

## **Action Research Project**

PGCLTHE - Module 2

**Fostering political discussions:**

**An action research project applying Critical Pedagogy to the teaching of Videodance in the context of higher education.**

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word count: 5430

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“Liberating education poses problems, deconstructs, is founded in dialogue, requires critical thinking, requires creativity, stimulates action, and affirms changing reality.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steiner, Stanley F., Mark Krank, Peter McLaren, and Rober Bahruth, 2000. *Freirean Pedagogy, Praxis, and Possibilities - Projects for the New Millennium*. New York and London: Falmer Press, p. xi.

## Introduction

I'm currently a Lecture in Dance and Technology at the London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS). I am module leader for the undergraduate BA2 Video Intensive and postgraduate Videodance. Additionally, I supervise BA3 research projects around the areas of video, photography, projection and related subjects. Another significant part of my role includes supporting students and staff on their use of technology, particularly in the live performances in the theatre.

The dance students that attend the course at LCDS come from a variety of backgrounds; after the course many will find employment as dancers and choreographers, but also as teachers, producers and even go on to work on other fields not directly related to dance.

In October 2012, as part of the coursework for the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE) at Rose Bruford College, I completed the Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI)<sup>2</sup>. This is a tool crafted by researchers Pratt and Collins with the purpose of aiding teachers in reflecting on their practice and identifying characteristics that perhaps are

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<sup>2</sup> *Teaching Perspectives Inventory*, Web Page, 2001 [Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2012], available at <http://www.teachingperspectives.com>

not evident for the practitioner. The inventory comprises of a questionnaire and a comparative analysis of the answers with regards to Pratt and Collins's five broad categories of teaching perspectives: Transmission, Apprenticeship, Developmental, Nurturer and Social Reform.

Although the TPI alone does not provide suggestions on how to improve personal teaching practices, the process of considering each question, looking at the final results and comparing them to the 5 different 'perspectives' seems to stimulate healthy reflective and critical thinking. According to Pratt and Collins, 'the TPI helps you better understand your own views of these perspectives and how you express them through your own beliefs, intentions and actions.'<sup>3</sup>

My Teaching Perspectives Profile (see Attachment 1) highlighted that, in October 2012, I did not possess any dominant or recessive perspectives. Social Reform, however, seems to have ranked high with regards to beliefs and low with regards to actions. According to the authors, teachers whose perspectives are aligned with the Social Reform model tend to approach the learning and teaching process as an awakening. In other words, they seek to change society through education, stimulating a critical approach to the values and ideologies that are embedded in society.

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<sup>3</sup> *About the TPI*, Web Page, 2001 [Accessed 13th November 2012], available at <http://www.teachingperspectives.com/drupal/about/about>

On November 2012, reflecting about my TPI results I wrote the following entry on my reflective journal:

This is definitely something for me to think about. I do believe very confidently that education can change not only individuals but also society, in other words, that going through higher education in performing arts can influence a person in a positive way so that this person can have an active role in changing the future. If I believe those things, then it is my duty to make efforts towards this goal. Perhaps I haven't been critical enough on my classes or perhaps I don't attempt to be as inclusive and open minded and political as I would hope to be.<sup>4</sup>

As the quotation above demonstrated, completing the inventory has had a significant impact on how I view myself as a teacher and, as a consequence, on identifying the areas I would like to improve.

Margaret Riel, when discussing the appropriateness of Action Research methodology in education, asserts that the best research questions will 'come from a desire to have practice align with values and beliefs. Exploring these questions helps the researcher to be progressively more effective in attaining their personal goals and developing professional expertise.'<sup>5</sup>

It naturally followed that, when given the opportunity of conducting an Action Research Project, I decided to address these discrepancies on what I believe the overall goal of education is and the type of teaching I was most often practicing in the classroom.

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4 Gabriela Tropa, online forum post at Rose Bruford College VLE, 13th November 2012.

5 Riel, Margaret. 2010. *Understanding action research*. Center For Collaborative Action Research, Pepperdine University. [Online] retrieved 9 August 2011 from the Center for Collaborative Action Research. <http://cadres.pepperdine.edu/ccar/define.html>

These ideas had a strong impact on me; they made me question not only the teaching methods I was employing, but also the discipline and institution I was working on. After conversations with colleagues and a review of the curriculum, I realise that very little if any political content was being debated in the dance students' modules, except from the obvious Cultural Studies module.

The relationship between theory and practice is often debated among artists, arts educators and students. 'There is a widely held assumption in art teaching that theory gets in the way of creativity and spontaneity.'<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the dichotomy that this distinction generates reverberates into other notions, such as thinking versus making, visual versus intellectual.

Distinction between practice and theory inhibits more complex debates about the relationship between Dance and the context in which it is inserted.

By fracturing the making of the art form and the thinking of about the art form, educators are isolating Dance from a wider debate about its context, its value, its aims. I suggest that this ultimately impacts on the student and later professional's capacity to reflect critically about art, society and his position as a citizen.

This research project was born from those ideas, placing political discussions in the core of the module and approximating the critical approach to the practice of Videodance.

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6 McKenna, Susan. 1999. *Theory and Practice: Revisiting Critical Pedagogy in Studio Art Education*. Art Journal. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/777885>.

## Theoretical Route

For the purposes of this research, I have chosen to experiment with inserting political debates into the teaching of Videodance through a Critical Pedagogy lens. Drawing initially from the writings of Critical Pedagogy's founder Paulo Freire and later from contemporary educators, such as Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, the principles and values of this movement have been present in most aspects of this research, particularly the planning, the observing and the reflecting phases.

Paulo Freire is considered by many as the inaugural philosopher of Critical Pedagogy<sup>7</sup>. His approach to education was highly influenced by progressive movements, such as anti-capitalism, feminism, anti-patriarchal movement, anti-imperialism and others. His approach to education was highly influenced by progressive movements, such as anti-capitalism, feminism, anti-patriarchal movement, anti-imperialism and others.

Freire's pedagogy is founded on the idea that traditional education emphasises a vertical relationship between teachers and students. In other

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<sup>7</sup> Freire, Paulo. 2005. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th ed. New York: Continuum.



words, traditional education is centred not in facilitating learning, but in delivering content.

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits, which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits.<sup>8</sup>

This realisation is not unique to critical pedagogy. Constructivist educators also defend that the learning and teaching process should happen through engagement and activities, as opposed to a transmission of knowledge.

The view of university teaching as transmitting information is so widely accepted that teaching and assessment the world over are based on it. Teaching rooms and media are specifically designed for one-way delivery. A teacher is the knowledgeable expert, the sage on the stage, who expounds the information the students are to absorb and to report back accurately.<sup>9</sup>

Freire, however, goes further in his analysis of the role of education for society and concludes that most pedagogical practices are not only ineffectual, they also perpetuate a model of the world that is oppressive, and ultimately contribute to the maintenance and proliferation of oppressive practices.

At this point, it is perhaps useful to clarify what critical pedagogues understand by oppression. In his article *Politics of Explanation - Ethical*

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8 Paulo Freire (2005) op. cit. 72

9 Biggs, John, and Tang, Catherine. 2007. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. 3rd ed. London: SRHE and Open University Press, p. 17.

*Questions in the Production of Knowledge*, Heaney defines power with regards to social relations as ‘more than mere capacity, which, when exercised, affects the behaviour of others; it is also a capacity exercised at the cost of the other’s capacity to act.’<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Heaney identifies three dimensions of power: force, in which the decisions are marked by open and explicit conflict; mobilisation of bias, in which the existence of conflict is obscured and decisions appear to be inevitable and irrevocable; and finally oppression.

The oppressed are not only ignorant of the social conflicts at play, they internalise, believe and proliferate ideas that are not their own. They often reconcile to their lack of power and assume a fatalist attitude towards what is believed to be personal inadequacy or failure. In this sense, oppression is far more sly and dangerous than the other dimensions of power, since it prevents individuals from articulating their own interests or even recognising the existence of social conflict.

