

**SOUND BODY – INTERDISCIPLINARITY TOWARDS AN
EMPOWERED BODY OF KNOWLEDGE**

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Sound Body - Interdisciplinarity towards an
Empowered Body of Knowledge

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....3-6

THE PROJECT *SOUND BODY*

I. Threshold Concept of the Dancer.....7-12

II. Methodology – Transdisciplinarity and Steiner’s Holistic Curriculum.....13-25

III. The Results – SWOT.....26-46

CONCLUSION.....47-49

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....50-56

APPENDICES:

Appendix I - The Project in Context.....57-58

Appendix II - Summary of Other Practitioners’ Models.....59-60

Appendix III - Sound Body Exercises Description.....61-66

Appendix IV - Questionnaire Template.....67-68

Appendix V - Ethical Consent Form Template.....69-70

Appendix VI - Sound Body Documentary

WORD COUNT.....10563

INTRODUCTION

“At the end of scientific modernity our knowledge about knowledge starts moving again”.¹

Since René Descartes and the Cartesian body-mind Dualism knowledge, or the intellect as it were, and the physical body have been pre-empted to exist as two separate entities. This resulted, as Boisot² highlights, in “man’s natural [and prevalent] tendency to separate, classify and conceptualise the surroundings”, precisely with the mind separate from the body, dividing knowledge into specialised fields. During most of the twentieth century education was hence shaped by disciplinarity and only during the late 1960s, a time of liberation from conformist and traditional ideas as well as the emergence of a counterculture and new social movements, a new mind set emerged that sought to embed more “holistic concepts that were closer to practical life”³ through which the term interdisciplinarity came to being, characterising reform, innovation and progress. During the 21st century ideas started to shift in relation to utilising the “dynamic properties of a network, a web, a system, and a field”.⁴ Consequently, the need for the emergence of newly defined, larger fields of

¹ (Gehm et al, 2007, 11)

² (in Chettiparamb, 2007, 2)

³ (Klein, Weingart and Steer in Chettiparamb, 2007, 10)

⁴ (Klein in Chettiparamb, 2007, 21)

knowledge in a time of postmodern interdisciplinarity came into existence with body studies being one of them.

While dance pioneers and movement practitioners such as Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman, Gret Palucca, Frederick Matthias Alexander and Moshe Feldenkrais have been revolutionising the rather rigid views on dance and concepts of the moving body all along, brain research only recently started supporting the idea that body and mind are one interconnected entity and the body, as a whole, a vast source of knowledge.⁵

Thus, the way we experience the world and gain knowledge can be described through what Trigwell⁶ calls phenomenography:

...the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which we experience, conceptualise, understand, perceive, apprehend etc., various phenomena in and aspects of the world around us...Reality is not seen as being 'out there'. It is seen as being constituted as the relation between the individual and the phenomenon.

Through the act of phenomenal experience meaning is created that is different from information. Meaning can only be derived from learning and as Baumard⁶ elaborates:

“Meaning implies the way we understand the world and our place in it. It involves knowing about things, sometimes tacit knowing: the way they interconnect and the way we relate to them, including connotative codes that they carry”. Precisely this tacit and I would like to add ‘intuitive’ knowledge is what is gained through movement.

⁵ (Gehm et al, 2007, 11)

⁶ (in Trowler, 2005, 16-19)

Perception is similarly identified by Gibbs⁷ as an “embodied or enactive process...[that]does not take place in the brain of the perceiver, but rather is an act of the whole animal, wrapped up in movement and a holistic engagement of the ‘self’ in a learningful interaction with the world we inhabit”. Both Piaget and Vygotsky, in the light of constructivism, equally agreed that “knowledge is constructed by the learner as s/he tries to make sense of experiences”.⁸ Thus, the performing arts, and in particular dance, provide a practical understanding via the senses that generate and make knowledge accessible through processes and various contexts of experiences.⁹ Paradoxically, this access to knowledge still perseveres via a traditional -and rather illogical- disintegration of the various disciplines in performance training into disjointed learning spheres that stand in accord with the troublesome dualistic conception of mind and body undermining the new ‘Zeitgeist’ of interdisciplinarity.¹⁰ Dr Experience Bryon (2015, 2), senior lecturer and course leader of the MA/MFA Performance Practice as Research at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, highlights the shortcoming of current training schemes for the performer:

Interdisciplinarity within and across scholarship and creative work has taken hold. Since the 1960s there has been an explosion in aesthetics and in the ways we categorise and value performance as an entity and practice...While the demands on the performer have become increasingly interdisciplinary, the training of the performer still tends to take place within an out-dated set of categories. Many of us still train in the arts of acting, singing and dancing within discrete models, techniques and vocabularies of learning.

⁷ (in Clark, 2007, 3 and Howarth in Bryon, 2014, 23)

⁸ (Richardson 1997 in Bryan, 2015)

⁹ (Gem et al 2007, 21)

¹⁰ (HEA, 2016)

In accord with current demands for the training of the performing artist, this Action Research, titled *Sound Body*, proposes a transdisciplinary holistic approach towards a possible new universal practice for the interdisciplinary performer. The emphasis here, however, is not necessarily on versatility or gaining more skills but rather on gaining an autonomous and empowered body of knowledge through reciprocity, connectivity, awareness and exploration of the self that essentially contributes towards the development of a more open-minded, creative, empathetic and diverse performer and contemporary citizen in a vastly complex and interdependent world.

THE PROJECT *SOUND BODY*

I. Threshold Concept of the Dancer

In a so called ‘knowledge society’ in the 21st century dance is becoming more and more vital as a means of ‘cultural knowledge’ narrated and displayed through the body. Klein¹¹ emphasises the significance of dance as a metaphor for the transient, ever-changing and transforming climate of such a society that demands self-reinvention and constant re-adjusting. Foucault¹¹ equally highlights the dancer’s predisposition for social development via so-called ‘technologies of self’, i.e. flexibility, dynamism, self-initiative, self-sufficiency and life long self-directed learning.

Particularly contemporary dance since the early 21st century has been emerging itself in concepts that are synonymous with a knowledge-based society as Klein¹¹ pinpoints, dealing with self-reflection, presence, representation, identity and cultural differences as well as body and language. These technologies of self, inherent in the nature of a dancer, are possibly the only way forward in a world of “‘supercomplexity’ and rapid change”¹² within Higher Education, and conceivably any type of education. Thus, the frameworks for understanding ourselves do not have to become “increasingly complex” as Barnett¹² argues, but rather more attune with the already existing complexity that our understanding mechanism is. His proposition and call for the

¹¹ (in Gehm, 2007, 28-31)

¹² (Barnett, 1997 in Bryan, 2015)

need of an “emancipatory experience through critical being - a process of releasing ourselves from the shackles of beliefs or knowledge systems which serve to limit human potential”¹³ stands in close relation with the viewpoints proposed in this research; yet, it would be more appropriate to substitute the ‘critical’ with ‘conscious’ being.

Marina Abramovic, probably the most radical and experimental performance artist of the 21st century, highlights the work on the ‘conscious’ self:

You always have to start from yourself...That’s what you understand the best...So the deeper you go into yourself, actually, the more universal you come out on the other side.¹⁴

Jean McNiff (2002, 6) additionally elaborates on the question of ‘who does it (research)’ with: “*You do. I do. Potentially, we all do*”, thus proclaiming that on one hand everyone should become a researcher of the self, reinforcing self-reflection and enhancement of practice, and on the other it echoes Abramovic’s statement of the universal. Here the sole individual/artist with his/her experience and gained ‘conscious’ knowledge becomes instrumental in developing concepts, theories or merely an understanding of the body that eventually can be applied universally to all human beings. The idea of teaching universal knowledge has been hitherto formulated by John Henry Newman¹⁵ in the 19th century in his theories of what kind of a place a University is.

Thus, the concept of this Action Research, titled *Sound Body*, precisely derived from the notion of ‘the self as a researcher’ following Lawrence Stenhouse’s principle of

¹³ (Barnett in Hilsdon, 2007, 3)

¹⁴ (Abramovic in Huxley and Witte, 2002, 21).

¹⁵ (1854 in Bryan, 2015)

‘teacher as researcher’.¹⁶ In this particular case it is vital to add a second dimension, namely that of ‘the student as researcher’ as observed knowledge, can never be equal to lived knowledge and thus fundamental in embodied practices. *Sound Body*, within the sphere of abstract movement, therefore seeks to discover the “semiotic richness that helps us communicate long before and after words have been exchanged and symbols produced”.¹⁷ This semiotic richness is construed via considering dance as an ontological art form of the individual celebrating the human body -with all its functions- as a whole that is more than the sum of its parts.

