**6015 – Research & Practice for the Artist.**

**Research Proposal**

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**Title/Question:**

How can a group dance work be a representation of research into how technical training of a dancer can cause habitual movement vocabularies and their own individual way of moving.

**Abstract:**

This research proposal will delineate the aims and objectives that will carry myself through the research into how technical training of a dancer can cause habitual movement vocabularies and their own individual way of moving. The literature review will then identify significant themes about my focus giving a description into current and existent literature based on habitual movement and the causes of technical training to a professional dancer. The methodology will touch on a performative paradigm for the collection of qualitative data that will help myself create a group dance project informed and inspired by the research and the methodologies used throughout this process.

**Aims:**

* To create a group dance worked based on the research into how technical training of a dancer can create an individual movement vocabulary and how it causes habitual movement.
* To correlate and collect data that makes sense to my focus, data that enhances my focus and makes it reliable and valid.

**Objectives:**

* Create workshops that develop more knowledge and understanding of different dancer’s technical training and their habitual movements, focusing on how that informs my research.
* To successfully, create a group dance work that clearly represents my research in the level 6 platform on the 14th March 2018.
* To work collaboratively with the other participants during this process to ensure the research is practice-led and reaches its full potential.

**Literature Review:**

It is stated by Erica Stanton that: “a technique class is a ‘laboratory’, where problem solving and finding out ate emphasised, opportunities arise for students and teachers to work with their abilities and their limitations” (pg.86, 2011) to suggest that technique class is performed like a laboratory would inform the opinion that moving through your body is factual and it has to move a certain way to appear correct or amicable. It is believed by Rebecca Enghauser that “body listening for dance is simply to attend to the processes, functions, needs and intuitions of the body within dance” (2007, pg.33) she also discusses that it is a “concept that has been under emphasised in the dance technique class and should be revisited” (2007, pg.33) this is explaining that if we took more of a somatic approach into most dance technique classes we wouldn’t have an established view on what dance technique should look like, I believe that the somatic approach is a clear representation of how it is possible to broaden a dancers movement vocabulary and for less habits to be maintained. It is explained by Cathie Caraker that: “Perception is a constant, cyclic process of sensing, perceiving and acting through which we learn” (Caraker, n.d.) suggesting that how we as dancers view other people’s movement is a perception and we may view peoples movement vocabulary as habitual when repeating the same movements, but to the dancer they are unaware of what the body is creating in the space. Caraker also states that we use our senses to focus on how we perceive information, if we took more concentration into our senses whilst moving, it is less likely our movement becomes habitual. “Without this active focusing, our perceptions remain poorly organized. And our responses are more likely to be unconscious and habitual, our choices limited” (ibid). During the process of collecting research into this focus, I aim to work with somatic approaches in my rehearsals to test if the participant’s movement changes and evolves without being in a set technique based setting, such as only working with Cunningham, Graham, Limóne… Techniques that require set exercise’s to be executed correctly.

Akram Khan recently worked with the English National Ballet, to create a new version of the classical work ‘Giselle’, he mentioned in a video on the creative process, how difficult it was to work with classically trained dancers compared to his creative style and the visions he possessed throughout. Isabell Brouwers, the artist of the company mentions that “it is a completely different movement vocabulary to us, he has a fusion of classical Indian and contemporary dance … It is has been extremely intense mentally and physically” (Akram Khan’s Giselle: The Creative Process | English National Ballet -Youtube, 2016). This suggests that dancers that are training classically within the ballet style have their own specific way of moving and if an artist tries to challenge that it becomes a strain on their mental capacity to focus on moving in a way their bodies aren’t used to as well as it also being physically draining. During my research that will be practice-led I, as the researcher would like to focus on this in more depth to challenge my participants with moving how their fellow participants transpose in the space; investigating if this also has the same effect and why from their own personal experience and opinions. Tamara Rojo who is the lead principal and artist director for the English national ballet states that they need “to be open to artists … looking at the classical repertoire, reinterpret it, reinvigorate it and give chances to the artists of today to mould it into something surprising.” (Akram Khan’s Giselle: The Creative Process | English National Ballet -YouTube, 2016). This connects with my focus as I want to re-invent the way the participants move by stepping out of their comfort zone, moulding and manipulating their bodies into new ways of moving, which will surprise myself and the other dancers involved; putting the research to the test and into practice.