Images propagated by mass media and education not only exclude understandings and meanings that have a high risk of unmasking conflict (as in the second dimension of power), but also include explanations that negatively affect self-concepts and expectations regarding “realistic” modes of behaviour.<sup>11</sup>

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10 Heaney, Thomas. 2000. Politics of Explanation - Ethical Questions in the Production of Knowledge. In *Freirean Pedagogy, Praxis, and Possibilities*, edited by Stanley F. Steiner, Mark Krank, Peter McLaren, and Rober Bahruth. New York and London: Falmer Press, p. 104.

11 Thomas Heaney (2005) op. cit. 105

As one could expect, such fervent ideas have been object of criticism by many. Later, when analysing my own research project, this debate will prove to be central to my reflections.

Philosopher John Searle, for example, argues that the hidden and ultimate objective of liberal education is to create political radicals<sup>12</sup>. According to Searle:

The frustrating feature of the recent debate is that the underlying issues seldom come out into the open. Unless you accept two assumptions, that the Western tradition is oppressive, and that the main purpose of teaching the humanities is political transformation, the explicit arguments given against the canon will seem weak... But it does not follow from the fact that there is a political dimension to the humanities... that the only, or even the principal, criteria for assessing these efforts should be political ones.<sup>13</sup>

This discussion is not a simple one. Yet a closer look at Searle's argument reveals his own assumption that education could, and in fact should, be neutral. Paulo Freire warns his readers about the illusion of neutrality by arguing that even a choice of what topics to include or exclude from the curriculum, frequently in the name of maintaining a neutral posture, are representative of the dominant power.

Critical pedagogy leaves no possibility of a neutral educational process. Education becomes either an instrument to help learners deal critically and creatively with reality in order to transform it through participatory action or an instrument to integrate learners into the present system by means of conformity.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Searle, John. 1990. *The Storm Over the University*. The New York Review of Books. doi:10.1007/978-1-4471-5340-5\_49. <http://www.ditext.com/searle/searle1.html>.

13 *ibid*

14 Stanley Steiner, Mark Krank, Peter McLaren, and Rober Bahruth (2005), *op. cit.* x

It was this realisation – that my teaching practice will never be neutral – that led me to reevaluate my classes and the issues being excluded by curriculum choices.

In addition to the concept of oppression, Critical Pedagogy is based on ideas about dialogue and “conscientisation”. Opposing a model of “banking” education, Freire proposes that the learning process should be based on dialogue – posing questions and debating issues relevant to the student’s everyday life.

Freire's legendary approach to education involved utilising the daily vocabulary of the students. By bringing up subjects directly relevant to them, he also managed to stimulate dialogue around transformation. Describing Freire’s approach to adult literacy, Peter McLaren reports:

These words represented the everyday reality of the workers. Each word was associated with issues related to existential questions about life and the social factors that determined the economic conditions of everyday existence. Themes were then generated from these words (i.e., words such as wages or government) that were then codified and decodified by groups of workers and teachers who participated in groups known as “cultural circles”.<sup>15</sup>

This has been an essential part of the current research project. Since the beginning I understood that, in order not to alienate students, I had to draw the political themes directly from their lives and make it as relevant for them as they were for me.

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15 Stanley Steiner, Mark Krank, Peter McLaren, and Rober Bahruth (2005), *op. cit.* pp. 3-4

The first questions I asked myself were: What are the most important political values ingrained in the Dance profession? What types of assumptions about the way a Dancer's life is or should be are my students not necessarily questioning? What are the issues that are shaping their everyday choices? What are the issues that are shaping their future as artists?

I subsequently began to consider political issues related to my students everyday lives, such as:

Dance has a tradition of a stereotypical portrayal of the female and male genders. These students are often reproducing those stereotypes on their work. It is rare to find female successful choreographers. Dancers are usually young, thin and beautiful. One rarely sees mature, over-weight or disabled dancers in non-specialised companies. Much of ballet and contemporary techniques today are based on the idea of the virtuoso performer, a perfect, strong, fast, almost superhuman artist. The attitude of a choreographer towards his dancers' can sometimes be compared to a benevolent dictator, this model is often use by the students themselves in the school productions.

Analysing the issues listed above, I have identified three main potential themes, which later became central to the changes to the teaching practices I propose in this project: Gender, Power and the Body.

## Methodological Approach

One of the aims of this research was to shift the focus of the class from a skills-based, form-driven approach to Videodance, to a class in which students would still have the opportunity to achieve all the learning outcomes, but also engage in political discussions about dance and film with regards to the wider context of society.

The research methodology proposed for this project is Action Research. Often employed in education, Action Research offers an ideal approach to identifying weaknesses, reflecting and ultimately improving an area of one's professional practice. 'Action research is built on the "action research spiral": "reflect, plan, act, observe, reflect, plan, act, observe etc."', each such cycle building on the previous one'<sup>16</sup>.

In agreement with this cyclical nature, Action Research does not adhere to dichotomise notions of 'right' or 'wrong' results, but rather embraces the difficulty and uncertainty of conducting "personal" research that is 'by the self into the self'<sup>17</sup>. By engaging in cycles of Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect, Revise Plan, the researcher is made aware that the process of improving teaching practices is fluid and requires constant re-valuation and re-adjustments.

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<sup>16</sup> John Biggs and Catherine Tang (2007) op. cit. p. 253

<sup>17</sup> McNiff, Jean. 2002. *Action Research for Professional Development: Concise Advice for New Action Researchers*, p. 6.

In this particular project, I have utilised Action Research methodology to investigate ways in which applying the principles of critical pedagogy could enhance the learning and teaching of Videodance in the context of vocational dance training in higher education.

## Plan

Interestingly, looking back at the first Plan phase of the research, I was very much beginning to analyse an uncomfortable feeling I felt towards my teaching. One of the issues that concerned me was that I believed I was mainly teaching skills, such as: how to use a camera; how to edit; or how to break down actions into shots and re-assemble them; and that, consequently, this type of teaching was not appropriate for higher education levels.

Both Videodance modules I was teaching at the time, postgraduate and undergraduate, had been written by previous lecturers. As one can observe on the Component Guide excerpts in Attachment 4, the language of the Learning Outcomes and the Assessment Criteria emphasised the acquisition of very practical skills. Having said that, an important objective of my class has always been to shift students' way of thinking about choreography for the stage so that they could begin to consider the possibilities of video as a medium.

The initial idea for the research was to include engaging political discussions grounded in critical film theory into the core of the Videodance classes.

During the Action Research proposal presentation for the Rose Bruford class, a member of the group wisely questioned how I intended to go about making such radical changes to the module without altering the Learning Outcomes.



Constructive Alignment<sup>18</sup>, the dominant model in the UK higher education institutions today, has historically been essential for shifting the focus from a teacher-centred to a student-centred pedagogy. However, one could argue that perhaps a side effect of having to constantly align your Learning Outcomes with your Assessment Criteria and Learning Activities is an exacerbated emphasis on the curriculum, and a certain disregard for the wider critical and contextual aspects of education.

This was perhaps why I originally dismissed the question about the Learning Outcomes posed during the proposal presentation, thinking this was a bureaucratic concern, as opposed to a pedagogical one. However, later on the planning of the sessions, I realised that, on the contrary, this was an essential pedagogical question. Practically, I would not have enough time to teach all the content I had in previous years and also implement all the modifications I would like to as part of my research.

After careful reflection, I decided to re-frame the research idea and, instead of re-structuring the whole module, devise themes of work. My courses typically, up until that point, would consist of a technical part (for example, discussing Composition), an examples part (watching films that had a particularly interesting approach to Composition), a practical part (students would receive a brief regarding composition) and a crit session (we would watch and discuss the films they had made).

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18 John Biggs and Catherine Tang (2007) *op. cit.*

An example of such types of assignment briefs is presented below:

Assignment 2: Composition

Create a movement sequence for 1 or more performers, including 1 jump, 1 gesture, 1 turn and 1 moment of stillness. Film the sequence using:

- 3 fixed shots in different camera positions
- 1 moving shot (handheld, tripod or other)

As one can observe, the brief is formalist and focuses on skills.

