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Weaving Presences, Unravelling Normal

Affirming Diverse Ways of Being in Dance Pedagogy

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MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMME IN DANCE PEDAGOGY

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This is an art-pedagogical thesis that is a continuation of a process of artistic-pedagogical practice as inquiry grounded in my work in Winter 2019-2020 at a vocational special education training program in contemporary dance, where I co-taught with fellow Dance Pedagogy MA student Mercedes Balarezo. Through this process, I came to clarify that I was focusing on what reflections, perspectives, and/or questions emerged when I aimed to artistically-pedagogically explore states of presence in a way that enabled students to be as they are.

I was and am not aiming to somehow describe or phenomenologically research the students' experiences or states of presence, but rather to see what reflections, challenges, possibilities, etc. came from a pedagogical process in which my intention was for the students to do that first-person exploration in a way that didn't demand a certain way of being. I also do not want to generalize anything within this project to any sort of defined populations. My goal is rather to use the intertwining of mine and the students' reflections with existing discourse to open further conversation amongst dance pedagogues. I will discuss elements around exploration, the unknown, reflective practices, and visibility.

I am working within a larger context of disability studies, neurodiversity, and mad studies, as well as existing developments and work around disability and/in dance, not in order to make any claims about disability (which is already something that escapes definition) and dance, but rather to bring to the surface questions or approaches that I believe are important to dance pedagogy in many contexts.

ENTER KEYWORDS HERE

Dance pedagogy; dance education; co-teaching; disability and dance; neurodiversity; mad studies; disability studies; practice as research; special education; vocational dance training; dance improvisation; reflective practice

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1. INTRODUCTION

> *"lying down on the floor i noticed sensing the group and its shared rhythm through the vibrations carried by the wood floor, fastness and tempo through the airflow passing me. Juicy were the moments of risks being taken. [they] probably gave everyone a lot of new information both of what had already happened and the chances and possibilities the future has to hold. Laughter in the midst of concentration was no longer separate, something that would have been outside of a task or breaking a situation. it had become a part of the situation, the setting, just as much as walking or stopping. it was sound waves, motion, atmosphere, information and knowledge of the space. it was pleasant and significant, but only just. only and just the way it felt adecuate [sic] and right. not as something jumping out of somebody, but as something within, happening, having been made possible, as something that occurs somewhere."*

This quote came from a student's journal during a process of artistic-pedagogical practice as inquiry based in co-teaching with fellow Dance Pedagogy MA student Mercedes Balarezo at a vocational special education training program in contemporary dance. Through this process, I came to clarify that I was focusing on what reflections, perspectives, and/or questions emerged when I aimed to artistically-pedagogically explore states of presence in a way that enabled students to be as they are. I was and am not aiming to somehow describe or phenomenologically research the students' experiences or states of presence, but rather to see what reflections, challenges, possibilities, etc. came from a pedagogical process in which my intention was for the students to do that first-person exploration in a way that didn't demand a certain way of being. I also do not want to generalize anything within this project to any sort of defined populations. My goal is rather to use the intertwining of mine and the students' reflections with existing discourse to open further conversation amongst dance pedagogues.

Jaakonaho and Junttila (2019, 26) took a point of view that I share, wherein they did not want to "objectify or target a group that is labelled as disabled" but rather engage in the discourse in a way that "can inform our understanding of this vulnerability and relationality as a way to destabilize dominant and normative notions of subjectivity and agency" (6). I am working within a larger context of disability studies, neurodiversity, and mad studies, not in order to make any claims about disability (which is already something that escapes definition) and dance, but rather to bring to the surface questions or approaches that I believe are important to dance pedagogy in many contexts.

2. BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I will sketch out a selective understanding of how I came to this particular area of inquiry, and why I believe it has significance to a larger dance pedagogy context. To do so, I will first explain how I came to want to explore states of presence and how I understand what that means. I will then address how I will relate to specific ideas from disability studies and neurodivergence discourse, as well as this type of work's relevance in the context of dance practices and disability. In the final section of the chapter, I will describe the situation in which this work took place and some important factors around the institutional context of the practice.

2.1. States of Presence

Throughout the past years, I have been approaching from various angles questions such as: How are we asked to be present? How do we experience our self or selves (which is already a complex phenomenon) in embodied practice? Why is this so fascinating to me and how does that come in to artistic-pedagogical work? The roots of my interest in this area are in experiences I had both as student and teacher of somatics, working with dance improvisation and instant composition, and in my secondary and post-secondary theatre training. The depth and complexity of these experiences led me to investigate literature around embodiment, including ideas around 'embodied cognition', a term which is attributed to Francisco Varela, and was described by Baston and Wilson (2014, xiv) as "a relatively new science of human experience and interaction…[that] partakes of the phenomenological and the neurological. This neuro-phenomenological perspective embraces all aspects of autonomous, self-regulatory control within artistic practice and performance." My initial relation to this massive field was a jumble of thoughts about the idea of self and action, how we are aware or conscious of ourselves and our bodies, and if and when those are seen as separate or one and the same. I was fascinated by these phenomena that are sometimes so taken for granted and are so deeply intertwined in everything we do and are. As I have continued with this work, I have travelled away from getting into the scientific concepts within or around 'embodied cognition', and I have instead taken it as a jumping off point for inquiry.

Although these questions point towards a phenomenological approach, I have taken them as sparks for further types of exploration, and as a way to engage with the connection I instinctively felt between the micro-scale internal connecting work I did in somatic practices, the sometimes magical, in-between heightened presence I felt while doing dance improvisation, and my theatre training around focus, intention, and action

all directed not only outwards but *towards* a specific target. I began to conceptualize that each embodied artistic process resulted in or had within it an individual experience of a certain way of being present, with elements such as those Gallagher (2005, 2-17) referred to as the "perceptual field", "contents of conscious awareness", and "an explicit or implicit awareness of the body". I started to think and practically work with how we could explore these *states of presence* (as I will call them) within movement classes. My motivation was also linked with a desire to not prioritize a certain way of embodied being over others, and exploring what I could do as an artist-pedagogue to allow participants to explore these states of presence and awareness in their own ways while finding and following their own needs or interests.

These contemplations were connected to questioning I was doing around a certain construction of "Somatics", or perhaps just my own limited understanding of what that could be. Somatic work is broad ranging, and although it is common in dance contexts, it has roots in and continues to be used in therapeutic contexts. In general, I understand somatic practices as those that stem from the ideas that "attending consciously to these micro-movements and micro-processes fosters bodymind integration" and that "non-conscious, automatic processes of self-regulation can surface more readily in an atmosphere free of the usual trappings of habitual patterns of effort" (Batson and Wilson 2014, 5-6). My own higher education dance training in the United States followed the long-growing pattern of somatic work being integrated within contemporary vocational dance training especially in university settings. What we usually think of as somatic practices ask us to enter a specific state of presence in which we are asked to have a heightened consciousness of internal sensations. However, due to a struggle pedagogically and in personal experience with this emphasis on the value of what I felt was a limited state, I wanted to look at embodied states of presence more broadly, wherein this highly internally conscious state is only one option or entry point, or as Green (2007, 87) suggested, "be reflexive about how somatics itself can dominate a curriculum and block out other ways of knowing."

This is certainly not to say we should not do these internal or more typical somatic practices, or that they don't have radical and transformational potential, especially when engaged in a way that takes in to account the many contexts that shape our bodies and embodied lives (Green 2015a). Instead, I want to take the growing practice and discourse around these various somatic experiences towards questions about what is valued, and how we approach bodies and dance education on an epistemological and social level, and the paradigms that are set up or are available to us as dance educators

around how ‘embodiment’ works and what is necessary to have a certain depth of experience.

My first targeted inquiry into these thoughts was through a course I led for students from the University of the Arts Fine Arts Academy in Helsinki as part of my Teaching Practice 1. In that course, I worked on exploring different practices to develop embodied connection while examining if “it was possible for me to not suggest or demand a specific way of being embodied, but rather allow whatever emerged in the moment to be enough, and to be what it was” (Nowack 2019). Coming out of that process, I wanted to continue questioning from the same sort of intentions while hopefully clarifying some parts of my approach. In my reflection on the process, I was asking questions such as:

> “Can I maintain elements of this open approach when using these sorts of practices in a performance process? What does aiming towards performance change, and what can we let go of? I also want to investigate what it would reveal to adapt these practices to different types of groups from different backgrounds and experiences…How can I find more security within myself, and my pedagogy, in a way that makes me more open to the unexpected?” (Nowack 2019).

It was from that process, and some of these questions I took from it, that this current inquiry progressed. Entering this process, I found myself wanting to clarify what it was I wanted to have students explore. I also wanted to provide more specificity than I perceived from ‘embodied’ or ‘embodiment’ due to some confusion or lack of clarity in those terms (Batson and Wilson 2014, 74). However, I also felt that every time I tried to articulate my interests, I faced the stumbling block of how ingrained the separation of *body* and *mind* is in the language easily available to me. Over time, I realized that I wanted to zoom in on how I could pedagogically facilitate exploration of how we are asked to be aware, to direct or shape our focus or attention, and what those things even mean and how they can be highly individual rather than prescriptive. I was inspired by the work of Batson and Wilson (2014, 103) who drew from conversations between dancemaking and cognitive science to discuss the importance of attention and some possible ways to investigate it, especially since it is something that has not been explored as much as a more narrow somatic approach. I connected to what Batson and Wilson (2014, 103) described regarding attention as “tethered to moment-to-moment changes within bodily- and contextual dynamics. Functioning as a kind of *attunement*, attention is critical to artistic communication and performance”. As such, although I am still grappling with the use of the word *presence*, in this case I use it to mean how we

are in a given moment within ourselves and/or the surrounding environment, although even there the ideas of self or environment could be collapsed.

2.2. Challenging Normal

Grounded in a place of wanting to question how I could facilitate explorations of states of presence in a way that affirmed numerous ways of being, I found a strong connection to my understanding of some of the discourse around neurodiversity or neurodivergence and its link to disability studies. Although this discourse around neurodiversity and disability did at times feel especially relevant and necessary to discuss due to the special education context of this particular pedagogical process, it is not something that is only present because of that context, but rather supports the way I want to approach pedagogy in general. Thus, in this section, I will explain certain ideas that I believe can support and challenge artistic pedagogical practices which strive to be open to all students' ways of experiencing, while also providing a background for further discussion of the specific context in which this work was done.

Reflecting on my engagement with 'embodied cognition' and ways of interacting with input and the world, I felt it important to engage with the neurodiversity movement's idea that there is a diversity of cognition or "neurocognitive functioning" wherein difference/deviation from the social ideal or constructed norm of cognition ("neurotypicality") are not something to be fixed or pushed away; we are encouraged to question and challenge the dominance of certain ways of processing and responding (Strand 2017). I found relevant here Kuppers' (2014, 44) introduction of "enmindment" which she used "to draw attention to the non-naturalness of how we come to be enminded, or 'have a mind'…And there are many different states of enmindedness, too, not just one 'right' way." As we work pedagogically to affirm what each student brings, it can be easy to focus on physical capacity, and this introduction of "enmindment" could support an approach that also takes into account diversities of perception as part of embracing all abilities.

