Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education

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Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education

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Foreword

In recent years, the higher education dance sector of the United Kingdom has faced a series of unprecedented challenges including the marginalisation of arts subjects in lower-level education, increased university tuition fees and a shortage of jobs in the performing arts profession. This has led to a significant number of undergraduate dance programme closures in UK universities. Exacerbating an already challenging landscape for the HE Dance sector is the global Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in the temporary closure of performing arts venues across the UK and the cancellation of numerous arts-based festivals and events. As such, many individuals working in the industry have lost employment or have had to find alternative ways of earning a living, using individual agency to draw on the resources available to them and forge new pathways.

Set against this complex backdrop, this PhD thesis examines the role that critical reflection plays in cultivating agency for students of contemporary dance technique in a British university setting. It explores to what extent the use of reflection subverts the dominant pedagogical paradigms of dance technique that are grounded in the prevailing discourses of western theatre dance. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1986, 1990, 1993) work to propose the notion of a 'doxic agreement', it investigates how reflection allows students to become aware of the 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 1977) at play within the learning environment and to effectively navigate the rules of engagement. The students' perceptions of reflection as a learning tool for dance technique are examined, investigating the relationship between cognitive reflection and the embodiment of dance techniques. The degree to which the doxic agreement facilitates the process of mobilising agency is investigated, both in relation to the students and the teacher, who is the author of the thesis and whose own sense of agency developed through the dialogical relationship that was established with the students. Finally, the value of agency is questioned in relation to the notion of the independent contemporary dancer and the navigation of an increasingly complex performing arts sector that is continually shifting and changing.

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There are some key notes that the reader should be aware of to enable effective navigation around this thesis. These are as follows:

- The thesis uses the preferred pronouns of 'she' and 'her' to reflect the gender identity of the author and the feminist, poststructuralist perspective adopted within the research.
- Italics are used to signify the author's reflective voice, i.e. When an excerpt from the author's reflective journal entry is cited.
- Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis to protect the identities of the students who participated in the study and also to allow anonymity of the author's colleagues at the time of the research.
- The author's former surname of Rimmer appears in some of the material attached in the appendix.
- The study's original working title appears in some of the material attached in the appendix.
- To access video material provided in the URL links to the video streaming service, *Vimeo,* the reader should use the password provided on submission of the thesis.
- The reader should be aware that although participants' identities are revealed in the video footage, with the participants' consent, all of the videos are password protected and only individuals with access to the password can gain access. The videos are not available for access by the general public.

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Abstract

This PhD thesis explores the concept of agency in relation to the dominant, or 'taken for-granted' (Bourdieu, 1977: 164) pedagogical discourses of western dance education. Situated in a Level Four British university context, the author investigates how such discourses have come to exist through the discursive practices (Foucault, 1972) that have created them, exploring what needs to occur to intervene within these repeated cycles of behaviour.

Investigating the idea that the dominant discourses do not foreground a reflective approach to learning dance technique and, thus, limit the opportunities for teachers and learners to mobilise agency, the author examines the extent to which the 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 1977) of the dance technique class can be disrupted through utilising what she refers to as a 'reflexive-dialogical' approach to learning. This approach draws on concepts from the fields of: embodied cognition (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 2016; Shapiro, 2011, 2014): social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1962): experiential learning (Kolb, 1984, 2015): reflective practice and practice-as-research (Schön, 1983, 1987; Nelson, 2006, 2013): and psychophysical approaches to performer training (Zarrilli, 2009; 2020) to explore the relationship between cognitive reflection, the embodiment of dance techniques and agency. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the dialogical is also used to examine the specific way that dancers are constructed by the broader pedagogical and aesthetic discourses that they participate in.

Through analysis of the data gathered from two iterative cycles of ethnographic-action research, the author proposes the idea that the teacher and her students to enter into a 'doxic agreement' with each other. Through engagement with a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique, social agents 'reconstitute' (Barnes, 2000: 26) the existing pedagogical discourses and construct alternative discourses. The way this process allows social agents to construct their moving identities is explored, while recognising that this phenomenon occurs in relation to the constraints of the doxa and the broader socio-cultural and political forces at play.

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Thesis Introduction

I stand there, aged four, holding my mother's hand at the back of the room. I see a wall of mirrors at the opposite end and a teacher who is standing in front of them, making unusual shapes with her body. I don't recognise this way of moving but I'm intrigued. Her feet make a tapping sound as they touch the ground. There are children standing alongside a wooden bar attached to the right-hand side of the room and they seem to be copying what she is doing. My mother lets go of my hand and I join the other children; it is at this moment that I begin to be constructed by the discourse.

I stand at the back and cling to the bar, doing my best to copy the movements that I see. As I try to achieve the tapping sound in my school shoes, my attempts feel clumsy and I observe that the other children have special shoes on that are designed to make a noise on the wooden floor. I feel like a fish out of water. Noticing that I'm struggling, the teacher takes my hand and I stand with her at the front, doing the movements next to her. I feel safer here and suddenly more confident. Next, we move away from the bar and into the middle of the room where I stand on a chalk cross that the teacher draws on the floor. Again, I copy the shapes that the teacher makes with her body and I'm transfixed by my image in the mirror.

At the end of the class, I tell my mother that I would like to go back again and every week, I gain a better understanding of the rules. Eventually, I begin to enjoy myself. My parents buy me my own pair of tap shoes and I eagerly practise at home, scuffing the new kitchen floor. Gradually, the movements become easier and it's not long before they become second nature. My mother asks if I would like to try another style of dancing and I decide that I would like to have a go at ballet. The rules are quite different but it doesn't take me long to learn them. I don't realise it at the time, but these experiences will significantly shape my body-mind. As my body grows and changes, the rules and gestures become deeply embedded to the point that I don't even notice them anymore. With every dance class, my habitus builds itself.

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Introduction to the study

This PhD study explores the concept of agency in relation to the dominant, or 'taken for-granted' (Bourdieu, 1977: 164) pedagogical discourses of western theatre dance[1]. Situated in a British higher education university context, it examines the pedagogical discourses of contemporary dance technique education in the UK, investigating the construction of such discourses through the discursive practices (Foucault, 1972) that have created them. By viewing teachers and learners as subjects of the discourses, I investigate the idea that the most dominant discourses do not facilitate a learning culture that enables subjects to develop and mobilise agency. Furthermore, I explore how the underlying 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 1977) of the given discourses shapes understandings and expectations of what it means to be a teacher and learner of dance.

Through the data analysis conducted, I propose that by virtue of these expectations, an unconscious understanding is formed between teacher and students; to describe this understanding, I draw on Bourdieu's (1977) work to claim the notion of a 'doxic agreement'. The unwritten rules of the doxic agreement determine how dance teachers and students should behave in the social arena of the dance class. I investigate the idea that the doxic agreement shifts and changes in response to the underlying rules being questioned or broken. In relation to this idea, I examine the extent to which the use of cognitive reflection[2] in the dance technique class allows students to question the rules and value systems of the dominant pedagogical discourses. I explore how cognitive reflection enables students to consider how their body-minds are constructed by the discourses, and in turn, to mobilise agency. I examine the ways that dance students display and mobilise agency in relation to

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[1] When using the term 'western theatre dance' I am referring to the pedagogical traditions that have emerged from the choreographic practices of North American and British dance and have significantly influenced the doxa of the dance curriculum in British higher dance education. However, I also recognise the problematic nature of the prevalence of western dance techniques and practices within the British HE dance curriculum; although this PhD study is not situated within the domain of dance pedagogy and decolonisation, when exploring marginalised practices in dance, including reflection, it is worth considering how drawing upon these dominant 'western' practices constructs particular body-minds, as discussed on page 97.

[2] I acknowledge that the term 'cognitive' is a complex word that is viewed as problematic in some areas of the academy. As such, in Chapter One, I examine this term in more detail and present my rationale for employing it.

the external forces of the dominant discourses; this includes analysing how agency is demonstrated through the physical actions of the dancer's body, as well as through her cognitive reflections articulated verbally. Finally, I analyse the extent to which the students perceive themselves as agential, and indeed, appear to desire agency.

To investigate these ideas, I have adopted an interdisciplinary, ethnographic-action research methodology, a unique methodological approach that I have developed for the purposes of this study. Using this methodology, I explore the relationship between cognitive reflection, embodiment and agency in the context of the dance technique class. I claim the notion of a 'reflexive-dialogical' pedagogical approach to learning dance technique, examining whether the application of this approach enables the construction of alternative pedagogical discourses that social agents can choose to move between. I analyse whether the reflexive-dialogical approach enables subjects to assume an agentic position in relation to such discourses, constructing their own moving identities (Roche, 2011), or sense of their own internal discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) through this process.

'Dance technique' as a concept

'Dance technique' is a contested term and many scholars have questioned the continued use of the term, with some proposing that it is an outdated concept given the current ecology of the dance profession in the west[3]. However, it could be argued that to many university students who have taken traditional routes through dance education such as syllabus-based grades in private dance school settings, GCSE, BTEC and A Level, 'dance technique' is a recognisable term that has a specific meaning. As such, since dance technique forms an essential part of the dominant pedagogical discourses, it maintains its position on many undergraduate dance degree programmes. The prevailing perception of dance technique defines it as an area of practice that is structured around the idea of learning codified vocabularies of movement to develop specific skills for performance. These vocabularies of movement originate from the trends in western theatre dance and

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[3] Please refer to Chapter Two for a more extensive discussion around this idea.

generally have names such as 'Jazz', 'Classical Ballet' or 'Graham Technique'[4], depending on the vocabulary being learned; in some cases, the term 'contemporary dance technique' is used to denote a movement vocabulary that draws more broadly on the movement principles of more than one technique, thus appearing to borrow from several approaches. In order to prepare the body for performance, teachers train students' bodies to perform the movements of a given technique through repetition, conditioning their bodies to move, and look, a certain way. Since dance techniques are based on the premise of all dancers learning the same movements as each other and dancing the movements in unison[5], the aim is to construct multiple versions of the same dancer who is primed and ready to embark on a career as a professional performer[6]. As such, the notion of being a thinking, feeling individual is not something that has traditionally been foregrounded in the dance technique class.

This trend has resulted in the use of pedagogical approaches that emphasise the external construction of objects by the teacher, as opposed to one that enables subjects to explore 'the creative construction of self' (Fortin et al., 2009: 49). A description of this pedagogical model at work is offered by American dance scholar Susan Stinson who states:

> In most dance technique classes, the teacher is the authority and the only recognized source of knowledge. All students face the teacher and a mirror, and the teacher often faces the mirror too, seeing her students only as reflections. Interaction between students is frowned upon. The teacher's voice is expected to be the only one heard, except in the case of a well-focused question. The teacher tells and shows the students what to do and, in some classes, how to do it. Students attempt to replicate the movement done by the teacher. Then the teacher gives verbal "corrections," the students usually repeat the movement, and the teacher continues giving corrections until it is time to move onto the next sequence. Some teachers give directions and corrections that refer to the internal sensation and artistic qualities, not just the mechanics of the movement. But in reality, most dance

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[4] Again, please refer to Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion around the different dance techniques that originate from western theatre dance.
[5] The term 'unison' refers to the idea of all dancers appearing to do the same thing at the same time, a common choreographic technique used in dance.
[6] This dominant, conservatoire model of training is discussed further in Chapter Two when I explore some of the differences between the conservatoire and university educational models for dance in the UK.

> training consists of learning how to follow directions and how to follow them well. The model for traditional dance pedagogy seems to be the authoritarian father in an individualistic world of "every man for himself."

(2015: 34)

Stinson's description illustrates what could be perceived as the most dominant pedagogical model for dance technique education; this is what I shall refer to as the 'teacher as expert model'. This is a model that is utilised to varying degrees within many dance technique learning settings, regardless of the style of dance or level of study[7]. This model could be viewed as what educationalist Shulman (2005) refers to as a 'signature pedagogy' of dance education. Shulman argues that signature pedagogies come into being through a set of assumptions about how best to educate future practitioners 'for their new professions' (2005: 52). My argument is based on the premise that in dance, the assumption about how best to educate future practitioners has constructed a dominant pedagogical discourse, which is grounded within notions of authority, hierarchy and discipline. Due to the impact of dance research, which is a relatively new area within the academy, existing pedagogical discourses have been questioned and new discourses have gradually emerged. This includes, but is not limited to, the somatic discourse, which counters the idea of the external objectification of bodies by adopting the approach of enabling students to sense the internal feeling of their dancing, the aim being to cultivate bodily authority (Green, 1999). Such discourses are examined in more detail in Chapter Two, when I explore both the construction and disruption of the other pedagogical discourses at play in the dance technique learning environment.

Despite these developments in dance research, with regards to the acquisition of technical movement skills, dance is as much about visual ways of learning as it is kinaesthetic ways of learning. Thus, it could be argued that learning to dance is heavily reliant upon the act of watching others dancing and incorporating this knowledge into one's own body-mind. In

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[7] Through the observations of practice conducted as part of this study, I saw various applications of this model in different HE contexts, including university and conservatoire settings. It is also a model that I have frequently experienced as a dance student myself in various contexts.

line with this idea, within the domain of western dance technique education, the assumption prevails that one of the most effective ways of imparting technical knowledge is through the physical demonstration of codified vocabularies of movement. However, in the dance class this usually takes the form of the teacher demonstrating and the students receiving, thus, reinforcing the 'teacher as expert' model that forms an integral part of the dominant discourses. The issue with the perpetuation of this model is that it maintains a binary opposition between teacher and student that continually positions the teacher as the expert and the students as passive recipients of the teacher's knowledge; this power-based relationship is explored further in chapters Two and Three when I examine the idea that dance students are not only conditioned to please the teacher, but actively participate in their own oppression by the teacher. Furthermore, a pedagogical model that foregrounds the idea of imitating others raises questions concerning the way that knowledge is acquired in the dance technique class. As such, this study seeks to explore how a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique might constitute a way of knowing that is particular to the individual[8].

In view of these ideas, this study investigates the relationship between agency and the physical embodiment of codified dance techniques that condition bodies into particular ways of being. Through examining the relationship between teacher and students, I examine how acts of agency such as 'variation, innovation, and resistance' (Noland, 2009: 1) might occur in a university dance technique learning setting by adopting a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning. By using dance techniques as physical scores, and enabling students to have a critical engagement with these scores, I argue that learners can reflect on their own embodiment of the dance technique movements. By viewing this reflection in dialogue with the movements of others[9], and the conditions of the external environment, I argue that dance students can develop and mobilise agency; this contrasts the dominant conservatoire learning model, which foregrounds physical virtuosity, but is less concerned

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[8] The notions of embodiment and embodied knowledge form part of the critical framework for this study and consequently, they are ideas that I explore in more detail in Chapter One.
[9] For example, their peers and the teacher.

with instilling a reflective disposition in students. By offering this alternative educational experience, I examine the extent to which a reflexive-dialogical approach allows teacher and students to mobilise agency, constructing new pedagogical discourses in the process. With that said, I also acknowledge the complexities of 'Expropriating it [the dominant discourse], forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents' (Bakhtin, 1981: 342), investigating the notion that dance teacher and students are the subjects of several, sometimes conflicting discourses that are simultaneously at play. Since dance requires an experiential approach to learning that invites different engagements of the body-mind, I examine how agency is not only mobilised through the students' physical embodiment of the dance techniques being learned, but also through their cognitive reflective processes, examining the reciprocal relationship, and at times tension, between these different modes of learning.

Motivations for the research

By surveying the literature in the area of dance technique pedagogy, undertaking observations of dance teaching practice in other universities and conservatoires, and reflecting on my own practice, I have arrived at the conclusion that the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance technique education do not encourage an approach that enables teacher and learner subjects to exercise agency. In relation to the current socio-cultural and political conditions of dance education in the UK, which due to a number of reasons including arts funding cuts, the marginalisation of dance in schools and increased university tuition fees, dance as a subject in higher education has experienced significant ostracisation, resulting in the recent closure of several degree programmes across the UK (Wood, 2021). Consequently, it could be said that the dance HE sector is under increasing pressure to justify the place of dance in the academy. Due to the expectation to recruit students to university dance programmes, this has resulted in the development of courses that offer a model of dance education that aligns more closely with a physical training, as opposed to a holistic education that combines different approaches to learning, including

reflection[10].

This trend highlights the counter-cultural nature of my study, which challenges the notion of a purely physical training by offering students an opportunity to reflect on their practice, and their sense of self, from a critical perspective. Furthermore, an education that foregrounds a physical training aligns more closely with the traditional conservatoire training model within Britain, as well as the dominant aesthetic in British contemporary dance performance. This aesthetic appears to be bound up within notions of fast-paced physical exertion, competition and binary opposition[11], reinforcing a mind-body dualism by avoiding the critical capacity of the mind at all costs. Since the prevailing purpose of a conservatoire training is to prepare dancers for careers as performers, it is possible that the absence of reflection also occurs as a result of financial pressures within the industry; in other words, time is money and, thus, opportunities to be reflective are limited since the priority is to get the dance finished and ready to perform. In this way, reflection becomes a luxury that is quite literally unaffordable.

Presenting an additional challenge is the complex ecology of the British dance profession as it currently stands. Since the dominant employment pathway for many dance graduates sees them embark on a freelance portfolio career, which typically combines aspects of performance, choreography, teaching and administrative work (Wood, 2021), to successfully navigate the profession and earn a living, dance graduates not only have to be skilled performers, but must be able to demonstrate competency in several other areas (Tembrioti and Tsangaridou, 2014). As such, the employability skillset required for the dance graduate incorporates creativity, collaborative working skills, 'Flexibility, adaptability and networking' (Wood, 2021: 4) all of which are tied together by the ability to be reflective and make informed decisions. Consequently, university dance lecturers are expected to teach in

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[10] An analysis of the differences between conservatoire training and university education can be viewed in Chapter Two, as part of the survey of existing studies in the field.

[11] Here, I am referring to the aesthetic often evident in the work of Britain's most high-profile contemporary dance companies such as Company Wayne McGregor, Rambert and Hofesh Shechter Company.

a way that nurtures a reflective disposition in students yet the requirement for students to work in an independent, reflective way often results in what dance academics in the UK have described as a 'mismatch'[12] (Stevens, 2006: online) between students' expectations of how dance will be taught within UK Higher Education and the reality of how the provision is actually delivered; this is of particular significance within the domain of dance technique education (ibid). In a time of such great change, the importance of professional competency, together with the desire to challenge the cultural trends in British dance confirms the importance of agency within dance education and the need for dance students to be aware of the discourses they are shaped by, and to be able to navigate these discourses effectively.

As someone who has taught dance in a British university for over twelve years and acted as the Programme Leader for an undergraduate dance degree, the finding by Stevens (2006) strongly aligns with my own experience, which demonstrates that Level Four dance students arrive at university having experienced a diverse range of training and education in dance. Most students express a desire to engage in as many practical learning sessions as possible, with the most common form of programme feedback being a request for more technique classes. Many of the Level Four students I have taught are rarely prepared, or in some cases, even interested (at least initially) in the reflective aspects of learning dance. Here, I recognise that this is somewhat of a sweeping statement and of course, there are always individuals who are the exception to the rule; however, for the majority of Level Four dance students, the ability, or indeed desire to be reflective needs to be nurtured over time. This became apparent when evaluating the quality of reflective essays in a Level Four unit called *Dance Practices 1* that I had delivered at Manchester Metropolitan University for a number of years. Having assumed that most students would automatically know how to reflect on their dance practice, it quickly became evident to me that most individuals needed support with not only identifying an area of practice to reflect on, but with their general

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[12] This was a finding from the 2006 report by Palatine (the former higher education subject centre for the performing arts) who delivered a seminar exploring teacher's experiences of delivering dance technique in UK universities.

understanding of reflective thinking. This demonstrated that reflection is a skill that needs to be nurtured with the guidance and support of teachers and peers, providing another key motivation for my decision to conduct this study.

Reflecting on my own experiences as a Level Four undergraduate student, I can recall the feeling of being out of my comfort zone as a result of the teaching approaches used at university. The expectation to reflect on my practice and to be critical was significantly removed from the education that I had received prior to university. All of my ideas and thoughts about dance were thrown into question to the point that I did not even recognise the 'steps' that I was learning. This led me to question whether I belonged in this new environment that I found myself in. Looking back, I am now able to recognise this as a significant clash between what Bourdieu (1977, 1993) refers to as one's 'habitus', the dispositions that are 'a product of conditionings which tends to reproduce the objective logic of those conditionings while transforming it' (Bourdieu, 1993: 86) and the 'field' (Bourdieu 1977, 1993) or social arena that I was participating in. According to Maton (2012) who has written extensively on Bourdieu, individuals are shaped by the field, thus, structuring the habitus, which is comprised of 'one's past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences' (Maton, 2012: 50). Bourdieu (1977) argues that the habitus not only determines the extent to which an individual feels at ease in a given social arena, but also affects whether an individual perceives herself as belonging to a specific social structure, potentially affecting her ability to mobilise beyond a certain class and, thus, affecting her overall life chances.

The severity of the clash between my own habitus and the field of the university dance class nearly led me to withdraw from my first year of study. Had it not been for an associate lecturer who utilised the traditional, didactive pedagogical methods that I was more familiar with, I probably would not have continued with my studies. With hindsight, I now see that there are obvious synergies between my desire to experience something more familiar and

directed, and the responses of the Level Four students who participated in this study; this idea is explored further in the later chapters of this thesis.

Since graduating, I have continued to be interested in the transition that dancers make into higher education and what happens on the journey between beginning and graduating that enables students to gain a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). In relation to this idea, this study explores the extent to which dance students actually develop the capacity to be agents who think and act independently, and the extent to which they learn how to conform to the unspoken rules of the pedagogical discourses at play, or what Bourdieu refers to as the 'doxa'. Conforming to the rules produces a particular type of behaviour or 'practice' that becomes embodied and turned into second nature (Bourdieu, 1990). In this study, I explore the notion that upon mobilising agency, individuals in fact do both, that is, conform to the rules while also using intuition to play with their flexibility.

It could be argued that the point of a three-year university education is to acquire graduate level skills such as critical and reflective thinking and therefore, a PhD study examining the development of such skills at undergraduate level is not particularly ground-breaking. However, by exploring the relationship between cognitive reflection, embodiment and agency in dance technique learning, this study will contribute new knowledge to the field of dance education. In recognising that there has recently been a surge in interest around developing the reflective ability of dance students in higher education (Tembrioti and Tsangaridou, 2014), my study not only seeks to investigate the efficacy of a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique, but to explore students' perceptions of cognitive reflection, including the extent to which students are aware of the reflective pedagogical discourse and indeed, see themselves as subjects of it.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the use of reflection as a learning tool for dance technique is an area with very little research and this is partly due to the lack of critical reflection around dance teaching practices in the west (Stinson, 2015). Although there are scholars who have

published studies that question the dominant pedagogical discourses[13], the perpetuation of the prevailing discourses means that a specific idea about what it means to be a teacher and learner of dance has become normalised and 'therefore goes unquestioned' (Bourdieu, 1977: 166). Since the dominant discourses do not nurture a reflective, inquiry-based approach to learning dance, they go without saying because they 'come[s] without saying' (Bourdieu, 1977: 167). According to Bronwyn Davies (1990), social agents do not 'collaboratively construct the social world; rather the individual is conceived as being in relation to 'society' which acts forcefully upon the individual' (343). From this perspective, teachers and learners of dance do not construct the dominant discourses, but are instead 'conceived' and shaped by the social world of dance education as it already exists. By examining the relationship between my students and me, I explore to what extent the dominant discourses are already at play within my own dance technique classes and the degree to which a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning can force them to submit (Bakhtin, 1981).

Research aims

In view of the ideas discussed in the previous section, the research aims of this PhD study are as follows:

- To explore the concept of agency in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western contemporary dance technique education and the discursive practices that have constructed them.
- To question the assumption that dance students automatically understand how to reflect on their practice.
- To analyse whether a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique enables social agents to uncover tacit knowledge about the act of dancing, and to reflect on the levels of embodiment being achieved in their dancing.

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[13] Please refer to Chapter Three for an extensive list.

- To investigate to what extent a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning allows social agents to develop an awareness of, and to question the dominant discourses.

- To examine how reflection can enable social agents to mobilise agency and to construct alternative pedagogical discourses that they can move fluidly between.

- To analyse how agency is exercised and displayed through the embodiment of dance technique movement material and the cognitive reflective processes of learning dance.

- To examine the desire for agency amongst the students participating in the study.

In Chapter Four, I provide an explanation of the methodological approach that has been used within the study to interrogate each of the research aims outlined above. However, to enable efficient navigation around this thesis, in the following section of this chapter, I offer the reader a brief overview of the key areas discussed within each chapter.

Overview of the chapters

In Chapter One, I present the reader with my Critical Framework, which is a discussion of the key sociological, philosophical and educational ideas that have informed my understanding of the research area. I begin by providing an analysis of the key concepts that underpin the study: discourse, agency, dialogue and embodiment. To explain how these concepts have been understood and applied within the study, I draw on the work of specific theorists. This includes, but is not limited to: Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990), Michel Foucault (1972, 1977, 1981), Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), Bronwyn Davies (1990, 1991, 2000), John Dewey (1938), Mark Johnson (2011), Drew Leder (1990) and Carrie Noland (2009). As well as presenting an interpretation of each concept, I explore the relationships, and at times, tensions between each theorist's perspective on the concepts explored. This analysis allows me to present a rationale for how social agents are constructed and interact with the world around them. Drawing on the theories of these authors, I also explore the ways that individuals might display and mobilise agency through the actions of their body, an important idea for the area of dance education.

In the second part of Chapter One, I examine key educational concepts that have informed the development of the reflexive-dialogical approach. This includes the work of Lev Vygotsky's (1962), Paulo Freire (1972), Jacques Rancière (1991, 2009), John Dewey (1938) and David Kolb (1984, 2015). Furthermore, I explore the notion of cognitive reflection, offering a definition of how it is being understood and utilised within the study; this discussion is informed by exploring the work of key scholars writing in the area of reflective learning including Elizabeth Kinsella (2001, 2009), Jennifer Moon (1999, 2004, 2006, 2008), Christopher Johns (2017), Robin Nelson (2006, 2013) and Donald Schön (1983, 1987). These discussions allow me to establish a contextual framework around the notion of a reflexive-dialogical approach learning dance technique by drawing on ideas that are grounded in critical, reflective and experiential perspectives on learning.

In order to examine the relationship between cognitive reflection and the embodiment of contemporary dance techniques, I explore the fields of embodied cognition and psychophysical approaches performer training. As such, I draw on the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999), Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch (2016) and Lawrence Shapiro (2011, 2014) to examine the idea that cognitive reflection is a phenomenon that is grounded within the actions of the body. Furthermore, I examine the work of theatre practitioners Phillip Zarrilli (2009, 2020), Jane Turner (2015) and Jane Turner and Patrick Campbell (2021) to analyse the reciprocal relationship between mind and body and the different states that the 'body-mind'[14] moves through when embodying movement and subsequently reflecting on the process of embodiment.

In Chapter Two, I examine the construction of the dominant pedagogical discourses through an analysis of the key aesthetic movements in western theatre dance including classical ballet, American modern dance and postmodern dance. Drawing on Foucault's (1972) notion of discourse, I propose that these aesthetic movements can themselves be

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[14] 'Body-mind' is not a term that I am claiming, but is informed by the work of other scholars in the field who have used this term.

considered as discourses. Furthermore, I draw on Foucault's (1972) concept of discursive practices to examine how dance is presented through the lens of popular western culture such as in television shows and social media. I propose that together, the pedagogical and aesthetic discourses, along with the discursive practices of popular culture, are equally responsible for constructing the underlying value system and the doxa of the dominant discourses. I also explore the way that specific pedagogical practices have been, and continue to be perpetuated from one generation of dancers to the next, investigating the idea that through a lack of critical reflection, the dominant discourses have been allowed to remain intact.

In Chapter Three, I conduct an analysis of studies that have attempted to subvert the dominant pedagogical discourses. I examine studies that have utilised somatic-based approaches to learning dance technique, as well as those that have utilised reflective learning approaches. I explore the idea that due to the increasing emphasis placed upon somatic-based approaches to learning in dance technique, somatic-based pedagogies have in fact evolved into a dominant pedagogical discourse of their own. I argue that by privileging the kinaesthetic experience of the body, an idea that is evident in many somatic-based pedagogies, the cognitive abilities of the mind continue to be viewed as secondary. Consequently, reflective learning approaches maintain their position as the marginal pedagogical discourse; this is evidenced by the noticeable lack of studies conducted in this area. I conclude Chapter Three by positioning my study within the research domain, offering an explanation of the significance of my study in relation to the findings of the studies surveyed and the gaps in knowledge that remain.

In Chapter Four, I present the methodological approach that I have adopted to examine the research aims. I begin by discussing the process of situating my research within a specific paradigm that maintains particular beliefs and values about how knowledge is generated. This involves an analysis of the ontological and epistemological stance taken within the study. I then examine the process of employing what I refer to as an 'ethnographic-action research' methodology, a term that I have claimed. I offer a rationale for my choice to adopt

this approach, as well as my reasons for rejecting other possible approaches. Given that the methodology draws on the perspectives of two scholarly fields, I investigate the field of interdisciplinary research methodologies, exploring what can be gained by adopting such an approach, as well as the potential challenges. In the second part of the chapter, I present my chosen research methods that were utilised to gather data for the purposes of analysis. The final part of the chapter focuses on analysing the practical, contextual and ethical issues that have required consideration within the study.

Chapters Five and Six are dedicated to analysing the findings that were gathered during the research process, Chapter Five being focused on Cycle One, and Chapter Six on Cycle Two. I begin by outlining the research aims and specific learning strategies used during each cycle of action research; due to the iterative nature of action research, Cycle Two had different research aims to Cycle One, and consequently, the learning strategies used during Cycle Two were subtly different to that of the first cycle. I then discuss some of the practical aspects of each cycle including how specific ethical considerations were managed and the data collection methods that were used. Both chapters then offer detailed analysis of the key research findings.

In Chapter Five, much of the analysis focuses on exploring my realisation that the dance technique class is a social arena with particular rules of engagement, or doxa, that I had previously been unaware of. I evaluate the findings from a specific learning activity[15] in relation to enabling learners to exercise agency within the constraints of the doxa. I also examine the extent to which students appeared to be aware of this phenomenon and to subsequently reflect on it. Through analysis of the findings, I propose the idea that dance teachers and students enter into what I refer to as a 'doxic agreement' with each other. I argue that the doxic agreement allows social agents to mobilise agency whilst also continuing to conform to the expectations of the social field; the extent to which agency is mobilised varied between individuals as discussed in Chapter Five. In addition, drawing on

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[15] That I refer to as the 'Choreographic Learning Activity'.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

Bakhtin's (1981) notions of the authoritative discourse and the internally persuasive discourse, Chapter Five is the first time that I explore how the student dancer constructs her own internal discourse by moving fluidly between the discourses available to her, an idea that is explored further in Chapter Six.

By reflecting on my approach to recruiting students during the first cycle of research, as well as how I communicated with these students regarding the underlying motivations for my study, Chapter Six focuses on analysing the impact of establishing more of a dialogical relationship between the students and me during Cycle Two. I explore the relationship between my own ability to communicate more openly with the students and the implications of this in relation to enabling agency. I propose that through my willingness to more openly expose my vulnerabilities during the second cycle, a stronger dialogical relationship was established between us, which consequently led to richer research findings. I also explore the idea that by virtue of the dialogical relationship, the findings uncovered during Cycle Two challenged my assumptions about how students viewed the role of reflection in the dance technique class. For example, some students openly admitted placing less value on reflection in comparison to dancing, as discussed in Chapter Six. By enabling the students to talk more openly about their experiences, I propose that greater levels of agency were mobilised during Cycle Two.

In the second part of Chapter Six, I analyse the findings from utilising a specific pedagogical approach[16] that focused on using students' questions about the technique movement being learned to stimulate reflective dialogues. I explore the extent to which this aspect of the reflexive-dialogical approach allowed student dancers to develop a more informed view of the self in relation to the external environment. Through the levels of self-awareness being displayed by several students, I argue that agency was mobilised to varying extents. In particular, one student displayed significant levels of agency through her ability to identify and question the discourses that were shaping her at the time of the research, a development from Cycle One. I continue to interrogate the notion of the dancer's own

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[16] That I refer to as 'Questions as a strategy for initiating reflection'.

internal discourse throughout Chapter Six where I analyse how the reflexive-dialogical approach enables the student dancer to construct a sense of her own moving identity in relation to the doxa.

In Chapter Seven, I conduct a meta-analysis, which consists of a reflexive commentary on the key overall findings gathered from both cycles of research. I then present my conclusions and recommendations for future research. Chapter Seven concludes by discussing the value of agency in relation to the British dance profession as it currently exists and the complexities of the current socio-cultural and political climate. I propose that further work needs to be done in the field to understand more about undergraduate dance students' perceptions and understandings of agency, including the extent to which students actually desire agency in the first place. By questioning this idea, I explore the possibility that agency is not something that is necessarily desired by the individual, but rather that it emerges in response to the external forces that individuals are subject to. Woven throughout this discussion are several reflections on my own developing sense of agency, which I perceive as an emergent process that has occurred throughout the duration of my own learning journey and has been further enhanced through the dialogical relationship established with the students in this study.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

Chapter One: Critical Framework

Purpose of the chapter

The aim of this study is to explore whether a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique enables dance teacher and students to mobilise agency, examining how agency displays itself within an undergraduate dance learning context. In this chapter, I present my critical framework by examining the conceptual ideas that underpin the study. In the first part of the chapter, I examine the work of critical theorists whose work explores the sociological concepts of discourse, agency, dialogue and embodiment. In exploring the interlocking relationships between these concepts, I present an understanding of the terms and explain how they are being applied within the study. To undertake this analysis, I examine Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and doxa (1977) to explore the pedagogical practices of western dance education. To support this analysis, I also examine Foucault's concepts of discourse and discursive practices (1972), Bakhtin's notion of dialogism (1981) and Noland's (2009) ideas concerning agency and embodiment.

In the second part of the chapter, I investigate key educational concepts and theories of learning that have informed the development of the reflexive-dialogical approach. This includes Lev Vygotsky's (1962) work on social constructivism, Jacques Rancière's (1991) concept of 'the ignorant schoolmaster', Paulo Freire's (1972) notion of critical pedagogy, and finally, the theory of experiential learning, which originates from the work of theorists including John Dewey (1938) and David Kolb (1984, 2015). This leads to an analysis of the concept of cognitive reflection, drawing on the work of Robin Nelson (2006, 2013) and Donald Schön (1983, 1987) amongst others; here, I offer a definition of reflection and explore how reflective practice can enable dance students to extract valuable knowledge

about the at of dancing and, thus, to mobilise agency.

Discourse

It is difficult to examine the notion of agency without considering the dialogical relationship between an individual and the broader discourses that she is shaped by. As Barnes (2000: 25) states:

> For an individual to possess agency is for her to possess internal powers and capacities, which, through their exercise, make her an *active* entity constantly intervening in the course of events ongoing around her.

The course of ongoing events that Barnes (2000) refers to could be considered as the discourses that individuals operate within, for example, the discourses of dance education. Within Foucault's (1977, 1981) work, the concept of a discourse refers to the different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice. Discourses are generated by discursive practices or rules that produce subjects who are governed by particular ways of thinking, speaking and acting creating what Foucault refers to as 'systems of domination' (1981: 52 – 53). Discourses create relations of power within the social arena that determine how subjects will behave. In order to push back against these systems of domination, Foucault (ibid) proposes that 'discourse is the power which is to be seized'.

Discourse also features within the work of Bakhtin (1981) and his analysis of dialogism within literary texts. He proposes the concepts of 'authoritative discourse' (AD) and 'internally persuasive discourse' (IPD) describing them in the following way:

> Internally persuasive discourse – as opposed to one that is externally authoritative – is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with 'one's own word'. In the everyday round of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition.

(1981: 345)

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

Matusov and von Duyke (2010) have applied Bakhtin's concept of IPD within an educational context. They suggest that 'IPD and its opposition to the authoritative discourse (AD) helps educators move away from the conventional notion of learning as a transmission of knowledge from the teacher (and/or the official text) to the student' (2010: 176). It is the presence of AD that supports the transference of one dominant, fixed meaning from teacher to student, an idea that resonates with traditional, behaviourist perspectives on learning, as discussed later. In contrast, IPD is dialogical in the sense that 'One's own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought of others' words that have been acknowledged and assimilated' (Bakhtin 1981: 345) and one's own discourse is considered to be fluid and changeable.

In a dance technique learning context, Bakhtin's concept of AD could be aligned with the dominant pedagogical discourse, while his concept of IPD could be considered in relation to alternative perspectives on learning in dance such as the somatic discourse and the reflective discourse [17]. For example, within the somatic discourse, there is an emphasis on cultivating what is known as 'somatic authority'[18] (Green, 1999) and enabling learners to become attuned to the felt sense of dancing whilst simultaneously being in dialogue with the external world (Olsen, 2002). In the reflective discourse, learners are encouraged to reflect on their experiences of dancing and to make meaning from them; not dissimilar to the somatic discourse, reflective approaches to learning dance invite learners to engage with their practice in a way that enables a dialogue between the internal sense of dancing and the information offered by external sources or 'triggers' (Jones and Ryan, 2015: 63), thus, enabling a dialogue between these two perspectives.

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[17] The notion of somatic and reflective discourses is discussed in more detail in Chapters Two and Three where I interrogate the discursive practices that have constructed these discourses and examine studies that are situated within both areas.

[18] The term 'somatic authority' is explored further in Chapter Two, but in a dance context, the term refers to the idea of an individual possessing ownership of the felt sense of her body and drawing on these sensations to make considered choices, as opposed to relying on the permission of the teacher.

In relation to Bakhtin's ideas, the process of assimilation that he refers to could be compared to the exchange between the inner and outer worlds that the dancer experiences within the somatic and reflective discourses. In different ways, both of these approaches emphasise the idea of the individual dancer being shaped both by the internal sense of her own body and the influence of the external environment, thus developing her own internal discourse and sense of self. This idea sits in opposition to the dominant pedagogical discourse, where the external objectification of bodies is foregrounded as the central learning approach. In some cases, the dominant discourse has even been viewed as promoting the idea that dancers should turn a blind eye towards their bodily sensations, including pain, thus creating docile bodies (Smith, 1998); this idea aligns with Bakhtin's notion of an externally authoritative discourse. Using Bakhtin's dialogism as a framework, these are ideas that are explored further in the analysis Chapters Five and Six.

Speaking from a feminist poststructuralist perspective, Davies (1991) suggests that as individuals, we can only ever speak about ourselves in relation to the discourses that are available to us and in this way, the discourses constitute our very existence. From the perspective of dance education, such discourses could be considered as the dominant pedagogical paradigms that determine what it means to be a teacher and learner of dance. One of these discourses is based on the notion that the dance technique teacher is the master and expert and dance students are the recipients of the teacher's knowledge; this is the discursive practice that is perpetuated and contributes towards the construction and reconstruction of this discourse. As such, teacher and students assume a 'subject position' (Davies, 1990: 53) in relation to the dominant discourse.

Our subjectivity, therefore, is produced through our use of the available discourses and discursive practices, which dance teacher and learner draw upon to construct their identities. In this sense, dance teacher and learner are subject to the discourses that shape them and 'thus become objects of our [their] own and others' discursive practices' (Davies, 2000: 62). However, despite the impact of these discursive practices and the way in which individuals are positioned within them, it should be acknowledged that the practices are

fluid and thus, objects can be 'shifting, always unfolding, relatively fragmented objects' (ibid). This idea resonates with Bakhtin's (1981) concept of an internally persuasive discourse and the notion of a fluid self that is shaped in dialogue with the available discourses. In this study, I am interested in exploring how a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique enables students to construct alternative pedagogical discourses and to choose how they will move between these discourses at different moments, exercising agency to do so. In light of this, it is useful to examine the relationship between agency, discourse, and the shifting, unfolding sense of self that Davies (2000) refers to.

Agency

'Agency' proposes the view that an individual has control over her ability to act autonomously, to exercise choice and free will (Barnes, 2000). However, when considering this idea in relation to the perspectives explored in the previous section, it seems that the extent to which one can exercise choice and free will is always determined by the broader discourses that she operates within. In Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism, self is always viewed in relation to other, the other being other humans, external conditions or discourses by which human beings are constructed. As Holquist (2002) writes, 'In dialogism, the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness' (18), suggesting that for Bakhtin, the notion of 'self' 'can never be a self-sufficient construct…"self" is dialogic, a *relation*' (Holquist, 2002: 19). Thus, when viewing the notion of agency in relation to Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, it would appear that the individual always acts in response to the conditions of the external environment, or the available discourses. Even when one chooses not to conform to the expectations of the external environment, she is still acting in response to the conditions by virtue of the fact that she is choosing to go against them; this is a key idea in relation to the notion of a doxic agreement, which is based on the premise of social agents operating within the constraints of an unconscious agreement and using agency to push and pull against the rules of this agreement, as discussed in the later analysis chapters.

Resonating with Bakhtin's perspective on the dialogue between the individual and the external environment is Bourdieu's sociological concept of 'habitus' (1977), which offers an alternative framework for examining the relationship between self and other. As discussed in the thesis introduction, in Bourdieu's work, the notion of habitus refers to one's dispositions or tendencies that are 'structured' by 'one's past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences' (Maton, 2012: 50). Bourdieu (1977) is concerned with examining the relationship between one's habitus, one's position within a given social field (known as 'capital' in Bourdieu's terms), and the behaviour or 'practice' that occurs as a result of the relation between these two entities. His argument is based on the idea that one's behaviour or practice is governed by the underlying rules or 'doxa' of the given social field. Such rules may be so entrenched within the field that they go unnoticed, or to use Bourdieu's term are 'taken for granted' (1977: 167). The habitus determines to what extent an individual is attuned to the doxa, or the 'rules of the game' (Maton, 2012: 53); when one feels like a 'fish in water' (Maton, 2012: 56), it indicates compatibility between the habitus and the field and the resulting practice will adhere to the underlying doxa. In contrast, feeling like a 'fish out of water' (ibid) suggests there is a habitus and field clash, meaning that the individual is not at ease with the doxa of the social field. The account of my first dance class, which I presented in the opening section of the thesis introduction, offers an illustration of a habitus and field clash at work; here, my teacher noticed me struggling and made a conscious effort to help me move into the field, showing me the rules and facilitating my participation in the game of the dance class.

Bourdieu's ideas are useful for examining the relationship between social structures and individual agency. With reference to Bourdieu's ideas, Maton (2012: 49) writes:

> Experientially, we often feel that we are free agents, yet base everyday decisions on assumptions about the predictable character, behaviour and attitudes of others.

This quote highlights the dialogue between the '"outer" social and "inner" self' (Maton, 2012: 49), a key theme within Bourdieu's work. If one's behaviour is determined by the unwritten rules of the broader discourses, or field to use Bourdieu's term, then from a

Bourdieuian perspective, the notion of agency appears to refer to the extent to which an individual is able to develop an awareness of the underlying rules of engagement and test the flexibility within them. Applying Bourdieu's ideas to a dance learning context, it could be said that the ability to mobilise agency relies on the individual (teacher or student) developing an awareness of the underlying rules of engagement or 'doxa' that is at play within the learning environment and a sense of how this might be shaping their behaviour. Only then can questions be asked and agency be exercised, but as I explore in the data analysis chapters, when acting within the constraints of the doxa, this can be a complex process that affords varying degrees of agency that is displayed in different ways.

Returning to the ideas of Bakhtin, Davies (1990) draws on his theories to explore a conception of agency that is constructed around the idea that it is 'discursively produced' (Davies, 1990: 344). Using Bakhtin's analysis of language and his suggestion that one's word is appropriated and populated 'with the intentions of others' (Bakhtin, 1981: 342), Davies (1990: 343) proposes that a 'person is a person by virtue of the fact that they use the discursive practices of the collectives of which they are a member'. In this sense, agency is mobilised by drawing upon the 'recognised discursive practices used by each collective' (ibid) such as the discursive practices used by the participants of the dance technique class. This could include the verbal and physical languages used to communicate and embody particular dance techniques, languages that become commonplace within the collective and are so frequently used that they eventually go unnoticed by the members of the collective. From this perspective, it could be said that dance technique teacher and students mobilise agency by drawing upon the discursive resources available to them as members of this particular collective.

Viewing agency from a Foucauldian (1979, 1981) perspective, like Bakhtin, self is not perceived as existing in a vacuum but rather as being constructed from a series of discourses and practices that serve to establish the concept of self. Exploring the relationship between self and other, Foucault argues that having a sense of self is integral to human existence, but our sense of self is defined both by our own internal sense of

ourselves, as well as the external perspective of the other. This idea returns to the work of Bakhtin (1981) in that the notion of self is constructed through the dialogue between one's own internal perception of herself and the external perspective of the other. It is this dialogue between inner and outer that dance teacher and student draw upon to construct their identities, acting in accordance with their perceptions and expectations of themselves and each other; this dialogical relationship between the internal and external perspectives of self is something that became particularly apparent when analysing the data gathered during the action research and when investigating how the students drew upon these two perspectives to further their embodiment of the dance techniques being learned, as discussed in the later analysis chapters.

Embodiment

As recognised by Sööt and Antilla (2018: 217) 'Embodiment is a highly complex concept that has varied meanings in different fields.' However, regardless of the field in which it is being applied, the notion of embodiment generally pertains to the idea of incorporating behavioural patterns into the physical body, often through continued repetition of specific gestures or actions (ibid). From a human science perspective, according to Jolles (2016: 361):

> *Embodiment* is a term used to describe the experience of living in and as one's body, and negotiating its psychological, physical, and social identity and the power, pleasures, and limitations that shape bodily experience.

This view of embodiment appears to perceive the body as being socially constructed through the experience of physically participating in particular social and cultural settings. Bourdieu's work is useful here in relation to understanding how the embodiment of physical dispositions that he refers to as the 'hexis' (1977, 1990), such as 'bodily postures and stances, ways of standing, sitting, looking, speaking or walking' (1977: 15), along with cognitive perceptions of the world, form the individual's habitus. For Bourdieu, the habitus is constructed through the direct relationship between practice and field, both of which

could be regarded as being governed by the powers, pleasures and limitations that Jolles (2016) refers to, depending on the context.

Writing about embodiment from a Foucauldian perspective, dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster offers a view of the body as being constructed by the 'discourses or practices that *instruct* it' (1997: 235) into particular ways of being. When considering this in relation to the area of dance technique, it could be said that the dancer's body is constructed through her physical embodiment of a specific technique. Aligning with this idea, Perry and Medina (2015: 4) provide a Foucauldian perspective of embodiment that describe the body as being 'discourse embedded with, and positioned by, structures of power', presenting embodiment as something that is discursively produced. These perspectives are especially pertinent when considering the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance education, which in this study, are viewed as shaping body-minds in a way that does not enable agency. Governed by the dominant pedagogical discourses, dance teachers and students embody behaviours and practices that enable them to participate in the social field of the dance class; this study examines whether reflection allows the dancer to become aware of these behaviours and practices and to what extent this process allows the dancer to reflect on her own construction, as a subject of the discourses.

Embodied knowledge and embodied knowing

The term 'embodied knowledge' is frequently used within dance education and research contexts, but it is useful to understand more about where this term originates from and how it is relevant to this study. Stemming from the work of Dewey (1938, 2004) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) there has been increasing awareness of the body's role in perceiving the world, and thus in education. In *Democracy and Education,* Dewey (2004) proposes that thinking occurs from actions, events and the relations between such phenomena, therefore suggesting that it is through the body that our immediate experience of the world takes place. From this experience comes cognitive thinking, enabling individuals to make sense of their physical interactions with the external environment. By giving equal status to the body

and mind in processing experience, this phenomenological view of perceiving the world not only challenges the Cartesian notion of privileging 'the mind as the sole locus of certain knowledge' (Nelson, 2006: 105), but also poses questions regarding how exactly knowledge is produced through one's physical interactions with the world.

Traditional perceptions of knowledge have tended to place greater value on knowing about phenomena in an abstract way, as opposed to experiencing phenomena first-hand. The view of knowledge that separates the 'knower from the known' (Reason and Heron, 1995: 122) could be said to be grounded in western philosophical traditions that do not typically acknowledge the embodied experience of living in the world as being congruent with knowledge (Nelson, 2006). Speaking about embodied knowledge in dance, Bannerman (2009: 238) questions traditional perceptions of knowledge proposing that although in certain parts of the academy, knowing how 'appears to have less status than *knowing what* or *that'*:

> very few of us would like to receive the attentions of a surgeon who had written extensively on the operation we were about to undergo, but who had never actually undertaken such a procedure, or indeed done any surgery at all.

(Bannerman, 2009: 238)

To learn to dance relies on the experiential activity of dancing. In a typical dance technique class, through repetition and rehearsal, the shapes and patterns of particular codified techniques become inscribed within the body; in other words, they become embodied. Discussing embodied techniques, Spatz (2015) suggests that dance techniques can be considered as a form of embodied knowing, the emphasis being on the idea that the knowing is never complete but generative. This view of knowledge resonates with Dewey's (1938) proposal that 'knowing' and 'knowledge' are distinct from one another; 'knowing' in the present tense pertains to the idea of open-ended thought processes that evolve in space and time, whereas 'knowledge' suggests something more finite and tangible. Writing about this idea in Dewey's work, Johnson (2011: 147) states:

> Dewey urges us to turn our focus away from the substantive term *knowledge* (as a noun) and to focus, instead, on *knowing* (as a verb). In this way we emphasize the character of the *process* of inquiry instead of some final *product* construed as a body of knowledge.

Since the body is an unfixed entity that is continually changing in response to the external environment, the notion of 'embodied knowing', as opposed to 'embodied knowledge', seems especially relevant to the act of learning dance techniques. Dance as an art form is ephemeral; unless it is presented as a film or another form of documentation, it exists through the body of the dancer in space and time, disappearing when the dancer stops moving. Continuous rehearsal is imperative for developing the technical, creative and artistic skills that are required to be a dancer, meaning that knowledge is gradually acquired through the body over time and at some point, can be considered 'embodied'. However, to move beyond a superficial level of embodiment[19], it could be said that the dancer needs to keep developing and deepening her practice meaning that knowledge acquisition becomes process-led and thus, positions the dancer in a state of 'knowing'.

Psychophysical perspectives on embodiment

Although it is clear that the body is foregrounded in the process of embodying dance techniques, what is less clear is the role that the mind plays. While the area of dance studies has tended to draw upon dance science and somatic discourse to understand more about the act of embodying dance movements, more needs to be understood about the role of the mind in this process, particularly in the area of dance technique education. In relation to this idea, Spatz (2015: 24) makes reference to the '"embodied turn"' that has become evident within the area of theatre studies; this movement has seen practitioners drawing upon theoretical frameworks from psychology, linguistics, neuroscience and cognitive science in order to explore how the thinking processes of the mind contribute to the process of embodiment; in a dance technique setting, this would be concerned with exploring how cognitive reflection informs the act of embodying dance movements and, thus, may help

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[19] Later in this chapter I draw on Turner's (2015) notion of a continuum of embodiment to examine what is required in order to move past a superficial level of embodiment.

the dancer to uncover valuable knowledge about this process. The work of theatre practitioner Phillip Zarrilli (2009, 2020) and his method of 'Psychophysical Acting' provides a useful framework for analysing these ideas. Zarrilli (2009) offers a three-stage framework to examine the different body-mind states that the performer moves through when embodying a physical score. Making a distinction between what he terms 'pre-reflective' states of awareness and 'reflective/reflexive' states of awareness (2009: 33), he proposes that each state commands a particular organisation of the body-mind:

- **First order pre-reflective state:** The body-mind is engaged in immediate experience without prior intention; an example of this would be the dancer learning a sequence of movements for the first time. The aim is to embody the movements to a basic level where they can be practised through repetition; in this state, neither the body nor the mind are privileged.

- **Second order pre-reflective state:** The body-mind attends to intentional experience; an example of this would be the dancer refining her embodiment of the movement sequence through repeated practise, leading to a nuanced performance of the movements. In this state, the body is foregrounded as knowledge of 'how' to execute the movement sequence is acquired through the bodily act of doing it.

- **Third-order reflective/reflexive state:** The individual reflects on the bodily experience of performing the movement sequence, extracting tacit knowledge about the act of dancing; in this state, the mind is foregrounded in order to make sense of 'what' is happening in the body. What is especially pertinent in the third state is that the act of reflecting emerges from bodily experience, an idea that is explored in more detail later in this chapter.

