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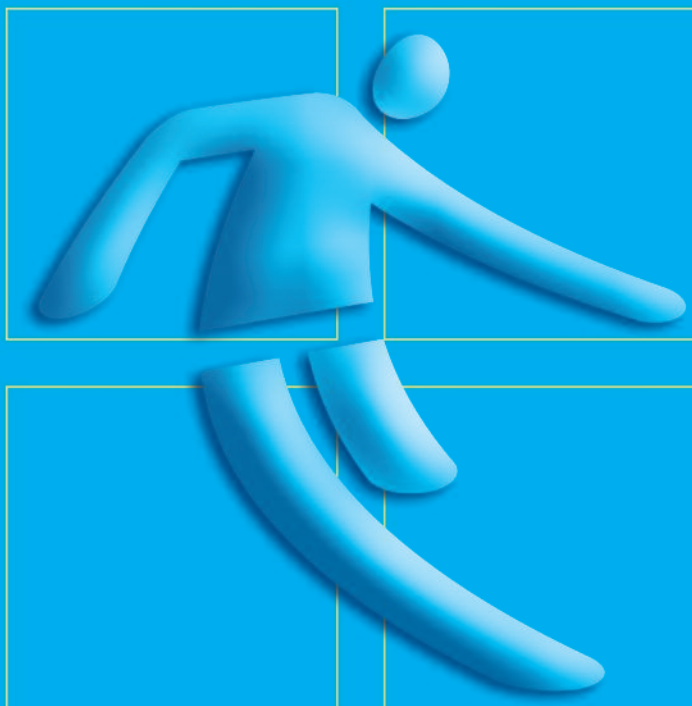

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CETL
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research informed teaching and learning edition

CETL Journal

Innovations in Practice

Volume 2, Number 1, December 2009

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Editorial

Research Informed Teaching (RIT) has been part of the discourse of teaching and learning in higher education for some time now and at the HEFCE annual conference in 2005 Liz Beaty identified a number of approaches to RIT. These included the integration of discipline-based research into teaching (telling students about your latest research or the latest paper you have read), pedagogic research, and research as a process by which learning takes place. This special edition of Innovations in Practice brings together good practice in RIT across a number of disciplines within the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure at LJMU.

Institutional and faculty support for RIT has, over the last few years, been of great importance in both developing research staff skills and confidence and enhancing student learning. Within LJMU and beyond, the Faculty of ECL is rightly seen as a centre of excellence for pedagogic research. The work of the CETL, LTA projects and the substantial contribution which staff make to the annual University LTA Conference all testify to the energy, commitment and enthusiasm with which staff approach the subject of researching their own teaching. The article in this edition by Luke Kahlich and Pauline Brooks offers an excellent example of such energy, commitment and ethusiasm to the development of technologically innovative practice.

The central focus for this edition is however research as a process by which learning takes place. Undergraduate programmes have always offered students the opportunity to act as 'researchers' via research methods modules linked to dissertations. Tina Overton (Director of the Physical Sciences Centre at the HEA) describes this as research oriented teaching; giving students an understanding of research processes, the research ethos and equipping them with some basic research skills. More exciting however is the challenge of what she refers to as research based teaching where the curriculum is designed around problems to be researched and resolved (or not) by tutors and students working together as co-researchers. Jenkins and Healy (in the introductory paper in this edition) present a model where students move from being an audience for research to one where they are participants in the process. Three papers (Stott and Forrestor, Stott *et al.* & Fairclough) report on research carried out jointly with students and Allan Hackett reflects on an interesting and varied life as a researcher where students have often been co-workers and sometimes co-authors.

The challenge quite rightly identified by Jenkins and Healy is in how to 'scale-up' such activity so that it is not restricted to the 'brightest' students or constrained by resource limitations. In tandem, they identify the need to research the impact of such activities, as evidence of the benefit to students is still partial and academics and policy will need convincing that a large scale re-vamping of the undergraduate curriculum is worth the effort.

So what is the future of RIT in the Faculty of ECL and how central should it be to our work as targeted RIT funding and the CETL come to an end? Mindful of Ian Stronach and John Clarke's paper and the new 'knowledge economy' they describe, we would argue, that in a faculty where the study of education is central and in which great value is placed on professional and work-related learning, the opportunities for students to engage as co-researchers in exciting and innovative research are many and varied. Further, such activities will provide staff with the context to develop their own research profiles while enhancing the student learning experience.

