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Dancing Between Realities:
Exploring the Body in Virtual Dance Improvisation

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Abstract

This article critically reflects on the pedagogical practices I explored, reimagined, and employed while shifting dance improvisation education from face-to-face lessons in a dance studio setting to existing online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Through self-study research as a method of inquiry I analyse my experiences and approaches to teaching and learning while navigating through the untested waters of transferring skills and knowledge in tertiary dance education via virtual means. It is revealed that interdisciplinary teaching and learning and the use of technology, such as camerawork, can help to overcome physical boundaries and could be seen as a new signature pedagogy in tertiary level dance improvisation education.

Redefining Space - Introduction

Social distancing measures and complete lockdowns of entire countries during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 forced educators to rethink their existing teaching and learning practices in schools, academies, and universities around the world. This was also the case in tertiary dance education where the focus revolves around learning with the body, about the body, and through the body in interaction with others (Heyang & Martin, 2021; Schmid & McGreevy-Nichols, 2022). This article examines and reflects on how I explored, used, and reimagined existing online platforms as an effective learning space in teaching dance improvisation at Singapore's Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

Tertiary dance education in this article refers to the education of future dance professionals. Students who aspire to become dance practitioners and performers undergo years of rigorous dance technique training in order to prepare them for careers in contemporary dance, ethnic dance forms such as Chinese, Malay or Spanish dance, classical ballet, jazz dance, or various street dance forms for more commercial dance projects, to name but a few. The body is thereby seen as a dancer's modality (Laban, 1996), which they use to learn dance movements, to practice, refine and further develop movement vocabulary, and subsequently to perform the dance in front of an audience.

In tertiary dance education, the learning, creation and performance habitually takes place within a dance studio, or any other setting that permits learning and performing dance. The face-to-face interaction between students, as well as between students and their educators, is thereby crucial (Rowe & Zeitner, 2011; Smith-Autard, 2002). Shifting dance teaching and learning to online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic challenged my proficiencies to facilitate student to student and educator to student interactions that foster the learning with the body, about the body, and through the body in interaction with others.

In turn, these challenges provided me with opportunities to rethink the relationship between learning about the body as a subject, and the body as an object in dance education, creation and performance. It also challenged established teaching and learning methods that I usually engage with in teacher-student interactions through the need to alter between being physically present with students within a studio space on one hand, and the virtual realities of teaching and learning online on the other (Gingrasso, 2020; Li, 2020; Tariao & Yang, 2021).

Tertiary dance education curricula around the globe comprise somewhat comparable course modules, depending on the university or academy program's particular focus and direction. These include learning various dance techniques, such as prominent contemporary dance techniques and ballet technique, dance sciences and dance education elements, as well as

creative units that explore different ways through which dance choreographies can be created and performed at a theatre or any other space and place (Butterworth, 2004; Zeitner, 2010). The latter usually requires the creative input of dance students (Burrows, 2010; Butterworth & Wildschut, 2009). In other words, during the process of dance creation students may be required to contribute movement ideas. The learning of how to explore diverging ways of bodily movement possibilities, and perhaps the subsequent creation of differing movement ideas to contribute to dance choreographies, takes place during dance improvisation lessons within tertiary dance education (Lavender, 2006; Lavender & Predock-Linnell, 2001). However, due to the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic I had to ask myself how I could best address and achieve these learning objectives in virtual dance improvisation education.

Dance improvisation can be described as combining the simultaneous creation and execution of bodily movement. Important to note is that the creation of movement originates without the need for any preplanning by student dancers (Burrows, 2010; Albright & Gere, 2003). In other words, dance improvisation can be explained as creative "movement of the moment" (Blom & Chaplin, 2000, p. 6) that allows and specifically requires spontaneous action and interaction by dancers to take place.