Engaging with this influence from neurodiversity discourse felt especially relevant due to some of the authors I had been inspired by using "pathology" or "pathologies" to talk about differences from conventional embodiment or functioning, such as Gallagher (2005; many instances) and Sheets-Johnstone (2016, xvii). I found here a heightened awareness of how easy it is, when writing about embodiment and cognition, to limit what it means to be *human*. As Manning and Massumi (2013, 74) brought up, "What is it we really mean, when we say human? According to autism activist Amanda Baggs, we certainly don't mean 'autistic.' We mean neurotypical". It is important to note here

that although the neurodiversity movement originated within and is still closely tied to autism and autistic identities, it includes a much broader range of people and experiences, with boundaries that change depending on who is defining them (Strand 2017). So, how can we within dance pedagogy, especially those of us who approach that pedagogy from a place of openness and a desire to push against dominant, harmful, social forces, engage more with the neurodiversity movement as something that "emphasizes the multiplicity of modes of existence" (Manning and Massumi 2013, 81)?

Regarding the broader, unwieldy concept of *disability*, I am not attempting to comprehensively describe the widely diverse and developing approaches within the area, nor define what it is or means, or who is or isn't disabled. Instead, I want to focus on drawing inspiration from the work within the field of disability studies that centers on the construction of the normal. McRuer (2002, 91) described how "A critique of normalcy has similarly been central to the disability rights movement and to disability studies", while Davis (1995, 23-24) focused "not so much on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy. I do this because the 'problem' is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person." I found this idea of critiquing the construction of normal to be something I wanted to bring more consciously to a dance pedagogy context, especially when I was already intending to do work that focused on allowing students to find their own pathways and ways of being and to not construct a certain way of existing as correct or better than others.

Kuppers (2004) and McRuer (2002) both addressed how disability is similar yet different to other categories/constructions of difference such as sexuality, gender, or race in which there have also been movements to question and deconstruct the identity or category that is dominant or the norm. For instance, McRuer (2002, 93) put forth his concept of "a system of compulsory able-bodiedness", drawing from the idea of 'compulsory heterosexuality', and how such a system "repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, *Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me* [emphasis added]". However, Jaakonaho and Junttila (2019, 29) also pointed out that some 'critics' take the stance that "disability is fundamentally different from many other group identities. To be disabled is not a choice, and for many, disability causes real suffering." In this area, I am not trying to argue towards one way of understanding or another; in fact, I aim to do the opposite, and to hold this complexity while listening without boxing others in or limiting possibilities for radical deconstruction of harmful structures.

In considering my personal connection to the work as well as positioning this thesis in broader discourse, there is also a link to the more recently emerging field of Mad Studies, which was defined by LeFrancous, Reaume and Menzies in their 2013 book *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* as "a project of inquiry, knowledge production, and political action devoted to the critique and transcendence of psy-centred ways of thinking, behaving, relating, and being" (cited in Beresford and Russo 2016)". The use of "Mad" as a term is still contentious, and in this thesis, I will use it, but will also use "mentally ill" to indicate a certain societal experience and perception that comes with being labelled as such. Essentially, I am trapped by how "Our language for extremities of experience and emotion is inadequate…whatever language you use the predominantly negative way in which mental distress is understood in society, catches up with you" (Beresford 2019). Mad Studies aims to challenge the way that mental distress is pathologized and those who are psychiatrically labelled are marginalized, which I use here to extend and support the elements of the neurodiversity movement that underly this project.

Mad Studies is still evolving and is not directly underneath or tied up with disability studies, although there are many links and possible conversations between the two. As someone who is "mad", although I still tend to fall back into the label of "mentally ill" (and I struggle with and fluctuate around how terms like disabled or neurodivergent apply to my identity or experience), and has a complex background in relation to that experience I have chosen to identify myself as such to both frame one element of personal motivation for exploring this material as well as to acknowledge my lived experience of madness as part of asserting my voice in a growing multiplicity of voices within this discourse. I open this up also because I want to participate in and spark more conversation around a central component of Mad Studies which is the need to include the lived experiences of those who are almost always written about as subjects and do not get to generate knowledge and discourse themselves (McWade, Milton and Beresford 2015). Although, as I have said, I do not want to speak for others or generalize, I do want to place myself within this larger community and project as one voice and perspective. I think it is especially important that I do so as a pedagogue, since discourses in education around disability or neurodivergence still heavily focus on students, and I perceive an underlying assumption that most of those teaching and writing are abled, sane, and/or neurotypical. I also see Mad Studies' goal to be "participatory, inclusive, non-hierarchical and non-medicalised" as aligned with my values and intentions for pedagogical inquiry. As I aim to challenge the construction of normalcy, I do not just want to do so towards students, but in all aspects of pedagogical work.

2.3. Dance and Disability

One main motivation for me in this work is to contribute to the existing field of work within and around not only dance and disability, but also who has access to what kinds of movement work. I also want to engage with the borders or boundaries around therapeutic movement work and dance. As I find it important to address the existing work being done and some of the context around 'disability dance' or disability and/in dance, I also note that I have some qualms about using 'disability' in this section in that I do not want the term to suggest a reductive othering, and acknowledge that it "runs the risk of being seen to be reinforcing categories and boundaries that could be perceived as discriminatory or contradictory of the message in this paper" (Whatley, 2007, 6). Instead, I use it to address developments within the field, while still problematizing the category and encouraging us to question not only its construction but also the construction of who gets to be 'normal' or has what Keifer-Boyd (2017, 52) called the "power and privilege to be unmarked". I am following from Goater (2019, 16) who in her thesis at the University of the Arts Helsinki also addressed some of these questions, and asserted that:

> "inclusive dance is not a means to an end to simply include people with disabilities or difference—it is an inclusive *field* of difference in relation, where neurotypical and normative bodied dominance is dispersed by spreading and receding, through practices not about compromising abilities but by being curious toward the unknown, new ways of seeing and being."

There have been growing work and opportunities within 'disability dance' in recent decades, including performance work in integrated as well as disability specific companies, teacher development opportunities, and greater discussion within dance research (Seham 2017, 169; Dunphy and Scott 2003). This work has included many different categories or definitions within a container of disability, and there are also many factors to consider regarding the visibility of disability, especially in performance, that I will not extensively address here. However, even though the discourse and representation around disability in dance has expanded, "training for the disabled dancer remains at the margins and therefore the disabled dance student is marginalised within a predominantly able-bodied community of learners; individuals with disabilities tend to be defined by their difference (Schwyzer, 2005, p. 7)" (Whatley 2007, 5). There are many questions that we could ask, some of which go back to macro level complex questions around how ability and disability are constructed. I am currently occupied with questions such as: how does dance training, especially vocational training, define disability? Who is seen as "other", whose needs are seen as outside of what is provided

by traditional dance training? What do we take for granted as being required to participate in certain kinds of dance training and why? While inquiring around and within this unwieldy container of disability, I also want to keep in mind 'intersectionality' and the fact that axes of marginalization can be complex and multiple, and that this project is part of larger work that aims "to call into question privileges and disadvantages that have historically resulted in some individual and collective bodyminds being marginalized" (Strand, 2017).

I also want to address the unique context of this project in that it occurred at a vocational dance program for students who have been determined to have special needs. Vocational dance training like this is very rare. As Aujla and Redding (2013) found:

> "most dance provision for young disabled people is recreational in nature…As such there is a clear gap in provision between recreational participation and the profession. This suggests either that young disabled people are not accessing dance training, or they are excluded from participating."

However, there are also questions to be asked about the form of the dance education, as in whether or not someone who has been determined to be disabled is educated in a "segregated" setting, where students with disabilities are separated out entirely in to distinct schools, an "integrated" setting where there are separate classes within a mainstream school, or an "inclusive" setting where disabled students are mostly or entirely included in mainstream educational settings (Shakespeare 2018, 106). However, these paradigms of special education are usually discussed in terms of primary and secondary school, and the situation of vocational post-secondary arts training is rarely addressed. It is beyond the scope of this work to go more in depth into some of the questions and issues around these paradigms, but they are a factor to consider in arts specific education.

I want to briefly address here the labelling of students as 'special needs', as our participants were by virtue of attending the institution at which we worked, and some of the problematics of diagnosis as relevant to this context. For instance, Kuppers (2004, 5) addressed how the label of 'disabled' can silence and impose "a lack of agency". From a Mad Studies perspective "Simply conferring a diagnosis is tantamount to stripping away the human-ity of the person in favor of a psy-label straightjacket…there is no monolithic view of emotional or behavioral causes or manifestations" (Breslow 2019). We can acknowledge that a label can also generate access to support and

necessary services, even as we challenge the structures and institutions around mental illness, neurodiversity and disability (Breslow 2019).

With this particular process, having been previously informed of trauma backgrounds in our students, I have also encountered the blurry borders between certain types of open, exploratory dance practices and Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) practices. DMT is not directly tied to disability, and "has been used extensively to support individuals who have experienced trauma", among other uses (Adamek and Darrow 2017, 222). Both contemporary dance improvisation and DMT have their roots in early modern dance in the United States, and there can be a great deal of overlap between the exercises and approaches (Dunphy and Scott 2003, 24). However, when is certain work seen as therapeutic, and when is it artistic? Who gets to be included in each of these types of work? I will also address some of the tensions with my personal boundaries in this area in Section 5.1.

Overall, I have been driven in this work to look at what questions, disruptions, and approaches can provoke further exploration from other pedagogues struggling with this same area. I want to encourage myself and other dance pedagogues and artists to hold the possibly fragile complexity of the need to set ethical boundaries regarding therapeutic work, as well as to meet student needs, without excluding certain categories of people or embodied experiences from certain types of dance practices.

2.4. The Vocational College Live

With this background and desire to keep exploring, I set out into the process of co-teaching and collaborating with my classmate Mercedes Balarezo at The Vocational College Live ("Live") in Espoo, Finland with students in their Vocational Qualification in Dance program. The Vocational College Live's website states that they are "a vocational special education college and training centre" and that they provide education "targeted at people who need special education, personalized support and guidance in their studies and employment." The dance program focuses on contemporary dance but is open to students from all backgrounds. The dance program has two staff members, Jasmiina Sipilä who runs the program and is the main teacher and another staff member who also teaches and provides student assistance. Jasmiina also served as my teaching mentor during the process.

My relationship with Live began when I taught a small number of contemporary classes to their students in Spring 2019 as part of my Teaching Practice 1. I appreciated their program's approach to dance learning and support, and so I had a desire to return in a

mutually beneficial arrangement to do a more in-depth process in that environment. I also started to discuss with Mercedes about working together on a project and seeing what could come out of putting our interests in conversation and supporting each other in our work. We came to an arrangement with Live to do an extended project that would simultaneously give us an opportunity to dive in to our research interests without pressure to produce a certain outcome other than some sort of sharing, while providing their students an opportunity to work with professionals in the field and experience a process and material that they would not have access to otherwise during this education.

We came as guest artist-pedagogues and worked with the students at their school twice a week in two and a half hour sessions for eight sessions before the winter break, followed by working with them for six weeks, four days a week with nine hours of class time a week, leading in to two performances titled "All You Can Do is Breathe and Hope" by the students in a studio space open to general audiences at the Theatre Academy Helsinki. The group had ten students, all over the age of eighteen, ranging from those who started the program just before we began our project to those who were in their third year. The students had very different amounts and types of dance experience. One of the students stopped fully participating in the process towards the end and did not perform due to injury complications and personal situation. Another student participated in the whole process but was unable to perform at the last minute.

Due to the nature of the institution, all the students in the group have at some point been determined as needing 'special' assistance. We could not know student diagnoses other than two students with developmental disabilities who were categorized differently by the institution and received extra support, however we did know that all the other students somehow dealt with mental illness and/or neurodivergence and that we needed to take in to account the possibility of trauma responses during exercises. Jasmiina also discussed with us before we began some of the needs certain students might have, such as needing more or longer breaks, or taking things slowly, or being aware of how trauma might affect types of movement work. For many students, a main accessibility factor was that they could attend fewer classes or have flexible attendance, which was something we navigated throughout the process.