The concept of this experiential work derived from precisely myself, my personal concerns of disintegration encountered as a practicing contemporary dance artist. A particular sensation of not using the whole bodily potential seemed irrevocable during my experiences as a dancer, which ignited my interest in research on myself:

...It happened to be distinctively a feeling of insufficiency or incompleteness -like I was dancing only from my neck downward- resulting in an inexorable need to want to use my voice that never seemed to leave me.¹⁸

The phenomenon of a peripheral way of moving the body without an integrated breath or connection to the self became soon very evident not only when watching other performers on stage but also in my students during my activities as an educator of dance. In the last couple of years I have also been confronted with my personal ideologies about teaching, questioning the fact that students imitate the teacher's movement most of the time (especially in Contemporary dance, as the only way to teach a sequence is to demonstrate it whilst verbalising certain notions of connectivity or imagery that go along with it). This became an issue as I really wanted for the students to explore how they moved rather than learn a set amount of steps. I believe this is a central matter within the performing arts touching upon how to encourage

¹⁶ (in McNiff, 2002, 7)

¹⁷ Gehm et al (2007, 11)

¹⁸ (Reznikova, 2010, 5)

freedom of creativity and truly empower students to trust in their own embodied knowing. Hence, this Action Research very much resembles a research into human nature through dance, as it seems that a great number of students lose their natural and intuitive qualities in movement during training.

The findings from my previous study in 2010 proved to form the ideal basis for *Sound Body*, linking my discoveries as a dance practitioner with pedagogical theories and aims as a facilitator for learning on the search for universal knowledge that might be inherent in all of us.

Sound Body is therefore rooted in the notion of the dancer as a truly holistic performer/presence who through the reciprocal agency of all the bodily functions (consciousness = movement of the mind, physicality = movement of the body, voice = movement of the vocal apparatus and emotion = movement of the heart) ceases liberation from all the restrictions and blockages that life itself as well as the dance medium, as conventionally received in the Western society, puts forth to finally reveal oneself with faults and greatness. This new concept of a dancer can be considered as what is known as a Threshold Concept. Meyer¹⁹ explains:

A threshold concept is a 'core concepts' that can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even worldview.

This transformed view of acknowledging everything as movement (including thought and the voice) and hence part of a dancer's training can be found as 'troublesome' in that it challenges the traditional conceptions of what a dancer is - shifting old

¹⁹ (2003 in Cousin, 2010, 2-3,7)

perceptions, ‘integrative’ in that it illuminates the interrelatedness between the inner and outer movements of the body in relation to the other, as well as ‘inert’ knowledge in that this knowing is deeply embedded and always accessible in our intuitive selves.¹⁹ Allowing for all these bodily elements to finally function and be expressed in its most primitive way, might possibly invite the self to experience a different realm of a truly holistic and universal embodiment very much akin to today’s concept of an interdisciplinary performer.

Unfortunately, as Bales and Nettle-Fiol²⁰ rightly recognise, with man’s advancement, “dancing to learn has shifted toward learning to dance”, highlighting the rather growing loss of an ‘inquiring culture’ into the self on the search for new knowledge.

Jose Gil (1998, 169) reminds one of the dance’s true meaning:

Dance is a sort of levitation that is sufficient unto itself, with its own space and time; it carries within it and represents to everyone the key to the intelligence of the body.

The undertaken Action Research attempted to serve exactly this particular purpose: to open the door to this intelligence.

Consequently, in contrast to the traditional training of a performing artist that approaches the various art forms in a fragmented way, such as in Dance, Singing and Acting, *Sound Body* frames an area of personal inquiry and research into a possible holistic module within the realm of interdisciplinarity in performance practice through integrative voice and movement work. The notion of a universal paradigm of

²⁰ (in Preston-Dunlop and Sayers, 2010, 97)

performance training that can be applied to all practices within the performing arts is
a far aim of this endeavour.

II. Methodology - Transdisciplinarity And Steiner's Holistic Curriculum

While the concept of *Sound Body* as a practice derived from interdisciplinary concerns of the ever growing demands on today's performer, the approach is coined rather 'transdisciplinary'. While interdisciplinarity embarks on the transfer of methods from one discipline to another, learning from each other,

...Transdisciplinarity concerns itself with what is between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines ... by weaving a new kind of knowledge...Its goal is the understanding of the present world, one of the imperatives of which is the unity of knowledge ".²¹

Stember²² and Carr et al. (2014, 6) further distinguish that in a transdisciplinary inquiry the attempt is to integrate, blur or even ignore discipline boundaries to the extent that the disciplines themselves disappear and a unitary type of inquiry emerges adopting a more holistic approach to learning.

Thus, interdisciplinary practice in such a case is concerned with what Karlqvist²² terms as the first of five modes of interdisciplinarity, namely "the unification of knowledge...an attempt to demonstrate that two things are actually the manifestation of the same structure". A further 'wide', rather than 'narrow', interdisciplinarity is at heart of this project, trying to establish not only a holistic praxis, but also illuminate the value and meaning of why there is a need for such a development in the

²¹ (Nicolescu in Bryon, 2014, 59)

²² (in Chettiparamb, 2007, 14, 18)

performing arts, and dance in particular.²³ There are four ‘disciplines’ that essentially presented themselves in need of unification: movement (dance), vocal sound (voice/singing), thought (cognition/theoretical knowledge) and emotion (Acting).-

In order to identify an appropriate methodology for this project, dealing with methods relating to practice as well as pedagogy, Steiner’s holistic model of an ideal curriculum served as inspiration. His aims were to “balance the physical, behavioural, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual aspects of the developing person, encouraging thinking that includes a creative as well as analytic component”²⁴.

Consequently, the total of six components have been assigned to the various pedagogical models and aims correspondingly: Physical (dance), Emotional and Cognitive (breath and voice), Spiritual (meditation) in relation to Alix’s et al (2010) models for teaching Collaborative Art Practices (*Other Practitioners’, Improvisation and The Self and the Other*) and Social and Behavioural in relation to Student as Co-Researcher and Producer of Knowledge, Research-based Teaching and learning, and Metalearning.

²³ (Kelly 1996 in Chettiparamb, 2007, 19)

²⁴ (Woods et al 2005 in Bryan, 2015)

PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, COGNITIVE AND SPIRITUAL

Movement, Breath, Voice and Meditation

...since what frightens people most of all today is speaking, one must begin neither with words, nor ideas, but with the body. A free body is where it all lives or dies.²⁵

Peter Brook, one of the most prominent theatre director's of the 21st century, pinpoints the fact that people are afraid of speaking. This attribute is surely less desirable in an actor than a dancer, however is vastly present in dancers in particular. To overcome this issue in a time where performers are asked to apply their bodies in a way that might be foreign to their traditional core discipline and be collaborative partners in an ever-growing interdisciplinary landscape within the creative arts, the focus is placed on finding freedom in the body first and foremost. For this purpose existing models and strategies in relation to Teaching Collaborative Art Practices as identified by Alix et al (2010) have been considered, including *Other Practitioners'*, *Improvisation* and *The Self and the Other*. While the focus was less on teaching the students on how to be collaborative, the sessions in and of themselves were delivered in a way that was reminiscent of a collaborative environment encompassing: Observation (seeing, listening, watching, touching), Trust (mutual respect between students and students, students and tutors, tutors and tutors), Communication (regular feedback, reflective critical approach, reflective discussion, video,), Teamwork

²⁵ (Brook in Zinder, 2009, 4)

(effective and responsible member of a production team), Work creatively, imaginatively and critically, Risk-taking (for tutor to push the students beyond comfort zone and outside of single-discipline or usual pathway). Overall the process was undertaken as a mixture between ‘Striated’, a strictly pre-planned and structured procedure, and ‘Smooth’, a somewhat free and exploratory route, whereby the on-going reflections informed the process ahead.²⁶ The sessions, therefore, did not follow a strict and regimented curricula but allowed for a rather mutual re-shaping of the class content through student engagement.

One of the prominent models applied was the combination of *Other Practitioners’* models in order to “explore the techniques of a practitioner’s work or more generally to bridge disciplines and demonstrate ways in which students can link together and explore contemporary issues”.²⁶ Practitioners such as Jerzy Grotowski (Poor Theatre), Rudolf von Laban (movement theories), Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (Body-Mind-Centering), Mary Starks Whitehouse (Authentic Movement), Kristin Linklater, Roy Hart, Meredith Monk and myself (Release Technique) have been selected to provide a foundation for a practice that seeks a free body, liberated from all restrictions and limiting judgements (see Appendix 2 for further details). As this practice is inter- and transdisciplinary the pedagogical model is coined as *Integrative*, whereby each performer is engaging in actions that appear to contain elements of “discernable

²⁶ (Alix et al, 2010, 14, 24, 27)

disciplines or have arrived at a new hybrid or intermedial ‘discipline’”.²⁶

Alex et al recognise *Improvisation* as a means to “stimulate and to develop the creative process within a collaborative environment”. Thus, essentially, an open improvisational playground of formless dance was provided as an experiential approach to freeing the body/voice energy. Ruth Zaporah²⁷ highlights the importance of improvisational practice in relation to gaining a more holistic awareness of oneself in space:

We talk about the mind and body as if they were separate but, in fact, it’s our attention that is split. Through improvisational practice, awareness expands to hold our entire self.