This edition of Innovations in Practice brings together a range of exciting projects which illustrate different facets of research informed teaching and which are a testament to the creativity and professionalism of the staff who have contributed articles. The final paper by Lizzie Smears and Mia Unsworth illustrates just this type of creativity. We hope this edition of the journal will inspire you to reflect on how RIT might impact on your own work and how you might work in partnership with your students and engage with them not only as participants but as co-conspirators!

- Kate Johnson is Dean of the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure
- Alan Hodkinson is guest co-editor of Innovations in Practice and Phil Vickerman is the editor

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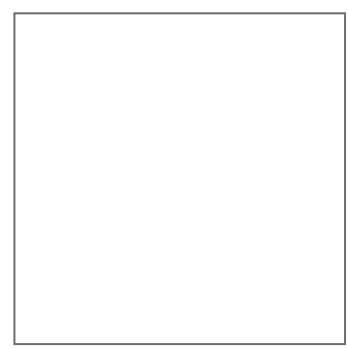

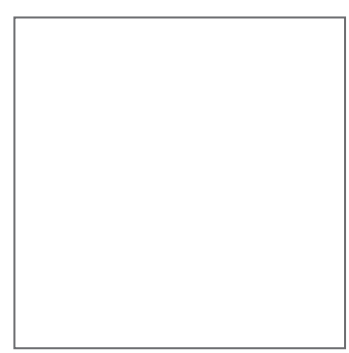

Reflections on a two-year joint international project **using web-cam technology to create new opportunities for student choreographic collaborations**

Luke Kahlich and Pauline Brooks

Our idea of exploring dance pedagogy and technology first came to light during a conference at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) in 2001. While we as artists/educators are very interested in the role of emerging media technology, as are increasing numbers of our students, our institutions (and many others) are not presently ready to invest the resources at the level of American institutions such as the University of Florida, Florida State University, Ohio State University, Arizona State University, and the University of California, Irvine, for instance. We therefore sought to find a low-cost alternative that might be available to a larger number of dance educators and students without major resource requirements.

Initial plans included using cell phones and emailing videos, but we finally settled on experimenting with the use of the internet, creative process/choreography and elements of learning. Each of us arranged to have five students meet each week to move forward with this idea. While we both had space and bodies, and software and hardware, we were unsure (as were the technicians at our respective institutions) of exactly how this would unfold. Temple University offered to host the sessions via Adobe Breeze (later upgraded to Adobe Connect and later to Adobe Connect Pro), software designed for 'talking heads' in the corporate world.

Entering New Territory

2007-2008, Project 1

We each advertised the project to students as an opportunity to sign-up for credit or to be involved on a voluntary basis. The original course description promoted the course as one in which there would be an experimental use of technology, specifically internet technology, for teaching, learning and creating in the choreographic process in an international web-cam environment. Our specific objectives were:

- To experiment with the use of internet technology in choreographic pedagogy.
- To develop basic knowledge and skills with internet technology.
- To design creative and educational projects for dance utilizing internet technology.
- To build a conceptual and practical foundation for further study and use of internet technology in dance.

Our attempts to keep a diary as the experience unfolded collided with ongoing issues of time management and learning/teaching the software and problems with connection and equipment, making it difficult to pay the hoped-for time for teaching, the creative process or to the journal entries. As we learned something new each week, we found that the challenges were considerable and usually frustrating, often focused on the technology itself.

Official sessions began on 19 September 2007. One of the first sessions included a tutor-led warm-up designed to introduce students to the software, to see how they would perceive themselves and their peers on the screen, and how they would respond to possibilities of interactions between each other.

Fig. 1 Computer Screen of Session - Liverpool on left and Temple on right

We established a pedagogic model in which we guided students to experiment with new materials, to find workable structures, and employed strategies to enable them to get to know each other -- encountering on the way frequent misconceptions of our 'common' culture and language. As their confidence grew, we encouraged them to take more responsibility in the sessions and the creative work. Three excerpts from journal entries of early meetings give an idea of the initial difficulties and frustrations we regularly faced:

19/9/07: Problems with Liverpool connection. We need to know what to do with the students when the technology doesn't work. Worked for the most part, but mostly talking. Difficulties with audio. Size of screen with breeze limited.