Student's learning environments play a critical part in the action and interaction between learners in dance improvisation (Carter & O'Shea, 2010; Gingrasso, 2020). For example, students exploring their moving bodies and the physical interactions amongst each other in response to their surrounding environment, such as a dance studio, a theatrical stage, or a specific urban site, enables them to realise the "embeddedness of thought in experience as it emerges" (Davidson, 2004, p. 198) while exploring their dancing bodies. In other words, dance improvisation provides a platform for students to explore and develop their body consciousness in different environments with their peers. This habitual process of teaching and learning had to change when dance improvisation lessons took place via online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, with students being confined to their individual homes.

Pedagogically, I seek to nurture students to sense their bodies and, importantly, to consciously sense their bodies in relation to others around them throughout the learning and movement exploration process in dance teaching and learning. Facilitating dance improvisation lessons also involves working towards achieving desired learning outcomes and curriculum objectives within tertiary education, including the development of sensory knowledge and body consciousness (Borghi & Cimatti, 2010; Oosterwijk et al., 2009; Spatz, 2015, 2020). The applied methods of teaching and learning in dance improvisation are, to some extent, similar to those in other performing art forms, such as music or theatre (Kornetsky, 2017).

In dance and performing arts education, critique, reflective practices, and inquiry-based teaching and learning, for example, are teaching methods that can be perceived as signature pedagogy (Hastings, 2017; Kornetsky, 2017). As mentioned above, additional notions of teaching and learning dance include nurturing students' embodied consciousness by facilitating their sensing and feeling of their own and other's bodies while being physically present in exploring, creating and performing dance within a dance studio or any appropriate setting. However, the application of these teaching and learning methods was challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted long established concepts of skills and knowledge transfer in tertiary dance education through the need to alter the delivery of practice-based dance modules, such as improvisation, between studio practices and online platforms.

In this article I analyse and critically reflect on my pedagogical practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the lens of self-study research (Garbett & Ovens, 2016; LaBoskey, 2004; Ní Chróinín et al., 2015), I provide a reflective account of my thoughts and lived experiences while planning and facilitating the process of students exploring their dancing bodies, including any shifts and changes in the perception of the body that occurred throughout the process of moving dance improvisation lessons from dance studio practices to online platforms.

Before I review discussions about differing perceptions of the body in dance, as well as literature on the application of signature pedagogies in education, I first touch on the research methodology I drew upon throughout this research. This is followed by reflections on how the change in ways students and I were able to communicate impacted their learning. The article concludes by discussing the need to expand on established signature pedagogies in order to embrace virtual teaching in dance and other performing arts education.

Exploring Change - Research Methodology

After being confronted with the fact that teaching and learning had to move online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently imposed lockdown measures by Singapore's government in 2020, I started to critically reflect on my current and past teaching and learning practices. I asked myself how I would be able to deliver the once a week two hour dance improvisation lessons online while still achieving expected curriculum objectives and learning outcomes at the academy. This, in turn, provided me with the opportunity to embark on this self-study research as a method of enquiry throughout this process (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Sahin & Shelley, 2020; Schön, 1983; Trumbull, 2004; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2016). Self-study research helped me to navigate through the untested waters of teaching and learning online during the second half of 2020 and in 2021.

Discussions with dance educators from other international tertiary dance institutes revealed that some colleagues experienced similar worries during that period. One question and concern that came to the fore was how educators could possibly provide students with the same quality learning experiences they were able to deliver within a physically present, face-to face dance studio setting. These discussions and exchange of ideas were very helpful to gain some support and sense of direction on how to move forward in dance improvisation education.

While the application of established teaching and learning methods provided me with some tools to plan and deliver lesson content, dance improvisation teaching and learning can be very complex and requires empathy and trust while interacting with student learners (Davidson, 2004; Jordan & Schwartz, 2018). This was particularly the case when teaching and learning was only possible through the use of mobile phones, laptops or desktop computers. Planning and realising the very unfamiliar world of online teaching thus required me to search for ways to maintain an empathetic and trusting connection with the student cohort that I was somewhat familiar with through teaching them in other dance subjects for two semesters prior the pandemic. I also realised that I had to overcome some emotional and cognitive challenges on my part.