Our way of teaching was also impacted by translation due to being foreigners in Finland who needed to teach in English. Although most of the students understood English (even if they were not comfortable speaking it), some of the students did not. The head of the program arranged with the students before we started that some of them who were more highly proficient in English would serve as translators and receive English

language credit for their studies if that was needed. We therefore relied on these students to translate back and forth during the entire process, which presented some unique pedagogical challenges and affected the inter-group interactions. Anything we had to say had to be given in shorter, clear increments, and we could not know exactly what information was being transmitted to the students who did not understand English, which also meant that the students who could translate took on an extra leadership role, sometimes helping to answer or support other students beyond just directly translating. It also meant that those who could understand English were able to receive instructions twice. Although I could write extensively about the use of language in pedagogy, that is not the focus here, and it is rather just important to know that this situation both created and limited possibilities within the work, as well as simply causing things to take more time.

Lastly, a vital factor of working at Live was how the institutional context enabled us to take the pedagogical approach that we wanted. For instance, we did not have to somehow evaluate the students or get them to a point where they could demonstrate certain skills, such as is the case in the rest of their education. Jasmiina and the other staff member were also always available for student support, which ranged from things like assisting students with written work, to being a sounding board and trusted advisor for students when they needed help to cope with something during the process. They especially supported the students in setting boundaries and respecting their own needs. Importantly, they also took extra time to support some of the students with learning our performance structure, which strengthened the foundation for us to go in depth with exploration. They also adjusted their other class schedule as we got towards the performance such that students could have enough resting time, and they organized everything with getting the students to the Theatre Academy for the final rehearsals and performances. We may often overlook some of these logistical or institutional elements when discussing things in the way I do in this thesis, and I was especially aware throughout this process of how many more tensions and challenges could have emerged in a different institutional environment.

3. ARTISTIC-PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE AS INQUIRY

Having shared the motivations and background of this work, in the rest of this thesis I will lay out my approach to pedagogical practice as inquiry, followed by a grounding layer of the practices we engaged in for this process, leading to a discussion of the themes that are currently most present within my reflection.

How am I engaging with generating knowledge through my work as an artist-pedagogue? How do I view my role in a (yet to be defined) process we may call "research"? In this thesis, I am taking an approach I will call *artistic-pedagogical practice as inquiry.* Centrally, I am conceiving of artistic-pedagogical practice and research practice as intertwined and inextricable, or "teaching *as* inquiry (Cole and Knowles 2000, 1). I see *inquiry* as a way of expressing an approach to practice and communication that strives for continuous questioning, rather than attempting to or asserting that I can generate any fixed or stable knowledge. Instead, I have approached this thesis as a continuation of pedagogical practice, which is already a practice that exists in interaction, in the in-between.

As such, even though this thesis comes from my perspective, and I approach it with a heightened awareness of that subjectivity, I see it not only as a continuation of the personal process of inquiry and developing myself as a practitioner, but also an opportunity to communicate some elements of that inquiry such that they might contribute to other practitioner's processes as well. I aim to contribute to communities or networks of inquiry in educational practice in the arts, following from what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009, 2) described as goals central to teacher research: "joint construction of local knowledge, the questioning of common assumptions, and the thoughtful critique of the usefulness of research generated by others."

In this chapter, I will first lay out my artistic-pedagogical approach, since the foundations for my pedagogical practice are also the foundations for my inquiry. I will then explain the methods I have used in order to engage in a directed inquiry during this process, and how I will communicate what has emerged from those methods in this thesis.

3.1. Artistic-Pedagogical Approach

My artistic-pedagogical approach is both inseparable from this process of inquiry, while also being part of my underlying question around how to explore states of presence with students in such a way that affirms all ways of being. I use the term *artistic-pedagogical* to highlight that this practice is always creative and intertwined with histories and practices of art, as well as to not separate my work as a pedagogue from my work as an artist.

How I conceive of and intend to engage pedagogically has been shifting and developing through continuously reflecting. I have been striving to interactively create and re-create a process wherein I do not pre-determine outcomes, but instead am being reflexive about what I value, what my expectations and assumptions are, and how I am perceiving and interacting. This approach is underneath both my intentions and aims in the actual practice of teaching, as well as how I approach that practice and the continued inquiry afterwards. In interaction with the participants, I strive to meet them where they are, to *affirm* that what they are and bring is enough over pushing or forcing towards a pre-defined product. I have intended to do the same with how I see the process itself as inquiry, not trying for a certain set of results or to reach a certain point, but rather weaving a multi-layered journey where my starting focus and intentions for inquiry stayed with me.

I also want to acknowledge my artistic-pedagogical approach's rooting in contemporary dance education practices, specifically the influence of Somatics, due to how "After many decades of exploring various avenues of exchange, the conversation between dance and Somatics has become richly interwoven and their principles and practices merged" (Batson and Wilson 2014, 9). There are many elements of my approach that are grounded in what Schupp (2017) calls "somatic values", which are not about specific practices but rather values that have come from Somatics' integration into contemporary dance training, such as:

> "increased emphasis on the process, recognizing individual ways of moving and capacities for movement, the use of explorative frameworks for movement instead of teacher-determined movement phrases as a dance learning paradigm, paying attention in the moment, reflection leading to action, and situating the teacher as a facilitator rather than authoritative expert."

I acknowledge this connection to a certain lineage of dance and movement training such that I also don't essentialize these values even as I align myself with them.

I also find a connection to what Marques (1998, 181) called "context-based dance education", in that I do not want to separate 'contents' and 'context'. Although my practice does not follow hers, I do share her intentions of "valuing and working with meaning in the vast net of relationships and communication", and working in such a way that "structures and proposals are developed and transformed according to the relationship established in the classroom among the context, the teacher, the students, and the dance contents." Marques (1998, 182) also proposed that this way of looking at pedagogy allows us to see art making and teaching as integrally connected in this field, rather than separating them. Working in dance pedagogy, I feel that dancemaking and the artistic part of the work suffuse everything, and do not want to oppose practices of teaching and making.

However, as I work in these ways that emphasize collaborative process, being open to what is present and wanting to, (sometimes transgressively), value and affirm what the students bring without forcing them towards any one way of being, I also want to stay aware of the authority that I have as a pedagogue. This authority is not a singular thing, but rather a shifting, contextual phenomenon of the power I have in each environment with each student. Green (2000, 3) followed from Ellsworth (1989) to remind us to be aware of how teachers' efforts to be radical or work against oppressive structures and the marginalization of students can lead them "to deny the power accorded to themselves as educators, or attempt to speak for those who they believe have been oppressed." I have been striving to keep this awareness underneath me in the process, even as I notice how easy it is to slip in to speaking for students. Coming from this awareness, I will go on to explain how I will share more about this process of inquiry, based on the idea that "A liberatory pedagogy demands self-exploration by the teacher as well as by the students" (Shapiro 1998, 14).

3.2. Sharing Inquiry

I will now explain how I will share some of what has so far emerged from this process of inquiry. I will organize this sharing as themes (or containers) that flow through and developed from multiple layers of personal reflection, student reflection, and conversation with existing theory. As I have stated, I do not conceive of these themes or what I present within them as any sort of fixed knowledge, but rather something that has morphed, expanded and fractured along the way, and will continue to do so even as I leave this step of the process behind. In this way, I am doing what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009, 44) claimed "distinguishes the inquiries of practitioners" in that we

"document from the inside perspective their own questions, interpretive frameworks, changes in views over time, dilemmas, and recurring themes."

In discussing these themes, I will heavily utilize my own reflections in the hope that by opening up my journey, including emotions, doubts, challenges, and endless questioning, there is something that will resonate with other pedagogues and be useful to their practice. My practice here is aligned with although not strictly within the idea of "self study" in teacher education as presented by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009, 40), who described it as "Often drawing on biographical, autobiographical, and narrative forms of data collection and analysis" and working "from the postmodernist assumption that it is never possible to divorce the 'self' from the research process or from education practice (e.g. Hamilton, 1998; Loughran et al., 2004)."

Although I focus most on myself here, our teaching was guided by our aims for the students, and I was constantly working on not letting imagined pressures around "research" warp my actions or de-centralize the students in practice. At the same time, teaching, for me, is an endlessly complex process that cannot, and should not, be divorced from our experiences of self as teachers. Furthermore, I do not want to speak for the students or claim things about them beyond what they have said themselves, and so I cannot make many statements about *what* happened within them, but rather examine what I *perceived* as happening with them, and then reflect upon that to connect to or open questions about larger pedagogical issues.

I am not aiming to use my experiences to illustrate theory, but rather hope to intertwine the two to see what questions and ways of thinking could emerge. It is a process of constantly trying to make sense while always deconstructing and going back and forth, around and in-between. In these methods, I am following from work done by other dance pedagogy researcher-practitioners such as Green (2000) and Stinson (2004). For instance, Green (2000, 3) presented a study about an artistic-pedagogical practice with university students in which she interrogated her pedagogical practice by "[highlighting] my own feelings and angst as well as the voices of the student participants" and wished "to demonstrate how theoretical and personal spheres can inform each other through a postmodern multiplicity of thought and action." I too strive to present multiplicities, where no thought is final or unable to be questioned, and actions are always understood as being reflected through my many personal lenses. I similarly aim for an inquiry along the lines of Stinson's (2004, 154) method of creating "a dance between personal knowledge and critical social theory" while also deconstructing her dance pedagogy practices.

In order to use my own reflections as material for inquiry, I engaged in multi-layered teaching reflection throughout the process, and then further deconstruct those thoughts and ideas here. I kept a more immediate teaching journal, taking notes during the sessions and writing instinctive reactions or first thoughts afterwards. I then also kept a further journal in which to record the overflowing thoughts and disjointed ideas that swirled around throughout the process. In that journal, I often questioned my own thinking and tried to examine my own biases or assumptions. In this way, I was engaging in the "self-reflexivity" that Green (2015b) argued as a way generating validity in qualitative research, which she suggested can "be facilitated through a field journal that sorts out personal reflections and methodological choices." Throughout this process, I have found myself in an impossible attempt at ongoing reflexivity. I am always struggling to find the balance between the burning need to be reflexive without letting it stop me from doing and trusting that there are seeds within whatever comes—the spiraling and the questioning are the purpose even though there is always much left to be recognized.

Now, as I look back on my teaching journals, I aim to see some of the things I wasn't seeing, or that were framing my ways of evaluating and making decisions, as well as validating my own embodied experiences as embedded in the inescapable present-ness of teaching. I see sharing these layered reflections as they are (filled, or rather, surrounded with insecurity, contradictions, even errors) as a way to complicate knowledge making or discussing. This approach could work as part of creating "spaces where the uncertainties and questions intrinsic to practice can be seen (not hidden) and can function as grist for new insights" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009, 37). This means showing all the challenges, the incoherencies, the moments of falling short, rather than presenting an image of shiny new pedagogical knowledge or presuming to have anything even remotely resembling the concept of a right answer.

The student reflection I use is mostly from student writing that was sent to us after the process, as well as some notes I took of comments made during in-class discussions. In their post-process reflections, some students included excerpts from or mentions of their process journal, whereas other students sent exclusively thoughts written after the end of the process. The reflective writing which we gave students a chance to do regularly during the process was all private at the time in order to focus on it being in service of the students, and then they were given the option to share extracts at the end. We received reflections from all the students, including one from the student who left the process, of varying length and depth. I would like to acknowledge that we could have

done more to make this student reflection process more open to other modes of doing, such as using recordings, since for some students producing written work was not the most effective way for them to communicate. Three of them were written in English and the rest were translated from Finnish. All the students had received a document translated into Finnish at the beginning of the process that explained our research approach and their options regarding participating in the thesis research, which had no bearing on their participation in the practice. We also went through this during the class so they could ask questions, and all the students included in their final reflections permission to include them in the thesis.