Consequently, the various exercises and directives, implemented throughout all sessions, sought to elicit, enhance and further develop the natural, free and untrained voice/body, with all its resonating chambers and creative outlets. The sound made is considered as the extension of breath providing for a limitless sphere of corporeality as a creative force. It is precisely in this manner that this practice finds its motivation: The paradoxical nature of the performer to always wanting and needing to look and/or sound ‘good’ is interrogated through a rather non-conventional, abstract interaction between the voice and the body removing any aesthetic or symbolic values with the aim to penetrate into a “body space”²⁸:

²⁷ (in Albright and Gere, 2003, 22)

²⁸ (Gil, 1998, 167)

But to inscribe in ‘empty’ space is to reconstruct this very space, not in symbolically reconstructing things...but in creating a ‘pure’ space. This is precisely what I have called body space...This freedom and the nature of absolute play in the dance are only obtained at the price of stripping away all bodily attachments...to dissolve it (the body) into a pure form of energy...to accentuate corporeality to such an extent that it would become ‘abstract’, liberated of the weight of symbols.

In contrast to Singing or Voice classes, whereby language and the narrative play a big role, it seemed of vital importance to not only make use of abstract bodily movement but also to abstract language and the voice: Left with only ‘random’, non-verbal sounds, the possibility is presented, as Zinder (2009, 171) points out, for “voice and body [to] complement each other to the point where they are interchangeable....a truly ‘connected’ actor can move just by ‘sounding’, or ‘sound’ just by moving”. Michael Lugering, founding director of the expressive actor and committed to integrating methods of actor training, conforms that a non-traditional way of exercising the body/voice has implication for new possibilities of expression that “transcend the literal and often confound the intellect...Sound and movement work encourages the actor to stop thinking and start sensing”.²⁹ As Grotowski³⁰ so poignantly remarks:

Always in our thoughts we are at the place to which we have not yet arrived...I’m either behind myself, or ahead of myself, but never there where I am.

Mind in this sense is not considered as the intellectual thinking mind, but rather a

²⁹ (Lugering in Cook, 2009, 13)

³⁰ (in Kumiega, 1985, 226)

kind of awareness and observing element of oneself in action. Here the meditation practice (see Warm up and Seven Breath Exercise in Appendix 2) served as a source of ‘centring’ one’s mind to the self, ridding oneself of excessive thinking, very much akin to spiritual practices. Stillness and meditation have moreover come to be associated with positive changes in the brain in relation to attention, interoception (sensitivity to stimuli originating internally) and sensory processing as noted by Lazar et al. at Harvard Medical School.³¹ Hence, when focusing on the breath, all cognitive movement becomes the conscious awareness of oneself breathing. When extending the breath to abstract sounding, the mind is drawn to and focused on that particular movement/sound in time, rather than immersed in judging oneself. Lewis and Cook³² confirm that breath lies at the heart of vocal and physical practice, which enables one to become empowered through the force of life energy:

To breath fully is to live fully, to manifest the full range and power of our inborn potential...The voice user then, through deep and deliberate breath practice, can release a wider range of intuitive, creative choices. She/he can tap into power and vitality, having a greater chance of making the journey to the deepest recesses of the soul and sharing its contents with the intended audience.

Contact, partner and group work formed the third model relevant within the context of the *Self and the Other* as collaboration is primarily a process of learning how to engage the self with others.³³ Here the students were there to help each other feel and

³¹ (2005 cited by Eckard in McCutchen and Sellers-Young, 2013, 54)

³² (in Boston and Cook, 2009, 175)

³³ (Alix et al, 2010, 15)

sense their bodies' qualities (in relation to tension and release) as well as support and challenge each other to overcome their personal habitual movement inclinations through touch, observing, listening and copying each other; moreover, an individual's perception and psychophysical capacity was taken and placed in the context of ensemble work (see Partner and Group work exercises in Appendix 2). Dance anthropologists have identified dance as an aspect of human behaviour that cannot be divorced from its social and cultural context. They further differentiate between 'knowing by observing' and 'knowing by doing', whereby knowledge acquired through the body is inherently integrative providing for "knowing cultures from the inside-out".³⁴ However, embodied knowledge does not merely refer to knowledge of the self but also knowledge of the other:

Moving in an idiom not one's own creates physical sensations that certainly contribute to the feeling of otherness. When we move beyond the initial discomfort of unfamiliarity, we begin to understand that otherness in a very fundamental way, in an embodied way.³⁴

This experiencing of own sphere of corporality as well as that of someone else's is key in understanding the interrelatedness of all things, which stand in close proximity to the social and behavioural aspects discussed next.

³⁴ (Peterson Royce, 2002, xv, xxiii)

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL

Student As Co-Researcher and Producer Of Knowledge, Research-Based Teaching and Learning, Metalearning

As part of Steiner's holistic curriculum the social and behavioural aspects were assigned in accord with pedagogical theories such as Student as Co-researcher and Producer of knowledge as identified by Neary and Winn (2009), whereby the work is rather student centred as he/she is the embodied entity through which knowledge is primarily gained. Practice as Research (PAR) and Research-Based Teaching (PBR) as discoursed by Connolly (2010), Taylor and Wilding (2009) and Nelson (2013 in Campos, 2013) are of great significance providing for the opportunity for the student to focus on his/her experience, as any integrative practice can only be regarded as extremely subjective and individual. Finally, the student as an autonomous life-long learner and practitioner is encouraged to develop meta-learning skills that ultimately give him/her a sense of empowerment through the knowledge accessed, reflected upon and reapplied in a new and improved way in his/her body.

Brookfield's (2013, 3-20) identification of empowerment draws on the essence of the pedagogical conception behind *Sound Body*:

Empowerment, after all, can only be claimed, not given...An empowered class- room is usually thought of as one where students decide what they wish to learn and how they are going to learn it. An empowered learner is deemed one who applies the new skills learned in class to take action in the world outside...Here the intent of teaching is to help learners understand how much they already know and how their experience, critically and collectively analysed, can

suggest responses to the problems they face in their communities, organizations, and movements.

Precisely, the notion of ‘helping learners understand how much they already know’ is emphasised through the student as producer, rather than consumer, of knowledge approach. Neary and Winn (2009, 127) propose the idea of a liberal humanist institution, in which students’ passive accumulation or reception of skills turn into an active engagement in the creation of knowledge. In the light of Humboldt’s ‘organic scholarship’ model proposed in 1810 students were encouraged to be “directly involved in the speculative thinking of their tutor, in a Socratic dialogue and in close contact”, providing for “opportunities to learn through enquiry rather than simple transmission of knowledge”, thus merging teaching and research.³⁵ Lambert et al³⁶ further suggest that positioning undergraduates as researchers offers a profound model of student engagement as it inevitably challenges the ‘hierarchical binaries’ between teaching and research, and staff and students. This new, what Lambert calls, ‘participatory pedagogy’ creates scope for critical and constructive intervention in HE grounded in authentic experience and representing an ‘engaged experience of learning’ as well as stressing the student's role in the production of learning and knowledge.³⁷ Employing students as researchers and as producers of original knowledge and even designers of curriculum raises important debates about the role

³⁵ (Boyer Commission 1999 in Neary and Winn, 2009, 128

³⁶ (in Taylor and Wilding, 2009, 1)

³⁷ (Mann 2001 in Taylor and Wilding, 2009, 5)

of the contemporary university and the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. Some of the arguments for research-based teaching and learning include the development of critical academic and evaluative skills that are used to support problem-based and inquiry-based learning as well as equipping students in continuing a lifelong-learning agenda.³⁸ Advocating the students as an active collaborator, co-producer and creator of knowledge places the student in a social context, promoting the idea that Humboldt~~Error! Bookmark not defined.~~ described as a ‘Culture State’, which consists of a population who are trained to act as independent and autonomous citizens.

Moreover, the model of Research-Based Learning relates closely to a social-constructivist view of learning, which assumes that one constructs knowledge based on own experiences within one’s social context.³⁹ Biggs⁴⁰, in his theories on Constructive Alignment, further highlights the importance of responsibility that the students have to take for their own learning, as students construct their own learning in their own bodies, where teachers cannot reach, and thus the ‘real learning’ is managed by the students. As a result, “learning takes place through the active behaviour of the student. It is what he does that he learns, not what the teacher does”.⁴¹ In this sense the student is confronted with what Haggis (2003, 6-9) calls a

³⁸ (Wieman 2004 and Brew 2006 in Taylor and Wilding, 2009, 130)

³⁹ (Vygotsky 1962, 1978; Bruner 1986; Barr and Tagg 1995 in Neary and Winn, 2009, 129)

⁴⁰ (1999 in Houghton, 2004, 27)

⁴¹ (Biggs in Bucur and Thorbek, 2009)

‘deep approach’, which is based on intrinsic curiosity and defined as the abstraction of meaning, developing as a person and ultimately as a process aimed at understanding reality through discovering, questioning and creating knowledge. In his report on *Enacting Metalearning* Connolly (2010, 6/7) illuminates the close link between a deep approach to learning and the notion of metalearning, that is the students’ own learning process. Biggs, Meyer & Norton (2004)⁴² identify two features as part of a metalearning process that enhances students’ capacity for self-regulation: the awareness of and simultaneously control over self as learner, which is crucial in increasing the capacity to understand oneself and how one acts in the world. Practice or Performance Based Research (PBR), thus, as further noted by Pelias (2008) and Fabian (1990)⁴² presents a way to engage in an embodied autonomous learning process, precisely through action, not merely discourse, creating and fostering understanding about everyday life. *Sound Body* made use of PBR in working with the students as collaborators and researchers into their own and very personal learning journey, allowing them to precisely “create their own knowledge from their own experiences” about themselves.⁴³ Metalearning, thus enhances the students’ engagement with disciplinary content by increasing criticality, capacity for reflection and a sense of purpose. Connolly describes the values of PBR by illuminating that it can foster personal growth, raise consciousness and/or empowerment. The individual and subjective knowledge produced through experience can then be added to

⁴² (in Connolly, 2010)

⁴³ (Llamputtong & Rumbold, 2008 in Connolly, 2010, 6)

“people’s collective knowledge, empowering them to solve their own problems”⁴⁴, which essentially relates to the construction of a universal body of knowledge that is aimed at in *Sound Body*.

