

ACTION RESEARCH

**The use of online learning in the support of studio teaching in the
performing arts**

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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Context and Enquiry	4
Research Questions	6
Literature Review	7
Locating a Methodology	10
Analysis of the Data	12
Limitations of the Research	25
Further Research Possibilities	26
Conclusion	26
Bibliography	28
Appendix 1: Initial Questionnaire	31
Appendix 2: Final Questionnaire	32

Introduction

Due to Covid-19, by 16th April 2020 of '89.5 per cent of the world's learners [...] [were] being taught online' (McKie 2020: 20). On this date, I was several weeks into delivering two practical 30 credit modules through a block teaching approach used at Staffordshire University Drama Department, where I am an Associate Professor in Acting and Directing. I became immediately interested in how I could draw upon my learning from this experience to supplement studio based drama teaching in future year and this piece of action research draws on data from several areas. The first is the learning undertaken 'in action' in terms of the ongoing online delivery (March to June 2020). Donald A. Schon states the need to take a moment to pause in the action to think and plan the next moment, thus allowing people to 'create opportunities for reflection-in-action' (Schon 1982: 279) whereby reflection occurs during the process of delivery, as opposed to following an event. The second is in relation to being able to take time to 'reflect on action' (Schon 1982: 276), both in terms of following the teaching sessions as well as upon completion of the overall delivery. This was specifically in relation to what learning can be taken into the delivery of a blended approach for 2020/21 academic year. As students move from blended learning to a face to face environment on campus, this research asks how virtual learning environments (VLE's) can be used to support, complement, deepen and aid learning, as opposed to replacing it. Below I outline that the data is collected from both my reflections in the form of a working diary, using the spirit of auto-ethnography, and two sets of questionnaires (one early, one summative) that

students took that captured their responses to this delivery pattern. Finally, the data is mapped against current pedagogic research.

The context and enquiry

Against the backdrop of Covid-19 and the move by Staffordshire University to purely online delivery for the two modules I was responsible for (starting from Monday 30th March 2020), I had to prepare to deliver these fully practical online modules online. Teaching using a 'block system' meant that these majorly credited modules had not started to run at the beginning of lockdown. These were:

- *Explorations in Rehearsal*¹, a 30 credit Level 5 practical module which explores directing and the interaction between a director, actor and the text on the rehearsal room floor. The assessment for this is 50% reflection on rehearsal processes via online Blackboard blog journals, and a 50% practical set of final pieces working in companies of three.
- *Staging the Classics*², a 30 credit Level 6 practical module which is facilitating/directing students in the full length classical text, Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. The assessment for this is 50% on the process (rehearsals) and 50% on their final contribution as actors to the production.

¹Module details here for Explorations in Rehearsal:

<https://www.staffs.ac.uk/current/student/modules/showmodule.php?code=DRAM50505>

² Module details here for Staging the Classics:

<https://www.staffs.ac.uk/current/student/modules/showmodule.php?code=DRAM60213>

Whilst the emergency University regulations allowed for 33% of the learning outcomes to be removed, this still posed the dilemma of the moving and delivery of teaching and assessment of purely practice based modules (which typically are delivered in a studio for five days a week intensively) online. Both student cohorts and I had no experience of online teaching or learning and I was determined to learn about this through undertaking action research.

Module adaptations made:

Explorations in Rehearsal adapted in the sense of the 50% reflection via weekly short online blogs on Blackboard was more explicit in relation to the practitioners studied, and the 50% practical was in applying these rehearsal methodologies to one classical and one contemporary/modern monologue filmed to camera. Teaching adaptations included creating all online teaching material based around practitioners who have considerable and wide source material available (via e-books, Drama Online, Box of Broadcasts) such as Katie Mitchell and Mike Alfreds who can be explored practically and via readings and reflections. The teaching delivery included masterclasses, short lectures, discussions, breakout Blackboard Collaborate online groups, readings/viewings and reflections (which allowed for formative assessment) and online personal tutorials.