4. THE PRACTICE

In this chapter I will provide a grounding for my further discussion by laying out some of the elements of our practical work with the students. Here, I am not trying to evaluate or discuss our choices or actions, or assert that they had any certain outcomes, but want to provide context so that I can weave my way in and out of the themes in the following chapter. We structured this process in two parts, divided by the Winter break. We looked at the first part (twice a week meetings) as a workshop period in which we could propose practices and get to know the students, essentially exploring without looking to make anything or get anywhere specific while being reflectively aware of what was happening between us all and our environment. In the second part (four times a week meetings), we planned to build on what had emerged from our initial process to go towards some sort of performance to be presented at the Theatre Academy.

4.1. Co-teaching

Ingrained within this process of pedagogical inquiry is the cooperation Mercedes and I shared. We started from having sufficient shared pedagogical values, in line with those I have discussed in section 3.1 and with the aim to have our collaboration generate unexpected possibilities. We also discussed our intention to have the work evolve between us, rather than being held separately and individualistically. I also see potential for this collaborative working to challenge ideas of their being a singular creator or holder of any knowledge, or a pedagogue as a singular, all-knowing authoritarian figure. We were also engaging with larger questions such as how do we collaborate as pedagogues, especially in artistic or arts-based work? How does that communication and interaction change and challenge our practices?

Although we had both participated in some of each other's previous work, neither of us knew how our approaches would come together. I will share some excerpts from Mercedes' process journal and unfinished thesis manuscript to allow her voice to also speak in this thesis, just as our practical work was multi-vocal. She was starting from a point of:

> *"what happens if I play with the impossibility of producing meaning and bring the non-sensical sounds to the core of the dance practice? Would this open the spectrum of the possibilities for sound and breathe as a deviant path?"*

She has called her approach "The Voice as a Limb", and has described some of the critical principles that she brought with her as we started this work:

- *Breathing is the bridge between movement and voice.*
- *In order to make sound and movement one unity of expression there must be the intention and attention thorough the whole practice in the connection of those.*
- *In this work, there is not a hierarchy of sounds. The quietest voice, as well as the loudest, yawns, moans, tongue clicking, laughter, whispers and all indescribable sounds are equally important part of the possibilities of expression.*
- *Words are not used in this phase of the practice; we keep the materiality of the voice as our raw material for exploration. Also, there is no aim towards musicality, even though it can be the case that in in the exploration some sort of melodies can appear, and group composition may occur. But there is no emphasis neither in the spoken language nor the musical language.*

We shared the importance of looking at our work in larger societal contexts, and a strong value of not wanting to approach students or the work in general with any aim towards *fixing* or reifying hierarchies. She has described these values in ways such as:

> *"if I think that voice could be isolated from the semantic production it does not mean that there is some sort of "natural" voice that I am aiming to find. Voice as body is so intimately connected to identity and personal history that ignoring all the factors that moulds it would be irresponsible and naive."*

> *"[this] is not an attempt to increase the value of a person or change something that is broken. There is nothing to improve. In this practice there is exploration that might lead to insights about voice and movement, power or silence."*

From our early conversations, we could see some possibilities for intersections, such as how I was interested in possible interplay between this approach to 'sono-movement' (as Mercedes has sometimes called it) and asking students to explore different ways of paying attention or having intentions towards others and the environment. Or how her approach could provide a different mechanism to sense internally and perhaps complicate or confuse the boundaries around the inside and outside or where our selves start and end.

We started our co-teaching process by doing two open workshops at the Theatre Academy Helsinki in order to get a first sense of working together. As we started at

Live, we worked with our practices somewhat separated in sense that one of us would lead one part of a session, and the other another part, or even trying at one point having a whole day led mostly by one of us. Throughout the process, we planned lessons and reflected on them afterwards together, keeping up a constantly flowing dialogue. As we went along, we started intersecting the work, combining our approaches and ideas as well as more fluidly trading off leadership in the classroom. There were instances when we would have liked to have one of us give extra assistance to some of the students, but we could not come up with an effective enough way to overcome the language barrier. As we began making the performance, which I will explain in more depth in section 4.3, I felt that our work became wholly intertwined, while still retaining the presence of our individual points of view.

In the following sections, I will focus mostly on the aspects of the exercises and practices we did that came from or were relevant to my research focus, and as such, for the purposes of this thesis, my description of the practice is quite incomplete. Yet I want to keep here the importance of the presence of the voice, especially in how it provided openings for exploration that we may not always reach towards in dance practices.

4.2. Initial exploration

For the first section of the work, Mercedes and I planned around and suggested to the students three lenses that we proposed as a framework for collaboration: inside/outside, leadingfollowing, and connection. We didn't follow them strictly, but used these lenses as links between our practices, as well as suggesting them as frames through which to view our work for the students.

The first lens we proposed was *inside/outside*. This felt highly relevant to both our practices, and invited questions of how we construct a body and/or a defined area of self (including the voice and other aspects), as well as how to engage with students around these concepts that are complex yet always present in ways we cannot necessarily define. Although I don't want to get bogged down in semantics, I have found myself using different words for this general container of ideas, including internal/external, or inner/outer, which somehow provide slightly different connotations regarding boundaries or delineations. Yet I have also been searching for a way to present this lens in a way that is less binary, as I do not want to look at any of these pairs of terms as opposites, but rather as constructs that keep appearing in my work around 'embodiment' and states of presence. I will leave it here with the slash, however I want to emphasize that this slash is porous, flexible, and not in a fixed position.

We then went with leading/following or '*leadingfollowing*' as a way to approach understanding (inter)action or as a frame for reflecting on embodied experience, even that which is conceived as being within yourself. We could use the frame within the practice to ask what *drives* the attention, or action, or voice? What is a passenger, or rides with? What is the impulse and what is the shockwave? What does it do to categorize things in this way? Mercedes brought the term 'leadingfollowing' as introduced by Lepecki (2013), who was building on ideas from Manning's (2009) "The Elasticity of the Almost". We were not focused on discussing with Lepecki's specific approach, but rather drawing inspiration from ideas of confusing "lines of authority and submission" and "a constant weaving of disparate and endless lines of initiatives and counter-initiatives". Leadingfollowing has no ending, and is, or results in "the dance itself" (Lepecki 2013, 35).

Our final lens was *connection*. Throughout this process I have felt ambivalent about the use of the term. On the one hand, it strikes me as imprecise in the sense that everything is connected, so what do we mean or aim towards by using the word? At the same time, this openness of meaning was part of what led us to the use of this term as central, in the sense that because we could argue that everything is connected to everything, or even that all that happens is happening *between,* that allows us to open up to any connections that emerge rather than trying to force certain ones to happen. In one of our earliest planning meetings, I wrote down that: *"it doesn't matter what connects, or what comes out of it, in fact we don't want to predetermine, but we do aim for new connections"*. Additionally, when we looked at connection it was within both the context of our artistic-pedagogical research focuses and the specific context in which we were working. Especially when working with this slippery idea of embodied connection, I have found it important to acknowledge what Weiss (1999, 5) called 'intercorporeality', which she used "to emphasize that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but it is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies."

We started the process by introducing ourselves to students, explaining a bit about our backgrounds and the structure and intentions of the project. Each class had its own structure based on how the interactions progressed that day, however we often began with a check-in with the students and would often end with group and/or private reflection if we had the time. For some of the classes, we would structure reflection by listing the exercises we had done, which helped students to share in the earlier days. The private reflection time could contain both free and structured written reflections and the option to draw or take a rest time. As I describe the practices, I also want to note

that most students had a scattered experience of the content due to their flexible attendance needs, and as such, we tried to design classes so that while we would still repeat and build on work we'd already done, students who had not been present could fully participate.

I started our work with the students wanting them to explore how their intention and attention organized their embodied experience or generated different *states of presence*. Initially, I was concretely asking the students to go between different realms of focus, in the sense that I was asking them to focus within themselves, within their kinespheres as they experienced them, and then within the whole space (with an open approach to how 'the space' could be defined), sometimes with suggestions for movement tasks and sometimes with open movement possibilities. I started out approaching these focuses as separate areas, and then within them asking the students to make their focus more direct, as in focusing on one specific body part or spot, or on one thing within the room, and then try to be aware of everything within a given area at once, and then to notice how that changed their experiences. I emphasized to the students that some of the tasks were intentionally "impossible", and that my aim was to have them explore what that intention did to them and what it felt like. We told the students that from our point of view, there was not a correct way to do these types of explorations, or rather, that anything they did could be correct. We also encouraged them to step out of exercises or take breaks if needed, as well as reminding them that they could keep eyes closed or open while keeping the same intention towards focus. In my journal, I described my guiding aims as:

> *"Can we focus on our focus, on the states of attention we create or that emerge in different types of embodied tasks and the expectations, or the ways we talk about them, the limits of our conceptions of mind/body…trying to break it down, or be able to examine different pieces so then the students can see it more, have a different type of awareness…awareness of awareness, focus on focus, attention on attention. There's a limit to our vocabulary or how we usually think about these things."* (2.12.19)

In addition to asking students to explore these different types of focus as described above, I was looking for other avenues of access to conceiving of and experiencing different ways of being present with or within yourself and the environment. One of the exercises I did to start this exploration was building off the "tiny dance", a practice attributed to Nancy Stark Smith within Contact Improvisation. My approach to this exercise asked students to attempt to release any tension or effort that was not needed to

keep them upright while standing in place, and then to focus on the movements that already existed within them even when they were still. I then prompted them to follow this "tiny dance" in various ways. In addition to proposing this as one sort of intention towards inward focus or presence, I wanted them to sense that there is already a rich world of movement, a 'dance' within them, even without conscious effort to *make* something.

Based on how I perceived the students' struggles with these sorts of tasks, I decided to see what would happen if I offered even more directed physical tasks within the same types of exploration of attention and focus. For example, I asked the students to explore moving one body part with another and vice versa, or having a conversation between the two, playing with how that intention and narrow, possibly separated internal focus shaped their exploration. In another session, I asked students to play with how they payed attention to their hand or hands with their gaze, such as following the hand with the eyes and doing the opposite, moving such that they could not see or look at their hands, following another students' hands, and following their own hands in a reflection.

These initial practices were done individually, but we soon introduced partner work, which would become a common practice during this first part. Both Mercedes and I used different variations on leading and following with a partner, especially since we were using 'leadingfollowing' as one of our frames. For instance, I asked students to explore a singular focused intention in the space by selecting a spot and going directly to it, while having a partner follow them and do things like try to reach the spot at the same time or before them: an "impossible" task that I intended to explore both a certain construction of *intention* and how it affected the leading student, as well as how we perceive another person's intention and can react to that. We also started to do different partner explorations with voice or *sounding* and movement that asked students to navigate different intentions towards interaction and relationships to self.

4.3. Towards Performance

Entering the second part of our process, we proposed a structure in which we would collectively work towards a score-based performance. Sipilä (2015, 45) described the use of scores in dance as, "dividing a time-based duration of a piece to different pre-decided scenes or sections, possibly with a certain focus point in each section," where the focus or rules of each section provide a basis or scaffolding for improvisation, which can produce a "certain quality for the improvised material." When we started the process, we had not determined what form the performance would take. However, after the first part, Mercedes and I wanted to keep working in an exploratory way, and we did

not feel that the work we were doing lent itself to us creating choreography. Instead, we wanted to stay in a mode of affirming whatever it was the students brought to explorations. We also felt that a score-based collaborative process could best utilize Mercedes' and I's backgrounds and strengths. We did not decide going into this part of the process the form the scores would take.