24/9/07: Browser quit repeatedly

26/9/07: Cameras are working well this time, but there is no sound from Liverpool. Worked on views that were more or less successful in sharing a physical warm-up, lead by Pauline, with students at both ends following. We began to work with the split screen that was set up, since each site had a screen set side by side. Students offered suggestions and we worked on the issues of levels of detail in the movement given the limited quality of video.

With the limitations from ongoing issues with hardware, networking, software and cameras, we finalized the work that was created during the semester for a final showing on 5 December 2007. The performance was aired via the internet between invited audiences at both universities.

Fig. 2 December 5, 2007 Internet Showing - Temple Perspective

Temple University agreed to fund a week-long trip to Liverpool for all of the American project members, which culminated in a shared performance at LJMU in March 2008. We continued to meet weekly during spring 2008. In addition to reviewing our first semester work, we added three more projects: experimentation with video at both sites to be combined with the interface of live dance with film at LJMU, a structured improvisation (demonstrating the split screen with two spaces with the live audience in Liverpool), and a new, live group dance. These projects involved the students in new collaborations with each other, and further opportunities to explore working with each other and the media.

Ongoing comments from the project participants included both positive and negative comments:

- Audio lag very troublesome.
- Could not log on at Temple.
- Total frustration.
- Projector not working.
- Things working!!!
- Total loss.
- Final session went great!!

The many weekly problems rather outnumbered the unproblematic sessions; however, it was the power of the moments of success shared by both students and tutors that kept the project alive. As one student commented '*this is a developing media and to be at the beginning of this cross-country exploration …is like being an early pioneer.*'

In spite of the tribulations, some of the successes were the:

- Persistence, excitement and dedication of students.
- Creative work accomplishments.
- Improvement of institutional interest and support.
- Individual and collaborative efforts, both by and between the students.
- Clarity of needs for continued developmental work.
- Production of cutting-edge research in transnational pedagogy and creative work.

At the end of Project 1 we were aware that there were a number of issues that continued to need to be addressed as we worked to develop ideas of using the internet for pedagogical research and creative practice. These included:

- Networking at institutional level - an inordinate amount of time has been spent on trying to find the right personnel across each university to trouble-shoot technical problems.
- Software for audio/video (DVTS) - Adobe Breeze is really a 'talking-heads' technology that we are pushing to stream movement and voice for performance work.
- Cameras (NTSC/PAL) - many of our problems come from having different formats for the media.
- Delay and noise/echo - not easy when trying to teach (l*et a*lone dance in unison) to have your words or image appear seconds, even minutes later.
- Microphones for moving bodies - the technology exits, it is the funding for suitable equipment that is the challenge.
- Time zones for scheduling - compromise and constant vigilance are vital.
- Dedicated Technology Space - designed to allow more productive use of time for researcher, teacher, and student. In each institution, staff have to set-up wires, computers, cameras, etc. each week, and then dismantle them after the session. At least one third of the session is spent on this rather than on teaching and learning.

Moving Forward - Learning from the Past

2008-2009, Project 2

Following a review of the first-year outcomes, a second project was planned via email and Skype sessions. The specific objectives for which were:

- To investigate how web-cam and e-mail technology can serve dance pedagogy and creative process, specifically if and how it might engage students in the making of dances within a new spatial 'frontier'.
- To use technology on a shared international project, encouraging the development of international links and the practice of networking.
- To explore the potential for linking spaces and audiences via the internet with web-cam choreography, including performance experience and aesthetic pedagogy.

In the second project we experimented with an alternate pedagogic model based on what we had learned the previous year. From the outset the students were to lead their own collaborative projects while we acted as tutors providing support and guidance, either weekly or at set points during the semester. Three Temple University postgraduate dance students on the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree were paired-up with LJMU undergraduate dance students. In some ways this design went more smoothly:

- We knew the software better (opportunities and limitations) and it had undergone some development/upgrading.
- We had some students who had previously worked with technology.
- The MFA students had more knowledge and experience with choreography than previous undergraduates, providing better greater opportunities for experimentation.
- We had a better idea of when to interject ourselves into the process.
- We provided more structure up-front and more time for development.