In hindsight, I realise that my emotional and cognitive challenges to teach dance improvisation online were predominantly due to my firm beliefs that dance improvisation lessons must be taught with students and educators physically present in a face-to-face dance studio setting. The lived reality during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic was that I had no choice but to overcome my resentments to teaching and learning dance online. In turn, these realisations freed me to explore new pedagogies and expand on my existing teaching and learning practices.

I started to critically reflect on the emotional effects and cognitive aspects that I experienced while planning and delivering dance improvisation lessons online (Schön, 1983, 1987). I wanted to find out how I would be able to cope with these challenges and how this process perhaps influences or changes my deeply embedded teaching and learning habits and values. I thus searched for existing literature on differing teaching skills and practices, as well as emotional influences and experiences in teaching and learning (Fried et al., 2015; Robertson, 2018; Schwartz & Snyder-Duch, 2018). Some literature specifically analysed similarities and differences of online teaching versus being physically present within a studio or classroom teaching context (Puritz Cook, 2018), for instance.

The review of literature led me to explore and analyse my thoughts and experiences of this subject in more depth. I collected and documented these thoughts, reflections, and ideas in a

written journal after each weekly improvisation class, which I then regularly reviewed, added to, and used as a tool to reflect on my past and current teaching practices (Janesick, 1999). For example, through the review of previous journal entries while planning for the next class I was able to gain more clarity and insights about my approaches to teaching and learning dance improvisation after testing and retesting some of these, such as the use of film and camera work, as well as employing very descriptive verbal explanations while interacting with students online.

Regularly revisiting and reflecting on my journal entries subsequently helped me to overcome my initial aversion to teaching and learning dance improvisation via Zoom or Microsoft Teams online platforms. Moreover, this self-study research helped me to learn and consequently expand and transform my approaches to teaching and learning dance and education in general in ways that I was not able to foresee prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Papadopoulou, 2021). The unforeseen discoveries of my thoughts and emotions as a result of reflecting on my teaching practices, and the need to adjust and expand my teaching and learning skills, provides this study with qualitative data on my lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Loughran 2014; Pinnegar & Hamilton 2009; Trumbull, 2004). I share more on these thoughts, reflections and experiences within the reflection and analysis section of this article.

In-Between Realities - Perceptions of the Moving Body

Acknowledging the body as central to our human existence is paramount, particularly in dance learning and performing (Marshall, 2001; Winther & Højlund Larsen, 2022; Zeitner, 2016). Developing an awareness about the relationship between our moving bodies and the teaching and learning of dance and any other related subject matter is also crucial to better understand signature pedagogies and their inherent habits of the hand, body, and heart. Dance improvisation lessons can provide the space for students and teachers to explore and realise differing facets of teaching and learning about the moving body.

In dance education, and arguably in life more generally, the human body is more than simply an object that is taking up space within a certain location (Bresler, 2004; Carter & O'Shea, 2010; Grau, 2011; Peters, 2004; Shapiro, 2008; Zeitner et al., 2016). Rather, the human body is the subject of action and interaction with the body being "essentially a practical, pre-conscious subject in the lived world that possesses both intentionality and knowledge" (Peters, 2004, pp. 18-19). Moreover, the human body may be explained as the "organising core of experience" (Shusterman, 2004, p. 51) and a "source of meaning making" (Stinson, 2004, p. 160) in dance and in everyday life.

