- The body (what?);

- The space (where?);
- The time (when?);
- The performance in the space (how?).

The *staff* is the Labanotation output. It is an iconic and symbolic representation of teachers’ movements (Figure 1). The central axis divides the body into two parts, left and right. In parallel to the central axis there are other two sidebars, right and left, where locating the different parts of the body. The writing is scribed bottom-up and the position of the symbol inside the columns changes when there is a body movement. The basic symbol is a rectangle. Other symbols refer to different directions. These symbols can be thusly: black (low level), white with a point at the centre (middle level) and with transversal lines (tall level). The length of the symbol indicates what length of time has one movement. Each of these basic symbols gives information on the following elements:

- The time (length of the symbol);
- The direction (form of the symbol);
- The level (colour of the symbol);
- The part of the body in movement (position in comparison to the central axle).

Time is divided into intervals marked on the central axis (each interval is equivalent to an account/beat). The movement description may be further refined through the use of additional symbols that identify different characteristics.

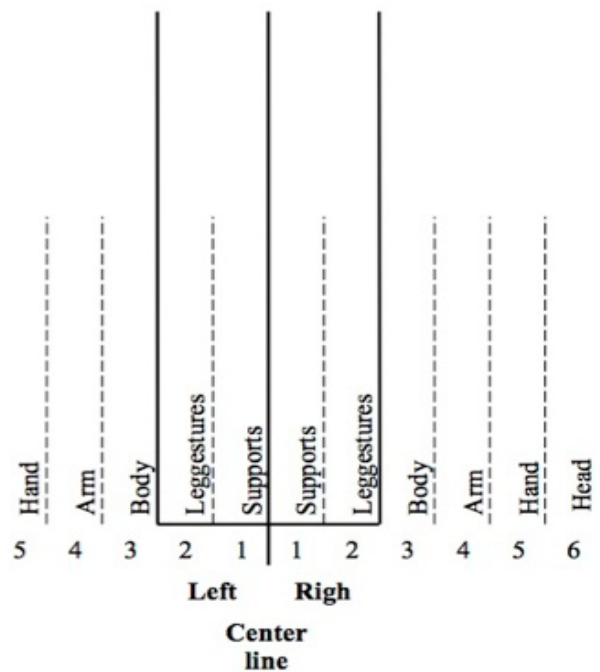


Figure 1. Standard staff

5. Choreutic Teachers’ Practice (Data analysis)

Starting from collected data we will attempt now to

interpret the teachers' practices observed in the primary school case-study. This data guided our interpretation of teaching practices as codified and repeated dance movements.

The first teacher is MN; she is a junior first grade teacher. The classroom is not very large: the desks are set out in three rows. Close to the teacher's desk there is a blackboard, and on the right a locker for teaching material. There is an abundance of light and there are many posters and papers decorating the walls making the room very colourful and lively. Her teaching actions are focused on the dimension of *warm-up* (it is the first hour of the class schedule): she explains the *learning goals* and *prepares her pupils to learning*. So, she *contextualizes* the lecture contents recalling what has been done the day before (Table 2). During the lesson (II observation session) MN is not static, she moves a lot and tries to establish a contact with her pupils. The observation of her movements underlines, in fact, her tendency to reach pupils in order to help them.

Table 2. Teaching actions of the teacher MN

Teacher _____	Day 1
Contextualization	1
Assessment of previous knowledge	
Learning goals introduction	
Preparation for learning	1
Interaction with past teaching processes	
Explanation of main topics	1
Call for feedbacks	1
Learning organizers management	1
Summary	
Class discussion	
Fix learning goals – assessment of learning achievement	1
Conclusions	

The Laban coding of this repertoire shows how MN's movements hardly ever occupy a time over two counts. MN alternates moments of immobility (of the body, but not of the head) and quick movements. The first staffs are related to the *warm-up* moment: between pirouettes and small runs, MN comes into possession of the space. The next staffs indicate how her *front* often changes because she turns and walks towards her pupils. For this reason the *floorplan* is present. The movements of MN are always very sudden (RUN): this is evident by the presence of directional symbols in one beat (Figure 2). The staffs show the main footsteps of her piece. Although she is moving and often quite quickly, we can identify some specific classical poses. The demi-bras are frequent and they are generally used as preparation or conclusion of sequences of movements. It is a position open to the audience where the dancer is often slightly stretched forward: MN seeks both contact and attention from her pupils; she is ready to interact with them.