Benjamin⁴⁵ provides for a coherent assimilation of the applied pedagogical methodology with organizing principle from the most progressive forms of political art (such as Dada, Brecht’s Epic Theatre and experimental Russian avant-garde art):

Key to these art forms was involving the reader and spectator in the process of production: not only are they the producers of artistic content, but collaborators of their own social world; the subjects rather than objects of history.

⁴⁴ (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991 in Connolly, 2010)

⁴⁵ (in Neary and Winn, 2009, 133)

III. The Results – SWOT

In order to evaluate and reflect upon all aspects encountered during the research period, SWOT analysis was utilised to illuminate Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. An analysis of the Questionnaire (see template in Appendix 4), which was constructed with the aim to encourage critical reflection as part of the students' transformational learning experience⁴⁶, students' notes, observations, dialogues and video footage served as reference points for the evaluative summary:

STRENGTHS

Synthesis, Integration, Self-Awareness, Reflexivity, Producer of Knowledge, Student-Centred Teaching and Problem-Based Learning

Considering the Action Research was undertaken in two different countries, with students at a Performing Arts College in London and at a Dance College in Germany, and over a period of four months in total, the results were rather surprising and extremely positive.

As previously discussed current trends turn towards competency-based education, enquiry-based learning and individualised student learning pathways and a sense that

⁴⁶ (Taylor 1998 in McGonigal 2005, 3)

the needs of contemporary graduates no longer fit traditional institutional structures of conventional disciplinary basis.⁴⁷ By breaking old conventions precisely in the light of providing a ‘synthesised’ practice via a transdisciplinary approach, a space to truly explore the interconnectedness of all the various disciplines of the body, in the attempt to try and construct a type of holistic knowledge with the students, *Sound Body* proved to be of vital importance. Lyall et al (2015, p.viii) highlighted this dilemma in their provision as a problem area within interdisciplinary teaching, namely the fact that teachers tend to remain in one’s own comfortable core subject, especially when co-teaching with another colleague, leaving the students to make the connections on their own. Even though I did not have to collaborate with another member of staff (also see point under Weakness), conducting the research on my own, it was essential to create the links for and with the students together through a partly guided procedure and partly a laboratory environment. Extensive experience in vocal and holistic practices as well as my own personal research endeavour previously provided for a good foundation upon which to build this Action Research on, proving the point that any interdisciplinary venture can be equally well managed by one sole individual. As it was a transdisciplinary approach, devising a new practice of its own kind, the focus was moreover on using the voice’s natural ability (as discussed later on) rather than applying a set of traditional skills, which did not need the presence of a vocals specialist. As an overall result, all participants agreed that such an interdisciplinary

⁴⁷ (Lyall and Fletcher, 2013/2015 and Carr et al. 2014)

module would be of great benefit to include in the curriculum at any performing arts colleges.⁴⁸ Even the German students, who were training solely in dance were intrigued about the benefits gained through applying the voice, underlining how the dancer of today is more and more required to use his/her voice in creative processes.

Treating it as an experiment of not only what the students would think about such an abstraction of their familiar techniques, but also how they would commit to it, the practice proved to be of equal resonance to my own experience during my early and very personal research period. The majority of benefits were similarly felt and reinforced such as integration of the self, enhancement of creativity and dynamics, remembering movement material and a sense of gained freedom of expression. In response to Question 1, when asked to describe the process with one word and explain one's choice, one student wrote:

Eye-opening / view-expanding. This project offered me personally a room to search and explore. The surprising fact of this process was that I would not only do it physically with movement but connect it with 'sound' – it was broadening my *understanding* of the intention and sense behind the movement; my means of picking-up were opened up (an extra channel was added) and equally I gained a new channel to express myself. I learned to use myself better through it. Strangely, I have never looked at myself before in the way I did in the Sound Body work. It made me see differently.⁴⁸

Every other participant, to my surprise, chose a positive word such as revelation, energised, connectivity, enlightening, freedom, holistic, interesting, exciting,

⁴⁸ (Anon, 2016)

exploration etc. noting how they have realised their bad habits (e.g. 'being in their own heads', tensions in the body and judging oneself), what true integration can look and feel like, how sound makes a difference in the quality of dance and how 'body, soul and mind were united, gathered to a fully powerful expression'. It is worth noting that I did not display any learning outcomes to the students prior to the sessions as I wanted them to have an uninfluenced experience being as impartial as they can with their feedback and gained knowledge. Hence, during discussions it was extremely remarkable to see the students becoming co-producers of knowledge, being able to observe (on themselves and on others) exactly what I observed. To a large extent placing the student in a position of a co-researcher via practice-based research on themselves was proven to generate fertile grounds for everyone involved and in relation to the ability to 'know' what is inherently in us, construing a type of universal knowledge.

As the explorations were very individual, the students could not only recognise but also work on and through their problem areas (be it freedom of movement, quality of the sound made or finding true emotional content). This problem-based learning and student-centred teaching highlights the adaptation of a deep approach, facilitating understanding on the part of and bringing about conceptual change and intellectual development in the student.⁴⁹ Thus, the learner by becoming interested in his own

⁴⁹ (Newble and Clarke 1986, Sadlo and Richardson 2003 in Richardson 2005, 674)

learning process naturally starts researching into his/her being. Two students noted⁵⁰:

-In this form of practice I found that there was no demonstrative mask-like acting/dancing/ being possible...Especially in a Musical Theatre training tradition it is so healing to be pushed into experiencing this truthfulness in one's expression. In our usual training we constantly have to fill a pre-established image, whereas here I could find qualities (and also tensions, which would still have to be transformed into 'qualities') in myself, that I wasn't aware I had to offer.

-I was completely in tune with myself. I could be me and was able to dance freely.

Consequently the project confirmed that working transdisciplinary, particularly involving the voice, is not only about breaking bad habits or accumulate more skills but it is work on the whole being.⁵¹

One of my personal 'aha' moments happened while teaching a sequence with sounds. The centrality of breath became very clear to me, recognising the work being fundamentally about integrating and coordinating breath with the movement on a very basic level, similarly to Yoga or Martial Arts practices. This aspect is usually never paid much attention to in dance training, which is why most dancers suffer from tensions and inefficient breath support.⁵² The main cause for such tensions appears to assert itself in the most frequently given direction of holding one's 'centre/core', which is associated as the source of readiness, balance, and reception. Flexing and

⁵⁰ (Anon, 2016)

⁵¹ (Cuthbertson in Boston and Cook, 2009, 74)

⁵² (Pauser in Cook 2009 and Bryon 2014)

holding the muscles around this area stops the flow of the breath via the sacral diaphragm directing the air towards the upper part of the chest raising the whole rib cage. Whilst this type of the so called ‘shallow’ breathing uses a great deal of effort only a relatively small amount of oxygen is inhaled followed by quick, short breathes. “Disconnections, self-consciousness and a lack of emotional freedom in performance” are examples of possibly developed by-products of such a body-breath habit.⁵³ Therefore, through sounding, the breath was directed and allowed to come deeply from the belly, the core area like in singing. This change, by trying to use what Linklater (2006) calls ‘the natural voice’⁵⁴ through the inner involuntary systems of free, impulse-connected breathing, truly made a huge difference in the weight effort used by the participants making them more grounded and assured in their physical execution, enhancing their technical dance skills. One student commented:

I think it made my movement a lot more relaxed/ easy to do as I was less tense when using sounds, particularly when we were taught the sequence with the sounds. I found it very helpful to get the correct dynamics of the movement and it also helped me to remember the sequence the following week.⁵⁵

When truly committed to the use of deep breath and sound, the ‘grounding effect’

⁵³ (Wilson in Boston and Cook, 219)

⁵⁴ It is transparent, it reveals, not describes, inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously. The person is heard, not the person’s voice. To free the voice is to free the person, and each person is indivisibly mind and body...The natural voice is most perceptibly blocked and distorted by physical tension; it suffers equally from emotional blocks, intellectual blocks, aural blocks, and psychological blocks. All such obstacles are psychophysical in nature, and once they are removed the voice is able to communicate the full range of human emotion and all the nuances of thought (Linklater, 2006, p.245)

⁵⁵ (Anon, 2016)

was visibly observable by all participants, placing the movement material much more organically within the different movement ranges of each student as well as being much more consciously immersed in the ‘foreign’ movement content. Richards⁵⁶ equally confirm that by being “rooted in the vibrations of sound and corporeal awareness...[a] level of self-awareness of being in the body both for those observing and those being observed is raised“. This type of self-awareness of the self and of the other is what encourages and promotes reflexivity. As Joy Amulya (2004, 3) underlines: reflection lies within learning through experience, that of one’s own account or of someone else’s, as well as via a collective dialogue. Hence, experiences were documented and shared through group discussions and individual journaling, which served as a further assistance to the formative assessment applied throughout the research period. This collaborative way of working together and sharing each other’s experiences proved to be an extremely valuable technology not only in supporting and facilitating learning for and with the students but also encouraging autonomous meta-learning skills. As I tried to step back from the process as much as possible (or at least placing myself as one of the group), the students had the freedom make their connections and conclusions for themselves and through each other maximising their learning as highlighted by Rogers⁵⁷: “...learning is maximised when judgements by the learner (in the form of self-assessment) are emphasised and judgements by the teacher are minimised”.