The idea of working with political themes provided me with the option of keeping most of the practical content of the course, but to slowly introduce the more contextual discussions I believe to be important. Hence the new class structure became: a technical part (for example, discussing Composition), a discussion of examples of films that, with my direction, would lead to a thematic discussion (watching films that had a particularly interesting approach to Composition with regards to the representation of genders – leading into a dialogue about Laura Mulvey’s Gaze Theory and Judith Butler’s social construction of gender identities), a practical part (students would receive a brief regarding genre and composition) and a critique session (we would watch and discuss the films they had made). An example of the new type of assignment brief is presented below:

Assignment 2: Composition

Create a movement sequence for 1 or more performers. Film the sequence using:

- 3 fixed shots in different camera positions
- 1 moving shot (handheld, tripod or other)

Consider Mulvey’s and Butler’s ideas regarding gender.

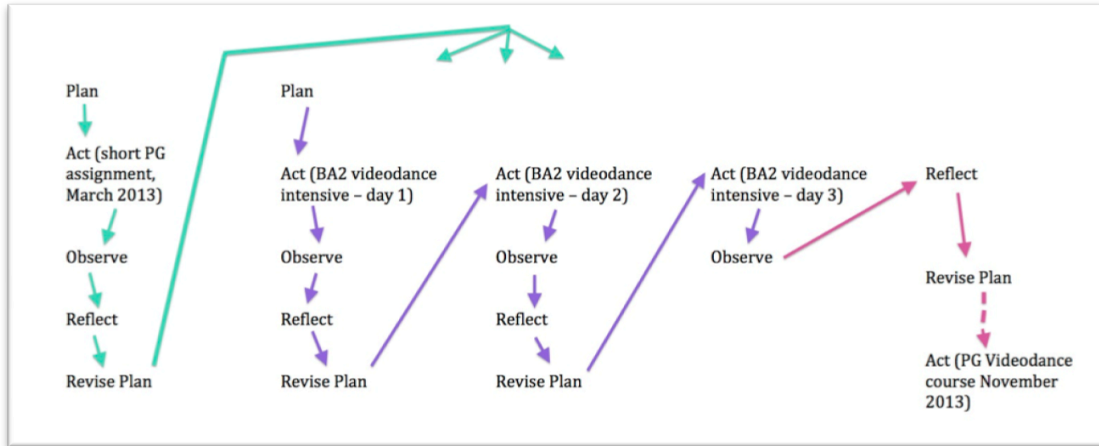
## Act

In an ideal scenario, I would like to be able to carry out the research over a long period of time, perhaps weekly term sessions, for example. However, due to the limitations of the curriculum design at the school where I currently work, the class that would provide more freedom and availability of students was a 3-day intensive course for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year dance students on 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2013.

This has considerably limited the number of Action Research cycles I could engage with, as well as the time I would have to reflect and adjust the plan for the following sessions. On the other hand, during those 3 days, I had the opportunity to work for a total of 16.5 hours with a group of 12 students and to fully dedicate my time and energy to the proposed project.

An important element of the research was a short experimentation carried out with a small group of postgraduate dance students on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013, before the official start of the project. On that occasion I had already begun to reflect on how I could insert political discussions into the design of the course and ended up conducting the first Action Research cycle that would eventually evolve into this project.

These Action Research cycles are represented on the image below:



The time limitation during the 3-day intensive was one of the reasons why it was even more important to anticipate potential problems and solutions that could be carried out in between the 3 teaching sessions.

On the following sections, I will discuss the methods utilised for gathering data with regards to the proposed modifications to my teaching practice and analyse the data collected on the observation phase with regards to Critical Pedagogy.

## Observe (research methods)

It is widely accepted that teaching is a complex phenomenon in normal circumstances; it involves engaging students, time management, fast reactions and multitasking. Teaching and concurrently having to observe how students were engaging with the modifications I had applied to the curriculum proved to be an even more complex task. Nevertheless, I believe I have gathered sufficient data from my personal observations as well as from other research methods to be able to evaluate the results of the project.

In the context of Action Research, participant observation is considered to be a very useful method for giving an account of a certain situation. As McNiff asserts, Action Research does not involve precise measuring methods of research, as it is often impossible to “prove” that something happened or something is correct.

You can however produce reasonable evidence to suggest that what you feel happened really did happen, and you are not just making it up. In saying that you believe you have influenced your situation for good, you are making a claim to knowledge. You are also producing evidence to back up the claim.<sup>19</sup>

One of the methods used for recording class observations was brainstorming everything I could remember about the classes immediately after they finished. This proved to be the most important material for reflection once the course was over, as it allowed me to record not only the hard facts but also

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<sup>19</sup> Jean McNiff (2002) op. cit.

how I felt and what I thought at that particular time. The following quotations have been taken directly from my notes and have been intentionally kept in their informal language. The full catalogue of notes will not accompany this written document, as much of the text is personal and unclear for an outside reader.

From these notes, it is easy to identify that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the intensive module seem to have gone really well. One of my main concerns was on making the class transition from a practical discussion about camera, editing etc., to a critical discussion about one of the political themes. I seem to have been very worried about making this integration seamless at the time. On the notes after the 1<sup>st</sup> day, I wrote:

The transition between composition and body representation went super well using Decoufle's film and then MacLaren's Pas de Deux. They got it!

From my personal perspective, the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the intensive seem to have been the most difficult one, as evidenced by the notes:

I'm not sure the session went so well today. They were super engaged at the beginning but I think they got a bit lost during the gender section. Jumping from types of shot to gender using West Side Story was brilliant. Getting them to talk about the gangs and the manhood and all the patriarchal culture was very good. Laura Mulvey with her big words was a bit more difficult.

Additionally, the film assignments created by the students also proved to be a relevant resource, particularly when compared to the coursework from previous years. By contrasting the results, I was able to draw conclusions

about the impact of the political discussions on the material they were creating but also assess whether or not focusing on themes had somehow been detrimental to the other Learning Outcomes of the module.

It has been essential for the research process to compare these works completed by students in 2013 to the ones from past modules I had taught. However, because of the difficulty of getting permission from the previous years students, their films will not be presented in attachment. Nevertheless, the 2013 group agreed to have their work included on this research and in attachment 7 (hard copy only) five short films are presented. The videos were all completed by 2<sup>nd</sup> year Videodance intensive students in May 2013.

At the end of the 3-day intensive, students were asked to complete an anonymous feedback questionnaire and 9 responses out of a total of 12 students were recorded. The full questionnaire responses can be found in Attachment 5 of this document. In addition to that, I have conducted a short focus group immediately after the last session and recorded the conversation on audio format. Other forms of collecting feedback were one-to-one conversations and sticky notes on mindmaps spread around the room (please see Attachment 6).

## Reflect

I will begin my reflections by analysing the results of the end of module feedback questionnaire. This is perhaps an unusual way to start, since it was the last method utilised on the process. Yet the questions it asks are at the core of this research and, I will argue, have a direct impact on what I perceive to have been the weaknesses and strengths of the module.

Through an analysis of what students' expectations were, it is possible to identify points of resistance to the type of pedagogy I was proposing, as well as to the progressive values underpinning the 3-days intensive. The first important question I asked myself after the course had started was: "Is this research idea my political agenda? Do the students want to talk about politics?"

The results of the questionnaires, in this sense, were quite positive since 7 out of 9 respondents believed political discussions on their course of study were important or essential. In subsequent questions, I have attempted to enquire about gradually more complex types of engagement. The questions I devised followed the example below, in which discussing a topic progressed into relating that topic to one's own artistic practice, into reflecting about their own personal relationship with that topic.



**Regarding the session on *BODY REPRESENTATION*, please select the extent to which the aims of the task were achieved:**

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	the aims were achieved very well	the aims were achieved	neutral	the aims were NOT achieved well	the aims were NOT achieved at all
to discuss about body representation in film and video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to consider about how you relate to body representation in your artistic work as a performer and/or choreographer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to reflect how you relate to your own body image	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to integrate the study of the principles of composition to the representation of the body in videodance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

As one could expect, the responses reveal that most students believed the aims of the task were less archived on the third item of the question. From my perspective, there are two possible explanations for this. The first one is that I have not devised a type of activity or directed a type of discussion in a clear manner that would ensure students had to critic that theme with regards to their artistic practices or personal lives.