Additionally, our choice to create a performance as part of this process in the first place was rooted in a desire to see what connections, insights, or other angles towards inquiry could stem from creating a performance while still maintaining the same affirming pedagogical approach. From a meeting with Mercedes before we started teaching, I wrote about:

> *"looking at expectations for what a performance is, how that shapes us (us as including the students), and then what do we want to do with that? How do we frame it? We have a desire to let go of these expectations of performance, but what will that dialogue be? What is our power here?"*

I want to also address here how I view the performance as part of this specific inquiry process. I have not had the performance evaluated as part of the thesis, because although it could be viewed as a 'research outcome' in and of itself, my approach from the beginning has been that I would perceive the performance like any other part of this process of inquiry: an opportunity to ask questions or to see things from a different angle. Due to this, while I engage with some of the possibilities for discussion that come from creating a performance and having students perform, I do not address the performance as any sort of art object or outcome that should be treated differently from anything else I am addressing in this thesis.

In order to provide a foundation for navigating the unknown, we presented a structure to the students of how we would move towards a performance, such that we had what Mercedes has described as *"doors to enter another phase of the project with whichever amount of material that we have gathered so far."* We also hoped to have enough time for students to be secure in whatever the material for performance ended up being. I also believe that having this structure supported our creative process, such that we had to make decisions and choose directions rather than staying lost in infinite possibilities. We utilized a collaborative creation process, checking in with the students as we went about to what extent we as leaders would take responsibility for making creative decisions. Additionally, one of the first things we did after returning from the break was to ask the students (and ourselves) to come up with around three things that they needed

to feel safe in a creative process. Everyone shared their needs, and we compiled a large list. Some recurring themes in this list were having enough time and having whatever you brought and however you were be enough and be respected.

In the first stage of the performance creation process, we evolved some of the exercises and explorations we had done in the first part, while also doing practices to generate ideas and themes towards creating a coherent performance structure. Through this work, we found that mine and Mercedes' practices merged and integrated, such that the use of the voice was fully present in the work that was also stemming from my interests. From my end, this part drew the focus for the students towards exploring how you are present as part of a group within creative tasks and what states of presence are asked for or experienced while part of a group in a performance context. For instance, we started out with an exercise based on ones that were a frequent part of my theatre training as a young person in which students walk around the space with a heightened awareness of all the other people moving in the space. Students attempt to stop and start moving at the same time, without a single person leading. We added other tasks and the use of the voice to the exercise, as well as asking students to reflect on their experiences doing these sorts of tasks. During this first phase, we also started doing some exercises in two groups so that students could watch each other and we could introduce discussion around seeing and being seen as well as encourage students to be aware of how they were noticing, which we saw as a way to start thinking about performance.

To generate ideas and themes for the performance, we began by having students come up with a few questions which they thought could create ideas for performance and were related at least tangentially to the work. Over multiple classes, we did rapid fire rounds of having everyone answer each question for themselves, followed by students being able to choose some of their answers to share with the group. We then asked students to work together to group these answers into categories or themes which they came up with, which could be used to inspire either material or structure creation. This categorization exercise was done by the students entirely in Finnish to make it easier and more inclusive as well as to challenge the students to work independently, so although Mercedes and I were present and had made our intentions clear for the students to work together in a way that included everyone's voices, we could not fully know what was happening. The title for the piece came from one of these answers, and it became "All You Can Do is Breathe and Hope".

Our other main generative exercise in this vein was to ask the students to use inspiration from this whole process to imagine a performance, both from the first-person

experience of doing it and from an audience and/or aesthetic perspective. They first shared this imagining with a partner, then shared what they felt were key elements with the group. This exercise generated some vivid images, sensations, and intentions which ended up being quite influential in our score creation.

This generative work was being done alongside of this development of our exercises and explorations of the first part, and we received feedback that doing a creative process like this was unfamiliar to students and there was some questioning of why we were doing so much writing and talking rather than *doing* (as in, dancing) in the ways that they were used to. We explained to them our intentions both to be patient, and to have them participate in this generative part of the creative process which is often done independently by a choreographer. We saw it as a chance to go through the feeling of not knowing what the point of things were or how they would end up being used in order to create something together. I will explore more in Section 5.2 the challenges around asking the students to enter in to the unknown *with* us.

Following this work, Mercedes and I reflected on where we were in terms of how the students felt and time, and we decided to synthesize the work we had done up until that point and make creative choices about the performance contents. We came up with a score that would have multiple *worlds* (as we decided to call them) which would each have a specific compositional focus regarding sound and presence. We discussed this with the students, and there was a very positive response, and I perceived the greatest enthusiasm and energy towards the work from the students from this point forwards. We also viewed making this choice as grabbing on to what had stood out at that point in a way that would anchor us for expansion and exploration without losing clarity or grounding.

Although we had this structure, we did not have a clear sense of what the worlds would be, so we then started to experiment with creating structures for improvisation for each world, inspired by both the explorations we had done from the beginning and the themes, statements, images, and wishes that had come from the previously described generative work. We used various formats to build up an improvisation score for each world with the students, working with them to see what was clear and impactful and what didn't work for them. We continued to work with some of our already developed practices, as well as introducing exercises that were intended to support what we were asking of students in the performance improvisations.

As we moved closer to the performance, we continued to work with our initial intentions for the process, aiming to enable continued engagement with these states of presence and voice work by making sure the students felt confident in their knowledge of the scores. This was, as I have mentioned in section 2.4, supported by the program staff working with some of the students outside of our rehearsal time to help them understand and remember the scores. The aesthetics fully emerged from these intentions and explorations.

For the technical elements, we focused on having them support the students' experience. Two of the students came up with the costume design as part of the production module requirement for their degree, which we then furnished using the Theatre Academy costume stock, and we set up our own basic lighting. The sound cues we used were edited by Mercedes from a recording we made of the students sounding, and all the other sound in the performance was generated by the students.

The following descriptions are my understanding of the worlds as they existed by the end of the process, and I provide our unofficial titles for them, a brief description of the score, and some of the practices that supported or underlie that world. I am not attempting to describe what was seen in the performance. Of course, there was a great deal of evolution, changes, and clarification that developed throughout the process that cannot be included here.

1. Quiet/ Hidden world: Some of the initial inspiration for this world came from images and sensations from the imagining exercise we did with the students. The students were underneath textured blankets, communicating with their own personal vocabulary of quiet sounds. They started still and internally focused while somewhat hidden in the space, including behind or around the audience areas, and were already in place and sounding when the audience entered the performance space. They then gradually started to expand their focus and the intention of their sounding outwards, growing in to moving more around the space with an attention to where others were even if they couldn't see them. They then began interacting with each other in small "conversations", ending by moving as a whole group to the corner and shedding their blankets. Each student was encouraged to develop their own idiosyncratic way of moving and sounding under the blanket, using their imaginations to fuel the movement, and playing around with how they felt about and chose to interact with the space and each other. We supported this work with practices around "conversing" or communicating through sound and movement.

2. “Popcorn” world: This world came from explorations of sharp, sudden sounds and movements (like popcorn), as well as thinking about having performers explode out of an otherwise monolithic group. Students began as a clump in the corner, sensing the group to simultaneously begin crawling diagonally across the floor. Creating a spontaneous rhythmical composition, and responding to their impulses, students would jump up out of the group, throwing sound out through their body parts towards a specific directed spot far away in the space. They could do so in any order and at any time and were asked to increase the frequency of these “pops” as they got further across the floor. Once the group reached the opposite corner, the students began to walk through the space, identifying spots to go towards, arriving there and doing a somewhat smaller version of this jumping and throwing the sound or directing it across the space, then identifying the next spot and so on. After a short while, one student began to walk in slow motion diagonally from the center of the space towards one of the curtains that surrounded the space. This was the cue for the rest of the students to increase the speed and dynamic intensity of the already existing task, starting to run and jump/throw more forcefully. When the slow-motion performer entered behind the curtains, one half of the group ran to join them behind the curtains, and the other half of the group remained in the open space and began the next score. This world was supported by other work with connecting internal sensation to throwing sound through body parts out into the world, as well as exploring identifying a clear intention towards a spot in the space to organize movement.

3. Challenging/hard things world: This world came from one of the main categories that emerged from our questions and answers generative work, which was about *hard things,* as well as work we had been doing with having some students create soundscapes while others did structured movement improvisations, playing with different ways they could respond and interact with each other while co-creating the environment. One half of the students began grouped behind the curtains, peaking through a gap, making sounds. The other half moved through the entire space. Everyone’s task was to collectively compose using movements and sounds that were challenging for them to produce, with the freedom to define or explore what challenging could mean for them. They would then find moments as a whole group, movers and sounders, to push, pull or squeeze into high tension and effort, then release that together. These moments of high tension were short and collective, while the challenging things flowed around them, with students being encouraged to be aware of how they used elements like spatial and temporal relationships. After a sound cue, the two groups formed into lines, facing each other in the space with an intensely directed focus on the other group. They then began to lean, feeling together the moment things

broke and running in to the opposite location and task (movers in the space to sounding behind the curtains and vice versa).

4. Flowing/ air sculpture world: This world was inspired by some of the questions and answers around hopes, dreams and wishes, and imagery around breath and air. In it, students began by creating a slowly contracting circle, and once they reached its smallest point, merged into moving the air between each other through also moving their breath as sound through the ends of their limbs. From a sound cue, they then moved into their own fixed spot in the space and began to sculpt with movement, sound, and air how they dream their voice could be. In this, we asked them to really engage with (possibly imagined) sensory elements such as textures, light, colours, weight, etc. As they sculpted, they kept an awareness of the group since at least one student at a time had to be frozen, although the frozen student was also looking at and taking in the other students' work. After a final sound cue, students continued sculpting, but had to freeze and move again into the task all as a group. The lights then faded out while they were moving to end the performance. There were many previously developing practices underlying this world. In one, students either pressed against each other's' hands, or pressed against the floor or wall, sensing, translating and responding to the amount of pressure with sound, creating a dialogue, then separating but continuing the intention and energy of the physical contact across space. The second was an exercise Mercedes had introduced in which students were asked to sculpt and dance a sculpture out of sound and air of how they experienced their voice now, and what they wished their voice could be. In developing the world, this exercise was done with the students sharing that sculpture with a partner, and we found that the students felt they performed this part of the score differently when they continued as if they were showing someone else what they were doing, even when they were all working simultaneously. Elements of this world also grew out of the exercises we had done with stopping and going together as a group without any cues or leader, as well as some work we had done with sensing textural tactile input and moving or responding instinctively, an activity to which students had a very positive response.

One student described in their reflection some of the key elements of how we constructed the performance tasks:

-Move with/through your breathing
-Notice the group
-Aim to be present on the group and in the space -Get support from the group -Remember to breath!

-Open your eyes to the space
-Play with voice
-Challenge yourself
-Move and make sound in accordance to feeling in the moment

Although I, perhaps naturally, started to feel at some points during the performance development process that I was not as grounded in my intentions or the focus of my inquiry as I would have wanted, I overall had to trust the artistic process as a pedagogical process and vice versa. Many of the themes, intentions, and ideas I'd been grappling with from the beginning did somehow end up as part of the performance, even if I couldn't always see it from within. Yet at the same time, there were areas in which I still challenge/question decisions we made in creating the performance, and I will address these in Chapter 5.