(Adapted from Zarrilli, 2009: 33)

Informed by the work of phenomenologist David Edward Shaner (1985), Zarrilli proposes that the third-order state of awareness identifies with what Shaner (1985: 48) refers to as 'reflective discursive consciousness', a state of awareness in which we are 'completely

absorbed in thinking about something and momentarily forget we have a body' (Zarrilli, 2020: 107). Zarrilli suggests that this idea resonates with Drew Leder's (1990) notion of the 'absent body' in the sense that when we are reflecting on an activity, our body falls into the background and essentially disappears. Although the notion of the absent body can be considered in relation to cognitive thinking, it can also be considered in relation to dancing. For example, when one has embodied a dance sequence to a level that it no longer requires conscious thinking to execute it, it could be said that the movements become second nature[20]. As such, it would seem that the body also has the potential to become absent in the second-order pre-reflective state, in which the dancer executes the movements without having to consciously think about them, allowing the dancing to simply happen; here, the body would appear to move fluidly through different states of presence and absence. In relation to this idea, dance education and performance has drawn upon somatic discourses to explore how dancers can develop a specific mode of attention that ensures the body does not disappear in this way; dancers are encouraged to be present within the felt sense of the movement as it unfolds, sensing movements on a bodily level during the act of dancing (Olsen, 2016).

Cognitive reflection offers another strategy through which the knowledge acquired in the first and second order pre-reflective states can be uncovered and made into something tangible. For example, with reference to the reflexive-dialogical approach utilised within this PhD study, dance students have been regularly encouraged to turn their attention towards the internal feelings and sensations of their dancing as they learn to embody different technical skills. This internal sensing has been informed by information offered from external sources, for example, feedback from the teacher (me), their peers and from watching themselves on video. In this way, the embodiment of the dance techniques has been facilitated through learners' engagement with both internal and external sources of

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[20] This could be compared to Schön's (1983) concept of 'knowing-in-action', which he uses to describe bodily actions that occur in the moment without the need for conscious thought.

information, resonating with the research findings of Jones and Ryan (2015)[21]. However, my study has also given specific attention towards what Zarrilli (2009) refers to as the third-order state of awareness, that is the reflective or reflexive state within which learners come to understand more about their actions through cognitive reflection. Having noticed a gap in knowledge in the area of dance education research, this study specifically investigates how cognitive reflection in the dance technique class can aid the process of embodying dance techniques, enabling learners to move beyond a surface level of embodiment and to develop their ability to verbally articulate the knowledge that resides in their bodies. Although Zarrilli's system for analysing the three different body-mind states could be viewed as implicitly hierarchical[22], my intention is not to privilege the cognitive, third state of awareness above the other two body-mind states or suggest that words should somehow replace the knowledge that resides in the dancer's body; rather, the intention is to examine what the third state of awareness offers to the dancer in terms of supporting the body-mind processes of embodiment, knowledge acquisition and the mobilisation of agency.

Embodiment and agency

So far, I have explored the concepts of embodiment and agency separately, offering definitions of how these ideas are being understood within this study. However, consideration needs to be given towards understanding the relationship between both concepts and the way in which dance teachers and students might display agency through their actions and thinking processes in the dance technique class. Writing about the relationship between agency and embodiment, Noland (2009) suggests that the sensory-motor practices of the body are key to determining who we are as human subjects. Her argument is based on the premise that humans embody gestures and movements as a result of social and cultural conditioning and thus, '*gestures,* learned techniques of the body, are the means by which cultural conditioning is simultaneously embodied and put to the test' (2009: 2). For example, in the dance technique class, teachers and students

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[21] Jones and Ryan's (2015) study focusing on the dancer as a reflective practitioner is examined in more detail in Chapter Three.
[22] ie. 'first order', 'second-order', 'third order'.

embody movements that are particular to the techniques being learned. Not only this, but they embody physical behaviours that belong to the customary practice and etiquette of the specific technique. For instance, beginning by lying on the floor in a contemporary dance class, or standing at the barre in a ballet class, both of which would be considered normal behaviours in their respective contexts, but may seem odd if done out of context or even in a dance class that operates according to different rules of engagement. In relation to this idea, Noland presents a view of agency that operates at the level of the body, exploring how through the actions of one's body, 'deviations from normative behaviour' (2009: 3) can occur that could be considered agential. According to Noland (2009: 2):

> a theory of agency that places movement center stage is essential to understanding how human beings are embodied within – and impress themselves on – their worlds.

These are useful ideas to consider within the context of this study, which explores to what extent a reflective approach to learning allows agency to be mobilised by students in a contemporary dance technique class setting. For example, it could be said that agency can be exercised by teachers and students through the physical actions they display in their bodies; this may be evident in the way a student tests the limitations of a particular movement, purposefully shifting her weight in a way that is different to that suggested by the teacher or playing with the rhythm or timing of a movement to discover new possibilities. These are actions that could be considered agential as they are indicative of the student making intuitive and innovative kinaesthetic choices of her own accord. However, although Noland's theories are useful for examining how agency might operate on a bodily level in the dance technique class, more needs to be understood about the role that cognitive reflection plays in enabling dance students to exercise agency in this way. As such, in the following sections, I explore the concept of cognitive reflection, examining its relationship to specific educational concepts and theories of learning. Drawing further on Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) work, I investigate the reciprocal relationship between action and reflection, examining how this process allows the dance student to uncover what Schön (1983, 1987) refers to as 'tacit' knowledge. Finally, I explore the relevance of these ideas in

relation to the idea of mobilising agency, drawing upon the theories explored in this chapter to present what I refer to as the reflexive-dialogical approach.

Key educational concepts and theories of learning

The educational system

Learning in a formal sense, for example at school, allows individuals to acquire knowledge on certain subjects; by learning about things beyond our immediate frame of reference, we develop our world view. Learning can also allow us to develop our understanding of ourselves and in particular, reflective approaches to learning tend to emphasise this idea (Johns, 2017). By developing our understanding of ourselves and the world around us, we can gain the skills and attributes that enable us to pursue a particular area of interest or profession. Gaining qualifications allows us to move through the different stages of education, for example, from school to college, college to university and so on. From this perspective, receiving a formal education can be perceived as freeing as it exposes us to opportunities that would be far beyond our reach without it. On the other hand, it could be argued that when we enter the educational system as children, we are conceived into a social discourse that could be viewed as restrictive. As discussed earlier, this is because any given discourse is governed by particular values, beliefs and ideas that determine how people are organised in relation to each other, thus creating a structured existence. In relation to this idea, Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1984) proposes the concept of 'Ideological State Apparatus' to describe the different institutions that are accepted as part of every life, such as education. Counsell and Wolf (2001: 33) propose that Althusser's theory is based on the idea that the function of such institutions is to 'maintain and reproduce the social, productive relations of the prevailing order' and furthermore, rather than enlightening individuals, the real purpose of education is to control individuals by keeping the social order intact.

Formal schooling is one aspect of western society that in Bourdieu's words 'goes without saying because it comes without saying' (1977: 167) and in this sense, it could be said that formal schooling is the prevailing educational discourse of western society. As children, we enter the system, often without question simply because it is the 'done' thing. From a

Foucauldian (1981) perspective, education could be perceived as a system of domination that is perpetuated, yet unless social agents are given an opportunity to become aware of the discourses of education, they may never have an opportunity to question them; indeed, it could be argued that this is one way of ensuring that the dominant discourses of education remain intact. As such, people in positions of power may utilise authoritarian behaviour to suppress the voices of those who are perceived to be less powerful, an idea that has been extensively explored by Foucault (1977, 1981) in relation to the themes of power, knowledge, discipline and punish.

Foucault's work not only examines the oppression of voices within systems of domination, but also bodies, investigating the way that bodies are disciplined into particular ways of behaving. Although dance is widely perceived as a creative pursuit that enables individual artistry, freedom and expression (Green, 2001), Foucault's ideas have been applied extensively within educational dance research (Smith 1998, Green 1999, 2001, Fortin et. al 2009) to explore how:

> the student dance body may be mechanised or habituated into an ideal form that represents the teacher's learned belief system and presumed ideas about what the body should be and do.
>
> (Green, 2001: 156)

By conditioning bodies into a way of being that represents the teacher's learned belief system, the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance education, which, as explored in the thesis introduction, are constructed around the idea of passing pre-existing knowledge from teacher to student could be viewed as directly contradicting notions of individuality, freedom and expression. This has been widely identified as an issue by the western dance education community, as explored in Chapter Three. To enable dance teachers and students to question this issue, it has been acknowledged that the pedagogical practices of dance education need to work towards enabling learners of dance to mobilise agency on both a bodily and cognitive level, and through the interlocking relationship between these different

states of being. In recognition of this, the development of alternative discourses in dance education, such as the somatic discourse and the reflective discourse have emerged. However, as explored earlier, regardless of the underpinning values and intentions, all discourses can be viewed as maintaining rules of engagement that shape social agents into particular ways of being. In view of this idea, this study explores to what extent dance teacher and students are able to mobilise agency in relation to the broader discourses of dance education and what needs to occur to facilitate this process. As such, the following sections of this chapter explore the key educational concepts and theories of learning that have been influential in allowing me to understand how cognitive reflection can facilitate the process of developing and mobilising agency.

Social Constructivism

The learning theory of social constructivism originates from the work of educational theorist Vygotsky (1962) and focuses on the idea of learning as a social process that happens in dialogue with the individual's external world. In contrast, traditional, behaviourist conceptions of learning are based on the idea of the individual acquiring new behaviours by learning how to respond to an external stimulus[23] (Adams, 2006). Therefore, from a behaviourist perspective, the learner is viewed as being programmed to act in a specific way. Furthermore, behaviourist learning tends to focus on the overall outcome of the learning, with less focus on how the learning is actually achieved (ibid). By emphasising the use of external stimuli[24] to train dancers' bodies into moving a certain way, and by advocating repetition of these movements without opportunities for reflection, the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance technique education could be said to align with behaviourist learning principles. On the other hand, social constructivism, which emerged out of the cognitivist educational movement, examines the mind's role in the learning process by:

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[23] As evident in the early 1900s experiment conducted by Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov who explored how dogs could be trained to behave in a certain way by responding to triggers in the environment around them.
[24] For example, the teacher's body, the mirrors, other students' bodies.

> adopting the idea that learner's shape their own minds through their own actions within given socio-cultural settings; in orientation, learning as construction.

> (Adams, 2006: 245)

Drawing on social constructivist (Vygotsky, 1962) perspectives on learning, this PhD study explores how the dominant pedagogical discourses of contemporary dance technique can be subverted by utilising cognitive reflection in the learning environment. By reflecting on their actions in the dance technique class, the students in this study were encouraged to think about *why* their bodies moved in a certain way; when I use the term 'actions', I am referring to both the gestures of a given technique and the behaviours that occur through engagement with specific aesthetic and pedagogical discourses[25]. By enabling dance students to reflect on how they are shaped by the broader aesthetic and pedagogical discourses, as Adams (2006) suggests, learning is constructed in orientation to the socio-cultural environment. In the sections that follow, I examine three key educational theories that foreground the reflective capacity of the mind in different ways, exploring the relationship between these theories and the notion of agency. These are: Rancière's (1991) concept of 'the ignorant schoolmaster', Freire's (1972) notion of critical pedagogy, and finally, the theory of experiential learning, which originates from the work of theorists including Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984, 2015).

The Ignorant Schoolmaster

Rancière's (1991) concept of 'the ignorant schoolmaster' proposes a model for deconstructing dominant educational discourses and can be usefully applied to examine the power-based relationship that is often evident between teacher and students in the dance technique learning environment. Rancière developed the concept in his seminal 2009 text *The Emancipated Spectator* in order to examine the relationship between the theatre performer and the spectator, drawing several parallels with traditional conceptions of teacher and student. With reference to the teaching experiments of Joseph Jacotot (1818),

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[25] I revisit this idea later on in this chapter, when I explore Bourdieu's (1977) notion of 'practice' in more detail and consider the range of bodily behaviours that constitute a dancer's practice.

who challenged the ideology that learners need something to be taught or explained by a master explicator, Rancière bases his concept of the ignorant schoolmaster on Jacotot's work in order to question the perception of the teacher as expert. According to Rancière, Jacotot claimed:

> that one ignoramus could teach another what he himself did not know, asserting the equality of intelligence and opposing intellectual emancipation to popular instruction.

(Rancière, 2009: 1)

As such, the notion of the ignorant schoolmaster rejects the idea that the teacher should be the bearer of all knowledge in order to maintain his position as master explicator; this is an idea that has interesting implications for the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance technique, which have sustained the traditional conception of the dance technique teacher as the authoritarian expert.

To achieve this approach to learning, Rancière (1991) exclaims that as well as imparting her own knowledge to the student, the teacher must also be inclined to present herself as 'ignorant' and as willing to learn from the student. Theatre scholar Andy Lavender (2012: 309) describes this as establishing:

> a mode of relation whereby both teacher and pupil would learn together – with the learning enabled by a facilitator rather than an elucidator

Rancière's ideas align with social constructivist and dialogical perspectives on learning, the idea being that the teacher facilitates the intellectual learning journey of the student and does not dictate what should be discovered, but rather responds to what is offered, opening up a dialogical relationship. Returning to the ideas of Bakhtin (1981), the self can be viewed as incorporating aspects of the other's discourse and both parties shape the construction of each other's knowledge. Educational scholars McArthur and Huxham (2013) examine the notion of dialogue in relation to feedback processes in higher education. They propose that

in order for teachers and students to establish a dialogical relationship with each other, teachers must 'find ways to let students know that they too are open to learn through the relationship' (2013: 96). As opposed to accepting one dominant perspective or truth, sharing individual experiences and perspectives forms an essential part of a dialogical learning approach (McArthur and Huxham, 2013). When situated in a dance technique learning context, the idea of enabling a dialogical relationship between teacher and student could be viewed as quite radical and could also present challenges in relation to the notion of providing a 'good' student experience, as discussed in the later analysis chapters.

These are important ideas to consider in relation to conducting action research with students where the knowledge acquired is viewed as co-constructed (Etherington, 2017). Within my own action research, there were occasions when I perceived myself to be more successful than others in enabling a dialogical learning environment, particularly during the second cycle, as discussed in Chapter Six. Based on the findings gathered from Cycle One, it became apparent that during Cycle Two, dialogue was more effectively facilitated when I communicated my underlying motivations for conducting the research with the students; in Chapter Four, I discuss this idea in relation to the notion of 'honesty' and what this means in the context of this research. It was also important that I was able to convey my desire to learn about my own practice to the students, and that this was not possible without their input. As such, enabling open communication channels between us was essential and although I was more confident to do this during Cycle Two in comparison to Cycle One, there were still occasions when it seemed that I missed opportunities to facilitate the kind of dialogical relationship I was aiming for, as discussed in Chapter Six.

Not only are Rancière's ideas pertinent in relation to cultivating a constructive research environment, but they also bring the dominant pedagogical models for dance technique into question, especially in relation to the notion of acquiring and mobilising agency[26]. In a

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[26] Dance scholars have drawn upon Rancière's model to analyse the teacher-student relationship in both technique and choreography learning contexts. See Dryburgh and Jackson, 2016 and Kelsey and Uytterhoeven, 2017.

learning environment that has been traditionally governed by notions of hierarchy, authority, discipline and prevailing truths that must be conformed to, the proposal of a dialogical relationship between teacher and students could be perceived as causing significant disruption to the dominant discourses. When developing the learning strategies for Cycles One and Two, Rancière's ideas strongly informed my thinking. For example, the use of specific reflective learning strategies during both cycles significantly contributed towards establishing a more dialogical learning environment, allowing the students to develop an awareness of self and the external environment and to question this relationship. In many cases, this resulted in the students being able to acquire and mobilise agency in different ways; these findings are discussed in more detail in Chapters Five and Six.

However, there were other reflective learning strategies that I explored during both cycles that on reflection, were less successful in facilitating dialogue, and in turn, agency. Even though my intention was always to enable students, analysis of the findings demonstrated that the power of the underlying doxa was, at times, too difficult to suppress. As such, there were some occasions when I fell victim to it and consequently, a teaching strategy that was meant to empower, sometimes ended up doing the opposite. This showed me that even when approaching one's teaching and research from a critical perspective, there can be instances when blind spots occur and something is missed. This affirms the importance of enabling and sustaining a dialogical relationship with students, as often, it is the students who are able to expose teachers to their blind spots (Brookfield, 2017) by virtue of the fact that they occupy a different centre (Bakhtin, 1981).

Critical Pedagogy
When exploring the field of education and agency, it is impossible not to encounter critical pedagogy, an area of education that is grounded in the belief that through critical thinking, learners can become more agential by developing a deeper, more informed view of the

broader discourses that they operate within. According to Guilherme (2015: 139):

> Critical pedagogy (CP) is commonly understood as an approach to education that, in brief, defines education as reflection and action. Therefore, it prompts agency that is reciprocal, since it implies learning-in-interaction, as well as political, because it arises from and results in political awareness and intervention. CP attempts to lead education far beyond the limits of functional methodologies, into ambitious cognitive and social objectives and deep into reflective citizenship.

Freire (1972), a key philosopher in the area of critical pedagogy, refers to the notion of a 'socio-cultural reality', proposing that in becoming aware of the reality of the cultural and political conditions of the social world, the individual can develop a 'critical consciousness' that enables her to question the way things are. Consequently, critical pedagogy is often associated with notions of agency and empowerment (Razfar, 2011). Educational perspectives that are based on the values of critical pedagogy tend to emphasise critical thinking as a key idea within the learning process (Guilherme, 2015). Many of Freire's ideas are grounded in the work he did with peasant communities in Brazil and, thus, it is acknowledged that the act of mobilising agency is a complex process that is impacted by the conditions of the socio-cultural reality including the hierarchical ideologies of the political forces at play; Freire's work recognises that these external forces govern to what extent the empowerment of individuals and communities can occur.

The area of critical pedagogy has been influential in the western dance educational research community[27]. Perhaps most notably, American dance scholar Stinson (1993) was one of the first people to draw upon the ideas of critical pedagogy in order to examine the dominant pedagogical discourses in western dance education. Questioning the traditional model for teaching dance technique and its capacity to enable learners of dance to acquire agency, Stinson proposes that the values of critical pedagogy are essential for helping teachers and learners of dance to find their own critical voices (ibid). One of the core values of critical pedagogy is based upon questioning dominant ideologies and being sceptical of the notion

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[27] Please consult Chapter Three for an analysis of dance studies that have drawn upon the perspectives of Critical Pedagogy.

of one, overriding truth (Freire, 1972). These are interesting ideas to investigate in relation to the dominant discourse of dance technique pedagogy, which is constructed around the notion of codified systems of movement that retain specific rules to which individuals must conform in order to embody the 'desired ideal' (Stinson, 1993: 133). Hence, Stinson (ibid) calls for dance teachers to engage in an ongoing critical process around their practice in order to prevent the continual perpetuation of traditional, authoritarian teaching methods; I return to Freire's ideas in Chapter Seven when I conduct a meta-analysis of cycles one and two.

Experiential Learning

Emerging out of the cognitivist and social constructivist educational movements is experiential learning, another learning theory that emphasises a social, experience-based perspective on learning that views the mind as an essential, sense-making tool (Kolb, 1984, 2015). Much like social constructivism, experiential learning is based on the belief that social agents are actively involved in the construction of their own knowledge as opposed to being the passive receivers of pre-existing knowledge and information. This perspective on education can be traced back to the work of Dewey (1938), Kurt Lewin (1946) and Jean Piaget (1966), who are seen as pioneering the experiential learning movement. Experiential learning is based on the idea of 'direct sense experience and in-context action as the primary source of learning' (Kolb, 2015: xviii). Knowledge is acquired by engaging in cognitive reflection in order to make sense of the interactions that the individual has with the external world (Kolb, 1984, 2015). Experiential learning provides a framework through which we can understand more about how 'experience is transformed into learning and reliable knowledge' (Kolb, 2015: xxi). Dewey's (1938) work on experiential learning and knowledge focuses on understanding the relationship between these different entities. As Johnson (2011: 142) writes:

> The locus of knowledge, according to Dewey, is experience, interpreted in the broadest sense to include both physical objects and states of affairs, but also everything that is thought, felt, hoped for, willed, desired, encountered, and done. The basis for Dewey's idea of experience is an account of an organism continually

interacting with its surroundings.

Here, we return to Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the individual existing in dialogue with the external world. In this perspective on experience, the individual learns how to participate in the social field that she is conceived into and shaped by. In Bourdieu's (1977) terms, she becomes attuned to the rules of the game and her knowledge of how to participate in the field is constructed through the dialogical relationship between the internal sense of self and the conditions of the external environment, across space and time. For example, in the context of a dance class, the repeated experience of participating in the learning activities ensures that social agents literally embody the 'regularities' (Bourdieu, 1990: 64) of the field. These regularities not only include the gestures of the dance techniques being learned, but also the expected behaviours that coincide with the cultural practices of the learning environment and the roles that social agents assume; in the field of the dance class, this would be teacher and student.

Within the area of experiential learning, reflection is viewed as the method through which individuals make sense of experience and thus acquire knowledge (Kolb, 1984, 2015). Moon (2004) suggests that in an academic context, reflective learning is the technique through which this sense-making occurs; although first-person, reflective writing tends to be viewed as the most prominent method for articulating reflections, other learning activities such as group discussions, peer support and feedback activities can help to facilitate the reflective writing process. Although the students who participated in the action research of this PhD study did have to produce a written reflective assignment as part of their learning, these written forms of reflection were not used as a form of data for analysis. Instead, I chose to focus on analysing students' verbal reflections, articulated during class activities and during the focus group interviews. This was a deliberate decision as I wanted to give specific attention towards exploring how discursive reflective activities functioned during the course of the technique class and understanding how this method worked to subvert the doxa. It was important to me that reflection was not only treated as an activity that the students undertook in private, outside class time, but rather as something that became embedded as

part of the learning culture. However, in Chapter Seven, I do explore some of the possible benefits that incorporating written forms of reflection may offer when presenting my recommendations for future research.

In his 'Experiential Learning Cycle' Kolb (1984) positions reflection, or 'reflective observation' as a specific stage in his four-step cycle of experiential learning (see figure. 1). The idea is that the practitioner can enter the cycle at any point, but that the stages of learning are carried out in sequential order. Kolb proposes that reflection emerges out of 'concrete experience', claiming that it informs future learning and action, as demonstrated in Figure 1:

Concrete Experience
(doing / having an experience)

Reflective Observation
(reviewing / reflecting on the experience)

Abstract Conceptualisation
(concluding / learning from the experience)

Active Experimentation
(planning / trying out what you have learned)
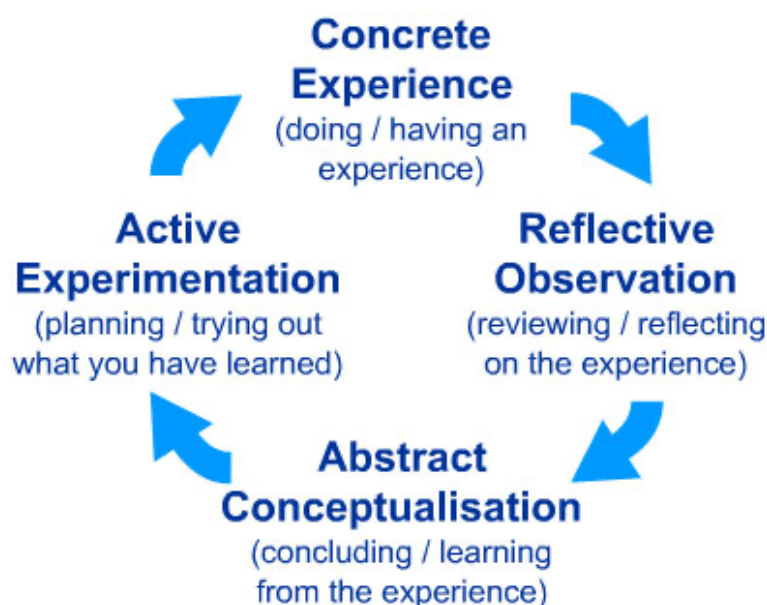
Figure. 1

Moon (2008: 27) offers an interpretation of the reflective stage of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, stating:

> The assumption is that the general aim of reflection is to move beyond current thoughts, ideas or behaviours with regard to the experience – in other words, to learn from it [the experience]. Expressed in terms of the Kolb cycle, it is to move to a

new cycle, and not to require the learner to circle through the same experience again with no change to their learning.

If reflection is a tool for enabling individuals to make sense of experience and, where necessary, to question habitual thoughts, ideas or behaviours, then this pertains to a direct relationship with agency. According to Moon (2008), there can be varying degrees of reflection ranging from surface-level thoughts to deeper, critical reflection. Critical reflection is widely viewed as a method through which the individual can develop an awareness of the broader discourses that she operates within (Freire, 1972; Johns, 2017) or in Bourdieuian terms, the taken for granted. As such, critical reflection is often viewed as a method for questioning the ideologies that are inherent within dominant discourses. Speaking about this idea in relation to the healthcare profession, Johns (2017: 5) proposes that 'reflection is concerned with empowerment' and furthermore:

> Empowerment is enhanced when practitioners are committed to and take responsibility for their practice, have strong values, and understand why things are as they are. However, empowerment is not easy for practitioners socialised into norms that render them docile…if practitioners truly wish to live their visions of practice then they have no choice but to become political in working towards establishing the conditions of practice *where that is possible.*
>
> (Ibid)

This idea can be viewed in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance technique education that have, in some cases, been identified as responsible for creating docile, colonised bodies (Smith, 1998; Roche, 2011). Acquiring knowledge in the contemporary dance technique class engages the individual in an interconnected network of seeing, doing, thinking and feeling that involves different organisations of the body-mind (Andersson and Thorgersen, 2015). To be learned, dance must be done, therefore making it an experiential activity. But what is less clear is how the pedagogical methods used to convey and cultivate knowledge in a dance technique setting encompass opportunities for reflection that go beyond the pre-reflective cognitive thinking processes that occur when learning to embody specific movements. In fact, there is only a small amount of evidence to suggest that teachers in British higher education are utilising methods that enable students

to engage in reflection around their dance technique practice[28], indicating that this is an area of learning and research that tends to be overlooked.

In view of these ideas, the originality of my study lies in my analysis of how a reflexive-dialogical approach to teaching contemporary dance technique enables social agents to find meaning in the experience of embodying dance techniques, acquiring agency through this process. I investigate how this pedagogical approach allows social agents to develop an awareness of the teaching and learning practices that they engage in. This idea is explored in relation to the embodiment of specific dance techniques, as well as the embodiment of the beliefs, values and behaviours that are inherent within the discourses that particular techniques belong to. I explore the idea that by enabling students to reflect on the relationship between these different perspectives, opportunities to mobilise agency can arise.

Cognitive reflection

Based on the literature reviewed, it is clear that reflection is not only a key component of the experiential learning process, but also any learning that intends to empower; by reflecting on experience, individuals have the opportunity to make sense of their actions, as well as the relationship between their actions and the broader socio-cultural environment that they participate in. However, although reflection is a term that is widely used across many educational contexts, its definition appears to have significantly broadened over time (Kinsella, 2009). There are also several interchangeable terms that are used to refer to the act of reflecting including 'critical reflection', 'reflective learning' and 'reflective practice' amongst others. In addition, different schools of thought have emerged regarding the notion of 'cognition' and the organisation of the body-mind during kinaesthetic and reflective activity; as such, there is increasing interest in understanding how thoughts arise from the actions of the body and vice versa, as evident in the work of Spatz (2015), which

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[28] Please refer to Chapter Two for a review of the other studies that have explored the use of reflection in the dance technique class.

was discussed earlier and in the work of scholars writing in the field of 'embodied cognition', discussed later in this chapter. In view of these complexities, further interrogation into both 'reflection' and 'cognition' is required in order to determine how dance technique students can use reflection to uncover what Nelson (2013: 44) refers to as 'know-what', that is, the insider knowledge that only the dancer has access to. Speaking about the purpose of reflection in an arts practice-as-research context, he states:

> The key method used to develop know-what from know-how is that of critical reflection – pausing, standing back and thinking about what you are doing.

(Ibid)

Nelson's ideas draw upon the theories of Schön (1983, 1987) and his work exploring reflective practice in professional contexts. According to Schön, the purpose of reflection is to make the implicit or 'tacit' knowledge of the professional, what he refers to as 'knowing-in-action', explicit. As such, in view of the ideas of Nelson and Schön, for the dancer, reflection is concerned with enabling her to do more than know 'how' to dance, but to develop an understanding of the know 'what', that is the inner-workings of her practice (Schön, 1983). From this perspective, in a dance technique learning context, reflection might enable the student to gain a heightened awareness of the technical, physiological, artistic or creative aspects of her dancing. Furthermore, reflection may also act as a tool for developing an awareness of the external learning environment, allowing the dancer to reflect on how her body-mind is constructed by her surroundings.

For example, by reflecting on her performance of a tassel-leg turn in the Hawkins' Technique, the dancer can develop an understanding of how her body executes that particular movement. Reflection may involve discussing the internal sensation of the movement with a partner. It may also involve using the mirror to evaluate the execution of the movement, or receiving a form of touch from someone else, both of which act as valuable sources of external information for initiating reflection. This process may be further

informed by discussing the underpinning values of Erick Hawkins' artistic work such as his desire to break-free from the conventions of American modern dance by creating a movement aesthetic that emphasised 'grace, sensuousness, immediacy, poetry and free, effortless flow' (Celichowska, 2000: 2). By reflecting on the relationship between these values and the execution of the tassel-leg turn, a shift in the dancer's embodiment of the movement occurs, and with it, a change in the structure of her habitus. By entering into a reciprocal and praxical (Nelson, 2013) relationship between action and reflection, the dancer can uncover additional layers of knowledge that further the embodiment of the dance technique movements being learned[29].

A continuum of embodiment

When discussing the act of using reflection to understand her experience of embodying the *Topeng* dance form of Bali, theatre scholar Jane Turner (2015) offers a useful framework for analysis. Drawing on the work of Zarrilli (2009), Turner explores the idea of a continuum of embodiment proposing that the performer lands at different points along the continuum depending on the sense of embodiment being experienced. Drawing on Zarrilli's notion that the performer embodies four different bodies[30], which are in a continual 'state of flux' (2009; 55) she states:

> The implication is that there is a continuum that marks different experiences of embodiment but that such a continuum is not rationally ordered, is not progressive and does not imply a value judgment or hierarchy of experience.
>
> (Ibid)

The notion of a continuum of embodiment is a useful idea to consider when exploring students' embodiment of dance techniques and the way in which reflection can be a valuable tool, not only for uncovering tacit knowledge, but also for allowing individuals to

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[29] Ehrenberg's (2010) notion of a 'feedback loop' is a useful image to employ here in order to illustrate the continuous, looping process that occurs between the dancer's actions and reflections, and inner and outer worlds of her practice.
[30] These are the ecstatic surface body, the depth/visceral recessive body, the subtle inner body and the fictive body (Zarrilli, 2009)

reflect on the different embodied states being experienced. However, Turner (2015) also proposes that it is possible for different levels of embodiment to be achieved across the continuum; reflecting on her experience of embodying a culturally foreign dance form, she states that it was difficult to move beyond a 'surface' (59) level experience of embodiment, which she defines as 'giving body – or form – to an entity that has no body' (ibid) through replicating and repeating the movements of codified forms; this is because the broader cultural and spiritual ideology that the *Topeng* dance form is grounded within was absent from Turner's habitus and, thus, she was unable to incorporate the cultural and spiritual sensibilities of the dance form into her performance. Applying Turner's (2015) notion of a continuum of embodiment in the context of the British contemporary dance technique class, I propose that it is possible to track the level of embodiment being achieved in a student's dancing by examining the degree to which she is able to move past a surface level of embodiment, that is, literally having dance movements layered onto her body from an external source. By allowing dancers to have greater critical and reflective engagement with the dance techniques they learn, they can develop a sense of authority in relation to their body-minds and the techniques that they incorporate, producing a kind of embodiment that is multiplicitous; this is turn gives licence to play with the creative potential of the movement and to test and innovate, characteristics that are aligned with a physical conception of agency, as discussed earlier.

Cognition: mind, body, or both?
Throughout this chapter, I have been using the term 'cognitive reflection' to describe the thinking process that the dancer engages in after the act of dancing, yet I acknowledge that the concept of cognition, which derives from the field of psychology, is a contested term as will now be discussed. In psychology, the process of obtaining, converting and applying knowledge is broadly known as 'cognition', an umbrella term that encompasses several mental processes that are commonly thought of as 'thinking' (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2014). As discussed earlier, reflection, as a form of thinking is associated with the mind (Sööt and Viskus, 2015; Moon, 2004). The counter perspective, which could be viewed as a more

humanist stance, views the notion of cognition as problematic as it appears to place body and mind in opposition to each other: the body being material and located in space and time, and the mind being a disembodied, abstract entity responsible for processing bodily experience. Not only can this be viewed as 'separating thinking from doing' (Ingold, 2022: 255), but thinking appears to be privileged over doing through the perception that thinking is how humans come to 'know'; in this way, the notion of cognition could be viewed as undermining other ways of knowing that are more discreet and inexplicable.

Commenting on this, Varela, Thompson and Rosch (2016) propose that this view of reflection has resulted in it becoming 'severed from its bodily life' (2016: 30). As such, scholars working in the developing area of embodied cognition are examining the organisation of the body-mind during thinking processes, investigating the idea that mental cognition is itself, an embodied act (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Pfeifer and Bongard, 2007; Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 2016; Shapiro, 2011, 2014). For example, drawing on eastern traditions and the Buddhist philosophy of mindfulness, Varela, Thompson and Rosch (2016) propose that reflection can be reconceptualised as an activity that is located within the body and through which a 'mind-body unity' (2016: 29) can be achieved:

> What we are suggesting is a change in the nature of reflection from an abstract, disembodied activity to an embodied (mindful), open-ended reflection.
> By *embodied,* we mean reflection in which body and mind have been brought together.

(2016: 27)

Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2022) explores this idea in relation to his practice of playing the cello, which he perceives as an act that evokes simultaneous engagement of the sensory and cognitive systems. He employs the term 'correspondence' to describe the mutuality of hearing and feeling states that 'twist around one another' (2022: 246) during the act of playing; for Ingold, these are states that speak for themselves without the requirement for thoughts, registered in words, to convey meaning. He proposes that

performance[31] cannot be reduced to an 'inherently thoughtless' (2022: 255) act since during the moment of performance, thinking 'goes in and out just as breathing does' (2022: 254) and therefore, the performance can be viewed as a consequence, or 'line of flight' to use Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) term, of such thinking.

While I recognise that dancing, like playing music, is by no means a thoughtless act, but a phenomenon that is entirely bound to feeling and sensation, experienced within the materiality of a body-mind that gives rise to cognition, I am proposing that the thinking that occurs during the act of dancing is distinct from the kind of mental cognition that happens when the dancer pauses to think about what she is doing (Nelson, 2013). The somatic philosopher Jeffery Maitland (1995) helps to clarify this idea by drawing a distinction between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness. He proposes that pre-reflective consciousness pertains to the immediate experience of the body-mind that happens during a physical activity; although thinking does occur in the pre-reflective state, we may not be consciously aware of our thoughts as they arise as this is a process that happens quickly and multiple thoughts may occur at once[32]. Suggesting that the pre-reflective state is 'the prior condition of reflective understanding' (1995: 74), he proposes that in this state, much like Ingold's account of playing the cello, the body-mind experiences reality without separating from it. In contrast, reflective consciousness concerns the idea of experiencing reality by momentarily separating from it. As Maitland (ibid) writes:

> Unless the world were already opened up to us prereflectively, there would be nothing to step back and reflect on.

Maitland's perspective resonates with Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) first, second and third order framework for categorising the body-mind states of the performer, the third-order state of awareness aligning with what Maitland refers to as reflective consciousness. When

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[31] In this case, musical performance.
[32] However, it should be acknowledged that the field of somatic research has focused on developed methods for cultivating conscious awareness of the sensations experienced in the pre-reflective state.

engaged in this state, by turning our attention to our pre-reflective experiences, we enter the cognitive process of drawing upon the experiences of the body-mind to construct our identities in relation to the world around us; due to our 'languaged' nature as human beings (Damasio, 1999), this process generally, although not always, happens by registering our thoughts in words.

Speaking about arts practice-as-research, Nelson (2013: 38) describes how knowledge exists on a spectrum and that there are different 'modes of knowing' that can be accounted for including 'tacit, embodied-cognition' and 'performative'; in this PhD study, reflection that arises from the act of dancing and is subsequently registered in words, is viewed as a mode of knowing that is distinct, yet no more valuable than the other 'knowledges' in the dancer's skillset[33]. Indeed, reflection that occurs outside the act of dancing can assist the dancer in realising what other 'modes of knowing' are available to her; for me, this is a cognitive process that is firmly rooted in the kinaesthetic experience of dancing. Although I see that 'cognition' is a complex term that could be viewed as reinforcing a binary that I am attempting to dismantle, in searching for a term to capture this interconnected relationship between body and mind, albeit a mind that is not 'confined only to the brain' (Ingold, 2022: 253) but is in fact located all over the body[34], I have settled on the term cognition.

Proposing an 'enactive' approach to embodiment, Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) work usefully supports this perspective on cognition by exploring the idea that performance itself is a mode of cognition, of sense-making. Acknowledging that there are both pre-reflective and reflective states, Zarrilli's approach accounts for the slippage that occurs between

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[33] Parviainen's (2002: 22) notion of 'articulated knowledge' is useful here as it refers to a 'mode of knowledge expressed in words, numbers, formulas, and procedures' that does not seek to replace embodied knowledge, but seeks to 'indicate the existence of bodily knowledge' for the purpose of communicating something about bodily experience. This can be useful in educational scenarios, where there is a need to share aspects of bodily experience for the benefit of others.

[34] The notion of the mind being located all over the body due to the expansive nature of the nervous system is something that the somatic movement practitioner Andrea Olsen has explored both in her writing (2002, 2014) and in practice. This is something that I have come to know (note the ironic use of the word 'know') from participating in her workshops over the last ten years.

such states, while emphasising that no single state is privileged more than another. In relation to this idea, Varela et al. (2016: 30) suggest that 'the mind-body question need not be, What is the ontological relation between body and mind', but rather that the emphasis should be on trying to understand the different modalities that the body-mind moves through during action and reflection; indeed, for the dancer, the processes of dancing and reflecting may at times happen separately, and at other times, simultaneously. Therefore, instead of taking an either/or viewpoint, the question is not whether it is body *or* mind, but rather, what is the nexus of body-mind states that the dancer is constantly slipping between? Are there moments when the mind is foregrounded more than the body, and vice versa? Or moments when these two systems appear to be working simultaneously? And furthermore, what kind of knowledge does cognitive reflection offer to the dancer in order to enrich her artistic practice? In the final sections of this chapter, I explore how the reflexive-dialogical approach invites the dancer to move through a series of different body-mind states when embodying the movements of a given dance technique and reflecting on this process; this is idea is also discussed in the analysis of the data gathered during both cycles of research, as discussed in chapters Five and Six.

Psychophysical approaches to reflection

Discussing the term 'psychophysical' in relation to the practice of Third Theatre performer training, Turner and Campbell (2021) state that it 'accounts for a both/and sense of experiencing and reflecting through the craft of acting' (2021: 150 - 151) and furthermore:

> Psychophysical practices are not necessarily assimilated in a sequential order; they are deeply embodied processes wherein learning actively occurs in and through the body over time.

> (Turner and Campbell, 2021: 151)

As discussed previously, the concept of the psychophysical provides a useful framework for examining the various organisations of the body-mind that the dancer experiences when embodying movement and reflecting on this process in the dance technique class[35]. However, with further reference to Turner and Campbell's (2021) ideas, since the dancer may move in and out of each state several times when learning and/or dancing a sequence of movement, it is unlikely that they will occur in sequential order. As discussed earlier, Spatz (2015) proposes that acquiring embodied knowledge is a generative process that takes place over time; in the context of the dance technique class, the repeated processes of exploring, executing, testing, playing and refining movements mean that the dancer's knowledge is never fixed but rather continually unfolding. Reflective practice sheds new light on these processes, allowing the dancer to uncover additional layers of knowledge that inform her physical practice. As such, the dancer may uncover 'new' knowledge at an unexpected moment, allowing her to draw a connection back to something learned previously. The idea of non-linear learning is something that became apparent when reflecting on my own learning journey and emergent sense of agency, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

Chapter summary: presenting the reflexive-dialogical approach
To summarise, when used as a tool in a dance technique learning environment, cognitive reflection can allow the dancer to develop an understanding of the level of embodiment being achieved in her dancing. Furthermore, it can allow the dancer to extract tacit knowledge about the inner workings of her practice Schön (1983, 1987). Reflection can also be used as a tool to develop an awareness of the broader contextual conditions of one's practice, such as the social, cultural and political aspects, or what could be considered as the outer workings of her practice. Both the inner and outer aspects of practice produce habits and dispositions that over time, become embodied and second nature until eventually, they become unnoticed. With reference to the ideas of Schön and Zarrilli, in this study, reflection has been utilised as a method for making the embodied or 'tacit' knowledge of the body

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[35] Please refer back to page 38 for a breakdown of each state proposed by Zarrilli.

explicit in order to acquire 'Propositional, reflexive knowledge about what one does' (Zarrilli, 2009: 33). When used in this way, reflection can be viewed as dialogical in the sense that it invites the individual to explore the relationship between the internal experience of dancing and the influence of the external environment. By enabling dance students to become aware of this dialogue between inner and outer, agency can be mobilised to varying degrees. However, as discussed in the later analysis chapters, the ability to mobilise agency is dependent upon the appetite of the individual to be agential and the flexibility of the structures that she operates within. Through interrogating the interlocking relationships between these ideas, both the synergies and tensions, in this chapter, I have presented a critical framework for a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique; this is the pedagogical approach that has been explored in this study during two cycles of ethnographic action-research. In view of these ideas, it is now useful to present the reader with an overview of the key components of the reflexive-dialogical approach:

- Cognitive reflection is viewed as a mental phenomenon that is rooted within the actions of the body and, thus, arises from the body.

- Reflection is not only viewed as a private act, but as a social process that occurs during the dance class through the dialogues between self and other, inner and outer. As such, the acts of dancing and reflecting are viewed as reciprocal and interconnected, each informing the other.

- Learners are encouraged to reflect on internal, or 'somatic' information offered by the body in order to extrapolate tacit knowledge about the act of dancing and to reflect on the degree to which the movements of a given technique are embodied.

- Learners are also encouraged to reflect on the information offered from the external environment, including the extent to which they perceive themselves as subjects of the pedagogical discourses that they operate within.

- Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) ideas are drawn upon to make sense of the body-mind states that dancers move through when embodying the movements of a given dance technique and reflecting on this process. As such, the body-mind is viewed as one interconnected organism that moves through a series of different states during the

course of the dance technique class, each state commanding a particular organisation of the body-mind.

- Turner's (2015) notion of a continuum of embodiment is utilised to examine the level of embodiment being displayed in a learner's dancing.

- Agency is perceived as being displayed both through the physical actions of the dancer's body when dancing and/or participating in the social field, as well as through the act of cognitive reflection where thought processes are articulated verbally and/or in writing in the context of the dance class.

- By analysing learners' engagement with the reflexive-dialogical approach, the extent to which individuals are able to exercise agency through physical actions and cognitive reflection is examined.

To view a session plan illustrating the typical structure of a dance technique class utilising the reflexive-dialogical approach, the reader can refer to Appendix 4; this session plan was used during the second cycle of action research. To demonstrate the extent of the counter-cultural nature of the reflexive-dialogical approach, in the following chapter, I explore the value systems of the dominant pedagogical discourses that the approach works to subvert. I investigate the discursive practices that are responsible for constructing and sustaining these discourses, examining how these practices ensure that social agents conform to the rules, or doxa that is embedded within each discourse. Finally, I explore the problematic relationship between the dominant discourses and the agency of independent contemporary dancer, two concepts that appear to exist in tension with each other.

Chapter Two: Investigating the construction of the doxa: exploring the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance education in the UK

Purpose of the chapter

In this chapter, I explore the construction of the doxa that governs the dominant pedagogical discourses of western contemporary dance technique education[36]. I begin with an examination of the discursive practices that have constructed the doxa of the discourses, focusing on western theatre dance from classical ballet to postmodern dance[37]. The purpose of this is to explore the idea that although much of western theatre dance has, in an artistic sense, been very progressive with regards to challenging the hegemonic ideologies of society, the dominant pedagogical methods that tend to be employed in western dance technique learning contexts have remained traditional and, in many cases, authoritarian. Thus, the purpose of the first section is to explore the misalignment between the progressive nature of western theatre dance[38] in contrast to its traditional pedagogic practices, investigating why these two areas seem to retain values that directly contradict each other (Lakes, 2005; Roche, 2011).

In Chapter One, I explored Althusser's (1984) notion of Ideological State Apparatus, which proposes that contrary to the belief that the purpose of education is to enlighten individuals, it actually functions as a form of social control. There are interesting synergies between this idea and the training systems of dance in the west, which have typically maintained hierarchical structures even though it could be said that a key purpose of the arts is to challenge and disrupt hegemonic ideologies. This raises a question concerning to what extent the western dance community are aware of, or actually want to depart from

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[36] When using the term 'western dance education', I am predominantly referring to the pedagogical practices of the United Kingdom and North America, with specific reference to the area of contemporary dance, which has tended to draw on the traditions of ballet, modern and post-modern dance forms.

[37] Much of this chapter examines the discursive practices of American dance techniques and their influence on British dance. However, I realise that there are other western movements such as German expressionist dance that have had a significant influence on British dance. Since my study is located in the area of dance technique education, I have made the decision to keep the discussion focused on American influences, since they are most often associated with the codified dance techniques that are generally taught on the British undergraduate dance technique curriculum.

[38] Particularly in relation to choreographic and performance practices.

such structures, or whether they have continued to be perpetuated as a way of preserving social order within certain areas of the profession. These structures are further reinforced by educational institutions, such as universities and conservatoires that tend to reflect the hierarchical nature of the dance profession in the west[39]. In fact, the very notion of teaching dance in an educational institution could be perceived as incongruous as it requires a standardisation of the art form that enables it to be organised into specific areas of learning with assessable outcomes. As such, dance is placed into a position of needing to conform to the ideologies of the institution, which may restrict the artistic and progressive potential of the art form as well as reinforcing the dominant pedagogical paradigms that have played such a significant role in constructing the doxa. These are ideas that are explored in relation to Foucault's (1972) concept of discursive practices, later on in this chapter.

To revisit the notion of 'discursive practices', according to Bacchi and Bonham (2014: 174), it is concerned with understanding:

> how knowledge is formed in the interaction of plural and contingent practices within different sites…The term "discursive practice/s" describes those practices of knowledge formation by focusing on how specific knowledges ("discourses") operate and the work they do.

In this sense, the notion of discursive practices refers to the act of examining the 'practices *of* discourses' (ibid), such as the specific behaviours, rules and regularities that determine how particular sites, or 'fields' to use Bourdieu's term, function. It is important to remember, however, that in Foucault's work, which places significant emphasis on the materiality of the body (Larsson, 2014), discursive practices do not only refer to the linguistic practices of particular sites (Bacchi and Bonham, 2014; Larsson, 2014) but also account for the embodied practices through which individuals learn to interact with the social world that they are shaped by. This is of particular importance in dance education, where much of the communication that occurs between individuals happens through the body and words are not always required to convey a particular meaning (Lakes, 2005).

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[39] For example, professor-student, undergraduate-postgraduate, Level Four, Level Five, Level Six and so on.

Furthermore, through regular participation in the field of the dance class, discursive practices become inscribed within the systems of the body, forming a significant part of its materiality. From a Bourdieuian perspective, this would be considered as the construction of one's habitus. As discussed earlier, the habitus is comprised of the hexis, the physical dispositions that are an internalisation of the external environment, as well as the cognitive perceptions of the social world.

In view of these ideas, in this chapter I examine the discursive practices of western theatre dance pedagogy from classical ballet to the present day, tracking the gradual construction of the dominant doxa and exploring how it has been both reinforced and disrupted. I investigate the relationship between the doxa as it currently exists and the notion of the independent contemporary dancer (Foster, 1997; Roche, 2011, 2015) who requires agency to navigate a complex professional field. Since the doxa advocates the notion of a collective body that conforms to external structures and standards, and many higher education institutions advocate the notion of individuality and agency, these are two ideas that appear to be in conflict with each other. Thus, I examine the notion that although the doxa does not appear to cultivate the specific skillset required to work as an independent contemporary dance artist in the west, the discursive practices of the prevailing discourses ensure that it continues to be reinforced.

An exploration into the discourses of western theatre dance education and their role in constructing the doxa

The discursive practices of classical ballet

The notion of training dancers' bodies into a particular aesthetic could be perceived as originating from the traditions of western theatre dance (Foster, 1997). Historically, western theatre dance has its roots in classical ballet, which having originated in the Italian Renaissance courts of the fifteenth century, became an increasingly popular art form in France and Russia (Anderson, 2018). Ballet became popular in America and Britain in the early part of the twentieth century with the birth of companies such as American Ballet

Theatre and The Royal Ballet (ibid). Ballet is a tightly coded vocabulary of movement that is based on the premise of transcending gravity while achieving effortless grace with the body (Warren, 1989). Although there may be slight differences between different schools across the globe[40], the fundamental movements and technical principles largely remain the same (ibid). Historically, classical choreographers have tended to draw upon the movements of the technical vocabulary to generate the choreography for ballet productions. Although individual choreographers may influence it with their own inflections, the aesthetic of the style remains consistent from one ballet to another. In this sense, ballet dancers are required to conform to the particular aesthetic of the codified technique, meaning that while individual interpretation of the technique is not impossible, there are limitations around how far this can actually go before it is no longer recognisable as ballet.

Although it is one of the oldest forms of theatrical dance, ballet continues to be widely taught in Britain with individuals usually beginning classes from a young age and studying a specific syllabus for which there are graded examinations[41]. Some student dancers study ballet alongside mainstream schooling, while others attend specialised ballet conservatoires from the age of eleven (Pickard, 2012). Classical ballet is known for its traditional, authoritarian teaching methods that reflect the hierarchical structures of ballet companies by positioning the teacher as the expert and the sole provider of knowledge. As such, ballet has been widely criticised for being resistant to 'pedagogic change' (Zeller, 2017: 99). As Zeller (ibid) explains:

> teaching practices that subordinate the student have long been considered not just inextricable from, but necessary for professional quality ballet training. Its authoritarian methods originate in the historical perspective that the teacher creates the dancer according to ballet's ideals.

Consequently, ballet training is often associated with creating competition between dancers resulting in individuals battling against each other to gain recognition and praise from the

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[40] For example, the Russian Vaganova method has subtle differences in the execution of specific movements to that of the Italian Ceccetti method.

[41] For example, the syllabus of The Royal Academy of Dance or The British Ballet Organisation.

teacher. Pickard (2013, 2015) has explored this idea in relation to Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'physical capital', suggesting that student ballet dancers compete for resources and power to achieve the highest levels of physical capital in the class (Pickard, 2013). The emphasis on hierarchy and competition has meant that unfortunately, ballet training has a long-standing association with creating unhealthy, sometimes abusive learning environments that subject students to mental and physical mistreatment from teachers, which in some cases can lead to student illness (Buckroyd, 2000). Countering the perspective that dance students are forced to submit to the teacher's authority, thus creating what Foucault (1977) would refer to as 'docile bodies' (Shapiro, 1998), Pickard (2012) draws on Bourdieu's work to explore the idea that to a certain extent, student ballet dancers are willing to accept such mental and physical suffering for the sake of the art form. Not only this, but mental and physical suffering is imperative to ensure the construction of their identities as ballet dancers, including the specific aesthetic of their ballet bodies (Pickard, 2012). This is a finding that aligns with Smith's (1998) research on professional western theatre dancers, which proposes that many dancers willingly participate in their own oppression by dance teachers, not only because it comes with the territory, but because it helps them to succeed in their ambition of becoming a professional dancer. In relation to this idea, Roche (2011: 107) proposes that 'the process of operating under a dance technique that maintains its position as an unachievable 'ideal'' such as ballet, can 'create feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth' (ibid) for dancers. Consequently, being governed by a technique in this way, as well as conforming to the normalised practices of the social field can have a significant impact on how able an individual feels to mobilise agency.