The other explanation could be one that has been frequently covered by the critical pedagogy literature: the idea that people are so immersed in the

culture of oppression, that it is often difficult and painful to contemplate their own cultural context. With regards to this, I wrote:

I think today I failed to really make the students connect their lives with the theme: gender. I think they are still very unaware of the types of images that they create as choreographers and the types of principles they are subscribing to.

Elizabeth Ellsworth on her enlightening article *Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy*<sup>20</sup>, defends that the critical educator, often makes use of dialogue and democracy in the classroom to impose a progressive agenda, what effectively perpetuates a relation of dominance.

Although the questionnaire responses and the sticky notes feedbacks were overwhelmingly positive, 1 out of 9 students has selected "I would prefer to not have any themes, but just discuss filmmaking language and technique". Possibly the same student has manifested: "I always like having a subject to focus on just not really political themes as much. I think that the way that politics is approached in school is close to preaching sometimes, so I prefer it when political questions don't arise in classes."

This is definitely a valid argument for me to consider regarding my own teaching practice. Not so much with regards to the student's entire dismissal of the themes and discussions, but in the sense that perhaps the most alienated students have not been engaged by my teaching practice. In other

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20 Ellsworth, Elizabeth. 1989. *Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy*. Harvard Educational Review, pp. 297-324.

words, the students who would benefit the most from social awareness and understanding of the subtle ways politics permeates everyday life are precisely the ones who are resistant to my pedagogical approach. In relation to this resistance, Freire asserts:

The oppressed, having internalised the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion.<sup>21</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> day session discussed the theme of gender. My immediate reaction to that day as well as the more distance reflections on the following months indicated that in future I need to restructure how to approach gender issues in the context of this class. I somehow lost control over the class and some of the male students seem to have felt alienated by the feminist discussions. The class polarised in a debate regarding male versus female. Looking back I see how I should have framed it differently so that the debate focused on each of us as individuals, with our different genders and sexuality, being aware of social conventions and patriarchal systems determining how one should behave, dress and love.

Nevertheless, the overall aims of the project seem to have been achieved, as evidenced by the short films created by the students on each assignment. Comparing the shorts from the BA2 Videodance intensive in 2012 and the

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21 Paulo Freire (2000) op. cit. p. 47

ones completed in 2013, there are not many differences in complexity, scale and technical skills between the films.

Most films are raw explorations through a medium unfamiliar to the students, who would typically be given around half an hour to not only realise the technical requirements of the assignment, but also envision an original take into the themes we had discussed earlier.

Given the short duration of the module, it was expected that students would not have time to mature all the ideas raised in the topic discussions. The intention was never for them to create original video masterpieces. On the contrary, I was much more interested in observing the thought process and the critical thinking that this model of teaching, inspired by critical pedagogy, could provoke.

In this sense, the aims of the task were achieved. Although some of the films are quite simplistic on the way they attempt to portray power, gender or the body; the students intentions are clearly marked.

On film "Group F - BODY", for example, the two female students use black eyeliner to mark the apparently naked body; the plastic surgery like lines suggest a relationship to body modifications and cultural notions of beauty and perfection. Perhaps even more relevant was to witness how the other students reacted to that video and how different interpretations fuelled an interesting discussion.

Another successful example was the "Group B - GENDER" assignment, where two female dancers alternate between set poses, while camera and

lighting are used to objectify their identities. On the other hand, not every group has engaged with the brief in a similar level. An example is the film "Group A - POWER". The film is fast, well edited, well planned and amusing. Yet the relationship between the work and the theme of power is exercised at a very superficial level.

Nevertheless, in general, the results were satisfying and the idea of introducing political themes to the core of the module seems to have been beneficial.

## Conclusion

The overall results of this research project were very positive. I have been able to develop an area of my teaching practice that is not only important to me as an individual and as a citizen, but also likely to impact positively into the students' relationships to their artistic practice and the wider context of the art form.

As evidenced on the Reflections session, I intend to continue the Action Research cycle by maintaining a self-reflective and critical approach to my teaching. I am particularly keen on enhancing the new BA2 Videodance intensive module. I also intend to re-write the PG Videodance module according to the findings of this research and to engage perhaps more deeply with Critical Film Theory applied to the practical components of the module.

Further research in this area should involve investigating new strategies for engaging students into more personal forms of reflection, especially on the theme of Genre, which proved to be the most difficult and controversial to work with.

Moreover, I have found a great tool for enhancing teaching practices: Critical Pedagogy seems to be a well-developed and grounded theory for educators interested in the Social Reform model. Finally, looking back at my Teaching Perspectives Inventory, I believe have been able to successfully re-align my actions with regards to my core beliefs.

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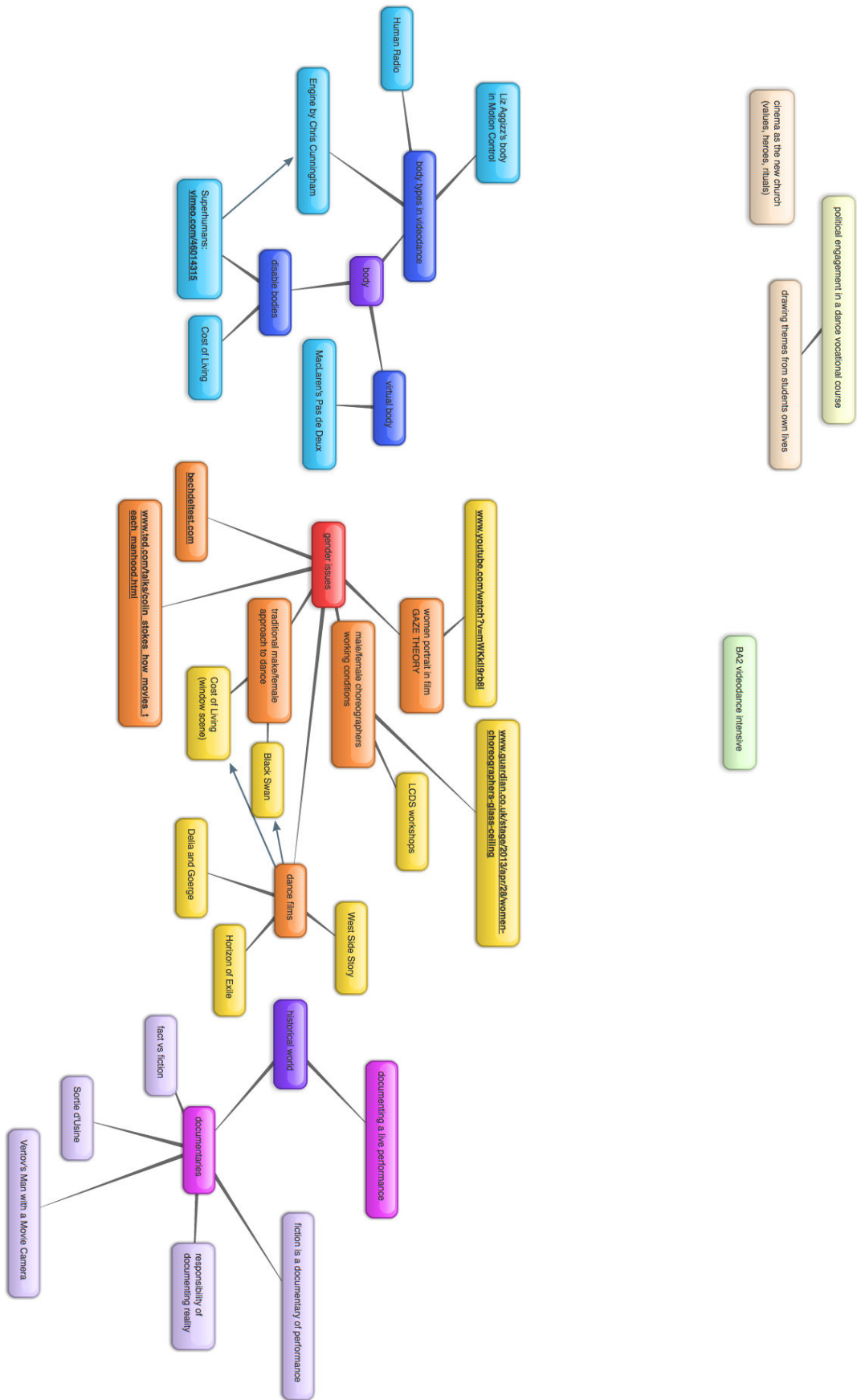