We paired-up students early according to interests and provided semester one as time to develop ideas and the spring semester to move toward more finished works. Three student projects were developed:

1. Carolina and Faye.

Their collaboration involved:

- The use of visual image and the screen to influence their devising process.
- Methods and devices included: improvisation, camera frame, on screen-off screen cues, unison complement/contrast, split-screen exploration.
- Spatial and choreographic use of 'cone of capture'.
- Communication methods used: web-cam, email, Skype.

Fig. 3 Working with the split screen

2. Colleen/Sarah/Amy.

Their collaboration involved:

- The use of their personal lives to influence devising, selection of props and text.
- Methods and devices included: free associative writing, use of question and answer, improvisation, split-screen, camera frame (use of close-up, distance, body parts, etc.).
- Spatial and choreographic use of the 'cone of capture'.
- Communication methods used: web-cam, email, Skype.

Fig. 4 Trio using text and props - Temple Perspective

Fig. 5 Trio using text and props - Liverpool Perspective

3. Beau and Danielle.

Their collaboration used a cast of seven and involved:

- Use of previously created material by the MFA student, based from gesture.
- Methods and devices included: accumulation formula, collaboration of ideas, autonomy of theme, numerical codes.
- Spatial and choreographic use of the 'cone of capture'.
- Communication methods used: web-cam, email, Skype, You tube.

Fig. 6 Group work based on accumulation patterns and using metronome for accompaniment

Fig. 7 Group work from Liverpool perspective showing viewing / camera capture cone area

On 30 April 2009, we held a formal performance via the internet between the Sudley Theatre (LJMU) and Conwell Dance Theatre (Temple). Along with an introduction by a senior administrator from each institution, three student works and two faculty works were presented and then followed by an audience discussion. We chose also to include two faculty (staff) works (one from each institution), to provide another alternative venue of sharing choreography in an international context. The performance is among the first ever cross - Atlantic university - based telematic performances.

As the projects have been about pedagogic and artistic research involving dance students and web-cam technology, it has always been important to hear the voice of the students involved in the projects. They were given opportunities to share their evaluations through group discussions and formal assessment submissions. Their critically analytical reflections comments have been a valuable part of our project evaluation process and some of their comments are included below.

Project Evaluation Student Comments - Artistic

'It was interesting that we each tried to do something specific with the technology, as well as to consider the definitions of the space of both the live theatre and the screen, and [how we were able to layer] connections and collisions between the two.'(USA)

'It was not just about how the technology helped with the piece, but how the dancers became something else; for example, we became an interactive company of 7 on screen at the same time as being 3 or 4 live dancers interacting with varying numbers on the screen.' (UK)

'*One choreographer makes the best of the awkwardness of adjusting to the technology… by playing with the dancers going in and out of view.*' (USA)

'*The audience struggled to watch both live dancers and the screen sometimes.*' (USA)

Project Evaluation student Comments - Pedagogic

'*The project and the technology gave us the opportunity to share a journey in a personal relationship through dance collaboration. It was an overwhelming experience for being in contact with each other...It has been a nice experience to get to know you, and weird because I cannot touch you.*' (USA)

'*It feels strange to be part of a performance where we have built a relationship, yet cannot enjoy a post-performance social! Sharing the experience has enabled us to feel close.*' (UK)

'*It can be difficult for developing intimacy. The relationship between dancers is on display [in class]. The dancers have to try to build a connection with one another, talking in front of everyone, while watching their own image projected on a screen, and often hearing their voice in an echo.*' (USA)

General Student Comments

'*Many ideas and thoughts were lost in translation over email because we did not understand each other's intentions.*' (USA)

'*Once I had links to the sessions, I would watch them during the week and piece together the phrase work.*' (UK)

'*I received interesting and surprising feedback about our performance. Because of its structure, any technical difficulty that we experienced read to the audience as part of the piece.*' (USA)

'*This was a new way for me to create work and I think our performance reflected what we learned about each other and technology.*' (UK)

'*We dancers were resourceful, and willing to keep bending to the capabilities of the technology.*' (USA)