For *Staging the Classics*, the full length play became a portfolio of two scenes recorded for radio, one paired scene and one soliloquy or monologue with the process mark and assessment criteria remaining the same. Teaching adaptations included created all online delivery including using Shakespeare's original practices

(where the actor has agency without a director using the early modern theatre rehearsal processes). Teaching strategies included an early series of masterclasses from all staff and guests working on the module covering original practices, approaches to verse and rhetoric for the actor and embodiment of language, using some pre-recorded short 'chunked' lectures on PowerPoint with current online resources. This then moved to becoming a series of online rehearsals using the Zoom platform.

Research questions

Against the above backdrop, the main research question explored is:

To what extent can online learning techniques supplement face to face studio based teaching in the Performing Arts?

This is answered through exploring the two subsidiary questions below.

SQ1 How do we ensure there is inclusivity through the delivery of the sessions and that compassionate pedagogy can be achieved with a lack of non-verbal communication?

SQ2 How do we measure the efficacy of the teaching in relation to a) individual sessions and b) a student's overall learning?

Literature review

There is an enormous amount of pedagogic literature in relation to online, blended and distance learning. This subsection is only able to give an overview of this literature is split into three key areas: extant pedagogic literature on blended and online learning, journalistic literature in the *Times Higher Education* newspaper amongst others and finally literature produced by the Academy.

Extant pedagogic literature

Moore *et al.* (2011) define the differences between e-learning, distance learning and online learning. Whilst not discussing blended learning, their research supports the notion that e-learning is a 'more recent version of distance learning' (2011: 130) which they define as education for those who are 'geographically distant' (ibid: 129) with the term e-learning superseding this terminology. Wang *et al.* (2013) point out that students need to demonstrate or accrue 'self-regulated learning behaviours [...] when taking online courses' (2013: 3) to ensure that students are skilled in time management and have a self-motivating approach to their studies. Supportive and systematic texts exist in relation to online teaching and learning, Vai and Sosulski articulate that if 'you no longer have a physical classroom [...] this completely changes the way you interact with your students' (2016: 11), demanding that challenge must remain at the heart of teaching, regardless of the form and that we are 'creating a custom experience for the online student audience' (ibid: 139). Judith Boettcher and Rita-Marie Conrad's 'how to' text *The Online Teaching Survival Guide* (2016) underpinned by pedagogic research, has several in-

depth chapters on the use of discussion boards for reflection, learning and assessment and models how to time an online course over the course of a week.

Journalistic literature

Very early in the Covid-19 lockdown, the *Times Higher Education's* articles stressed the importance of not simply lifting face to face pedagogy and assuming this will work in a digital environment. Acting as provocateurs, contributors from teaching and learning backgrounds (mainly from UK HEI's) highlighted their experiences. Nicholas Murgatroyd's key message a week after lockdown, related to the importance of structuring time (as this action research also discovers) whereby a sense of realism is needed and '30 minutes of student-facing digital content can take hours of development time' (2020: 26) and warns pedagogues not merely to transfer 'lecture notes to a digital platform' (ibid: 26). Countless articles followed over a four month period, many also stressing the time required to create materials, as 'the challenge will be enormous' (McKie 2020: 21), echoing Matt Jenner's call to arms to undertake this work correctly as 'emergency remote teaching is not online learning, and students will not be blind to the difference - particularly as the lockdown takes an increasing toll on teachers' energy and spirit' (2020: 28). John Ross and Joyce Lau (2020) discuss how Covid-19 is a chance to revisit assessment. This supports David Carless's need for 'flexibility and choice' and that exams online can be flexible as online delivery can allow 'opportunities for students to choose their own pace in the course and assessment' (Ross and Lau 2020: 22). Bruce Macfarlane encourages the need for academics, and something discovered through this research, to ensure that we do not use VLE environments as a 'repository for

dumping content such as handbooks and lecture notes' (2020: 31) and consider more sophisticated approaches to the use of VLE in online delivery that impact directly on learning.

Academy literature

Initial literature circulating was with the aim of supporting lecturers to think about contingency planning. Leading HE expert Sally Brown's article *Contingency Planning: exploring rapid alternatives to face to face assessment* (13 March 2020) was widely circulated prior to lockdown via Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD) by Professor Paul Kleiman with pragmatic advice of how to move teaching and assessment into other forms, such as take-away exams, narrated and filmed presentations, drawing on #LTHEchat forum on Twitter. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education's speedy response on the 7th April authored by Sally Booth *et al.* (2020) entitled *Covid-19: Thematic Guidance Practice and Lab-based assessment* had concrete suggestions for theatre courses, with Professor Dan Reballato's contributions amongst others. Suggestions ranged from grading 'the working practices and rehearsal process' (2020: 4), to reflective portfolios, written alternatives and recorded work, allowed for a range of possibilities provided that assessment measured 'the required learning outcomes' (ibid: 4) was essential.