**Attachments:**

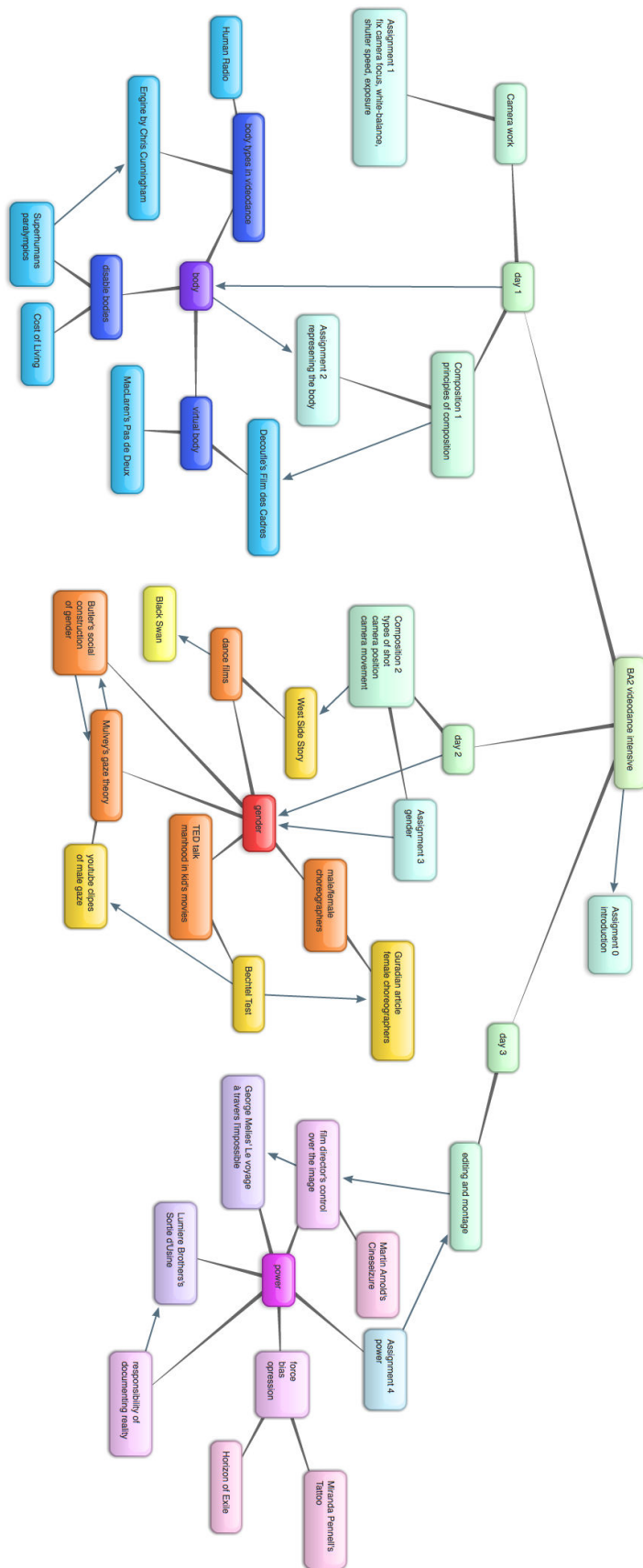
**Attachment 1: Teaching Perspectives Profile (Gabriela Tropa)**

<b>Teaching Perspectives Profile: <i>Individual</i></b>				
				Respondent: <b>Gabriela Tropa</b>
				TPI ID Number: <b>121108071045</b>
<b>Transmission</b>	<b>Apprenticeship</b>	<b>Developmental</b>	<b>Nurturing</b>	<b>Social Reform</b>
Tr: <b>28</b>	Ap: <b>28</b>	Dv: <b>31</b>	Nu: <b>31</b>	SR: <b>29</b>
B:10, I:8, A:10	B:7, I:8, A:13	B:9, I:13, A:9	B:10, I:9, A:12	B:11, I:10, A:8
45	45	45	45	45
44	44	44	44	44
43	43	43	43	43
42	42	42	42	42
41	41	41	41	41
40	40	40	40	40
39	39	39	39	39
38	38	38	38	38
37	37	37	37	37
36	36	36	36	36
35	35	35	35	35
34	34	34	34	34
33	33	33	33	33
32	32	32	32	32
Your scores at or above this line (31) are your <b>DOMINANT</b> perspective(s).				
31	31	• <b>31</b> •	• <b>31</b> •	31
30	30	• <b>30</b> •	• <b>30</b> •	30
29	29	• <b>29</b> •	• <b>29</b> •	• <b>29</b> •
• <b>28</b> •	• <b>28</b> •	• <b>28</b> •	• <b>28</b> •	• <b>28</b> •
Your scores at or below this line (28) are your <b>RECESSIVE</b> perspective(s).				
• <b>27</b> •	• <b>27</b> •	• <b>27</b> •	• <b>27</b> •	• <b>27</b> •

Attachment 2: AR Mindmap – before



Attachment 3: AR Mindmap – after



## **Attachment 4: excerpt from the component guide of the PG Videodance course**

Course Title: **VIDEO DANCE**

### Aims and Objectives:

This course aims to stimulate careful thought and deliberation in the process of using a video camera with dance, and to enhance understanding of the screen as a canvas for making dance. Students should learn how to communicate their choreographic intention using the tools of filmmaking and the language of the screen. The course will cover basic technical aspects of working with a video camera (Sony HDV-HC9E) and editing software (Final Cut Express), as well as the conceptual challenges of developing choreography for the screen.

### On completion of the course students should have acquired an understanding of:

- the language of the screen with respect to dance-film.
- the tools of film-making: scale of shot, angles, movement of subject and camera.
- camera features.
- the basic functions of non-linear video editing using I-movie
- equipment operation: they will be able to operate a miniDV camcorder unaided and operate an Apple Mac with I-movie.
- the manipulation of time and space in film.
- the use of sound in film.
- the use of location in film.
- the choreography of camera in relation to the dancer/environment.

Course Content:

The course will consist of the following:

The process of: pre-production, production, post-production.

The roles of director, assistant director, camera operator, performer

**Camerawork:**

The cone of the camera (in contrast to the stage space)

depth of field and how it is effected by the zoom,

the use of focus

principles of using a tripod

concepts behind hand-held camera

exposure: Iris/aperture/gain/brightness

shutter speed

white balance and colour temperatures: daylight, Tungsten lenses

formats Mini-DV & firewire

tapes and cables

frame rate, breaks & tape blacking

in-camera effects

widescreen

filming with editing in mind

leaving the tape rolling either side of the action

**Creative techniques:**

breaking a movement sequence into shots

shot sizes and framing

the effect of camera positioning

the effect of camera motion: pan, tilt, track, hand-held

the importance of location

continuity and contrast

the importance and usage of lighting

basic stop-motion animation techniques

**Editing in Final Cut Express**

browser, viewer, canvas, tools, timeline

capturing the footage

organising the capture scratch

trimming clips

transitions

working with video layers and opacity  
effects and speed  
image control (colour correction, brightness, contrast)  
rendering

making a simple DVD

**The use of sound:**

atmospheres, Foley sound, sound design  
soundtracks  
working with sound layers and cross fading

**The art of editing:**

creating continuity in movement, sound and location

creating rhythm through editing  
fragmentation & abstraction  
the role of sound  
manipulation of time:  
extended cuts, condensed cuts, continuous cut, jump cuts  
  
slow, fast and reverse motion

Assessment criteria:

