

Teaching Methodology and Emergency Transitions into Virtual Environments - Language, Dance, Music and Media Education¹

Abstract: This paper reflects on the issues in teaching methodology and the emergency transitions into virtual environments due to the pandemic crisis and mandated quarantine experiences from March 2020. Themes of innovation, interaction, motivation, digital pedagogies - teaching methods, use of digital/digitalised content (media, language, music, audio, visual arts), classroom culture, possibilities for virtual mobility, are all discussed in relation to the potential future(s) for education in a world affected by the pandemic. In conclusion, several areas of educational response are highlighted with potential guidance in envisioning future educational processes.

Keywords: digital pedagogies, emergency remote teaching, music, teaching methodology, virtual learning environments.

Introduction

“At the start of this year it was hard to imagine that the whole world would be experiencing the dramatic changes that have now come to be called ‘the new normal’” (Kuchah Kuchah, 2020)

In the period of worldwide public health emergency, with mandated quarantine for working and educational experiences (in the year 2020), the majority of educational institutions in the world have faced the forced emergency lockdown and migration into the digital, online or virtual learning and teaching environments. In addition, many teachers and learners were displaced out of academic institutions worldwide, migrating to their home countries or changing their physical locations due to the worldwide closure of borders and transport lines. The mandated social distancing measures, travel restrictions and prohibitions of large gatherings of people in indoor and outdoor, has greatly affected many working and educational sectors, especially sectors of the arts (music, opera, ballet, dance, theatre), cultural and creative industries (Flew & Kirkwood, 2020).

Recalling on the definition from three decades ago, given by Ursula Franklin in the book “The Real World of Technology” (1990), technology should be regarded as “a *practice*, or a *system* that involves organisation, procedures, symbols, new words, equations, and most of all, a *mind set*” (Weiss, 2006: 2). One of the possible obstacle to some of the educational institutions may have been in this health crisis situation, that the technology was regarded as “an important tool” for content delivery. During the emergency school closures, governments or educational councils of many countries in Europe and the world developed rapid response guidance notes for teacher volunteers and television filming teams on developing broadcast schedules and video lessons for different subjects and levels of studying, all by using national or educational television programming through “TV Schools” daily broadcasts and on-demand watching through platforms. Therefore, the teaching approach of instructivism, applied throughout the years and decades, had the opportunity to be applied again in the structured schedule synchronous or asynchronous online classroom, with the instructor-centred lessons. Many subjects such as Languages, Art, Music and the Digital or Media Literacy all involve practical work, and the abrupt transition to distance learning clearly affected the

¹ The paper and its more coherent passages have not been published and have not been submitted for publication in another journal, proceeding or monograph.

ability of many schools to cover these practical elements for their arts activities to still be a collective pursuit in an online environment.

In the context of higher education, findings from the research study of the emergency online migration in UK universities, by Watermeyer, Crick, Knight & Goodall (2020), signpost the migration to online teaching and learning “as a major challenge for student recruitment, market sustainability, an academic labour-market, and local economies”, furthermore, from the perspective of teachers, this forced migration “is engendering significant dysfunctionality and disturbance to their pedagogical roles and their personal lives”.

The Must Use of Digital/Digitalised Content in Teaching and Learning (media, language, music, audio, visual arts)

As the majority of overall world workforce was temporarily moved to online working environments, the lives of classical musicians, according to Parsons (2020), although being very turbulent with great uncertainty for the future work and performances in live events, brought intensified innovation and engagement from ensembles in a variety of approaches, such as, live premieres on social media, stream broadcasts of pre-recorded concerts before the pandemic, virtual concert broadcasts given by solo musicians in isolation, or online concerts and masterclasses recorded in public cultural spaces during intensive measures of social distancing. In these unprecedented times, all these activities were with the aim of providing musicians with work and keeping as much of the elements of performance, while fulfilling the needs of audiences. In the context of music industry, Brunt and Nelligan (2020) identified four key narratives (acknowledging grief and loss, supporting creativity and well-being, adapting to the new normal and envisaging a post-pandemic future) communicated in the media and by musicians through social media that “point to the Australian media’s disparate communication of the serious issues facing the music industry during the pandemic”.

From the perspective of languages Piller, Zhang & Li (2020) noted that, as the global public communication is usually conducted through a small number of the world’s languages, the global communication structure and the global dissemination of knowledge in place to deal with such a global emergency replicates this linguistic hierarchy”, where English predominates, as “the undisputed global lingua franca”, the language of world media, followed by other world languages (Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, German, Hindi, and Portuguese). In addition, this research was based only on the information and research published in English language. In terms of language education, specifically English language teaching and learning, there is a thirty years of history of technology implementation. In the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching in Indonesia during this health emergency crisis in 2020, Fansury & Rahman (2020) findings show that the use of authentic digital content made by teachers and available on the internet and social media about the pandemic, can increase student motivation in learning, “because the material provided has been designed to evoke students’ interest”.