Whilst the journalistic literature was a call to arms, the Academy literature (coupled with the Advance HE teaching and learning webinars) ensured pragmatism, but rightly stopped short at dictating or foregrounding preferences. This amplified

the place of academic agency within decision making in relation to individual course and module needs to fulfil the learning outcomes. Finally, returning to extant literature of online pedagogy ensured there was a scaffolding of systematic and pragmatic teaching and learning methods to draw on as the move online occurred.

Locating a methodology

This research predominantly utilised a qualitative data collection methodology, which concerns collecting and analysing data from a non-numerical perspective,

encompassing such designs as ethnography, case study analysis, and historical or document analysis [...] knowledge consists of understanding and [...] the goal of research is the examination of processes.

(LeCompte and Preissle 2003: 46)

A qualitative method (the 'how' of the methodology) was the keeping of a reflective journal [See Appendix 1] by using an auto-ethnographic approach by reflecting on all taught sessions. Autoethnography is 'the use of personal experience to examine and/or critique' (Jones *et al.* 2013: 22) highlighting the relationship of personal experience to practice. I was able to reflect and capture this detail immediately following a session, echoing Schon's reflection 'on action' as outlined above. Yet, as J. A. Wilson states:

one of the primary methodological problems for artist-scholars working in practice-as-research is that they must wear at least two hats at all times. The researcher needs to 'get' something out of the research, some output, while also wearing the artistic hat that demands full presence in the artistic process.

(Wilson 2019: 4)

It was thereby imperative to synthesise data from other areas, as the nature of autoethnography means that, as Wilson alludes to, the needs of teaching with the needs of research had to be balanced. This research, to be meaningful, needed both learner and pedagogue reflection.

The second qualitative method was to therefore undertake voluntary online questionnaires. These were done after the first week of teaching on both modules, as 'the first time you teach [a course] you'll want to make changes to future lessons if something is not working' (Stein and Graham 2014: 188). Pedagogues state the importance of undertaking this 'as early as midweek of the first week [...] after all, we don't see the students as often' (Boettcher and Conrad 2016: 53). The questionnaire after week one [see Appendix 1] allowed for student reflections on their first week using open question feedback questionnaires concerning the Learning and Teaching online strategies. Sixteen of thirty students undertook the survey, supporting SQ1 and the main research question in particular.

Both of these methods support the notion that qualitative data can be beneficial at 'describing the particular, the micro, and the situated elements of our lives' (Jones *et al.* 2013: 26). However, this research also draws upon a small amount of qualitative data. Mixed methods are encouraged by Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, who argue that 'methods must be collected according to purposes' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: x). This research employed the use of a intervalist Likert scale [See Appendix 2] where 'validity may be easily and quickly assessed' (Carifio And Perla 2008: 1151) in the form of summative feedback (with an open box

for comments) in terms of what potentially could be used from online learning as the University moves to blended learning during 2020/21. This was to primarily to collate data to support the main question, and SQ's 1 and 2. Seventeen out of thirty students undertook the final survey.

All data from the students was collected via Staffordshire University's VLE Blackboard 'surveys' tool and was therefore anonymous as per the software's default setting, ensuring confidentiality. This supports Duncan Light's ethical notion that 'it goes without saying that you should never write anything that can reveal the identity of the people being researched' (Light 2010: 179). Whilst the dataset is small, it is targeted to my students, ensuring the analysis can create a 'lot out of a little' (Silverman 2013: 141).

Analysis of the data

Beginning with the subsidiary questions, an analysis of the data from both the online questionnaires and the reflective diary answers the enquiry of the research.

SQ1 How do we ensure there is inclusivity through the delivery of the sessions and that compassionate pedagogy can be achieved with a lack of non-verbal communication?