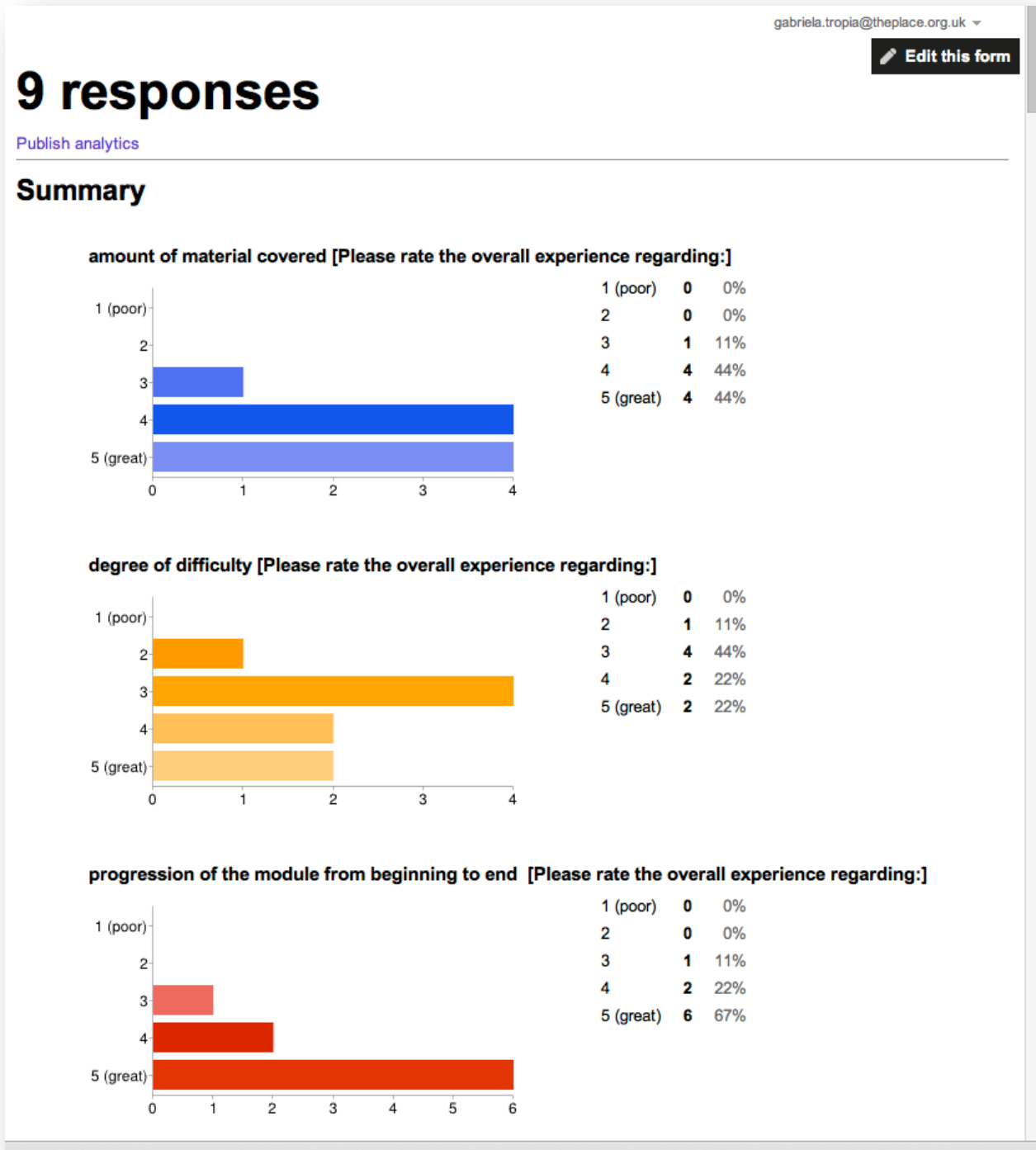
Students will be expected to attend and participate fully in all workshop exercises.

Practical projects:

- Students should show an understanding of 'shots' and break action and movement sequences into series of shots for the screen.
- They should be able to articulate ideas and communicate those ideas on the screen.
- They should demonstrate an understanding of form and content with respect to dance-film.

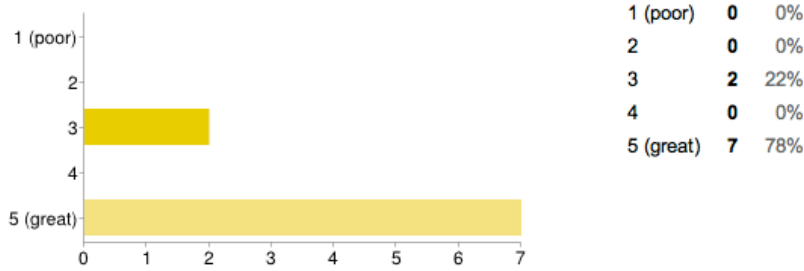
- They should be able to demonstrate basic technical skills: be able to set up and operate a MiniDV camcorder unaided; record to tape; carry out a basic edit
- There should be a mature engagement with the issues introduced in the first five weeks and an ability to explore these ideas in original ways in the practical project.
- They should demonstrate the ability to verbally articulate the aims and processes of the project in a sophisticated and reflective manner.

## Attachment 5: 3-day intensive feedback questionnaire

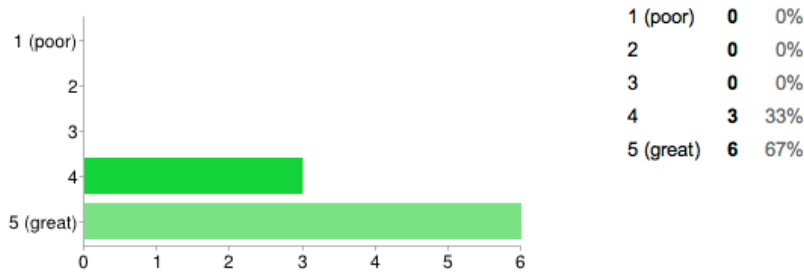




**the actual content covered during the module [Please rate the overall experience regarding:]**

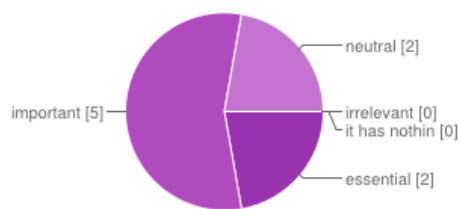


**quality of teaching [Please rate the overall experience regarding:]**



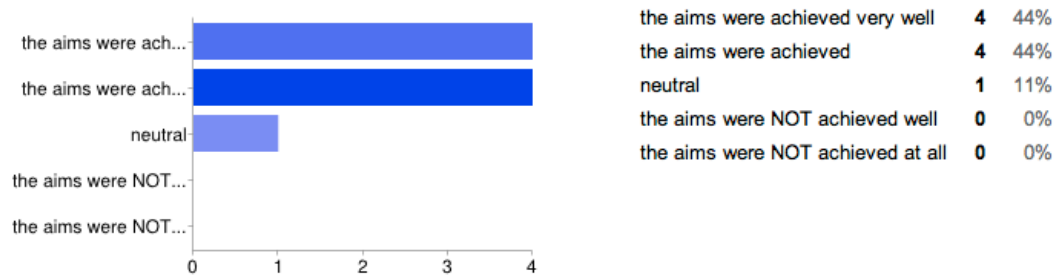
**section 2 of 3**

**How important do you think it is to discuss political subjects while studying Dance at LCDS?**

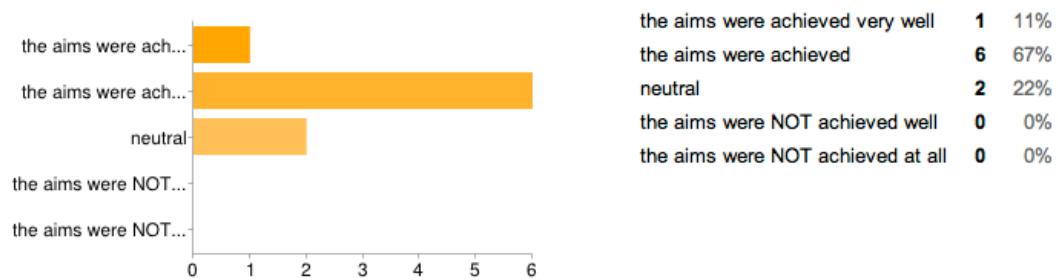


essential	2	22%
important	5	56%
neutral	2	22%
irrelevant	0	0%
it has nothing to do with the course	0	0%