The exploration of differing movement ideas and varying perceptions of their bodies in dance improvisation helps students to raise questions about their experiences of moving bodies and their divergent ways of expressing and constructing knowledge in different environments (Foucault, 1988; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Piaget, 1973). It also helps students to raise queries on "how our knowledge is embodied" (Davidson, 2004, p. 199), and how dance student's perceptions of their own and other's bodies were affected once dance education was moved online due to social distancing measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, within the process of exploring movement ideas in dance improvisation, students can realise their memories, create new associations, and gain better self-awareness through their bodily movements (Bresler, 2004; Gehm et al., 2007). A better awareness of the self profoundly depends on how individuals perceive themselves through the proprioceptive system "by which the body judges spatial parameters, distances, sizes; monitors the positions of the parts of the body; and stores information about laterality, gravity, verticality, balance, tensions, movement dynamics, and so forth" (Blom & Chaplin, 2000, p. 18). The human body is thereby explained to have its very own sense of timing and a subconscious understanding of its body positions. Pedagogically, I strive to facilitate a learning process in which students feel comfortable to explore their thoughts and experiences through their moving bodies within a face-to-face setting. As mentioned above, moving online challenged these habits of the hand, heart, and head.

The literature also discusses different perceptions and perspectives through which our moving bodies may be analysed. One perspective describes the "individual body, understood in the phenomenological sense of the lived experience of the body-self" (Davidson, 2004, p. 198). A somewhat different perspective debates the social body, "referring to the representational uses of the body as a natural symbol with which to think about nature, society, and culture" (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987, p. 7). Yet another perspective examines the political body, "referring to the regulation, surveillance, and control of bodies (individual and collective) in reproduction and sexuality, in work and in leisure, in sickness and other forms of deviance and human difference" (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987, pp. 7-8). Fundamentally important and central to these discussions is the human body with its capabilities and ways of expression and interaction. Though how does the perception of human bodies change when interacting virtually, and how can I address such issues in teaching and learning dance improvisation via online platforms?

During improvisation lessons with students in a face-to-face dance studio setting I deem it as vital to explore, play with, and reflect upon some of the above discussed thoughts, ideas and experiences about the body. The process of exploring the idea of the political body (Kowal et al., 2017; Mills, 2016), for example, usually brings about lively conversations and movement

ideas. Students often explore the idea of unity and standing together in political discourse, which can be translated through people dancing in unison and spatial closeness while moving towards a common goal. However, exploring this idea while students and I were confined to our individual homes during the COVID-19 pandemic proved challenging from a teaching and learning perspective.

In turn, this made me think about approaches to teaching and learning that I did not need to practice as much in a dance studio learning context, such as employing different means of communication. For example, while teaching online I had to rely on much more descriptive verbal language while providing students with ideas, giving instructions, and sharing feedback, rather than predominantly using body language to express and convey meaning, which would normally be the case. Before delving deeper into the discussion on my thoughts and experiences in shifting from being physically present in a face-to-face dance studio setting to online learning, I briefly touch on literature about signature pedagogies to provide this article with a context about applied pedagogical practices in tertiary dance education.

Learning Structures & Methods - Signature Pedagogies

Educating students to develop an awareness about the relationship between our moving bodies and our environment is central to dance improvisation. Moreover, this approach to learning to create and perform dance requires me to employ habits of the hand, heart and head as part of signature pedagogies used in dance education.

Signature pedagogies are frequently used in tertiary education with the aim to prepare students for their future profession (Esterhazy et al., 2021). In view of the overall context of this article, I draw on Lee Shulman's (2005) work on signature pedagogies to discuss how tertiary dance education employs various methods of teaching and learning in the education of future dance professionals, and how particular issues and challenges that emerged while teaching online can be addressed.

Shulman (2005) identifies various elements that make up a specific characteristic of a profession's signature pedagogy. He suggests that there are three particular characteristics to a signature pedagogy. These are the distinctiveness to a certain profession, its pervasiveness within the curriculum of an institute, and the essence of the signature pedagogy to broader pedagogy in terms of socialisation and instruction. Moreover, Shulman (2005) proposes signature pedagogies to scaffold a given profession's skills (habits of the hand), its particular values (habits of the heart), and its innate content (habits of the head). In terms of dance, this suggests that a deep understanding and consciousness of one's own and other's bodily movements in learning, exploring and performing dance would be an essential aspect of a signature pedagogy in tertiary dance education. In other words, it can be argued that the innate

content in tertiary dance education does not only include habits of the hand, heart and head, but also habits of the body as a vital characteristic to signature pedagogy.