⁵⁶ (in Banes and Lepecki, 2007, 43)

⁵⁷ (1969 in Bryan 2006)

WEAKNESSES

Co-teaching, Time Management and Knowledge Transmission

As mentioned previously the research was undertaken by myself without any support from a colleague from another discipline (e.g. Singing, Voice or Acting) due to unavailability of other staff members to conduct it with me as an extracurricular activity in the evenings. Co-teaching, however, would aid greatly with feedback and gaining a different lens and better insights into the depths and strengths of each discipline that is enhanced through the interdisciplinary approach. In such a case an attitude combining “humility with open mindedness and curiosity, a willingness to engage in dialogue and, hence the capacity for assimilation and synthesis”⁵⁸ would be of utmost importance for such a collaboration and is not always given.

As the abstract *Sound Body* work established itself to be at an extremely personal level, building trust within the working group was another major aspect essential for a successful collaboration. Creating a group environment with reliable participants and good attendance proved to be more difficult after all. Ambitiously I invited about 20 students to participate in this research in order to try and keep the reality of class sizes (especially in dance) on HE courses today. After about the first three sessions, and sporadic attendance by some students, I decided to cut the group down to 8

⁵⁸ (Chettiparamb, 2007, 36)

participants, which was extremely beneficial for the remainder of the project. One student reflected upon the process:

My dancing and honesty in it really depends on the people who create the group. Doing what we tried to do was incredible personal. Since it is an exploring of one's own human depths and short-comings, it was necessary to have a safe rehearsal space. I found it really difficult to be completely honest and blunt in my movement and sound choices, in the beginning of the project – in the end it now became a lot better. It was a smaller and more consistent group.⁵⁹

Consequently, the size of the group and the time frame needed to create a 'safe space' in order to commit to such a practice should be well considered and planned. Here the restrictions of the timetabling and the size of the year cohort could be an issue. As my chosen students were a mixture of 2nd and 3rd year students, they were also not used to working together, which of course created more of a gap to fill. Possibly working with a consistent class from the same year group would be more beneficial and not take as much time to get familiar with each other.

The length of the sessions (min 3hours each) as well as the length of the adaptation and preparation period of finding 'true integration' in the body, as opposed to putting several disciplines on top of each other, could be viewed as a possible weakness if one wanted to incorporate this approach within the usual class time (1.15-1.30h). The students do not only need time to trust each other but to trust oneself by

⁵⁹ (Anon, 2016)

truly feeling and experiencing the breath, and later voice, *in* their bodies. All of the experiential improvisational activities took a long time to be accomplished truthfully and with full commitment as a vulnerable environment was created and one needed time to establish those new connections in the body. Thus, the warm up and preparatory floor breathing/voicing exercises (see Appendix 3), that every single participant thought of as the most essential part to prepare the body⁶⁰, needed to be implemented in each session to get the students in the right kind of state before the actual work could begin. Rushing through the exercises or even cutting some short would have been detrimental to their experience, resulting in falling back into their habitual approaches of disintegration. Finding time to implement preparation, improvisation, set material, reflection and feedback even into a weekly three-hour session proved to be rather difficult. Hence, more frequent and lengthy meetings would be most beneficial in order to allow for an efficient absorption and reflection of the newly found knowledge, yet problematic to embed in normal timetables.

Another difficulty arose in the attempt to encourage autonomous life-long learning, independent thinking and trusting the findings and knowledge gained through one's own personal embodied experiences. Even though students attending a degree programme might be thought of more reflective and intellectually inclined to be able to think for themselves and decide what might be right or wrong, within the

⁶⁰ (Anon, 2016)

performing arts, when it comes to physical lessons (in contrast to theoretical), most students find themselves squashed into a typically traditional Transmission of Knowledge and Apprentice teaching model. They are used to and want to be told what to do, what is right and what is wrong for their bodies in regards to the technique taught. The teacher seems to be of hierarchical importance above all assumingly knowing everything the student needs to, should and, as, a matter of fact, will know. Penfield and Steel (2005) write about the difficulties of teaching performing arts students how to learn about themselves:

In some cases where we are trying to look at the movement style of the individual... we find we are dealing with people who don't know who they are yet – much less how their movement is different from someone else's. They are asked to learn – and think – about themselves without judgment; they are not to grade themselves but rather to explore, observe and learn about their own and their colleagues' movement. This is seen as a challenging and sometimes even frightening prospect for the young person who wants to be told exactly how to “do it” – i.e. become the next big star of stage and screen.

In this sense, it seemed somewhat a paradigm shift for the students to all of a sudden get that ‘permission’ to explore and find validation in their very personal embodied knowing. Even though already mature and thoughtful participants were chosen to be part of this research, an underlying unsaid questioning of ‘Was that correct?’ or ‘Is this the way we are supposed to do the exercise?’ and ‘What are we meant to achieve here?’ seemed to be somewhat present in the room, however dissolving through discussions towards the end of the project.

OPPORTUNITIES

Disciplinary Enhancement, Universal Training for Performer, Authenticity, Transformation

In relation to the opportunities for a future and possibly a more concentrated research that arose during the process, the overall concept seemed to divide itself naturally twofold:

1. In the first instance the voice served as a third dimension to contemporary dance classes (initially in Release Technique but also possible to be applied to other dance forms), aiming at enhancing the technical level. Through integrating another ‘discipline’ the core discipline is enhanced. Here the possibility of an efficient identification of and accruing a variety of dynamic qualities of the voice/body could be via the application of Laban’s Effort Actions.
2. On a much more all-encompassing outlook, utilising a Threshold Concept of ‘everything (including the voice and thought) being movement’ the definition of the dancer gained a new meaning leading a promising path towards a holistic and universal training regime for the interdisciplinary performer. Grounded in abstraction of movement via predominantly improvisational practice the main aim was established as the attaining of embodied knowledge of the self.

More variations for performers are possible, however, in relation to this approach:

3. Similar to integrating other disciplinary approaches within a dance class, Singing

and Acting classes could benefit from this practice equally well, re-examining and polishing the core discipline. For example, singers would benefit through gaining more physicality and connection to their bodies (i.e. an embodied vocal sound) and actors could explore the depths of their emotional lives through abstraction, creating greater expressive facility (i.e. physical, mental, vocal or emotional).

Carr et al (2014, 45) confirm that interdisciplinary working can aid students in valuing and comprehending the different disciplines as well as articulating their technical embodied knowledge. Klein⁶¹ adds to the benefits gained the weakening of the division of labour in disciplines, exposure of gaps, cross-fertilisation and new knowledge inquiry.

Particularly in relation to authenticity, truth and sincerity in performance, this practice seems to demonstrate great potential as one student notes:

'In the breath lies the truth'...So, alright then, we just have to use the *breath* to access our 'own emotional reality' which is needed for the form of theatre. Although breath carries that feeling of sincerity and truth, to really commit and utilize one's breath the sound on top of it is what helps to check if it is actually the right kind of breathing. (→ the sound is magnifying and showing the breath.) If it is just the breath alone, one can cheat oneself since it is not heard. One can distract with the usage of the words or big movements. It is big and powerful, but never totally really sincere. With the sound, all of a sudden, it becomes so evident when there's a cheating moment or when it is real. So, in the *sound of a breath* lies the power of the emotion that is carried through the body. In the sound one can hear where the breath is coming from; if it is superficially happening or coming from deep

⁶¹ (2000 in Chettiparamb 2007, 16)

down in the soul/body/human-being.⁶²

While we only managed to scratch the surface of how emotions are interlinked with breath and sound, the research brought some further insight into how abstract, non-verbal sound can actually aid in Summative Assessment procedures within Dance. Sound reveals whole body integration and dynamic content, which goes beyond the conscious mind, seemingly and very accurately illuminating one's persona and any intention inherent in the movement or action prescribed. Whilst it is possible to pretend and 'fake' a particular sound, it will always remain what Cicely Berry (2004, p.22) calls 'cerebral':

You can, in fact, get by with very little breath, manufacturing the vocal energy in the throat, but the result will be what I call 'cerebral' sound – it will reveal nothing beyond what is in your mind and will have no physical or emotional resonances.