My early diary entries of my first sessions discuss the use of time: that I needed to do 'less'³ in the teaching period and that learning resources and

³ Personal Reflective Journal p.1 30th March 2020

information needed to be 'sent out before'⁴ An online course needs to be structured differently than a five day practical class context in order to take into account the diversity of learners and that digital equity is ensured. By using a flipped classroom model, this allows learners to engage asynchronously with the materials.

In the online classroom, a second common problem was that of the quality of student engagement *sans* body language. Finding other tools such as the online discussion board to comment during a session of directing Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* was, from the second week, a positive attribute where the 'quieter students express[ed] themselves'⁵ yet a question remained in my diary of, 'how to keep all engaged and measure engagement in an inclusive manner?'⁶. This was a concern for Student 3 on the first Level 5 survey who wanted lecturers to 'get people more involved, making sure they're paying attention'⁷ as some were not engaging. Student 11 suggested that 'we could maybe have more discussion over messages' to combat the issue of the 'monopolisers ... the over-talkers' (Gilbert and Bryan 2019: 153). The use of the discussion board with contributions from students in response to a question, followed by peer contributions and finally staff feedback supports the idea that there can be an improvement in 'the quality of their thinking processes' (ibid: 152). Compassionate pedagogy supports students and staff to explicitly 'notice distress and/or disadvantaging of others and commit to reduce it' (Gilbert and Bryan 2019: 155) by aiming to enhance the social and learning experiences for everybody in the room. I was unable within the confines of this research project to undertake a

⁴ Ibid: p.1 30th March 2020

⁵ Ibid: 1st April 2020

⁶ Ibid: 1st April 2020

⁷ Level 5 mid-point questionnaire

formal compassionate pedagogic project as this 'requires guided *practice*' (Gilbert 2013: 495) but, by utilising the *spirit* of the work I aimed to 'spot [students] who are very clearly emotionally distressed or problematic' (ibid: 504) and to 'actively bring others into the discussion, which is admittedly a challenge when some students specifically ask their tutors not to put them on the spot' (Grove 2020: 20). I extended this personally to think whether social and educational issues were the cause of any distress and by the fourth session delivered, my diary states that 'I still need to engage all students'⁸, not to silence the monopolisers, but to ensure everyone felt comfortable to contribute. Setting up weekly discussion boards as well as staying at the end of online sessions to answer queries were two ways I overcame this. By Monday 20th April, and linked to SQ2 below, teaching rhythms and familiar archetypes were in place, with an hour's kick start masterclass followed by work self-led over three hours (as well as lunch) prior to returning together as a group for a plenary share back. This allowed for students to negotiate their own individual life situations as well as linking to the need for off screen time. Student 17 commented strongly in relation to screen exhaustion:

[I] feel very mentally drained at the end of each day but I'm not sure if it's just because it's a different way of working and that I might get used to it the further we move into the module.

(Student 17)⁹

⁸ Personal Reflective Journal p. 4 20 April 2020

⁹ Level 6 mid-point Questionnaire

To begin with, I was falling into the trap by not heeding the warning that 'emergency remote teaching is not online learning, and students will not be blind to the difference' (Jenner 2020: 29). The action research allowed me to reflect in and on action, making changes *during* the delivery in 2020, as well as grounding learning opportunities for ongoing teaching strategies post-Covid.

'Familiarity' (Bligh and Elkington 2019), whereby there are enough archetypes for students and staff to engage and socialise in any learning context, was balanced against the evidence to keep it varied as per the pedagogic literature. Inclusivity was also important via a Webinar poll undertaken on the 5th Session on Tuesday 23rd April, whereby 'the use of a poll - do you understand *x* - was useful as I could see who was struggling and needed extra support'.¹⁰ Moving from using Blackboard Collaborate Webinar where I could only see a number of students to rehearsing on Zoom, enabled everyone to see each other, which is important to notice distress or concern. Student 8 wanted lecturers to 'ask students who don't participate in conversation more questions to check they're actually listening'¹¹ to promote a more inclusive cohort identity. By Monday 11th May, I became aware of those students who were moving ahead and requiring more tasks. This session introduced students to Michael Chekhov acting techniques, and I embedded advanced exercises on the task sheets, not related to the assessment needs, for those who want to work at their own asynchronous pace via deeper level exploration. All of the essential work and tasks relate to the assessment directly, so there was less 'busy work' (Graham and Stein 2014: 106) that wastes a student's time. This concerns not packing the

¹⁰ Personal Reflective Journal p. 6 23 April 2020

¹¹ Level 5 mid-point Questionnaire

course with material that doesn't relate to assessment or Learning Outcomes. Ensuring time for reflection and self-feedback mechanisms on direct assessment tasks for learners was also important. As Student 2 stated, 'I think allowing for time for reflection and continual assessment has been very useful for me personally'¹². This segues this report into the area of learning efficacy, which is the focus of SQ2.