The research findings of Pickard (2012, 2013, 2015) Zeller (2017), Buckroyd (2000), Smith (1998) and Roche (2011) indicate that traditional authoritarian teaching approaches are a significant part of the discursive practices that constitute the social world of western ballet training. Thus, the dominant discourse of ballet training seems to be governed by practices that reinforce notions of hierarchy, competition, physical rigour and suffering. Since such practices are normalised within the social arena, ballet teachers and students participate in

them, sometimes unknowingly and therefore, are significantly shaped by them. In resistance to the traditions and structures created by classical ballet, western theatre dance has experienced significant transformations throughout the last two centuries, both from a choreographic and pedagogic perspective. However, it is necessary to explore to what extent the doxa that has been constructed by ballet has been perpetuated in other professional dance contexts and thus continues to prevail, despite the emergence of progressive choreographic and pedagogic movements that have attempted to disrupt it.

The discursive practices of American modern dance

Choreographic innovation of the early twentieth century saw new developments in western theatre dance with the emergence of American modern dance techniques developed by pioneers including Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. Both had attended the Denishawn School of Dancing and Related Arts, an institution that was formed by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn in California, 1915 and combined dance training in ballet technique with Asian dance styles from India, China and Japan as well as offering creative lessons exploring music and dance relationships (Banes, 1987). Denishawn productions were typically 'exotic and extravagant' (Banes, 1987: 3), an aesthetic that many graduates sought to reject, including Graham and Humphrey. In the early 1920s, both Graham and Humphrey began creating their own technical movement vocabularies and choreographies. In 1926, Graham formed her own centre for contemporary dance in New York (www.marthagraham.org) and Humphrey worked alongside a fellow dancer, Charles Weidman to develop her fall and recovery technique that she taught at the Humphrey-Weidman school, also in New York (Banes, 1987).

Other American modern dance pioneers include Erick Hawkins and Merce Cunningham[42]. Both had begun their careers as performers with Graham's company and in the 1950s,

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[42] Due to his non-hierarchical and chance-based choreographic approach, I acknowledge that Cunningham is often considered as sitting somewhere between modernism and postmodernism. However, his technique is a tightly codified system of movement that combines the legs of classical ballet and the torso of Graham technique and thus, it can be argued that the aesthetic of his technique aligns more closely with modernism.

started to create their own choreographic works and subsequently developing their own codified techniques that all company members would receive daily training in. Similarly, between 1946 and 1957, Mexican born choreographer José Limón, who had previously graduated from the Humphrey-Weidman school developed his distinctive dance technique that he taught to members of his newly formed company in New York. For these choreographers, training company members in their particular dance technique was not only viewed as a form of body conditioning but also as a way to create the kind of aesthetic required for their artistic vision (Foster, 1997). In this sense, much like classical ballet, modern dance techniques have historically been viewed as the material for choreography (Roche, 2011). For example, the contraction and release principle that forms the foundation of Graham's technique also provided the basis for many of her choreographies where contraction and release of the dancer's body was used to convey the psychological turmoil of pain and ecstasy (Banes, 1987).

As stated earlier, classical ballet is a codified system of movement that is universally recognised. Similarly, it could be said that over time, modern dance techniques have become increasingly formalised as they are passed on from one generation to the next. In this sense, much like ballet, modern dance techniques construct bodies that are reflective of the particular aesthetic style of the choreographer and, thus, impose their own value systems onto dancers that shape their bodies in a specific way, as explored by Foster (1997). Furthermore, the notion of the individual choreographer (Humphrey, Graham, Cunningham and so on) directing dancers in their own eponymous technique, an idiosyncratic aesthetic that usually originates from the body of the choreographer, seems to be a model that positions the choreographer in a position of power, devaluing the creative contribution of dancers. Not only this, but the very terms 'choreographer' and 'dancer' are quite specific to the culture of western theatre dance (Gardner, 2007) and could be said to establish a binary opposition that reinforces this hierarchy. It could be said that this sense of opposition between choreographer and dancer is then mirrored by the teacher-student relationship that is commonplace in many western dance technique classes. Given that the intention of modern dance was to reject the traditions of classical ballet, it seems ironic that the

choreographers and teachers of this period tended to maintain 'training systems within institutional structures that often are modelled on the ballet academy' (Roche, 2011: 107).

Not only did the choreographic practices of the American modern dance period contribute significantly towards the construction of the prevailing doxa of western theatre dance, but the pedagogical approaches that go hand in hand with them are also worthy of investigation. Lakes (2005) examines the well documented authoritarian, and in some cases, abusive teaching methods of many modern dance choreographers that have often sat in direct opposition to the progressive themes being explored in their choreographies. He states:

> One of the great puzzles within the Western concert dance world is why so many artists who create revolutionary works onstage conduct their classes and rehearsals as demagogues.

> (Lakes, 2005: 3)

He suggests that this heritage of western theatre dance has created a culture in which many dance teachers continue to adopt the same pedagogical approaches that they were subject to as students, thus, perpetuating and reinforcing the prevailing doxa of western theatre dance technique training. This is an idea that I became aware of as a result of my own action research, during which I realised that due to the dance education I had received, certain behaviours that I had adopted in my own teaching practice made me responsible for perpetuating this doxa, albeit unknowingly. According to Lakes (2005: 4), such behaviours, which can be communicated in both verbal and non-verbal forms may include:

> rote imitation and repetition over time with unchanging verbal prompts from the teacher. They can escalate to humiliation of students for making errors, screaming, sarcasm, mocking, belittlement, barbed humour, and bullying. Questions are dismissed or squelched and the questioners demeaned. Some teachers exhibit preoccupation with arbitrary behavioural control, engage in unfair or negative comparisons to other students, encourage rivalries, refer to adult students as "girls" and "boys", and use other forms of infantilization or patronization.

The list goes on to include other examples concerning body shaming, overtly emotional responses to situations to gain a reaction, physical and mental abuse. Lakes suggests that the overriding message of such behaviour is to ultimately 'render the student powerless' (ibid). While there are some extreme examples of authoritarian behaviour here, it could be said that there are some examples that would be perceived as practices that have become normalised in the dance technique classroom, some of which I witnessed during the observations of practice that I conducted as part of this study and others that I encountered as a dance student myself, not that long ago. For example, during my career as a dance student, both in a private dance school and university setting, I have been shouted at by teachers for apparently doing something wrong, singled out[43], prodded and poked at without my permission and forced to keep repeating something even though it might be causing pain. I have often encountered teachers that seemed aloof and unapproachable, behaving in ways that ensured they maintained a hierarchical gap between themselves and the students. One university lecturer subjected me to a form of psychological manipulation through their unpredictable and emotional behaviour that meant I continually questioned my own actions and felt unsure of myself. This forced me into a position whereby I felt I had to continually please this person in a choreographic setting, succumbing to requests that I did not necessarily feel comfortable about.

Aside from these examples from my own experience, with further reference to Lakes' (2005) study, rote imitation and repetition with unchanging verbal prompts from the teacher is not an uncommon teaching method in the dance technique classroom. Of course, the tone and content of the verbal prompts can drastically change the nature of the teaching method being employed. However, it could be said that the fundamental idea of the teacher demonstrating, the students imitating and the teacher surveying the room and giving verbal prompts is how most dance technique classes tend to operate (Foster, 1997; Green, 1999;

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[43] On one occasion at the private dance school I attended, a teacher deliberately humiliated me in front of my classmates by sending me out of the studio and telling me that I did not know the dance well enough to perform it in the annual show. The reason I did not know one particular section of the choreography is because I had been performing in a national theatre production that meant I had to miss some of my regular dance classes, something that this teacher gave me no support or credit for.

Stinson, 2015). Furthermore, the idea of a silent technique class where talking is limited is also not uncommon (Stinson, 2015) and is something that I have frequently observed both in colleagues' technique classes and again during my observations of practice. When viewed with a critical eye, these are discursive practices that over time have become normalised; from a Bourdieuian perspective, they go without saying because they come without saying, yet they could in fact be viewed as oppressive. Yet regardless of this, these are the social and cultural practices that dance students and teachers have come to expect within the dance technique class and hence, continue to dominate. In fact, when I was a student at university, it would not be unfair to say that my classmates and I generally responded more positively to the teachers who were 'harder' on us in a technique context, as it played into the narrative that we were creating for ourselves as dance students.

The discursive practices of postmodern dance and somatic practices
Following the trend of rejecting what had come before, the early 1960s saw the emergence of postmodern dance, which in America was pioneered both by the work of Cunningham and a collective of artists known as the Judson Dance Theater (Banes, 1987). Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Cunningham's work had become progressively experimental, largely due to his longstanding collaboration with composer John Cage. His distinctive 'chance' approach to making dance destabilised the traditional hierarchy of western theatre dance by challenging conventional notions of space and time (ibid). Cunningham continued to choreograph until his death in 2009, remaining a highly influential figure in western theatre dance.

In 1962, The Judson Dance Theater emerged in New York and involved artists including Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, David Gordon, Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer. Having attended a choreography workshop with Robert Dunn at Cunningham's studio in 1960, Forti and Rainer became influenced by the radical approaches to creating performance. As such, the work of the Judson Theater became concerned with exploring democratic approaches to creating dance (ibid). Both the work of Cunningham and the Judson Theater spurred the

postmodern dance movement in America, which dance drew heavily upon the philosophical ideas of the time. Postmodern dance set out to question the value system of modern dance by rejecting codified movement vocabularies, hierarchies and linear narratives in favour of conceptually driven performances that deliberately diverted away from privileging one particular aspect of the performance. This attitude is evident in Rainer's famous 'No Manifesto' that stipulated:

> No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make believe no to glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.

> (Rainer, 1965 cited in Roy, 2010: online)

Contrasting with Cunningham's classically orientated aesthetic, a new movement aesthetic grew out of the Judson era that was grounded in experimenting with releasing the weight of the body to gravity and interacting with the external environment, including specific sites and other dancers. As such, performances tended to take on an improvised, task-based approach with dancers completing specific assignments, through which movement would organically emerge; this approach is particularly evident in the early work of Trisha Brown (Banes, 1987). Dance technique took on a different meaning as codified systems of movement were replaced with open-ended activities that allowed dancers to develop their improvisation skills, sensing the natural flow of movement, often through physical interaction with other dancers or their surroundings. This approach is particularly evident in the technique of Contact Improvisation, which was developed in the 1970s by Steve Paxton and colleagues and cultivates a 'weighted and momentous' (Foster, 1997: 250) body that does not conform to a set vocabulary of movements but rather trains the body to 'be sensitive to its weight and inclinations and to allow new possibilities of movement to unfold' (ibid). It is because of this that postmodern dance techniques are often described as being

'released-based' in nature and according to Bales (2008: 157), the two terms are often viewed as being 'interrelated'.

There has been much discussion around what 'release-based' dance techniques actually are with some choreographers and educators claiming that it is an overused and vague term, and others claiming its importance in conveying a very specific physical quality that does not rely on using the muscular system to force the body into a particular shape or form (Bales, 2008). For example, Trisha Brown's work has often been categorised as being release-based due to its watery, sequential quality that makes the body appear as though it is a subject of the relationship between gravity, weight and momentum. However, Brown always maintained that she did not understand what a release technique was and that she simply allowed her body to move in the way that it wanted to (ibid). In contrast, choreographer and dancer Daniel Lepkoff[44] (1999) proposes that release technique is something quite specific that relates to the notion of releasing habitual movements through exploring one's relationship with gravity and utilising movement imagery to repattern the muscular and nervous systems. Thus, it would seem that one's perception of 'releasing' depends on the bodily experiences that have occurred before one arrives at the point of releasing, and in what way these experiences have shaped the individual habitus. For example, a gymnast will have a very different perception of what it means to 'release' compared to someone who has a history of practicing Tai Chi; this is because the individual embodies particular habits and patterns that are inherent within the values of the given movement system, thus, resulting in the development of specific bodily practices and behaviours.

Despite these differing perspectives, dance techniques that are considered to be release-based generally have synergies with the underlying principles of most somatic practices wherein:

> the body's relationship with gravity is examined on and off the vertical axis, through exercises or experiences that require lying, sitting or getting up and down from the

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[44] Who incidentally happens to be a former dancer with Brown's company.

> floor. Alignment is not about standing straight but rather about the changing relationships within the body, sensing balance, and avoiding unnecessary muscular holding so the body is open to possibility.

(Bales, 2008: 157 – 158)

Thus, the general premise of release-based dance techniques seems to be concerned with facilitating a 'more "natural" use of the body' (ibid) that advocates the falling, catching and rebound of the body's weight, as opposed to the forced relationship with gravity that is often associated with classical ballet and some modern dance techniques; these are key ideas that are of particular relevance to the analysis of action research cycle two that is conducted in Chapter Six, later on in this thesis.

In Britain, the timeline from modernism to postmodernism was slightly different than in America. Robin Howard, the founder of the London Contemporary Dance School had previously seen Martha Graham's company perform in America in 1954. Identifying this approach to dance as something that was missing from the classically influenced British dance scene, in 1963, he brought Graham's company to perform at the Edinburgh Festival (www.theplace.org.uk). This spurred the beginning of a new movement in British dance that was heavily influenced by the American modern dance aesthetic. For example, in 1975, choreographer Richard Alston spent time in New York studying at the Merce Cunningham Dance Studio (Mackrell, 1992). Although Alston has not typically adopted the radical 'chance' element of Cunningham's choreography and performances, the influence of Cunningham's dance technique is evident in Alston's work, which is often described as sharing a similar physical aesthetic through its experimentation with classically orientated legs and a Graham inspired torso (ibid).

In 1976, British dance saw further developments through the emergence of the X6 collective, a group of dancers 'who wanted to work independently of any established company or organisation' (www.chisenhaledancespace.co.uk). Based at the Chisenhale Dance Space in London, much like the Judson Dance Theater, the X6 collective were partly

responsible for pioneering the 'new dance' movement of the late 1970s and early 80s, an era that had many synergies with American postmodern dance. For example, artists involved with X6 were known for creating work that rebelled against the ideologies and stereotypes that were dominating British theatre dance at the time, particularly those associated with ballet (Jordan, 1992). Other artists associated with the 'new dance' movement began to emerge including people such as Emilyn Claid (a founding member of X6), Rosemary Butcher and Lea Anderson, individuals that continued to challenge the conventions of western dance through choreographic experimentation. What is interesting is that despite these radical developments in British dance, the training systems of British conservatoires, and to a certain extent, universities have generally adopted traditional pedagogical models that conform to the ideologies of the dominant discourse, that being ballet and modern dance. Although dance students in higher education might be encouraged to explore experimental approaches to making performance, this idea exists in tension with the underlying doxa that is at play, which favours a conformist attitude as opposed to a rebellious one.

The 1970s also saw the emergence of the somatic practices movement, which simultaneously unfolded alongside the development of postmodern dance in the west (Batson, 2009; Eddy, 2009) and has since been enthusiastically embraced by western contemporary dance (ibid). The term 'somatic' was originally coined by Hanna in 1970 and refers to the experiential, felt sense of the body (Hanna, 2004). By acknowledging the body and mind as an integrated whole and rejecting the dualistic stance that 'following Descartes, sees the body as separate from mind' (Clarke, Cramer and Muller, 2011: 206), somatic thinking transpires from the seminal work of key philosophers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century such as Dewey, Merleau-Ponty and Whitehead (Batson, 2009). Such philosophers contributed towards the emergence of existential phenomenology as a framework for understanding and analysing the body's involvement in human perception and experience. Furthermore, this shift in thinking concerning the relationship between mind and body was also being reflected in education with the emergence of the 'experiential learning' movement, as discussed in Chapter One.

Occurring alongside this philosophical shift was the development of formalised somatic practices, such as The Alexander Technique and The Feldenkrais Method, which were both developed in the early part of the twentieth century. Both practices were designed to enable individuals to develop increased awareness of specific bodily behaviours (Batson, 2009). Many other somatic practices have since been developed, all of which differ slightly in their approaches but the common feature that most somatic practices share is based on the notion of questioning habitual behaviours that have occurred as a result of simply living in the world and instead, 'trusting the intrinsic intelligence of the body' (Olsen, 2014: XV) as a way of acquiring new movement habits and pathways that are, in some cases, perceived to be healthier.

The increased focus on becoming more attuned to the internal sensations of the body is an integral aspect of developing a greater understanding of oneself and the agency to make different choices (Johnson, 1992). However, it also raises questions concerning to what extent it is possible for an individual to become detached from the influence of the external environment so that it no longer governs one's actions, particularly when viewing the body from a Bourdieuian perspective. Thus, it seems that one's internal discourse exists in tension with the forces of the external discourse and this poses a dilemma for somatic thinking. For example, there has been much discussion around the notion of 'somatic authority' in dance education (Green, 1998; 1999; 2001; 2002) and the idea of somatic-based pedagogies being utilised as a way of cultivating bodily autonomy in the dance technique class[45]. Yet, these methods are generally employed in learning environments where a teacher is present and facilitating, or in some cases, directing the actions of the students. Therefore, it is unclear exactly how influential somatic-based approaches can be in relation to nurturing a sense of agency, when the learning is located within a context where different power relationships are at play.

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[45] Please refer to Chapter Three for a detailed examination of the discourse around somatic-based pedagogies and bodily autonomy.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

Along with ballet and modern dance, postmodern, somatic-based approaches form a substantial part of the higher education dance technique curriculum in Britain and, thus, their practices make a significant contribution towards the construction of the doxa. Due to the emphasis on departing from traditional codified techniques, they are often viewed as being freeing, imperative for cultivating agency within undergraduate dance students and, thus, as the most counter cultural approach within western dance education. My study examines to what extent this assumption is accurate, investigating the idea that while teachers may regard somatic-based approaches as useful methods to employ within the dance technique class, they also present several challenges, especially if dance students do not understand why they are being asked to engage with them. In this sense, without integrating reflection alongside such approaches, it could be said that the postmodern, somatic discourse becomes, what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as the authoritative discourse. Not only this, but as I have proposed earlier in this thesis, dance teacher and students are the subjects of the environment within which they participate. Much like the ballet class, the postmodern, somatic-based dance technique class constructs bodies in a particular way, albeit in a different way to that of the ballet class. Thus, unless students are provided with the opportunity to reflect on the values of the discourse and to choose whether it will form part of their own internal discourse (Bakhtin, 1981), the capacity for these approaches to enable agency is debateable.

The discursive practices of conservatoire and university dance trainings
From the lineage of western theatre dance, two conservatoire training environments emerged in Britain providing practical, vocational tuition in dance for students aged eighteen plus, and in some cases, aged sixteen plus (Smith-Autard, 2002). The first was the traditional ballet academy such as The Royal Ballet School, which was founded in 1926 and the second was the contemporary dance conservatoire such as The London Contemporary Dance School, which was founded in 1966. Although the ballet and the contemporary dance conservatoires have traditionally offered different provision, due to choreographic experimentation in the west and the changing landscape of the British dance profession, it

could be argued that there is now more slippage then ever between the ballet and contemporary dance worlds as both dancers and choreographers find ways of surviving the profession. This means that the training one receives does not necessarily mean she will pursue a career as a specific 'type' of dancer. These ideas tie into the notion of the 'independent' contemporary dancer, a concept that is explored in more detail later in this chapter. According to Conservatoires UK, which is the representing body for conservatoire education in the UK, the purpose of a conservatoire education is to offer:

> talented, ambitious young musicians, actors, dancers and arts practitioners the training, freedom and encouragement to fulfil their creative and professional aspirations in successful careers. Creativity lies at the heart of the conservatoire experience in the UK. Performance – in all of its innovative manifestations – is studied rigorously alongside vocational skills in the context of a broad cultural experience. This is designed to equip artists with the means to develop a distinctive profile that will give them a competitive edge in the fast-evolving creative industries.

(www.conservatoiresuk.ac.uk, 2019)

While it is evident that conservatoire education aims to equip students with a range of skills necessary for a career in the performing arts, it appears that performance is significantly foregrounded as a key aspect of the education provided; certainly, this has been the traditional function of a conservatoire dance training (Smith-Autard, 2002). As such, students will receive intensive daily training in dance that engages them in a full timetable of classes and rehearsals throughout the week (www.lcds.ac.uk) as well as having time to work independently on their own projects. In the above statement from Conservatoires UK, notions of rigour, competition and ambition seem to prevail, bearing striking resemblance to the discourses of classical ballet and modern dance, as explored earlier. Within the contemporary dance conservatoires of Britain, the techniques of classical ballet and American modern dance have tended to dominate the curriculum (Foster, 1997; Roche, 2011). This means that despite the emergence of postmodern dance forms and somatic practices, technique classes in the traditional styles of ballet, Cunningham and Graham are

still perceived as an important part of the curriculum[46]. This provision tends to exist alongside technique classes in other western theatre dance forms such as jazz, street dance or tap, postmodern dance techniques such as different forms of improvisation, as well as choreography, theoretical studies and in some cases provision in other cultural forms of dance, for example Indian classical dance.

Traditionally perceived as offering an alternative to conservatoire dance education is university dance education, in which dance has tended to be studied as a single subject or combined with another subject[47]. Dance has been studied in British universities since 1975 (Bannon, 2010) with earlier courses aligning more closely with the academic study of dance (Smith-Autard, 2002). However, more recently, some British university dance programmes, including the BA Hons degree that I taught on at Manchester Metropolitan University between 2008 and 2019, have based the design of their courses on the artistic practice-as-research methodology. This model adopts a 'praxis' (Nelson, 2013) stance in relation to the integration of theory and practice, placing equal emphasis on the theoretical and practical components of dance. In this sense, theory and practice are no longer perceived as separate learning domains, but as being inextricably connected with one informing the other. Aligning with this perspective, Smith-Autard (2002: 27) proposes what she refers to as 'a midway model' arguing that contrary to a purely physical training, a balanced coming together of theoretical and practical elements is required to respond to the 'perceived need [for dance] to be more accountable and credible in an academic environment' (ibid). Consequently, students studying dance at university are likely to spend some time participating in classes and lectures, but equal time will be spent engaging in independent study to develop their own research projects.

Both Smith-Autard (2002) and Bannon (2010) have discussed dance's long battle with proving itself worthy as an area of study in the academy and as 'a way of knowing and a

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[46] This was evident from the observations of practice that I conducted in several UK conservatoire and university settings between 2014 and 2015.

[47] This does not have to be an arts subject – for example, combinations of dance with sport, social sciences and education were popular routes at MMU.

body of knowledge' (Bannon, 2010: 49). Thus, it seems that a praxical approach to dance research has come to be perceived as a way of enabling scholars to effectively articulate and evidence research enquiries that may take a practical form (Nelson, 2013). Not only this, but a holistic dance education that integrates 'our physical, intellectual and emotional selves' (Bannon, 2010: 50) has, in some areas of the dance education community, been perceived as a more effective route for preparing graduates for careers both within dance and related fields than that of a vocational training. However, despite this, several scholars have examined the challenges that dance faces within the British university system (Bannerman, 2009; Bannon, 2010; Rafferty and Stanton, 2017). In fact, its sustainability as a subject of study was debated at the 2016 Dance HE Conference at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance as well as during 'The Future of Dance in HE', an event hosted in January 2020 by Dance HE, Independent Dance and The Centre for Performance Philosophy. During this discussion, attendees were invited to consider how dance provision in HE might be reimagined, an interesting idea to contemplate in relation to the gradual decolonisation of the performing arts curriculum in British HE. The recent closure of several university dance programmes in the United Kingdom including Ulster University (2017), Manchester Metropolitan University (2019), Coventry University (2019), The University of South Wales (2019) and the University of Plymouth (forthcoming) amongst others has raised questions about the success of the university model due to the challenges that many programmes have faced with recruiting students, especially due to the increase in tuition fees in 2012.

While universities and conservatoires could be said to offer different educational experiences, these changes in the ecology of British higher dance education put pressure on universities to compete with each other, and with conservatoires, for students. Although university dance education has tended to place less emphasis on vocational training and more emphasis on critical engagement with dance, it could be said that given the pressure to recruit, many students now arrive to university expecting a similar experience to that of a conservatoire, or at least to what they have experienced prior to university. However, it is difficult for universities to provide this kind of provision since the number of contact hours between staff and students is often much less than that of a conservatoire; adding further

complexity is the fact that university tuition fees are now the same, or thereabouts, to that of a conservatoire. Therefore, university dance programmes must find other ways to essentially 'sell' their provision and this is the ongoing struggle that many programmes face.

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to speculate on the direction that Dance in British HE might take, there seems to be no doubt that the design of undergraduate programmes will require significant changes in order to respond to the current requirements of the student market, and indeed the dance profession. Furthermore, these changes will also have to respond to the challenges presented by the Covid-19 Pandemic, concerning greater use of blended and distance learning models. These are interesting ideas to consider in relation to the focus of this PhD thesis, which examines the use of cognitive reflection in the dance technique class and questions the notion of whether this constitutes a 'good' student experience. One has to wonder whether due to the increasing pressures and demands that come from external forces, the reflective discourse will become further marginalised in an attempt to essentially give students what they want, or at least, what they think they want.

The discursive practices of pre-university education

Before dance students embark on a career at higher education level, many will have studied dance in another educational setting such as a private dance school, youth group, sixth form or college. One Dance UK (2017: 2) provide guidance on the various pathways that are available to individuals wanting to pursue a career in teaching dance and the qualifications required to work in each setting. These are as follows:

- Higher Education.
- Further Education.
- Secondary School/Sixth Form (KS3 – KS5/S1 – S6).
- Primary School (EYFS – KS2/Primary 1-7).
- Syllabus Teaching/Private Dance.

- Community Setting.
- Teaching disabled young people.
- Sport and Fitness Initiatives.

With the exception of the first bullet point, these pathways provide a useful indication of the various routes that students may take towards studying dance in a university and the qualifications that they are likely to attain in each setting. In this section, I will predominantly focus on exploring the role that the further education (colleges and sixth forms) and private dance school settings play in constructing the dominant pedagogical discourse for dance education, as they are the routes that from my experience, tend to be the most common trajectories that most students follow before studying dance at university level. As such, students tend to apply to university having either attained or while working towards one or more of the following level 3 qualifications: AS or A Level Dance, BTEC Level 3 National Extended Certificate in Performing Arts (Dance), as well as graded exam qualifications awarded by national organisations that in some cases can be converted into UCAS points[48].

- *BTEC, AS and A Level Dance*

The AS, A Level and BTEC Extended Certificate in Performing Arts (Dance) qualifications that are currently studied in further education follow a specification of assessments that is recognised on a national level (www.aqa.org.uk/dance, https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/btec-nationals/performing-arts-2016.html, www.onedanceuk.org). In this sense, regardless of where they are situated in the UK, AS, A Level and BTEC Dance students follow the same syllabus and complete the same assessments. This differs to the curriculum of a university dance programme that is bespoke to a particular institution, the content of which has traditionally reflected the research specialisms of the academics teaching on the course. Furthermore, many

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[48] For example, higher level qualifications such as those awarded by The Royal Academy of Dance, International Dance Teachers' Association or the British Ballet Organisation.

university dance programmes, such as that of MMU, assess students through coursework and continuous assessment (particularly where practice is concerned), placing equal emphasis on the process of the learning journey as opposed to only privileging product-orientated learning that takes the form of an examination[49]. Resonating with the ideas explored in Chapter One concerning embodied knowing[50], at MMU, the reason for designing the programme in this way was to emphasise the idea that knowledge in dance is acquired over time and there is in fact no conclusive 'end point' to the learning; this idea is particularly relevant to the area of dance technique as it requires regular daily or weekly practice to enable the embodiment of specific movement skills and the refinement of these skills over time.

The BTEC Extended Certificate foregrounds the practical aspects of learning dance with a view to preparing learners for direct progression into the workplace or 'via study at a higher level' (Pearson BTEC 2016 Performing Arts Specification, online: 5). In this sense, BTECs have been traditionally viewed as a vocationally-orientated qualification and this is reflected in the nature of the assessments, which are both internally and externally assessed (depending on the unit being studied) and must evidence knowledge through the 'practical demonstration of skills' (Pearson BTEC 2016 Performing Arts Specification, online: 45). Forms of evidence can include projects, recordings of performances, oral or written presentations, logbooks and reflective journals (ibid), assessment methods that appear to place less emphasis on traditional examinations and more emphasis on process-based, practical forms of assessment. However, the degree to which FE students will be prepared for keeping reflective logs and journals is not easily determinable in the specification itself meaning that the quality of such reflection is difficult to ascertain. Essay writing is not foregrounded within the specification as a suggested form of evidence, which is interesting since the ability to write an essay is generally regarded as a key academic skill within most university dance degree programmes.

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[49] This approach to assessment is also evident on the dance programmes at Leeds Beckett University, for which I acted as the External Subject Specialist for the 2015 periodic review, and The University of Wolverhampton, for which I am the External Examiner.

[50] As opposed to embodied knowledge, which pertains to something more complete and finite.

The 2021 version of the AQA specification for AS and A Level Dance proposes that it gives students the 'the skills and experience to better prepare them for the demands of higher education or the workplace' (2019: 5) by placing equal emphasis on the practical and theoretical aspects of dance. Yet, in contrast to the BTEC specification, both the assessments for the practical performance and choreography areas, and the written critical engagement area take the form of examinations, with no coursework element built into the assessment framework. This seems to directly contradict the notion of preparing students for the assessment methods of higher education. In fact, the AQA specification even describes the qualification as being 'linear' in nature, meaning that 'students will sit all their exams and submit all their non-exam assessment at the end of the course' (AQA AS and A Level Dance Specification, online: 9). This approach to assessing students appears to view the learning of dance as a chronological process, with the examination marking the end of that process. While dance is a skill that is acquired over time, the process of creating a choreography or embodying a physical technique is rarely linear, especially if the learning involves a reflective dimension that causes the learner to keep questioning their embodiment of the movement and testing different approaches. This idea returns to the notion of psychophysical practices, which Turner and Campbell (2021) propose as not necessarily being incorporated into the body in a sequential order, as discussed in Chapter One. Therefore, this raises questions regarding the extent to which learners undertaking an AS or A Level qualification are able to be inquisitive and reflective when given the design of the syllabus, or whether they are simply taught how to be skilled at learning and reiterating specific information for the purposes of an exam.

The BTEC and AS/A Level frameworks are clearly based on different approaches to learning and assessing the quality of one's learning. While the BTEC syllabus foregrounds a practical approach to learning dance, the AS/A Level syllabus appears to adopt a more traditionally 'academic' position through its emphasis on theory as well as practice and its use of examinations. In this way, practice and theory are perceived as being separate entities rather than interrelated and what is unclear is the extent to which both routes enable some

integration between the practical and theoretical aspects of dance. Given that the BTEC and AS/A Level are the two most dominant routes into higher education, perhaps this is one of the reasons why scholars in HE (Stevens, 2006) have questioned how well further education prepares students for studying dance at degree level since from my experience, it is often a shock to many Level Four students when they are asked to support their practical work with theoretical research, to explore theoretical ideas through practice or to reflect on their practice in the form of an essay or log[51].

- *The private dance school sector*

Within the private dance school sector, the focus is upon learning a syllabus of exercises and sequences of a perceived level[52] and style such as ballet, tap, jazz, modern and so on. Students are then assessed on their ability to embody the specific style being learned and practical examinations are the only method of assessment[53] (www.onedanceuk.org). Alongside exam preparation, students may also participate in an annual showcase hosted by the school in which they perform dances for the public or in some cases, national competitions in which they compete against other schools/groups from the UK. The lack of theoretical content in an education of this nature seems to position dance as a purely practical pursuit that constitutes a form of entertainment. Similar to the BTEC Level 3 qualification, a private dance school education seems to prepare students for a vocational career such as teaching dance in the private sector or performing in a commercial environment.

While this route is appropriate for individuals wishing to pursue this trajectory, the counter argument is that it offers a rather narrow experience of dance that is based on notions of entertainment and hierarchy. In contrast to the AS, A Level and BTEC routes, the total absence of a theoretical base can present significant challenges for individuals from the

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[51] As previously discussed, the ability to reflect on dance technique practice is something that Level Four students find particularly challenging, at least initially, as demonstrated by my study findings.
[52] For example, Grade One, Two and so on.
[53] This is the case until those individuals wishing to acquire teaching qualifications in the different styles complete the training for this, at which level, a theoretical element will form part of the learning.

private dance school setting who are wishing to embark on a university career studying dance. Unfortunately, these discursive practices construct a discourse that suggests these individuals are not capable of acquiring an undergraduate degree and from my experience, this often results in student retention issues at Level Four. The reality, however, is that the doxa of the private dance school setting retains rules of engagement that sit in direct opposition to those of the university setting and this results in a habitus and field clash that leads some individuals to feel as though they do not belong in the university environment. Therefore, the actual ability of the individual to acquire a degree has nothing to do with how competent she is, but is in fact influenced by external factors that constitute the habitus, such as background, age, class, ethnicity and so on. It is these factors that determine how able the individual is to move into a new field and become attuned to the rules of the game.

Furthermore, much like the discourse of classical ballet and modern dance, in the private dance school sector, the notion of conveying a series of pre-choreographed exercises to the learners that must be executed in a particular way positions the teacher as the expert. Thus, the dance teacher must perform the exercises accurately so that the learners can copy the movements and therefore, she is perceived as possessing all of the knowledge that learners require. It could be said that this immediately establishes a binary opposition between the teacher and the learners that locates the teacher as the most powerful individual in the room. Not only this, but there is a hierarchy that exists beyond the teacher, that of the broader organisation who devise the syllabus content and eventually examine the learners on their ability to perform the exercises and indeed, the teacher on her ability to teach them. Thus, the broader organisation in this case could be aligned with the ballet or modern dance choreographer who sits at the top of the hierarchy and controls the events around her. This hierarchy is reinforced by the idea of linear progression through consecutive examinations for which learners are awarded a specific grade[54] or in some cases, may even fail if the quality of the performance is deemed unsatisfactory.

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[54] For example – pass, pass plus, commended, highly commended, honours.

- *Community dance settings*

There are, of course, some exceptions to the rule and other students will follow a different trajectory before embarking on a university dance education; this depends on the age of certain individuals and whether dance was available to study as a subject at the time they attained their Level Three qualifications, whether they are from the UK or overseas and what dance provision is available in their area. For example, some individuals may have learned to dance in a youth dance group that was available to them through their school, or by participating in community dance classes of another form. Community dance settings generally adopt a different learning model that is based on alternative values to that of a formal dance education (Amans, 2017). In the UK, community dance gained popularity in the 1980s and has maintained consistent support through the work of key organisations such as People Dancing[55].

According to Rubidge (1984), community dance focuses on providing opportunities for individuals to participate in enriching dance activities regardless of age, class or cultural background. Providing opportunities for individuals with particular mental and/or physical needs is also a key objective for community dance meaning that although it is not a form of dance therapy, it often penetrates wellbeing settings. Projects are usually publicly funded and therefore promote inclusivity since there is either a reduced payment or no payment associated with the learning. Participants do not generally complete assessments or examinations as part of their learning, but might work towards performing in showcases or festivals. Community dance is also viewed as being concerned with breaking stereotypes, not conforming to the hierarchies of traditional dance classes and enabling performances to happen in non-traditional spaces (Amans, 2017). In the midlands and north west regions of the UK, key organisations offering provision of this kind include Dance Xchange, Restoke, Frontline Dance and Cheshire Dance. Given the underpinning objectives and values, it could be said that a community dance education is the most counter-cultural offering for young people in Britain who are wishing to pursue undergraduate study.

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[55] Originally known as The National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs and then later as The Foundation for Community Dance (www.communitydance.org.uk).

An example of a community dance project that challenged the dominant discourse surrounding dance education for boys can be seen in one of my previous projects, titled *Boys Dance Lab* (2008 – 2009). In my former role as Dance Artist in Residence[56] for Stoke-on-Trent Theatres, I worked for the Creative Learning Department of a commercial theatre venue that funded educational projects. One of these projects was *Boys Dance Lab,* which was a response to my observation that most mainstream education or community-based dance provision for boys and young men in the midlands region of the UK was subconsciously governed by a dominant strategy of engagement. This strategy seemed to rely on aligning dance with physical education, break or street dance[57] culture, both of which seemed to present it as a highly physical, competitive activity that foregrounded a stereotypical idea of masculinity in order to make dance a more socially acceptable pursuit for boys.

To me, this strategy of engagement seemed to be disadvantaging boys and young men by presenting a very narrow version of dance that was not truly representative of everything it had to offer. Not only this, but presenting dance as an overtly masculine activity seemed contradictory to me; in a world where boys are afraid to dance in fear of having their masculinity questioned, what kind of message did it send if dance suddenly became acceptable as long as it maintained stereotypical 'masculine' qualities? Although I understood that the overriding aim was to engage more boys in dance, I wondered whether it was inadvertently oppressing boys by sending the message that dance was acceptable as long as they conformed to the underlying 'boy code' (Risner, 2007). My view was, and still is that dance educators should be encouraging young people to depart from these narrow stereotypes by enabling them to question and challenge such ideas both within their dancing and through reflection. To question the dominant discourse surrounding boys dance, over a four-month duration, *Boys Dance Lab* focused on providing boys and young men with an alternative dance experience, one that did not rely on using methods of

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[56] Also known as DAiR.

[57] I reached this conclusion based on my experiences as a community dance practitioner in the area of Stoke-on-Trent, where I seemed to continually encounter this trend where male dance was concerned.

engagement that reinforced problematic gender stereotypes. The aim was to provide a learning space for dance where boys could not only develop their physical skills and technical proficiency, but to enrich this learning through engagement with creative tasks and reflection. Since this dance provision did not have to conform to any external standards or structures, as a dance artist I had the scope the explore these ideas freely. The only factor that determined the success of the project from an external perspective was whether the participants continued attending, which all apart from one did.

One Dance UK is the supporting organisation for the development of the different dance sectors in the UK. By continuing the work of Youth Dance England and The Foundation for Community Dance, One Dance UK oversee the area of youth dance by facilitating opportunities for young people to engage in high quality enriching and inclusive dance experiences. In my role as DAiR, I facilitated several youth dance projects that gained support from Youth Dance England through their 'U.Dance' initiative, 'a national programme which seeks to increase the number of performances involving young people and support those who organise them' (www.onedanceuk.org). Many of the young people who participated in these projects were encountering dance for the first time, although some participants were also attending other extra-curricular dance classes of some form, such as at a private dance school or in an after-school club setting. In retrospect, the students who were participating in a range of dance education settings must have been required to conform to several different doxas, each operating with their own rules of engagement. I do remember some occasions when the more experienced young people lost interest with the youth dance classes I was facilitating and chose not to continue attending. While my classes tried to cultivate a different skillset to that of a private dance school, I have often wondered whether some individuals did not perceive them as challenging enough in a technical sense and, thus, became disengaged.

Students who pursue a community dance education prior to studying on a dance degree programme will inevitably arrive to university with a different set of values and expectations to those who have not. Participation in a community dance setting will result in the

construction of a different habitus that is comprised of alternative bodily behaviours to that of a student who has received a dance training comprising of formal examinations. Furthermore, some students apply to study dance in a university having received no formal dance training at all. Thus, these individuals will have a completely different set of expectations again and an entirely different sense of their bodies. In view of the many discursive practices that Level Four dance students will have encountered prior to university, dance lecturers in HE must negotiate a complex web of ideas and expectations concerning what it means to be a learner of dance. Therefore, it is necessary to explore how such discursive practices impact upon young people's perceptions of dance and the consequences of this in relation to agency.

The implications of the discursive practices in relation to individual agency and the doxa as it currently exists

Syllabus learning in the private dance school sector and to an extent, in the AS and A Level Dance syllabus could be perceived as what dance scholar Hanstein (1990) refers to as a closed system of learning. In 1990, Hanstein shared a vision of dance education as an open system of learning that foregrounds discovery and change. She argued that when dance is 'taught only as the replication of steps, as a closed system in which the ends are preset and the outcomes tightly controlled' (1990: 56) educators do not 'promote the kind of inquiry, imaginative thinking, and discovery necessary for ordering our experience and making sense out of our lived world' (ibid). The organisation of dance into styles and syllabuses and the focus on linear, exam-orientated learning both present challenges in relation to the notion of open systems of learning.

Firstly, when dance is reduced to being only concerned with replicating steps, it reinforces the notion of right and wrong and does not encourage learners to explore other possibilities, to be critical or reflective. Dance becomes merely a form of entertainment that adheres to specific codes and aesthetic categories. Furthermore, when taught as a chronological process with prescribed outcomes, it leaves little room for this process to be disrupted by scepticism and curiosity, acts that align with the inquiry, imaginative thinking and discovery

that Hanstein (1990) speaks of and can also lead towards the mobilisation of agency (Noland, 2009). These ideas resonate with both Freire's (1972) concept of 'Critical Pedagogy' and Althusser's (1984) concept of 'Ideological State Apparatus' and the notion of education operating as a form of control, as opposed to something that can enlighten. Furthermore, it could be argued that by standardising dance within an educational context, it creates a version of the art form that can only operate within the confines of the curriculum and, thus, limits its creative potential.

Although these ideas are being discussed in relation to Level Three dance education and private dance school education, the same could be said for university dance education. There is a dominant perception that there is more flexibility within university education to go against formality and create innovative learning frameworks that differ to that of schools and colleges. However, the increased demands on universities regarding recruitment, tuition fees, academic performance and research funding means that in some cases, universities are having to provide a more 'customer' orientated learning experience that conforms to the expectations of the students being recruited; these expectations are established by the discourses through which Level Three students are shaped. For example, in a culture of instant gratification provided by the internet, globalisation and value for money, universities are under pressure to offer added value beyond core programmes, as well as the assurance of a qualification at the end of one's studies. This discourse significantly reinforces the dominant doxa, which does not encourage a culture of independent thinking and agency, but rather places students in a position of power and privilege by virtue of the fact that universities are under such pressure to recruit. As such, university dance programmes are being forced to meet the demands and expectations of those they aspire to recruit, which in most cases refers to young people of around 18 years of age.

The doxa of dance education is further reinforced by trends in popular culture such as the rise of television shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance, The Greatest Dancer* and *Strictly Come Dancing* that promote the idea of dance as a form of entertainment or

competition. Shows of this nature see individuals, who are in some cases celebrities, competing against each other to perform the dance with the greatest level of spectacle and technical virtuosity to ensure they are not eliminated from the process by public vote. Contestants' bodies are externally objectified by a celebrity judging panel who are perceived to be experts in the field and score each individual's performance; creating a binary relationship that echoes that of the teacher and student, in this context, contestants seem to be at the mercy of the judges and any sense of individual agency is bypassed in favour of doing anything to please them[58]. Such shows tend to emphasise the physical rigour of learning to dance or developing one's pre-existing dance skills, but rarely foreground contestants' reflections on the process of doing so. As such, dance is yet again reduced to a commercial entity that only serves the purpose of entertainment. *Strictly Come Dancing* could be said to be the most active in terms of interviewing contestants about their experiences, but even then, it is unclear how genuine these reflections are and as Carter (2007: 124) suggests, 'the actual dance element of this type of programme [*Strictly Come Dancing*] recedes in favour of a focus on the celebrities'.

As well as on popular television shows, physical rigour and virtuosity is also foregrounded as an essential component of dance training in other contexts. For example, the physical theatre company Frantic Assembly, who also feature on the OCR AS and A Level Drama and Theatre syllabus launched the *Ignition* project in 2008, which is a participatory programme for young people aged 16 – 24. Originally aimed to engage working class young men in dance (Evans 2021), in 2019, the project expanded to include a parallel programme for women, titled *Ignition for Women.* The description for the *Ignition* project on the company's website states that they are seeking individuals who are risk-taking, determined, energetic and strong, to work with them on creating a piece of 'high energy' theatre (www.franticassembly.co.uk); these are physical and mental traits that, much like ballet and modern dance, emphasise notions of physical exertion, discipline and hardship. Corroborating with this, in a recent critical text by Evans and Smith (2021), which explores

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[58] This idea is particularly evident on other talent shows such as *The X Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent,* where it could be argued that the celebrity judging panel are of more prominence than the contestants themselves.

the working processes of Frantic Assembly, there appears to be an overriding emphasis placed upon the notion of an energetic body that is consistently on the edge of physical exertion; this includes the *Ignition* project. In an interview with a male *Ignition* participant who is cited in Evans and Smith's book (2021: 60) the participant states, 'I don't ever remember sitting down. I genuinely never remember sitting down.' This suggests that calmer opportunities for reflective conversations were largely absent from the creative process, and if they did occur, they happened standing up so that the general flow of the dancing/moving was not disrupted too much. Furthermore, in summarising the general aesthetic of the company's work, the authors state that:

> The body announces its presence in Frantic's work – it is not recessive, quiet, docile, an instrument of the mind or a support for the voice.

(Evans and Smith, 2021: 80)

This particular statement seems to pose further separation between the body and the mind; not only is the body clearly foregrounded in the work of Frantic Assembly, but it appears to act independently of the mind and quieter practices such as reflection are not generally viewed as informing the body's involvement in the creative process, or the embodiment of the movements being learned.

Furthermore, the company's decision to offer the parallel *Ignition* programmes for men and women creates yet another problem by positioning the sexes in opposition to each other, yet Evans and Smith (2021) do not appear to recognise this as an issue. In a profession that is already riddled with binary relationships[59], the decision to position men and women in opposition to each other is not inclusive of those individuals who neither identify as male or female. Due to the place of Frantic Assembly's work on the AS and A Level syllabus, these are the discourses that young people all over Britain are being shaped by before they arrive to university and, thus, contribute towards the construction of the doxa. Consequently,

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[59] For example, choreographer-dancer, teacher-student, judge-contestant and so on.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

within the context of the higher education dance technique class, for many students the notion of reflecting on their dance practice seems alien and, in some cases, frustrating as it detracts from the physical training. This is something that was revealed in the focus group interview during the second cycle of action research. When asked about the idea of engaging in reflective discussions about their dance technique practice during class time, a participant called Tamara* replied:

> I think people – different people can explore the question in different ways, rather than talking – because we're all like – we're movers – I think the best way to do it is through movement. I think if we sat down and talked continually, it stops the flow – of being creative. Sometimes when we keep stopping – I'm like, I just need to do it, for me, as a dancer, I need to keep doing it and keep doing it rather than, oh let's talk about, because I don't want to talk, I just want to dance. But I understand the importance of talking about it because it makes you more thorough, it makes you more – understanding what you're doing, but sometimes I need to just do it and get it – if that makes sense.

> (Comment from focus group on 9.3.2016)

This comment highlights a complex tension between the notions of physical rigour and repetition, which are generally perceived as the main function of the technique class, and cognitive reflection. Although Tamara is able to recognise that talking about her practice can develop her understanding of it, reflection (through talking) does not appear to be perceived as being of equal importance to dancing. For Tamara, dancing should function as the key medium for making sense of ideas, whereas cognitive reflection plays a subsidiary role. At the time of this focus group, I can remember feeling anxious about the experience I was providing for these students and being worried that my classes were too 'talk heavy'. However, on reflection, I now see that this comment illustrates the power of the doxa in the sense that the body is privileged as the most important instrument and the mind is marginalised. Consequently, this is the narrative that plays out in most technique classes and, thus, becomes what most students, and indeed teachers, come to expect.

Summary of insights drawn: The problem of the doxa in relation to the independent contemporary dancer

In 1997, Foster spoke about the emerging notion of the postmodern 'independent' dancer who, unlike her predecessors, moves between projects and works for different choreographers in order to sustain a career in the profession; this is a different employment pathway to the traditional model of dancing for one company for the duration of one's career. At the time of Foster's research, this was a fairly new model of practice that came into being through the gradual decline of pioneering modern dance companies, artistic and philosophical shifts in the profession. Rather than using terms such as 'The Graham Dancer' or 'The Cunningham Dancer', discussing the 'topography' (1997: 238) of the independent dancer's body, Foster proposes the idea of a 'hired' body that draws on its existing embodied knowledge in order to continue embodying different styles and aesthetics. The resulting aesthetic is something much more eclectic, a kind of embodiment that creatively incorporates and cross references between techniques and ideas. It could be said that this conception of the western theatre dancer bares far more resemblance to the contemporary dancer that we have come to recognise in the present day.

In her study exploring the moving identity of the independent contemporary dancer, Roche (2011, 2015) refers to the notion of the hired body as 'embodying multiplicity' (2011: 105). She states:

> The dancer's body in the 21st century, 'un-hooked' from the canon of dance techniques to follow a variety of choreographic styles, can embody a multitude of shapes and forms. Dancers who take this particular career path have much to convey about the body's potential to express many (even mutually conflicting) movement forms.

> (2011: 109 – 110)

Furthermore, contrary to the traditional perception of the dancer merely executing the demands of the choreographer, Roche (2011, 2015) explores the idea that in fact,

independent dancers make significant creative contributions to choreographic processes. Both Rowell (2007) and Whatley (2007) have discussed this in separate essays in which they examine the notion of choreographic style and explore different models for analysing what might determine a choreographer's style. Whatley (2007: 118) suggests that in contrast to traditional choreographic models, in some cases, 'dancers may contribute much to the creation of dance material, acting more as 'agents' of the choreographer.' The use of the word 'agent' implies that dance artists are afforded a degree of agency within the choreographic process, to make choices and to interpret the choreographer's ideas freely. However, as explored in Chapter One, the extent to which an individual can exercise choice and free will is determined by her external conditions. Therefore, when viewing the dancer's sense of agency from a dialogical perspective, it seems that her own 'moving identity' (Roche, 2011) is constructed in relation to the external influences around her such as the choreographer and her fellow dancers. Thus, contemporary movement forms are created through a dynamic relationship between all those involved in a choreographic process meaning that in some choreographic contexts, it is impossible to tell what belongs to who.

Returning to Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the internally persuasive discourse, in view of these ideas, it could be said that dance techniques, or movement forms are themselves discourses that contemporary dancers have the agency to move between. As Bakhtin (1981: 345) remarks, 'the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's', an idea that could be aligned with the dialogical relationship between choreographer and dancer, or even teacher and student; through this dialogue, new movement forms can emerge and as such, new pedagogical and aesthetic discourses. Furthermore, the creative potential of the internally persuasive word is grounded in the idea of developing 'new and independent words' (ibid), which when viewed in relation to dance could suggest that the independent dancer develops her own distinctive moving identity by choosing what she will incorporate from the techniques and movement forms that are available to her, a process that relies heavily on mobilising agency. This creative process is informed by the external influences around her, including the 'words' of the choreographer and fellow dancers. In a dance learning environment, such 'words' may include a particular movement aesthetic, verbal

discussions, reflections, touch-based information, sounds, images and so on; modes of communication that involve all of the senses and inform the dancer's ongoing sense of embodiment.

However, as previously discussed, dance techniques are much more than sequences of steps. Dance techniques and indeed other movement forms[60] retain value systems to which they adhere and these values are also responsible for shaping bodies in a particular way. As such, the habitus of the independent dancer is constructed both by the techniques she embodies and the broader value systems of those particular techniques[61]. For example, the discipline and physical graft of ballet form an important part of its value system, as explored by Pickard (2012). Consequently, this produces a particular kind of physical gait that is different to the physical gait that would be expected in a street dance class, or a Skinner Releasing class, movement forms that adhere to a different set of values and therefore mean that the body is held in a particular way. In the university contemporary dance technique class, this complex process of embodiment can be exposed and examined by the teacher and students. Reflection can facilitate this process by enabling individuals to understand how their moving identities are being constructed by the techniques and movement forms being learned, as well as the values of the broader discourses to which they belong; in relation to Nelson's (2013) ideas, this allows the dancer to uncover a further layer of knowledge that strengthens her overall practice.

Returning to the notion of the independent contemporary dancer, it appears that agency is not only required within the creative process of developing one's own movement identity, but also for the purposes of navigating the profession. As discussed in the thesis

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[60] For example, Tai Chi, Butoh, Yoga and so on.

[61] The emerging discourse around the decolonisation of the HE dance curriculum (for example, see Loots, 2021) also highlights the increasing need for dance educators to reflect on the cultural heritages of the dance techniques they teach and the value systems that are embedded within this. Although this PhD study does not directly explore reflection as a form of decolonisation, further work in this territory could examine how reflection, as a marginalised practice in dance training, can provide opportunities for teachers and students to challenge the dominance of western dance practices in the HE dance arena. This may in turn establish a more inclusive learning environment through the acknowledgement of a diversity of student body-minds that are shaped by different cultural perspectives beyond a western frame of reference.

introduction, it could be argued that a career in the arts is now more demanding than ever, as a result of arts funding cuts and the funding structures themselves, the marginalisation of arts subjects in education and the need for art activity to have increasing social and cultural impact (www.artscouncil.org.uk). Furthermore, the contemporary dance profession operates in such a way that artists are required to work on a national and global scale, often managing complex, unpredictable schedules that involve much organisation and wearing different 'hats' depending on the project being undertaken. As such, independent dance artists need to have a good sense of the current professional landscape, an ability to make clear choices and to actively take control of their careers, skills that require the ability to be reflective, critical, strategic, imaginative, creative and curious. These are characteristics that are synonymous with agency and are also relevant to those individuals working for bigger organisations[62], as well as independently. When viewing these skills and characteristics in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance technique education, which promote a conformist attitude, traditional approaches, linearity, pre-determined outcomes, power imbalances, binary oppositions, virtuosity, excessive physical rigour and a lack of reflective and critical thinking, it is difficult to see how the dominant pedagogical approaches in dance education effectively cultivate the kind of agency that is required to lead a successful career as an independent dancer in contemporary western society and it is this idea that my study investigates.