After a flurry of pirouettes (highlighting the numerous changes of direction), we can find another pose the *tendu derrière*, a typical movement of classical ballet in which both legs are stretched and a leg moves away from the other one. Poses and movements are slow and with a low complexity.

The second teacher observed is F and she is a senior fifth grade teacher. The time of observation was at the middle of a typical school day and the order and the discipline within this class are fairly noticeable. In brief, the desks are in singular and placed in symmetrical columns in front of her. Out of the teachers we observed, F has the longest experience within the school system.

The lesson proceeds very slowly, because F is *assessing* and *verifying students' previous knowledge* to switch to a new topic in the poetic text unit (I observation session). *Contextualization, learning goals introduction, preparation for learning, interaction with past teaching processes, explanation of main topics*, as well as *summary* and *the promotion of a collective discussion between students* (Table 3) are not part of her lesson.

Table 3. Teaching actions of the teacher F

Teacher _____	Day 1
Contextualization	
Assessment of previous knowledge	1
Learning goals introduction	
Preparation for learning	
Interaction with past teaching processes	
Explanation of main topics	
Call for feedbacks	1
Learning organizers management	1
Summary	
Class discussion	
Fix learning goals – assessment of learning achievement	1
Conclusions	

This teacher wishes to catch pupils' attention. This is a surprising aspect of her performance because she can manage the classroom by simply standing up or sitting behind her desk and moving her head. The only occasions of approach and contact occur when pupils move towards her. Although she remains seated for most of the time, F retains control of the class via constant movements of her upper torso, head, and continuous hand gestures. Her teaching practice is, in fact, like a 'static' dance, mostly made of *port de bras*. The lesson conducted through discussion is gently guided by the teacher who absorbs all the attention on herself (II observation session). Indeed, there is not much spontaneous interaction among her students and this analysis shows the substantial *simplicity* of her lesson.