Moreover, the student as co-producer and researcher of embodied knowledge approach has equally much greater implications in relation to not only engaging students in the design and delivery of the curriculum but also in students becoming more flexible human beings willing and able to respond and deal with a world full of unpredictability, uncertainty and challenge. As Barnett (2007, 27/37) further highlights, through a sense of flexibility new potentials might be glimpsed for the student as a person-in-the-making.

⁶² (Anon, 2016)

This person-in-the-making is literally in the making through performance, which can indicate a great moment of behaviour or concentration always inevitable in a process of change and transformation as Abramovic⁶³ denotes.

Hence, research and practice-based learning and teaching reveals considerable scope and opportunity for transformational learning through transforming the body, i.e. the conditions and processes necessary for students to make the most significant kind of knowledge.⁶⁴ As Paulo Freire⁶⁵ indicates, dialogue should not be about acting *on* each other but *with* each other and *praxis* should involve particular values, developing consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality. This particular Action Research was grounded in precisely these kind of values of building consciousness about oneself and what it means to just be, as an expressive entity and performer. Here, working with the self rather than against it stood at the forefront.

Moreover, consciousness is raised not only via movement or dialogue and reflexive thinking but also through meditation practice, which besides the spiritual benefits, adds a new and innovative dimension to inclusive and democratic learning environments (Marshall et al, 2014).

Minor transformations in thinking about and embodying the whole self as a performer, specifically in relation to the new Threshold Concept constructed, were

⁶³ (in Huxley and Witts, 2002, 17/19)

⁶⁴ (Mezirow in McGonigal 2005, 1)

⁶⁵ (in Taylor 1993)

achievable through several conditions, which demonstrate great potential in relation to Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory⁶⁶: exposing the limitations of and providing opportunities for the student to identify and articulate the underlying assumptions in a student's current knowledge/approach; critical self-reflection on how these assumptions influenced or limited understanding; critical discourse with other students and the instructor and provide for opportunities to test and apply new perspectives. One student reflects:

It was a room to study 'me' instead of quickly learning a performance technique and not have time to fully understand it. In training we are always pelted with technique and new styles so it is not a creative training but rather a „performer crash course or factory“. And here, all of a sudden we could work with the material we actually have: ourselves. We have to study ourselves to become good performers. What I mean is that we are never *taught* to understand our unique body with our facility (we are told to do so, but never *taught*). Within this project I found the first steps to look at myself as a performer and what I have instead what I should have. This is the base of every performance training. Without it, one shouldn't bother doing it at all, because all one has is the material of one's own personality, or self, or whatever one wants to call it.⁶⁷

Interdisciplinarity is seen to be tied to reflexivity enhancing the potential of both democratisation of knowledge construction and discourse.⁶⁸ Heidegger⁶⁹ further illuminates the capacity of integrating knowing, acting and being through reflexivity

⁶⁶ (in McGonigal 2005, p.2)

⁶⁷ (Anon, 2016)

⁶⁸ (Romm 1998 in Chettiparamb 2007, 14-15)

⁶⁹ (1998, 167 in Dall Alba, 2005, 6)

and its importance in transformation of the self, which is achieved through “removing human beings from the region where they first encounter things and transferring and accustoming them to another realm where beings appear”. Thus, by just providing the ‘realm’ where students can just be and explore the new possibilities transformative ways of thinking can emerge as highlighted by two students⁶⁷:

-Firstly it was a space to experiment. In the usual classes I always feel like I am running after something, that I have not yet got, but should know or be able to do. I am always in the 'negative' space, like with a bank account. Contrary, in the space of the Action research I could search freely, and whatever I found on the way was great.

-It reminded me why I started to dance. Because I came out of the studio and felt exempt, light, complete, relaxed, lucky and full of creative ideas and impressions. I was searching for that feeling since 2 1/2 years now. Now I know how I can find it - so whenever I feel stuck in the ‘dance box’ I know how to escape.

THREATS-

Threshold Concept, Abstraction and Vulnerability, Institutional Structures, Mind

One of the biggest threats surrounding such a transdisciplinary practice, particularly in relation to the Threshold Concept introduced in *Sound Body*, are the preconceived aesthetic values that accompany a performer’s mind being used to the strict division and traditional training approaches within each discipline. While it is argued that precisely abstract or formless dance provides the performer with an “infinite sphere of

corporeality”⁷⁰ enhancing an abundance of expressive possibilities, getting to the core of who one is, it is these “sequences of non-conventional evolutions of the body” as Laban (2001,145-146) calls them that equally seem as a threat to one’s existence.

Particularly the non-conventional use of applying one’s voice seem threatening as they do not necessary reveal the ‘prettiest’ side of the self encouraging vulnerability. One student notes: “I couldn’t be emotionally negative, as I couldn’t let myself go in case I lost control of myself”.⁷¹ However, elements of trust/support and challenge are key for transformation. Cranton⁷² argues that although student empowerment and support are important, an ‘environment of challenge’ is the central ingredient for transformative learning: “Push too hard and students resist; push too little and the opportunity for learning quickly fades”.

A further threat lies also within the realms of understanding the proposed way of focusing and centring the mind to the body. Most performers do tend to have an internal ‘judge’ in their heads always commenting on their progress. This is critical and can be detrimental to the practice in that the mind is occupied with the wrong kind of mental activity and movement, not allowing for empty space to receive new knowledge. These personal judgments equally hinder one’s freedom of expression in that one remains in a safe space, never overcoming the challenge presented with.

Another male students comments on his experience with challenge:

⁷⁰ (Gil, 1998, 115)

⁷¹ (anon, 2016):

⁷² (2002 in McGonigal, 2005, 3)

I don't want to put that one feeling (sadness) on a podium or stage or for anyone to see. I am so afraid of that, because it affects me personally so very much. And I have the idea that as a man, I cannot show myself weak or failed. Through the process of rehearsing the sound-movement practice I did allow myself to also use this part that I have in me. So, it helps to explore and understand oneself as a person whereby it gave me the ability to use myself as a whole to perform.

The challenge to 'use oneself as a whole' is not necessarily akin to every performer. Dancers distinctly and paradoxically tend to refrain from this concept, avoiding the use of voice and authenticity by either objectifying movement to the point whereby movement is executed for movement's sake or, similar to actors, by hiding behind a mask or 'putting on a show'. Too often performers tend to overindulge in their performance forcing themselves to portray an emotion, which is not rooted in truth. Even though the proposed type of work tackles with exactly this dilemma, the possible threat observed seemed to prevail in that some students would either boycott (by remaining in a safe zone) or not take the work seriously, due to fear of letting go and become vulnerable, which again hinders the building of trust in a group environment and the process aimed at. Moreover, by not trying to gain a deeper understanding of the values inherent in such a practice, the temptation is there to just 'mock about' and maybe even 'go mental' in such a free space of exploration without the search for true integration and new knowledge. Whilst this could be a possible threat, allowing enough freedom can equally empower and encourage the students' creativity and autonomy on the search for new ideas and knowledge. One student comments:

The looseness of rules was a bit scary at first but forced us to use our creativity. The pleasant, unpressured atmosphere let us play around a bit, and sometimes we just messed around and had fun in doing nonsense – and actually out of that some of the nicest ideas emerged. So this chilled, free, experimenting climate was definitely enhancing the creativeness.⁷¹

However positive the outcome in the end for that particular student was, efficient Constructive Alignment as well as the support from other staff members, management as well as institutional structures, in relation to the particular Threshold Concept and open-ended approach, would be essential in achieving a positive outcome. Paul Kleiman (2003, 11-15) talks particularly about the issue of rigid assessment, time and resources driven institutional structures that do not allow for an emergence of creativity, opposing interdisciplinary characteristics. Clark⁷³ further emphasises how “replication and formulation lie at the heart of much higher education [being] antithetical to the development and enhancement of creativity”. This is reinforced by quality assurance and standards via strictly formulated learning outcomes that are based on what is already known rather than that which is new, unexpected and different to the norm creating a closed system, which discourages innovation and origination. Just like not wanting to reveal and work on the whole self, most students tend to be drilled into conformist and reactive, rather than independent thinking, and a follower, rather than lead, mentality.⁷⁴

⁷³ (1995 in Kleiman 2003)

⁷⁴ (Puccio, 2004 in Kleiman 2003)

CONCLUSION

...all open-ended systems have the potential to transform themselves into richer versions of themselves. Humans and human interactions, by the fact that they are living, are open systems.⁷⁵

As McNiff rightly points out, we all are small structures part of a much bigger structure called the universe. All things, even though not always visible to us, are connected and interdependent in one way or another, always developing, never standing still. The potential of a much richer self is hence always present, there for us to take and run with it. This Action Research was the attempt to provide an initial layout for how to reach these waters of an utmost whole, creative and abundantly expressive human being embedded in Steiner's vision of a holistic curriculum design. The realm of the performing artist seems to make available the perfect conditions for striving towards such a goal, however much work is yet to be done.