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[62] And not just exclusively arts organisations.

Chapter Three: A review of studies in the field that have challenged the doxa

Purpose of the chapter

In this chapter, I examine a range of studies conducted by scholars situated in university and conservatoire contexts who have explored pedagogical methods through which the doxa can be disrupted. This results in an analysis of two key areas that I have identified: an examination of studies exploring somatic learning approaches and an examination of studies exploring reflective learning approaches. Due to the number of studies that have been conducted in each area, I propose the idea that both of these areas are, in different ways, pedagogical 'discourses' of western dance technique education. To revisit the notion of 'discourse', from a Foucauldian (1981) perspective: a discourse is an area of knowledge or social practice that is structured through specific discursive practices that are inherent within the social field. Thus, not only do I analyse to what extent the studies located in each area have supported the mobilisation of agency, but I also investigate the discursive practices that are embedded within the discourses and the assumptions that occur as a result of such practices. For example, although new pedagogical discourses have emerged that reject traditional approaches, as evident in the research of Foster (1997), they still retain their own invisible value systems that produce specific behaviours that construct teachers' and students' body-minds in a particular way; this is something that is not always acknowledged within each study and often seems to be taken for granted.

A particularly distinctive aspect of this PhD study is the focus on the role of cognitive reflection in the contemporary dance technique class. The purpose of this is to explore the extent to which cognitive reflection allows a teacher and her students to become aware of how they are being constructed by the available discourses, including the somatic and reflective discourses. I also examine the tensions around attempting to create a culture of reflection in a dance technique learning environment, which has traditionally operated as a silent space where verbal dialogue is limited to the teacher (Stinson, 2015). By analysing where the perceived gaps in the knowledge domain are, I position my own study in relation to the existing research and identify the unique contribution that my research offers to the

field. Since my study is positioned within a British university, this chapter predominantly surveys studies that have been conducted in the United Kingdom. However, in acknowledging that some of the key thinkers on western dance education are located outside the UK, where necessary, I also draw on the work of American and European scholars who comment usefully on the pedagogical discourses of dance in British Higher Education.

Existing research studies in the area of dance technique education and agency

There have been several studies that have examined how the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance education can be disrupted through the use of specific pedagogical approaches. Such pedagogies are often grounded in critical, constructivist, emancipatory, feminist and somatic learning perspectives (Doughty and Stevens, 2002; Stevens, 2006; Doughty et al., 2008; Hay, 2008, 2009; Bannerman, 2009; Råman, 2009; Weber, 2009; Bannon, 2010; Ehrenberg, 2010; Stanton, 2011; Ehrenberg, 2015; Glaser, 2015; Dryburgh and Jackson, 2016; Reed, 2016; Dryburgh, 2018). Scholars beyond the UK have also made significant contributions to this field of knowledge (Hanstein, 1990; Stinson, 1993, 1998, 2015; Fortin, 1994; Smith, 1998; Shapiro, 1998; Fortin, 1998; Green, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002; Fortin, Long and Lord, 2002; Brodie and Lobel, 2004; Enghauser, 2007; Dyer, 2009, 2010; Fortin, Vieira, Tremblay, 2009; Leijen, Lam, Wildschut, Robert-Jan Simons, Admiraal, 2009; Buck, Fortin and Long, 2011; Burnidge, 2012; Leijen, Valtna, Leijen, Pedaste, 2012; Jones and Ryan, 2015). Many of these studies are located in university or conservatoire educational contexts, with some being located in professional settings. Although the majority of the studies surveyed are situated in dance technique learning contexts, there are some that are situated in other dance learning domains such as choreography. However, all of the studies share a common interest in challenging pedagogical traditions, or 'the way things are' (Stinson, 2015: 37), with a view to enabling learners, and in some cases teachers, to acquire agency.

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Alongside the discourse surrounding dance technique and agency, there are several other discourses that emerge through the discussion; for example, many scholars are attempting to make sense of what an education in dance, including dance technique, contributes to the broader acquisition of skills that not only prepares an individual for professional work of many kinds, but also contributes to one's development as a decent, ethical human being who is able to exercise agency in a world beyond the dance class (Green, 2002; Kauppila, 2007; Rouhiainen, 2008; Dyer, 2010; Stinson, 2015). In addition, other British studies share a concern with understanding how the teaching of modern and contemporary dance techniques in higher education remains relevant to the British dance profession as it currently exists (Bannerman, 2009; Bannon, 2010; Rafferty and Stanton, 2017). This discourse is informed by a broader discussion around the very notion of 'dance technique', questioning what the term actually represents and how it is being used within western dance education in the twenty-first century (Diehl and Lampert, 2011)[63]. However, although these ideas are connected to my study, they are not the key areas for examination. While I acknowledge that these ideas are being interrogated in certain areas of the dance education community, as established in Chapter Two, university dance students are constructed by their learning experiences prior to university and will arrive to the first year of study with particular expectations intact. Thus, to the majority of first year dance students, 'dance technique' forms a very important part of their provision and is frequently perceived as one of the key areas of learning. This is demonstrated in the following comments from three of the students who participated in the focus group interview that I conducted on 9th March 2016:

> I believe that if you don't do any technique or don't have any technique in your body you can't be considered as a dancer, so, of course, it's necessary for our training

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[63] Many of these issues explored in the published research studies presented here were discussed at two research symposiums convened in 2018 and 2019 by Cathy Seago and Noyale Colin at The University of Winchester, UK. The 'Dance technique and performance training' roundtable (2018) and the 'Bridging dance training contexts: re-assessing techniques and skills for the social and cultural sphere' symposium (2019) invited scholars, including myself, to debate current issues surrounding higher dance training and its relevance to contemporary society.

> I think technique – it gives you like the foundation for, not just in contemporary, any other styles that have stability and strength

> I think it [technique] is the most important thing – technique – and I prefer it to choreography – er – I like how the exercises are – it's like small choreographies – is technique – I enjoy that a lot.

Furthermore, comments from the focus group interview that I conducted on the 20th March 2015 demonstrate that first year dance students have quite specific perceptions of what 'dance technique' entails and in most cases, this is based on their experiences prior to university. For example, when commenting on her college education in relation to her experiences in my technique class, which during the first cycle of research predominantly drew on the principles of the Cunningham Dance Technique, one participant said:

> And you come here [to university], I was used to, you know in our technique class, that's what I did at college, so it feels natural to me, the precision of it.

When asked about what the term brought to mind, another participant said:

> Straight away I'd say ballet – as a technique. I think it just stands out more than anything else. Like contemporary is so broad – like you could go Graham, Cunningham, even though they're all a little bit different in so many ways kind of thing. Ballet's kind of the grounding.

For these students, 'dance technique' has an association with codified systems of movement that adhere to specific rules. This is not an inaccurate interpretation of the term since as explored in Chapter Two, many dance techniques originate from the traditions of western theatre dance and generally operated as closed systems of movement. Although my dance technique classes attempted to challenge this idea by taking an interdisciplinary approach that encouraged experimentation across different forms[64], it seems that the students quoted here retained their perception of dance technique as something quite precise and rigid.

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[64] Although it could be said that this was more evident in action research cycle two than in cycle one, as discussed in the later analysis chapters.

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Although these are ideas that are examined in more detail in Chapters Five and Six, it is important to foreground these students' voices in this chapter as they act as a reminder of how the majority of Level Four dance students begin their educational experience at university. With reference to Brookfield's (2017) model of Critical Lenses, which encourages teachers to view their practice from multiple perspectives, including that of the student, when conducting studies examining best practice for educating students, it can be easy to forget the position that most Level Four students adopt. As teachers, we might assume that our students automatically understand the values and beliefs that underpin our pedagogical approaches, yet to them, it may not be obvious and needs to be made more explicit. While the purpose of a university education is to question conventions and ideologies, this is a gradual process that takes time and is rarely the position that most Level Four students start from. This is an idea that I kept having to return to throughout the duration of this PhD study and, thus, provides a lens through which I have examined many of the studies in this chapter. When engaging with the findings of the studies surveyed, I also spent much time reflecting on my own experiences as a Level Four dance student and wondering what my capacity to understand and reflect on such ideas would have been.

Dominant and marginal discourses

As discussed earlier, in this chapter, I have categorised the studies into two areas that I refer to as discourses; firstly, the somatic discourse, and secondly, the reflective discourse[65]. In relation to the dominant pedagogical discourse, the doxa of which was explored in Chapter Two, the areas of somatic and reflective learning can be perceived as the non-dominant, or 'marginal' (Fortin, Vieira and Tremblay, 2009: 48) discourses of dance technique education. This is because their respective value systems, which both embrace agency in different ways, contrast with the values underpinning the dominant doxa. Although learners of dance may encounter the marginal discourses within their university or conservatoire education, they exist alongside the dominant discourses, which govern the majority of educational settings for dance, areas of the dance profession and popular culture, as explored in

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[65] The reflective discourse includes studies that have explored reflective and critical thinking learning methods that foreground a cognitive dimension.

Chapter Two. All of these social fields have a significant influence on university and conservatoire dance education and the learners that enter into these systems. Thus, despite educators' efforts to disrupt the dominant discourse within higher education, 'forcing it to submit' (Bakhtin, 1981: 342) is an extremely complex process since its values are deeply entrenched within many areas of dance education and the broader profession.

In an action research study exploring how French-Canadian dance students are constructed by both the dominant pedagogical discourse and the marginal somatic discourse, Fortin, Vieira, and Tremblay propose that dancers continually 'negotiate' (2009: 47) between the discourses that are available to them, actively participating in the construction of their bodies. This finding resonates with the perspective being explored in Chapter Two, where I proposed the idea of the independent contemporary dancer constructing her own internal discourse. Fortin et al.'s (2009) study, which has a focus on somatics, dance and health, provides a useful framework for examining how dance students mobilise agency to navigate their way between different discourses. However, the area of somatic practices is foregrounded as the key marginal discourse. Although reflection was used as a form of data collection to understand how students perceived their experiences, it does not appear to have been regarded as a pedagogical discourse in its own right. While some studies have explored the use of reflective approaches in the dance technique class, due to the increasing prominence of somatic approaches in dance technique education, in this chapter I explore the idea that over time, the somatic discourse has gradually become the dominant-marginal discourse and is now recognised as the most prominent method for cultivating agency within dance students.

While there are certainly benefits to instilling the values of the somatic discourse, which 'promotes body awareness to allow individuals to make choices for their own well-being, thus, counteracting the fantasy of an ideal body' (Fortin, Vieira and Tremblay, 2009: 48), the emphasis on the sensory experience of the body as being mainly responsible for cultivating agency, or 'somatic authority' (Green, 1998, 1999) seems to negate the cognitive processes of the mind. This, somewhat ironically, appears to privilege the body over the mind and

establishes a binary between them that places less value on cognitive thinking processes. Exploring the idea of an integrated body-mind, my study investigates to what extent cognitive reflection can be perceived as a valid learning method in the dance technique class and how it can work alongside other pedagogical approaches to facilitate the process of embodying dance techniques. Drawing on literature from the area of Psychophysical Performer Training, I explore how the act of embodying dance techniques and reflecting on this process evokes different organisations, or 'states' within the body-mind. By viewing the acts of dancing and reflecting as reciprocal and connected, I explore the way that the dancer moves fluidly between these states, thus, allowing her to uncover additional layers of knowledge that further her embodiment of the techniques. In addition, I examine the extent to which reflection allows the dancer to become aware of the dialogical relationship between the inner and outer worlds of her practice and to reflect on herself as a subject of the external discourses.

The somatic discourse: 'Listening to the body'

'Once considered esoteric and far removed from daily technique class, somatics is now a household word in a dancer's training' (Batson, 2009: 1). As explored in Chapter Two, the prominence of somatic practices in western dance training emerged alongside the choreographic developments of the postmodern and new dance era of the 1970s. The use of somatic practices and somatic-based pedagogies has become increasingly popular within western dance education, particularly in higher education and professional contexts as evident in the studies conducted by Fortin (1994, 1998), Fortin, Long and Lord (2002), Green (1998, 1999, 2001, 2002), Brodie and Lobel (2004), Enghauser (2007), Fortin, Vieira, Tremblay (2009), Dyer (2009, 2010), Weber (2009), Bannon (2010), Stanton (2011), Burnidge (2012), Ehrenberg (2015), Glaser (2015), Reed (2016) and Dryburgh (2018). Even if dance educators are not trained within a specific practice, many have drawn upon the fundamental principles of somatic practices to develop their own somatic-based pedagogy that foregrounds the notion of listening to the sensory information offered by the body. This is thought to enable students to develop a sense of authority in relation to their own bodies,

emphasising the idea of developing knowledge that is particular to the individual (Bannon, 2010), an approach that seems inherently agential.

Thus, somatic-based pedagogies are grounded in the idea of departing from a teacher centred pedagogy; as opposed to relying solely on the external objectification of students' bodies, educators that teach from a somatic perspective tend to make reference to the internal sensations of the body, encouraging students to draw upon this information as a way of judging how best to organise their bodies in space and time. In this way, the dancer can combine the information that is available on an internal level, with the information available on an external level[66], in her learning of a given technique. But what is the relationship between the somatic discourse and the reflective discourse? Sööt and Anttila (2018: 217) propose that the purpose of a somatic approach to learning dance is to:

> lead students to listen to their bodies and become aware of their inner, bodily experiences and even subtle sensations. Such practices often employ reflective work in connection to bodily practice… Increased attention to body-mind integration leads to the need to understand how bodily (pre-reflective) experiences can be reflected verbally, that is, brought to the level of reflective consciousness.

Consequently, as evidenced in the following section, some dance technique educators draw upon teaching methods that are grounded in both the somatic and reflective discourses in order to establish an integrated approach. This integrated approach is also evident in some somatic practices including Authentic Movement, which is a therapeutic movement practice that combines a reflective component. By allowing the 'mover' to speak about her experiences of moving to an observer, who is known as the 'witness' (Pallaro, 2007), she can bring knowledge about herself to a level of consciousness through verbally articulating her observations. However, this level of integration between the somatic and reflective discourses is not necessarily evident in all applications of somatic-based pedagogies in higher education. As such, the following section examines studies that have drawn upon somatic-based pedagogies in a dance technique learning context, analysing the extent to

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[66] For example, by observing the body of the teacher, or viewing oneself in the mirror.

which scholars have integrated a reflective component into their somatic work. Although reflective learning methods might be present alongside somatic approaches, I explore the idea that without providing opportunities for dance students to reflect on the underlying value systems that govern such approaches, only limited agency can be mobilised since the individual may have little understanding of why such an approach is being used[67]. Consequently, the ability to reflect on how one's body-mind is constructed by the different pedagogical discourses remains limited. With further reference to the ideas of Bakhtin (1981) and Bourdieu (1977), despite the well-meaning intentions of somatic pedagogies, without critical reflection, they subconsciously become part of the authoritative discourse, which as Bourdieu (1977: 167) states, 'goes without saying because it comes without saying.'

Studies examining the integration of somatic-based pedagogies into the dance technique class

As explored in Chapter Two, codified dance techniques that originate from the traditions of western theatre dance have been identified as systems of movement that construct dancers' bodies in a way that is perceived as ideal for that particular technique (Foster, 1997; Roche, 2011, 2015). Furthermore, Roche (2011: 106) suggests that dance techniques could be perceived as rigid structures that limit 'the body's potential expressivity by defining correct and incorrect movement choices'. From this perspective, it could be said that dance techniques not only reinforce the notion of an ideal body, but they place dancers into a position whereby they must conform to the rules and values of the technique they are governed by. Somatic philosopher Don Johnson (1992: 160) refers to a western tendency to 'locate authority outside ourselves' and a 'desire to please outside authorities'; when viewed in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourse of dance technique, such authorities could be perceived as the dance techniques themselves, the values systems they

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[67] During an informal discussion with a student at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2014, the student reported of this very phenomenon when reflecting on his time as a foundation year student at a Dance Conservatoire in England. He described participating in compulsory Alexander Technique classes but having no idea how the practice was connected to his broader learning in dance. The student said that on reflection, he would have valued the classes more had he been given an opportunity to discuss their relevance.

are built upon, as well as the teachers who teach them, all acting as powerful forces within the dance class.

The integration of somatic approaches into the dance technique class, ranging from formalised practices to 'semi-structured somatic frameworks' (Weber, 2009: 237) has come to be recognised as a key method for disrupting the dominant discourse and enabling students to acquire agency. This is due to the emphasis on one's dancing emerging in response to the internal sensing of their own body, as opposed to the notion of conforming to an external ideal, as discussed earlier. However, when considering that the majority of codified dance techniques operate as form-based systems of movement that can be visibly observed and 'copied' from an external perspective, the idea of dancing from the 'inside-out' does not align easily with the core values of dance technique training. The phenomenon of 'listening' to one's body is quite an abstract concept and not something that is easily transferable or taught since it relies on the dancer's ability to sense something internally. In contrast, imitating form-based movements that are demonstrated by another body and assessing a body's technical execution of such movements could be said to be more easily achievable since it is a process that is visible, and therefore, measurable. This poses questions concerning to what extent dance educators can actually know whether an individual is dancing with an internal sense of their own body and, consequently, developing and mobilising agency.

Most dance educators would probably argue that after years of observing bodies moving, it is possible to assess the agency of a dancer through their movement alone. However, my argument is based on the premise that this is hard to verify if reflective practice does not feature as part of the pedagogy since an individual's reflections can often help to determine the degree to which they are incorporating the concepts being explored, especially at Level Four. In Chapter Seven, I explore Freire's (2005) idea that while social agents may be able to act as though having agency, without opportunities to reflect on the socio-cultural reality that they participate in, the degree of agency exercised may be superficial; the same could be said for the dance student who may display agency on a physical level, but may have

limited awareness of the agency she possesses if she never has chance to reflect on this aspect of her practice. Irrespective of this, many dance scholars propose that when approached from a somatic perspective, dance techniques can operate as open systems of learning that empower the student. While this might be true to an extent, are students aware of the somatic-informed social field that they participate in? And how many studies have created opportunities for students to reflect on this idea within the dance technique class itself?

Dance scholars Brodie and Lobel (2004) conducted a study in North America exploring the integration of four key principles that are all common to different somatic practices into the dance technique class. The principles explored were 'breathing, sensing, connecting and initiating' (2004: 80). The authors (ibid) claim that engagement with these principles can 'assist dance students at all levels and with diverse learning styles in fulfilling their movement potential' by improving 'sensitivity, awareness and responsiveness while moving' and that this was evident in the dancers' physical execution of the movements. While the findings demonstrate that the authors perceive somatic-based approaches to be useful in relation to improving the technical proficiency of the dancers in their classes, there is no evidence to suggest that participants in the study were given an opportunity to reflect on their development as dancers, or to question how this pedagogical approach differed from the other approaches they were used to receiving. Therefore, the extent to which the participants in this study were aware of the teaching methods being used and the teachers' motivations for using them is unclear. Consequently, this study appeared to place students into a position where they were expected to passively accept the teaching method used without question.

In another study conducted in North America, dance scholar Enghauser (2007: 33) explores the benefits of teaching from a somatic perspective in a broader sense, placing less emphasis on 'specific somatic-based knowledge, tools, and skills or professional practitioners in "codified" modalities' and more emphasis on a 'first person, experiential approach, which emphasizes awareness of sensation, or the act of listening to the body'

(ibid). According to Enghauser, 'body listening' is a concept that underpins all established somatic practices and has been somewhat 'under-emphasized in the dance technique class' (ibid). Not only is body listening deemed important in relation to a learner's development as a performer, but Enghauser (2007: 54) also explores this idea on a more holistic level suggesting that increasing 'somatic acuity and intelligence' helps students 'both within and beyond the dance classroom'. This suggests that she perceives engagement with somatic ways of working as valuable in relation to an individual's holistic development, as well as in relation to technical dance practice. While there is evidence from the teacher's external perspective that this approach was useful for improving the performance of the dancers, again, there is no data provided from the perspective of the students to evidence these claims and no indication that students were given an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of this pedagogical approach. Furthermore, as discussed previously, the notion of 'body listening' is rather abstract and highly complex to achieve, yet there seems to be an assumption in this study that all students automatically understand it.

Enghauser's approach, which has been tested on university dance students and appears broader than that of Brodie and Lobel (2004), resonates with the findings of a qualitative action research study by dance scholar Weber (2009). Conducted in a Level Three British college environment[68], Weber explores the integration of what she refers to as 'open' or 'semi-structured' (239) somatic frameworks into the dance technique class. In contrast to Brodie and Lobel (2004) and Enghauser (2007) whose studies are solely based on their observations as teachers, Weber's study includes the voices of students who participated in the action research. Data was collected using video and audio recordings of sessions, transcriptions of group discussions and participant observation. Consequently, Weber's study appears to present a more balanced argument for the integration of somatic approaches since she addresses both the benefits and challenges of a somatic-based pedagogy. Weber proposes that in contrast to codified or formalised somatic practices, semi-structured somatic frameworks tend to enable greater autonomy and bodily authority

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[68] As opposed to a higher education learning environment.

for learners since they rely on a student's ability to 'realign and re-pattern through somatic awareness of what feels pleasurable or 'good'' (ibid). In this sense, like Enghauser, the aim of Weber's approach appears to be concerned with facilitating astute body listening amongst students through the integration of a somatic-based pedagogy that is not governed by any single technique or practice but instead draws upon principles that are common across most practices.

To explain how engagement with a semi-structured somatic approach can facilitate this process, Weber (2009) draws on Johnson's (1983, 1992) concept of bodily authority, which as discussed earlier, is based on the idea that 'people have been systematically alienated from their own personal autonomy and have become dependent on experts' (Weber, 2009: 250). In her findings, Weber refers to several themes that emerged as a result of students' engagement with the somatic approach including increased bodily connection, creativity, confidence and other technical implications. These benefits were observed both by the author and students' as evident in their responses to the questions asked during discussions. A fifth theme concerns the area of 'critical understanding of underlying tenets' (2009: 248), which appears to refer to students' understanding of the underpinning values of somatic practices and the way in which they differ to that of traditional teaching methods for dance. However, it is difficult to understand to what extent students were given an opportunity to reflect on this idea since as Weber herself says:

> Though the philosophical and political tenets underlying the somatic work were not emphasized or made explicit, several students displayed a subtle understanding of these principles.

(2009: 248)

This suggests that although students' dancing clearly improved as a result of engaging with her somatic-based teaching approach[69], opportunities to reflect on the broader socio-cultural values of the learning they were participating in were limited.

Although Weber's study refers to 'outliers' (2009: 249), or rather discrepancies that do not necessarily align with the broader research findings, like Brodie and Lobel (2004) and Enghauser (2007), Weber's study seems somewhat biased towards the use of somatic-based pedagogies and demonstrates a lack of interrogation around the challenges of this teaching approach. For instance, she states that there were some responses that suggested students did not benefit from the teaching approach used but she puts this down to individuals misunderstanding 'the meaning of the question asked' as opposed to not finding the 'somatic explorations beneficial to their personal dance practice' (2009: 249). This seems like a somewhat naïve analysis since other studies have openly examined the challenges that students face with somatic-based pedagogies such as struggling to see the value in the approach or feeling conflicted between the dominant discourse and other pedagogical discourses (Fortin et al., 2009; Dyer, 2010). Weber (2009) also suggests that despite some students feeling unsure about the somatic approaches early in the research process, all students eventually transitioned towards understanding and appreciating them. Again, this seems like a rather idealised perspective on somatic-based pedagogies and negates the idea that students should have the opportunity to be critical of them, to question or problematise them. Unfortunately, this then positions somatic-based approaches as an alternative dominant discourse that simply goes without saying.

In 2011, dance scholar Stanton conducted a study in a British university setting exploring the notion of the dance technique class as a 'laboratory' (2011: 87). Her study examines her teaching of the Limón modern dance technique and the way in which a somatic-informed pedagogy can enable opportunities for students to engage with a process of trial and error, re-doing and undoing patterns of embodied knowledge. Stanton's study offers a useful

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[69] It should also be noted that the participating students also proved to be aware of this improvement in their reflections.

example of how a codified dance technique can be approached as an open system of learning with different possibilities and outcomes. However, since her analysis does not integrate the voices of her students and only offers her own external perspective on how students' engagement with this somatic-based pedagogy influenced their dancing, the extent to which her students were aware of the specific methods being used and their underlying values is not evident. Like Weber's (2009) study, this means that much like the doxa of the dominant pedagogical discourse, despite the intention to empower and enable, somatic-based pedagogies remain invisible and taken for granted.

Exploring similar themes to Stanton (2011) is dance scholar Dryburgh (2018) who conducted a qualitative study in a British conservatoire setting analysing students' interview responses to the use of a somatic-informed pedagogy in his Level Five release-based dance technique classes. Much like Stanton, Dryburgh examines what he refers to as the 'lively tension' (2018: 37) of enabling students to continue being explorative in their learning of codified or 'set materials' (2018: 36), opening up to different possibilities and mobilising agency to make choices on a bodily level. He refers to this as a process of settling and unsettling the embodied knowledge that is acquired through learning set materials, proposing that a somatic mode of attention can facilitate this process. In contrast to Stanton, Dryburgh's study foregrounds students' voices in an attempt to understand how 'meaning is constructed by the participant dance students' (2018: 38) in relation to their experiences of a somatic-based pedagogical approach in the dance technique class. This study offers useful data to the knowledge field by exploring how students mobilise agency on a bodily level and reflect on the process of doing so, as evident in their interview responses. However, although students were given an opportunity to reflect on their experiences in an interview setting, the extent to which cognitive reflection formed part of the pedagogical approach is not evident in the study itself. Thus, the role of reflection in relation to mobilising agency is not examined in this study, which appears to foreground the notion of acquiring and exercising agency primarily through the body, as opposed to an integrated body-mind.

Resonating with Stanton (2011) and Dryburgh's (2018) studies, dance scholar Dyer (2009) also challenges the view that codified dance techniques are limiting, instead proposing that 'The value of experiences with traditional dance techniques is dependent on the nature of inquiry and the teaching and learning approaches employed' (2009: 121). As a qualified Bartenieff Fundamentals[70] teacher, Dyer suggests that somatic approaches can be of great value in relation to enabling students to acquire agency in a dance technique class setting. In her study conducted in a North American university, Dyer proposes that students should have the opportunity to approach dance techniques as 'texts' (ibid) through which they can learn about the theoretical, cultural and historical lineage of western theatre dance in an embodied way. She proposes that students should be encouraged to engage with such texts from a critical perspective, asking questions and exploring different perspectives. According to Dyer, this integrated approach between critical reflection and somatic approaches can establish a more 'democratic' (ibid) learning environment that disrupts the dominant discourse:

> Learning occurs from a more holistic perspective when students can exert agency, critically reflect, and assume responsibility for their learning and personal movement choices. From this perspective, students could be given choices regarding how they would engage with specific movement vocabularies and apply them to their current understandings, interests, goals, and developing movement aesthetics.

> (Dyer, 2009: 121)

What is particularly useful about Dyer's (2009) study is that it endorses the idea of an integrated pedagogy that not only draws upon somatic-based teaching methods, but also values critical reflection as part of the pedagogical approach. She refers to the work of another dance scholar, Jill Green, who having conducted several studies on the subject of somatic pedagogies (1998, 1999, 2001, 2002), has arrived at the conclusion that they are of little use when employed as the only teaching method used. In Green's (2002) view, students should be given opportunities to understand how the embodied knowledge they

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[70] Bartenieff Fundamentals is a somatic practice that focuses on achieving movement integration by exploring the weight placement and sense of intention in a given action.

acquire in the dance class extends out to the social world, otherwise the knowledge remains abstract; this is a process that inevitably requires a level of reflection. I agree with this perspective and would also propose that as well as encouraging students to reflect on how their unique embodied knowledge can be transferred to a world beyond the dance class, reflection can also be used to develop a better understanding of the self, in relation to the broader world. This can include understanding how the self is constructed by the discourses of the social world, including those that operate within the social world of the dance class; this is the perspective explored in the study by Fortin et al. (2009) that I made reference to earlier in this chapter.

In a later action research study, Dyer (2010) takes her ideas further and explores both her own and her students' perspectives on the way in which they perceive themselves to be shaped by the social processes and value systems of dance techniques and the pedagogical approaches used to teach them; this includes both somatic and reflective teaching methods. This study offers a highly reflexive perspective on this research area and aligns most closely with the themes being explored in my study. However, my study, which was conducted in a British university as opposed to North America, offers new knowledge to the higher education dance sector of the UK by specifically exploring the perspectives of students who have entered university through the British educational system. Furthermore, to examine my research findings I draw on a unique critical framework that as discussed in Chapter One, incorporates the theories of Bourdieu (1977), Foucault (1977, 1981) and Bakhtin (1981) therefore viewing the relationship between dance technique pedagogy, reflection and agency from a new perspective.

The reflective discourse: Understanding and making sense of things
The integrated approach that is evident in Dyer's (2009, 2010) research demonstrates that reflective practice has an important role to play in dance technique education. British dance scholars Doughty and Stevens (2002: 1) propose that 'reflective thought and judgement are central to the artistic process and established features of arts pedagogy', advocating the

need for reflective learning in dance at HE level. Many scholars have also suggested that an education in dance needs to be more than the acquisition of physical skills and should encompass opportunities 'for students to develop concepts of dance in relation to their skills' (Tembrioti and Tsangaridou, 2014: 5). As such, there has been a recent surge in interest around the role of reflective practice in western higher dance education, as evidenced by the literature conducted in this area by Tembrioti and Tsangaridou (2014). Although this demonstrates that this is a growing area of research, it should be noted that not all of the studies reviewed by Tembrioti and Tsangaridou are located in the domain of dance technique education and therefore explore different concerns to those explored in my study. This indicates that while the importance of cognitive reflection in dance is being acknowledged, in contrast to somatic approaches, reflective practice is currently viewed as a learning method that has a broader reach across the different areas of dance education as opposed to a method that can serve a specific purpose in a dance technique learning setting. Furthermore, the volume of literature in the area of somatic practices and dance education is comparatively more than in the area of reflective practice and dance education, demonstrating that somatic studies and dance is much more prolific, as demonstrated in the previous section. This demonstrates the need for more studies in the field of reflective practice and dance education, particularly dance technique education and reaffirms the position of the reflective discourse as the marginal discourse.

In relation to enabling dance students to acquire agency, the interest in reflective practice and dance pedagogy could be dated back to Stinson's seminal 1993 paper endorsing a feminist pedagogy for dance education. In this study, Stinson not only advocated the use of somatic-based approaches in dance education, but also called for dance educators to enable students to become reflective by identifying their own learning goals and measuring 'their progress in reaching them' (1993: 140). According to Stinson, this process can be supported by keeping video portfolios of work and writing in journals in order to 'engage in ongoing reflection as they examine their work and the thinking that underlies it' (ibid). While these are useful suggestions for integrating reflective practice into dance education, studies examining the challenges and tensions around utilising reflection in a dance technique

learning environment are sparse. This may be due to the technique class being perceived as a space for physical exertion and not necessarily mental exertion, as explored in Chapter Two. This results in reflection being perceived as an activity that should take place in private, outside the class environment, often by asking students to write in journals. In relation to this, within my own study, I frequently came up against resistance from students who were reluctant to take time away from dancing in order to reflect on their dancing. In view of these ideas, the following sections examine studies that have explored dance students' engagement with reflective practice, assessing the extent to which it improved their practice. Studies that have been conducted in the research area reflective practice and dance technique have been divided into two key sections depending on the nature of the pedagogical approach explored. The first examines studies in the areas of reflection and the use of video technology and dance studio mirrors, while the second examines studies in the area of reflection and collaborative learning.

Reflection and the use of video technology

The use of video technology has been examined in several studies to explore how it can facilitate reflection in dance education, particularly in relation to technique and performance practice[71]. For example, in England, dance scholars Doughty and Stevens (2002) examined the use of video as a tool for enabling Level Five students to reflect on their dance technique practice in a university dance class. The authors acknowledge that 'reflection is not necessarily easy or straightforward. It is not something students can simply be sent off to do' (2002: 4). As such, they describe how time was dedicated during the dance classes for students to engage in reflective discussions and writing activities, allowing them to 'crystallise their observations and condense their thoughts' (2002: 3); according to the authors, this is something that the students became increasingly skilled at throughout the duration of the study. While Doughty and Stevens claim that this pedagogical approach

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[71] Sööt and Anttila (2018) have conducted a study exploring the use of video technology to support reflective practice in novice dance teachers. Although the results demonstrated that video was particularly useful for enabling teachers to reflect on the physical sensations and feelings experienced by their bodies from an external perspective when teaching dance, I have not examined the study in the main text of this chapter since the focus is on teachers, not learners of dance.

supported 'the development of autonomous, independent learning' (2002: 6), the study fails to acknowledge any of the challenges or tensions around integrating cognitive reflection into a dance technique learning environment offering a somewhat unbalanced argument in favour of its use. Students' perceptions of reflection are also not explored, meaning that it is difficult to gain an understanding of whether this group of participants found the teaching approach valuable, or how it differed from the style of teaching they had been used to receiving.

Continuing in the vein of video technology, in Estonia, Leijen et al. (2009) examined how video streaming facilitated university dance students' reflective practice in the areas of ballet technique and choreography. Comparing the two learning areas, the authors' findings suggest that this method of reflection was, in general, more useful for the ballet technique students as it allowed them to focus on the development of specific details within their practice. They do however propose that further research is required in this area to explore students' perceptions of the teaching approach in a broader sense and to enable students to reflect on 'conceptual questions [and] on a more general level of practical experience' (2009: 175). This is a useful finding that resonates with the themes being explored in my study, which explores how reflective practice can not only facilitate reflection on the level of embodiment being achieved in one's dance technique practice, but also on broader conceptual issues such as the pedagogical constructs that play out in the dance technique class and the way in which students perceive the value of reflection in this learning environment.

Leijen et al. (2012) conducted a separate study analysing the focus and quality of students' reflections, again in a ballet technique class and a choreography class. In this study, the findings were gathered by analysing students' written self-reflections and peer feedback accounts of their practice in both learning environments. Much like the 2009 study, the findings indicate that the ballet technique students' reflections mainly focused on the quality of their technical execution of the movements. However, like Doughty and Stevens' (2002), both the 2009 and 2012 studies by Leijen et al. seem to focus on discussing the

benefits of reflection in relation to improving the technical components of one's dance practice, with neither study examining students' perceptions of the reflective activity itself, or the challenges of integrating this approach into this particular learning environment. Therefore, more needs to be understood about whether the use of video technology as a reflective tool in dance technique education can have a purpose beyond improving the technical aspects of one's performance. For example, can it be used as a tool to explore perceptions of the self on a broader level, or the teacher-student relationship and the way that this informs the learning that occurs in this setting? Although my study explored the use of video technology on a much smaller scale, it was not the key method of reflection used and instead formed part of a broader portfolio of reflective methods; thus, a thorough examination of these ideas is beyond the scope of this PhD.

Reflection and the use of mirrors

A study conducted by Ehrenberg (2010) explores both the benefits and challenges of using the dance studio mirror as a learning tool in the context of a university level contemporary dance technique class. By analysing the data collected from semi-structured interviews with students, Ehrenberg proposes that the mirror enables learners to perceive their bodies from an external perspective, creating a relationship between the dancer's perception of her body in the external image offered by the mirror and her kinaesthetic experience of her body. This results in what Ehrenberg refers to as a 'dancer-mirror feedback loop' (2010: 175) leading her to draw the conclusion that, 'Upon analysis, the mirror image and the dancer's kinaesthetic awareness were consistently affecting each other in a cyclical action–reaction pattern' (ibid). This study appears to be concerned with exploring the nuances of this reciprocal relationship, focusing on the way it impacts upon the technical aspects of the dancer's performance and the construction of the dancer's perception of herself. The role of cognitive reflection in this process is not a specific focus for the author, although it could be argued that a certain degree of reflection must occur in order for the dancer to mentally process the image observed in the mirror and make the necessary physical adjustment. The author does make reference to this idea when she draws on the research of anthropologist

Hall (1977) to propose that while using the mirror, action and reflection seem to happen concurrently for the dancer.

Although Ehrenberg's study does not specifically focus on exploring the relationship between mirror use and agency, when examining some of the benefits of mirror use, she briefly discusses how the act of dancing without the use of the mirror allowed some students to experience a sense of agency. This is because the dancers were more attuned to the kinaesthetic experience of their bodies, rather than their external appearance. There are synergies with the reciprocal nature of the dancer-mirror feedback loop and the reflexive-dialogical approach explored in my study; although my study has not focused on exploring the relationship between mirror use and agency, it does explore how external sources of information are essential for enabling a dialogical relationship between the inner and outer worlds of the dancer's practice. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate the dialogical nature of mirror use and agency further, as discussed in Chapter Seven. However, what Ehrenberg's study does draw attention to is the importance of external prompts or 'tiggers' (Jones and Ryan, 2015) for initiating cognitive reflection, an idea that is discussed later in this chapter.

Reflection and collaborative learning
Reflective practice is often aligned with collaborative modes of learning. Through collaborative activities such as peer feedback, learners can engage in dialogue with each other, enabling them to encounter the perspectives of others, therefore initiating reflection (Ladyshewsky, 2013). Reflective learning scholar Moon (1999: 172) states:

> Working with others can facilitate learners to reflect and can deepen and broaden the quality of reflection so long as all the learners are engaged in the process. Another person can provide the free attention that facilitates reflection, ask challenging questions, notice and challenge blocks and emotional barriers in reflection.

These are interesting ideas to consider in relation to the area of reflective practice and dance technique education, particularly with regards to the dialogical relationship between the inner and outer world, or self and other, as explored in the following sections.

For example, dance scholar Hay (2008, 2009) conducted two studies in the UK exploring different models of reflective practice, including peer feedback, to explore whether this approach allowed Level Four university dance students to assess their performance practice. Although these studies were not specifically located in a dance technique learning environment, the findings demonstrate that the reflective activities, including peer feedback, were useful in supporting students' ability to self-assess their performance practice more broadly. Interestingly, Hay (2009) comments on the effects of the peer feedback model in relation to the teacher-student relationship, stating that the findings indicate that students started to view their performance practice as a 'process of learning rather than a product for lecturer judgement' (16). This finding suggests that students not only developed a sense of autonomy in relation to developing their practice, but that they may have begun to view the teacher-student relationship differently. This demonstrates that they may have gained an awareness of a pre-existing power dynamic where the teacher's role is to objectify and 'judge' students' bodies. This is a useful finding that resonates with the themes in my study, which investigates how reflection can be used as a way of exploring the power dynamics at play within the underlying doxa of the dance technique class.

In Wales, dance scholar Råman (2009) conducted a study investigating how collaborative peer learning can be used as a method for enhancing students' critical thinking skills in a Cunningham-based university dance technique class at Levels Four, Five and Six. The purpose of the study was to challenge the 'traditional demonstration/copying method' (2009: 75) that according to Råman, promotes a kind of learning that emphasises the 'automatic' (2009: 77) repetition of a movement 'and does not require conscious attention to its execution' (ibid). As explored in earlier sections, the notion of consciously attending to movement during its execution is an idea inherent within somatic practices through the

emphasis on feeling and sensing movements as they are experienced in the body. It is very interesting to see that Råman proposes that such an idea can also be explored through the perspective of critical thinking, thus, offering an alternative view on the way in which dance students can be supported in understanding how they experience the movement that is performed in the dance technique class. In this sense, dance students are invited to engage in a kind of reflection that resonates with the third-order reflective/reflexive state that is evident within Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) model of psychophysical performer training. In contrast to somatic learning perspectives, which tend to identify with the first and second order pre-reflective states where the body comes to the fore, in the third order reflective/reflexive state, the mind comes to the fore as the individual reflects on *how* they experience the movement after the event of moving. Reaffirming the need for integration between somatic and reflective learning approaches, Råman (2009: 77) asks:

> Should not efficient dance technique training actively encourage dance students to engage in the movement material and to explore and to question how they perform it?

Råman's study examines students' perceptions of the collaborative peer learning method by analysing responses gathered during semi-structured interviews. Her findings demonstrate that while some individuals initially met the idea of peer learning with resistance, by the end of the study, most students acknowledged some value in the approach, particularly in relation to developing a sense of autonomy and learning to rely less on the teacher to motivate their learning. While the study presents an argument in favour of the use of peer learning, Råman does suggest that more research needs to be conducted to understand how critical and reflective learning methods can 'complement' (2009: 83) more traditional learning methods 'in order to enhance the efficiency of students' technical skill acquisition' (ibid). I agree with this recommendation and would also suggest that more needs to be done in order to understand how such approaches can successfully co-exist with learning methods that are grounded in the somatic discourse, as well as understanding how such approaches contradict or challenge one another, an idea that is explored within my study.

However, Råman's study fails to examine some of the challenges of peer learning methods, such as the power dynamics that might be at play between students. Often, it seems to be assumed that students will openly embrace peer learning since they are all perceived to be equal to each other, yet from my experience, this is something that can never be presumed. Teachers must be careful that peer learning activities do not play into pre-existing power imbalances between specific students that perhaps go unnoticed. For example, peer feedback might unintentionally allow students to limit each other by failing to notice blind spots such as important details in the movement, or worse, potentially dangerous habits concerning movement execution. It may also facilitate abusive behaviour by allowing individuals to act in a bullying way. In addition, there is the issue of students not taking peer feedback seriously, since in their eyes, it is the teacher who holds the authority and only her opinion matters; this idea is particularly important in relation to dance technique education, where the teacher has traditionally been perceived as the expert. Some of these issues concerning peer feedback arose in my own action research and as such, are discussed further in Chapter Five.

Resonating with some of the themes in Råman's study, in England, Dryburgh and Jackson (2016) explore how the use of a flipchart can support the process of feedback and reflection in a Level Four contemporary dance technique class in a conservatoire setting. They propose that collating thoughts and ideas about movement by writing on a flipchart facilitates collaborative learning between students and encourages 'inquiry-orientated learning through dialogue' (2016: 130). This allows students to consider perspectives on movement that might contrast to their own, thus, generating shared conceptions of knowledge within the group. Furthermore, the flipchart is viewed as a tool for supporting the transmission of feedback from teacher to students, and between students themselves, supporting the 'dialogical nature of inquiry in dance education' (2016: 142) that views feedback as 'an ongoing communicative act between individuals involved in learning together' (ibid). Dryburgh and Jackson's study examines the responses given by students on paper questionnaires, which asked them about their experience of the pedagogical method. While the majority of students appear to view the approach positively, especially in relation to

being introduced to alternative teaching methods for dance technique, the extent to which the approach presented challenges in the technique class remains unclear.

In 2016, I was fortunate enough to witness one of Dryburgh's classes during the observations of practice that I conducted as part of this study. In this class, he utilised the flipchart method and I was able to observe how he seemed to flow seamlessly between dancing and other activities that involved feedback/reflection with the flipchart. However, I left his class curious about how he managed the transitions between such activities and what kind of challenges this presented for him as a teacher. Did the act of writing on a flipchart half way through the technique class break the flow of the class at all? Did he ever experience a jolt between exploring things on a bodily level and then attempting to make sense of these experiences through discussion/writing? To what extent were the ideas explored through cognitive reflection later realised in the body? Were there any students who struggled with the written form of processing and communicating ideas? Thus, I was hoping that this paper might reveal some of his own reflections on the experience of combining a cognitively-driven teaching approach into a dance technique learning environment, especially in a conservatoire 'training' setting. However, this particular paper seems more focused on exploring the benefits of the approach and looking at how cognitive reflection can predominantly support the activities of the body. Thus, the different states that the body-mind experiences when embodying dance technique and reflecting on this process remains unexplored.

In Australia, Jones and Ryan (2015) conducted a study examining the idea of the dance student as a reflective practitioner, investigating how students combine sensorimotor feedback from the body with feedback from the mirror, peers and the teacher within their performance of ballet technique. Drawing on established models of reflective practice, the authors explore the notion that individual reflection in the ballet technique class relies on

the use of external 'triggers'[72] such as feedback from peers or teachers in the form of 'oral, tactile and visual/gestural feedback' (Jones and Ryan, 2015: 53). The proposal is that dance students learn to integrate information from external sources with the sensorimotor information that is produced by the body and this engages the individual in a process of ongoing reflection on their performance; here there are direct synergies with the study conducted by Ehrenberg (2010), which focuses on the relationship between the dance studio mirror, the dancer's performance and the construction of her dancing identity. In contrast to the other studies surveyed in this section, which seem to emphasise a collaborative, dialogical approach to reflection, in Jones and Ryan's study, reflection is viewed as more of a private activity that runs parallel to the act of dancing. However, resonating with the studies surveyed in the previous section, although Jones and Ryan's study does not explore the use of video technology, it does demonstrate the importance of enabling dance students to perceive their practice from external perspectives in order to aid such private reflection. This suggests that while individual self-reflection can contribute towards increased levels of self-awareness, the dancer also needs to reflect on the information offered from other perspectives in order to form a more authentic perception of the self; for example, the information provided by a video recording or the feedback from a peer or teacher.

Reciprocal exchange within the body-mind
In contrast to somatic-based pedagogical approaches, which foreground an internal perspective of the self by focusing on the sensory experiences of the body, the reflective pedagogical approaches explored in these studies seem to emphasise the idea of viewing the body from an external perspective as a way of initiating reflection. It could be said that when used independently of each other, neither approach is particularly useful since as explored in Chapter One, the construction of self occurs through a dialogical relationship between one's inner and outer worlds. While somatic approaches seem to privilege the

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[72] It is worth noting that the term 'trigger' now has an alternative meaning, which has occurred from the phenomenon of video conferencing software 'triggering' social anxiety in those who use it, something that is specific to the Covid-19 world.

inner world, it could be said that reflective approaches privilege the outer world. This finding reaffirms the importance of an integrated pedagogical approach that values the information offered by both sources, such as that explored by Dyer (2009, 2010). Much like Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) proposal that the performer is continually engaged in a nexus of body-mind states that require different organisations of the bodily system depending on the activity, the embodiment of dance techniques can be viewed in a similar way. From this perspective, neither mind nor body is privileged but rather both entities are viewed as being in a reciprocal exchange. Yet in much of the writing on reflective practice and dance, it appears that cognitive reflection is viewed as a tool to support the requirements of the body. Thus, in reverse of Cartesian Dualism, it could be said that this creates a hierarchy between body and mind where the body is privileged and the mind merely works to serve the activities of the body.

In view of Zarrilli's ideas, for the dancer, the inner and outer worlds of bodily experience and reflection on this experience can be viewed as being in constant exchange with each other, both coming to the fore at different times. Both provide valuable sources of information that can inform the acts of embodying movement and reflecting on this process, allowing the individual to form her own internal discourse that is constructed through critical engagement with both perspectives. The challenge comes in encouraging students to not only explore a way of learning dance technique that disrupts the traditions of the dominant discourse, but to develop an understanding of *why* it is being used. This requires students to be willing to reflect on the influence of the external environment in relation to the embodiment of dance techniques and one's sense of self, a process that can present challenges for both teacher and student. Nevertheless, such challenges need to be confronted in order to develop an understanding of specific pedagogical approaches and their complexities.

Summary of insights drawn

Although most of the studies surveyed in this chapter are able to evidence that specific pedagogical approaches have disrupted the traditional rules of engagement of the dance technique class, the analysis of students' broader perceptions of the teaching methods used is relatively unchartered territory. For example, most studies focus on presenting the positive effects of a given pedagogical approach, whether somatic or reflective, or a hybrid of the two. Thus, it seems that students are rarely given opportunities to reflect on the value system of a specific pedagogical approach, or even the broader discourse to which it belongs. Within the studies surveyed, there are few occasions when areas of tension or discrepancy are interrogated; in other words, where findings are examined that do not necessarily fit with the broader argument being presented. Furthermore, it is also difficult to gauge to what extent students are even aware of such discourses, or how different discourses might instruct their bodies in particular ways; there are only a few studies surveyed that attempt to engage with these more difficult ideas. Rather, it seems to be assumed that since members of the dance education teaching community will appreciate the ideas explored in each study, students will inevitably do the same.

This finding resonates with the ideas explored in a study by dance scholar Dragon (2015). Speaking about the area of somatic dance education, Dragon (2015) suggests that methods of teaching and learning in dance tend to be silently embedded into the class and there is rarely discussion around the values and purpose of a specific approach. She suggests that in western dance education, there is an issue with pedagogies remaining unidentified and undisclosed, contributing to the perpetuation of specific teaching paradigms, some of which have been identified as problematic. She relates this to the area of somatic-based pedagogies, which rather than enabling students to exercise agency, can actually result in suppressing learners as educators often fail to provide opportunities through which students can understand how they are being shaped and influenced by the somatic discourse. Instead, learners are expected to passively participate in the learning environment without question. This creates a learning culture whereby a pedagogical approach that is supposed to empower unintentionally becomes the authoritative

discourse, to use Bakhtin's (1981) term.

As explored in Chapter One, in relation to Freire's (1972) ideas, to acquire and exercise agency, an individual needs to develop an awareness of the broader discourses that govern the social fields they participate in; only then can the individual make informed choices regarding how they will choose to exercise agency in relation to such discourses. As such, Dragon (2015) proposes that it is the responsibility of dance educators to be transparent with students about their underlying motivations for using a specific pedagogical approach. It is suggested that this can cultivate a culture of dialogue through which the values and purposes of dance pedagogies can be explored. This is a key idea that I kept returning to in my own study, particularly in relation to enabling my students to understand why I was undertaking this action research and the effects it might have on their learning. The extent to which I was successful in conveying these ideas to my students is explored in the later analysis chapters of this thesis, where I conclude that I was more successful in doing this during the second cycle, than in the first.

Throughout this chapter, I have suggested that due to the volume of literature available in the area of somatic studies and western dance education, where dance technique education is concerned, somatic-based pedagogies have gradually transformed from a marginal discourse to a dominant-marginal discourse. This may be because although somatic-based pedagogies do not tend to be emphasised within dominant pedagogical paradigms, in some areas of the dance education community, such as some higher education settings, they are viewed as the most effective way of cultivating agency within students. Thus, they have become increasingly commonplace and possibly the most prevailing pedagogy to counter the dominant authoritative approach. However, in view of Dragon's (2015) research, if the values and purposes of somatic-based pedagogies are undisclosed, then the degree to which they can actually cultivate agency within learners of dance technique remains unclear. Similarly, the same could be said for the reflective discourse; the ability to be reflective is often viewed as a fundamental skill to develop in higher education and indeed, this PhD study is predominantly based around this idea. However, even though the

significance and purpose of reflective practice has been well documented within educational research, it cannot be presumed that Level Four dance technique students are aware of this discourse. Consequently, it could be said that dance educators have a responsibility to enable students to become aware of the somewhat marginal discourse of reflective practice and dance technique education, particularly in relation to the idea of mobilising agency. Again, this is an idea that I investigated within my own action research, as discussed in the later analysis chapters.

As explored in the previous section, where the traditional perspective on the mind-body dichotomy has been to view the body as secondary to the mind, in most of the studies examined in this chapter, it could be said that the body is foregrounded as the key site for perceiving and experiencing in the dance class. Even the studies that advocate reflective approaches to learning dance technique seem to view the mind as secondary in the process of embodying dance techniques and making sense of this experience. Once again, this privileges the somatic discourse, reinforcing its position as the dominant-marginal discourse and maintaining the position of the reflective discourse as subsidiary. This highlights the need for reflective practice to be taken seriously as an integral part of learning dance and for the relationship between dancing and reflecting to be viewed as fluid and reciprocal. Speaking from a psychophysical perspective, Turner and Campbell (2021: 151) state that the 'constant slippage between training, performance and expanded practices of cultural action such as pedagogy and participatory facilitation' results in a 'non-dualistic sense of self' (ibid) that is developed through engagement with such practices. These are ideas that are particularly useful when exploring the acts of embodying dance techniques and reflecting on this process in the context of the dance technique class.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

Introduction

As previously discussed, this PhD study explores the notion of agency in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western theatre dance education and the embodiment of contemporary dance techniques. Situated in a UK university, it investigates how a teacher and her students are the subjects of the pedagogical discourses that are at play within the learning environment, investigating how body-minds are constructed through the dialogical relationship between self and other. By employing a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique, I argue that teacher and students can be given licence to develop and mobilise agency in order to move fluidly between the discourses at play. I suggest that this process enables the construction of new and alternative discourses that teacher and students exercise agency to navigate between. These ideas align with a poststructuralist conception of agency that views both the subject and the discourse as unfixed and changeable. For example, writing in relation to gender identity, Judith Butler (1990: 13) states that 'the subject is neither a ground nor a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process'. Similarly, the same could be said for the moving identity of the contemporary dancer who is the subject of multiple, sometimes conflicting discourses that imprint upon her body-mind in different ways. By employing a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique, the aim of this study is to explore how Level Four dance students experience being the subjects of such discourses and in what way this influences their embodiment of the dance techniques being learned.