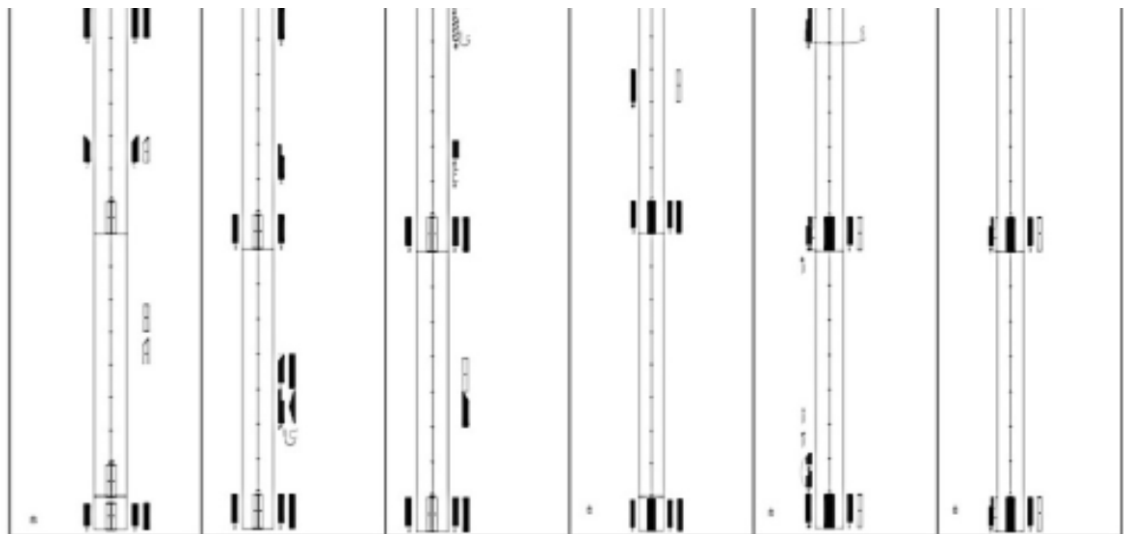
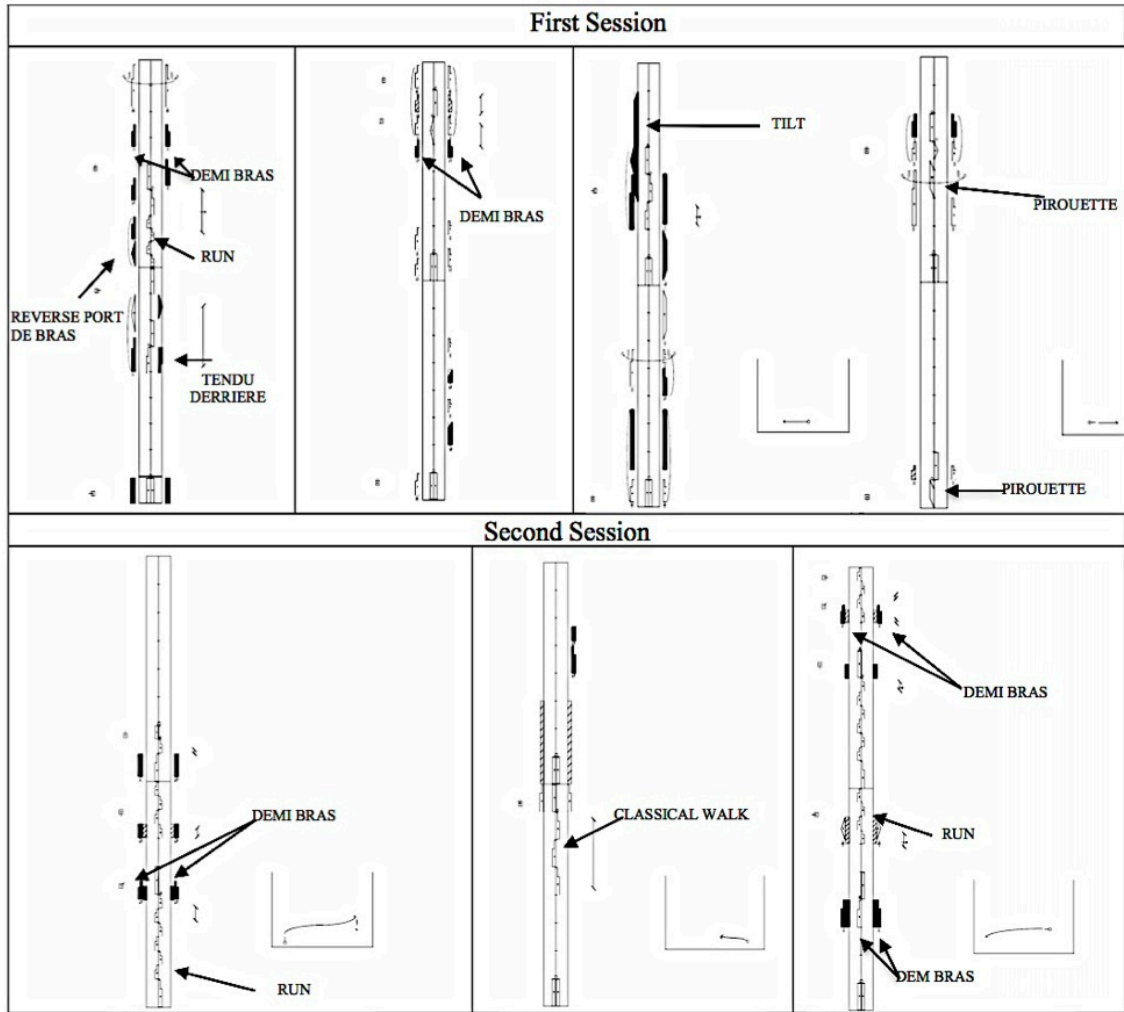


Figure 3. Staffs of the teacher F

The staffs elaborated confirm what has already emerged from the performance of F. In the first session we can see how she occasionally moves her arms, and when she does, her movements are slow and soft (Figure 3). In the last three staffs (II observation session), however, the teacher is sitting. Her gestures are even less frequent. It is not possible to identify the specific steps because she is always sitting behind the desk, in a closed position. She is the focal point of the stage: she is the main actor on the scene. Her performance, therefore, is comparable to the variation of an *étoile*: in short we have a *solo* choreography performed by a single dancer.