SQ2 How do we measure the efficacy of the teaching in relation to a) individual sessions and b) a student's overall learning?

My very first diary entry states 'it is like speaking [on Blackboard Collaborate Webinar] into a "void" – how do I know any learning is taking place? PowerPoint is not my usual!¹³ I have always believed that a block of teaching time is simply where learning has to be demonstrated to take place. Yet suddenly I could not read non-verbal signifiers; I had to discover what I needed to do to ascertain if any learning was taking place, and then test the most appropriate technological tools to achieve this. A cohesive approach was required for learning and I had to safeguard that 'engaged learners are active participants in the learning process' (Vai and Sosulski 2016: 84). This relates to the feedback from students who were frustrated with the monopolisers, or for those who are intimidated, as Student 7 expressed: 'some people can find talking and sharing thoughts/ideas in groups they're not familiar with very daunting'¹⁴. Discovering the 'touch points' to ensure learning was taking place such as online polls and mini-quizzes where guidance could be offered, ensures voices are heard. Parallel to this were the weekly short blogs. This formative

¹² Level 5 end-point Questionnaire

¹³ Personal Reflective Journal p.1 20 March 2020

¹⁴ Level 6 end-point questionnaire

approach identified where there were gaps in their knowledge from which individuals could be targeted with specific feedback, quickly and effectively.

In the second session I used small breakout group function on Webinar. I joined each group very quickly to observe and noticed those who hadn't spoken in the full cohort session were now engaging more fully, as well as working with their videos on in a less inhibited manner. Using the 'think-pair-share' method, I also asked them to independently reflect, prior to assigning them into the breakout smaller groups prior to sharing ideas in the full cohort environment, thus still aiming to facilitate differing types of learning. Use of simple 'polls' twice of this session enabled me to see what was being understood as well as seeing if someone wasn't replying but looked as though they were online. From this, I was able to undertake some follow up emails to certain students to ascertain wellbeing.

Two end point comments by students has allowed me to consider how to change my practice. The first was relating to resources, as 'if resources are late/handed out so close to a lesson that they can't be fully reflected on, then I think that takes away from the overall learning' (Student 3)¹⁵. By the fifth session I was preparing PowerPoints and posting these and other learning resources in advance, prior to delivering online practical work. One student commented that 'more physical exercises is a good step forward' and a second stating, 'I enjoyed getting on my feet today'¹⁶. The second comment relates to inclusivity: 'I think with being dyslexic the idea of videos and or pod cast would be really useful when getting ready to prep for

¹⁵ Level 6 end-point questionnaire

¹⁶ Feedback via online chat: 27 April

a session the next day (Student 6)¹⁷. By the 10th Session, I was using audio recorded notes on feedback, alongside resources in advance with vocal recordings over the top which was commented on by Student 4 whereby using 'recorded feedback [was useful] as I found this easier to understand and could reflect back on the feedback better than other written or verbal feedback in the past I case I missed something from my feedback'¹⁸.

Linked to the notion that feedback in blended learning should happen 'as soon as possible' (Graham and Stein 2014: 106), the assessment was reworked to weekly online blogs marked by myself with an indicative grade prior to their next submission. This was well received by students, and one commented that it was

great to have feedback and a mark and see how we were doing and therefore better improvements were made, because the feedback was still there for us to look back on and was still fresh in our minds, instead of there being a gap of an entire module. (Student 8).¹⁹

By not setting one final, summative assessment, I could support learners individually with feed-forward notes. Some related to their creative content and ideas, some on their standards of reflection, whereas others needed support in relation to deepening skills of contextualisation and application of research to practice. In relation to spatial issues, when working with the Level 6 acting students I asked them to imagine their rooms (even tiny box rooms) as creative spaces. This 'adaptation to

¹⁷ Level 6 end-point questionnaire

¹⁸ Level 5 end-point questionnaire

¹⁹ Level 5 end-point questionnaire

their learning space'²⁰ where I worked with whatever their personal circumstances are, contributed to a more equitable approach to teaching standards.