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological approach that has been taken to examine these ideas. I explore the process of choosing to employ what I call an 'ethnographic-action research methodology'. A term that I have claimed, ethnographic-action research refers to an approach that draws upon the research methods of established models of ethnography and action research, while also allowing a dialogue with perspectives from other disciplinary fields. The rationale for settling on a methodological approach that is grounded in interdisciplinarity is discussed later in this chapter where I also examine my reasons for

rejecting other possible approaches. Although the ideas and methods of ethnography and action research have been highly influential on the study, I also explore the limitations that both methodologies present with regards to exploring the relationship between reflection, embodiment and agency in dance technique education. This discussion allows me to present my rationale for drawing upon both methodologies like that of a bricolage, stating why this specific approach was needed. As well as examining my choices for selecting an interdisciplinary research methodology, I also present the chosen research methods that were utilised to gather qualitative forms of data and the approaches to data analysis. This discussion is informed with analysis of the practical, contextual and ethical issues that have required consideration within the study.

Methods, methodology and research paradigm

According to educational scholar Basit (2010: 6), educational research is a form of social science research and seeks to explore how 'truths' about social reality can be uncovered and subsequently contribute towards a specific field of knowledge. In order to do this, a research methodology and specific research methods must be adopted as a way of investigating the social reality being explored. A research method refers to the actual techniques that are used to explore social phenomena, while the methodology refers to the broader approach taken within the research. Selecting a research methodology depends on whether the researcher identifies more with the traditional positivist paradigm or the non-traditional interpretive paradigm (Basit, 2010). The positivist paradigm proclaims that truths about human behaviour can be discovered by 'observing, experimenting on, or interrogating a large number of subjects, resulting in findings that can be statistically analysed' (Basit, 2010: 14). In contrast, the interpretive paradigm takes the view 'that human behaviour needs to be described and explained by individuals in the way it is perceived by them' (ibid) and, thus, requires the researcher to be directly involved with the subjects of her research. Consequently, methodologies that align with the positivist paradigm tend to work with quantitative forms of data, while those that fall into the interpretative paradigm generally collect qualitative forms of data (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). In some cases, researchers may choose to adopt a mixed-method approach that collects both forms of

data, but the study will still be situated within a particular research paradigm (ibid).

Ontological and epistemological stance

When choosing a research methodology, issues relating to 'ontology' and 'epistemology' must also be considered. This means that the researcher must assume a particular stance in relation to her assumptions about phenomena and the world around her, as well as her assumptions about how she perceives knowledge to be uncovered and conveyed. Ontology concerns the first of these areas and relates to the researcher's view of reality; for example, if an objective ontological stance is taken, then the relationship between the individual and the external world is seen as detached and unconnected; this ontological stance is usually situated within the positivist research paradigm. In contrast, if a subjective ontological stance assumed, then the subject is viewed as being constructed through a dialogical relationship with the world around her (Basit, 2010); this ontological stance tends to be situated within the interpretive research paradigm. In connection to this, epistemology concerns 'the researcher's view of how knowledge is attained and conveyed to others' (Basit, 2010: 6). For example, from an objective epistemological stance, any knowledge acquired is viewed as being 'tangible' (ibid) and detached from the researcher, therefore aligning with the techniques and procedures of science, such as experiments. In contrast, from a subjective epistemological stance, any knowledge acquired is viewed as being personal to the individuals involved in the research. Therefore, the researcher adopts techniques through which she can be directly involved with the subjects of the research in order to explore the social reality being experienced by them.

In view of these ideas, in order to understand more about the students' subjective experiences of engaging with a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning, and the extent to which it allowed them to mobilise agency, it was clear that a methodology situated within the interpretive paradigm would be required. In relation to the ontological stance, as stated earlier, a poststructuralist perspective has been taken to explore conceptions of agency and discourse within dance education. From this perspective, the dancer is viewed as being the

subject of the discourses that she is shaped by, a relationship that I perceive as being dialogical. As such, the epistemological stance I have taken within the study views knowledge as being acquired through the researcher's interactions with the participating dance students. This involves examining their behaviour in the learning environment to analyse the extent to which they display agency, both through their dancing and physical interactions. It also involves analysing their verbal reflections on their dance practice to determine the degree to which they perceive themselves as agential. In addition, knowledge has been acquired through examining and reflecting upon my own behaviour in the learning environment and exploring whether this approach has allowed me, as well as the students, to be agential.

In relation to the epistemological stance, within dance education, there is a dominant perception that knowledge is primarily embodied and displayed through the actions of the dancer's body[73]. Consequently, this results in a perception of knowledge that privileges the dancer's body and views her cognitive thinking processes as secondary. Drawing on the ideas of Schön (1983, 1987) and Zarrilli (2009, 2020), my study explores the idea that the dancer's knowledge is acquired and conveyed through a reciprocal relationship within the body-mind. I argue that cognitive reflection plays an essential role in the process of embodying dance techniques by allowing the dancer to reflect on the experience of moving her body, thus, uncovering valuable tacit knowledge that would otherwise go unnoticed. From this perspective, drawing on the ideas of Bakhtin (1981), knowledge is not only viewed as being conveyed through the 'utterances' of the body, but also through the verbal utterances that the dancer makes in relation to her physical practice; the degree to which students have displayed agency is determined by examining the reciprocal relationship between both of these body-mind states. Therefore, by analysing the students' subjective experiences of being constructed by the discourses at play, as well as my own experiences of being a subject of such discourses, knowledge can be obtained and disseminated within the field of dance education.

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[73] Please refer to Chapters Two and Three for an analysis of how the discourses of western theatre dance and the somatic pedagogical discourse has contributed towards this perception of knowledge in dance.

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Ethnographic-action research: Adopting an interdisciplinary methodological approach

As previously discussed, working within the interpretative paradigm requires a methodology that allows the subjective experiences of the research participants to be uncovered and examined. According to Basit (2010: 17), this can include 'Case Study, Ethnography, Action Research and Life History or Narrative'. Certainly, action research is prevalent within educational research communities and in fact, dance itself has recently embraced it as a viable methodology with scholars claiming synergies between the practice-led approaches of action research and dance education (Giguere, 2014). For example, in 2009 the *Journal of Dance Education* released a special issue on the topic of action research, publishing studies by dance scholars who had employed the methodology to examine a specific aspect of their teaching practice. In this issue, Prevots (2009: 39) suggests that the process-led nature of action research 'addresses the essence of dance education', which focuses on the daily practice of the dancer and the notion of refining one's practice over a concerted period of time. A later study by Giguere (2014) explores the idea of action research and dance education as 'twins' by drawing several parallels between their respective social, political and cultural values. With the growing interest around dance education and action research, it presented itself as a natural methodology to explore using within the context of this PhD study.

Action research

Action research enquiries usually begin with a question related to improving the conditions of one's practice (Bell et al., 2008; McAteer, 2013) whether this be in a professional, educational, social or political context. Action research scholar McNiff (2013: 28) proposes that action researchers make a commitment to action by 'having the courage to speak and act in ways that are often contested'. As opposed to simply accepting that things are the way they are, action researchers are often concerned with questioning an aspect of their practice in relation to the broader discourses that are at play (ibid). Originating from Freire's work on critical pedagogy (1972), within action research, there tends to be an emphasis on empowering communities whose voices have traditionally been suppressed; an interesting

idea to consider in relation to the oppressive nature of the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance education, as explored in Chapter Two. As Razfar (2011: 27) states:

> Historically, action research has been viewed as a 'critical' tool for empowering educators and underserved communities to define and analyze their social problems, develop new understandings, and action.

Given the specific focus on locating studies within a particular social setting or community, action research generally takes place within the natural context of one's practice; in my case, this was a Level Four dance technique class in a university setting. According to Basit (2010: 23), the practice-led nature of action research often makes it 'attractive to practitioners as they can understand, inform and reform their practice'. The notion of informing and reforming means that action research enquiries usually take the form of iterative cycles, with one cycle informing the next. Cycles are generally constructed around a four-step 'plan – act – observe – reflect' model that dates back to the work of Lewin (1946). In the 'planning' phase, the researcher devises intervention/s that will be applied to their practice and then the 'acting' phase is when the interventions are put at play. During the 'observation' phase, the researcher witnesses the behaviour that the intervention/s are producing, ensuring that this behaviour is documented for future analysis. During the 'reflection' phase, the documentation, or data is examined and the researcher considers how the findings will inform subsequent cycles (McAteer, 2013). It should also be said that regular reflection is strongly encouraged within action research studies in order to record significant events as they happen, as well as those that may become significant at a later date (ibid). The role of reflection within action research is discussed further later in this chapter when I examine the use of my own reflective journal as a research method.

The notion of iterative cycles is designed to enable the researcher to collect data within one cycle, to analyse this data and then use the findings to further explore the research aims within subsequent cycles. As such, within an educational setting, action research enables the practitioner to test and explore different pedagogical strategies, allowing the enquiry to

become more refined and focused, and the data gathered to become more specific (Basit, 2010). This framework was particularly appealing to me as the idea of testing a range of reflective learning strategies over consecutive cycles of research seemed like a useful approach to take within the context of my own teaching practice. To ensure there is parity around the conditions of the research across different cycles, scholars recommend limiting the number of variables from one cycle to the next (McAteer, 2013; McNiff, 2013). As such, in this study, the decision was made to conduct two consecutive cycles of action research, which were situated within a Level Four dance technique class setting.

Although the action research took place during the students' regular timetabled classes, I still introduced the study to all of the students and asked for their consent to participate[74]; even if they chose not to participate, they were still required to attend all classes as usual in order to complete the assessments for the unit[75]. The first cycle took place during the spring term of academic year 2014/2015, with the second cycle taking place during the spring term of 2015/2016[76]. Although both cycles involved a different cohort of Level Four students, the action research took place within the same unit of study and I tried to maintain consistency with the pedagogical strategies employed. However, due to the data analysis that took place after Cycle One, during Cycle Two, I did make some amendments to the style of the dance technique being taught, as well as to the way the reflexive-dialogical approach functioned. These variables offered some interesting points of comparison between the two cycles, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Cyclical processes can, in theory, become never ending and so it is the researcher's responsibility to place parameters around the study. According to McNiff (2013), this is an important consideration to make within action research studies since there can be occasions when the project seems unruly and difficult to contain; although the linear plan –

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[74] The Information for Participants form and an example of the Participant Consent form are attached as Appendices 1 and 2.
[75] The ethical implications of this are discussed further in Chapters Five and Six, where I further examine the complexities of the power dynamics in the study and discuss how these were addressed.
[76] More of the logistical details of both cycles are discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

act – observe – reflect sequence provides a useful framework, it could be viewed as rather idealistic and not representative of how events play out in reality. Within a complex process that requires the researcher to navigate various ideas, activities, tensions and voices, it is inevitable that she will experience slippage between these different stages, which can, at times, result in chaos. Furthermore, there may be occasions when something significant happens beyond the formal parameters of the study and therefore, the researcher must decide whether or not to allow it to influence the design or analysis within the study[77].

The tendency for action research to be chaotic or messy has been highlighted by scholars including Goodnough (2008), Cook (2009) and McNiff (2000, 2013). Cook (2009) argues that mess is an essential part of action research where the focus is to disturb particular conventions and bring about change. She refers to the 'interface between the known and the nearly known' as the 'messy area' (2009: 277) and proposes that in the pursuit of a 'messy turn', this area should not be overlooked. Resonating with Cook, Goodnough (2008) points out that the messy, unpredictable nature of action research is often left out of researchers' accounts of their experiences, despite this being where the most significant ideas and revelations are often situated. These are ideas that strongly resonate with the context of my own study where the aim is to challenge and disrupt the pedagogical conventions of the dance technique class. As such, within the later analysis chapters, I have attempted to be as transparent as possible with regards to foregrounding some of the messy tensions and difficulties that I confronted during the action research and the learning that emerged as a result of this. Therefore, not only do I present the findings that align with the discourse I have constructed around the research, but also those that do not and therefore provoke further questions.

For example, in Chapters Five and Six, I examine several occasions when the process of disrupting the regular conditions of my teaching practice led me to feel insecure about my

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[77] For example, please refer to the section in Chapter Six where I discuss an interaction with a student that happened before Cycle One had formally commenced, but after much reflection, actually went on to influence the direction that the reflexive-dialogical approach took during Cycle Two.

abilities as a teacher. I would often question whether I was providing a 'good' student experience and would sometimes struggle to see the value in what I was doing. When telling the story of the research for the purposes of this thesis, there were moments when it was tempting to skim over these occasions for fear of appearing incompetent. However, I later learned that these details are actually essential in relation to adopting what ethnographic scientist Robert Aunger (2004) refers to as 'reflexive analysis', an approach to ethnographic data analysis that is discussed later in this chapter. By telling the whole story, not only does this ensure that an ethical approach to data analysis is taken, but valuable insights that may otherwise go unnoticed can be revealed. In view of these ideas, McNiff (2013) advises researchers to trust in messy and chaotic processes suggesting that eventually, order will naturally re-occur. This is an interesting idea to consider in relation to the way in which discourses are constructed since in disrupting the dominant discourse, a new discourse occurs that eventually becomes 'the norm'. Thus, it could be said that in order to enable agency, it is important to keep questioning such norms to ensure that they do not become taken for granted.

While action research would allow me to construct a robust framework around the study and to test ideas over consecutive cycles, there were aspects of the methodology that appeared more limiting. For example, although action research is clearly concerned with investigating the experiences of the individuals participating in a particular environment, especially those individuals who traditionally, have not been given licence to exercise agency, would it allow me to fully explore how agency is displayed on both a bodily and cognitive level? From the reading I had done around action research, there was little mention of terms such as 'embodiment' or 'body-mind' and this led me to contemplate how the research community viewed the construction of the body-mind in relation to the acquisition of knowledge. Later on in my research process, I presented at the Collaborative Action Research Network conference in Manchester, England[78]. Here, it became apparent to me that there was little discussion around the body in relation to people's understandings

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[78] This event took place in October 2018.

and applications of the research methodology. This was something that I was curious about since without the body, it could be said that the ability to exercise 'action' is somewhat limited. These observations led me to explore what other research methodologies and disciplinary perspectives were available that could help me to understand the phenomenon of mobilising agency in the dance technique class.

Ethnography

Speaking about the act of investigating a given social field, ethnographer James Clifford (1983: 119) writes:

> It is more than ever crucial for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another, as well as of the relationships of knowledge and power that connect them.

In order to make sense of the relationships of knowledge and power evident in my own dance classes, I required a methodological approach that allowed me to examine the reality of this social setting. Furthermore, the methodological approach needed to include data collection methods that would allow me to examine how agency was being displayed by dance students, both on a bodily and cognitive level. While action research can offer models and frameworks to support such explorations, the research methodology of ethnography also became of interest to me in relation to exploring the actual learning culture that my students and I were participating in and the way in which we were constructed by it. Discussing the application of ethnography within educational research, Basit (2010: 21) describes it as 'the writing of culture' and as a research tradition that originates from biological, social and cultural anthropology. Aligning with these ideas, sociologist Brewer (2000: 11) suggests that ethnography is concerned with understanding:

> the social **meanings** [sic] and activities of people in a given 'field' or setting, and its approach, which involves close association with, and often participation in this setting.

To achieve this level of social understanding, in ethnography, the researcher usually adopts an 'observer' role that enables her to observe the actions of the participants within the given field from an external perspective (Brewer, 2000). Observations are recorded in field notes made by the ethnographer, which are then used to produce written accounts of the social field (ibid). However, there may be occasions when the researcher actively participates within the field in order to experience being a subject of it, thus, embodying the actions that constitute participation. For example, in a ballet class environment, this would not only include embodying the movements of the technique, but the broader behaviours associated with being a ballet student such as positioning oneself at the barre or in the centre of the room, keeping talking to a minimum and observing and copying the actions of the teacher; from a Bourdieuian perspective, these behaviours could be considered as the 'practices' that are inherent within a specific social field.

Clifford (1983: 119) refers to the act of participating in the field being researched as 'participant observation', suggesting that it 'obliges its practitioners to experience, on a bodily as well as intellectual level, the vicissitudes of translation', an idea that is relevant in this study given my own direct involvement in the dance classes being examined. Later on, I explore the notion of observation in relation to the research method of fieldwork, and in particular, what is known as 'insider' and 'outsider' fieldwork (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). In light of my own participation in the learning environment, the methodological choice not only needed to enable me to investigate the behaviour of the students in my classes, but also to account for my own involvement in the field[79]. However, although I was a participant in the field being researched, it was important to acknowledge that I was not participating as someone with equal status to the other individuals, but as the teacher of the classes undergoing examination. As such, due to the differences in status and, therefore, power, my analysis of my own experience in relation to the students'

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[79] When undertaking research into methodologies, a particular branch of ethnography known as 'autoethnography' was also of interest due to the emphasis on researching self. However, in recognising the dialogical nature of my study, it seemed more appropriate to maintain a focus on traditional ethnography due to the focus on examining how the body-minds of the students, as well as my own body-mind are constructed by the external environment.

experiences would require a considerable amount of reflexivity and critical engagement in order to minimise the effects of researcher bias and keep power relationships under constant scrutiny. Clifford's (1983) concept of 'ethnographic authority' resonates with these ideas by proposing that ethnographers should establish their authority in the writing of their ethnographic accounts. Writing about Clifford's concept in practice, David Wellman (2006: 569) suggests that one method for establishing ethnographic authority is to 'detail the process through which ethnographic accounts get constructed', an idea that resonates with Aunger's (2004) notion of reflexive data analysis, as discussed later in this chapter.

Drawing upon the methods of ethnography, specifically fieldwork and participant observation, seemed like an effective methodological approach that would serve the sociological nature of my research well; I was particularly drawn to the emphasis on examining the relationship between bodily and intellectual participation within the social field and felt that this spoke directly to the themes of my enquiry. However, despite the benefits that ethnography presented in relation to making sense of the behaviour of individual body-minds within the learning environment, I was not persuaded to commit to it as the only methodology. The iterative nature of action research, and the opportunity to reflect on one cycle of research in order to inform subsequent cycles, was not something that ethnography could accommodate. My research concerned more than observing the behaviour of social agents in the field; while this was one focus, a key aim was to examine the use of the reflexive-dialogical approach, and to analyse students' engagement with, and perceptions of, this approach. Therefore, the behaviour in the field was, to an extent, a direct outcome of the approach. Conducting more than one cycle of research would allow me to gather more than one set of data for analysis and comparison, something that would enable a more extensive understanding of how the reflexive-dialogical approach was functioning in relation to facilitating agency, and the effects of this on the power dynamics within the field.

By investigating what action research and ethnography could both offer to the study, adopting an interdisciplinary ethnographic-action research methodology appeared to be the

most rigorous way of exploring the phenomenon of mobilising agency in a dance technique class context. At its core, this is a study that draws on established models of action research to examine the application of a specific pedagogical approach within the dance technique class, that being what I refer to as the reflexive-dialogical approach. As such, two consecutive cycles of action research were conducted within the context of a Level Four university dance technique class; the details of these cycles are discussed at length in Chapters Five and Six where I explain the logistical aspects and aims of each cycle to the reader. However, in recognising that the dance technique class is a social field that adheres to particular customs, values and expectations, in order to examine the relationship between the reflexive-dialogical approach and the broader contextual conditions of the learning environment, it was imperative that I also allowed myself to be informed by the techniques and practices of ethnography. In view of these conclusions, further work needed to be undertaken to understand more about an interdisciplinary research methodology and to ensure that it was the right approach to take within the study.

Exploring interdisciplinarity

In Chapter Five, I discuss my experiences of having being a student and member of staff in a contemporary arts department that was constructed around notions of interdisciplinarity; this was evident both within the cross-disciplinary practices of art forms within the department, as well as within the development of particular research methodologies. Acknowledging that the notion of interdisciplinarity is a somewhat contested term, Lury (2018: 1) offers a definition of what it could mean within the context of contemporary research:

> Interdisciplinarity is characterized as interaction *across* and *between* disciplines. Importantly, this interaction is not orientated toward either a synthesis or a disappearance of disciplines. Instead, interdisciplinarity emerges through *interfaces* between disciplines and between disciplines and other forms of knowledge.

The idea of exploring 'interfaces' between disciplines and examining the knowledge that emerges as a result of discovering specific connections is something that I had become

accustomed to as a result of participating in a particular educational environment. However, being mindful not to take interdisciplinarity for granted, I knew that it required further interrogation before I settled on an interdisciplinary methodological approach. Discussing interdisciplinarity in relation to the artistic practice-as-research methodology, Nelson (2006: 109) refers to the notion of 'bricolage' suggesting that in examining the relationship between disciplines, the aim is:

> to discover 'what works' or what invites critical insights through a dialogic engagement, rather than what is true adjudged by the criteria of scientific rationalism.

(Ibid)

In Chapter Five, I draw further on Nelson's (2006) ideas to explore the notion of bricolage in relation to the embodiment of dance techniques. I propose that in positioning different aesthetic practices alongside each other, such practices can be allowed to sit in juxtaposition, the point being that such differences do not need to be resolved but rather allowed to co-exist in dialogue with each other. In navigating between these different practices, the dancer can mobilise agency to develop her own moving identity, or what could be considered as an internal discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). Throughout this thesis, I also explore these ideas in relation to pedagogical discourses, investigating the phenomenon of dance teacher and students exercising agency to navigate between such discourses as opposed to working within the confines of a singular discourse. My argument is based on the idea that in doing this, alternative pedagogical discourses are constructed that teacher and students can move between fluidly. In this sense, dance teacher and students can be viewed as being constructed by several, sometimes conflicting discourses. Similarly, bricolage is also a useful idea to consider when developing a methodological approach that encourages a dialogical relationship between different disciplines and perspectives. As such, Nelson's ideas have not only been influential when examining the data gathered from both cycles of research, but also when designing the methodological approach for this study.

Although interdisciplinarity has a place within artistic research, it is not something that should be passively accepted as the most effective approach within an educational research study. Rather, it should be deliberately employed with the intention of selecting particular research methods to examine phenomena. As Lury (2018: 1) writes:

> Methods are fundamental to the paradigms that structure the production of knowledge: they contribute to the history of disciplines and inform lines of enquiry.

Therefore, in utilising methods that originate from specific disciplines, it is important that the researcher is able to provide a rationale as to why the chosen method was used and in what way it contributes towards the production of knowledge. Similarly, by drawing on critical perspectives that originate from disciplines beyond the location of the researcher's study, which in this case is dance education, particular theories can be used as lenses through which to examine social phenomena. For example, speaking about educational policy and the sociological theories of Bourdieu, Rawolle and Lingard (2008) propose that although his work never addressed this area explicitly, Bourdieu's concepts and approaches can be usefully applied to examine several key areas relating to educational policy. Indeed, the same can be said for Bourdieu's work and dance; his sociological concepts of field, practice, habitus and doxa (1977) can be used as lenses to examine the social field of the dance technique class and the 'systems of domination' (Foucault, 1981: 52 – 53) that prevail in this arena.

By drawing upon the structural components, values and beliefs of action research and juxtaposing these alongside the fieldwork techniques of ethnography that allow the participation in a given social field to be analysed on both a bodily and cognitive level, I have adopted a methodological approach that allows me to fully explore the phenomenon of mobilising agency in the dance technique class. This approach has allowed me to gather valuable data and to analyse this data from the most informed position possible. By examining the interdisciplinary relationships and 'interfaces' (Lury, 2018) between action research and ethnography, I believe that my study reveals insights that offer new

knowledge to the field of dance education research, thus, justifying the application of this particular approach and the selected research methods.

Selected research methods

To recap, a research method refers to the specific techniques and procedures that are utilised as a way of exploring phenomena and gathering data for analysis (Basit, 2010). As discussed earlier, while studies adopting a subjective ontological and epistemological stance generally utilise methods that gather qualitative forms of data, such as participants' experiential accounts of a social phenomenon, researchers may also choose to utilise methods that gather quantitative forms of data if there is a specific reason for doing so (ibid). In choosing to adopt a subjective ontological and epistemological stance situated within the interpretive paradigm, I decided that the selected research methods needed to gather qualitative forms of data through direct interaction with the students involved in the study. This study was, after all, an analysis of the students' experiences of participating in a particular learning environment and therefore, the research methods needed to allow me to observe their behaviour within the environment, talk to them about their experiences, or a combination of both. Through acquiring qualitative forms of data, I would be able to understand how the social field of the dance class was being experienced; quantitative forms of data would not be sufficient in relation to gathering the level of experiential detail required. As such, I needed to consult the techniques and procedures of both action research and ethnography in order to assess what the most effective methods of data collection would be.

Although the students and I were already interacting with each other on a day-to-day basis, there were several considerations to make when selecting research methods that formalised these interactions as a research process. For example, how would pre-existing power dynamics be managed within the context of the research? If I chose to utilise one-to-one interviews or focus group interviews as research methods, would it be me who conducted them, or a research assistant? What kind of power-related implications would

there be if I chose to conduct such activities myself? According to McAteer (2013), within action research projects, the management of power relationships is an aspect of the study that must be constantly negotiated and reflected upon during the research journey, particularly when studies are conducted by a teacher-researcher in her own classroom setting. Therefore, while power relationships cannot be completely removed, the researcher can make decisions regarding how best to minimise their impact (ibid).

For example, within the context of my own project, one way of minimising the effects of power dynamics could have been to ask the students to describe their experiences of the reflexive-dialogical approach by completing anonymous questionnaires. By knowing that their responses were anonymous, it could be said that this approach may have allowed the students to comment more openly on their experiences. However, given that the study is concerned with disrupting the dominant discourse by encouraging a dialogical relationship between teacher and students, this approach seemed rather one-directional and presented limited opportunities for facilitating a fluid exchange of ideas and perspectives, thus, contradicting the very nature of the pedagogical approach being employed. As discussed in Chapter Six, by communicating my pedagogical intentions and motivations for conducting the research with the students, I was confident that we could engage in meaningful discussions about our experiences and that this method of communication would produce viable data[80]. Of course, there is always a chance that someone did not feel able to speak honestly[81] about their experiences, or was influenced by another external factor, but then it becomes the researcher's job to identify when this might be the case and to examine the data from multiple perspectives, rather than taking it at face value.

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[80] Although this was an observation that did not become apparent until Cycle One was underway, I was still sure that a face-to-face mode of communication would be a more suitable method for exploring the students' subjective realities as the opportunities to ask questions and probe ideas further seemed greater.

[81] I acknowledge that the notion of 'honesty' might seem problematic and incongruous with the interpretive research paradigm, however, here, I am trying to capture the idea of students not feeling as though they can speak openly about their experiences with their teacher, for fear of what the broader implications might be. Similarly, there may also be occasions when, due to external pressures, teachers feel as though they cannot be honest with students about specific topics because they are worried about the ramifications. When using the term 'honest' throughout this thesis, I am suggesting that by communicating more clearly with students about the underlying belief and value systems of particular pedagogical approaches, it helps to demystify the learning process and destabilises the sense of control that is maintained by authoritarian approaches.

Another method that I considered in the early stages of the study was conducting one-to-one interviews with individual students. Although this method presented many opportunities to engage with the students directly and to discuss ideas in detail, the idea of literally placing our bodies in opposition to each other seemed too resonant of the way in which bodies are often organised within the dominant pedagogical approach for dance technique[82]. While some students may have been comfortable with this approach, for me, the binary nature of a one-to-one interview also sat awkwardly alongside the dialogical learning environment that I was trying to establish. I reflected on how I may have felt as a student if my technique teacher had requested to interview me about his or her research. The idea of this seemed particularly daunting given the nature of the underlying hierarchy that can often be prevalent within a dance technique class environment. As explored in Chapters Five and Six, even if the teacher's aim is to disrupt this hierarchy, the ideological structures of the university context ensure that she still possesses a degree of power over her students, which could present a challenge in a one-to-one interview setting, especially when it is the teacher herself who is conducting the interview. In light of these ideas, I needed to identify a research method that would ensure the students felt comfortable enough to speak openly about their experiences through a fluid exchange of ideas and perspectives.

Focus group interviews

Group discussions were already commonplace within my technique classes and were frequently used as a pedagogical strategy for reflecting on the experience of dancing[83]. Thus, it seemed appropriate to investigate how a discussion format could function as a formalised research method. According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) focus groups originate from 1920s marketing research America and have since been adapted by

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[82] That being that the teacher stands directly in front of the students to demonstrate movements while the students copy.

[83] Indeed, I continued to employ group discussions within the action research as a reflective learning strategy, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

researchers utilising a range of research approaches, including action research, as a method of data collection. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013: 374 – 375) describe the focus group as:

> a gathering of a limited number of individuals, who through conversation with each other, provide information about a specific topic, issue or subject.

They propose a distinction between group interviews and focus group interviews, suggesting that group interviews involve the researcher asking direct questions and participants answer individually, in turn. In contrast, a focus group interview encourages interaction between participants and can therefore 'allow the researcher to view social processes in action' (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013: 375). The idea of facilitating and observing interactions between the students, as well as with myself, was interesting to me as it seemed that it would expose the students to different ideas and perspectives, thus, enabling a more dialogical approach to the discussion. This resonates with Ladyshewsky's (2013)[84] ideas concerning dialogical peer feedback in that by being exposed to the perspective of the other, the self can reflect on her own perception of an idea. This dialogue between the internal and external perspective may in turn lead to a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon, or a shift in perception for the individuals concerned.

In view of these ideas, I decided that focus group interviews would be the most useful research method to adopt as a way of exploring students' perceptions of the reflexive-dialogical approach in a discursive way. I made the decision to conduct the focus groups myself taking on the role of a 'Researcher/moderator' (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013: 379) who asks questions to the group, prompts discussion and facilitates conversation between the participants by 'interjecting occasionally with a question or remark for clarification or summing up' (Basit, 2010: 104). Although I understood that in choosing to conduct the focus groups myself, particular power dynamics needed to be considered, it did

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[84] Please refer to Chapter Five for a more extensive exploration of Ladyshewsky's (2013) ideas.

not seem appropriate to employ a research assistant to undertake this role. After all, I am the lead researcher in this study and I have been present for every aspect of it, so not being present for the focus groups themselves would have seemed very odd and could have been disorientating for the students too. I wanted to have the opportunity to prompt and probe ideas further where necessary and, thus, it was clear that I needed to be directly involved in the discussions. Not only this, but I was learning about which research methods were working most effectively and which research questions were coming to the fore and hence, this process of exploring different approaches formed an integral part of that learning journey.

One focus group took place at the end of each cycle of action research. In Chapters Five and Six, I discuss my approach towards recruiting students for the focus groups and I explain why this approach differed between cycles. For the purposes of this chapter, the reader should know that seven students participated in both focus groups and these were students who had attended the technique classes within the Level Four *Dance Practices 1* unit, which was the location of the action research[85]. To minimise the effect of power dynamics, I took the recommendation of McAteer (2013) and conducted both discussions in a neutral classroom environment, which was not a typical dance learning space. This was to support us in partially departing from the roles that we would normally assume in the dance studio setting. During the activity, I arranged the participants in a circular formation, which again can help to reduce the impact of power dynamics by avoiding hierarchical spatial formations that might be associated with a traditional classroom environment (ibid). By positioning myself and the participants in this way, it ensured that everyone could see and hear each other and therefore, more opportunities for social interaction between participants might emerge. Throughout, I had a sense of the topics that I intended to discuss, but I tried to ensure that the students also had opportunities to steer the direction of the conversation where possible. Both focus groups were filmed for the purposes of documentation and were

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[85] The reader may find it helpful to refer to Appendix 3, which contains a map of the Level Four units that the Single Honours BA Dance Programme was comprised of. Combined Honours students who were studying Dance with another subject, enrolled onto the two core units, which were Dance Practices 1 and Choreographic Perspectives 1.

later transcribed for analysis. The transcribing process allowed me to immerse myself within the data and to identify units of meaning, something that McAteer (2013) and Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) suggest is key when analysing qualitative forms of data. To further excavate meaning, a thematic analysis approach was used, as discussed later on in this chapter. This was facilitated by adopting a colour-coding approach to aid recognition of recurring themes and areas of interest, which later contributed to identifying the key findings for each cycle.

Fieldwork

As discussed earlier in this chapter, my chosen methodological approach needed to allow me to examine the social reality of the dance technique class environment. One way of achieving this was to speak to the students directly about their lived experiences of engaging with reflection in the dance class, hence my decision to employ the focus group interview as a key research method. However, as discussed in Chapter One, this study takes a holistic view of agency by exploring how it is displayed and mobilised through the reciprocal relationship between an individual's bodily actions and cognitive reflections. Therefore, as well as talking to the students about their experiences, I also needed to identify a research method that would allow me to observe their bodily behaviour in the dance class. As discussed earlier, in ethnography, the observation of a cultural setting is known as 'fieldwork' and is described by Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013: 339) as:

> the process of collecting raw data from natural settings. Fieldwork is often taken up by qualitative researchers because of its wide capacity for letting them capture information about the ways in which individuals inhabit and experience their social worlds.

Fieldwork involves observing the social setting in action and writing field notes to document key observations that emerge; field notes are then analysed to identify themes and patterns (Brewer, 2000). Within the context of my own study, not only did I write field notes during class time, but I also wrote a reflective journal entry after each technique class, an additional research method that I discuss later on. This critically reflective mode of writing

differed from the field notes, which tended to be more immediate and descriptive. As well as keeping notes, I made the decision to film all of the technique classes so that I could revisit the footage at a later date and conduct further analysis. As such, not only did I write field notes during the classes as a way of recording something that seemed significant[86], but I took additional field notes when observing and analysing the video footage at the end of each cycle.

In addition to conducting fieldwork within the setting of my own technique classes, throughout the study, I carried out several observations of practice in other British universities and conservatoires[87]. This was an important part of my methodological approach since as discussed in Chapter Five, there were several assumptions I had made about the conditions of my own teaching practice that I did not begin to question until I observed other social fields outside my own institution. Up to this point, I had presumed that all other technique classes operated in a similar way to my own, only to be proven otherwise. By engaging with this kind of fieldwork, I was given the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between my own teaching practice and the broader pedagogical discourses that my practice was situated within. Johns (2017) likens this process of reflection to a mirror that enables the practitioner to view herself from a different perspective; it was as though by looking out, I was suddenly more able to look within.

For example, by observing the practices of other technique teachers, I was able to witness the dominant pedagogical discourse at play in a variety of different contexts. This led me to reflect on my own attributes, values and beliefs as a teacher, or in other words, my own sense of subjectivity, as well as allowing me to identify what I had been taking for granted. One of the most prominent examples was my realisation that the integrated approach of the dance programme at my own institution, which saw units combine aspects of technique,

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[86] These field notes were accompanied by written reflections that I wrote after every technique class, an additional research method that I discuss later in this chapter.
[87] This included observing the teaching practice of twelve individual teachers located in the following institutions: Northern School of Contemporary Dance, Trinity Laban, Roehampton University and Middlesex University, as well as three teachers located at my own institution, which at the time of this research was Manchester Metropolitan University.

choreography and analysis, was not always mirrored at other institutions. In fact, all of the institutions, including the universities, took a more traditional approach to the design of their programmes by categorising technique classes by style. As such, students' timetables would include classes in 'Ballet', 'Cunningham', 'Graham', 'Release Technique' and so on[88]. This is an approach that aligns more closely with the conservatoire training model (Smith-Autard, 2002) that I referred to in Chapter Two. In addition, I was able to observe other teachers' uses of reflective learning approaches, allowing me to evaluate the position of cognitive reflection within the broader pedagogical discourse for dance technique.

By taking these two different approaches to fieldwork, I could be viewed as adopting both 'insider' and 'outsider' positions (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). When observing the field of my own technique classes, I would be taking an 'Insider fieldwork' approach (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013: 343), which involves the researcher investigating a setting within which they already participate. A key example of this is the teacher who is investigating her own classroom, a common phenomenon within action research studies. While being an insider can have some benefits, for example, having an already-established relationship with the other participants and being familiar with the social and cultural rules and expectations, the influence of the researcher's own subjectivity can result in biases and blind spots that may become problematic if a reflexive approach towards data analysis is not employed (ibid), an idea that is discussed later. In contrast, observing technique classes in other institutions could be viewed as conducting 'Outsider fieldwork' (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013: 343). However, outsider fieldwork is generally perceived as involving going into an unfamiliar setting that is usually unknown to the researcher (ibid). This was not necessarily the case with the observations of practice conducted at other institutions, since although they were not within my own institution, the dance technique class is a familiar setting for me and consequently I have a detailed understanding of the basic rules of engagement and the general 'context, values and background' (Savin-Baden and Howell

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[88] Here, it should be noted that this was only the case at the institutions that I attended. It is of course possible that other universities may take a more integrated approach to their programme design, similar to that of MMU, but that these institutions were not observed during this study.

Major, 2013: 339) of the field.

Although my use of fieldwork may have differed from traditional ethnographic approaches, by adopting these two different positions, I became interested in the dialogical relationship between the internal and external worlds of my practice. For example, this particular application of fieldwork has required me to reflect on my own position and status within the dance technique classes and the way in which I, as well as the students, am shaped by the pedagogical discourses at play and the rules, or 'doxa' (Bourdieu, 1977) that such discourses determine. Indeed, it could be said that in the context of my own dance class, I am not only responsible for constructing the doxa, but I am constructed by it[89]. In view of this, my use of fieldwork not only needed to allow me to observe the behaviour of the students in relation to the doxa, but also my own behaviour, while being mindful that I was participating with a different social status to that of the students. These complexities have required a substantial level of reflexivity on my part in order to effectively analyse the relationship between the students' sense of agency, my own sense of agency and the external discourses that we operate within. Reflexivity within qualitative data analysis is discussed later in this chapter, where I also examine the influence of my own subjectivity in relation to particular aspects of the research process.

Personal reflective journal
The use of reflective journals is widely recognised as an effective way for an individual to examine their learning journey in a range of educational and professional contexts (Moon, 2006, 2008). Referring to what she terms a 'learning journal', Moon (2006) proposes that any reflection that takes the form of a diary or log should enable practitioners to move beyond a descriptive mode of writing in favour of 'using the page as a meeting place in which ideas can 'intermingle and, in developing, give rise to new ideas for learning' (2006:

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[89] In Chapter Five, I explore the notion that teacher and students enter into a 'doxic agreement' with each other, which views them both as responsible for constructing the doxa of the dance class and then playing by the rules.

17). By moving beyond a mode of writing that simply records events, the purpose of a reflective learning journal is to engage with ideas in a critical way, thus, allowing new insights and knowledge to emerge (ibid). It is for these reasons that reflective journals are perceived as a 'lynchpin of the action research process' (McAteer, 2013: 25). Resonating with Moon's comments, McAteer (ibid) proposes that within the context of action research studies, reflective journals should enable teacher-researchers to seek a more 'problematising approach' in relation to their practice, 'one which raises questions, and seeks alternative perspectives' in a way that the everyday evaluation of teaching practice may not.

In view of these ideas, it was clear to me from the outset that I needed to maintain a reflective journal throughout the duration of the study. After all, this project was taking place across two academic years, involving two different cohorts of students and as such, it would be impossible for me to remember the details of every event that took place. Furthermore, there were some events that at the time of the research, did not seem particularly significant, but later became important and having my notes to refer back to was essential. Without writing consistent entries in a reflective journal, it would be difficult for me to track and analyse how my own thinking and perspectives had shifted over the duration of the study. While it is often easy to see where one has arrived to, it can be more difficult to remember where one first started. Thus, without the use of the reflective journal, I may have overlooked or even forgotten significant learning that had taken place, learning that needed to be made explicit in the writing up of my action research story[90] and the way I articulated the transition from Cycle One to Cycle Two.

Earlier on, I discussed the complexities of my involvement as a participant in the social field of the dance technique class. Although this study does not focus solely on my own experiences as a teacher, it does examine the dialogical relationship between me and the students in my classes, and the way in which we shape each other. Therefore, as well as

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[90] The notion of 'stories' within action research studies is explored later on in this chapter.

analysing the students' voices within this dialogue, I needed to examine my own voice in relation to the students' voices in order to explore where there were synergies and contradictions with regards to our experiences of specific events. Not only this, but by having my journal entries to hand when observing my behaviour on the technique class video footage, I have also been able to explore to what extent my own cognitive thinking processes appear to align with my behavioural tendencies, as well as where they do not. One way of achieving this level of analysis is to examine the reflections that are recorded in my own journal. As such, this means that within the context of this study, my own reflective journal has become a form of data through which insights and knowledge have been excavated, meaning that my own voice has actually acted as a source of data.

Reflective journal and subjectivity

As well as acting as a source of data, the reflective journal has been an essential tool in allowing me to develop an awareness of my own sense of subjectivity, something that is of particular importance when conducting research that adopts a subjective ontological and epistemological stance and involves placing meaning and value judgements on particular phenomena. According to Basit (2010), subjectivity can be considered as the social, political and cultural baggage that the researcher brings with her into the research process. These are factors that inform her perspective on the world and the judgements that she makes (ibid). Educational scholar Peshkin (1988: 17) likens subjectivity to 'a garment that cannot be removed'. By recognising that researcher subjectivity is inevitable and cannot be avoided, Peshkin proposes that researchers should 'systematically identify' (ibid) their subjectivity in order to understand how it is shaping the direction the study is taking and the eventual interpretation of the data. In this way, researchers are encouraged to make explicit any factors related to their subjectivity that could influence the way that particular data has been engaged with. These ideas constitute what could be considered as a reflexive approach to data analysis, an idea that is explored in the following section. By keeping a reflective journal, I have been able to identify aspects of my own subjectivity, to examine the events and circumstances that have played a role in the construction of my subjectivity,

and to understand how this might be influencing my interpretation of the data gathered. What is more, I have also been encouraged to be continually critical of such interpretations and to recognise that when offering a perspective, this perspective is informed by a social, cultural and political position that is particular to me.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis approach has been employed to examine the data gathered by the different research methods adopted within the study. This includes the transcriptions of the focus group interview responses, the video footage of the technique classes and my own reflective journal entries. In different ways, each form of data communicates something about the students' experiences, and my own experiences of mobilising agency in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance technique education. According to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006: 82), thematic analysis is one of the most established forms of qualitative data analysis and can be described as 'a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon'. A thematic analysis approach towards analysing data, such as focus group transcriptions, enables the researcher to identify patterns or units of meaning that are recurrent throughout (ibid).

According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013: 440), thematic analysis 'provides a general sense of the information through repeated handling of the data'. This approach enables the researcher to 'get a feel for the whole text by living with it' (ibid) and to 'rely on intuition and sensing, rather than being bound by hard and fast rules of analysis' (ibid). Through repeated handling of my own data, I have been able to keep uncovering new insights, a process that has facilitated the gradual construction of a discourse that is based on the most prominent themes and ideas that have emerged. However, when constructing this discourse, it is essential that the researcher is mindful of the influence of her own sense of subjectivity, as discussed earlier. As such, to ensure that her own personal biases and pre-conceived ideas do not drive the process of data analysis, the researcher must be vigilant with regards to handling the data in a reflexive way (Basit, 2010).

Reflexive data analysis

In view of these ideas, it has been important for me to explore reflexive approaches towards qualitative data analysis. Discussing a reflexive approach towards examining ethnographic data, Aunger (2004) proposes that the researcher should utilise what he terms 'reflexive analysis' (2004: 16). He describes this kind of reflexivity as an analytical method that takes account of 'the context of data elicitation' (ibid), thus, ensuring that all the contextual aspects concerning how the data has been collected and managed are made explicit. These ideas resonate with those of Etherington (2017: 84) who proposes that:

> A reflexive researcher does not simply report facts or truths but actively co-constructs meanings and interpretations of his or her experiences in the field, and then questions how those interpretations came about. Reflexive research encourages us to transparently display in our writing the interaction between ourselves and our participants so that our work can be understood as co-constructed knowledge, not only in terms of *what* we have discovered, but also in terms of *how* we have discovered it.

Both Aunger (2004) and Etherington (2017) suggest that in order to exercise reflexivity, not only do researchers require an awareness of their own subjectivity, but they should aim to be explicit with regards to communicating how the data has been gathered and analysed; this is to ensure that the data is presented in a way that reflects the actual conditions of the research environment and not in the way that the researcher would prefer to present it. Earlier on, I offered the example of being tempted to skim over aspects of my research journey that did not necessarily fit with the discourse I have constructed or might have made me look incompetent. However, as Goodnough (2008) suggests, these areas are often where the most significant revelations are made and therefore, should not be concealed from the reader. Thus, it could be said that the opportunities for learning are greater when things do not play out as expected, in comparison to when they do. It is for these reasons that action research scholars suggest that researchers should aim to tell the full story of their study to ensure that nothing is assumed or hidden from view (McNiff, 2013).

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Etherington (2004: 31 - 32) states, the reflexive researcher must 'acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry'. Not only does this involve offering an honest portrayal of how events were experienced, but providing transparency around the contextual conditions of the study, the research methods used and the way in which the analysis of the data gathered has determined a particular line of enquiry. For example, in relation to my own project, it is important that I am able to communicate why I chose to conduct the study within my own dance class setting and what kind of implications this had on my teaching practice more broadly. I also need to be able to discuss how I recruited students to participate in the study and what the implications of this were for them. Furthermore, given the volume of data collected, I must provide a viable argument as to why specific data was selected for analysis, and why other data was not deemed as being relevant within the context of the study. These are ideas that are explored in more detail in the later analysis chapters.

Narrative privilege

Handling data in a reflexive way ensures that the contextual factors surrounding the gathering of participants' voices are taken into consideration and that their voices are conveyed in a fair and ethical way. These issues are of particular concern in research studies that involve complex power dynamics, such as the power-based relationship between a teacher and her students. This relationship is not uncommon within action research studies where the teacher is investigating the conditions of her classroom (McAteer, 2013). However, speaking about action research as a methodological approach, Grant et al. (2008) propose that no matter how reflexive the researcher sets out to be, in most studies, 'researchers enjoy a place of relative and actual power in comparison to most participants' (2008: 592). This is an idea that I spent much time reflecting on within the context of my own research, since despite my best intentions to create an empowering learning environment for the students, we still assumed the roles of 'teacher' and 'student', or 'researcher' and 'participant'. Furthermore, when writing up the research findings for the purposes of this thesis, it would be me who would have the final say with regards to how

their contributions to the study would be conveyed and how the 'story' of the research would be told.

The notion of storytelling is a prominent theme in both action research and ethnography (McNiff, 2013; Adams, 2008). Discussing the ethical implications of constructing stories in ethnographic research, Adams (2008) examines the idea of the 'narrative privilege'. He suggests that there are many 'cultural forces' that influence 'what sorts of stories get told' (2008: 181) and proposes that it is the author's responsibility 'to acknowledge, to the best of our abilities, privileges we have when constructing a story' (ibid). Such privileges include possessing the academic ability to write, access to resources that facilitate the writing and an outlet to then publish one's story. All of these factors assume a certain level of education, something that not all of those we are writing about may have access to. Furthermore, Adams proposes that they place the writer in a position of 'textual control', enabling her to tell the story from a position of power. As such, in acknowledging her narrative privilege, the researcher should not only consider how she portrays those voices that 'fit' with the narrative being constructed, but also those that do not, as well as those voices that are excluded from the final draft and therefore silenced. Dealing with the complexity of narrative privilege requires integrity on the researcher's behalf to ensure that the choices she makes when selecting and organising the voices involved in the story are conveyed accurately and fairly, therefore advocating a reflexive approach towards data analysis.

Chapter summary

To summarise, in this chapter I have presented an argument for employing what I refer to as an ethnographic-action research methodological approach. I have discussed how this interdisciplinary approach was developed through exploring the dialogical relationship, or 'interfaces' (Lury, 2018: 1) between action research and ethnography. By situating my study within the interpretive research paradigm and presenting my reasons for adopting a subjective ontological and epistemological stance, I have examined the use of specific

research methods that derive from the disciplinary fields explored. I have provided a rationale for how such research methods have allowed me to investigate the phenomenon of mobilising agency in the dance technique class from a poststructuralist perspective. I have examined how the specific combination of these research methods has allowed me to uncover insights and new knowledge that can be disseminated to the dance education community, knowledge that it would not have been possible to acquire had a different methodological approach been taken. Furthermore, I have explored how this particular methodological approach has supported a conception of knowledge that views the body-mind as a holistic entity, something that after much research, I concluded that action research alone would not have been able to facilitate.

In addition, I have explored the ethical complexities of employing this approach within the context of my own dance technique classes. I have examined issues concerning the power relationship between teacher and students in action research studies and my own involvement as a participant in the field being investigated, exploring the possible problems of this approach. These issues have been examined in relation to notions of subjectivity and reflexivity, particularly where data analysis is concerned. Drawing on the ideas of Aunger (2004) and Etherington (2017), I propose that by taking a reflexive approach to data analysis, participants' experiences of the social field are presented in a way that offers a fair and ethical representation of how events took place, thus, presenting knowledge as being co-constructed by all research participants. This approach towards data analysis helps to ensure that the lead researcher is aware of the narrative privilege that she has over the other research participants when constructing a discourse around the study. Thus, it is imperative that the researcher shares all aspects of her research journey, even those aspects that do not necessarily 'fit' with the discourse being constructed, since this is often where the most valuable insights are situated. These are ideas that I have taken forward into the analysis, as evident in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Five: Analysis of Action Research Cycle One

The aims of Cycle One

The first part of this chapter sets out the research aims for the first cycle of action research, looking at how these had shifted from the proposal stage of the study. I then present the logistical aspects of the cycle including the learning strategies used, the timeline, ethical considerations and data collection methods. In the second part of the chapter, I analyse the data gathered during Cycle One before summarising the key findings that informed the design of the second cycle. In the early stages of my research, I had identified that a key characteristic of the dominant pedagogical discourses is the authoritative teaching methods that tend to establish a hierarchy between teacher and students. This hierarchy positions the teacher as the expert who is responsible for providing pre-conceived knowledge to the students, an idea that resonates with Rancière's (1991) concept of The Ignorant Schoolmaster, as explored in Chapter One. This relationship between teacher and students forms part of the underlying doxa of the dance technique class, determining the rules of engagement that teacher and students conform to. In relation to this idea, one of my initial aims for the study was to develop a specific teaching method that would collapse the hierarchy that I perceived to be present between my students and me. By utilising this pedagogical method, I would explore whether it was possible to collapse the hierarchy and consequently enable students to mobilise agency.

My original intention was to disseminate this pedagogical method as a model of practice within the broader dance education community. However, as my research progressed, I started to question this idea; not only did it seem rather unrealistic for one person to dismantle the doxa alone, but by developing a model of teaching practice, it seemed that I would only be reinforcing the notion of an authoritative discourse; the very idea I was being critical of. After examining the data gathered from the first cycle, I eventually decided against developing a model of practice and consequently, this informed the aims for Cycle

Two. However, at the beginning of Cycle One, the research aims were as follows:

- To embed and normalise cognitive reflection within the dance technique class.
- To collapse the teacher-student hierarchy through the use of a specific pedagogical approach.

Both of these aims are explored in more detail in the following sections where I discuss the methods used to investigate them and examine the findings extrapolated from the data gathered. Before this, I will discuss the practicalities of the action research in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the location, timeline and other logistical and ethical factors that inform the data analysis.