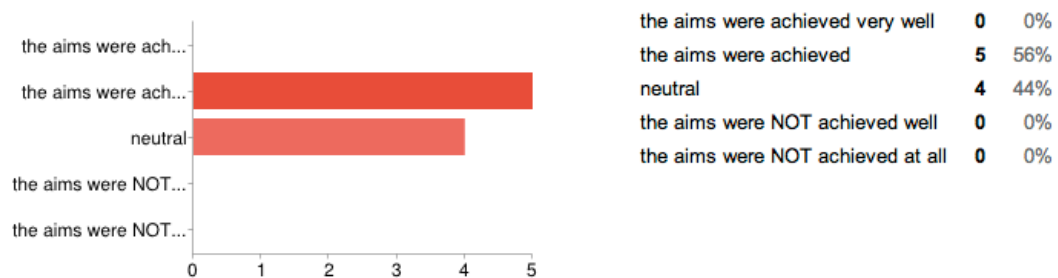
**to discuss about body representation in film and video [Regarding the session on BODY REPRESENTATION, please select the extend to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



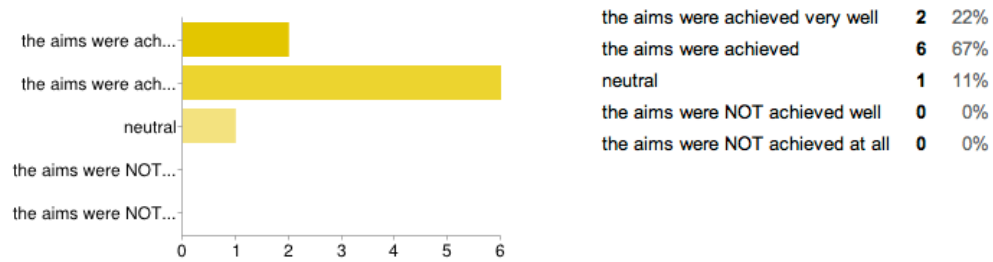
**to consider about how you relate to body representation in your artistic work as a performer and/or choreographer [Regarding the session on BODY REPRESENTATION, please select the extend to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



**to reflect how you relate to your own body image [Regarding the session on BODY REPRESENTATION, please select the extend to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**

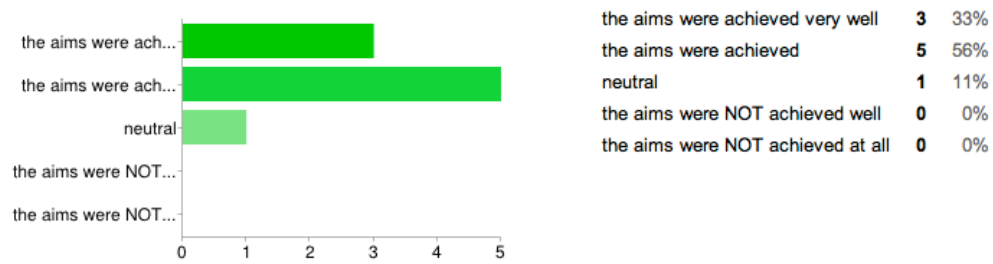


**to integrate the study of the principles of composition to the representation of the body in videodance [Regarding the session on BODY REPRESENTATION, please select the extent to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**

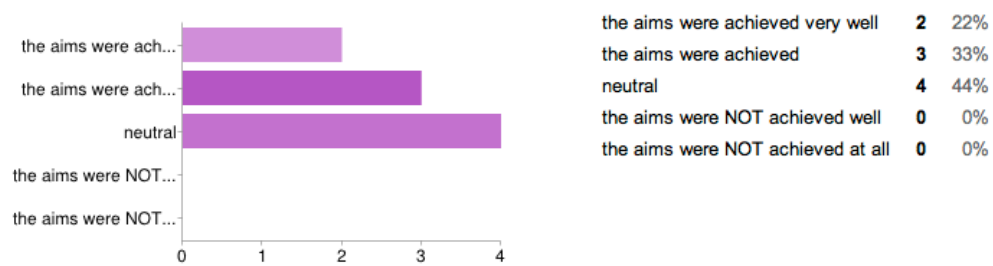


**Would you like to add any comments about the BODY REPRESENTATION activity?**

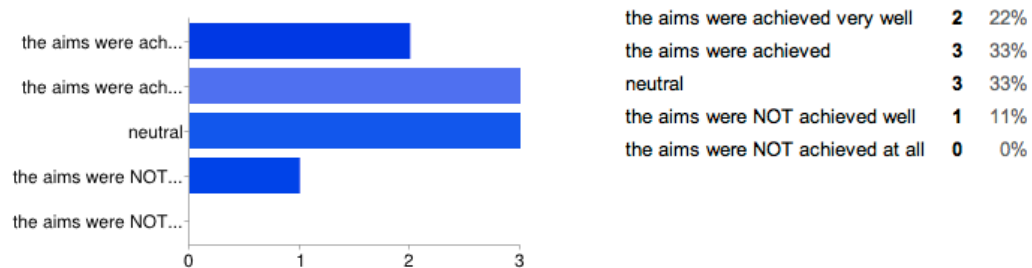
**to consider gender issues in film [Regarding the session on GENDER, please select the extent to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



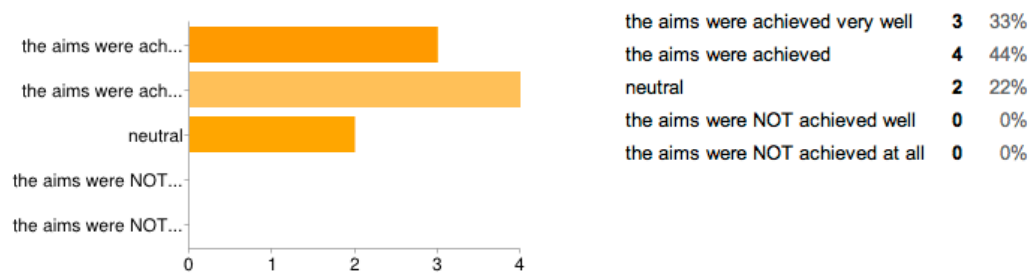
**to think about how you, as an individual, relate to gender issues [Regarding the session on GENDER, please select the extent to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



**to reflect about how you relate to gender in your artistic work as a performer and/or choreographer [Regarding the session on GENDER, please select the extend to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



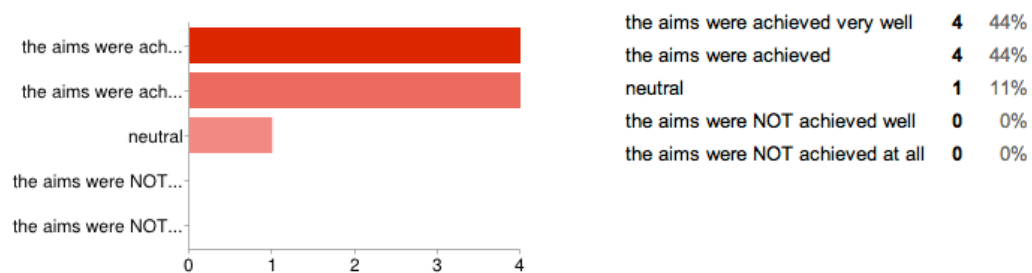
**to integrate the study of types of shot, camera position and camera movement to the gender issue [Regarding the session on GENDER, please select the extend to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



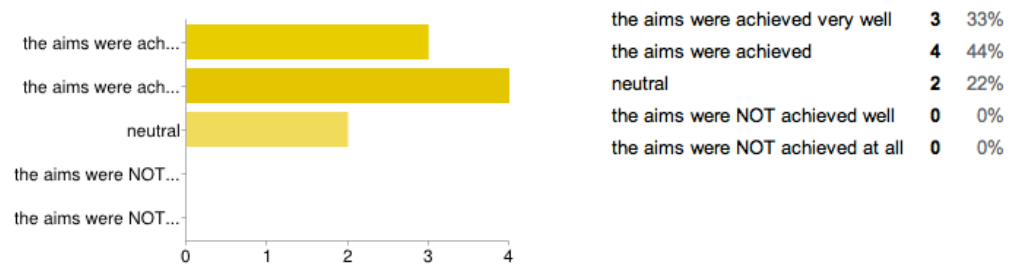
**Would you like to add any comments about the GENDER activity?**

It might have been nice to see an example of a film which challenges gender stereotypes or the male gaze theory.