The proposed transdisciplinary practice finally seemed to transcend my personal 'living contradictions' of a rigid disciplinary education (Whitehead in McNiff, 2002), recognising the various bodily functions as one whole and complex system with its own intelligence that is larger than our conscious mind can perceive, thus promoting the potential and interconnectedness of human expression with its surrounding world. Through building autonomous embodied knowledge of the interdependence of a microcosm (the body) in relation to the macrocosm (the universe) it exists in, the

⁷⁵ (McNiff, 2002, p.12)

student as a co-researcher and producer of that knowledge is not merely able to survive in a time coined “liquid modernity”⁷⁶ but actually create and form his/her own life path with fluidity and grace. Consequently, the “cross-fertilisation of subjects [does not only] contribute to a considerable enrichment of the students' learning experience”⁷⁷ but plays a vital role in sustainable teaching, whereby the student does not only become better equipped for his professional life in regards to his skills, but actually learns about a sustainable way of being, namely flexible, open-minded, creative, imaginative, reflexive, critically conscious, self-motivated and empathetic.⁷⁸ Moreover, skills learned through interdisciplinary learning and teaching are increasingly in demand in the evolving global employment landscape such as being able to work collaboratively in multi-professional teams and adopt holistic approaches to problem solving.⁷⁹

Interdisciplinary knowledge and research hence represent the unity-of- knowledge ideal to quote Nissani.⁸⁰ Research within the proposed frame, however, as it deals with the ephemerality of being in a constant flux of movement existing as a journey of personal discovery, can only be constructed via intuition, playfulness, experimentation, unconsciousness and eclectic and sensory impressions, rather than strictly formulated agendas and learning outcomes.⁷⁸ The developing and possibly

⁷⁶ (Baumann in Gehm, 2007, 30)

⁷⁷ (QAA, 2015, 6)

⁷⁸ (Wareham, 2008, 3-10).

⁷⁹ (Lyall et al, 2015, v-ix)

⁸⁰ (1997 in Chettiparamb 2007, 16)

transformed individual or graduate, as Wareham (2008, 3) so poignantly notes, should ultimately be able to “create new knowledge and art forms in the context of the pragmatics of the creative industries [and] aspire to contribute to society in a full and meaningful way”.

I would like to end this report by briefly drawing on Taylor’s article on 21st Century Enlightenment (2010, 16). By identifying empathetic capacity of the human being as the core competence for the global 21st century citizen, Taylor propels a deeper level of self-awareness and self-expression as vital ingredients to be explored. He relates these two characteristics with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs of which self-actualisation is at the top. Self-actualisation is depicted by Maslow as the “intrinsic growth of what is already in the organism, or more accurately what is the organism itself...”. Thus, the self-actualised person can be very well assimilated with the interdisciplinary holistic performer who, by developing a deeper sensitivity to our nature as a species, embraces reality and facts rather than denies truth, is spontaneous, interested in problem solving and accepting of him/herself and others lacking prejudice.

“We can know ourselves better. Perhaps we need to”.⁸¹

⁸¹ (Taylor, 2010, 30)

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Appendix 1 - Project in Context

Being a commuting free-lance dance tutor between two countries, the opportunity arose to conduct the research on two different focus groups: One in London and another one in Germany. Having been a member of the Contemporary Dance department at Bird College - a performing arts college on the outskirts of London, a focus group of about 8 (initially 14) 2nd and 3rd year Degree students was formed there to conduct the research on; whilst in Germany a group of 4 Diploma students at Dance Professional - a vocational college for professional dance, pedagogy and choreography - committed to the project. The criteria for the choice of participants, who were male and female between the ages of 18 and 22, relied primarily on availability, interest, maturity and a somewhat inquisitive nature. Moreover, a mixture of mixed abilities in dance was sought after in order to be able to differentiate between a range of applications. Being part of a three year BA (Hons) Degree programme in Professional Dance and Musical Theatre the great advantage at Bird College was the students' familiarity, even though at varying levels, with all three subjects (Dance, Singing and Acting), being used to applying their bodies to a variety of practices. Whilst they were used to a distinct disintegration of these subjects, the project sought to examine how a combination of the vocal, physical, cognitive and emotional content can be combined within one class setting. For this purpose (and due to varying timetable availability) the project was suggested as an extracurricular

activity consisting of a total of 10 weekly studio sessions (3 hours each). The German students only had three sessions (3 hours each), which were equally extracurricular and displayed a new terrain with the application of the voice as their training merely involves various dance styles and creative work but no Voice or Acting classes.

Both focus groups were documented via video recordings of each session that served to create a short film documentary of the process, my personal and the students' reflections.

Further continuous journaling, interviews and questionnaires were undertaken to enlighten the investigation and the individual experiences of each student that are invaluable to gaining access to the lived experiences and embodied knowledge gained throughout the process.

Appendix 2 - Summary of Other Practitioner's Models

Laban's identification of the vocal sound as the "movement of the voice producing organs [which is] indispensable to presentation on the stage" (Laban, 2001) established the central point of view supporting the idea for including the voice as part of the body's movement of a dancer. Theories on Body-Mind Centering further approved the interdependency of all the anatomical systems in the body and stressed the superior significance of the vocal apparatus above all other systems with its power as an integrating agent of the whole being:

It is through the expressive qualities of our voice that we communicate to the outer world who we are. Our voice reflects the functioning of all of our body systems and the process of our developmental integration. Bringing kinaesthetic and auditory consciousness to our vocal structures opens pathways of expression between our unconscious and our conscious mind and between ourselves and others (Bainbridge Cohen in Hartley, 1995).

The notion of Grotowski's *via negativa* (Kumiega, 1985), a technique of elimination of that which hinders a performer to be spontaneous and creative was influential in the design of the physical improvisational activities (See Appendices 2/3). Mary Starks Whitehouse's discoveries on Authentic Movement served to penetrate into one's primordial 'central'- way of moving exploring the unconscious; it is referred to the kind of movement that needs to be 'found' in the body through a self-sensing awareness - an attitude of 'inner listening', which ultimately aims at a reunion of body and mind (Whitehouse In Pallaro, 1999, p.52).

Kristin Linklater's (2006) training approach of *Freeing the Natural Voice*, which is closely linked with Grotowski's emphasis on the spine as the centre of expression, were used to underline how the vocal organs and the production of sound in the body are intertwined with the lower base of the spine, the sacral nerve centre, accessing the primordial channel to instinct, intuition, and spontaneous creativity (see Individual Work - Floor Series in Appendix 2). Roy Hart's discoveries on the potential of the voice and Meredith Monk's artistic practice of integrating voice and movement brought further insight into the possibilities of voice and movement integration practices.

Besides structured improvisations conducted during the sessions, voice work was used in a more structured, 'form-full', dance environment, very similar to traditional dance lessons, in order to enhance the dynamic expression of the body. In this case it was my own Release Technique-based contemporary dance class that provided the 'physical' content material taught to the students, however with allowing organic vocal sound to accompany the movement in order to accentuate and/or explore the dynamic qualities inherent in a sequence. This particular style, which focuses on a somatic understanding of the moving body with its correct skeletal alignment in space, facilitating utmost efficiency in movement, does not in any way alienate from the holistic approaches discussed above, but rather complements them.

Appendix 3 - Sound Body Exercises Description

Body Part Warm Up (15-20min - with or without music)

- Start walking in circular patterns throughout the space.
- Sense the connection between the back of the head, the sternum, the tail bone and the heels (use hands to place on these parts of the body, except for heels).
- Connect to the ground through the soles of the feet rolling from your heels to your toes, spreading the toes into the floor.
- Focus is straight ahead.
- Start by exploring the various body parts through circular movement patterns in the joints in the following order: fingers, wrists, elbows, shoulders, upper back, middle back, lower back (tail), hips, knees, ankles, feet, top of the head, eyes and then the rest of the face. Here the exploration should be based on the movement of the bones and skeletal structure rather than musculature. (Make sure to know the difference when the movement is isolated and when it is initiated by a particular body part! Try both!)
- Whilst moving play with an inner and outer focus to sense the awareness of own body and simultaneously engage with others and the space around you. Alternatively you can also close your eyes to see the difference in proprioception.
- Continue to explore the exchange of all the body parts now INITIATING the movement in a random order. Listen to how the body wants to move rather than making decisions on your own.
- Start speeding up your movement and then flip into 'shaking' and 'flicking' your whole body as fast as you can.
- Drop into 'Savasana' pose on the floor (lying flat on your back, legs and arms comfortably just slightly apart and by your side, palms facing the ceiling, eyes closed).
- Notice your breath filling the lower abdomen in a rise and fall action. Notice the natural placement of the ribcage whilst lying down and breathing.

Important!

You can use music for this first warm up session but only instrumental, preferably drum based music. NO vocals. Make sure to try and 'zone in' on how your body feels and allow it to move you rather than the other way around (overthinking everything). Explore different and new ways of moving avoiding movement material that you do in class.