Creative Arts discipline such as music, dance and creative writing, experienced a major turbulent and challenging transfer to online teaching and learning, as “human-to-human interaction is essential in delivery of content”(Kaur & Bhatt, 2020: 41). As music art is not primarily something material (a thing or a collection of things), but an activity in which people engage in the act of musicking (singing, playing or performing music, improvising or creating and performing music, conducting groups of musicians, etc.), musicians and music educators needed to “adapt” to this emergency situation, and make “a shift in content, modes, outcomes and purposes of education offered”

through school lessons (Daubney & Fautley, 2020: 107). Furthermore, the spread of the health problem situation and the mandated quarantine measures, influenced the overall engagement of artists in all disciplines, in searching for or creating new “spaces” for their practice, research, communication, education, interaction and performance in a virtual environment. An example of such creative interaction is the online platform “Quarantine Opera” founded as an initiative of “connecting classical freelance musicians in quarantine across the globe to create full-orchestral, choral and solo ensemble productions of well-known opera pieces”. This project initiative started independently, later was supported through donations and grants for creating new solutions for artistic activities during the pandemic lockdown. During the period of five months of activities, the result is a playlist of four “instruction and play along videos” and a global opera ensemble performing three arias, one “question and answer session” and one “Quarantine Opera Quiz” testing the participants knowledge in opera storylines, characters, famous tunes, etc.

The world known opera houses and theatres have broadcasted concerts, for example, the Metropolitan Opera “At-Home Gala”, but also opened up their exclusive video archives to the online audience through daily, weekly or scheduled broadcasts through their websites or on social media platforms. The “Metropolitan Opera” continued their daily broadcasts, now streaming the “Nightly Opera Streams Week 28”, on September 21st, 2020. In total, up to now almost 200 opera livestream concert performances (with the duration between two to four hours of video material daily). Furthermore, The Metropolitan Opera, committed to deepening student experiences with opera through access to our world-class productions, apart from the “HD Live in Schools” initiative broadcasts, offered the “2020 Met Opera Global Summer Camp” (recording available on YouTube and Facebook), and weekly opera streams of specially selected operas for students (free of charge), with additional remote learning materials from their extensive educational library online. Furthermore, the Royal Opera House (ROH) London, apart from streaming pre-recorded performances, has published five hourly masterclasses by The Royal Opera's Jette Parker Young Artists being coached through key pieces of repertory by Music Director Antonio Pappano. Also, the ROH created a “Learning Platform” with the aim of bringing the world of opera, ballet and theatrecraft into the lives of children of school age and people of all age (radio and online cinema broadcasts, weekly summer activities for in home singing, dancing and theatrecraft, free teaching lesson plans, teacher professional development opportunities, etc.).

Through the use of social media site YouTube, Mariinsky Theatre provided the audience and professional musicians and dancers with full performances of opera and ballet, concerts with orchestra, choir concerts, and live ballet rehearsal classes. On their YouTube channel, the English National Ballet dedicated a series of video classes for professional ballet dancers, youth ballet classes (11-16 years), and other groups of dancers such as beginners or limited-mobility dancers. In addition, guided by the idea “From Our House to Your House”, many opera and theatre houses through their channels on YouTube regularly posted great musical works and full concert performance with the aims of promoting arts - Opera di Roma, Teatro Colón, Sydney Opera House, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Teatro La Fenice, Bolshoi Theatre, Teatro Regio Torino, Teatro San Carlo, and locally from Serbia: NOMUS Festival, and time limited livestreams by Serbian National Theatre from Novi Sad and National Theatre, Belgrade.

If and in what way have teachers, educators and professors used these artistic offerings in the digital environments and what effect it had on learning, student engagement, motivation, interaction and social gathering and cultural needs during this pandemic crisis? The future educational research will need to focus on examining the used digital content, teaching methods, adapted emergency

curriculums, lesson preparation, student engagement, online assessment in all the educational context and levels.

Towards Digital Pedagogies - Teaching Methods

As Kaur & Bhatt noticed (2020: 41), emergency migration to remote teaching brought the new roles of the teacher, where “the faceless teacher is becoming the new normal” - teachers without the “physical proximity with students, struggle to re-establish their role from a primary input provider to a facilitator of learning”. Additionally, the authors recognised the issues of “mental block among teachers in accepting this new reality” and “lack of interest in exploring and implementation of technology”, while from the students’ perspective, the issues of “lack of discipline” and “lack of autonomous learning skills to effectively manage their study plans” or learning goals, emerged.

Avgerinou & Moros (2020) reported on the designing and implementation of a new approach, during the pandemic, for teaching and learning approximately 400 students within grades Junior Kindergarten and 5th Grade (ages 3 - 11) at the International School (Elementary School at the American Community Schools (ACS) Athens, Greece). The 5-Phase Process included teaching in a new, “virtual learning setting”. In brief, the five phases included: 1) the implementation stage of asynchronous virtual teaching (greeting videos, powerpoints, daily learning objectives in the core subjects, worksheets, links to interactive games and educational sites); 2) synchronous learning (Moodle’s synchronous interaction feature, smaller groups with “mid-week Screen Free day”), 3) live sessions or and pre-recorded sessions - “Virtual Re-teaching Sessions (VR Sessions), ESL conversational courses, Book Clubs, Technology hours, Student Council Club time, Early Childhood language courses & Mind, Body, Soul courses” - physical exercises for parents and their children; 4) assessment, grading and reporting; and 5) collecting reflections from all constituents. The implications of this study were that by replicating this approach in similar teaching and learning contexts institutions “could provide students, faculty, parents with the necessary guidelines, expectations and goals that could be achieved by all, thus blanketing the community with a sense of purpose, security and calmness” (Avgerinou & Moros, 2020: 585/586). However, this report paper lacks more specific information about the lessons in Arts during this remote learning period.