The performances at the Theatre Academy were open to all audience members. From my perspective, the students were deeply generous with their energy and commitment to the performances, and I will include here some of their reflections on how they felt about them:

"*the performances went well in my opinion"*

"After the performance I'm really tired. I feel like my mind and head are empty. I think it's because of me having been nervous and once the performance is over, my head doesn't have to remember anything anymore. I also feel it in my body. Already on my way home I felt how the nervousness was gone and my muscles also felt somehow empty. These performances have been the first, which have not left "a sour taste". And also the first performances where I was mostly positively nervous. I think it's because I got good and clear answers and I knew what to do."

"I would have liked if the performance would have been more polished and had more details but I understand that it was probably hard to create something like that since rarely all dancers was in the class."

"Performance week was also challenging. I had my own emotional issues, which made it difficult for me to be in a group. On the other hand, when we went through the performance I really enjoyed it. It sucked me into its worlds and my own issues disappeared…The first performance was personally a very important experience to me. I had not had an experience like this before. I am extremely thankful that I got to

be in this project so that this experience was possible. It kind of felt like I had brought myself into that moment and in the performance. Simply what I am. It was very harmonising to me. I was kind of offering myself something very fine. After that I felt like I was just empty… Empty in a good way. There was deep peace in being me. A really great experience. An ahaa-experience. I will remember it! Before the second performance I felt that I had nothing left in me that I could kind of bring there. And I felt like I was just accomplishing it"

"I think I liked the performance. and when I got to perform at the university of the arts to others and make it your own and like that made me happy. that I got to be at the university of the arts and show my own skills what I have in dance."

I include these reflections without much commentary due to a desire to have the students' voices speak without necessarily attempting to make them conform to one interpretation. I leave these and the rest of the descriptions of the process as a diffuse system of roots for the discussion that I will present in the next chapter.

5. DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will wind between my own layers of reflections, discourse from other writers, and some of the students' writing, not to find any one particular thing, but to open my process of inquiry. Although I organize this discussion in containers, it is tangled in a web such that each strand can lead in unexpected ways, and it extends beyond the edges I have given it here. I have felt often throughout this process something that I in one point described in my journal as: *"Nothing here sits exactly right--my thoughts on this, much less how to phrase them, are muddled and I write something but only halfway feel that I actually think or agree with it…"* (16.12.19). The process of crafting this discussion has been one of weaving a tapestry that is simultaneously unravelling, such that one will never grasp more than a glimpse of a constantly changing image.

5.1. Ability to Explore

I will start with diving into my continued focus on the *ability to explore*, which already emerged as central for me in my previous work (Nowack 2019). I initially focused mostly on questions around this ability in students, but I have come to think of it as something that exists in-between when in a pedagogical group setting. My conception of the ability to explore is integrally connected with examining how teachers and students tolerate, cope with, or facilitate and navigate entrance in to the *unknown*, which I address in the next section.

Even before this process started, I had been diving into what it meant, or could mean, to facilitate an environment in which students can create their own exploration, dialoguing with structures, trusting their instincts and asserting or affirming their experiences as valid. Although it is easy to cite as a pedagogical aim it is not always so straightforward to facilitate students to take *ownership* or make their own way in relationship to given instructions or structures for exploring certain states or tasks. Mercedes and I started out with encouraging the students to operate in dialogue with our instructions rather than following them simply because we "said so". In our introduction of our approach to the work with them, we included wanting them to consider *"How do you make the exploration your own? Negotiating/ re-framing the task if needed"* (21.11.19). We also aimed for students to feel that whatever they did was "right", or as one student did state at one point: *"it was supposed to happen, it was inside a task, it was included in whatever we were doing, be it without knowing it would."*

However, as we started working, we perceived that many of the students did not have an existing framework for what the above approach could mean and were struggling with the amount of initiative we were asking of them in the work. Furthermore, Stinson (2004, 158) presented some problematics with "the messages of…'being your own teacher'" in that "It is seductive to get children to do what we want them to do while thinking that it is their own idea." She also brought up a very important consideration in this pedagogical approach which is that "teaching students to become their own teachers is not very useful if they will not be allowed to make their own decisions about their art or their lives" (Stinson 2004, 159). Although I felt very aware of how most educational systems discipline students in to always looking for what an authority figure wants from them, or if they are doing things "right", I want to consider further how to engage with other contextual factors when aiming for student ownership within exploration without a determined outcome. When students may be in a situation where they don't have agency in their lives, even as adults, how do we take that into consideration in this type of pedagogical work? I am deeply unsure about how to relate to this question, or even if this is the most helpful question to ask in different situations, but it is one which I would like to open.

One aspect of this *ability to explore* is also what and how we are asking students to explore, which is of course an integral part of my focus on states of presence. I feel that I have to ask myself what I mean when I say I want students to *explore*, and specifically in which ways I am asking that of them. Due to my focus on states of presence, I had a heightened awareness of how even well-intentioned work can ask students to conform to or train them(selves) into a 'normal' (or perhaps I could say neurotypical) way of doing embodied exploration. For instance, in the case of the work drawn from a somatic base, as so much of a certain lineage of contemporary dance work may be, we still "need to challenge our own cultural biases and assumptions, as well as the institutional authority that leads to standardization and normalization…and to ask who is not being taught or what is being taught in class" (Green 2007, 88). I therefore wanted to reflect on different components of the types of explorations we asked students to do in this process, which can maybe lend some ideas for other pedagogues to examine what types of explorations they are asking for, and what they may take for granted within those.

For instance, what is it to ask students to explore *within* or *inside* themselves? I confronted early in the practice my own uncertainty around asking students to spend longer amounts of time within themselves, especially as it related to trauma response, anxiety and diversity of perception. For instance, one student shared in their final reflection that

> *"the beginning of this project was very difficult to me. The texts that I have written are quite, well, full of anxiety. It was challenging for me to keep falling back to different trauma experiences of my past life. I was kind of forced to face many things which felt unpleasant. I also felt deep frustration and sadness like why can't a be a normal person like everybody else here. A person who could be around other people without a lot of anxiety and fear."*

I had a heightened awareness of the power I had to 'ask' students to enter in to certain states, such as when guiding them to do a version of the tiny dance (as described in section 4.2) or spending time focusing on their internal sensations in both broad and narrow ways, and that simply hearing those instructions as well as the underlying lifetime of training to follow the teacher's directions, especially in an institutional context, did to some extent (although I can't claim to what extent and it varies deeply depending on the person) make my 'asks' something that had a power we maybe don't always acknowledge when teaching. I have found that it can be tempting to fall into wanting to create a non-hierarchical space, and in doing so, make that very intention and impossibility by ignoring the need to deal with one's own power or authority as a teacher. I wrote in my journal: *"Thinking about power to make a statement and [somehow] change their state of embodiment/embodied experience because of it"* (9.12.19). Of course, every student had a different experience with each exercise, and we cannot control what those are (nor would I want to). However, I still want to keep in mind what Anttila (2004, 59) articulated about how "dance as an embodied practice is not innocent. The vulnerability that dance itself entails for the body/subject, compromises and complicates the possibility for dance to become a liberatory praxis."

I also felt that it was important to honor my *own* boundaries in this area, even as I struggled with what that meant and how to navigate my embodied experiences within the process. I was aware that I felt that trying to expand students' ability to explore in a certain internal way was, for me, in the domain of therapy. This could be true in many instances, but it felt especially present due to knowing that some students were navigating trauma responses and anxiety with the work. Of course, these challenges are not limited to internal work and could have a relational component, such as one student's reflection about experiences in pair work reminded me: *"my body goes in alarm mode very easily and reacts as if I was in danger…Although in my head, I would like to trust them."* However, my background and experiences with therapeutic somatic work made me feel that certain types of internal work crossed a boundary I had, whereas working in a more directed internal way, or especially working with more

external focus, didn't prevent these challenges from arising, but didn't make me feel as if I had entered knowingly into a grey area regarding therapeutic work that personally would also put me at risk.

I also had to be very aware of not placing my own experiences with mental illness and trauma on to members of the group, which I described in my journal as *"I have to maybe walk the fine line between projecting in a way that doesn't help anyone and using my own experiences to have an increased understanding of potential challenges and be more sensitive."* (24.1.20). Although I have, for instance, experienced having an exercise that was supposed to be in an arts education context be highly triggering while also not feeling safe or allowed to take steps to care for myself, I didn't want to somehow assume that my lived experiences could extend to giving me information about the students'. At the same time, I was very aware that my background affected my choices in terms of how I progressed with the exercises. I realized that although another teacher might feel comfortable finding ways to ethically work in certain directions around developing the ability to stay within yourself and cope with discomfort, going there was something I was especially sensitive about. This sort of personal pedagogical struggle is one that I am wary of sharing, because it is not the sort of thing one sees much in pedagogical literature, and I can't help but feel that I should somehow be "better". However, when I come back to the values underlying this work, I want to extend that intention to work with whatever is present as enough to myself, as well as open up this type of struggle on the chance that it can open greater discussion within dance pedagogy communities.

What all this discussion brings me to, is asking in what ways can we create structures for security to support students? Although we can receive information from students and their other teachers or the institution about students' needs and circumstances, I still aim to not assume what students can or cannot do. However, these considerations should not be limited to groups that already are labelled as having 'special needs', and I want to keep developing practices around structures and ways of interacting such that students are supported in setting boundaries, exiting tasks or asking for support to adjust tasks, and utilizing other support systems (such as those within the institution), rather than feeling like they must somehow make things work for themselves or they have "failed". What could it mean to adjust our point of view such that leaving an exercise, or leaving the class for the day when that is what is needed, is seen as a vital part of a student's learning rather than something to be avoided, or a teacher needing to do whatever they can to keep the student participating? One student articulated how finally setting boundaries freed them to continue the work:

"A turning point in the course was actually when once I had such a hard time in the class that I could not participate. It is difficult for me to trust and rely on people and I got to learn that. I told the teacher how hard I was having and together we thought about how I could participate and also keep my boundaries enough for me to feel good. I learned about setting up boundaries and at the same time something in me was set free and I really could enjoy this. I also found it an important moment when I was able to tell you how hard I had had and I felt that I was heard in a considerate way."

Other students also shared that when needs they expressed to us, even practical ones or ones that might have seemed small to me, were heard and addressed, that they were encouraged about being in the process. There are no guarantees in pedagogical interaction, nor is there a one size fits all script. I have often felt this fraught sense of not knowing if I have done enough, or if my actions and their impacts have aligned with my intentions. However, I am reminded that this listening, this being present with each other, while not always an easy state in which to place oneself, can be a starting point for a pedagogical interaction that honors or affirms how and what others perceive and experience.

5.2. Navigating the Unknown Between

Through considering the ability to explore I have further reflected on how to engage with, or even cope with, the unknown *between* teacher and student. Mercedes and I entered with a desire to not determine outcomes, to let things be unknown for us as artistic-pedagogical researchers. We wanted to work with what Kuppers (2004, 130) called "generative 'unknowing'" and "[valuing] uncertainty as a way of allowing openness towards difference the possibilities of change". This meant that we were asking the students to join us in that indeterminateness on a meta-level, along with going into the unknown concretely in exploratory exercises. Although we aimed to be as transparent as possible about how we were approaching and navigating the process, as well as attempting to create structures that were enough of a tether for the students to feel secure, there was still discomfort or anxiety that we all had to find a way to navigate. In their final reflections, multiple students expressed how the project was new and/or challenging:

"The voice and movement project was very challenging in many ways. I had to push my limits and widen my comfort zone."