Individual Work: Floor Series (20-30min)

1. 7 Breaths (5min)

Whilst lying on the floor, take 21 breaths in total. For the first 7 breaths inhale and exhale through your nose. For the following 7, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. For the final 7 inhale and exhale through your mouth. Make sure to relax and release your full weight into the floor.

The inhalation is there to take in energy and spread it through the whole of the body, while the exhalation is there to release all unnecessary tensions and/or blockages. Visualise how the breath enters every single part of the body that you have used in your warm up as well as all the interior organs and fills it with light and warm energy. When breath exits your body, imagine how it becomes an empty vessel, one with the space around you.

For this exercise it is best if the supervisor counts each 7 breaths quietly for himself and uses the sound bowl between each so that the student does not have to count him/herself.

2. 'fff' Sound (5min)

Breathing in through your nose and breathing out on a gentle 'fff' sound (bottom teeth gently touch the inner part of the top lip). Make sure the 'fff' sound is not forced but just allowed to escape through this particular lazy shape of the mouth.

Keep noticing the rise and fall of your stomach area and the position of the ribcage. Allow the breath to enter and spread in a 3D motion around your torso (i.e. the back and sides, not only the front).

3. 'Huh' Sound of Relief (10-20min)

- Start making a gentle sound of relief on each out breath. This again should be a gentle 'huh' sound and notice where the touch of sound happens.
- Develop this further by using a variety of pitch and vowels ending in 'mmm', i.e. 'Huuuummm' or 'Hooooomm', 'Heeemmm' etc.. Notice depending on the vowel sound where the resonance travels to or is felt in the body. You can also allow the pitch to slide up as the vowels suggest 'OO-OH-AH-EY-EE. Imagine the sound sliding up your spine and filling different parts of your body.
- Whilst doing the sounding change positions to:

- **Diagonals** (tuck both knees into your belly and then place both on one side of the body, looking away from your legs, stretching out the opposite arm on a diagonal to your legs);
- **Shaking Pelvis in Semi-Supine** (lifting on in-breath and shaking on out-breath);
Rolling (stillness on in-breath and rolling on out-breath);
- **Moving Up** (use other positions to come slowly to standing by moving on each in-breath and pausing in a particular position on each out breath).

Important!

Make sure you are comfortable and there is no holding in the abdomen area or any other tensions in the body throughout these exercises! Feel free to move at your own pace and explore the voice in volume and intensity. Notice what positions help or hinder the sound to travel and resonate through the body. Keep the body as relaxed as possible throughout these exercises. Preferably you keep your eyes shut to start with but as the movement progresses feel free to open them and notice the difference.

Individual Work: Standing Series (30min)

1. Bouncing (1min)

Finish the previous exercise by standing in a neutral stance, feet hip-width apart and parallel, long spine feeling the connection of the 4 points explored at the start of the lesson (back of the head, sternum, tail bone and heels), keep your knees relaxed. Also notice the alignment of your ribcage which should be the same as on the floor. Take a breath in and on each out breath start bouncing in your legs without collapsing in your rib cage or folding in the back of your neck. Feel the expansion on each in breath in a 3D fashion filling up the whole of your bodily kinesphere.

2. Undulations (3min)

Start rippling through your spine from your pelvic floor to the top of your head and vice versa by sliding up your register through the use of the vowel sounds in this order: OO-OH-AH-EY-EE.

3. Plastiques (6min)

Develop the undulation exercise by sending these sounds to other body parts and back. This will start looking more like a 'sound dance wave' with the whole of the body moving.

4. Consonant Exploration - (10-15 min)

Now try and add consonant sounds to your exploration. Notice how the sounds 'sit' in the body and the difference in resonance. Try the following order:

1. W, Y
2. R, L
3. S, Z, SH
4. TH, V, F
5. M, N, NG
6. G, D, B
7. K, T, P

5. Emotive Entity - (10-15min)

Play with any vocal choice allowing sound to evoke movement, image or an emotion (crying, whining, anger, laughter etc.). At this stage you can use gibberish instead of actual words. Notice how the body responds to these sounds naturally.

Partner Work (40-50min)

1. Sound Massage (10min)

Partner A touches a chosen body part of Partner B whilst Partner B tries to sound into this particular area. Experiment with different intensities of the touch and a variety of areas. You can use other body parts to make contact with your partner other than hands. The touch can slide up or down to a different area and/or become a manipulation of it. The partner should allow the sound to slide along with the touched area and/or be manipulated/moved also. Keep eye contact with your partner where possible to see any emotional content present. You can also use the floor when it comes to legs.

2. Vocal Ribbons (10min)

Partner A starts again by touching one particular body part and pulling an invisible ribbon away from it. Partner B reacts to this gesture with a sound in quality and volume (increase when far and decrease when close or vice versa) in the attempt to resonate along the ribbon. Here a coordination is needed between the partners to work together on one breath for each ribbon. However, if several breaths are needed, then each initiation of sound should remain at the resonating level that it was left of.

3. Contact Improvisation (10-15min)

This exercise works only in twos and should be a constant weight sharing experience. Both partners should send the sound to the body parts that are touched at one particular moment in time. The moving or changing of positions should preferably happen on the in-breath only and pause during the sounding so a sense of 'giving into the partner' and 'relaxing one's weight' is achieved.

4. Copy Cat - (10-15min)

One person starts by going on a journey of sounding and moving. The other just copies what his/her partner does. Then swap. Make sure that the person copying does it with great detail and the same intensity as the partner. Here particular attention should be given to the quality of movement and the sound.

This exercise can then develop into an 'exchange' of who is doing and who is copying.

Group Work (45min)

1. Circle (15-20min)

One person starts going on his/her personal sound/movement journey inside the circle until **he/she decides** to pass on a particular sound gesture to someone else. The other person starts copying that particular sound gesture and continues onto his/her own journey etc. Throughout this experimentation the sound can encompass a variety of vowels and consonants.

This exercise can then develop to having more than one person joining in (i.e. all the participants). Anyone at any moment can decide to come out of the circle on particular movement gestures or sounds and come in again.

2. Dance Sequence - (30min)

Either taught by the teacher directly or explored independently by the students: Divide the whole class into 2nd and 3rd years. Each group decides on a particular sequence from their recent Contemporary class and performs it as learned in front of the other group.

Each group then works independently for a while on adding particular sounds that '**organically match**' that particular movement and dynamic. Then, the sequence is performed again with the integrated sounds. Note the difference in performing and observing!

Important!

During partner and group work it would be great if everyone could give feedback to the others and discuss the findings. Some of these questions might be useful to use as a guide:

- 1. What was effective to observe and what was not? Why? What did you learn through observing?**
- 2. Is the person wholly integrating both sound and movement or is one dominating over the other?**
- 3. Which exercises did you feel prepared you for the 'Sequence' work best? Which did less so?**
- 4. Do you feel like you are dancing more fully, as a 'whole you' integrating mind, body and voice rather than just moving your body?**
- 5. Do you have any suggestions on improving or changing any of the exercises listed so far?**

Appendix 4 - Questionnaire Template

1. If you could summarise the *Sound Body* work we have done with one word, what would that word be and why?
2. What could you observe about yourself during this practice, positive and negative aspects?
3. Did you have any 'aha' moments or insights about yourself during any of the sessions in relation to your practice as a dancer? If so, what were they?
4. Did you experience any difficulties or struggles with any of the aspects of such a practice? If yes, please describe?
5. What did the voice add to your movement experience in comparison to just using your breath?
6. Which exercises were effective in relation to whole body integration in your own experience and why?
7. Did you feel like you were wholly integrating both sound and movement equally or was one dominating over the other?
8. Which exercises did you feel prepared you for the 'Sequence' work best? Which did less so?
9. Did you feel like you are dancing more fully, as a 'whole you' integrating mind, body and voice rather than just moving your body?
10. Do you have any suggestions on improving or changing any of the exercises listed so far?
11. Would you say that this work enhanced your creative ability? If it did, could you describe how?
12. Would you say that this work enhanced any technical aspects in relation to Release technique? If it did, could you describe how?
13. Do you feel this work would benefit your training as part of a performing arts course? Why and how would it do so in comparison to your normal lessons?
14. Could you say this practice 'transformed' you in a certain way? If it did, please describe how?
15. Do you have any other comments or observations that you would like to share?

Appendix 5 - Ethical Consent Form Template

Programme: Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Theatre and Performing Arts

Module 2 – Evaluation and Enhancement

Project: Action Research: Sound Body - Interdisciplinarity towards an empowered body of knowledge

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.
I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the E-mail dated February 25th, 2016.
2.
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.
3.
I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.
4.
I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.
5.
The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.
6.
I agree for the recorded data (practical studio sessions, interviews, audio, video and other any other collected data) to be used in reports, publications (social media) and other research outputs.
7.
The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.

8.

I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.

9.

Select only **one** of the following:

| I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised.

| I do not want my name used in this project.

10.

I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.

Participant:

Name of Participant Signature Date _____

Researcher:

Name of Researcher Signature Date _____