'*The strangeness of navigating mediated presence, the experience of connecting with another human being through a technological filter. You can't really see them, you definitely can't touch them, and you can't sense those subtle energetic shifts that allow dancers to sync-up their movement… At times, their movement feels purely mechanical to me. At the same time, certain human characteristics are amplified; one dancer leaves the microphone on and close to her mouth as she dances, and halfway through a lengthy piece, the sound of her breathing drowns out all other noise in the space.*' (USA)

'*This process has been an exercise in letting go, not only of the expectation of being able to work on any given day, but also of any previous ideas for the work because of communicating through this medium is so different than anything experienced before. I feel like I am grasping for someone's energy.* ' (USA)

'*I was becoming uncomfortably aware of her image at first, but then gradually settling into the experience of being larger than life.*' (USA)

The one choreographer who had the most prior experience of working with technology developed a very specific, cleanly geometric and gestural phrase. Yet even with this adjustment, he commented that teaching the phrase to the Liverpool counterparts 'took an inordinately long time'.

Inspirations for future work

Despite the challenges, each choreographer felt that he or she had gained something positive from this process. Some comments regarding these benefits included:

'*I had a connection with dancers half way around the world, and this project enabled me to be connected to a global sense of a dance community.*' (USA)

'*This opportunity was valuable career skill building, enabling me to have at least a familiarity with technology that is becoming increasingly important in all fields.*' (UK)

'*As a dancer and a kinaesthetically-oriented person, I still value personal contact over virtual. However, these kinds of virtual connections offer a complementary education and communication tool that enable connections and information that would not be shared otherwise.*' (USA)

Their suggestions for future projects included:

'Longer sessions might bring more humanity to the work. You would see the tiredness, the tension, readings that you get when you see a person. ' (USA)

'If I worked with this technology again, I would most likely narrow down the scope of my project from the beginning. I also think that it would be helpful to have one person in charge of setting the choreography and the other performers could contribute input and creative ideas.'(USA)

Future work and continued considerations include:

- Exploration with students' idea of the presentation of a new 'extended body' through the use of technology and screen projection possibilities.
- Education of audiences regarding viewing of intermedial/telematic performances shown in theatre settings.
- Further networking at institutional level for support and help with development of software and resources.
- Alternative software for audio/video (DVTS).
- Problems with cameras (NTSC/PAL).
- Problems with delay and noise/echo.
- The need for microphones for moving bodies.
- Continued awareness of the different time zones for scheduling.
- Development of dedicated technology space: designed to allow more productive use of time for researcher, teacher, and student.

Larger issues for Consideration:

- How does the use of technology affect pedagogy and the creative process?
- Can traditional expectations be applied to the appreciation of this type of work, or do media-aesthetics need to be developed?
- How can this work be more widely used?
- How can international collaborations be developed into the regular curriculum?
- Where do we go for other technology that might more effectively enable the development of the educational and artistic research?

The Next Exploration: Autumn 2009, Project 3

We plan to continue our explorations with a third project. It will:-

- Be restricted to semester 1, 2009-10.
- Have a more developed structure to make best use of the shortened time period.
- Be a staff-directed work.
- Experiment with assisting the education of audience, by bringing them into key points of the process and involving them in dialogue with the creators and performers.

Conclusion

This three-year project has allowed both students and faculty at two institutions of higher education to work in an international venue, across timelines, within different curricular structures. Each project has involved a change of student involvement, the positives of which have been to give opportunities to more students to work in a global learning network, but the limitations have been that in Project 2 we were not able to build upon what students had learned in Project 1, but rather had to start the process over again - although we had both practical and pedagogical knowledge to bring to Project 2 to help it to move forward more quickly. There were limitations as well as positive consequences as a result of bringing postgraduate students from one institution to work with undergraduate students from another. The former brought experience and maturity which countered-and at times created-some tension alongside the naivety and inexperience of the undergraduates. The latter brought much enthusiasm and energy, which brought a different dimension to the project. The undergraduates learned much from the postgraduates and there was collaboration between them, but the difference in their levels of education did bring issues to the project at times.

The fact that both projects had one main common denominator, the same two researcher/educators, was a tremendous positive factor as it supported both a continuing philosophical basis and an opportunity to develop methodology, process and goals. The use of this internet technology has enabled shared international research on a regular weekly basis, and consequently creates the potential to continue to develop the work and to consider future projects with published results that will add both to the theory and questioning of dance pedagogy, creative process and learning theory in higher education.

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