"Definitely, it hasn't been the easiest in the world and there has been some difficulties along the way. But now afterwards I'm extremely thankful for each and every experience and I'm happy that I got to be a part of this."

"…this was a whole new and awesome experience, although sometimes a bit challenging."

"It is interesting to get to know a completely new technique. I haven't done anything like this before."

Each person involved in the process (students and teachers alike) had different needs to feel secure enough in a process that not only contains but *aims* for this "generative unknowing". As I've already said, one through line in this work was navigating how not to assume that students already have the tools to engage with what we were asking, but to also not assume incapability, and as such there becomes this dance of listening and adjusting how we acted on our responsibility for teaching and having a leading role in a process of exploration. I find here that the theme of "leadingfollowing" we used in the process (as introduced in section 4.2) is also a metaphor for the type of pedagogical relation I aim for. I want to keep a reflective awareness around how I perceive students, how I use those perceptions to "follow" or respond to students to then "lead" again, and what other factors are shaping my choices of when and how and what to put forth in my pedagogical interactions, especially when I don't want to be forcing students towards a narrow or "normal" way of perceiving or understanding.

At the same time, when looking back on this process of navigating not-knowing, of finding where we were going *together* with the students even when that was uncomfortable and unsure, there was still something keeping the students with us in the process, and us with them, such that many of them eventually expressed that they could see it as a process and how things were connected or developed. In this context, it was not a small thing that so many students continued to participate through to the end. At times during the process, I was insecure or anxious about what I was bringing and where we were at, as well as grappling with what Stinson (2004, 162) described as what "is too often a large gap between my ability to understand a situation, even on a somatic level, and my ability to do anything about it". How do I manage and navigate my own perception and presence as a pedagogue? How can I hold the need to be reflecting on how I am present without letting it take me out of that present-ness? I then want to also ask how we as pedagogues can see what we bring as enough when in such an open-ended process, and especially when we don't know how things are landing for students

or we see them struggling. Mercedes also wrote about this struggle to trust oneself, and how *"It seemed like I would have to convince myself that trusting myself is possible."* However, we had to accept that we couldn't force it, couldn't force the students to know that we meant what we said, that we had to keep going and staying true to our intentions in each action and interaction without knowing if those would have the outcome of providing whatever support or assurance the students needed, and then to listen and be open to whatever they were able to communicate with us.

This phenomena of trust was something that continued to come up in the process, and it is something I want to examine further in terms of how I look at it in artistic-pedagogical settings, especially when working in situations where the context creates a larger power differential. The idea of having *enough trust* comes in the context of sticking with things even when you are unsure. For instance, students stayed with us even when they had not had enough experience with us to trust that we meant what we said about whatever they did or were in the moment being enough. There had to be enough trust in all of us that somehow what we were doing was worthwhile, that we would be safe enough. I wonder how much this type of trust can be taken for granted in collaborative creative processes, or at least taken for granted as something that we can create rather quickly and through certain practices? Yet when I say trust, I also struggle to say exactly what I mean, other than that which kept us together and continuing to show up and give ourselves to the work. One student explained how they initially struggled with being open:

> *"In the beginning of the project, I had a hard time to be present in the group and to have guts to be and show how I felt just then I noticed quickly, that it was almost impossible to, for example, do the given assignment with an emotion I didn't really feel right then."*

This statement brings up another element of exploring *presence,* which is what can it mean, or what does it take, to feel that one can "be present" in a situation or "in the group" in the first place? How can we honor each students' starting place in relation to being present in or with the group, and support them in their journeys around that?

In this process, I also had a heightened awareness of the role of time and literal presence within this entering the unknown together. We didn't want to succumb to pressure to be efficient, instead we strove to let ourselves, with the students, be slow or *unproductive,* and to challenge those labels. Yet at the same time, our time in each class was limited, and in the second part, we had the goal of creating a performance and having enough

time to develop it so that the students felt secure in performing. So when our artistic-pedagogical time is restricted, I want to continue to ask how we can work in a way that takes in to account multiple ways of perceiving and being in the world and that values the need for, as one student described, *"space for goofy and silly time for fun and the seemingly unnecessary, open for relaxation and ease (navigating around what it means to waste time, what is wasting it)…be a human, be me with my needs."* What could it mean or do to apply some of the elements articulated in work about 'crip time'? Samuels (2017) discussed 'crip time' as it connects to disability and illness, and how it:

> "requires us to break in our bodies and minds to new rhythms, new patterns of thinking and feeling and moving through the world. It forces us to take breaks, even when we don't want to, even when we want to keep going, to move ahead. It insists that we listen to our bodyminds so closely, so attentively, in a culture that tells us to divide the two and push the body away from us while also pushing it beyond its limits. Crip time means listening to the broken languages of our bodies, translating them, honoring their words."

This type of listening to ourselves and honoring our needs even when they are contrary to what is often demanded is a value that I want to carry with me. And in having this intention, how do we navigate different paces within the group or ourselves when teaching? For instance, my internal pace tends to be at warp speed, and I have to constantly be aware of grounding myself and slowing down in order to be present with others, which also involves navigating internal tensions. In this group, some students had a fundamental need for things to go slowly enough that they could feel like they could stay with us, as one said: *"let's proceed slowly."* Yet other students found it quite challenging to spend a long time in certain exercises. There isn't an easy answer, or a certain practice that I want to propose here, merely that we continue to challenge our pre-conceived notions of how time needs to be used in educational contexts, and continue the conversation around navigating pressures towards efficiency and production that not only exist in most institutions but saturate most elements of our lives.

I also connect this element of time in the process to the ebbs and flows of various participants' literal physical presence, and how we can work through an unknown process in which all the members are always part of it even when not physically in the space for some (or even much) of the working time. While there are challenges that come from doing a creative process with shifting attendance, it is also an opportunity to

examine what we assume are fundamental needs of artistic and/or pedagogical processes. I wrote in my journal about my view on working in this way:

> *"it's about how to create a program/structure/whatever where you can include people whose reality means they can't be there more often than is generally considered possible or acceptable for someone to participate in this sort of thing. We often think in performing arts that being present and having the experiences is the most important thing, and I don't necessarily dispute that. But different people have different capacities for literally being present (as in physically there), and I think it's actually a huge barrier to participation, or means that participating in these types of things often demands big sacrifices of personal wellbeing…although of course being held accountable and being expected to be somewhere can be an important and helpful factor for some people."* (21.1.20)

Beyond this process, I wonder what we can do to bring to different dance spaces, including those in higher education, some of these elements of challenging notions of productivity, of an approach to time that is attentive to our needs even when those needs go against dominant expectations, as well as a different perspective on attendance.

5.3. Demands of Presence in Contemporary Dance

In discussing these themes of the ability to explore or the unknown between teacher and student, I have not addressed them specifically within a vocational dance context. I understand these considerations around the ability to explore and states of presence as related to dance pedagogy, but existing beyond a limited dance field. However, this process asked me to confront the ability to explore, and ways of paying attention or being present, as dance specific skills, and the expectations and assumptions around what vocational students or professional performers will learn or be able to do in that regard. As I attempted to articulate in my journal early on, I was not sure how I wanted to relate this work to the idea of working professionally in contemporary dance:

> *"there's something there about justifying what I'm doing in relation to contemporary dance as a field, and how that's fine, but also I have this sense of wanting to keep the importance of it in general, not just in relation to dance. Although I know it's a context thing, and also maybe because the previous context I developed this stuff in really was just an art/being a person in the world context, and so although I feel it's important to communicate why it is relevant and important to teach/do in this context, I don't want to need to make it fit in to what we expect in contemporary*

> *dance now, but it does…and that's not even quite right at all there's some way of thinking about this or something that's just not clicking or not there right now"* (11.12.19)

One area that emerged in relation to these questions around the context of the contemporary dance field, especially in the earlier parts of the process, was how much literal, physical movement or *dancing* the students felt they could do or were doing during the explorations. In a check-in with Jasmiina during the first part of our process, she brought up that for some of the students, they struggled with this feeling in our work that they weren't dancing, or didn't conceptualize how they could use more possibilities of physical action within the type of work we had been doing. This feedback led me to reflect from an unexpected perspective on the process of doing these types of explorations that ask for different types of interactions and intentions without prescribing what type of movement that could or could not generate or contain. I was coming from a place where, as I wrote after my previous years' process, "as I let go of feeling like the work we were doing needed to be concretely useful for the students, I became clearer in my belief and trust in developing awareness of the body and taking time to be present as valuable in itself, without focusing on what it produces" (Nowack 2019). Although we often stated to students that they could move as much or as little as they wanted, they still felt constrained and there was, at least initially, a context in which some students may have felt that they could not move freely. However, this feeling could also be seen as part of the process, one that connected to unfamiliarity, both with what we were doing and us as teachers, and a discomfort or uncertainty that we need not have aimed away from.

This desire for the students to not have to produce any certain kind of thing is closely tied to this idea of 'somatic values' I discussed in section 3.1 such as how the "(s)pace of learning allowed for autonomous movement exploration -- control lay in the process (the means), while suspending the movement outcome (the goal)" (Batson and Wilson 2014, 7). Moving away from an outcome-oriented practice also aligns with what Manning (2015, 206) called "a pragmatics of the useless", which is:

> "dedicated to uselessness, to practices that have not yet been defined in accordance to value imposed from the outside. A pragmatics of the useless celebrates the fact that we do not know where a thought can take us. It delights in study for study's sake."

However, this conversation and further reflection made me realize I may not have been as transparent as I could have been with that point of view, or that it did not come across to the students in the way I expected it to.

I still have much to consider regarding challenging students to appreciate and dig into all movement possibilities, including those they might not think of as dancing or even 'moving', and how to engage them with confronting or becoming more aware of hierarchies or standardized paradigms of what it means to be a (good) dancer without cutting off those trained possibilities that can be joyful or fruitful to include in exploration. For instance, some students included things in their final reflections that I read as indicating how important using or *demonstrating* their physical skill was to them, such as how for one student, the "Difficult/challenging things" world was their favorite because *"Move-wise I was able to show my skills the best"*, or how

> *"The popcorn world was the most challenging and awkward for me. I felt like I would have liked to do something more aesthetic and polished. It was a moment for me to grow since I felt embarrassed especially cause we practiced for so long and we end up crawling and running like in some small children's gym class."*

In this, there is something to be worked on regarding facilitating students' consideration of what they believe they need to know or be in order to be a dancer, as well as a number of questions posed by Anttila (2004, 51) that I would like to include as especially relevant here:

> "To what extent is the importance of bodily skill derived from socio-cultural environments where measurable, observable achievements are highly valued? How should we deal with young dance students' apparent dependence on acquiring social prestige and feedback from authorities? …How do dance teachers' own value systems and aesthetic views play out in constructing possibility for meaningful learning experiences for all dance students?"

I think it is important for us to engage with these questions on multiple levels, and I am left now with a desire to explore more how to challenge or expand on students' ideas of dance, while still validating what matters to them, their desires, and what they enjoy.

I have also been asking how we can increase awareness of, or even destabilize how we look at and/or demand 'attentional skills' or skills related to complexly engaging multiple states of presence in the dance field. I want to consider the idea of building the

skill or ability in a contemporary dance context of doing what Sipilä (2015, 61) described as "to take in consideration several fields simultaneously," especially because I understood our performance scores as asking the students to have several simultaneous modes of heightened presence. Batson and Wilson (2014, 106) stated something that I have often perceived as taken for granted in dance training: "Gaining expertise in dance includes developing flexible and adaptive attentional skills". However, what does it mean to develop "adaptive attentional skills?" Does that become just another area in which to be measured and compared like traditional teaching of physical techniques? I have experienced throughout my dance education and work the expectation that you will not only receive but process and output information immediately, retain it, and then replace or change it if necessary, all while being internally sensitive, highly aware of the group, and having clear, powerful intention and stage presence, and have seen students or performers be treated quite poorly when they couldn't meet these expectations. Even in processes that are trying to radically challenge limited ideas of who a dancer is or what one needs to be, there's always some way we expect people to be able to be present, especially with improvisation work. We perhaps cannot eliminate having these expectations, so how do we continuously bring our awareness to them and what can it change to articulate them or open them up to students?