Thomas Fuchs discusses that the procedural memory does not “represent the past, but re-enacts through the body’s present performance.” (2003, p. 11). This states that dancers habitual movements can be picked up through subconscious choices to move a certain way and it becomes a reoccurrence to the mind, our body attract habits from a young age, such as walking. Walking is something that we are taught to do at the early stages of our lives and as you get older you can do this without thinking. “What we once had acquired as skills, habits, and experience have become what we can do today; hence, body memory is our lived past” (2003, p. 11) dancers register with technique training as a skill, once you begin to put these skills into practice and your ability strengthens, it becomes a part of your procedural memory and you move the body in the way your body has been technically programmed without thinking about what you are doing.

Due to most techniques becoming habitual to a dancers subconscious mind, I aim to work with a more somatic approach to my rehearsals, working closely with improvisation. Peggy Swartz describes improvisation to have led her to “look at it as a dance form that has an integrity and coherence that is as important to the development of dancers as the more traditional study of modern dance.” (pg.42, 2013) again, going against the frame of a technical dancers ‘procedural’ memory, to develop a wider range of skills to enable them to move their bodies in a way they are not used to and out of their comfort zone.

**Methodology:**

During the process of this study, I will be working in a performative paradigm.

*the paradigm is a mode of inquiry to which we are drawn to and use to frame our understanding of reality of our points of view that influence the ways we construct meaning (Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999).*

Within the framework of a performative paradigm, I will be aiming to use qualitative research to gather inquiries on my evidence and focus’. Qualitative research will allow me to appreciate the value of learning through doing, rather than using research and methods that is setting stone therefore this determines that my findings will be practice-lead: this is described as a type of “ongoing and persistent practice that enables practitioners to initiate and then pursue their research through practice” (Efrosini Protopapa, 2011, p.104) This enables me to use a starting point from my research and to become more experimental in the space, this being phenomenal to the participants in the process, Aiming to interact with my participants and the movement that evolves noticing the emergent parts of the practice and accepting the things that don’t necessarily voice the focus or the direction that the process is leading into. “exploration, trial and error, improvisation and such acts as defining, refining ... and re-shaping that are familiar to us dance makers are the fundamental process of the researcher” (Hanstein pg. 24) Which for myself; working in a practice-led outlook will justify this. There are multifarious ways to carry out practice-led research in an artistic and dance-based setting that can enable me to verify the queries I have put in place for my chosen research focus, the methods I have chosen will allow me to perform and create the sessions in a way that does not contradict my framework for the process of my focal point.

One of the methods I have chosen is reflective writing within a journal, as my mode of inquiry is practice-led and metacognitive, I will be researching whilst doing; this will require myself to keep track of the process by reflecting on the experience in hand, describing what does contribute to my aims and what does not. Reflective practice challenges myself as the researcher to investigate my data and knowledge I have collected in the process and to recognise that my knowledge is always something to be researched into a deeper context to make the information rich and more accurate to my findings. Tembrioti &Tsangaridou states: “They reflect on themselves, including their assumptions and their theories of action of practice, and take action grounded in self-awareness”. (2013, pg. 5) … taking this into consideration; I will also require my dancers to take notes during the rehearsals to distinguish what works from their own findings, which has stemmed from the given tasks and methods from myself allowing them collect data in the space.

In relation to collecting information and valid data from my dancers, the second methodology will be focus groups, this way of collecting knowledge from my dancers will be most sufficient. As Morgan (1997) states that it is a gathering of a group of participants to discuss a certain issue that may be a concern or that could enrich and validate the strategy used in the space for your findings that would be less accessible without the communication within the group. At the end of each rehearsal, I will gather my dancers to stimulate a conversation between them and myself giving a recollection of the production that has taken place in the space. This can only make the process develop and become embellished, as the discussions will give myself as the researcher more of an insight into what works and what calculates my aims substantially and effectively. “Arguments in the group can reveal people's underlying beliefs. Disagreement offer the opportunity for the participants to review their perspectives or to consider the reasons for holding such perspectives.” (Liamputtong, 2011, pg.32) As a researcher, I have to acknowledge that not every task I set may go to plan, and whilst in the midst of a constructive argument with the participants I can discover their beliefs into their own technical training and why they move differently to others. This makes the process for themselves more personal and this will initiate my findings. In addition to this, I would want the participants to be comfortable with each other discussing their own beliefs and opinions even if it does differ from others and myself in the discussion; Liamputtong (2011) states that it is crucial for the participants to bestow similar lived-experiences which provides comfort to the participants and enhances more of a fluid discussion. This is known as a ‘homogenous’ group of people in a focus group.