From the context of music education in UK, the online curriculum that was put in effect from after the Easter holidays in 2020, “included very little by way of music”, therefore, other cultural organisations managed to provide a wealth of music resources into the online space to be used for educational purposes, where “the choice of activities includes all the elements of the English National Curriculum for music, composing, listening and performing”.

From the international tertiary dance education context, dance as “deeply tied to bodily and collective practice and performance”, Heyang & Martin (2020: 9) have noticed that teachers had no alternative, and needed to start online dance teaching through different platforms (QQ groups, WeChat groups, Tencent meetings, Superstar), through “adapting and gradually accepting this online teaching mode as a form of interaction”.

“With dance being an activity deeply connected to relationships with others, while developing community and a sense of belonging, it is vital to consider how a sense of belonging in an online dance community might be fostered, and how an online to in-real-life community might be fluid within our tertiary dance education practices.” (Heyang & Martin, 2020: 10).

The major problem identified in dance education online was that technology cannot replace “the physical aspect of dance training”, dance class or performance, and in a time of a global overload of technological engagement, it may become “overwhelming” for dancers Heyang & Martin (2020: 11). However, technology, inevitably, is an important tool for international dance education, in terms of lesson, performance and concert events, helping to connect the teachers, learners and audiences internationally.

The innovative actions by teachers have yet to be discovered and recognised in the simultaneously appearing multi-streams of sharing materials and classroom stories, online public school project and events on the local, national and international level, will continue to emerge with the ever-evolving transformation of educational realities between physical, hybrid and remote teaching and learning. The positive effect of this emergency remote teaching was that “the considerable expertise of the various organisations, as well as the labours of individual musicians and teachers has, revealed how broad an offer there can be for music education” (Daubney & Fautley, 2020: 111).

In 2020, the initiative of composer and conductor Eric Whitacre, the “Virtual Choir 6: Sing Gently”, has gathered 17,572 singers from 129 countries. The adaptation of “the virtual choir” methodology of virtual ensemble creation and performance first experimented by Eric Whitacre in 2009, as “a global phenomenon, creating a user-generated choir that brings together singers from around the world”, has been adopted by world renowned musicians and professional ensembles, but also by local schools, such as the Music School “Isidor Bajić” primary music school orchestra “Bajić Young String Players”².

After the three weeks implementation of physical distancing measures in this new school and academic year 2020/2021, the music and arts education on general and professional level, face a new challenge of strictly planning every lesson activity, respecting the measures of limiting the number of students or people by square meter of the room for certain activities. Now many schools have to apply the hybrid model of teaching, focusing on the main subjects though in-person with smaller groups and in shorter periods of time, with online teaching of group subjects. The large ensemble classes are still largely affected by the social distancing measure, and the measures of obligatory face masks during lessons.

Final remarks

One of the possibly attainable predictions for future education is that “the virtual learning and the integration of the Internet in learning and teaching should become the norm in most institutions worldwide” (Kaur & Bhatt, 2020: 41). Furthermore, in the future teachers and educators will experience the transformation of their *role*, *function* and *expectations* in teaching. Possibly, “the access to information would no longer be the primary concern”, and the next greatest challenge for teachers would be to equip themselves with “interpersonal skills” and “keep the students engaged, interested and invested in their education”, highlighting the importance of lifelong learning (Kaur & Bhatt, 2020: 42).

After the majority of educational institutions closed down in March 2020, and teachers were forced to move the learning, teaching and professional development activities online, such as PD events and conferences. Professional networks on social media groups and online communities were the main support for needed discussions on online learning environments, development and exchange of ideas.

² “Bajić Young String Players” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-EsDJ5MQwg>

It will take many months and years of study research, analysis, discussion and contemplation to understand how and why the year of 2020 brought changes in society and education internationally. Therefore, it is not possible to firmly state any conclusions about the future of education at this stage. In the “faceless teaching and learning environments”, where face-to-face interaction is largely reduced or diminished, on non-existing, the main challenge of online or remote distant teaching will probably include addressing the emotional and psychological needs of both learners and teachers (specifically physical and mental health). Teachers will need to develop skills how to effectively “build on students’ emotional well-being, alongside academic development” in remote/distant or online learning environments (Kaur & Bhatt, 2020: 43), teachers “will need to attend to the social before they can address the educational, in many instances”(Daubney & Fautley, 2020: 112). To conclude, we hope that the education through languages and arts, and arts education in music, dance, theatre, literature, multimedia, will offers a way forward for to all the other educational institutions and communities to work together and make progress, and that the experiences of the current crisis and changes will help to appreciate more the important role of the arts in lives of children, young and adult people.

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Conflict of interest statement

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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