Table 4. Teaching actions of the teacher ML

Teacher _____	Day 2
Contextualization	
Assessment of previous knowledge	
Learning goals introduction	
Preparation for learning	
Interaction with past teaching processes	
Explanation of main topics	
Call for feedbacks	1
Learning organizers management	1
Summary	
Class discussion	1
Fix learning goals – assessment of learning achievement	
Conclusions	

The third teacher is ML, an expert first grade teacher. The space management in this class shows a specific situation: while the teacher's desk is quite central, the pupils' desks are scattered following no precise order. Pupils are standing up and moving around the classroom freely: there is a constant noise in background. From the analysis of her teaching activities (Table 4) we can see how her lesson is characterized by an interactive nature based mainly on *dialogue with the students*. However, this lesson ends in a quick and abrupt way.

The repertoire presented by ML is largely static. Collected data confirm a predominant feature of her performance: the centrality of her person. She often moves her head although she remains seated most of the time. The way she tries to approach her pupils is remarkable. She often touches objects

around her (mostly books and teaching materials), especially when she is standing, but not whilst she is walking around the classroom. This lesson was characterized by one critical incident: pupils were reproached for their rude behaviour. In the second session, ML is often stood.

Using the Labanotation we can now interpret ML's teaching style. In the first five staffs presented (Figure 4), the *floorplan* shows how the teacher fills the entire scenic space: the lesson has temporarily suspended as she moves between desks reprimanding pupils for their unruly behaviour. As the first teacher we have observed, ML moves frequently with very slow classical walks. In choreography, those steps are, generally, used during the introduction of variations. The last two staffs (Figure 5) are about the second session, including the conclusion of the lesson. The movements here were minimal: ML is sitting, and from the symbols about the front we can understand that the teacher always faces the class.

The last two teachers that we analysed were been observed in the second case-study. The study was conducted in a middle school. More specifically it was a night school for adult learners.

Data collected reported no relevant differences compared to that of the three primary teachers; however, interesting reflections can be deduced about the relationship between teaching practice and Labanotation.

The first teacher observed in this school was S, a Geography teacher. Her teaching is characterized by a sequence of: *call for feedback*, *learning organizers management*, and *fixation of learning goals* with the *assessment of learning achievement* (Table 5).

Table 5. Teaching actions of the teacher S

Teacher _____	S
Contextualization	1
Assessment of previous knowledge	
Learning goals introduction	
Preparation for learning	
Interaction with past teaching processes	
Explanation of main topics	
Call for feedbacks	1
Learning organizers management	1
Summary	
Class discussion	1
Fix learning goals – assessment of learning achievement	1
Conclusions	