An overview of the learning strategies used: Peer feedback, group discussions, reflective journals and choreographic learning activity

Given that this study examines the social construction of self through the dialogical relationship between the internal sense of self and the influence of the external world, it would have seemed odd to adopt only one mode of reflection within this action research. Therefore, I chose to utilise an interdisciplinary approach that would enable the students to perceive their practice from different perspectives. Resonating with Brookfield's (2017) model of Critical Lenses, the idea was that by perceiving their dancing from different positions, for example, by viewing themselves on film, engaging in group discussions and hearing their peers' perspectives and by engaging in reflective writing tasks during class time, this would help to facilitate a reflexive-dialogical approach that allowed the learners to explore the relationship between the inner and outer worlds of their practice. As such, three key reflective learning strategies were adopted during Cycle One: peer feedback activities, group discussions and reflective journals. Each strategy is examined in order to analyse the extent to which the students displayed agency through their cognitive thinking processes that were communicated in different forms.

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As well as the reflective learning strategies, an additional approach was adopted during Cycle One, which I shall refer to as the choreographic learning activity. During Cycle One, my general perception of 'action research' was that it referred to the notion of making a significant change that would have a profound effect on the social field being researched; this is something that I explore in more detail in Chapter Four. While this is one perspective, given that the research methodology being adopted was an interdisciplinary ethnographic-action research approach, at this point in the research process, I had not fully considered the possibility that my research was also concerned with examining the pre-existing conditions of the social field and developing a more informed understanding of the actions of the participants. According to action research writer McAteer (2013: 13) 'In its most simple form, it [action research] has its roots in the question "how can I improve my practice?"' I took this quite literally to mean that something about my teaching practice had to change in order for it to improve. As well as embedding reflective practice into the learning culture, in the initial stages of this cycle, an additional aim was to explore the hierarchical relationship that I perceived to be present between my students and me. My assumption was that by developing a specific model of teaching practice, I could collapse this hierarchy. However, as previously discussed, the notion of dismantling the underlying doxa of a dance technique class could be said to be a rather unrealistic idea, particularly when trying to do this alone. This is because perpetuation of the dominant pedagogical discourses ensures that the doxa stays intact, as explored in Chapter Two. With that said, I did learn that it is possible to disrupt and destabilise the doxa to varying extents and to even use the doxa as a tool for mobilising agency; this is an idea that I discuss in more detail later on.

With my focus on collapsing the hierarchy between my students and me, I developed the choreographic learning activity with the aim of repositioning us in relation to each other. The idea was to provide the students with some control over the learning activities, meaning that I was no longer perceived as the only provider of knowledge. So, as well as teaching the regular exercises and sequences that formed the majority of the technique class, I incorporated a choreographic element to the sessions. This activity required the

students to collaborate with each other and choreograph a phrase of technical movement material that they would then teach to the rest of the class. My reasons for this are discussed later in this chapter where I examine the data gathered from the task. However, although the activity did not behave in the way I presumed it would, I did gather some valuable insights that informed my thinking and aims for the second cycle. This experience also demonstrated the importance of not making assumptions about the direction a research process will take, an idea that influenced my thinking in the later stages of the study.

Cycle logistics and ethical considerations

The first cycle of action research took place in the spring term of the academic year 2014/2015, beginning on Monday 12th January, and ending on Tuesday 24th March. The cycle consisted of eleven two-hour weekly dance technique classes, which formed part of a first-year unit called *Dance Practices One* (DP1). The cycle concluded with a focus group interview on the 20th March 2015. DP1 combined three assessed elements: classes in dance technique, a choreographic assignment and a reflective essay. The choreographic assignment required students to contribute towards the creation of a dance piece that was performed and assessed at the end of the unit. The dance technique classes, which supported the choreographic assignment, were continuously assessed on a week-to-week basis and concluded with a moderation session at the end of the term. The reflective essay was informed by the technique classes and in this piece of writing, the students were expected to analyse an aspect of their technique or performance practice.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the students were informed about the action research before it commenced and were given the opportunity to decide whether they gave their consent to participate[91]. At this stage in the research, I was fairly inexperienced as an action researcher and consequently, had not given particularly extensive consideration towards the way in which I introduced the study to the students. During Cycle One, this part of the process

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[91] Please refer to Appendices 1 and 2 for an example participant information sheet and an example consent form, both of which were given to the students prior to the study commencing.

seemed like more of a formality rather than an opportunity to involve the students by discussing perceptions of dance technique and the teacher-student relationship. Instead, in an attempt to simply 'get through' this part of the process, I briefly talked about the focus of the study and handed out information sheets and consent forms. In retrospect, this was not a method that afforded a great deal of dialogue between us and as the research progressed, I gave more consideration towards how this aspect of the research process could enable a more open and fluid relationship from the outset, as discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Six.

Fortunately, all students were happy to contribute towards the research and were extremely generous in the process of doing so. However, it should be noted that due to the pre-existing power relationship, there is a possibility that some individuals felt obliged to participate since the research was being conducted by their teacher. This was a particular concern when analysing the focus group interview responses, since during Cycle One, I had approached specific students directly to ask them if they would agree to take part. After reflecting on this decision, in an attempt to minimise the effect of such power relationships, during Cycle Two, I asked for volunteers to participate in the focus group interview[92]. These are issues that I was mindful of throughout the research journey, particularly when analysing the video footage and focus group responses; again, this is examined in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapter Six.

Data collection methods

In this chapter, I examine the data gathered from the application of two specific pedagogical approaches: firstly, the use of specific reflective learning strategies and secondly, the use of the choreographic learning activity. The data collected includes video footage from all of the technique classes in Cycle One, transcriptions of discussions from this video footage, my own reflective journal entries and transcriptions of the focus group interview from 20th

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[92] The implications of this are discussed at length in Chapter Six when I explore the notion of creating a more transparent relationship between researcher and participants.

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March 2015[93]. The focus group interview was the only activity involving the students that took place outside normal class time. For this, I booked an alternative classroom space that was not a regular dance teaching space. This was based on the recommendation from McAteer (2013) that choosing a more neutral space to conduct interviews and/or focus group interviews can be a useful way of minimising the influence of pre-existing power relationships. In addition, McAteer (ibid) proposes that positioning the group members and the discussion facilitator in a circle can help to reduce the sense of hierarchy, especially when it is a teacher who is conducting the discussion. This was a further recommendation that I also considered when designing the layout of the room and choosing where to place the camera in relation to the participants.

I selected seven participants based on gender, age and programme of study, with the idea of bringing a diverse range of students together who would offer a range of perspectives. As discussed earlier, after reflecting on the outcomes of this discussion, this recruitment strategy was something that I reconsidered during Cycle Two. The interview participants (using pseudonyms) were[94]:

- Roxanne: female, age 21 and studying a combined honours route of Dance with English.
- Ruth: female, age 19 and studying a single honours route of Dance.
- Sarah: female, age 19 and studying a single honours route of Dance.
- Rory: male, age 19 and studying a single honours route of Dance.
- Kiera: female, age 20 and studying a combined honours route of Dance with English.
- Poppy: female, age 19 and studying a single honours route of Dance.
- Callum: male, age 18 and studying a single honours route of Dance.

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[93] As the data collected was extensive, for the purposes of this chapter, I examine a selection of each form data in order to respond to the key themes that emerged from the research. The reader can view a full transcription of the focus group interview, which is attached as Appendix 5.

[94] Please note that at times, the participants refer to the names of other lecturers on the Dance programme and consequently, I replace real names with 'Lecturer A' and so on.

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During cycles one and two, the students who participated in the focus group interview were representative of a typical cohort of dance students at MMU. For example, students generally came from lower to middle class backgrounds and were often the first member of their family to study at university[95]. This had interesting implications with regards to the students' sense of self-esteem and the way in which they perceived their ability as dancers, as explored later in Chapter Six.

Holland and Elander (2013: online) suggest that a focus group is a useful data collection tool when the project is about investigating shared understandings, or group processes, rather than one individual's understandings or beliefs. Due to the shared environment of the dance technique class, despite the recruitment strategy used in this cycle, the focus group interview proved to be a useful way to engage in dialogue with the students about their perceptions of dance technique and their experiences of engaging with reflection. During the discussion, I adopted a researcher/moderator role that according to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) involves actively contributing by asking general, rather than specific questions, and probing deeper when necessary. According to Holland and Elander (2013: online) it is the role of the moderator to reflect the group consensus by regularly summarising what has been said and pointing out where participants appear to agree or disagree, something that I tried to do as frequently as possible throughout the activity.

My technical dance 'style' during this cycle
As explored in Chapter Two, the movement content and underlying values of classical ballet, modern and postmodern dance techniques have been largely constructed around the pedagogical approaches that have been used to teach them. Such approaches have enabled dance techniques to be passed on from one generation to the next, resulting in the perpetuation of dominant pedagogical discourses that still continue to prevail (Dragon 2015; Stinson, 2015). While it could be said that classical ballet and modern dance forms

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[95] I know this from my former role as Programme Leader for the BA Hons Dance programme, during which I regularly engaged with the university's admissions processes and therefore had access to recruitment statistics and data.

have been predominantly constructed around authoritarian teaching approaches that force bodies to conform to an ideal, some postmodern dance forms could be viewed as countering this ideology due to the emphasis on less codified forms of movement, improvisation and synergies with somatic practices. Consequently, from a pedagogical perspective, postmodern dance forms are generally viewed as facilitating a more democratic learning environment (Burnidge, 2012; Dryburgh and Jackson, 2016; Dryburgh, 2018) as opposed to the authoritarian learning environment that is associated with traditional western theatre dance forms. Some dance scholars dispute this idea by suggesting that when taught from a somatic and/or democratic perspective, classical ballet and modern dance forms can operate as open systems of learning through which students can develop and exercise agency (Hanstein, 1990; Dyer, 2009; Ritchie and Brooker, 2019). However, as explored in Chapter Three, unless students are aware of and able to question the underlying value systems of the teaching approaches being used, much like classical ballet and modern dance, postmodern dance forms that are taught from a somatic perspective could be viewed as yet another authoritative discourse that constructs teachers' and students' bodies in a specific way.

Probably, like most teachers of contemporary dance technique, the style of technique I have tended to deliver has drawn on my own embodiment of the techniques I have learned throughout my career. Much of my early educational experiences in dance were focused on classical ballet and jazz. Consequently, a large part of my habitus is constructed through engagement with these dance forms; certainly, I am aware of the particular alignment and patterns of classical ballet that are deeply entrenched within my nervous system and still continue to inform my moving identity over ten years after I stopped practicing ballet on a regular basis. Later on in my education, my body incorporated modern and postmodern dance techniques such as Cunningham, Hawkins and Contact Improvisation; my habitus inevitably shifted to accommodate these different, albeit sometimes conflicting ways of moving. Consequently, the technique class I have typically taught has never focused on one particular dance technique since I have always viewed myself as being somewhat of a 'bricolage' of different styles. Discussing the notion of 'bricolage' in an artistic context,

Nelson (2006: 109) describes how new insights can be acquired by examining the contrasting relationship between different forms, a process that requires 'deliberate and careful juxtaposition'. This is an interesting idea to consider in relation to the moving identity of the dancer, who, it could be said, mobilises agency to move between different technical discourses, acquiring her own internal discourse through this process; this is an idea that I explore in more detail later on in this chapter.

During the observations of practice that I conducted during this study, one teacher[96] actually asked me what dance technique I taught to the students on the programme at MMU; at the time, I found myself unable to answer this question and felt quite destabilised by it. However, on reflection, the interdisciplinarity of my approach was not something I had given much thought towards and was in fact something that I had previously taken for granted. In the same way that I do not align myself with one particular pedagogical perspective[97], perhaps the same can be said about my own moving identity: I do not perceive myself as belonging to a single technical 'camp' but rather as an agent that has incorporated a range of different technical aesthetics into my body-mind.

This perspective on dance technique is also likely to be indicative of the broader approach to dance technique at MMU that I not only experienced as a member of staff working at the university, but also as an undergraduate Community Arts and Dance student and a postgraduate Masters student, over the period between 2004 and 2011. During my time at the university, both as a student and a member of staff, dance technique was generally perceived to support and inform the other areas of a student's dance practice. Dance technique classes tended to be located within units that had a broader choreographic or performance focus, rather than as an independent unit of study. Technique was still an assessable element, but the grade earned contributed towards an overall mark for the unit. This programme design aimed to enable students to draw connections between the different areas of their practice as well as supporting the integration of theory and practice,

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[96] This particular teacher delivered classes in the style of the Limón dance technique.
[97] For example, as only teaching from a somatic perspective, or as only teaching from a reflective perspective.

which as discussed in Chapter Four, is an idea that was of particular importance within the Contemporary Arts Department due to world leading research in the area of Practice as Research and interdisciplinarity[98]. This contrasts with the dominant model that I encountered in most of the universities where I conducted observations of practice. Here, programmes took a more traditional approach that seemed to reflect that of a conservatoire training model. For example, dance technique was taught as a single module or a collective of modules that had a specific focus such as 'Cunningham Technique' or 'Ballet Technique' and so on. It was not until I went out into the field to conduct these observations that I realised how much I had been shaped by the learning culture at MMU. Where I had assumed that an interdisciplinary approach would be commonplace across the HE dance sector, I quickly realised that this was not necessarily how other dance courses were operating. As such, this experience exposed me to what I had been taking for granted, shifting my perspective on my own learning experiences and teaching practice.

Within the DP1 unit (the location of this action research), the choreographic assignment focused on the work of Merce Cunningham, examining his chance approaches to creating performances. As such, somewhat contradicting what I have just said about interdisciplinarity, in order to enable students to experience Cunningham's work in a more holistic way, I decided to make the technique class largely Cunningham-based, incorporating only some aspects of other technical styles. On reflection, although this was not a deliberate decision for the purposes of the action research, it was an interesting choice since it differed to my usual approach to teaching technique, which tended to be more eclectic. This choice resulted in some surprising research findings regarding the way in which students responded to particular activities in the class environment, as well as how they perceived my teaching approach in comparison to their other learning experiences on the programme. Although this did not become apparent until I examined the data gathered from Cycle One, it was a finding that strongly informed the decisions I made for the second cycle as discussed in this chapter and in Chapter Six.

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[98] As evident in the research of Robin Nelson (2006, 2013) whose influential accounts of PaR were built on academic practices taking place in the department he worked in and led for much of his career.

Before signposting the reader to a video montage of excerpts with examples of my technical dance style throughout Cycle One, it is worth pointing out again that the aim of the dance technique class is for all students to embody the same movements of a given dance technique. This results in all individuals moving at the same time and in the same way[99], a choreographic approach known as 'unison'. Conforming to a dominant way of moving is an interesting idea to consider in relation to the notion of mobilising agency, since the two ideas could be viewed as somewhat contradictory. In the analysis that follows in this chapter, I explore how students were able to mobilise agency within the constraints of the dominant technique, by using reflection to encourage critical engagement with the dance movements being learned and, thus, to uncover a further layer of knowledge. The video montage of my technical dance style during Cycle One can be viewed here: https://vimeo.com/507060046.

Analysis: Reflective learning strategies

The challenge of embedding and normalising reflection

As discussed in the thesis introduction, a key aim of this PhD study is to question the assumption that dance students automatically understand how to reflect on their learning. Although the ability to be reflective is frequently regarded as a key skill in higher education, the actual teaching of reflection is often viewed as secondary to the act of reflecting itself (Ryan, 2015). Therefore, how do educators ensure that students are equipped with the skills to effectively reflect on their practice? In light of these ideas, a central focus during this cycle was to embed cognitive reflection into the dance technique class as a way of enabling students to develop and exercise agency; what I did not realise at the beginning of Cycle One was the extent to which this reflective activity would challenge the underlying doxa of the technique class, as discussed later. Resonating with the research of dance scholars Doughty and Stevens (2002), to counter the assumption that students can simply be sent away to reflect, the aim was to normalise cognitive reflection and make it part of the pre-

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[99] This teaching approach is grounded in the traditional conservatoire training model for dance, which aims to produce multiple versions of the same dancer, as discussed in Chapter Two.

existing learning culture, rather than viewing it as an activity that only happened in private outside class time. As discussed earlier, three key reflective learning strategies were implemented during Cycle One and these were as follows:

- Peer feedback activities.
- Group/whole class discussions.
- Maintaining personal reflective journals.

My initial presumption was that integrating these activities alongside regular dance technique practice would be straightforward since I had often made time for reflective activities within my general teaching practice. However, when I began to reflect on this action more deeply, I became much more aware of its counter cultural nature. As explored in Chapter Two, the customary practices of the dance technique class do not naturally align with the notion of being reflective. Firstly, the dominant perception of the dance technique class is that it is a private experience where talking is frowned upon; dancers focus on their own body and the teacher's body and the only voice heard is that of the teacher (Stinson, 2015). This kind of environment does not easily facilitate reflection, an activity that can often involve verbal discussions between individuals, as well as private thinking. Secondly, the purpose of dance technique training is often viewed as cultivating physical virtuosity. A key aspect of this is building one's physical fitness and stamina and therefore, it is not customary practice to interrupt the act of dancing in order to stop and reflect on one's dancing[100].

Resonating with the aforementioned ideas of Zarrilli (2009, 2020), the acts of dancing and reflecting require very different organisations of the bodily system. The act of dancing relies on exploring different forms, energies, and qualities with the body, shifting through space,

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[100] Certainly, this was the case in the majority of the observations of practice that I conducted, where I saw only two out of ten teachers using reflective learning methods as part of their pedagogical approach.

breathing, sweating and getting lost in the flow of the moment[101]. In contrast, the act of cognitive reflection relies on standing back from the event, slowing down and being stationary, often sitting down and giving something careful consideration by engaging in conversation or writing. The bodily organisation assumed when engaging in cognitive reflection is not the dominant state expected in a traditional dance technique class. This presented several questions for me both as a researcher who was trying to investigate a specific idea, and also as a Lecturer, who was aware of the broader ideological influences within the university, such as student satisfaction surveys, which are a powerful force in ensuring that a particular quality of student experience is being provided. Throughout the action research, there were many occasions when it seemed that these were two discourses that were running in parallel, yet continually at odds with each other.

In view of these ideas, as Cycle One progressed and I started to examine both mine and the students' behaviour more closely than I had previously, I became much more aware of the potential challenges of what I was doing, especially in relation to the notion of providing a perceived 'good' student experience. Although the students in this cycle did not comment on this directly, the notion of being a 'good' teacher was something that I began to question about my own teaching practice, often leading to periods of uncertainty around what I was doing. As discussed in Chapter Four, the vulnerability and insecurity of the action researcher is a key idea in much writing on action research (McAteer, 2013: McNiff, 2013). The general view is that this is a normal part of the research process, since any form of disruption in an environment that has otherwise operated in accordance with specific rules of engagement will inevitably lead to periods of uncertainty and messiness (McNiff, 2013). Thus, it becomes the action researcher's job to hold and maintain the space while trusting that some sense of order will evolve from the mess (ibid).

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[101] It could be said that there are synergies between this way of being and Csikszentmihalyi's 'Flow Theory' (1975), which refers to a bodily state in which an individual is fully immersed within a specific activity.

Peer feedback activities: Reflexive-dialogical exchange

In this section, I examine the use of a specific peer learning activity known as 'peer feedback', which is a reflective learning strategy that was regularly used throughout Cycle One. According to Topping (2005: 631):

> Peer learning can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions. It involves people from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers helping each other to learn and learning themselves by so doing.

In relation to Topping's statement, in this action research, students were invited to help and support one another's learning by offering and receiving feedback from each other. They were frequently asked to engage in activities that involved partnering with a classmate and observing each other dancing. They were then encouraged to offer feedback on specific aspects of their partner's practice. As opposed to merely pointing out the 'positive' or 'negative' aspects of their partner's dancing, I attempted to encourage students to structure feedback in a critical way. This approach resonates with Ladyshewsky's (2013) model of engaged feedback, which in contrast to basic peer coaching, that is based on asking simple open-ended questions, engaged peer feedback 'is more evaluative and while it may involve open-ended questioning, peers offer direct positive and developmental feedback to their peer' (Ladyshewsky, 2013: 178). An example of this can be seen in the following video excerpt (https://vimeo.com/505840252) during which I invite the students to work with a partner and observe each other dancing. To ensure that the feedback offered is specific and not too broad, I ask the group to focus directly on the relationship between their partner's body and the ground during a floor-based sequence, analysing to what extent their partner appears able to release their weight to gravity. Following this exercise, I gave each pair a chance to share and discuss the feedback received from their partner. Two pairs then shared the key points from their discussion with the whole class. Since the point of the task was to enable students to offer feedback to each other, I did not offer any feedback to the students myself. However, I did provide a commentary to summarise what appeared to be

being said. For example:

> Student observing:
> From the exercise that we did at the start, I could tell she was focusing more on the rebound and on the fall.
>
> Rachel Rimmer-Piekarczyk:
> Was that something that you were kind of considering, Rebecca[102]?
>
> Student dancing:
> It felt a lot different. It felt like, before, I wasn't thinking of where my weight was going, it felt like I was getting stuck, like I could only go so far and that I was focusing more on my head moving than I was on my body. I think doing that exercise with the weight shift, makes you realise more that your body does actually move as well as your head. So it felt, the movement felt bigger.
>
> Rachel Rimmer-Piekarczyk:
> So the whole body was more involved in that movement. And also maybe, I think, from what you're saying, there's something about noticing where movement is initiated from. Because often I think we think that it's our head, but actually it's not and it's happening somewhere else in the body. So maybe, for you, that was quite useful in terms of kind of, checking in and identifying where's the initiator for the movement? That's really good.

In this discussion, there are three perspectives being offered: the external perspective of the student giving the feedback, the internal perspective of the student receiving the feedback, and the external perspective of me, the teacher, who was summarising and clarifying the feedback being shared. This dialogical discussion enables the student receiving the feedback to reflect on her practice through three different lenses. The observations that she makes concerning her ability to experience her body as more of an integrated whole demonstrates a high level of self-awareness. Through receiving these different forms of feedback, a process is facilitated through which the dancer can use the information provided to make astute observations about her practice, as demonstrated in the comments above. The feedback also informs her physical practice, allowing her to choose how she will

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[102] Note the use of a pseudonym.

respond to it when she revisits the movements. These processes could be said to enable the dancer to acquire greater control over her practice and, thus, greater levels of agency.

Because of its emphasis on shared, dialogical learning, peer feedback is often viewed as an effective way to facilitate an individual's development (Topping, 2005). In the comments from the student receiving the feedback above, it is evident that there is an enabling nature to this process. The student reports directly on obvious shifts in her dancing that would otherwise not have occurred. Indeed, it could be said that this could be the case whether the feedback was delivered by a peer or the teacher. However, when viewing the relationship between self and other, there is also an argument to suggest that peer feedback can be equally as hindering as it is enabling. When engaging in peer feedback activities, the self is momentarily defined by the gaze of the other. In Sartre's (1957) concept of the body as 'theft', the self can never perceive her own body in the same way as the other. According to Sartre (1957: 351), she is 'utilized and known by the Other' as an 'object', a process that could result in 'the death of my [her] possibilities' (1957: 271)[103]. Since students may not have the same level of experience in viewing dance technique practice as a teacher, the ability to offer useful feedback on a dancer's practice may be more limited. Thus, peer feedback activities also have the potential to limit movement development if the student is restricted by her peer's perception of her. This may in turn have negative implications in relation to the mobilisation of agency. Although there were no discussions relating to the idea of peer feedback being limiting during this cycle of action research, it was something that I made an effort to be aware of when analysing the examples of peer feedback that were shared within the group.

According to Ladyshewsky, dialogical exchanges between peers can also enable learners to reflect on what they are learning and to discuss how this relates to their pre-existing

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[103] Ehrenberg (2010) explores the complexity of the self-other relationship in the contemporary dance technique class by examining the use of the mirror. Drawing on the ideas of Parviainen (1998), she proposes that the dancer's image in the mirror presents itself as a form of 'other' that may limit or indeed, conflict with the dancer's perspective of herself. However, it is through these limitations and conflictions that the dancer constructs her identity.

knowledge. He states:

> The advantage of peer feedback and engagement in this process is that it is a safe way to resolve discrepancies and to further increase knowledge. This is due to the feedback being peer-based, as it does not come from a supervisor or instructor who often possesses evaluative power over the learner.

(Ladyshewsky, 2013: 176)

In relation to these ideas, peer feedback can be viewed as a key strategy for disrupting the underlying doxa of the dance technique class. In a setting that has been traditionally dominated by the teacher, peer feedback involves a more democratic approach to learning by enabling students to offer feedback to each other, asking questions that they may not feel comfortable to ask the teacher and acquiring knowledge in collaboration with each other. There can be several positive outcomes from this, as evident in the student responses above, which show that the students involved were able to make key observations about their practice, all with limited guidance from the teacher. These findings directly challenge the prevailing notion that the teacher must be the sole provider of knowledge in the dance technique class.

While peer feedback is generally viewed as a positive addition to most learning settings, in the social field of the dance technique class, there is an additional argument that could challenge this perspective. In an environment that has traditionally positioned the teacher as the most powerful and knowledgeable person in the room, it is possible that some students may view peer feedback as insignificant. In Chapter Two, I explored the notion of acquiring physical capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in the dance technique class; thus, it could be said that feedback from the teacher is viewed as one way of acquiring physical capital since it demonstrates that the teacher is offering her attention to the student and literally shaping her with her knowledge, thus, making her into a 'better' dancer. As such, while dance teachers may view peer feedback as a strategy for enabling students, students themselves may only place value on feedback offered by the teacher since she is the one with the greatest amount of power. In this action research, this power was reinforced by virtue of

the fact that it was the teacher who assessed the students' technique practice and awarded them with a grade; these are all important factors in the acquisition of physical capital. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter Three, several dance scholars have documented the benefits of peer feedback in relation to dance technique education. The majority of these studies suggest that peer feedback was generally well received by the students. This may have been because the feedback was of a formative nature and did not contribute towards any summative modes of assessment, as was the case in this action research. These are ideas that exist in tension with each other and consequently, during Cycles One and Two, I tried to be aware of both the enabling and potentially hindering aspects of utilising peer feedback strategies to ensure that nothing was taken for granted.

Group/whole class discussions: Navigating the internal and external worlds
Group discussions were used in most technique classes as a way to comment and reflect on the act of dancing, both one's own experience of dancing and also of observing others dancing. These discussions were an additional way of determining the levels of the students' reflections and also their capacity to display agency through their cognitive thinking processes. For example, as preparation for the session on the 24th February 2015, I invited the students to look back on the written reflections recorded in their reflective journals over the course of the term[104]. As part of this reflective task, I asked the students to identify where they spoke about the feedback they had received from another person, where they spoke about feeling the movements in their bodies and where they spoke about watching themselves dancing on video footage. By encouraging the students to draw on these different viewpoints, the aim was to cultivate a form of reflection that enabled a dialogical relationship between the internal and external perspectives of the self.

During the session on 24th February, I asked the students to talk with a partner and share any insights gathered from engaging in this process. This then opened out into a broader

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[104] All students were encouraged to keep reflective journals, as discussed earlier in this chapter. At the beginning of Cycle One, I asked the students to write down three personal goals or areas for development that they hoped to achieve within their dance technique practice.

group discussion where some individuals shared useful reflections on their practice. For example, one student made the following comment:

> I said that I wanted to improve my technique – to express myself freely, but then like, also be able to control everything I'm doing. So like, to improve my core is a big thing, so I've done that, and I've seen a big improvement in like, the way I travel through the space, all my transitions between movements are a lot smoother now. Whether it is, I don't know, but it feels like it. I think my balance was quite off when we first came here, so my core has been a, improving my core has been a big part of getting to where I am now. And like, the lessons were like focusing on different parts of the body, so like lengthening, and feeling space between the joints, or like energy all the way through to the finger tips. It's all helping me to make my technique a lot better.

This student places a lot emphasis on the internal 'felt' sense of her body, indicating that this is a useful source of information for her. She comments on several areas of development: exploring the relationship between freedom and control in movement, core stability, balance and transitions; all of which are key ideas within contemporary dance technique. Returning to the ideas explored in Chapter One, to reflect on one's practice offering this level of detail could be considered as what Schön (1983, 1987) refers to as examining the inner workings of one's practice and to extract tacit knowledge. Thus, it could be said that when the emphasis is only placed on embodying specific movement forms that are viewed from an external perspective, as is the case within the dominant pedagogical discourses, the opportunity to turn inwards, towards oneself is missed. Although it could be argued that this is one of the purposes of somatic-based pedagogical approaches, without opportunities for reflection, like the example given here, valuable, implicit details such as these have the potential to go unnoticed and may never be made explicit in the way that Schön describes.

When I asked the group about what it was like to reflect on their practice in this way, the same student made the following comment:

> I think it was nice to find out that I had actually improved on what I wanted to. So a lot of the time, normally before coming here, I'd say, Yeh, I'll improve on this. But then, a few months later, I haven't done anything towards that. But like here, I don't know, I just, I have actually improved. And it's nice to look back and go, actually yeh, and I feel better for it.

This comment suggests that prior to studying dance at university, this student may have been encouraged to set herself goals, but was not necessarily provided with the appropriate support to measure her progress towards achieving them; it is unlikely that she showed no improvement, but rather was not given opportunities to notice her improvement. If this is an accurate interpretation of her comment, then it reaffirms the idea that students are often asked to engage with tasks of this nature but then left alone to reflect on their progress in private. Thus, without the appropriate support from a tutor, reflection can become rather useless and superficial, meaning that students then find it difficult to see its value. By acknowledging that this reflective activity had been useful for her, the student shows some awareness of the outer workings of her practice (Schön, 1983, 1987) and the shifts that have occurred as a result of the particular conditions of the external learning environment. Consequently, this comment demonstrates a very developed level of agency in the sense that the student shows some awareness of the influence of the external environment and an ability to direct her own learning in relation to it.

Offering a different perspective, another student made the following comment:

> I think it's nice to see the difference, because I think sometimes, I know I do it, you put yourself down. Like, especially with some of the technique, because I see some people's turnout's like that (gestures outwardly with her hands) and mine's like that (gestures inwardly with her hands) and it's hardly even turnout. But, to think if you look back, even though you put yourself down, you're at the back and you think, even though it might not be a massive improvement, a bit like what Jen[105] was saying, it's still an improvement. And I think even the smallest improvement for some people, is a big, especially with me because I've never done this before, so the slightest thing for me, is a big satisfaction.

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[105] Note the use of a pseudonym.

In this comment, there is evidence that this student predominantly draws upon external perspectives to reflect on her practice. She makes much reference to comparing herself to her peers and using this to gauge her development. This may indicate that she merely perceives herself as a subject of the external environment, as opposed to having an awareness of the external environment and then using the information offered internally to negotiate its influence. While aspiring to meet external ideals and comparing oneself to others could be considered as characteristics that are cultivated by the dominant pedagogical discourses, the fact that this student has been provided with an opportunity to reflect on her tendency to do this could be viewed as the beginning of developing agency. Not only this, but her actual observations are very astute and her ability to acknowledge that changes in her practice, which may initially seem small, actually have significant consequences; this is a mature and insightful observation. Again, this resonates with the ideas of Schön in the sense that the student could be viewed as uncovering insider knowledge about her practice that would otherwise go unnoticed, thus, making her tacit knowledge explicit. Echoing Schön's ideas, in my personal reflection from 12th February 2015, I comment on the notion of enabling the students to gain an understanding of the 'how' of their practice, as well as of the 'that':

> I start to see that what I'm trying to do is create space in my classes for more of these conversations and exchanges, observations and discussions to happen. It's important to me that in amongst all the adrenaline of the technique class, my students get a chance to speak, and they get an opportunity to talk about what, why and how they are doing what they're doing.

Reflective journals: Managing different body-mind states

As discussed earlier, at the beginning of Cycle One, the students were invited to keep reflective journals for personal use as a way of measuring their progress within the unit. Since the students' dance technique practice informed the focus of the reflective essay, my idea was that the journal should function as a private repository to document thoughts and observations both during class time and in their own time. As such, the students were encouraged to bring their journals to every session and to have them close by in case they

should wish to record something. They were also used to respond to specific reflective tasks, as discussed later. Although I did make it clear to the students that this was the purpose of the journals, the actual act of writing in them during the class itself opened up some unexpected questions for me, as explored later on.

The journals were neither assessed within the unit or used as a source of data in this PhD study. However, although I was not examining the content of the students' journals directly, I wanted to include them in the discussion around reflective learning strategies because in some ways, they proved to be the one of the most counter cultural learning approaches used within the action research. Compared to the other strategies that were used (peer feedback activities, group discussion activities), which maintain an interactive and dialogical relationship between individuals, the physical act of writing in a journal is possibly the most far removed from typical practice in the dance technique class and, thus, seemed to command the biggest shift between body-mind states. As an undergraduate dance student myself, I recall being asked by certain teachers to write in a journal during practical dance classes, including technique classes. I do remember that this felt rather alien to me as it was something I had never been previously asked to do. However, as time went on, I came to accept it as part of the learning culture. Consequently, it is something I have continued to do in my own dance classes, never really questioning it until conducting this action research.

My attempts at understanding how best to facilitate the shift between dancing and writing was something I regularly tussled with in my own journal entries. For example, on 24th February 2015 I wrote:

> *I worry that my class is clunky and doesn't flow well when moving from one activity to the next. Sometimes it seems as though I lose the students' attention during the reflective moments, especially when writing is involved and I ask them to sit down and turn their attention towards something else other than dancing. It seems hard to come back to the body from this.*

Although switching between the different body-mind states sometimes felt clunky, it was not something that the students themselves commented on during Cycle One. However, it was something that I was constantly questioning. This could have been because I was aware that for many Level Four students, writing was not necessarily typical practice in a technique class and consequently, I became almost hyper-aware of it. By going against the doxa established by the dominant pedagogical discourses, I worried that I was not providing a 'good' student experience by relentlessly pushing the students to their physical limits for the full two hours. This returns to Dragon's (2015) notion of the silent perpetuation of pedagogical discourses; for me as the teacher, I had no difficulty in seeing the value of the journal writing activities in relation to the broader development of the students' practice[106], but perhaps this was less obvious for them, especially since I did not explicitly ask them about their experience of writing in the journals. Although I had tried to make the purpose of the journals clear at the beginning of the action research, to maintain a dialogue between the students and me, in retrospect, it would have been useful to ask the students about their actual perception of this reflective activity.

The fact that the written reflections were accepted as part of the usual class activities may also indicate something about the students' willingness to conform to the doxa. Much like I came to accept it as the 'norm' as a student myself, perhaps it was the same for these individuals. Later on, in this chapter, I analyse a selection of the focus group interview responses from Cycle One and explore the notion that dance students adapt to different rules of engagement depending on who is teaching them. In one sense, although the students in this cycle seemed willing to participate in the reflective activities, this raises a question concerning why they seemed happy to do this. Was it because they perceived it as a requirement of the learning environment that I had established? From this perspective, although reflection is intended to be an empowering activity, by failing to give the students an opportunity to comment on their perceptions of it, perhaps I was unintentionally forcing

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[106] This value was also reflected in the grades awarded for the students' reflective essays, which incidentally happened to be much stronger than the previous year group.

them to conform to my expectations as opposed to enabling them to view the learning method from a critical perspective.

In relation to this idea, one activity that I developed was titled 'Reflective Tags' and involved laying out a collection of postal tags on the floor, each one with a different question or prompt that I had written on the back[107]. Each student had an opportunity to choose a tag and write a response to the question in their journal. The idea was to assist the students with writing their reflective essay assignments by encouraging them to articulate their experiences of dancing in the form of writing. This activity would sometimes initiate further reflection in the form of a group discussion. When reflecting on the use of this method at the end of Cycle One, it occurred to me that it was possibly the least dialogical strategy that I had employed. Firstly, I did not have access to the students' written reflections that were developed in response to this task. Therefore, although this task sometimes initiated broader group discussions, the ability to engage in a discussion with the students about their thinking processes was limited. Secondly, I was the one who had developed the questions on the tags and this could be viewed as imposing a structure onto the students, not dissimilar to that of a codified dance technique. In retrospect, it may have been more empowering for the students had we developed the questions together, thus, offering them a greater sense of ownership over the activity. So, despite all of my efforts to develop a dialogical learning culture and to be critical of my teaching practice, this particular activity demonstrated that even with the best intentions, one is still capable of unintentionally submitting to the power of the doxa.

Analysis: Choreographic learning activity

Acknowledging the power of the doxa

As discussed earlier, the choreographic learning activity was designed to give the students an opportunity to influence the direction of the technique class, rather than me being solely responsible for directing the class activities. As opposed to only teaching movement

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[107] Refer to Appendix 6 for photographs of the tags.

material that had come from my own body, I wanted to give the students an opportunity to have input into the class material, thus, allowing them to develop a sense of ownership. The activity required students to work together in small groups to create a phrase of movement that was based on one of four technical movement principles. Adapted from the fundamental movement skills proposed by Kimmerle and Côte-Laurence (2003), the technical movement principles were:

- Transfer of weight.
- Rotation.
- Control of centre.
- Elevation.

In the first session of Cycle One on 12th January 2015, I delivered a session that took an explorative approach to introducing each movement principle. Rather than taking the form of a typical technique class, this session operated as a creative workshop that allowed the students to explore each movement principle through improvisation tasks and games. It was a deliberate decision to structure the session in this way as I was keen to give the students an opportunity to develop non-codified responses to the four movement principles; my thinking was that as well as supporting the students' technical development, this approach might help the work they were doing in the choreographic part of the unit. As well as this, I had a focus on challenging the dominant 'teacher as expert' model by conveying the idea that there can be alternative methods for learning and embodying the movements of dance techniques, which do not rely solely on imitating the teacher's body. Such methods could be playful and explorative, countering the dominant perception that dance technique is only concerned with achieving a 'correct' way of doing something (Dyer, 2009; Stanton, 2011). Following the introductory session, the idea was that each week, the students would work independently in their groups to choose one of the four principles and create a short technical dance phrase in response to it. Each group would then have an opportunity to teach their phrase to the rest of the class and gradually, we would build an extended dance

phrase that combined the phrases of every group.

Doxic understandings and agreements

Despite taking a more creative approach to introducing each technical movement principle, when viewing the phrases of each group, it became apparent that some groups were drawing heavily upon the codified movements that formed most of the exercises and sequences elsewhere in the technique class. Where I had assumed the students would see this activity as an opportunity to 'cut loose' and get creative, for most students, their technical histories and current perceptions of what they understood to be 'dance technique' proved to be heavily influential. With further reference to the ideas of Foucault (1977, 1981) and Bourdieu (1977), although I was not aware of having placed any limitations around the kind of movements that were 'acceptable' within the context of the task, it became apparent to me that the discursive practices of my dance class had communicated clear ideas regarding the types of movements one should expect to see in a contemporary dance technique class. In this sense, the actions of the bodies in the social field, including my own, had generated a doxic understanding that determined what was, and was not customary practice within the technique class. As explored in Chapter Two, this doxa is reinforced by the discursive practices that students will have encountered elsewhere in their dance education, such as in private dance schools, college settings and also through popular culture, each contributing towards the preservation of the dominant discourses. As Deer (2012: 115) points out, '*Doxa* refers to pre-reflexive intuitive knowledge shaped by experience, to unconscious inherited physical and relational pre-dispositions'; thus, in a dance technique class context, it is through these pre-reflexive, pre-dispositions that doxic understandings are formed.

In my personal reflection from the session on 20th January 2015, I comment on my surprise that the first group to undertake this task chose to choreograph their 'elevation' phrase in

the style of a grand allegro[108] from classical ballet:

> *The thing that surprised me the most, was that the group had chosen elevation as their focus and they had created something that came from the corner, down a diagonal trajectory. Why was I surprised by this? Most technique classes (or certainly mine) teach grand allegro sequences travelling from the corner. Clearly the group had made that association themselves and had thought this would be the best (or right?) way to create and deliver the material.*

This reflection reveals two things; at this point in my teaching career, it is likely that I was following a similar formula to the creation and delivery of my technique material as I had observed as a student myself. Therefore, if my jumping sequences were presented in the style of a grand allegro, then it is understandable that the students would adopt the same approach. This illustrates how easily specific teaching approaches can be perpetuated within dance education. In addition, it highlights the powerful influence that the teacher has within the dance technique class setting and how, together with the students, particular rules of engagement are developed, which teacher and students may not be consciously aware of but subconsciously reinforce. In this sense, teacher and students could be said to enter into a 'doxic agreement' with each other; such an agreement manages what can be understood and determines what the acceptable codes of behaviour in a given field are.

Resonating with these ideas, the following video extract contains footage from the choreographic learning activity discussed above: https://vimeo.com/507676413. The extract shows the three members of the trio who completed the task on 20th January teaching their 'elevation' phrase to the rest of the class. In this footage, it becomes evident that the chosen movement style of this trio is particularly ballet orientated, something that I questioned them about during a reflective group discussion later on in the class: https://vimeo.com/507050384. During this discussion, one member of the trio says that the decision to use movements from the classical ballet vocabulary was not a conscious one and

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[108] Grand allegro refers to a category of movements in ballet that involves a series of large jumps that travel around the room, usually beginning from the corner and travelling on a diagonal trajectory.

that it 'just happened'. She states:

> We just thought of what types of moves would, like, be good for elevation, and then we just put them all together.

As discussed in Chapter Two, classical ballet is constructed around the notion of defying gravity; this is realised through the bodily actions of 'pull up', which requires pulling the torso into a lengthened alignment, dancing on pointe shoes, gravity defying lifts and jumps (or allegro). With this in mind, during this discussion I suggested that perhaps this group had made an unconscious association between ballet and elevation, thus, causing them to choose this movement vocabulary. No comment was made in response to this idea, but as discussed in Chapter Three, during the focus group interview from 20th March 2015, when asked about their perceptions of dance technique, one participant did comment on the position that ballet seemed to have in relation to other western dance techniques, suggesting that ballet stood out more than any other technique[109]. This implies that for some students, there is a hierarchy of dance techniques and classical ballet is located at the top. This then presents a challenge when attempting to question the pedagogies of classical ballet, since some students may view them as having the most importance.

In retrospect, I regret directing this group towards the pedagogical approach of splitting off into three groups, each with a different leader. Watching it back, it feels as though I am pushing them towards an approach that is quite traditional whereas they may have had another idea for how best to teach their phrase. It would have been much more interesting, and perhaps telling, to allow them to choose how they delivered the material, possibly revealing something about the way they perceived the role of the technique teacher and their ideas regarding the most effective, or expected way of teaching a phrase of technique movement to a group of individuals. On the other hand, they may have done something completely unexpected, thus, challenging my assumptions. This was an observation that I

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[109] See page 105.

took forward into the second cycle of research.

Negotiating the rules of engagement

In contrast to the group discussed in the previous section, during the following session on 27th January 2015, the trio who completed the choreographic learning activity required no direction from me with regards to taking control of the group and teaching their material: https://vimeo.com/507053363. I did not actually have an opportunity to interject before one group member took control of the class and organised everyone into pairs to try an experiment that involved falling on and off balance, an exercise they had developed to explore the movement skill of 'control of centre'. This was an innovative and engaging way to introduce the phrase and the movement concept being explored. However, it could be said that this confidence came from being the second group to attempt the task. A precedence had already been set by way of me taking control of the first group and communicating the 'right' way of teaching a dance technique phrase. With that said, the more explorative nature of this group's pedagogical approach aligned more closely with the one I took in the introductory session on 12th January. This demonstrates that this group may have reflected on this and taken it as licence to be more playful with their method for introducing their chosen movement principle. Again, this illustrates the power of the doxa, since although this group could be perceived as being more agential through their decision to adopt a non-traditional pedagogical approach (at least in the initial stage of the task), they are still conforming to the rules set in the introductory session. Although the introductory session had different rules of engagement to that of a traditional technique class, they were still rules, which communicated a particular message to the students, that being that it is OK to be playful within the context of a technique class[110].

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[110] All of these instances demonstrate the social and cultural nature of dance and the idea that particular dance settings communicate expected codes of behaviour to participants. This is explored by Cynthia Novak (1990) who examines how dancers, in the context of contact improvisation, behave in response to the social conditions of the dance environment and communicate these codes of behaviour to each other through their dancing.

Poppy was a member of this trio and also participated in the focus group on 20th March 2015. During the discussion, she offered a reflection that resonated with the notion of conforming to different rules of engagement depending on the specific setting:

> We go into different classes with kind of different heads on. I don't know, you all have completely different styles, and you kind of go in with that lecturer's kind of style in you.

This comment is highly perceptive and could be said to display agency; not only does Poppy recognise that different learning environments require her to follow different rules, but she notices that her own behaviour changes in response to a particular setting. This demonstrates a high level of awareness regarding the way in which the external environment influences her actions; in this sense, Poppy could be said to have an understanding of how the doxa, which is constructed by the normalised practices of the dance technique class, and the social agents that participate in the class, instruct her body to behave in a certain way, thus, contributing towards the shaping of her habitus and moving identity. Not only this, but Poppy is aware that each class operates according to a different doxic agreement and that the agreement is formed through the lecturer's communication of her 'style', and the student's compliance to agree to the 'style' being proposed.

Contradicting this view, the actual movement content of this group's phrase seemed resonant of Doris Humphrey's concept of fall and recovery, which underpins her modern dance technique (Legg, 2011). This suggests that although this group did not adopt a balletic aesthetic, they still worked within the constraints of the dominant pedagogical discourses[111]. As discussed in Chapter Two, the dominant discourses are predominantly constructed around the aesthetics of classical ballet and modern dance and taught using the

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[111] There is of course an argument to suggest that this would only be the case if the group were aware of the Humphrey technique. To illustrate this idea, as a teenager, I learned the contraction and release movements from Graham Technique as part of the generic 'Modern Dance' syllabus taught at my local dancing school. However, at the time, I was not aware that this is what I was learning. Hence, it could be a similar situation for the students in the example given, thus demonstrating how dominant ideas are perpetuated within dance education, but students are often not aware of their underpinning origins or values.

traditional 'teacher as expert' model, which is the approach that this group took during the second half of the activity. With that said, just because a student may appear to work within the constraints of the dominant discourse, it does not mean to say that she displays a lack of agency. Thus, it could be said that acquiring and mobilising agency involves having an awareness of the discourses at play and deciding how one will negotiate them; in this sense, new discourses can be developed through the dancer's ability to construct her own internal discourse by drawing on what is available to her within the constraints of the doxa. This conception of agency resonates with the ideas explored in Chapter Two concerning Roche's (2011, 2015) notion of embodying multiplicity. When viewed from this perspective, this group could be said to display a very developed sense of agency through their ability to shift between traditional and non-traditional pedagogical discourses and indeed, to teach a more traditional dance technique from a non-traditional perspective.

Internal discourses, agency and power

The group who completed the choreographic learning task on 17th February 2015 based their phrase around the theme of 'rotation': https://vimeo.com/507057083. Interestingly, where the other two movement phrases examined earlier aligned quite clearly with established dance techniques, this phrase does not appear to be grounded in any one specific technique. It is quite form-based in its approach and resonates with ballet and Cunningham technique through the use of turnout and classical lines. Furthermore, the 'tossed' pelvis that is evident in the barrel jump shares similarities with the Hawkins dance technique. Out of all of the phrases presented, this one seemed most closely aligned with my own technical dance style and I could see inflections of my own aesthetic within it. Rory was a member of this group and also participated in the focus group on 20th March 2015. When asked about his approach to the choreographic learning task, he said the following:

> Because it [the task] was set by yourself, we kind of knew which way to do it. Like if Lecturer A said make a dance about rotation, it'd be different. Same with Lecturer B. So I think it depends what class it is and who's teaching it. It's similar to your style, the phrase we did, but then we kind of made it our own.

Like Poppy, Rory's reflection also conveys a sense of agency. Rory recognises that my technical dance style directly influenced his groups' approach to the choreography and had this task been set by another teacher, they probably would have created something entirely different. This reinforces what Poppy said about entering classes with a particular teacher's 'style in you' and conforming to the expectations and rules of the doxic agreement that is established with that teacher. Although Poppy and Rory were able to recognise this, the underlying reasons for complying with the rules of this unconscious understanding were never really explored within the discussion itself. This left me wondering why some students felt they had to stick to the rules so rigidly while others were more playful and, thus, to reflect on relations of power.

As explored in Chapter Four, conducting action research in an environment where there are established power dynamics at play, such as those between teacher and students, can mean that research participants do not feel able to be completely honest about their perspective on a specific issue for fear of being discriminated against. This focus group interview was conducted in the early stages of this study when I was more hesitant to directly question the students on specific ideas than I was in the later stages of the study. If I had the chance to conduct it again, I would make a point of probing the participants about why they felt as though they needed to behave in accordance with the doxic agreement and what might be gained by doing this. From my experiences of being a dance student myself, I am aware of the way in which dance classes can be a site for competition between individuals who strive for the teacher's praise. Therefore, conforming to a movement aesthetic that resonates with the one presented by the teacher could be seen as a way to acquire physical capital, consequently leading to higher marks and greater opportunities.

Certainly, this is not unknown within the dance education community and I know from experience that dance classes can often function as informal auditions for performance opportunities. One of my most significant performing opportunities came from being a

student in the class of a teacher who actually told me that I seemed to 'get' his movement style and therefore wanted to work with me in a professional capacity. It could be said that for those dancers who are aware of this discourse, they make a conscious decision to play into it. From a somatic perspective, this could be perceived as demonstrating a lack of agency as it involves conforming to an external ideal that has not evolved from one's own body, but is instead imposed upon one's body. Johnson (1992) proposes that this is a form of pleasing an outside authority; however, an alternative perspective could be that this does in fact display agency since the individual has an awareness of the doxa at play but makes the conscious decision to play by its rules. Perhaps, then, it is only by having an awareness of the rules in the first place that one is able to experiment with their flexibility.

As discussed in Chapter One, variation, innovation and resistance (Noland, 2009) are characteristics that are synonymous with agency. Therefore, for Rory, who says 'It's similar to your style, the phrase we did, but then we kind of made it our own', this approach could be considered highly agential since, not only does he play by the rules, but he bends them to meet his own requirements, ensuring that he conveys what he perceives as a sense of his own individuality; in this sense, the doxa becomes essential in Rory's process of mobilising agency. In relation to Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the internally persuasive discourse, it could be said that through assimilating aspects of the authoritative discourse with his own 'word' (Bakhtin, 1981: 345), Rory 'awakens new and independent words' (ibid) that contribute to the construction of his own moving identity.

Exploring the parameters of my authority

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the intention of the choreographic learning activity was to disrupt the notion that the technique teacher always has to be in control by allowing students to lead some of the class activities. However, while the students were teaching each other, there were occasions when I observed myself struggling to drop my 'teacher' hat or feeling unsure about what my own role within this process was. A key example is the instance discussed earlier in the chapter, where I described giving instructions to the first

group about how to teach their phrase. In this sense, although I had tried to afford the students with the power to take control, I then contradicted this and, as such, the majority of the power remained with me. This was something that I spent much time reflecting on after the event, contemplating what my input to the task should be. On many occasions I wondered where I should position myself in the room; should I sit out and observe? Should I join in and learn each phrase with the students? What messages do these different actions convey to the group? For example, in my journal reflection from 21st January 2015, I wrote:

> *What was interesting was that I found myself asking a lot of questions to myself about when I should input, when I should intervene, guide, direct etc. How long should I stand back for? I felt the students reached a point whereby they had reached their limit of the task. They were not forthcoming with giving the group more direction eg. regarding the technical aspects of the material…Is this because they don't have the knowledge, or is it because they feel they don't have the authority over the group to give directions of this nature?*

This comment suggests that there were occasions when I was also having difficulty understanding what the rules of engagement in this activity were. Given that disrupting the dominant pedagogical discourse can lead to uncertainty and vulnerability, it could be said that this was inevitable. However, in relation to the research conducted by Dragon (2015), had I perhaps been transparent with the students regarding my underlying motivations for conducting this learning activity, as well as my uncertainties about my own role within it, this may have facilitated more open discussions around some of the challenges that this task presented. This was something that I became more aware of as the action research progressed and certainly during Cycle Two, when I made more deliberate attempts to facilitate honest discussions of this nature.

By presenting an alternative to the 'teacher as expert' model during the introductory session, I had intended to convey the idea that there can be alternative methods for learning and embodying the movements of dance techniques. While one group appeared to play with this idea, most groups stuck to the dominant teacher as expert model. What is more, the movement choices made by the majority of groups were closely aligned to that of

my own technical dance style, indicating that although I perceived myself to have granted the group 'free will' to play with a whole range of movement responses, what I predominantly saw was a mirror image of my own technical aesthetic reflected back at me, generally taught using a traditional pedagogical approach. On the one hand, this reaffirms the power of the doxa in that it determines the behaviour that is, and is not acceptable within the social field. However, an alternative perspective could be that the students worked within the parameters of the doxa that they were participating in at that particular time. Thus, for those students who displayed the most developed levels of agency, they could be said to have played with the flexibility of the underlying rules of the doxic agreement in order to meet their own requirements and convey a sense of individuality, as discussed earlier.