Furthermore, Shulman (2005) explains a signature pedagogy to be characterised by four dimensions. These comprise of surface structure, deep structure, shadow structure, and implicit structure. Surface structure describes and discusses varying dimensions and implications of space, such as learning environments or personal learning spaces. Deep structure comprises the underlying philosophical approaches to teaching and learning within a profession, as well as their characteristic teaching styles. Shadow structure refers to potential challenges that teachers may face with regards to either positive shadows reflecting students' strength and effort, or negative shadows that mirror weakness and perhaps a lack of alignment with a chosen profession. Implicit structure reflects a professions values, attitudes and particular dispositions that students are exposed to, or perhaps already possess to some extent before pursuing a profession, such as a potential student possessing good body consciousness before commencing their professional education in dance.

I further discuss these and the above explained signature pedagogies in relation to the challenges I faced and experienced while moving improvisation lessons from being physically present in a dance studio context towards the virtual world of using online platforms to teach dance improvisation.

Transforming Communication - Reflection & Analysis

One signature pedagogy that I employ to develop student's body consciousness is inquiry-based instruction (Dewey, 2009; Piaget, 1973, 1985; Vygotsky, 1971, 1978). Some of the reasons for employing inquiry-based instruction are that it develops student's creativity through the need to make instant decisions on how to find solutions to inquiries, it engages learners to think, feel and act like professional dance performers, and it encapsulates implicit, surface, and deep structures in terms of signature pedagogy. The above explained example of students exploring the political body through the idea of standing together and moving in unity towards a common goal in political discourse is one example of that.

I also employ constructive and positive criticism as a method of teaching and learning in dance education (Ani, 2019; Rowe, 2011). Critique helps me to facilitate a learning process that guides dance students to become aware of and explore differing habits of the mind. Moreover, the critique that I share with students entails surface, deep, shadow, and implicit structure characteristics in view of signature pedagogy in dance education. From a different perspective, providing the space for critique can have different dimensions, such as peer evaluation and critique amongst students, audience critique where parts of a dance improvisation class improvises with a movement idea, and the other half of the class becomes

the audience, as well as teacher-student critique and student's self-critique. Important in providing students with space for critiquing each other is a respectful, positive, and supportive learning environment.

In order to illustrate the above mentioned teaching and learning qualities and values, I want to focus on sharing different means of communication that appear to be vital in engaging students in teaching and learning dance improvisation online. These include spatial communication, haptic communication, and the sensing of each other amongst the student cohort.

Sensing Others

Some vital questions I asked myself while preparing online improvisation lessons included how I could best foster student's awareness of their senses? This comprises the development of an awareness about physical sensations, as well as sensory empathy that under normal circumstances emerges through physical contact amongst the student cohort while improvising together in a dance studio, for example. Being conscious about ones own body and the ability to sense and understand others' bodies and body language is arguably vital, if not the most vital aspect, of dance as a performing art form with physical expression at its core of communication.

Since teaching and learning dance improvisation eventually took place via Zoom or Microsoft Teams online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was impossible for students to have any physical contact. I thus delved deeper into refreshing my mind about other facets of communication that I could possibly address within online teaching and learning. Moreover, after overcoming my aforementioned resentments to teaching dance improvisation online, I wanted to expand my teaching habits of the hand, heart and head to explore and experience teaching from somewhat different perspectives to studio teaching and learning practices.