Moving finally to the main research question:

To what extent can online learning supplement face to face studio based teaching in the Performing Arts?

2020-21 sees my teaching moving into the blended environment throughout Semester 1, with an intention to return to face to face delivery by Semester 2. However, I believe that as we move from online via blended learning to face to face, there are methods that can be taken to support learning in a studio environment. At the heart of this is using blended and online learning and teaching strategies to support studio based practice learning, rather than merely using the technology as a 'digital facelift' (Campbell and Groom: 2019) where there is a transfer of the onsite classroom to the online environment.

The Covic-19 emergency experience has allowed me to understand how to create a 'custom experience' (Vai and Sosulski 2015: 139) of balancing face to face *synchronous teaching*, whereby interactions happen at the same time in the studio, with *asynchronous teaching* where interactions do not happen at the same time but where there is space for reflection, consideration and peer responses. Table 1 below

²⁰ Personal Reflective Journal p.8 11th April 2020

outlines the online and blended approaches that I will be feeding into my teaching from next academic year to support studio delivery.

Teaching and learning method	Rationale	Possibilities for application
Use of audio feedback and verbal/visual commentary.	Students are able to watch, re-watch (or listen and re-listen). This allows for reflection, consolidation and incubation time which is specifically important for neuro-diverse learners and aims that students can action their feedback.	Mid-point feedback. Formative Feedback. End point feedback.
Recording short video introductions at both course and module level.	Through using a personal approach, an online but personalised learning community can be promoted as lecturers are 'nurturing a learning	On all modules. On all courses.

	community' (Boettcher and Conrad 2016: 47) prior to the commencement of teaching.	
Digital alternatives to assessment, such as video monologues, radio plays, zoom duologues.	Increasing the range of assessment strategies that are appropriate to 'authentic assessment' and real world learning. In the past, alternative and referral assessments have defaulted to a written format, not commensurate with our learner's experiences.	Alternative Assessment Referral Assessment
Consider more 'chunking' for neuro-diverse learners, i.e. shorter MOOC style videos they	'Unbroken density' (Vai and Sosulski 2015: 191) is very difficult to deal with online but also face to face.	As flipped learning approaches prior to studio work in acting and directing techniques.

<p>can watch asynchronously.</p>		
<p>Supporting students to create space / think about their space at home as 'creative' for practical work.</p> <p>'Crossing the threshold' (Rushe 2019: 295), for example, is a Michael Chekhov acting technique to physically move whilst imaginatively adaptinh.</p> <p>This can be a way of ensuring a creative state within any environment.</p>	<p>For students not to see their environment as negative or one that would impede practical work and learning.</p> <p>To embrace a creative space in a studio environment as a collective.</p>	<p>Introduced in practical work at the start of every session whether online or in the studio.</p>
<p>Use of discussion boards: allowing turnaround time for posting, peer responses and lecturer comments.</p>	<p>'building an online community [...] promotes a high proportion of student to student dialogue' (Boettcher and Conrad 2016: 47). Using</p>	<p>Every module as a way of connecting studio practice to ongoing reflection and learning.</p>

	<p>discussion boards as a place to reflect with time to analyse and make synthesis via consolidation, peer learning, and tutor responses that enables learning between sessions.</p>	
<p>Shorter, more frequent assessment tasks with more feedback (as feed forward) from early formative points.</p>	<p>Linked to the need for rapid feedback as outlined above.</p>	<p>Finding formative assessment opportunities.</p>
<p>Use of open discussion forums.</p>	<p>Question and Answer boards on the Blackboard Discussion tool can be more useful than private emails, as all staff and students can see correspondence and see</p>	<p>Ongoing, through setting aside 10 minutes per module daily to check communication from students.</p>

	shared concerns which builds the learning community.	
Undertake work to develop compassionate micro-skills in students.	To ensure all voices are heard, to reduce the monopoliser's voices and to increase the voice of the quieter students, also relating to closing 'the black and minority ethnic attainment gap' (Gilbert and Bryan 2019: 155).	Through the first number of sessions on practical modules at Level 4 to explicitly introduce compassion-focused pedagogy.
Clear, concise folders/content chapters on Blackboard VLE.	Ensuring clear VLE learning resources using flipped approaches in an organised and systematic way. As Student 8 articulated, 'it would be nice if things on blackboard were a little more organised, some things weren't in the	All module VLE organisation need to be standardised across all modules, especially for neuro-diverse students.