During these discussions, this will give me an opportunity to review and discuss any of the other methods I have chosen to carry out my research, for example video documentation.

In addition to the methods I have already discussed the final form of methodology will be the use of video feedback and documentation, evaluating one’s self and the sessions the dancers partake in, again finding out what contributes to our findings and what does not. “Assimilation provides the opportunity for the researcher to become more kinaesthetically perceptive to nuances of the movement and how they might feel and what they might mean to the dancers”. (fraleigh & hanstein pg.297). As the researcher, there could be a certain moment in the session that I would like to explain phenomenally to whether the task has worked or if something clearly is not connecting to the participants. As the research is going to be practice-led, methods like this are crucial into the data being reliable and worthy to use. Hepplewhite (2014) states that a various stage process of conversations can be created by analysing video recordings of a session, stimulating a reflective dialogue about their technical skills within dance which can reveal their own individual understandings of the research. Parikh, Janson and Singleton state (2011) also that video documentation helps the researcher not miss out anything in a session that may be over looked or something that may not have been captured if there was not a camera recording live footage of the session. As the sessions are all going to be practice-led it may hinder my ‘ability to communicate my thought and feelings on paper’ as well as lead a session. Any vital moments that have been recorded live on camera can be an initiation of a discussion in our focus groups and also a way of writing down thoughts and feelings of myself and the participants in my reflective journal; making the data collection more reliable and valid.

**Limitations:**

* Risk of dancers becoming injured due to my visions for the choreography to be tedious and technical.
* High risk of myself as the choreographer to have a creative block, this will cause the process being un able to flow, leaving the participants in a confused state of mind on how their role in the process will go and what they are going to do next.
* Video documentation may be a hindrance to the project as it can cause the dancers to self-evaluate themselves, which may hold them back restricting them to indulge into the research
* Focus groups may affect the way a conversation can lead as there may be a participant that is more outspoken than others, which may knock a person’s confidence to talk and express their opinions on the research.

**Research Timetable**

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| **Week Commencing** | **Activity** |
| 14th November 2017 | **First tutorial:** discuss ideas and creative strategies. |
| 15th December 2017 | Two copies of my research proposal to be handed into the library. |
| 16th January 2018 | Commencing the practical sessions, introduce my ideas for the focus to the participants, ask them to give a brief background into their training. |
| 23rd January 2018 | Second rehearsal: delve more into the participant’s backgrounds in more detail and ask them if they can explain why or how they move a certain way. Improvisation task. |
| 30th January 2018 | Merge together the dancer’s movement vocabularies and begin to question their ability to move like their peers. |
| 5th February 2018 | **Tutorial 2:** show any progression into my project and show research that supports that. |
| 10th February 2018 | Write reflectively about any video documentation viewed, question what is working and what isn’t. |
| 13th February 2018 | Begin to create some choreography based on the dancers movement vocabulary and their abilities to imitate etc. |
| 20th February 2018 | Ensemble a focus group to discuss what the process is like for the dancers attempting to embody somebody else’s movement vocab. |
| 27th February 2018 | Begin to construct the choreography into sections, ready for tutorial 3. |
| 5th march 2018 | **Tutorial 3:** the work will be in its final stages, making sure there can be room for improvement by looking at reflective journal kept throughout process, and maintaining a focus group also. |
| 6th march 2018 | Finalise the work by using the methodologies chosen to improve and bring the piece to completion. |
| 14th march 2018 | **Dissertation Platform.** Level 6 work will be shown to an audience, then to be marked by tutors. |
| May 2018 | Critical evaluative assessment to be handed in. two copies submitted via the library. |

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* Morgan, D. (2009). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. [u.a.]: Sage Publ.

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