The literature on communication studies that I subsequently reviewed reveals, perhaps unsurprisingly, many parallels to what is commonly talked about in dance improvisation. For example, various studies on communication suggest that our awareness about how we interact and communicate with each other comes predominantly through nonverbal cues (Birdwhistell, 1970; Mehrabian, 1971, 1972; Stanton, 2004; Thomas, 2013). Nonverbal cues, or in other words bodily communication, is defined by Judee Burgoon and Thomas Saine (1978) as physical interaction with collective social meanings that may either be consciously sent or received by individuals without the use of words. Furthermore, Jessica L. Lakin (2006) suggests that bodily communication is "one of the most powerful methods of communication; it conveys important information about a person's likes and dislikes, emotions, personal characteristics, and relationships" (p. 59).

Other studies suggest that communicating with and through the body also relates to creating an authentic picture of the self (French & Raven, 1959; Knapp & Hall, 2009). For example, an audience's perception of a person performing on stage may be influenced by how they communicate through the moving body (Dwyer, 2011; Mai & Akerson, 2003; Sligo et. al, 2000). From a different perspective, some literature proposes that bodily communication is embedded in cognitive processes (Lakin, 2006), though these processes may not always be conscious or controlled (Hassin et al., 2005). Consciously controlled bodily interaction is suggested to be characterised by a cognitive awareness of bodily movement efforts (Bargh, 1997; Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977). It could be argued though that whether an individual's bodily movements are predominantly driven by a conscious mind or a conscious body (Bresler, 2004), or an entangled interaction between the mind and the body, is debatable.

In order to address the student's experiences of their dancing bodies while being physically isolated in their individual homes I first gave short improvisation tasks. These inquiry-based learning tasks included improvisation exercises that deal with emotions of fear, sadness, excitement or anticipation, for example. The aim of these improvisational tasks was to evoke emotions in students while improvising, and to subsequently translate these emotions into danced movement patterns within their individual homes.

In terms of signature pedagogy, I employed habits of the hand, heart and head. These habits were reflected by deep and implicit structure methods of teaching and learning that I would normally use within a face-to-face dance studio setting. For example, I verbally outlined the purpose of each task at the beginning of a lesson. This included reasoning why students were asked to undertake a given improvisation exercise in terms of learning value and content. I did so by asking students to remember a time in their lives when they were very excited, for example. The next step would be to remember and analyse how their feelings translated into physical actions, reactions, and interactions at the time. Based on these memories, students would then improvise in their homes accompanied by music that mirrors such feelings. After repeating this exercise several times, the students and I discussed how this movement exploration process could contribute to creating a certain character of a person within a choreographic process and towards the creation of a choreography, as this is what may be asked of them once they become professional performers. I repeated this approach to teaching and learning with some of the other above mentioned emotions as well. The aim of doing so was to analyse and discuss how their bodies felt different while dancing with excitement as opposed to dancing with a feeling of sadness, for instance. While these tasks worked reasonably well during the first two initial online lessons, I soon realised that I could not sustain this approach to teaching and learning dance improvisation online.

Some challenges that emerged during the initial online lessons were to keep student's level of

interest and focus on each improvisation task, as well as to maintain the cohort's social cohesion they enjoyed during pre-pandemic face-to-face lessons. For example, from my perspective I could see each individual student on my computer screen while they were improvising with their given tasks. This enabled me to provide each student with positive feedback and constructive criticism about their movement exploration exercises. From a student perspective, however, the feedback was that they felt lonely and isolated while improvising at their individual homes. They were neither able to see, critique, or learn from each other through their computer or mobile phone screens, nor were they able to feel each other's company or critiquing each other's efforts while exploring excitement or fear through dance improvisation.