	places that they were expected to be in. it would make things easier if there was a universally agreed on folder for things'. ²¹	
Assessing and utilising wider resources: Drama Online and the National Theatre Archive, for example, in relation to teaching support.	There is a wealth of pre-existing online resources readily available for flipped learning on contextual sessions.	Embedded across all modules.

Table 1: Methods taken from online and blended learning to be utilised to support studio practice.

Limitations of the research

There can be no assumptions that this research can be mapped onto all courses across the HE performing arts academy. This research is informed by my personal experiences, underpinned by relevant pedagogic theory, spring-boarding

²¹ Level 5 end point questionnaire

into future delivery possibilities for the course and modules that I am responsible for at Staffordshire University.

Further Research Possibilities

One area that merits deeper research is that of compassionate informed pedagogy. Building on the physical work of Bryan and Gilbert (2019), undertaking a study surrounding online compassionate pedagogic techniques and adapting studio based to online based work, would require separate action research.

Conclusion

Blended learning approaches support numerous learning styles and multiple intelligences. Whilst studio work remains at the centre of the HE experience for the Staffordshire University drama students, reflecting on my experiences of rapid online delivery through this action research has enabled me to reframe my thinking in relation to learning and teaching strategies overall. This is set against the backdrop of the 'B[A]ME attainment gap is approximately 14% across the UK Higher Education sector' (Gilbert and Bryan 2019: 156) and within the Performing Arts, the 'percentage of students with a specific learning difference engaged in actor training is about five times higher than in the general population' (Zybutz and Farquharson 2016: 79). This has been coupled with an increased personal awareness to be more explicitly inclusive in my approach. This research has led me to commit to utilise blended learning methods within a previously studio only learning environment, coupled with an awareness of compassionate pedagogic techniques to allow for a

diversity of learners to engage *diversely* using all platforms to support their learning. Further action research will be undertaken throughout the academic year 2020-21 to assess the efficacy of this in relation to studio and face to face teaching.

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE AT START OF MODULE

Q1. What should we CONTINUE doing? What is working for you so far?

Q2. What should we STOP doing? What is hindering progress (or could we think differently about something)?

Q3 What should we START doing? What haven't we explored so far that would help you?

APPENDIX 2: END OF MODULE QUESTIONNAIRE

I am interested in finding out what we can use from our Covid-19 online teaching experience this semester moving forward. It's been a real pleasure to hear more people's voices in a virtual environment and I'd like us to look at how we can capture some learning from this. I know that you will have finished but your learning can help others in the future as we have been the most intense online.

When students return to an on-campus studio based work (either productions or practice based modules such as *Explorations in Rehearsal*) do you think the below could be useful to bring from our online learning approaches to aid and support learning?

Use of handouts and online resources in advance or following sessions;

Vimeo or other online viewings to be watched in own time;

Shorter (and more often) reflective tasks with feedback as opposed to one final assessment;

More 'self-led' independent time, with you following task/work sheets (to be done at home or in the studio) and then sharing back discoveries and breakthroughs with lecturer and peers

Mini 10-15 minute videoed lectures/ audio podcasts to watch or listen to in advance to set the scene/context of a practitioner or rehearsal technique we might then explore practically.

What about the below that we haven't used much of/at all? Would you like to use...

A Q and A forum for questions, concerns and queries about the module

Use of discussion boards with tutor feedback;

Quizzes as a form of assessment

Peer assessment online

Part of the assessment for process (e.g. about 10%) is on contribution to studio/rehearsal discussions and online forums.

In order for any of the above to be most beneficial for your learning, what would you need in a perfect world to allow this to happen? *Think about timing of the above: when would you need them to prepare fully? What about if you are neuro-diverse (dyslexic/ with dyspraxia), are there other considerations we can take into account?*

Anything else you'd like to add?