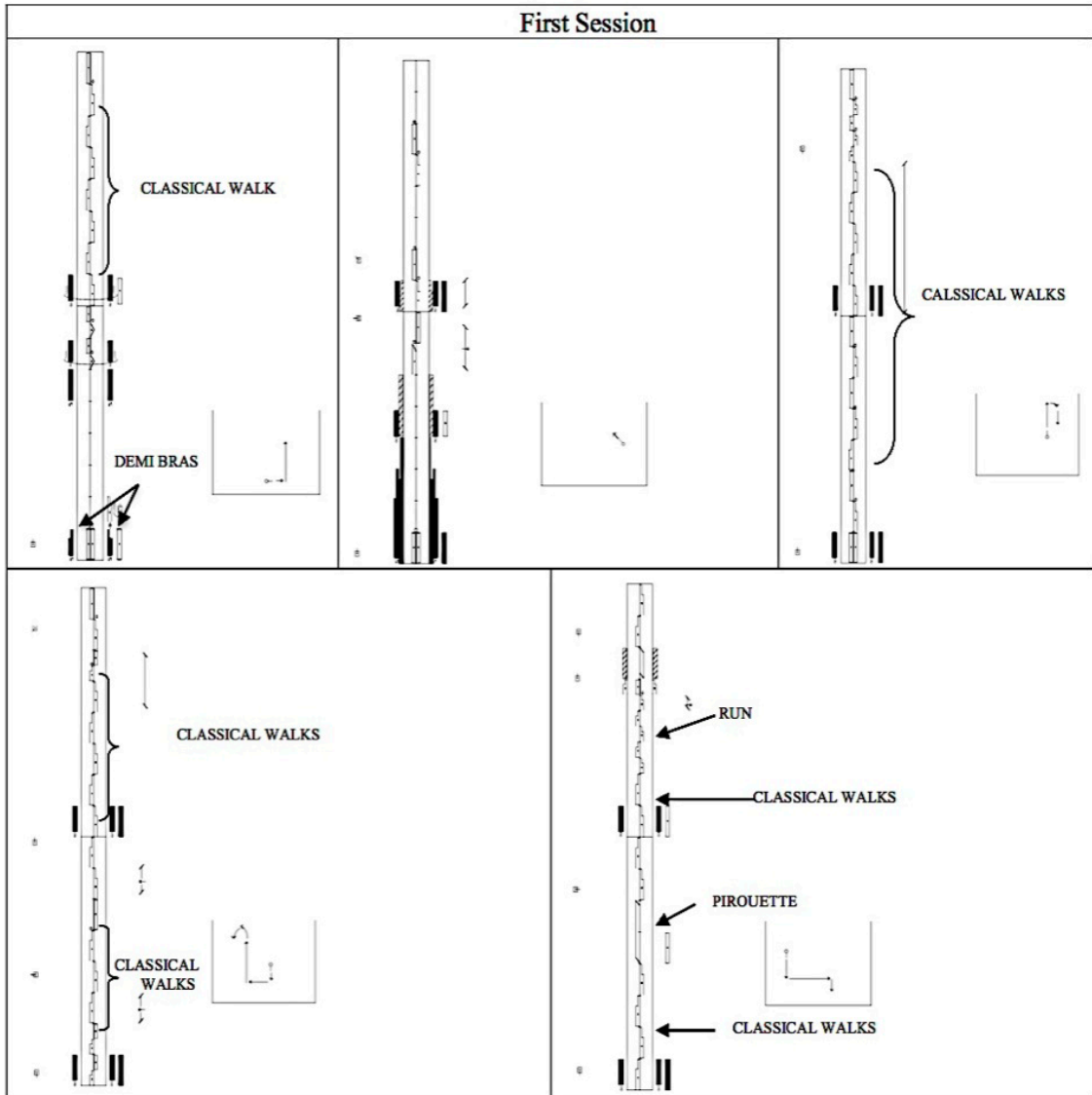


Figure 4. Staffs of the teacher ML

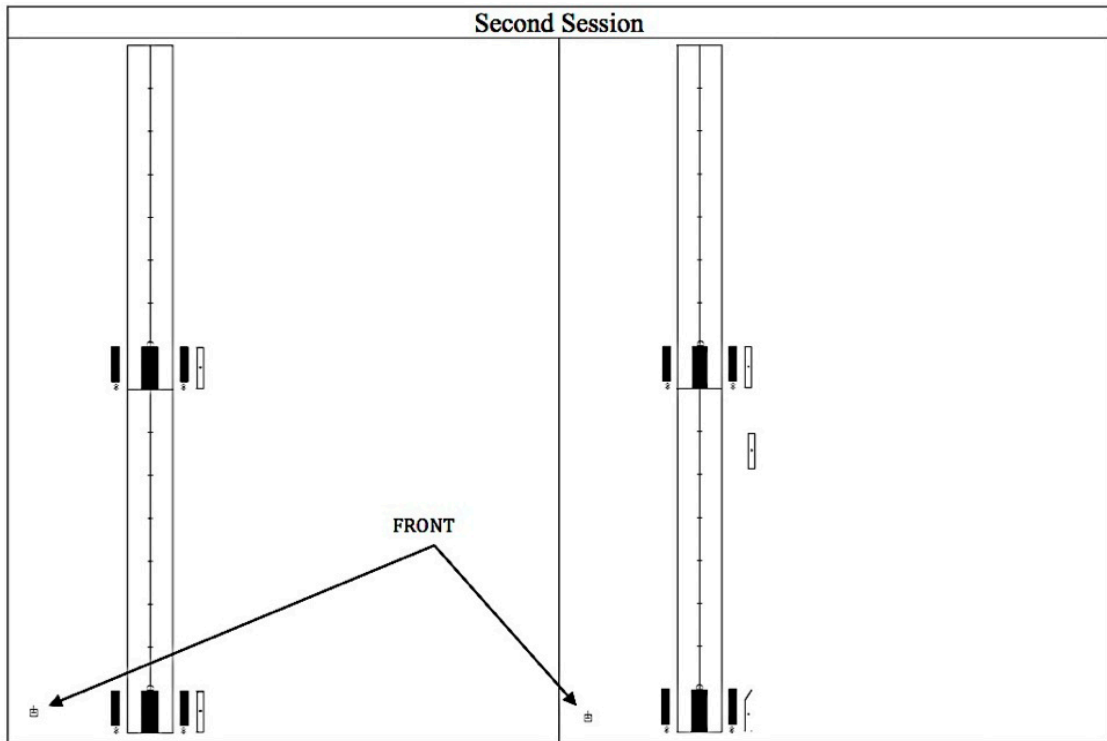


Figure 5. Staffs of the teacher ML

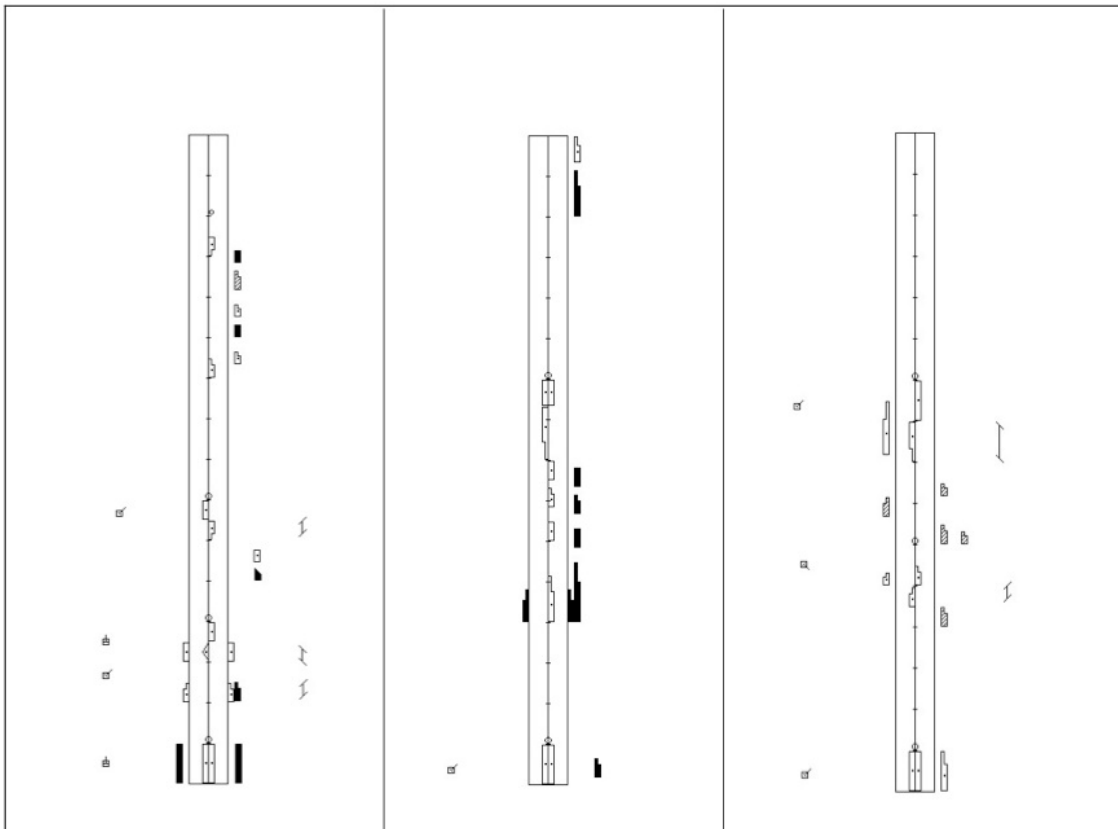


Figure 6. Staffs of the teacher S

S presented a very poor choreography (Figure 6): she was seldom connected to her audience. At the time of observation, she was showing a map of Italy. She rarely looks directly at her students and focuses her attention on the blackboard where she remains for most of her time in class. Her staffs show quick movements even though movement was kept to a bare minimum. Specifically, most of her movements are justified by the need to show the map; therefore, she never leaves that part of the classroom. Furthermore, focusing her attention only on the map she seems to forget that students were present.

The second teacher observed is GP, a male teacher who teaches Math. *Contextualization, assessment of previous knowledge, the preparation for learning, the call for feedback, class discussion* and the *fixation of learning goals* with the *assessment of learning achievement* are his principal

teaching actions.

Table 6. Teaching actions of the teacher GP

Teacher	GP
Contextualization	1
Assessment of previous knowledge	1
Learning goals introduction	
Preparation for learning	1
Interaction with past teaching processes	
Explanation of main topics	
Call for feedbacks	1
Learning organizers management	
Summary	
Class discussion	1
Fix learning goals – assessment of learning achievement	1
Conclusions	