If we do assert a certain way of integrating multiple tasks and attentions or specific, heightened presence states as something that is necessary for a dancer's work, how do we develop it without trying to *fix* students, or while embracing multiple ways of being in the world. If, for instance, we take the idea that "Dancemaking poses 'puzzles for the body to solve'" which "require dancers…to enact answers through heightened kinesthetic and proprioceptive capacities in unusual and often challenging conditions (McKechnie and Stevens 2009)" (Batson 2014, 37), can we actually be open to multiple ways of not only solving those puzzles, but understanding those puzzles in the first place? Constructing dance learning and making as 'puzzles' is common in dance pedagogy that focuses on inclusion and accessibility, in which "artists and educators approach the process of dance learning and creating by introducing and working on principles or concepts of movement" (Seham 2017, 171). However, this approach is perhaps most "inclusive" in how it does not "[restrict] movement to a narrowly defined physical execution" (Seham 2017, 171), and, as I've indicated, there are more ways we can interrogate our work in terms of how we expect people to process the world.

What about when we create a performance, when we see it as central that everyone is somehow working on the same 'puzzle'? In this process, as we created our scores for performance, I reflected on how they asked for certain shared ways of understanding:

> *"the way we're making scores…the group has to agree on a certain definition for certain shared concepts…but that it still allows for individual interpretations. e.g. we have some shared idea of 'high' or 'sudden' (and their finnish translations because that's always a factor here), but then each have their own ways. Or with the challenging things/tensions. That's experienced differently for each, but there's something underlying that is shared which is what makes it a 'world' and also that group connections create that charge that is so powerful to watch."* (21.1.20).

As I continued to reflect on this element of our work, I considered how creating scores in the way we did could be in tension with my aims to be open to and affirming of all ways of perceiving and being. If we wanted to, as I put it in my journal, *"create a performance together with connection, but also knowing that people connect differently"* and we asked *"the whole group to be the 'same' in some sort of specific presence or awareness"* (12.2.20), how can that, or *can* that, still include multiple ways of connecting, understanding, or processing? I am still unsure and holding this tension that stayed with me beyond the last performance.

In this process, I wanted the students to get to narrow in on these expectations around attention or presence. As I asked students to reflect after exercises or parts of the performance scores that asked for multiple simultaneous attentions and types of tasks, some of them did say that it was difficult for them to, for instance, be in their own movement improvisation while also paying attention to the group, or be aware of cues for the performance structure; that they would get lost in their own world, or feel that they could only do one or the other. Yet I still wondered what else I could have done around bringing up for the students this sort of tension around asking for a shared way of being in the scores. This was one of the ways in which I struggled with elements of reflective practice in its relation to my aim to have students explore states of presence while affirming their modes of being.

I therefore want to ask: how are certain types of reflective abilities expected in dance training, or certain types of contemporary dance work? How do I view reflection as part of exploration? How does teaching students *how* to be reflective play into all of the previous themes I've addressed? Although we of course used different methods to engage the students in a more verbal, conscious level of reflection, as we got towards the end of our process I was questioning if I could have somehow engaged them more around the material I am including in this thesis, something I contemplated in my journal:

> *"when we started out I somehow wanted my theoretical/philosophical interest that was underlying or within the practical work I was doing to be more communicated (or more understood) by the students, but…some of them were 'there' and some weren't, and so then sometimes I didn't put it out there as much as I could have, and then as we got towards the end I somewhat regretted that"* (28.2.20)

I still feel that if I aim to have students explore something like states of presence, that pedagogical process has to involve reflecting not only on what those experiences are, but what lies behind them and our understandings or expectations around things like being present, paying attention, or having a *body* or *mind* or *bodymind.* Yet how to facilitate not only each person's communication whether verbally or otherwise, but their comprehension or reception of the questions themselves? I also recognized that I hoped to, and maybe even expected to be able to engage the students in critical awareness of various societal structures around them. I was grounded in a point of view described by Schupp (2017):

> "The transgressive path is further paved through the use of reflective practice…Reflection causes students to unearth the reasoning and motivations of their daily experiences, teaching and learning, and movement practices; it reveals where they are on their journey, identifies where they have come from, and hints at where they could go next."

Another element behind this contemplation is the need I felt to be as transparent as possible about the work, and to have even the type of work I was doing towards this thesis have a collaborative element with the students. I also saw it as one way for students to be able to have their experiences be seen and affirmed, yet does that require that they be externalized? However, with this group, as I indicated in the above journal entry, I perceived that they were at different places regarding this type of reflective process, while also noticing that I had a specific idea of what it should look like for them to engage with this material in what I would describe as a complexly analytical or multi-layered reflective way. I now ask *why* I felt that I didn't engage them enough in a certain type of reflection or analysis, and what practices I was including within what that could be? I can now recognize that things like our practice of asking students to share what they needed to feel safe in a creative process, or our generative question and answer process was also a form of reflective practice, even if that's not how I was conceiving of it at the time. For instance, the questions students proposed were a way of

expanding upon what they understood from the practice, and in that way could open reflection for their peers without us having to lead them. They asked things such as:

> "*If you don't feel the connection between you and the group/partner, what do you do to get it or feel it?; "Can you trust the others?"; "Can you have fun in the group"; "What social rules you have had to learn but you didn't want to/don't agree with?"*

I simultaneously want to hold that I still feel that I could have taken other pedagogical steps to build further reflection in interaction with the students, while wrestling with this instinct to see the ability to do that in the way I understand (or understood) it as somehow further *ahead* of, or, even *superior* to not being able to do so. This hierarchical view of reflective skill (and how it is tied to views of cognitive ability) is something I see as deeply underlying many societal structures and highly relevant to pedagogical discourses, and to push against it is a massive discussion. Going forwards from this work, I hope to continue inquiry into reflective practices in dance pedagogy, keeping all the above considerations in mind.

5.4. Visibility

To widen this discussion, I want to address my continued uncertainty around how elements of this process could relate to larger contexts of disability studies or disability activism, if I should make those connections, and if so, how and with what considerations? With my limited knowledge and understanding of the multiplicities of experiences and conceptualizations of this area that we call disability yet still escapes definition, the place from which I start my interaction in this area cannot be *correct*, if there even is such a thing. Instead, I am striving to take this experience and allow it to morph within me from a place in which I am reflecting on my assumptions and listening to others while giving myself freedom and care in the interaction. One question or consideration that emerged early in the process but remains open and shifting within me is:

> *"Do we need to bring attention to these things [e.g. disability] within what we actually do/say with the group, and how? But also that not everything with this group/ in this context has to be specifically about disability, but it is there….so. No easy answers. Maybe we bring up some questions, rather than being afraid of doing it wrong, be transparent. Still easier said than done."* (29.11.19)

We did not end up specifically engaging with the students around the concept of 'disability', firstly because it did not emerge from the students, and secondly because it

didn't feel like it was needed to support our process. However, I could also say that, for instance, moments in which students asserted and honored their needs or boundaries or took the jump to share with us their anxiety or difficulty with engaging in the ways we were asking, were also ways of connecting with this complex area. I found myself focusing on not forcing the students or their situations to be something they weren't or trying to fit things into a preconceived idea of how anything under the umbrella of disability would be manifesting in the process. I didn't want to take the institutional context, or other assumptions that were simmering underneath my reflective surface to somehow box the students in to an experience of or need to share something around things like difference or 'impairment'. We could have perhaps engaged with the students about how they conceptualize or identify themselves in relation to things like neurodiversity and disability, while acknowledging that these concepts may also not have been things that resonated or were part of the students' lives in the ways I might assume. This is not to say that I have somehow the right approach to the unique nature of this context, but to instead share some of these contemplations that I am still not certain of.

Presenting a performance by students who are from a vocational special needs program also created questions around the visibility or communication of disability in performance. The subject of disability in performance is one that requires more background and discussion than there is scope for in this project, but it is still one that I want to open for further consideration, especially when that performance is in an educational context. What does it mean to make, or have, disability be *visible* within a performance? What does it do, to, in an example from this process, have the students who ended up performing all externally have no identifiable features that place them easily in the category of "disabled", or, as could have happened had all of the students performed, have only one in the group who does?

In this case, we did not try to hide anything that could be perceived as deviating from the norm, but we also did not state it. We did not include in our audience materials that the students were from a "special needs" school, although audience members who were familiar with or looked up Live could have known. The performance was not *about* disability, and so then to really make it present would have been a choice requiring complex considerations—a whole different process of inquiry. To do this, what further structures and knowledge would be required?

I also want to interrogate this idea of *visibility* especially when we often think of disability in *dance* as being centered heavily on clear physical differences from the

norm or things commonly viewed as impairments. As I have extensively discussed, we were focused on the students being able to be as they are, to bring themselves to the improvisation and the scores without knowing in what that would result. In that way, in the performance, there might have been difference that could or could not be read as disability (as each watcher's conception of that is also unique), however even that outcome has its own problematics. I am also wary of working in such a way that there is a strict binary between creating dance in which there is disability, or dancemaking which is about it, and dancemaking which is not. Could I say that we made a dance in which the student-performers were as they are, and after that point, it's a matter of the audience seeing what they will see? However, I still wonder what it would mean to provoke dialogue around the previous questions within audience members, or to challenge audience members' assumptions about special education in dance education?

6. CONCLUSION

I started this process wanting to underly my work with the value that there is "*no right way to be (in) a body*", however I was very aware that to hold true to that in practice was not so straightforward. As I continue, I hold with me the question "*How do we take for granted a type of embodiment [or presence]. How it's always there even when we don't notice it?"* (6.12.19). Going forwards, I hope to continue to see elements of these questions that I have yet to uncover, as well as to continue engaging around them not just with existing discourse but in practice with other students and professionals in this field.

Even as I want(ed) to focus on the construction of normalcy, I still have to ask myself how I could have woven that more thoroughly in to the process, and to stay aware of the work I still have to do to challenge those structures of normal within myself. When working pedagogically with a group who have all been defined as outside of the 'norm' or some sort of 'center' in terms of their needs or ways of being, I did want to take in to account those needs, not because they are *special* but simply because that is part of what is central to my pedagogy in any context. When the dominant forms of vocational, and especially higher education dance education are exclusive, there does seem to be a value in providing alternate settings in order to increase access to the work, while also working on shifting the structures all over. However, that does not absolve us in the field of the responsibility to examine our choices regarding who is able to participate in our artistic/pedagogical work, or who is able to participate without forcing themselves to engage in ways that are harmful to them. How can we as pedagogues hold this mindset when it is not placed on the surface by the institutional context such as it was in this process?

I want to go forth taking this work into networks of practice, to ask how to connect this work to other pedagogues and institutions and the like, while thinking about changing policies and attitudes and forging connections. Seham (2017, 166) and Aujla and Redding (2013) addressed the importance of building community to address barriers within the dance field, especially for students with disabilities. Yet these connections do not just have to address students. In a dance pedagogy context, how can we expand opportunities for those often excluded from to access pedagogical training and positions, as well as working towards having more diverse contributions to academic and professional discourse?

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