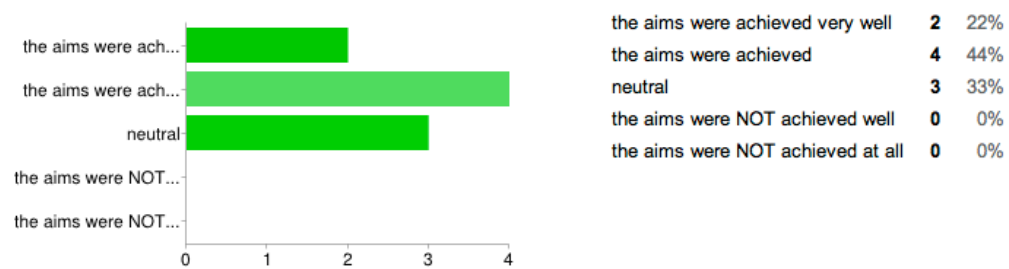
**to consider power relations in film [Regarding the session on POWER, please select the extend to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



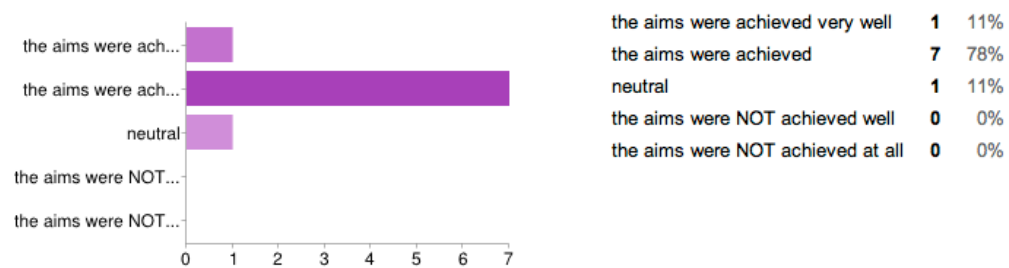
**to think about how you, as individual, is subject to forms of power [Regarding the session on POWER, please select the extend to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



**to reflect about how you relate to power in your artistic work as a performer and/or choreographer [Regarding the session on POWER, please select the extend to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



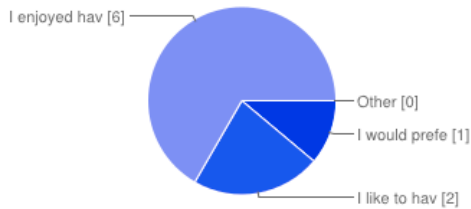
**to integrate the study of editing to the discussions about power and oppression [Regarding the session on POWER, please select the extend to which the aims of the task were achieved:]**



**Would you like to add any comments about the POWER activity?**

More time needed to achieve a further development of this section.

**Regarding the organisation of the class discussions and the assignments around certain themes...**



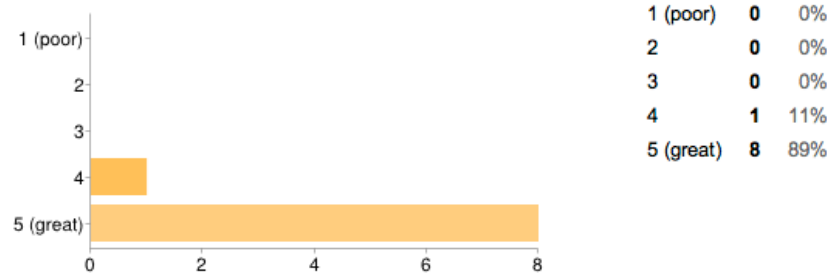
I would prefer to not have any themes, but just discuss filmmaking language and techniques.	1	11%
I like to have a subject to focus on, but would prefer if they were not political themes.	2	22%
I enjoyed having political discussions and think the themes chosen are important topics.	6	67%
Other	0	0%

**Please explain your reasons for choosing the option above.**

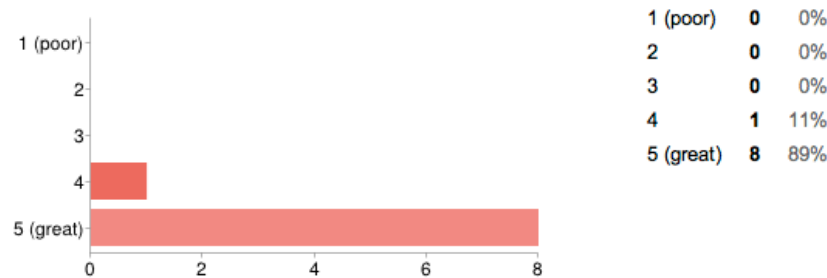
It was helpful to have themes as a guide to the recording of the videos. It was also very interesting to have discussions about political and social topics during the course and especially these particular ones that are closely related and frequently used in films and videodance. I think it's good to have political discussions at school in general because, being that we spend 90% of our time talking about and studying dance, it's helpful to spend some time relating our art to the outside world. For this class in particular though, it was good to see how these topics are addressed, in depth, in a medium other than dance and it gave us reasons to apply the technical aspects in the tasks other than just practicing how to do those things. I enjoyed that we had themes, it's much easier to approach a task when you have some guideline/ idea/ restriction to start with. Although when the themes are so important and broad, it's feels difficult to discuss something like that in a short film. I think it was good to have different discussions on set themes as it's common for film in general. It also makes you think one step further and analyse filmmakers intentions and way of working to present their ideas. Everything became clearer with the themes. I always like having a subject to focus on just not really political themes as much. I think that the way that politics is approached in school is close to preaching sometimes, so I prefer it when political questions don't arise in classes. It's really important to have a critical way of thinking when we make art. Especially in our modern times that art is more a way to commend, pass messages and bring any kind of revolution (social, aesthetical etc), we must know how to introduce our political perception in our pieces and manage to say what we wish.

### section 3 of 3

Overall, how would you rate this module? [null]



Overall, how would you rate the Lecturer Gabriela Tropa? [null]



Would you like to make any other comments or suggestions about the BA2 videodance intensive in general?

I really enjoyed the intensive and I am even more interested in video dance. As it has been a really constructive and useful course, I feel it's necessary to have another chance to practice and learn about filmmaking. The only thing that I missed from the intensive is more time! I think this course is essential not only for a workshop, but as a part of our degree. I honestly do not understand why we do not have this as apart of our degree, specially with the way dance and film making are merging today. Great course and Gabi is amazing! A bit long talks sometimes so maybe the pace in the discussions need to speed up sometimes. It is a great course and lots of important knowledge is gained throughout. However I think more time is required in order to further develop some of the techniques and themes. It would be great to have Videodance as part of the curriculum and not just as an intensive of 3 days. The only thing I really wish is that we had had more time to practice, but this would be really difficult to achieve given that we only had three days for the intensive. This is e very good course and we should have this as part of our degree earlier on. We should have more time so we could practice more and get a bit trust and experience in what we learn. It's very good this intensive and I feel it works much better than to have some subject only once a week for a whole term. We learned a lot in just 3 days, it was very efficient. We should apply this way of learning to other subjects like design and costume too. Instead of having two courses of design, we should have a course of film with design.

**Attachment 6: student feedback on sticky notes**



### **Attachment 7: DVDs**

- students short video assignments
- Action Research Proposal presentation
- BA2 Videodance CLASS presentation