Not only did this activity cause me to question the parameters of my own authority, but it was useful in relation to examining students' perceptions of dance technique. It also helped me to understand more about their experiences of being a dance student in an institution where there are several, sometimes conflicting doxas simultaneously at play. For example, Sarah, who participated in the focus group offered the following reflection:

> [in choreography] you feel like you can't really go wrong with it, because it's so broad, and like, anything you do is OK. Whereas in technique classes, it's this is what you do, this is how you do it. And I think with me, my confidence is better when I'm choreographing, because it's something that I've come up with myself, dya know what I mean? Instead of it being so set.

Contrary to my assumption that I had created a learning environment in which technical movement ideas could be playfully explored, Sarah still seems to perceive dance technique as a closed system of learning. On the other hand, for Sarah, choreography is a space for experimentation. It is difficult to ascertain whether this perception of technique and choreography is purely based on this individual's experiences at MMU, or more broadly informed by her educational history and indeed, the dominant discourses, which position dance technique as a closed system of learning that forces individuals to conform to an

external ideal. Regardless of how Sarah's perception of choreography and technique had been formed, perhaps the most important thing is that she is provided with an opportunity to question this perspective and to reflect on how her body-mind is constructed by the discourses that govern the different areas of her learning. In relation to this point, Sarah's comment may also indicate something about the significance of different learning spaces; perhaps for the student, the idea of having two complimentary situations is an important way of exploring the interfaces between the different settings. For example, while the technique class offers an opportunity to follow, and indeed question, specific 'rules', the choreography class offers a space to deconstruct them. This does not mean to say that the technique class cannot operate in a way where students are encouraged to reflect on the relationship between self and the structures they are shaped by. However, perhaps this is a different way of mobilising agency to that of the choreography setting, which requires a different skillset and, thus, cultivates agency of a different nature.

Summary of insights drawn from Cycle One

Based on the analysis conducted in this chapter, the evidence suggests that the aims of Cycle One were met to varying extents. For example, despite my reservations around incorporating a reflexive-dialogical approach into a dance technique learning environment, from examining the video footage of the reflective activities, it appears that in general, the students received this input positively. Through the application of the approach, which focused on enabling students to reflect on their practice from both internal and external perspectives, some students were able to appreciate that reflection had allowed them to develop stronger levels of self-awareness and a more developed understanding of the extent to which they had embodied the dance techniques being learned. Through this process, the students made sophisticated observations relating to the details of their technical dance practice, thus uncovering valuable tacit knowledge. Furthermore, in their cognitive reflections, some students demonstrated an awareness of the influence of the external learning environment, with one student appearing to recognise that the particular nature of the external environment had allowed her to reflect on her technical dance

practice more meaningfully; this demonstrates awareness of the dialogue between the internal experience of dancing and the influence of the external environment. In relation to this, a broader aim of this study has been to challenge the assumption that Level Four dance students automatically understand how to reflect on their dance technique practice. Analysis of the data suggests that with the appropriate guidance and support, the dance student can be assisted in entering a third-order reflective/reflexive state and to make key discoveries about the inner and outer workings of her practice, thus, acquiring 'reflexive knowledge' (Zarrilli, 2009: 33) about what she does and therefore, to mobilise agency.

However, although this may have been the case for some individuals, the extent to which the students felt obliged to passively accept the reflective learning methods is difficult to determine since they were not directly questioned on this topic. From this perspective, the students could be said to have conformed to the expectations of the doxa without question, accepting that reflection was something they simply had to do as a requirement to pass the unit. This resonates with Dragon's (2015) research, which suggests that without transparency, the value systems of specific pedagogical approaches become silently embedded into the learning environment and even though the teacher may appreciate their worth, it is often assumed that students will automatically do the same. Contrary to the ideas explored in the previous paragraph, passively accepting a learning approach without question could be viewed as demonstrating a limited level of agency. This constructs something of a paradox whereby a pedagogical approach that is intended to empower becomes oppressive. To address this going forward, during Cycle Two, I made more direct attempts to tell the students why reflective approaches were being used and to question them on their perception of the approaches. In retrospect, this would have been useful during the first cycle of action research, since it may have helped to further determine the extent to which agency had been mobilised by the students. However, since this was my first attempt at conducting action research, and indeed a focus group interview, I did not have the experience that I now have. What is more, I do remember feeling tentative about being too explicit with the students for fear of how my ideas would be received and my desire to provide a 'good' student experience.

In relation to the choreographic learning activity, as discussed earlier, my initial assumption was that the addition of this activity would help to collapse the hierarchy that I perceived to be present in my teaching, therefore creating a significant change in my teaching practice. Although the choreographic learning activity gave the students an opportunity to guide the learning activities, as I became aware of the deeply entrenched doxa that governed the learning setting, I began to realise that it was unrealistic, and in fact, problematic to try and collapse the hierarchy by myself. By focusing on this idea, I had overlooked the possibility that by integrating reflection, things were already changing and what is more, perhaps the structure that was provided by the teacher-student relationship was actually an essential component in the students' ability to exercise agency; this finding relates to the notion of a doxic agreement, which is based on the premise of the teacher and students entering into an unconscious understanding with each other that sees them play by the rules of the agreement to varying extents.

In the findings gathered from Cycle One, it is evident that by enabling the students to reflect on themselves and the external environment, together we were able to disrupt the doxa to varying extents; this is an idea that became a particular focus during Cycle Two. However, the extent to which this approach constituted what the students would perceive as a 'good' learning experience still remains questionable and this continues to be an issue that I grapple with. This point relates to the vulnerability of the action researcher, an idea that I have previously explored. During Cycle One, it became apparent to me that in order to question the dominant pedagogical discourse and instigate change, I had to be willing to experience a degree of insecurity around my teaching. Although this was initially difficult, it was something that I gradually came to terms with and by Cycle Two, my ability to negotiate the tension between disrupting the doxa and providing a 'good' student experience was something that I was able to manage more effectively, as discussed in Chapter Six.

The data gathered during Cycle One also contributed towards a more developed understanding of what agency might mean for the dance technique student. Not only does

the acquisition and mobilisation of agency relate to the notion of using reflective practice to extrapolate implicit, or 'tacit' (Schön, 1983) knowledge about what one does, but it also relates to the broader behaviours of the dancer. For example, in the choreographic learning activity, it became apparent that the students had developed the capacity to negotiate several different aesthetic and pedagogical discourses at one time. While some students worked within the confines of a particular technical aesthetic, other students appeared comfortable to switch between different aesthetics, taking a more interdisciplinary approach. This observation resonates with Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the internally persuasive discourse in the sense that the dancer mobilises agency to incorporate a range of aesthetics within her body, thus, constructing her own embodied discourse.

In addition, when teaching their phrase, one group of students integrated both traditional and non-traditional approaches, drawing upon the different pedagogical discourses available to them. In the comments from the focus group interview that are examined earlier in the chapter, it was apparent that although some individuals felt an expectation to approach the activity in a particular way, other individuals displayed the confidence to disrupt the doxa by blending the values of different discourses; there were also students who were able to verbally articulate an awareness of this. From this perspective, agency in a dance technique learning context could relate to the ability to negotiate different discourses and to play with the flexibility of the rules that govern such discourses. Through this process, alternative pedagogical discourses are constructed that can be moved between.

Chapter Six: Analysis of Action Research Cycle Two

The aims of Cycle Two

In the first part of this chapter, I set out the research aims for the second cycle of action research, exploring where they remained the same as Cycle One and where they had shifted in response to the findings gathered from the research already undertaken. In the second part of the chapter, I analyse the data gathered during Cycle Two. I examine how specific variables in the research process led me to discover new insights that both confirmed what had been revealed during Cycle One, and in some cases, challenged what had been found. The chapter concludes with further examination of what it means to mobilise agency in a dance technique learning context, exploring the role that cognitive reflection plays when embodying contemporary dance techniques.

To briefly recap the key insights gathered during Cycle One, it became apparent that through engaging with the reflexive-dialogical approach, some students were acquiring a greater sense of self-awareness and the ability to reflect on their embodiment of the dance techniques being learned. Furthermore, some individuals demonstrated an awareness of the broader contextual conditions of their learning, observing that their behaviour changed in response to the underlying doxa of the specific learning environment that they were participating in. These findings demonstrate that for some individuals, the use of reflection proved useful in relation to developing an understanding of self, as well as self in relation to the broader environment; this could otherwise be understood as acquiring a sense of agency. It was evident that, to varying extents, the students were using this agency to navigate the rules of engagement that governed the particular learning environment. This was evident both in class discussions and in the focus group interview, demonstrating that some students had an explicit awareness of this idea[112]. This has led me to explore the notion of a doxic agreement, which pertains to the idea that the teacher and students enter into an unconscious understanding with each other regarding the rules of engagement of

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[112] For example, in the comment from Poppy (see page 193) who referred to the notion of wearing 'different heads' depending on whose class she was attending.

the given learning environment. This agreement not only determines how social agents should behave, but is also used to navigate where there may be flexibility within the rules. Furthermore, the data showed that at times, more than one set of rules, or doxic agreements were at play; for example, when two pedagogical discourses were operating simultaneously[113]. This meant that in some cases, the students were actually navigating multiple doxas at any one time, even though they may not have been explicitly aware of this.

Although it was useful to gain some evidence that the reflexive-dialogical approach was enabling the students to mobilise agency, there were many questions that emerged for me going forward. For example, even though I was able to observe what was happening from the outside, to what extent were the students themselves aware of the agency they were displaying? How could I find ways of allowing them to develop greater levels of awareness regarding the agency that was being mobilised? Furthermore, how could I more confidently question the students about their perception of cognitive reflection in the dance technique class, rather than shying away from this? Despite a great deal of learning occurring during Cycle One, it seemed as though a lot of the discoveries being made were only evident to me and it was me, and me alone, who was drawing most of the conclusions. Going forward into Cycle Two, I set out to create a learning and research environment that was much more dialogical, enabling many of these observations to be made explicit and, thus, enabling a more co-constructed approach to knowledge acquisition, as explored later in this chapter.

As discussed in the previous chapter, during Cycle One, much of my early research was based on the assumption that in order to explore the perceived hierarchical relationship[114] between my students and me, something about my teaching practice had to significantly change. By presuming that it was not enough to investigate this hierarchical relationship, I pursued the idea of attempting to collapse it, hence the application of the choreographic

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[113] For instance, the reflective discourse and the dominant discourse, or the somatic discourse and the reflective discourse, as evident in the choreographic learning activity.

[114] I had previously identified that this hierarchical relationship was a key aspect of the dominant pedagogical discourse for dance technique.

learning activity. The outcomes of this were examined in detail in Chapter Five, but for the purposes of this chapter, the reader should know that in coming to understand that this pedagogical approach was not capable of entirely collapsing the hierarchy, it did become evident that it could disrupt the hierarchy to an extent. Furthermore, the use of reflection became an integral aspect of this disruption, allowing me, together with the students, to collectively develop a learning culture that allowed the use of reflective learning strategies that do not typically belong to the dominant pedagogical discourses for dance technique. As such, new pedagogical discourses began to emerge alongside the existing ones, and as discussed earlier, it became evident that the students were able to successfully navigate between these discourses, demonstrating agency to varying extents.

As a result of these findings, during Cycle Two, my research aims were focused upon further exploring the use of critical reflection and enabling students to adopt a more critical stance in relation to their learning. Drawing on Brookfield's (2017) ideas, reflection continued to be facilitated by utilising a dialogical approach that allowed learners to view their practice through different lenses. In contrast to Cycle One, during Cycle Two there was a specific focus on examining the role of students' questions about the dance technique movement being learned; this is an idea that is discussed in more detail later on. As such, in contrast to Cycle One, which had been predominantly constructed around the notion that something within my teaching practice needed to change, Cycle Two became more concerned with examining what was in fact already there. From an ethnographic perspective, this could be considered as investigating the existing learning culture from my position as a participant-observer. Furthermore, in relation to the findings gathered from Cycle One, in Cycle Two, there was a greater emphasis on being more transparent with the students regarding the aims and purpose of the research, as well as the underlying values of the reflexive-dialogical approach being adopted. My intention was that in doing this, the students would feel able to speak about their experiences and perceptions of the reflective learning methods being used, especially in relation to the rules and expectations of the dominant pedagogical discourses for dance technique. Consequently, the research aims for Cycle Two were as follows:

- To build on the findings gathered in Cycle One and to further investigate the notion of a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning in the dance technique class.
- To explore how students' questions might act as prompts for critical reflection to occur and in what way the reflexive-dialogical approach facilitates this reflection.
- To examine students' perceptions of this pedagogical approach in relation to the other pedagogical discourses at play and the mobilisation of agency.

An overview of the learning strategies used: Questions, peer feedback and group discussions

Continuing to build on the notion of a reflexive-dialogical approach to reflection, Cycle Two focused on an idea that had actually emerged even before Cycle One had formally commenced; this idea had not become a particular focus until later on in the research process when I had reflected on it more deeply. This was the notion of questions, specifically, the exchange between teacher and student during the moment when a student poses a question to the teacher concerning a technical detail of the dance movements being learned. This is a common occurrence in most technique classes and generally goes hand in hand with learning something in a visual way. Where the dominant approach is for the teacher to answer the student's question directly with a straightforward verbal or visual response, I became curious about placing a critical lens onto specific questions to promote the idea that there could, in fact, be multiple answers. This would differ to my usual way of answering questions, which on the majority of occasions would be to offer an immediate answer for the sake of moving on quickly and minimising disruption to the dancing; it could be said that this way of dealing with questions belongs to the dominant pedagogical discourse for dance technique, which foregrounds physical exertion, rigour and repetition.

My interest in this 'pedagogical moment' to borrow Van Manen's (1991) term, had been sparked following what could be considered a 'critical incident' (Tripp, 1993) during a technique class before Cycle One had formally commenced. This incident involved a student

enquiring about the use of the focus[115] during a *tendu* exercise that required a particular organisation of the head, arms and torso. Specifically, the student was asking about what the direction of the 'eye line' (to use his term) should be during the exercise, something I did not actually have a conclusive answer to as I had not choreographed this level of detail into the exercise. I reflected on this incident in a journal entry from 29th October 2014:

> *This particular question was interesting – I didn't know the answer. I felt put on the spot. It was a detail he had picked up on that I hadn't thought about. I tried to be honest in my response, but I felt the student was almost disappointed that I couldn't give a final answer. Maybe he wasn't? Maybe this is my assumption or the way I want to read his response? I said something along the lines of 'I would like to see you make a choice about where the focus is, and be consistent with that choice.' He seemed to accept this answer as OK.*

There is a sense of insecurity in this reflection that suggests I was questioning my ability as a technique teacher as a result of not having a pre-planned answer up my sleeve, or at least pretending that I did. However, the more I reflected on this incident, the more I started to question whether this was actually the responsibility of the technique teacher, or whether her job should be more concerned with opening up a dialogue around the question and enabling the students to investigate and reflect on a range of possible responses. After all, if I was trying to enable the students to develop and mobilise agency within the technique class, the idea of imposing a single answer seemed to be more aligned with the notion of a closed system of learning (Hanstein, 1990), as opposed to an open system of learning that advocates discovery. For me, this discovery was two-fold; it not only concerned the students, but also myself. I wanted to acquire new knowledge about myself as a teacher and the material I was teaching and the students were an essential part of enabling this discovery. As Brookfield (2017) suggests, in order to really become a critically reflective teacher, one must be able to view herself through the eyes of her students. As such, this means authentically listening to the perspectives of her students and taking their ideas seriously, a concept that could seem quite radical in a dance technique class setting where

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[115] When I use the term 'focus', I am referring to the position of the eye line during the exercise.

traditionally, the only voice that is perceived as having any authority is that of the teacher (Stinson, 2015).

These ideas have synergies with Rancière's (1991) concept of the ignorant schoolmaster, which was discussed in Chapter One. Rancière's model advocates a dialogical relationship between teacher and student whereby the teacher is no longer seen as the sole provider of knowledge, but rather teacher and student acquire knowledge about a specific subject together. This is an interesting idea to consider in a learning environment that has traditionally privileged the notion of adhering to a fixed or 'correct' ideal; how does the dance technique teacher present herself as 'ignorant' and willing to learn from her students, when it could be said that the dominant pedagogical discourses convey the idea of a prevailing ideal that she should be encouraging the students to adhere to? What is more, how would the technique teacher be perceived by her students if she were to say 'I don't know'? These were questions that I kept returning to throughout the second cycle of action research where I regularly found myself grappling with contradictory discourses that struggled to align with each other.

Building on the findings gathered from Cycle One, during Cycle Two, I not only continued to explore the use of peer feedback activities and group discussions[116], but responding to the observations above, I implemented an additional learning strategy that examined how particular questions that were asked by the students could initiate reflection. Rather than offering a straightforward response, I would open the question out to the group and encourage a collaborative approach towards investigating it; this usually involved peer feedback and group discussion activities. The aim was to explore whether this approach offered scope for different perspectives to be shared on the same idea, a key aspect of a dialogical learning environment (Alexander, 2008). Here, it should be noted that this was not the approach taken for every single question that was asked, but rather, specific

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[116] During Cycle Two, the students continued to keep reflective journals for the purpose of supporting their essays, but due to realising that this method of reflection offered little in relation to gathering data for analysing the reflexive-dialogical approach, they are not discussed in any great level of detail in this chapter.

questions that appeared to lend themselves towards further interrogation. This usually resulted in me selecting one question that was explored in this way during every technique class, but certainly no more than two[117]. By providing opportunities to explore the question and make choices regarding how they would like to 'solve' it, my aim was to enable the students to become more agential within their embodiment of the technical material being learned. Indeed, this approach also allowed me to examine to what extent they actually *wanted* to be agential. The findings gathered from implementing this strategy, along with peer feedback activities and group discussions are discussed later in this chapter.

Cycle logistics and ethical considerations

The second cycle of action research took place over a series of eight technique classes during the spring term, beginning on the 12th January and ending on the 15th March 2016. For the purposes of parity between cycles, like Cycle One, the technique classes were located within the unit *Dance Practices One* (DP1). In contrast to Cycle One, the focus group interview was conducted on Wednesday 9th March, the penultimate week of the action research. This slight difference in the timing of the focus group was due to a comparatively shorter spring term during academic year 15/16 (ten weeks including a scheduled week off timetable due to independent study), to that of the spring term of 14/15 (twelve weeks with no formal independent study week). While Cycle One took place over eleven technique classes and concluded with the focus group after the eleventh session, due to the availability of the students during cycle two, the discussion had to be scheduled a week before the cycle concluded. This created an unintentional, but interesting variable in the research, since it allowed me to gain an insight into the students' perceptions of the teaching methods that had been used before the cycle had fully concluded.

In contrast to Cycle One, during which I selected focus group participants based on gender, age and programme of study, during Cycle Two I asked for volunteers to participate in the discussion and seven students came forward. After reflecting on the focus group interview

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[117] The potentially problematic nature of this approach is discussed later in this chapter, when I explore how this could in fact reinforce the dominant doxa, as opposed to disrupting it.

from Cycle One, I felt concerned that the students may have felt obliged to participate since I had approached them directly and was, after all, their teacher. I wondered whether this had affected their ability to be honest with me about their experiences of participating in the action research. In light of this, during Cycle Two, asking for volunteers seemed like an effective way of enabling the students to feel more empowered regarding their contributions towards the research. In relation to this idea, in comparison to Cycle One, the data gathered during the Cycle Two focus group interview appears to be more critical of the reflexive-dialogical approach, suggesting that there may be a relationship between the recruitment method used and the data that was gathered. However, there could also be other contributing factors that led to this variation in the research process, such as my own confidence in conducting action research, shifts in my own thinking and a new year group with a different group dynamic to that of the previous year group; these are all ideas that are explored in more detail later on.

Data collection methods

During Cycle Two, for the purposes of parity I continued to use the same data collection methods as those used in Cycle One. This included video footage from all of the technique classes, transcriptions of discussions from this video footage, my own reflective journal entries and transcriptions of the focus group interview from 9th March 2016[118]. Like Cycle One, with the intention of minimising the influence of pre-existing power relationships, I chose to conduct the discussion in a classroom environment that was not a regular teaching space for the Dance programme. Myself and the participants sat in a circular formation to ensure that the sense of hierarchy between teacher and students was decreased. When presenting data from the focus group interview, I use pseudonyms to refer to the participants. These were:

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[118] Like Cycle One, as the data collected during Cycle Two was extensive, for the purposes of this chapter, I examine a selection of the data in order to respond to the key themes that emerged from the research. The reader can view a full transcription of the focus group interview, which is attached as Appendix 7.

- Ellen: female, age 18 and studying a single honours route of Dance.

- Tamara: female, age 18 and studying a single honours route of Dance.

- Dominique: female, age 18 and studying a single honours route of Dance.

- Fiona: female, age 18 and studying a combined honours route of Dance with Sport.

- Michelle: female, age 18 and studying a combined honours route of Dance with Drama.

- Naomi: female, age 18 and studying a combined honours route of Dance with Drama.

- Gina: female, age 24 and studying a combined honours route of Dance with Drama.

Ellen and Dominique were also European Union students from Cyprus. This was something that I considered when examining the data and interpreting the experiences of these students in relation to their British peers, since the Cypriot students would have engaged in a different pre-university educational system to the British students.

My technical dance 'style' during this cycle

During the second cycle, I purposely chose to adopt a different technical aesthetic to that of the first cycle. Where previously I had based the majority of the technique class around the codified and form-based modern dance technique of Merce Cunningham[119], during this cycle, I did not align the movement material with any one particular technique, but instead took a more eclectic approach that was grounded in the ideas and values of postmodern dance techniques that are often described as being release-based (Bales, 2008). This decision had interesting implications in relation to the students' ability to mobilise agency in a physical sense, as discussed later on. As explored in Chapter Two, the general premise of release-based dance techniques is concerned with facilitating a 'more "natural" use of the body' (Bales, 2008: 158) that advocates the falling, catching and rebound of the body's

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[119] To remind the reader, the rationale for this was due to Cunningham's choreographic work being the broader focus of the *Dance Practices 1* unit. Although chance approaches to choreography continued to be a broader focus within the unit, I decided that it was no longer necessary to look specifically at Cunningham's work within the technique class.

weight, as opposed to the forced relationship with gravity that is often associated with classical ballet and some modern dance techniques. In this way, release-based techniques do not tend to be as tightly codified and consequently, may align more easily with the notion of an open system of learning, as explored by Hanstein (1990).

In relation to these ideas, the exercises and sequences that I choreographed for the technique classes in this cycle of action research were based on the principles of falling on and off the central axis, pouring and collecting the weight of the body and moving with momentum rather than force. This was partly due to my own evolving interests as a dance artist, which had been influenced by increased engagement with movement practices such as Contact Improvisation, Authentic Movement, Yoga and the Alexander Technique. Here, it should be noted that as an experienced dance artist, my willingness to depart from more disciplined systems of movement in favour of embracing less structured forms could be something that happens over time as one's practice evolves. In contrast, due to their previous trainings, it could be much more challenging for Level Four students to embrace less structured movement systems in the same way as me; this was something that I reflected on throughout the second cycle, as discussed later. However, this shift in approach was also due to the observations made in the first cycle, during which I had wondered whether the tightly coded system of the Cunningham Technique had restricted the students' ability to further develop and mobilise agency through their execution of the movements and their creative input to the choreographic learning activity. This is because the Cunningham Technique is constructed around an established system of form-based movements that can imply a 'right' and 'wrong' way of moving. When this is the case, it becomes more challenging[120] for dancers to demonstrate agency since there is the underlying notion of conforming to an external ideal.

In contrast, a release-based dance technique that does not adhere to a specific system of movements may provide the dancer with more opportunities to explore and play with

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[120] Though not impossible, as demonstrated in the findings from Cycle One.

different movement possibilities; this was an important idea for me to consider in relation to my use of the reflexive-dialogical approach to answering the students' questions about the technique movement. Exploring and playing with different movement possibilities could be viewed as exercising variation and innovation, characteristics that Noland (2009) proposes are synonymous with a bodily conception of agency. This is something that I placed great emphasis on during the second cycle of action research by attempting to create opportunities for students to interpret a movement in a way that was different from my example, should they wish to. However, as discussed in the analysis sections later on, this approach often raised many questions amongst the students and became a frequent topic for discussion, and in some cases, seemed to cause confusion. This suggests that despite the absence of a named technique, the presence of the teacher's body, and her demonstrations of the movements, maintains the notion of an external ideal that students feel a pressure to conform to. This is an area of tension that frequently occurred and became the subject of many of the students' questions, as well as my own reflections. This often led me to question to what extent the students actually desired agency, as well as my assumption that agency was, in fact, something that should always be aspired to[121]. The reader can view a montage of excerpts with examples of my technical dance style throughout Cycle Two here: https://vimeo.com/507062212.

Analysis: Creating transparency around the research enquiry

Exploring the relationship between honesty, authenticity and agency

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the data gathered during Cycle Two appeared to show the students as being more directly critical of the reflexive-dialogical approach compared to the data gathered during Cycle One, particularly during the focus group. Although there could be several reasons for this, one significant difference during the second cycle was my ability to be transparent with the students regarding the aims of this research study and my underlying motivations for conducting it. Where I had held back with this during the first

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[121] In September 2021, the Theatre and Performance Research Association Performer Training Working Group discussed this subject at the annual TaPRA conference where delegates explored the relationship between structure and agency, questioning to what extent the performer's ability to exercise agency is determined by the structures that they work within and whether agency is always useful.

cycle for fear of how it might be received by the students, by placing more emphasis on this during the second cycle, my aim was to enable a greater level of honest and open communication between the students and me. Furthermore, I hoped that this would allow the students to act as collaborators within the research, as opposed to simply having a set of expectations silently imposed onto them by the teacher, which at times, had felt like the case during Cycle One. However, although the relationship between us felt more dialogical during Cycle Two, the notion of collaboration also presented some challenges, as explored later in this chapter.

My observations were a response to the reading I had been doing around power relationships in ethnographic and action research. For example, in her seminal study conducted in 1989, educational scholar Ellsworth challenges the idea of critical pedagogies being empowering, proposing that they perpetuate a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student that perceives the student as requiring empowerment, and the teacher as possessing the knowledge and power to 'free' the student. Similarly, dance scholar Dragon (2015) questions the ability for dance students to be empowered by pedagogical approaches that are perceived to be emancipatory[122] if they do not have any sense of what the underlying values are and why they are being used: what are students being empowered to be; what are they being emancipated from and what are they being emancipated to do? Thus, in order to really offer students greater levels of power and the opportunity to acquire agency, both researchers call for more communication between teachers and students regarding the use of specific pedagogical approaches and their underlying intentions. As discussed in Chapter Four, this aligns with Grant et al.'s (2008) suggestion that it is the action researcher's responsibility to communicate with participants in an honest and authentic way in order to ensure that 'participation, empowerment and democracy' (2008: 591) are prioritised within the research and that the objectives of the research are made explicit to the participants. On a broader level, these ideas have synergies with Rancière's (1991) concept of the ignorant schoolmaster, in the sense that in

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[122] In this case, Dragon was examining the use of somatic-based pedagogies.

order for true emancipation to occur, the relationship between the teacher and the student should be viewed as an ongoing, dialogical exchange with open channels of communication.

In view of these ideas, resonating with the perspectives explored in Chapter Five, this suggests that, for the dancer, agency relies upon having an awareness and an understanding of the broader discourses that she is subject to, including those that are implemented by the teacher. While these external forces are difficult to suppress, when an individual is aware of how she is shaped by them, there is more opportunity to navigate the discourses at play. With these ideas in mind, in my written reflection from the 11th January 2016[123], I commented on my attempt to introduce my research study to the students during a group discussion that I led during class time:

> *This time I felt much more confident to be transparent with the students about my research and what I was hoping to explore with them this term. I emphasised the idea of reflective learning and suggested that this was the approach I was hoping to explore with them this term. I explained that traditionally, dance technique has promoted a hierarchical approach to learning. I asked the group what they thought that meant. Jen[124] said it was about someone being higher than someone else. I said I was interested in using reflection to question and destabilise this hierarchy, and tried to emphasise the idea that we're all learning and enquiring together. I also talked specifically about how I would like to explore the exchange between me and them when questions are asked. I said I would like to pay attention to how I responded to their questions and whether they might be able to function as opportunities to reflect on the material being learned. I tried to emphasise the idea that this research is collaborative by nature, and together we would be contributing to new research in dance education.*

The reflection also goes on to document how I spoke about my own experiences as a dance student, to which some individuals could identify with and even shared their own stories, something I found highly encouraging. It also documents how I asked the students whether they had any questions or comments about the study itself, to which no-one responded. Although this way of introducing my research felt like a significant development from Cycle One, if I was to conduct a further cycle of research, I would develop a more interactive way

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[123] This was not actually a technique class session, but an introductory session to the unit, during which I also chose to introduce the research enquiry.
[124] Note the use of a pseudonym.

of introducing the students to the aims and motivations of the study. For example, group activities that involve reflecting on their experiences of dance technique, their perceptions of dance technique and the teacher-student relationship and so on. Approaches such as this could help to introduce the themes of the study while foregrounding the students' voices and enabling them to feel more invested in the research; this in turn could facilitate greater levels of understanding around the socio-cultural and political environment of the dance technique class and the influence of this on the students' body-minds. Even so, in comparison to Cycle One, the data gathered during Cycle Two indicates that the role of cognitive reflection in the dance technique was more openly examined and debated by both the students and me, which already seemed like quite a shift.

For example, during the focus group, when asked directly about their experiences of using their own and their peers' questions to encourage a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning, Gina made the following comment:

> I think the more questions we have, the more answers we get and the more we learn about ourselves and the more we kind of focus in on what we're doing and why we're doing it – and it can just be anything from – all of a sudden you realise you use imagery for everything and then it's like, well why do I use imagery and then that leads onto another question and then you start to find answers about yourself and what direction you want to go in.

Here, Gina appears to comment directly on the way in which the reflexive-dialogical approach to responding to questions encouraged her to reflect on the inner workings of her dance practice. This includes her sense of self, her habits, tendencies and interests as a dancer. Achieving this level of self-awareness could be viewed as an essential component of developing and mobilising agency. When viewed in relation to the third research aim for Cycle Two, which was concerned with understanding more about students' perceptions of the reflexive-dialogical approach and the way in which it enabled them to exercise agency, Gina's response suggests that she is aware that cognitive reflection plays a valuable role in cultivating agency in this learning environment. By acknowledging the ability of the mind to enhance bodily awareness, her comment suggests that a reciprocal relationship within the

body-mind is an essential component of embodying dance techniques and furthermore, in reflecting on this process of embodiment.

Returning to Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) conception of Psychophysical Acting, he proposes that there are three states of awareness that the performer moves between during the process of mastering a physical technique. To recap for the reader; in the first order pre-reflective state, the body-mind is engaged in immediate experience without prior intention and neither the body nor the mind are privileged. In the second order pre-reflective state, the body-mind attends to intentional experience and the body is foregrounded as the site of knowledge regarding 'how' to execute a specific action. In the third-order reflective/reflexive state, the mind comes to the fore as the individual reflects on the act of performing actions with her body. Zarrilli argues that the performer moves fluidly between these different states and as such, depending on the activity being undertaken, the mind and/or body may be privileged at any given moment. This idea resonates with Gina's comment, in the sense that it points towards the reciprocity between mind and body that is required when embodying a dance technique; the mind informing the actions of the body and the body informing the actions of the mind. It is this ongoing and circular process that ensures the cultivation of self-awareness.

Offering an alternative and somewhat provocative perspective on cognitive reflection is the response from Tamara, which appeared earlier in Chapter Two[125]. Here, Tamara comments on the difficulty of stopping her dancing to talk about a question or explore an idea verbally, suggesting that it interrupts the flow of the class. Although she briefly refers to the importance of 'talking' in relation to having a more detailed understanding of an idea, she talks about her perception of herself as a 'mover' and her desire to answer questions through movement; incidentally, in much of the technique class video footage, Tamara can often be seen dancing 'to herself' during class discussions, appearing only half-engaged in conversations and more concerned with perfecting her physical execution of a movement.

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[125] See page 97.

In contrast to Gina's comment, Tamara's comment and actions appear to view the body as being chiefly responsible for embodying dance technique, viewing the mind as secondary in this process. With further reference to the ideas of Zarrilli (ibid), this may be the case at different moments in the class, particularly during those experiences that align more closely with the first and second order states of awareness where the body comes to the fore. However, what seems to be overlooked in Tamara's response is the value of reflection in relation to achieving a level of understanding that aligns more closely with the third-order state of awareness. Here, the mind comes to the fore and the body may momentarily become absent[126] (Leder, 1990) as the performer tries to make sense of her actions through cognitive reflection. However, it is not just Tamara who questions the place of talking and reflecting in the dance technique class; earlier on in the discussion, Gina, who seems to advocate the role of reflection in her comment above, also noted the challenges she experiences with this approach:

> I think it [talking] has a small place in the technique classroom and I think questions should be encouraged and maybe the writing down of those questions at the end of class…just because we have so few dance classes

Here, Gina could be viewed as being the subject of conflicting discourses; while she appreciates the value of reflection, she also questions whether, on a purely practical level, there is time for it within the context of the dance class, especially when there is only one technique class a week[127]. As previously discussed, this was an ongoing area of tension that I found myself trying to navigate, especially with regards to the notion of providing what was perceived as a 'good' student experience. Gina's ability to recognise the conflicting nature of these different discourses again affirms her position as agential.

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[126] To reiterate, Leder's (1990) notion of the absent body refers to occasions when the individual is so engrossed in a cognitive thinking process that any sense of the body disappears. A similar sense of the body may also be evident when an individual is engaged in a habitual action of some kind and performing actions on autopilot, with little awareness of the felt sense of the body.

[127] This tended to be the case for Combined Honours students, who were studying Dance with another subject and therefore had access to less dance classes than a Single Honours student.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

In different ways, both Gina and Tamara's comments offer a useful insight into understanding how some students might view cognitive reflection and its ability to help them develop as dancers. For the most part, one student appears to value the input of cognitive reflection, while the other places more value on the experience of the body. In relation to the latter, as explored in Chapter Two, the dominant pedagogical discourses for dance education, and particularly dance technique, have typically placed more importance on the physical aspects of learning dance and any kind of reflective activity such as verbal discussions or writing are not generally viewed as customary practices of the dance technique class. Indeed, as a dance student myself, it often seemed to be an expectation of teachers that as a movement was being demonstrated or verbal feedback was being offered, students should not stand still to watch or listen, but should be practising at the same time, showing the teacher that they were eager to embody the movement and improve their execution of it. When examining Tamara's comment and observing her behaviour on the video footage, I have often wondered whether this is the discourse that underpins her actions and, thus, in her view, she is conforming to what she believes are the teacher's expectations.

However, although Gina and Tamara's comments offer contrasting perspectives, without transparency around the research enquiry and open communication between the participants and me, it would have been difficult to gather data that offers this level of honesty and insight. This felt like quite a shift from Cycle One, where I left the research process wondering how able the students felt to speak truthfully about their experiences; when I say 'able', I am referring to the idea of the students having licence to speak their truth in front of me, their teacher. However, on reflection, this also raises a question about the students' ability to grasp the words to articulate a felt experience or truth in their body, something that this analysis has not explored, but could be the focus of future research. Although Tamara's comment was quite difficult for me to hear at the time, on reflection, I feel encouraged that I facilitated an environment in which she felt comfortable enough to speak so openly, knowing that her view was likely to be different to that of her teacher's and some of her peers. However, just because Tamara's response indicates that she may

struggle to see the significance of reflection, she could still be viewed as exercising a degree of agency through her ability to question its value, as opposed to just passively accepting it. Later in this chapter, I examine some additional comments from the students that discuss the role of reflection in the dance technique class, and in some cases challenge its usefulness.

'Collaborative' research? Or co-constructed knowledge?

In my personal reflection in the previous section, I refer to the idea of enabling the students to be collaborators within the research, an idea that could, in some ways, be viewed as rather idealistic. As explored in Chapter Four, there are different perspectives on the collaborative nature of action research and indeed, 'Collaborative Action Research' is a specific field of its own. Although having a greater level of transparency around the research enquiry enabled more honest communication between the students and me, the extent to which the students viewed themselves as collaborators within the research process remains unclear since it was not something that was directly discussed. Furthermore, as the second cycle progressed, I quickly realised that there were several challenges with attempting to work collaboratively with first year students, particularly in an environment where ultimately, I held the power. As discussed in Chapter Four, according to Grant et al. (2008) and McAteer (2013), in most action research studies, researchers generally assume a position of power in relation to the participants. This dynamic is further enhanced if there are pre-existing power relationships such as the one between a teacher and her students (ibid). What is more, the lead researcher is generally responsible for constructing the narrative for the study, thus, assuming a 'narrative privilege' (Adams, 2008) over the participants and controlling how the story will be told. Although the researcher can act reflexively and question her subjective perspective within this process of storytelling, these are factors that cannot be eliminated. As a result of the findings gathered from Cycle One, during Cycle Two, I became much more aware of these ideas and this led me to question exactly how collaborative this research really was.

There are several contributing factors that make the notion of collaborative research with students potentially problematic. For instance, although the teacher may have the students' best interests at heart, as explored in Chapter Five, drawing on the ideas of Bourdieu (1977), in a given learning environment a doxa is constructed that determines the behaviour and expectations of both teacher and students. While the teacher may maintain her position of power within the construction of this doxa, since all individuals bring their histories and expectations into the dance classroom, all parties influence this process and, thus, can be seen to enter into a doxic agreement with each other. This means that at times, the teacher may find herself surrendering to the expectations of the students, even if these expectations do not align with her own value system. Similarly, the students may find that they have to conform to particular systems and structures in order to pass a unit, often without understanding why. As such, the doxic agreement involves all parties in a game of negotiation whereby everyone is trying to navigate and make sense of the underlying rules of the social field in order to survive.

The doxa is reinforced by other external influences such as the broader discourses of dance education that convey the expected codes of behaviour in a specific setting, as well as the ideological structures of the university. For example, the very titles of 'Lecturer' and 'Student' place individuals into a specific role that denotes a particular power status, and, thus, produces behaviour that aligns with that role. The university education system is constructed around learning outcomes, assessments and criteria, structures that measure the student's learning in relation to specific expectations. When considering all of these contributing factors, regardless of an individual teacher's pedagogical intentions, there are always going to be external forces that influence the agential capacity of both teacher and students. In view of this, there are several complexities that make it challenging, though not impossible, to conduct a research study that is genuinely collaborative in the context of a Level Four university dance class, especially when the study has been initiated by the teacher.

However, it is possible to conduct a study that involves students as participants, and to conduct the study in such a way that honours the voices and experiences of the participants by engaging reflexively with the data that is gathered. As discussed in Chapter Four, Etherington (2017: 84) refers to this approach to research as 'co-constructed knowledge', proposing that it is the researcher's responsibility to be as transparent as possible when articulating *what* has been discovered, and indeed, *how* it has been discovered. From this perspective, the study could be viewed as taking on a dialogical dimension by valuing the different perspectives of the individuals participating in the social field. I have found Etherington's ideas around reflexivity and co-constructed knowledge to be very useful in relation to gaining a more developed understanding of the dialogical relationship I was attempting to facilitate with the participants in this study. This has led me to question to what extent the study has actually been collaborative and to be critical of how and when this term is used, since it may denote something that does not accurately convey the relationship that was established with the students. The notion of co-constructed knowledge appears more aligned with the nature of the relationship that I formed with the students during Cycle Two and is therefore used as a lens when examining the data in the following sections.

Analysis: Reflective learning strategies

Questions as a strategy for initiating reflection: Body-mind dialogues and the cultivation of agency

As discussed earlier in this chapter, a significant point of enquiry during Cycle Two focused on exploring how students' questions might initiate opportunities for reflection. Building on the findings from Cycle One, I wanted to explore how this reflection might take a dialogical form by continuing to allow the students to perceive their dancing experiences from different perspectives. There was also an emphasis on considering the relationship between the internal and external worlds of their practice. Like Cycle One, during Cycle Two, a bodily conception of dialogue was foregrounded in relation to the embodiment of the dance technique being learned. As such, the notion of 'dialogue' was not only perceived as adopting a verbal form, but was also inclusive of other bodily acts such as touching,

watching, listening, feeling and moving, ways of perceiving the world that are particularly significant within a dance learning environment (Anttila, 2007). Such bodily acts are also responsible for constructing and maintaining the discursive practices of the dance technique class, as explored in Chapter Two. It is these discursive practices that convey specific messages (Lakes, 2005) concerning how social agents are expected to behave in the context of the dance class; these expectations and behaviours determine the doxic agreement that teacher and student enter into unconsciously. Therefore, when examining the development and mobilisation of agency in this study, a bodily conception of dialogue is essential in order to understand the various ways in which students might display agency in the different areas of their technique practice.

During the session on 12th January 2016, I taught the students an arm swing exercise that involved swinging the arms through the frontal and lateral planes and using the momentum of this to drop and catch the weight of the torso in different directions: https://vimeo.com/507065530. There is one particular part of the exercise when the body travels from side to side performing a galloping action with the legs that ends in an off-balance suspension to either side. While I was offering feedback on this exercise to the class, Gina[128] asked the following question:

> Can I just ask, do you go on your demi-pointe?... As in when you do your suspension, do you stay flat footed or not?

To which my response was 'It's a really good question, ahm, what I'm gonna say to that is that I'm gonna answer it in a minute.' When watching the video footage of this exchange with this student, I can see that I take a little more time than I usually would to respond to a question; there is a degree of hesitancy while I think about how I would like to reply. By taking a pause before answering, I seem to allow myself time to consider how I would like to respond, therefore questioning my habitual response, which would usually be to offer a

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[128] The same Gina who later participated in the focus group interview.

straightforward answer[129]. I then suggest that we attempt to answer the question as a whole group by dancing the exercise together and keeping Gina's question in mind. This involves giving direct attention towards the weight shift into the suspension, sensing what the heel of the foot wants to do. By inviting the students to actively engage in a cognitive thinking process of this nature while dancing, it could be said that they are 'reflecting-in-action', a concept developed by Schön (1987) that has synergies with Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) first order pre-reflective state, during which the body-mind is engaged in immediate experience without prior intention, the aim being to essentially 'get' the movement into the body through repetition. In this state, neither the body or mind are privileged but the mind could be seen as 'catching up' with the actions of body by analysing and processing the experience immediately after it has happened, or even during the moment of embodying.

After dancing the exercise as a whole class, I invite the students to find a partner and talk about Gina's question. While the question is deliberated, there is an extended moment of talking, moving, demonstrating, playing and testing, which leads into a broader group discussion of sharing responses and contemplating different possibilities: https://vimeo.com/507067976. As evident in the video excerpt here, two pairs of students suggest that they find it more effective to keep the heel in contact with the floor as it helps to control the balance and a sense of a relationship with the floor. I probe these students further on how they arrived at this answer and their response is that it helps to control the balance and overall alignment of the body with one student proposing that it offers the opportunity to take 'more of a risk'. Another pair offer a different response with one student stating that her heel naturally 'pops off' the floor as a result of tipping her weight, although she is quite clear that it is not a 'deliberate relevé' action (to quote my words). A different student from a group of three suggests that the heel could, at times, come away from the floor as an 'extension' of the movement and as a way of challenging oneself to see how far the weight of the body can be tipped.

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[129] In the somatic practice known as the Alexander Technique (2001), this moment of pausing before allowing a habitual response to occur is referred to as 'inhibition'. The idea being that the individual uses the space between the trigger and the response to choose how she would like to respond, as opposed to executing a habitual action. There are synergies between this idea and the scenario that I discuss here.

As the verbal discussions are happening, the video footage shows that some class members continue to physically play with the movement in response to the ideas being suggested. In this way, the dialogue takes multiple forms by involving talking, listening, moving and observing. The words appear to act as prompts to return to the body and investigate further, indicating that the cognitive reflections are emerging from the actions of the body, an idea that I discussed in Chapter One when drawing on the work of Varela, Thompson and Rosch (2016). To remind the reader, the authors propose that reflection should not be viewed as a disembodied act, but rather as an activity that directly informs the actions of the body and at times, requires complete unity between the two entities. In this way, the dancer establishes a cyclical relationship between action and reflection, like that of a Möbius strip, that allows her to further her embodiment of the dance technique.

Once this reflective dialogue has concluded, I ask the students to dance the exercise again and it is evident in the video footage that the dancing of some individuals has shifted as a result of the reflective activity. Several students can be seen paying specific attention to trying out different placements of the body's weight and heel position; resonating with Nelson's (2013) idea that reflection allows additional layers of knowledge to be uncovered, it is evident in the students' dancing that further knowledge has been acquired. In addition, within the verbal and physical responses, the students display agency to varying extents. In the verbal responses, each student refers to the idea of taking a risk or challenging oneself in some way. As explored in Chapter One, in view of Noland's (2009) ideas concerning a bodily conception of agency, in the context of the dance technique class an individual who demonstrates the ability to 'innovate' by testing the limitations of a particular movement, or to show an awareness of this idea on a cognitive level, even if it is not yet realised on a bodily level, could be considered agential. This is because these actions demonstrate the ability to make critical judgements and intuitive kinaesthetic choices that may be different to the perceived expectation of the teacher. With further reference to Turner's (2015) notion of a continuum of embodiment, those students operating with this level of agency could be considered as moving beyond a surface level of embodiment where the dance

movements are simply layered onto the students' bodies. Instead, there is a sense of taking ownership of the movement and being confident enough to play with its creative potential, despite the influence of external forces, such as the teacher's demonstrations and even the way one's peers execute the movement.

Navigating and summarising dialogue: The teacher's dilemma

On many occasions in my personal reflections, I discuss how I have not been sure how to summarise the reflective dialogues that emerged from the reflexive-dialogical approach to addressing the students' questions. As a result of changing the rules of engagement around how I responded, I frequently found myself questioning my own role within this action research process, often wondering whether, as the teacher, it was my job to provide a conclusive answer. Although it was never explicitly said by a student, there were occasions when it felt that my professional responsibility as a teacher was questioned. This was especially pertinent due to having made the choice not to teach a specific codified dance technique that determines how certain movements should be executed; from my perspective, to an extent, movement choices were 'open to interpretation', but it was not always clear whether the students saw it in the same way. For example, during the session on 2nd February 2016, one student asked a question about whether the aim of a jumping sequence being learned was to achieve height or length. Since both of these are valid aims for a jumping sequence, I used the question as an opportunity to initiate discussion around the differences between each approach. When reflecting on the session afterwards, I wrote the following:

> *What I still feel confused by is my role in terms of summarising the dialogue. When considering open systems of learning, I feel a strong tension between wanting to leave things open and, and wanting to summarise or 'solve' the dialogue. For example, during this exchange, I felt that there was an expectation that regardless of the discussion being had, in the end, I would provide the 'answer'…This time, just to see what happened, I resisted offering a conclusive response instead suggesting that both perspectives were welcomed…Why fix the outcome? Surely new things can be learned about the body by trying both? Or perhaps an individual can learn something about the self by reflecting on what their preference is?*

Incidentally, there are similarities between my uncertainty here and the uncertainty I felt during Cycle One when I was unsure about how I should input into the choreographic learning activity. Indeed, both situations involve disrupting the underlying doxa of the technique class by shifting the typical rules of engagement. The reflection above points towards a desire to move away from a didactic pedagogical approach in favour of enabling the students to make considered choices regarding their execution of a movement. In relation to Nelson's (2006, 2013) model of practice-as-research, the idea of integrating a level of critical reflection into dance technique training, which is grounded in the idea of achieving physical virtuosity, has the potential to create an interconnected and dynamic relationship between reflection and action. However, the power of the prevailing discourse, which does not view the mind as essential in the act of achieving physical virtuosity, can make it challenging for teachers and students to accept this as a viable approach to learning. With further reference to the notion of the 'good' student experience, if the teacher chooses not to provide a conclusive answer to a technical question, how is this perceived by students? Are students able to see the value in using reflection to explore different possibilities or to uncover a further layer of knowledge, or is the teacher simply viewed as being inadequate for failing to 'solve' things for the learners? Opening myself up to the possibility of a dialogical relationship with the students felt like a vulnerable position to place myself in, especially as I was unsure to what extent the students actually desired this kind of relationship.

Returning to the instance discussed in the previous section involving the position of the foot during the arm swing exercise, I took the approach of summarising the dialogue by attempting to round up what had been said by each group. My response, which was genuinely informed by the perspectives offered by the students, as well as my own, was as follows:

> I notice when I do it, personally, that sometimes I'm on a flat foot and sometimes I'm, there is that kind of sense of tipping and the heel does pop off, kind of like what you were saying (quote student's name). So, it varies for me, and maybe as you do it, it might also vary. I definitely agree with what you're saying that, it's not a relevé,

> but there might be that sense of the more I go, the heel, as a result the heel kind of peels off, and I think you're right, the more you tip, the more the heel, ah, yields if you like. I think, I don't know if that helps to answer your question, Gina at all?

Educational scholar Robin Alexander (2008: 110) draws on the ideas of Bakhtin (1986) to propose that one of the key aims of dialogue in a classroom setting should be focussed on 'achieving a common understanding through structured, cumulative questioning and discussion'. Furthermore, in response to Bakhtin's (1986) idea that dialogue is essentially made up of utterances that are chained together within a particular context, Alexander suggests that in order for the dialogue to create 'a meaningful sequence' (2008: 104), the teacher will usually have a sense of how the dialogue should conclude. In my response above, it seems as though I am attempting to chain together the different perspectives offered by the students in order to offer an answer that has a sense of coherency about it[130]. However, while I appreciate that reaching a common understanding may have provided clarity and direction for the learners, I also tried to be aware of the importance of not undermining the perspectives offered by the students, particularly as I had invited them to share such perspectives. Informed by the ideas of Rancière (1991, 2009), it seemed important that I maintained a commitment to authentic dialogue by taking the ideas of the students seriously. In view of this, for the teacher to essentially steer the discussion towards a pre-determined conclusion seems to make the very point of dialogue redundant. This in turn could limit the ability for students to mobilise agency by conveying the idea that regardless of their insights or perspectives, there is a prevailing idea that they must conform to. I found that navigating these various tensions was a delicate balancing act that required constant scrutiny on my behalf. As such, there were some occasions when it seemed appropriate to direct the group towards a common consensus, and other occasions when it seemed acceptable to keep things open.

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[130] Bakhtin's (1986) notion of a chain of dialogue was also something that I commented on in my personal reflections, where it seemed that in revisiting ideas from one class to the next, there was a sense of developing dialogical discussions that were continuous and open-ended, with the learning building from one week to the next.

Regardless of this, it did not occur to me until after the cycle had concluded that the very fact that it was me, the teacher, who selected which questions were worthy of further exploration could itself be problematic in relation to enabling agency. In retrospect, perhaps this selective approach, which was designed to enable agency, actually reinforced a hierarchy by way of me deciding whether a question was interesting enough to interrogate in the first place. Thus, despite all of my efforts to not undermine the students' ideas during the dialogical exchanges, much like the use of the reflective tags in Cycle One, critical reflection showed me that even when the intention is to empower students, the teacher can still unintentionally assume a position of domination that inadvertently renders the students powerless.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, at the beginning of Cycle Two, I had attempted to be transparent with the students regarding my desire to encourage a more reflective learning environment. However, the extent to which they understood why I was adopting this particular approach to responding to their questions remained relatively unclear until it was discussed during the focus group. Up until this point, within my reflective diary I often questioned whether the students perceived me as being vague and unclear, leading me to wonder whether they thought they had to passively accept the approach because it was being implemented by the teacher. On reflection, if I was to conduct a further cycle of action research, I would build in more regular opportunities for feedback on the approach as a way of furthering the dialogical relationship in the group and checking in with them. However, despite this, during the focus group, I did question the students directly on the approach as I wanted to gauge what their perception of it was. For example, I asked them how they perceived the idea of executing movements in a 'right or wrong' way in the technique class and whether this could co-exist with the notion of being given choice. There were varying perspectives on this, as evident in the following comments:

> Dominique:
> I believe that right and wrong – exists in classical technique. In contemporary though I can still see something that's wrong, but it's wrong because it might be dangerous for our body. We can injure ourselves. I don't consider many movements wrong in contemporary dance because it's contemporary, it could be anything.

> Tamara:
> I see things 'right' – if that's the way you've choreographed it, that's the way you dance it. Like saying you don't put your hand up, you put your hand down and that's how I see it, just like doing exactly what you showed us.