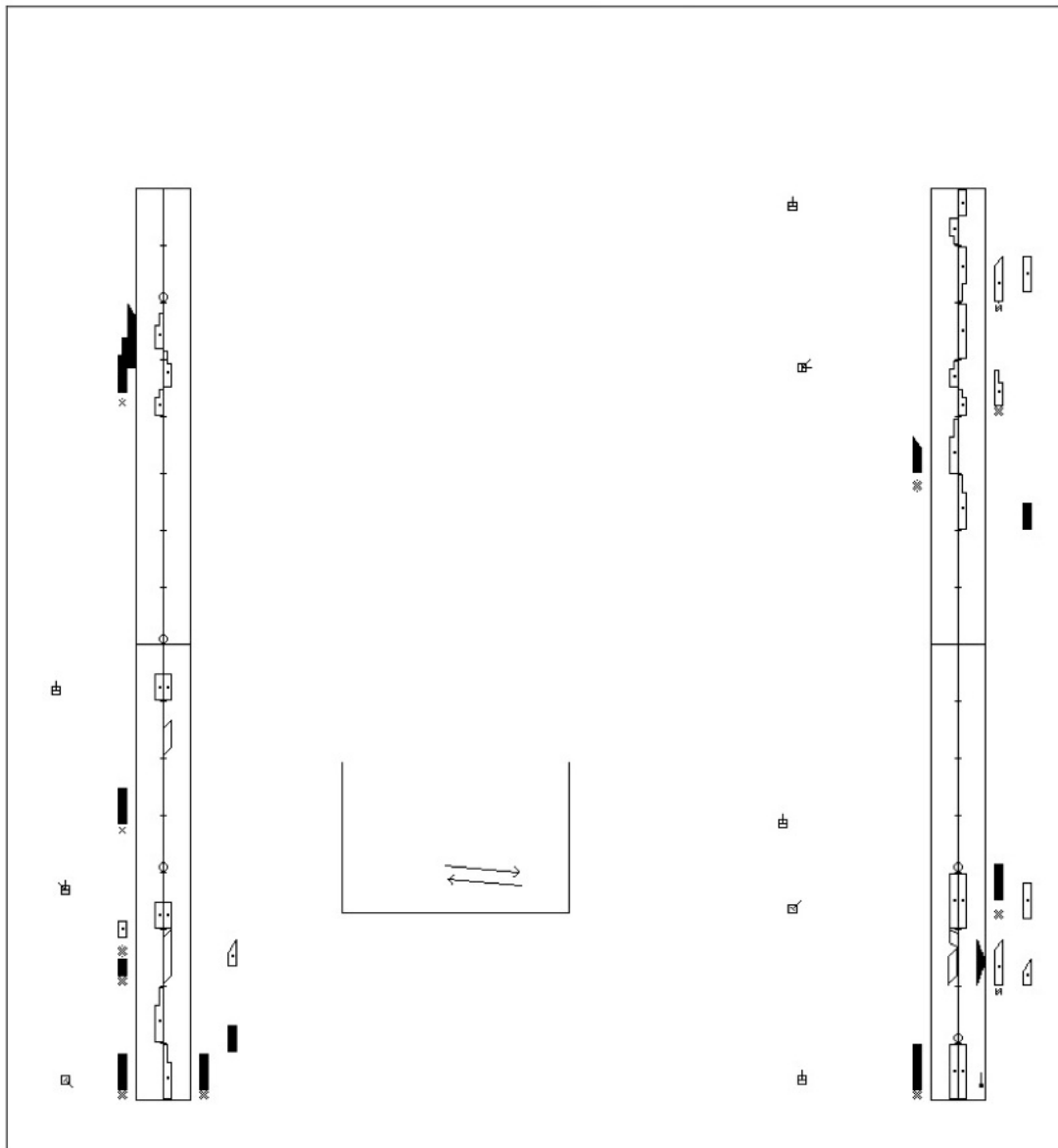


Figure 7. Staffs of the teacher GP

Observing his staffs, we can note, first of all, the presence of the *floorplan*, where it is possible to see his movements from the outset. On the whole his movements are fluid and coordinated. He stands at the centre of the class and in front of his students. He represents the most important element in the teaching-learning setting, having the students tune in on him. His staffs are more complex than those of S. He dominates most of classroom space. This is an active lesson where GP always addresses his students directly. The observation of symbols hinged around the front of the actor and his head movements confirms this aspect. This scholastic setting is characterized by a lot of interaction with the students: they are an active part of the scene. GP is like a director/choreographer who coordinates all the actors in his scene.

6. Pas de Bourrée (Connecting Data for Future Research Paths)

With all the evidence to hand we can now try to draw conclusions based on teachers' practice analysis.

The five performances we have observed correspond to five different teaching styles. MN's teaching practice can be combined with a dynamic and lively performance. She appears self-assured and focused, but her movements are still choppy although smooth nonetheless. Her performance can be compared with a specific moment of a ballet opera: a prologue. This performance is similar to the GP teaching practice but it is worth noting at this juncture, that he is more experienced and able to manage the classroom in a more affluent and capable way.

The performance of F appears decidedly static. This teacher plays always a pivotal role in the scene nevertheless. She can retain the attention of pupils and maintain control of the class only moving her head and arms. Therefore, her performance is comparable to a variation, both for the centrality of the dancer, and for her technical qualities. For this aspect, her performance is very similar to that shown by S. However S is concentrated on transmission of information and not on the relational and social aspects of teaching.

ML has a latent performance, without a real choreographed routine. Her teaching practice consists of actions and movements that are inexpressive. Her teaching practice looks like a character dance. In this dance, the main character occupies a lateral position in the scenic space, but all that unfolds here is always in relation to her person.

Research findings suggest how contextualizing, describing, and identifying a teaching practice is, as already stated, not easy to define. Hopefully, this research can be taken into consideration and may be able to provide some insights with regards to educational field. Connecting art and educational research could contribute to the development of new understandings of teachers' professional practice.

We would like to suggest a further category to analyse, investigate, study, and understand the teacher's work: the dance. This research aroused many questions: How do

teachers live their body at work? What aspects characterize their *dance*, their performance? How do they coordinate different instrumental actions to perform competently (i.e. fluency and rhythm) their work? Which movements punctuate their *dance*? What is the choreography of their *routines* (i.e. the dexterity of the body)? The answers to these questions need further research.

As a *pas de bourrée* (step of junction or connecting) is useful to prepare a complex *piqué arabesque*, this study seeks to act as a liaison for complex but possible future transdisciplinary research itineraries.

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