These realisations led me to shift my approach to teaching and learning dance improvisation online. More explicitly, I started to use camera work as a tool to facilitate a learning process that enabled students to physically explore their moving bodies, film themselves with their mobile phone cameras during the process of dance improvisation, and subsequently share their exercises with each other in either small groups via break out rooms on Zoom, or with the entire cohort on Microsoft Teams, in order to facilitate group discussions. This sharing of their improvisation videos and discussion segment of every subsequent online lesson provided students with the platform to learn from each other, and to analyse and critique each other's work in a positive and constructive manner. Importantly, this sharing and discussion segment of every lesson also enabled me to facilitate an exchange of ideas and experiences between students with the aim to foster social cohesion amongst the cohort within the constrains that the COVID-19 pandemic brought upon us. It also helped to create a learning community amongst the student cohort which went beyond the curriculum hours of the academy.

Engaging students to work with their mobile phone cameras also opened opportunities to explore improvisation beyond the boundaries of dance and cross into other artistic disciplines, such as film making, video editing, music, and in some student cases even the creation of their own soundscapes to accompany their videos. It also opened up opportunities to explore different places and spaces through engaging students to discover and rediscover their individual homes from various angles and perspectives.

Learning Spaces & Places

The circumstance that students and lecturers were homebound during the most stringent lockdown periods of the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore made it vitally important to think about the spatial constraints and implications that teaching and learning dance improvisation in each individual home brings with it. For example, all dance studios that we normally use at Singapore's Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts are equipped with a special dance floor that supports learning and exploring dance. The studios are, with the exception of a piano and

some chairs, otherwise free of any other obstacles. This is thought to provide students with a safe learning environment in which they can explore their moving bodies and simultaneously develop a consciousness thereof.

In addition to the challenge of facilitating learning processes that help students to consciously explore the body and its movement possibilities via a mobile phone, laptop or desktop computer, learning from home revealed various spatial constraints. One example is that in opposition to a nearly empty dance studio at the academy, the vast majority of students were restricted to improvise in their living or bed rooms while being surrounded by furniture and the occasional accompaniment of an animal friend or family member joining the improvisation exercise in the background. It also revealed that some students had a relatively large space to explore dance, while others had very little room to manoeuvre around in. I only became aware of these circumstances after I could see student's individual homes during the initial online lessons. This subsequently added another layer of complexity to the planning and realisation of teaching and learning dance improvisation online.

From a dance perspective, an empty dance studio space might be compared to a blank canvas. While a painter uses a paint brush to create lines, silhouettes or any other form through painting strokes with various colours, for example, dancers use their moving bodies to visually shape space by creating forms and movement patterns that only exist in the very moment they are physically executed by dancer's moving bodies (Burrows, 2010; Laban, 1966). Video recording dance improvisation thus helped us to capture, revisit, and analyse movements during online improvisation lessons. The filming and subsequent sharing of students' improvisation exercises was, from my perspective, a great way to overcome physical divides and helped students to facilitate the analysis of each other's use of space while dancing in their homes.

In terms of using space as an important aspect of communication in dance and any other aspect of life, literature reveals that *how* we use space plays an important role in how we are understood by others. Moreover, in addition to analysing how we move through space, it is also vital to consider how we place and move our bodies in relation to others around us. The area of proxemics in communication studies divides these areas into territorial and personal concepts of space (Knapp & Hall, 2009; Richmond et al., 2012; Schermerhorn et al., 2010). The territorial concept of space, for instance, deals with the perceived need of people to make and maintain their personal space. This can be seen by individuals having their personal office desk at work, or by owning their home with a fenced garden surrounding it. The development of an awareness about these human behaviours is enriching to students who learn how to use the moving body as a tool to communicate meaning in different situations, and in diverse spaces and places.

To address learning about different aspects of spaces and places within the constraints of their homes, I asked students to use the zooming in and zooming out function of their cameras while filming themselves improvising. I also asked students to position their cameras in different parts of their rooms in order to explore different perspectives of their moving bodies, as well as moving the camera around the space and moving body while zooming in or out simultaneously. If a student needed help with the filming, they usually asked a member of their family to do the filming for them.

In terms of signature pedagogy, this teaching and learning process helped to explore and discuss the varying dimensions and implications of space within their immediate learning environment, as well as spaces and places within student's homes more generally. As mentioned above, besides analysing the improvisation tasks via sharing the video material with each other at the end of every online lesson, this platform also enabled me to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences between student learners, as well as addressing the social cohesion of this learning community.

Throughout the semester I increasingly realised how important and helpful the use of technology had become. Through the use of film and camera work students could capture their improvisation tasks and share this material with their peers. Moreover, students started to become so versatile and creative with dance improvisation and their film making skills that I asked them to create a short dance film that would reflect their individual lock down dance improvisation journey in form of a dance film diary. While I did not grade the short dance films, they became a point of reflection on the learning process and content itself. This in turn helped students to retain the learning content, as well as remembering the different approaches to dance improvisation that we explored throughout the semester.

Additional learning outcomes that I neither planned, nor was able to foresee, included these dance students becoming very versatile in crossing artistic boundaries. Besides learning how to film dance from various angles and perspectives, they collectively learned how to edit their video material by sharing ideas about differing software and editing techniques within our group discussions. Students also shared how to add and edit music to their dance films, with some even creating their own soundscapes by using various freely available software to compose sounds that best suited their dance and visual material. While I started the semester with many concerns on how to facilitate dance improvisation lessons online, I was excited about the many benefits and opportunities this process of teaching and learning brought to the fore at the end of the semester.

Opportunities and Challenges - Conclusion

This article reflected on challenges and opportunities I faced while moving dance improvisation education to online platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Through self-study research as method of inquiry I critically analysed my teaching and learning practices and the values that I hold in terms of how I approach dance improvisation education. While the qualitative data that I am sharing in this article provides a valid and honest account of my lived experiences throughout this process, it may be said that this research had some limitations. This is due to the fact that the idea for this study was born only at the very beginning of the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic and thus limited the time for preplanning the research process.

The main areas of learning with the body, about the body, and through the body in dance improvisation that I discussed in this article are the development of student's awareness of their senses, as well as how differing spaces and places play a key role in the perception of the human body. As critiquing and sharing each other's exercises was challenging via computer screens, I decided to ask students to film themselves with their mobile phones while improvising. More explicitly, the use of student's mobile phones to film themselves dancing, and the sharing of these videos at the end of every online lesson, subsequently provided a platform through which an analysis and reflection of improvisation exercises, as well as a sharing of ideas between students and I took place.

While teaching and learning dance improvisation online proved challenging in various respects, it opened up opportunities to cross the disciplinary boundaries of dance as an art form. This included the learning of how to film dance in different spaces and places, how to edit film material, as well as how to add or even compose music to accompany the short dance films that emerged at the end of this process.

In reflection on the process of exploring the body and its movement possibilities online, it can be argued that the use of technology to communicate and interact with each other during, and increasingly so since, the COVID-19 pandemic helped the emergence of new approaches to teaching and learning. Moreover, the interdisciplinary character that emerged throughout this process might be seen as a new signature pedagogy in dance improvisation education. Through interdisciplinarity and the use of technology we can find ways to overcome physical boundaries by sharing ideas, concepts and experiences via virtual platforms. Overall though, these approaches to teaching and learning do not replace inquiry-based learning methods or the use of constructive criticism in the education of future dance professionals.

In order to further support the findings of this study, I suggest that future research would help

to establish perhaps very specific benefits of employing an interdisciplinary approach to the teaching and learning of dance improvisation online, as well as the proposed emergence of a new signature pedagogy in dance education. This could be done through an action research cycle process (Dickens & Watkins, 1999; Mertler, 2014), for example, though hopefully not during a global pandemic that negatively affected the lives of many people, in particular students who's learning suffered during that period.

It is hoped, however, that this study can provide an example of how interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning in dance and education in general can transcend any boundaries through the use of technology. While technology can help us to reach beyond physical boundaries though, it is important to keep in mind that anything we do begins and ends with our human bodies.

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