> Fiona:
> Yeh, whenever I get taught something I try and do it exactly like the choreographer, because I feel like it's their work, I should execute it the way they want.

Tamara and Fiona's comments appear strongly aligned with the dominant pedagogical discourse in the sense that they both perceive the instructions or the example provided by the teacher or choreographer as something that must be adhered to. This suggests that despite being offered the opportunity to make choices, they maintain the perception that the dominant rules of engagement are inflexible. By viewing the rules in this way and demonstrating limited awareness of how self is shaped by the rules, the ability to exercise individual agency is limited. On the other hand, Dominique's comment points towards a more fluid perception of 'right' and 'wrong' suggesting that she was aware of the possibility to be agential and was also willing to engage with this idea. This perspective was again evident in her later comments:

> Dominique:
> It is interesting 'cos by doing something we choose, we have – not justify why we're doing it, so we have to think.

> Rachel Rimmer-Piekarczyk:
> You have to think?

> Dominique:
> When we're given something, we don't have to think we just have to do and when I have to choose between something – I have to justify why I choose it.

These comments demonstrate that my decision to adopt a release-based approach to dance technique could have been beneficial in relation to enabling the students to mobilise agency. This is because it could be argued that there are more opportunities to 'choose' and 'think' than there may be in a more tightly codified traditional modern dance technique. The following comment from Gina both resonates with Dominique's perspective, while also challenging it:

> I think it's good that we're treated as intelligent dancers and given that opportunity to play and explore, but I think it's sometimes, maybe because it's just the nature of dance, that you want some more clarity. Like, I want to know exactly where my hand goes or I want to know that, just so it's not something that's a question mark in my own mind.

Gina's comment relates to the notion of managing various tensions in the dance technique class learning environment, a recurrent theme within this research. As discussed in Chapter Two, this is a topic that other dance scholars have debated, including Dryburgh (2018) who explores the 'lively tension' (2018: 37) of enabling students to maintain a curious approach towards embodying choreographed movement material, whilst acknowledging that at some point, the movement needs to take on a more refined form. Similarly, in my research, the idea of enabling students to make choices, and to be continually critical of those choices, provides another source of tension that adds an additional layer of complexity. With that said, Gina's comment could be said to display a strong level of agency since she appears to recognise that there are two discourses running in parallel: the discourse that embraces autonomy and play, and the discourse that embraces clarity and certainty. From this perspective, Gina could be said to view herself as an agent who continually moves between these two discourses while not being afraid to question how she is constructed by them.

Another participant, Michelle, offered the following comments:

> I feel this technique explores your body and your little habits and things. Like, for example, you know when we say about the arms and if you're pushing, in a normal technique class like your arm's here and then it goes here, but in yours, it's kind of do what you want, do what your body tells you to do – if that makes sense. 'Cos I

> think technique is – when I've done it before – it's really strict, like you have to be here at this count, but with yours, it is free and it is exploring what you want to do and where you want to do it.

In this comment, Michelle presents as a student who chooses to play by the rules of the doxa established by the teacher in the given learning environment; that includes the 'strict' setting of her previous experiences of dance technique and the 'free' setting of the release-based technique class that she currently finds herself in. In this comment, she clearly recognises that in this learning environment, she has been offered the autonomy to sense how her body wants to move and to make informed choices from this. From a somatic perspective this could be viewed as being highly agential since there is an obvious willingness to depart from the notion of conforming to the perceived expectations of the teacher. However, by behaving in accordance with the underlying rules of the doxa, Michelle could also be viewed as demonstrating limited agency by simply adapting to the rules of a given environment without question. With that said, in a separate comment, she stated the following:

> I think about the clarity – say – sometimes – say Gina asked a question – erm – you might answer the question with a question – which at first you're like 'what?' – so, am I doing that or not? It makes you work harder because then you have to go and figure it out yourself, which I guess Uni is all about – you're not spoon-fed it and then you go and make the choice and that choice is better for you…that challenge makes you a better dancer.

This comment could be perceived as displaying a strong level of agency. This is due to Michelle's ability to identify the underlying values of the pedagogical approach used in this cycle of action research and the way in which it shapes her as a dancer. From this perspective, she could be viewed as having an awareness of the doxic agreement she has entered into; even though she complies with the rules of the agreement, by demonstrating an awareness of the rules and the way in which she is constructed by these rules, she could in fact be perceived as highly agential. Indeed, the agency that both Gina and Michelle display in their cognitive thinking processes was also evident in their dancing, where both of them demonstrated an ongoing willingness to test, play and explore with the movement material offered to them. By embodying the movement with this level of somatic intuition,

they both evolved into highly committed and engaging performers who displayed agency in through their ability to take ownership of the movement and to play with its creative potential, as explored earlier.

Despite the differing opinions expressed in the focus group, in the final session of Cycle Two[131], I remained committed to this way of managing the students' questions. By the time the cycle had concluded, I was no clearer on the most effective way of summarising the dialogues that emerged from this approach than I was at the beginning. Rather, I came to accept that it was an ongoing game of negotiation that shifted and changed depending on the nature of the question being asked and how this existed in relation to the other external factors that were influencing the learning environment at that particular time.

Although it was difficult to hear the comments pertaining to a desire for more clarity and a need to know if there was a 'right' or 'wrong' way to execute a movement, when reflecting on my practice, I felt sure that in other areas of the class, I was providing the students with an appropriate level of clarity and security. It was, and still is my belief that while some aspects of the doxa can remain intact, other aspects can be opened up to disruption in order to expose Level Four students to alternative ways of perceiving the world around them, while maintaining a sense of equilibrium.

Peer feedback: Developing a more informed view of the self

In Chapter Five, I examined the use of peer feedback activities during Cycle One, looking at how they can enable a student to view their practice from both internal and external perspectives and to explore the dialogical relationship between these two positions. I also investigated the idea that as well as enabling students to make astute observations about their practice and to exercise agency on both a cognitive and physical level, peer feedback also has the potential to limit the student, if the feedback received defines her in a certain way. During Cycle One, I was not particularly successful in gathering students' perceptions on peer feedback, so much of my analysis was constructed from my own perspective. In this

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[131] Which, to remind the reader, happened after the focus group interview had taken place.

section, I examine the way in which peer feedback can be used to develop a more informed view of the self by using students' comments during the focus group to explore this idea. I also examine the use of a self-observation video task, which functioned in a similar way to a peer feedback activity by offering an additional layer of perspective for the students, thus, enhancing the reflexive-dialogical approach being explored.

In every technique class during Cycle Two, the students participated in different peer feedback activities by partnering up with a critical friend and observing each other dancing. I continued to adopt the same 'engaged' approach to peer feedback as I did during Cycle One, encouraging the students to offer both positive and developmental feedback to each other in accordance with a specific focus (Ladyshewsky, 2013). During the focus group interview, I questioned the students directly on this approach to learning, asking them how it had been working for them in terms of allowing them to reflect on their own practice. There were several comments that related to the idea of acquiring higher levels of self-awareness that would not necessarily be possible if it was not for the information offered by an outside eye. For example:

> Gina:
> People give you feedback that you hadn't even considered and everybody looks at things differently. Dominique gave me some fantastic feedback the other day that I hadn't even considered and no-one had highlighted it to me and it was just a simple thing that I'm going to break my fingers if I do that (presses fingers on knees) in my handstands. So I really concentrate on that, but every person we've gone into a pair has given me completely different feedback and so it's nothing that I would have intelligently thought of.

This comment seems to place real value on the act of peer feedback, suggesting that Gina regards the insights offered by her classmates as something that can genuinely help her to develop as a dancer. As discussed in Chapter Five, by obtaining knowledge about her dance practice through engaging in peer feedback, it could be said that in line with Schön's (1983, 1987) theories, activities of this nature have allowed Gina to make the implicit details of her dancing explicit, thus, heightening her embodiment of the material being learned. Relating

to Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) ideas, for Gina, it seems that peer feedback allows her to enter the third-order reflective/reflexive state, using cognitive reflection to develop knowledge 'about' the actions of her body. Furthermore, Gina's comment appears to demonstrate an awareness of the dialogue between self and the external world; for example, Bakhtin (1981) proposes that every individual occupies her own 'center' and therefore offers her own unique perspective on the world. Writing about Bakhtin's theory of 'center', Holquist (2002: 22) states:

> Our places are different not only because our bodies occupy different positions in exterior, physical space, but also because we regard the world and each other from different centers in cognitive space/time.

By suggesting that 'everybody looks at things differently', Gina acknowledges the sense of centre that Bakhtin refers to. She appears to understand that her view of herself can be enhanced by engaging with a range of external perspectives, and not just the teacher's perspective, an observation that displays a high level of insight. By conveying a willingness to engage with an approach that belongs to the reflective discourse, as well as those that belong to the dominant pedagogical discourse for dance technique, Gina displays agency. This comment also reminds me, the teacher, that when viewing the world from my own centre, there will inevitably be things that I am unable to perceive and therefore cannot comment on; it is impossible for me alone to see every student from every possible angle. This is where the voices and perspectives of the students contribute significantly to enabling a dialogical learning environment.

Similarly, the following comments also relate to the notion of peer feedback heightening self-awareness:

> Dominique:
> I think we can understand some mistakes or habits we have, but we can't really watch ourselves dancing really, so it's important that somebody else can watch us and tell us 'that's wrong, that's ugly' or something.

> Fiona:
> I feel like when you're doing the dance you don't realise sometimes what your body is doing because you can't see it, so you might be doing something completely different to someone else and then someone picking it out and then when you're doing it again, you realise that, oh yeh I am doing that and you might change it slightly, so I think it's good.

> Tamara:
> It just heightens your awareness.

Much like Gina's comment, these comments suggest that the addition of peer feedback helped the students to develop a more informed view of themselves. This view seems to go beyond their own perception of themselves, as well as how they perceive the teacher to view them, the two perspectives that are usually the most prominent in a traditional dance technique class setting; this demonstrates the counter cultural nature of peer feedback in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourse for dance technique. Fiona's idea of not always realising 'what your body is doing' again relates to the notion of blind spots and the importance of the self being open to receiving information from other external perspectives. When an individual is engrossed in a physical activity where the body is foregrounded, a body-mind state that could be likened to Zarrilli's (2009, 2020) pre-reflective first or second order states of awareness; the individual has not yet had chance to reflect on what she is actually doing. It may not be until after the event of moving her body that she is able to stand back and see how her body is executing something; this is a process that can be greatly enhanced by the input of an outside eye, such as that of a peer. It could be said that the use of video is another way of achieving this kind of awareness, an idea that is explored later on in this section.

Again, commenting on the use of peer feedback activities, Michelle stated:

> I think it's really useful because I think with dance, you do learn from watching. So, for example, if I watch Gina and Gina does a move and I like it, I automatically copy her because I want to do it exactly how Gina did it. But if I didn't watch Gina I would never know, I would never learn and I think that in dance you learn your moves from other people doing them.

Michelle's comment makes reference to something that has not yet been discussed in relation to peer feedback. So far, I have mainly examined the act of receiving feedback from a peer and not the act of watching another person dance. Peer feedback involves both of these actions; in order to feedback to someone, you must first observe them. This suggests that not only can one's sense of awareness be heightened by receiving feedback, but also through the act of watching someone else and using this as a mirror, or 'trigger' (Jones and Ryan, 2015: 63) to reflect back on oneself[132]. Resonating with the image of a mirror, Johns (2017: 3) describes a process of reflection such as this as:

> Being mindful of self, either within or after experience, as if a mirror in which the practitioner can view and focus self within the context of a particular experience.

This seems to be what Michelle is referring to in her comment above where she very astutely observes that watching her peer compelled her to reflect on her own performance[133]. Michelle also acknowledges that the prevailing form of communication in the dance technique class is by watching a teacher or peer demonstrate a movement and then 'copying' that movement. Here, she shows an awareness of how the dominant doxa operates, again offering another astute observation. Thus, by both acknowledging the presence of the doxa and demonstrating an awareness of how peer feedback enables her to reflect on herself in relation to the doxa, Michelle can be viewed as an agent who is able to move fluidly between these discourses whilst making informed choices that determine the construction of her own internal discourse.

Continuing with the theme of viewing oneself from an external perspective, another strategy used during Cycle Two involved the use of video. During the session on the 19th

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[132] Here, there are synergies with the neuroscientific concept of 'mirror neurons', which despite being a relatively contested area, tends to agree that humans have a system of neurons in the brain that enables them to experience behavioural empathy with another human (Hickok, 2014). In dance, these ideas have mainly been explored in relation to the notion of 'kinaesthetic empathy', as evident in the AHRC funded *Watching Dance* project (see Ehrenberg and Wood, 2011). The relationship between mirror neurons and the use of peer feedback in dance learning contexts has not yet been explored by scholars, however, this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

[133] Much like Michelle, through my observations of other teachers' practice that I conducted in the field, I was compelled to reflect on my own teaching practice, an idea that I discussed in Chapter Four.

January 2016, I asked the students to work with a partner and to use their smart phones[134] to film each other dancing the extended phrase sequence. They were then asked to watch this footage back and review their own performance before the next technique class, specifically focusing on their ability to release their weight to gravity. During the session on the 26th January 2016, they were asked to join with a new partner and watch their performances together whilst sharing their individual reflections on their own performance: https://vimeo.com/507070081. Here, it should be acknowledged that as well as video, the dance studio mirror can act as a further tool for initiating self-reflection, thus, allowing the dancer to achieve higher levels of self-awareness. As discussed in Chapter Three, Ehrenberg (2010) explores this idea from the perspectives of phenomenology, cognitive science and feminist theory, proposing that the dancer's image in the mirror creates a 'dancer-mirror feedback loop' (2010: 175) that enables her to make physical adjustments to the alignment of her body. Although these ideas are relevant to exploring the dialogical relationship between self and other in the dance technique class, my action research did not investigate the role of the mirror in this process. However, incorporating the use of the dance studio mirror into the reflexive-dialogical approach could be a useful perspective to further research in this area, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

After watching the video footage of their partner's performance, every person was invited to write down one piece of feedback for their partner. These pieces of feedback were then put face down in a pile in the middle of the room and everyone was invited to select one. Even though this feedback was intended for someone else, in line with the reflexive-dialogical approach, my aim was to emphasise the idea that when the teacher or a student offers feedback to a particular individual, this feedback can be applicable to everyone; this democratic approach to delivering feedback challenges the dominant pedagogical discourse for dance technique where 'corrections' are often delivered directly from the teacher to one

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[134] To ensure that everyone had their own performance saved to their own phone, the students were asked to use their partner's phone to film with. This was also to ensure that no video footage was shared without permission.

student (Stanton, 2011), reinforcing a binary relationship. This was something that Naomi commented on positively during the focus group:

> you watch us dance and then you come over to us, but you don't say 'oh, you're doing this wrong', you just say 'can everyone watch Naomi just do this move'…you give us the opportunity of other people seeing me doing it wrong – so they can – if they were doing it the same as me, they'll know as well…You get other people to watch us, because it helps other people watching us as well as yourself.

Although Naomi still seems to privilege the idea of conforming to a 'right' or 'wrong' way of executing a movement, she appears to recognise the value of taking a more dialogical approach to feedback, suggesting that she is willing to work beyond the confines of the dominant pedagogical discourse. In contrast, Tamara shared a different perspective stating that she prefers feedback that is directed at her and explicitly tells her whether she is doing the movement right or wrong:

> See, I think I would want more specific – 'Tamara you're doing it wrong', so I'd know, rather than it being broad, 'cos I wouldn't know if it was me or not, if that makes sense. So, I don't mind it is was 'Tamara, do it like this', I think it's better 'cos I'd know where I am.

This view of feedback aligns with the dominant pedagogical discourse in that the student expresses a desire to know if her execution of the movement is correct or incorrect; this echoes the majority of Tamara's other comments, which show a preference for playing by the rules of the dominant doxa and privileging notions of hierarchy and discipline. These are ideas that seem important to Tamara and consequently, raise questions concerning to what extent she is willing to mobilise agency as a way of going beyond the constraints of the dominant discourse in order to explore other possible discourses. Not only this, but Tamara's comment and several of the other student comments often refer to making 'mistakes' and there is a sense of needing to be validated by the teacher. In Chapter Five, I discussed the idea that during both cycles, the students who participated in the research were representative of a typical cohort of students at MMU; since many of them were from working to middle class backgrounds and tended to be the first member of their family to

attend university, this could have implications on the students' sense of worth and, thus, may explain the need for approval that seems inherent within the learning culture. In relation to this idea, going forward, it would be interesting to see how a group of students in a conservatoire training context respond to the reflexive-dialogical approach to learning dance technique and whether this same need for approval is evident.

At the end of the class, each student returned their piece of feedback to the original person it was intended for, an aspect of the activity that seemed important. On reflection, I wish that I had built in more opportunities during the class time for students to engage in group discussion and share their reflections on their own performances, as well as evaluating the usefulness of the self-observation video task. However, Ellen did comment on her experience of the task during focus group:

> the other thing we did once and it was very helpful for me – we had partners and they were videoing – they gave us feedback, but they were filming us and then I went home and I saw like my mistakes in what she told me – I think it's very helpful to record yourself.

This data suggests that much like peer feedback, which takes place during live class time, filming one's performance and viewing this back after the event can provide an alternative way of entering the third-order reflective/reflexive state (Zarrilli, 2009, 2020). This is where the mind is foregrounded and makes sense of the actions of the body from an external perspective, after the event has occurred. The difference with this approach is that it requires the individual to view herself, as opposed to someone else. It could be said that when viewing one's own performance, the potential for blind spots to emerge could be greater than when viewing someone else, since the individual's own subjectivity will determine a perception of herself that may be skewed. However, the purpose of the reflexive-dialogical approach is to enable the teacher and students to mobilise agency as a way of developing an awareness of these perceptions and to question them where possible. Had there been a third cycle of action research, this is something that I would have tried to do more actively. However, having reached a point with the students where they felt

comfortable enough to share their perceptions so honestly, the idea of then directly challenging them on these perceptions seemed quite brutal and was not something that I felt secure enough to do at this stage in the research.

Summary of insights drawn from Cycle Two

The findings gathered from Cycle Two suggest that the pedagogical strategies employed within the reflexive-dialogical approach enabled the students to mobilise agency to varying extents. This was evident both within their cognitive reflections and bodily actions and the interconnected nature of these different states, which demonstrated that the cognitive reflections of the students informed the actions of their bodies, and vice versa. This evidences a cyclical relationship within the body-mind wherein mind and body come to the fore at different moments and at times, are in complete unity. When learning the technical movement material, the students appeared able to navigate their way through these different body-mind states in order to move beyond a superficial level of embodiment, mobilising agency to do so. While the students demonstrated the ability to acknowledge the values of the reflexive-dialogical approach and the way in which it could help them to develop an awareness of self, there were some occasions when they directly questioned the approach. Both of these scenarios present the students as demonstrating agency in different ways. On the one hand, they show a willingness to engage with a pedagogical approach that counters the dominant pedagogical discourse. Consequently, they demonstrate the ability to move beyond the dominant discourse and to develop an awareness of self, actions that could be perceived as agential. On the other hand, in some instances, the students seemed to maintain expectations that belong to the dominant pedagogical discourse. This does not, however, demonstrate a lack of agency, but rather could present the students as being able to move fluidly between a range of pedagogical discourses that do not always align with each other. Those students showing the most developed sense of agency were able to exhibit an awareness of the way in which they were the subjects of these contrasting discourses and how their body-minds were shaped in accordance with the underlying values.

As the research journey progressed, it became apparent that my decision to present the study with as much honesty and openness as possible was beneficial in relation to the data that was gathered. In comparison to Cycle One, the students during Cycle Two appeared more willing to speak openly about their experience of our technique classes and where appropriate, to be openly critical of the pedagogical approach used. The dialogical nature of this relationship allowed me to gain a more informed perspective of the students' perceptions of the pedagogical approach, contributing towards the notion of co-constructed knowledge. In relation to this idea, although it was not specifically examined in this chapter, there was one section of the focus group interview that focused on the 'human' aspect of my teaching and the way in which some students perceived this positively with regards to their development as dancers. Comparing her experiences in my technique class to the 'strict' experiences of her pre-university education, during which she had felt 'scared' of going to lessons, Michelle referred to an occasion during induction week[135] when I had given a short presentation on myself, talking about myself in both professional and personal capacities. She describes a moment when I showed a photograph from my wedding, something that seemed to have made a real impression on her. Suggesting that this somehow made me appear more human, she said:

> there is a boundary that's been knocked down and then again, in technique, usually the teacher would just kind of walk round the room saying the exercise – you kind of do it with us, you stand with us, so I think that's kind of why the barrier's down – because I don't know, you seem like a normal person – you don't seem like a teacher

When I asked whether this made a difference to her experience of learning dance technique, she stated:

> Because you're not scared to like fail, fall over 'cos you're not – I don't know how to put it.

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[135] Induction week took place during September 2015, which was four months prior to the beginning of action research Cycle Two.

Although Michelle was referring to an occasion that was outside the formal timeline of the second cycle of research, her comment seemed so relevant within the context of the research itself. It showed me that a precedent can sometimes be set long before the teacher and students are situated in a formal learning environment together and this precedent is the beginning of the construction of a doxa that becomes more embedded as time goes on. Based on the comments examined in earlier sections, in Michelle's case, it seems that the doxa at play afforded her with the space to construct her own internal discourse by using agency to navigate between the discourses that were available to her. On the same subject, Gina stated:

> I think it gives me more of a respect for you than other teachers in the past because I know the responsibility is coming down with me. It's almost by knocking down that barrier, you're giving me more responsibility and there's actually, in a weird way for me, more of a pressure, because, even though there isn't that strict 'you have to do this', it's like, well, if you don't do it, you don't do it, but you're not going to improve and that's fine

Here, Gina seems to suggest that by the teacher not imposing such tight structures around the learning, she must essentially create her own structures against which she must measure herself. This process seems to enable her to mobilise greater levels of agency in relation to constructing her own moving identity; from this perspective, Gina is not only relying on the teacher to construct her moving identity but she is equally, if not more reliant upon herself. Interestingly, Tamara, who had previously shown more of an allegiance towards the dominant pedagogical discourse commented:

> It's like you're dancing for your own expectations rather than the teacher's.

This suggests that despite the general trend in her comments, Tamara was still able to acknowledge that there was some value in being offered the chance to have more authority over the construction of her own moving identity.

There were a range of findings that emerged from using students' questions as a strategy for initiating reflection. While in some ways it afforded a more dialogical approach towards the learning through enabling an interconnected relationship between bodily explorations and critical discussions, in other ways, it presented some challenges. For example, an ongoing area of tension was my uncertainty around how to summarise such dialogues, when to offer conclusive 'answers' and when to leave things open for further discovery. This idea was compounded by the fact that I had chosen not to work within a tightly codified dance technique but instead explored a release-based approach to technique that was informed by broader movement principles, as opposed to the idea of achieving specific shapes and forms with the body. This technical choice aligned more closely with an open system of learning that foregrounded discovery (Hanstein, 1990) and as such, specific answers did not always seem appropriate to offer. Although this formed part of the underlying value system of the reflexive-dialogical approach, as well as the dance technique itself, there were occasions when the students seemed to crave more direction and clarity and a desire for statements indicating what was right and wrong in their learning of the technique. As their teacher, I also experienced this uncertainty from a different perspective; there were many occasions when I felt like a fish out of water, often questioning the approach and wondering whether it would in fact be better, not to mention easier, to offer closed answers, especially in relation to providing a perceived 'good' student experience.

Despite this uncertainty, towards the end of the cycle, I did reflect on the dialogical nature of the approach in relation to the idea of positioning myself as 'ignorant' (Rancière, 1991) and willing to learn from the students. In my reflection from 22nd February 2016, I wrote:

> *When a student asks a question about something, this is an opportunity to re-define something in my teaching. To re-enquire into the movement and consider new possibilities. This realisation has been a shift for me, enabling me to see that it's not just about enabling the students to enquire, but that they enable me to enquire too.*

Although in retrospect, I have questioned the idea of making myself responsible for determining which questions were worthy of further exploration, therefore placing myself

in a position of power, from another perspective, I am reminded of the importance of positioning myself as a learner. Rather than simply going through the motions of the movements and allowing them to evolve into something that was taken for granted, each time a student asked a specific question, it afforded me with an opportunity to rediscover something about my movement material, to open it back up again and take another look. In this way, I began to learn as much from the students as they did from me and each other, cultivating an environment that at times, felt genuinely dialogical.

Consequently, as the cycle progressed, I developed the confidence to say 'I don't know, but let's find out', something that felt like quite a shift from the scenario I share in my reflection from 29th October 2014, earlier in this chapter. The extent to which the students themselves were aware of how I was experiencing the reflexive-dialogical approach remains unclear. Although there were occasions during class time when I explicitly emphasised the idea that I was learning a lot from their valuable insights, this was not something that the students ever commented on directly. This could be because within the dominant pedagogical discourse, it would not be perceived as acceptable to question the teacher about the knowledge she has acquired through the act of teaching, since the relationship tends to operate in a one-directional way where the teacher essentially supplies the students with the relevant knowledge. Although several students commented on feeling more secure to test and explore, and indeed, to fail as a result of the 'human' aspect of my teaching, Dominique stated 'it's nice now we have a real relationship in the class, but I still believe that there should be a distance [between teacher and student].' This resonates with the notion that despite engaging in a dialogical relationship, the perception remains that in dance, there should be a professional 'distance' or hierarchy between teacher and student, an idea that could be viewed as belonging to the dominant pedagogical discourse.

Finally, with regards to the use of peer feedback activities, the findings gathered from Cycle Two suggest that much like Cycle One, the students were able to use this approach to view their practice from both internal and external perspectives. What is more, they demonstrated an ability to explore the dialogue between these two positions; not only did

they acknowledge how the experience of receiving feedback enables a more informed view of the self to emerge, but they also acknowledged how the act of observing another person dance can function as a mirror through which they can further their perception of self. These were highly mature observations that indicated a shift from Cycle One, possibly due to my own awareness and understanding of how a dialogical learning environment can enable this degree of reflection on the relationship between self and other. Furthermore, the use of the video self-observation task also proved to be another useful opportunity for the students to develop their view of self through another means. Although this strategy was only briefly explored during Cycle Two, if there had been a further cycle of research, the relationship between this particular approach and the other peer feedback activities is something that I would have valued exploring in more detail.

Chapter Seven: Meta-Analysis, conclusions and recommendations

Purpose of the chapter

This thesis has investigated the extent to which a reflexive-dialogical approach to learning enables students of dance technique, and their teacher, to mobilise agency. It explores how agency is mobilised by dance students through the tacit knowledge displayed by the physical actions of their bodies. It investigates how this tacit knowledge is extrapolated through the use of cognitive reflection, allowing dance students to reflect on the way they are constructed by the aesthetic and pedagogical discourses that they participate in. I have proposed that this reciprocal relationship between body and mind, action and thought, as evident in the reflexive-dialogical approach, can enable dance students to move past a superficial level of embodiment; to remind the reader, drawing on Turner's (2015) notion of a continuum of embodiment, this involves moving beyond the act of replicating steps and shapes in order to play with the creative potential of the movement, push boundaries and innovate, thus, displaying characteristics that are aligned with a physical conception of agency (Noland, 2009). By inviting the students to engage in reflective activities alongside their physical practice, the data analysis conducted in Chapters Five and Six demonstrates that dance students move through a range of body-mind states (Zarrilli, 2009, 2020) when embodying dance techniques and reflecting on this process. Therefore, the act of mobilising agency in the dance technique class requires an integrated configuration of a body-mind that lands at different points on a continuum of embodiment across space and time.

Throughout Chapters Five and Six, the different applications of the reflexive-dialogical approach have been explored and the findings gathered over two cycles of ethnographic-action research have been examined. Analysis indicates that the students who participated in this study demonstrate the conception of agency discussed above to varying extents. In this chapter, I conduct a meta-analysis of the key research findings gathered from both cycles. I offer a commentary on what has been observed and not only consider the extent to which the students displayed and mobilised agency, but also the relevance of individual

agency in relation to the current socio-cultural and political climate. I also reflect on my own sense of agency, as it developed in dialogue with that of the students'. This analysis allows me to draw conclusions regarding the contribution to knowledge that my study makes to the field of dance education. By reflecting on my own research findings and exploring where there may have been missed opportunities to extrapolate more data, I identify where further research needs to be undertaken in order to address the gaps in knowledge that still remain. The chapter concludes by presenting the suggested recommendations should further work be conducted in the field.

Recognising the doxa

This study has taught me that individuals can still have agency even if dominant structures and ideologies remain intact. Where I had initially viewed the doxa as a form of restriction, I now perceive it as an essential component in the process of exercising agency. In the initial stages of the study, I had assumed that in order to enable dance students to have agency, I needed to depart from the structures and ideologies that were governing the learning environment, one of these being the hierarchy that was present between the students and me, their teacher. Although I recognised that there was a relationship between cognitive reflection, embodiment and agency, I was not yet sure how these concepts were connected. As Cycle One progressed, I was able to make sense of these ideas by drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'doxa', Foucault's (1977, 1981) notion of 'discourse' and Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the dialogical. Not only this, but through my own engagement with social and cultural theory, and by viewing my practice in dialogue with such theory, I was able to situate my thinking within a context that equipped me with the language to articulate my insights. Access to theory and a unity between theory and practice is something that Freire (1995) argues is essential in the process of generating knowledge and this was certainly true of my own learning process. By using specific theoretical ideas as lenses, my perception of the learning environment shifted and my awareness of the power relationships at play within the environment was heightened.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

For example, beginning to view the dance technique class as a social world that was built upon specific traditions and values, and operated in accordance with particular rules of engagement, was, arguably, one of the key discoveries I made during the course of this research. Writing now, this observation seems rather obvious. However, since conducting the action research, I have spent time reflecting on why I was not aware of the sociological nature of the dance technique class prior to conducting the study[136]. As discussed in Chapter Two, as a young person, I had spent years training in different dance techniques in several different contexts. I had become accustomed to the idea of viewing the technique class as separate from everyday activities, almost as though it existed in a vacuum. I believe that this was the result of many dance teachers encouraging my peers and me to leave our 'emotional baggage' at the door of the dance studio, the rationale being that our everyday lives should not be distracting us from our dancing.

Although I recognise that these teachers were doing their best to help me focus on the task at hand, it now seems that I was essentially being asked to detach from the lived experience of my body and to treat it as mechanical tool to execute dance movements with. Having now been given the opportunity to question this approach, I am able to recognise the problematic nature of this non-holistic view of the self. However, as a younger person, viewing my dancing self as separate to my everyday self was quite normal for me. This probably led me to consider the dance technique class as an environment that did not belong to the regular social world that I knew; that being home life, school and friendship groups. Furthermore, the way I used my body in a technique class was so distinct from the way I moved in everyday life, that I had never considered the possibility that this learning setting could be permeated with the same issues concerning power and competition that were present in other areas of my life, such as school. There was also a sense of regarding my dance classes as a retreat, a place where I went to have a break from the challenges of

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[136] This was especially intriguing given my background in socially engaged arts practices, such as the *Boys Dance Lab* project discussed in Chapter Two. Because of projects like this, I had a strong awareness of how arts practices could be used to disrupt stereotypes and to promote inclusivity and empowerment. This made me increasingly curious as to why I perceived the dance technique class so differently to other dance learning settings and led me to wonder how these perceptions had been constructed.

everyday life, reinforcing the sense of division between my dancing self and my everyday self.

Educational scholars Alexander, Rose and Woodhead (1992: 21) discuss this idea when exploring the structure of the curriculum in primary education and the notion of 'Subject divisions'. Proposing that the teaching of subjects imposes a 'received version of knowledge' (ibid) as opposed to enabling the child to construct their own meanings, the authors suggest that the notion of subjects is 'inconsistent with the child's view of the world' (ibid), stating that 'it is the wholeness of the curriculum which is important rather than the distinct identity of individual subjects' (ibid). The same could be said for the teaching of dance, which has traditionally divided specific skillsets into areas of learning, for example, technique, choreography, improvisation and so on. Therefore, to enable learners to construct a more holistic view of the discipline, and themselves as subjects of the discipline, perhaps educators need to foreground the connections and interfaces between the different areas of learning, as well as the broader relationship to the surrounding socio-cultural environment. For example, students could be encouraged to consider the interfaces between the structured nature of dance technique and the explorative nature of choreography and to examine the push and pull relationship between the two areas of learning. In addition, students could explore the synergies and discrepancies between their dancing identities and their everyday identities, as evident in the research conducted by dance scholar Dyer (2010).

Through the work done in my study, shifting my perception of the dance technique class has required me to question everything I thought I knew about a world I was so familiar with and to consider my own social construction, as a subject of this social world. Once I had recognised the sociological nature of the technique class, I was much better equipped to explore these ideas with the students who participated in the study. Although, on reflection, it seems that these explorations could have gone further, valuable data was gathered over the course of both cycles that allowed me to make sense of how the students perceived the

social world of the dance class, and themselves, as subjects within it.

Cycle One: Identifying forms of agency

To remind the reader, the four learning strategies that were used to explore the research aims during Cycle One were peer feedback, group discussions, reflective journals and a choreographic learning activity. Based on the analysis conducted in Chapter Five, the choreographic learning activity appeared to be the strategy that revealed the most significant findings regarding the way the dominant discourses and the doxa were playing out in my technique classes. When analysing the movement contributions that the students created during this activity, and indeed, the way they taught this movement to each other, I began to realise that whether consciously or not, the students appeared to be adhering to a doxa that I had previously been unaware of. For instance, the way the students chose to teach each other was often resonant of the way I taught them, or alternatively copied the teaching practices they had experienced in other areas of their dance education. Lortie's (1975) notion of the 'apprenticeship of observation' is useful here as it refers to the idea that teachers learn how to teach by observing their own teachers. This idea can also be viewed in relation to Judith Butler's (1988) theory of performativity, which she uses to examine the social construction of gender identity. Proposing that individuals '*constitute* [sic] social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic sign' (1988: 519), Butler suggests that social agents learn how to 'act' a specific identity. The same could be said for the identities of dance teachers and students, who learn how to 'act' in accordance with a particular identity by embodying the discursive practices that are commonplace within the social reality, which in this case, is the dance class. By 'performing' what they perceive to be the identity of dance teacher or student, it could be said that individuals participate in the perpetuation of teaching and learning approaches from one generation of dancers to the next, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three (Shapiro, 1998; Stinson, 2015).

In view of these ideas, when observing the students teaching each other during the choreographic learning activity, it became apparent that some students were drawing on

teaching approaches that are rooted in the dominant pedagogical discourses[137]. In contrast, others blended different approaches, appearing to borrow from several pedagogical discourses, including those evident in my own teaching practice. In Chapter Five, I propose that it was these students who displayed agency most evidently through their ability to navigate the discourses available to them and to draw on specific aspects of each discourse; it could be said that this is a direct consequence of the reflexive-dialogical approach since it demonstrates the students' ability to examine pedagogical approaches in a sceptical way and to question and filter information, as opposed to simply accepting it. The need to nurture a level of scepticism amongst dance students and teachers is something that I will return to later in this chapter when I propose my recommendations for future research.

Furthermore, the aesthetic of the movement that the students created during Cycle One seemed to be either grounded in a dominant movement discourse of western theatre dance[138], or resonant of the technical movement style that I had adopted within my own teaching. Where I had assumed that the choreographic learning activity would allow the students to work with their own individual movement languages, it actually did quite the opposite. First of all, it brought the very notion of an individual movement language into question; in Chapter Two, I draw on Roche's (2011, 2015) notion of the dancer constructing her individual moving identity by embodying specific aspects of the movement discourses she is subject to. In Chapter Five, I draw a parallel between this idea and Bakhtin's (1981) concept of the internally persuasive discourse. This analysis demonstrates that individual movement languages do not simply emerge from nowhere, but are constructed in dialogue with the external world. Therefore, this explains why the students would inevitably draw on the information available to create their movement sequences in the choreographic learning activity.

These findings also reinforced the presence of the doxa that was determining what the students perceived as acceptable, and not acceptable, within our technique classes. This

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[137] For example, the teacher demonstration and imitation model that I refer to in the thesis introduction.
[138] For example, classical ballet, modern dance, postmodern dance.

was something that the students discussed during the focus group interview when Poppy referred to the idea of going into each class with a different 'head' on. Although I was not aware of having communicated any rules to the students, it became clear that by virtue of the discursive practices communicated through my/their body-minds, the students had created sequences in accordance with what they perceived as an 'acceptable' aesthetic within the context of *my* class specifically; it is worth noting that the students also discussed changing their movement style in relation to who was teaching them, suggesting that they understood there to be different rules of engagement in each of their dance technique classes[139]. On observing this, it became apparent that the students and me had come to an unconscious understanding with each other that I refer to as a 'doxic agreement', as discussed in Chapters Five and Six. By using our intuition to navigate the discourses that determined what was socially acceptable behaviour, an agreement was constructed. Furthermore, each time the students mobilised agency to test the parameters of the doxic agreement, new variations of the doxa were constructed to accommodate these new ways of being.

In addition to the findings relating to the doxic agreement, during Cycle One, there were several other findings that emerged regarding the way the students displayed agency. These findings are discussed at length in Chapter Five, but to summarise for the purposes of this chapter, agency was perceived as being displayed and mobilised by the students in the following ways:

- Reflecting on the internal, or somatic sensation of the dance technique movement being learned; or -
- Reflecting on the external appearance (ie. performance) of the dance technique movement being learned.

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[139] This discussion also extended beyond the area of dance technique to include other learning areas such as choreography. As such, it became evident that the students were involved in simultaneously navigating the doxa of more than one area of learning.

- Reflecting on the dialogical relationship between these two sources of information (inner and outer) to extract tacit knowledge (Schön, 1983, 1987) residing in the body, thus, aligning with the third order reflective/reflexive state discussed by Zarrilli (2009, 2020).

- Using this process of reflection to establish the level of embodiment being achieved in one's dancing, drawing on Turner's (2015) notion of a continuum of embodiment.

- Exploring the constraints of the external environment by playing with the flexibility of the rules belonging to a particular pedagogical discourse or movement aesthetic and exploring the relationships between these discourses.

- Constructing one's own moving identity, or sense of an internal discourse (Bakhtin, 1981), by drawing on different components of the dominant and marginal pedagogical and aesthetic discourses, therefore constructing alternative discourses that can be moved between.

- In some cases, constructing one's own moving identity by showing awareness of, and reflecting on oneself as a subject of such discourses.

These findings suggest that different pedagogical and aesthetic discourses can be at play within one learning environment, often simultaneously; this was another key insight that was gathered during Cycle One. Barnes (2000) proposes that the individual exercises agency by 'intervening' with the course of events around her, as discussed in Chapter One.
In the instance of the independent contemporary dancer, as each discourse encompasses its own value system, the dancer can be viewed as an agent that navigates a complex network of discourses to construct a sense of her own internal discourse, as discussed earlier. Based on this evidence, where I had initially assumed that I needed to break free from the doxa to enable agency, I began to realise that the doxa was in fact essential to the process of mobilising agency. After all, what does one push against and pull from if there are no surrounding structures? Although this was a conception of agency that was more complex and subtle than I had initially imagined, when I looked closer, I began to realise that the students were already very skilled at drawing on the discourses available to them and putting them to use. This was a key insight that informed the design of the second cycle of

research, which aimed to further explore the dialogical relationship between the students and me and to examine the extent to which the students viewed themselves as agential.

Another key finding uncovered during Cycle One concerned the way in which agency was being displayed by the students' body-minds. The data gathered demonstrates that agency was being displayed through the physical actions of the students' bodies when dancing and/or teaching each other as well as through their cognitive reflections, which were articulated during peer and group discussions and during the focus group interview. Therefore, I began to view the act of mobilising agency as something that commanded an integrated organisation of the body-mind. As such, dancing and reflecting were viewed as synonymous with each other and reflection was viewed as a phenomenon that arose from the actions of the body (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 2016). What is more, it became apparent that particular activities commanded more from the body while others commanded more of the mind, meaning that at times, the body essentially became absent (Leder, 1990). This resulted in several different organisations of the body-mind, an idea that resonates with the view explored by Zarrilli (2009, 2020) in his psychophysical approach to performer training.

On further reflection, in relation to mobilising agency, this finding highlights the importance of perceiving the dancer's body-mind as a non-binary entity. Commenting on the reciprocal relationship between thought and action in relation to achieving social change, Brazilian educator Freire (2005: 125 – 126) writes:

> Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action...revolution is achieved with neither verbalism nor activism, but rather with praxis, that is, with *reflection* and *action* directed at the structures to be transformed.

In other words, to have agency, the body is no use without the mind and vice versa; the individual cannot simply 'act' as though having agency, in order for real transformation to occur, she must be given opportunities to think about her actions and to question them. This is an important observation for the western dance education community since as

established in earlier chapters, a questioning approach to learning is not generally encouraged. Even within learning settings where more progressive pedagogical approaches are used, such as somatic-based learning environments where the intention may be to liberate learners, there remains a tendency to accept the dominant value system of the approach being used. While critical reflection may be present in some sectors of the dance community, it is not embedded within the dominant pedagogical discourses or the general learning culture. And while the western dance community may present itself as liberating children and young people by exposing them to physicality and creativity, as Freire (ibid) writes, 'The leaders cannot treat the oppressed as mere activists to be denied the opportunity of reflection and allowed merely the illusion of acting'. This idea not only highlights the tendency for the dominant pedagogical discourses of dance to unconsciously privilege the body over the mind, but in some cases, to deliberately exclude the reflective ability of the mind altogether. During Cycle Two, these ideas were brought into question by foregrounding the use of cognitive reflection during the dance technique class and exploring students' perceptions of reflection more directly.

Cycle Two: Digging deeper

Although several significant findings were uncovered during Cycle One, there were areas that required further investigation during Cycle Two. For example, although the findings from Cycle One indicated that there was a clear relationship between embodiment, cognitive reflection and agency, the extent to which the students were actually aware of themselves as agential still remained unclear. In fact, due to the more subtle and complex nature of the agency displayed by the students during Cycle One, I had only just begun to view the students as being agential, so it was probably too early for me to seek ways of questioning them on this idea. What is more, the students' perceptions of the actual value of cognitive reflection in the dance technique class had not yet been investigated. In relation to this point, during Cycle One, the students had willingly engaged with the reflexive-dialogical approach without question. Although this was useful for me because it allowed me to gather data regarding the efficacy of the approach in relation to facilitating

agency, what I had not acknowledged were the potential issues with imposing a specific learning approach onto the students, without allowing opportunities for them to ask questions or indeed, to be sceptical.

In Chapter Three, I explored the idea that the opportunities for dance students to exercise agency are limited if there is a lack of awareness of the pedagogical discourses they are shaped by. As discussed in Chapter One, Freire (1972) refers to these discourses as the socio-cultural reality and in his view, only when becoming aware of the socio-cultural reality can the individual develop the critical consciousness that is required to question the conditions of the social world. In the case of dance education, the socio-cultural reality could be grounded in the values of a dominant discourse, which privileges notions of authority, discipline and conformity, or the values of a marginal discourse, which privileges notions of critical thinking, individuality and agency, or even both. However, if the values of the discourse remain silently embedded (Dragon, 2015) and the learner has no sense of the socio-cultural reality that they are participating in, then it could be argued that a pedagogical discourse that intends to empower learners inadvertently operates as a dominant, or authoritative discourse, to borrow Bakhtin's (1981) term.

My analysis of Cycle One led me to draw the conclusion that I had not been explicit enough with the students about my underlying intentions for conducting this research and my beliefs and values as a teacher of dance. It was not enough to simply tell the students that engaging with reflection would make them into better dancers. Taking this approach would undermine the integrity of my research and so I knew that during Cycle Two, I needed to find ways of more effectively communicating with the students about why I viewed reflection as being of value to their learning. What is more, I needed to be more confident when it came to questioning the students about their perceptions of reflection and indeed, when being questioned myself. This meant being better prepared for hearing things that did not align with my own beliefs about reflection, or caused me to question my abilities as a teacher. These were difficult realities to confront, especially in the pressurised world of higher education where the objective of the university was to provide a 'good' student

experience, an idea that did not necessarily align with my own perception of a 'good' education, as discussed in Chapter Six.

Upon closer examination

From the findings gathered during Cycle One, I began to consider the idea of looking more closely at what was already there, which in ethnography, would be viewed as examining the working practices of the social field as it currently exists (Brewer, 2000). As Cycle One progressed, I began to realise that there were specific aspects of my teaching that I had been taking for granted, aspects that already encompassed significant amounts of knowledge that needed to be uncovered. In the same way that I was encouraging the students to reflect on their dance practice to extract tacit knowledge about the act of dancing, I realised that I needed to do the same for my teaching practice. For example, as explored earlier, my presumption had been that in order to facilitate agency, I needed to 'free' the students from the traditions and rules of the dance technique class. What I did not realise is that the students were already skilled at navigating and re-purposing the existing rules. This was evident in the data gathered from the first focus group interview, during which one student commented on playing by different rules, depending on who was teaching her, therefore complying to the rules of multiple doxic agreements. On reflection, it is possible that while this idea came as a surprise to me, it may also have come as a surprise to the student who could have been unaware of her tendency to act in this way until she articulated the reflection verbally. This scenario highlights the emergent nature of agency as a process that becomes realised over time, an idea that I explore further later on.

In recognising this, as my research progressed, the idea of examining existing phenomena more closely continued. As such, during Cycle Two, I continued to focus on exploring the use of peer feedback and group discussions as methods of reflection. However, as discussed in Chapter Six, an additional focus was placed on using students' questions about the technique movement, a common occurrence in the dance technique class, to initiate reflection. In an effort not to skim past questions too quickly or answer them in a didactive

way, during Cycle Two, I examined the effects of using students' questions as a starting point for reflective activity, with a focus on the use of peer feedback during this process. From the analysis conducted in Chapter Six, it became evident that this approach to responding to students' questions allowed agency to be displayed and mobilised in the following ways:

- Through the physicality of the body by adopting an explorative approach to answering questions that departs from the dominant notion of one fixed meaning or truth. This endorses the idea that there can be more than one way to approach the physical execution of a movement, therefore encouraging an approach to dancing that supports innovation and agency (Noland, 2009).

- Exploring a specific aspect of the dance technique both individually and through peer feedback activities, thus, participating in an engaged and dialogical approach to reflection (Ladyshewsky, 2013) that enables learners to share and encounter different perspectives.

- In continuation from Cycle One, reflecting on the dialogical relationship between the internal (somatic) and external (teacher, peer) information available.

- In continuation from Cycle One, reflecting on the information offered from an external source to 'trigger' (Jones and Ryan, 2015) reflection on one's sense of self, as though viewing oneself in a mirror (Johns, 2017).

- In continuation from Cycle One, demonstrating an awareness of the dominant discourses and reflecting on the way one is constructed by such discourses.

- In some cases, sharing and reflecting on perceptions of a reflective approach to embodying dance techniques and commenting on its value as a tool in the dance technique class.

As demonstrated above, during Cycle Two, there was significant evidence to suggest that a reflexive-dialogical approach to responding to questions did enable students to exercise agency and, in some cases, to demonstrate awareness of this agency. This was furthered

through the additional focus on the dialogical relationship between self and other, as explored in the peer feedback activities. In Chapter Six, I suggested that the additional use of video as a tool for reflection in the peer feedback activities enhanced the dialogical relationship between self and other, allowing the individual to develop increased levels of self-awareness. In relation to this idea, if a third cycle of action research was to take place, building on the research of Ehrenberg (2010), it would be useful to examine the use of the dance studio mirror as a fourth source of external information, thus, acting as an additional tool to enable a dialogical mode of reflection in peer feedback activities. Although mirror use is a contested area in dance education research (ibid), mirrors do provide a source of external information that could prove useful for developing the reflexive-dialogical approach.

Although several new findings were acquired during Cycle Two, which support the use of cognitive reflection in relation to enabling agency, there was also evidence to suggest that the open-ended nature of the way questions were dealt with caused confusion for students, thus, bringing the approach into question. This was evident both in my own reflective journal entries and during the focus group interview, when some students commented on the desire for a more conclusive answer. Aware of the counter-cultural nature of this approach, throughout Cycle Two, I frequently questioned the integrity of this reflective mode of teaching dance technique, as well as my own abilities as a teacher. Although I persevered with encouraging the students to essentially 'answer' questions themselves by exploring different movement possibilities, throughout Cycle Two, this approach created tensions that I recognised, but never really resolved; these tensions are discussed at length in Chapter Six. Although in retrospect, I see that it is perhaps not necessary to resolve such tensions, in the moment of teaching, the pressure to conform to the students' expectations felt significant. Consequently, if I had been more courageous, I would have valued questioning the students further about their desire for conclusive answers and initiated discussions about the way different pedagogical discourses aligned, or indeed, did not align with each other; these are ideas that would benefit from further interrogation and could therefore form the focus for a third cycle of research.

Even with that said, during Cycle Two I did focus on being more honest with the students about my motivations for the research. The aim of this was to allow the students to talk more openly about their experiences of learning dance techniques, both past and present. As discussed in Chapter Six, the findings gathered during Cycle Two do indicate that I was more successful in enabling more open and honest communication. For example, some students were more forthcoming in discussing their perceptions of dance technique and indeed reflection, with some individuals even questioning its relevance as a learning tool in a dance technique learning environment. This level of honesty was a significant step forward from Cycle One, however, at the end of Cycle Two, it still seemed that opportunities to glean knowledge from the valuable insights of the students had been missed. For instance, I would have appreciated a chance to question the students more directly about why they viewed reflection as secondary, or even unimportant to the act of dancing. In relation to this idea, if an additional cycle of action research had been conducted, it would have been useful to speak with the same students later on in their studies to see whether this was still the dominant perception. In other words, does this view of reflection change over time as undergraduate learners become more experienced and are exposed to a broader range of pedagogical approaches and ideas? This was certainly the case for me as an undergraduate student myself, as discussed later on.

This question highlights a further area for consideration for future research concerning the notion of reflection and time; during this action research, students were invited to reflect on the act of dancing immediately after dancing. Although this was a recurring process that took place over a number of weeks, and the students were encouraged to make connections from one week to the next, the immediacy of this approach to reflection is something that was never really discussed. As someone who takes time to process information myself and recognises the non-linear nature of learning, ironically, the potential pressures around expecting the students to reflect 'on-the-spot' never really occurred to me at the time of the action research. Therefore, this reinforces the idea of speaking to the same students later on in their studies to explore whether any further reflections about this

pedagogical approach had emerged over time. The notion of non-linear learning and agency as a time-based, emergent process is something that I discuss in relation to my own sense of agency, in the closing section of this chapter.

In addition to the findings already discussed, there was some evidence to suggest that the less codified, release-based technical dance style that was utilised during Cycle Two may have afforded more opportunities for students to exercise agency than the more codified, Cunningham-based style that was utilised during Cycle One. This is an idea that is discussed at length in Chapter Six when I suggest that in comparison to a more tightly codified technique, the release-based dance style could be viewed as presenting more opportunities to play with the interpretation of a movement, therefore affording greater levels of physical agency to be mobilised. With that said, it should be acknowledged that even when a less codified dance technique is being learned, the research findings suggest that in some cases, dance students still perceived the teacher's body as an external 'ideal' that should be conformed to. This could help to explain the tensions surrounding the reflexive-dialogical approach to responding to students' questions and the desire for the teacher to provide more conclusive answers. This reinforces the point made earlier in this chapter regarding the importance of reflection in enabling students to understand how their body-minds are constructed by different pedagogical and aesthetic discourses and to exercise agency in navigating these discourses.

My sense of agency

Although this study has predominantly focused on examining the agency of the students, as agency is a dialogical phenomenon, I cannot summarise the research findings without talking about the effects on my own sense of agency as the teacher of these students. Although only two cycles of research were conducted during this study, and the variation in pedagogical strategies from one cycle to the next was subtle, the shift in my own sense of agency seemed immense. For example, during Cycle One, reflecting on my experiences as a leaner and teacher of dance allowed me to challenge my perception that a 'good' dance

teacher maintains a knowledge gap between herself and her students. This is an idea that Rancière (1991) questions in his concept of the ignorant schoolmaster when he proposes that the notion of the teacher continually being one step ahead contradicts the idea of a dialogical relationship between teacher and student. What is more, it led me to question the approaches of some of the teachers who had taught me and to see that even those I had held in great esteem were as guilty as me when it came to perpetuating the dominant discourses. It felt shocking to acknowledge that those individuals were, just like me, subjects of the socio-cultural reality. As such, I now view myself as privileged to have been given opportunities to reflect on the way I have been constructed by the discourses, something that many of my peers and teachers may not have been fortunate enough to experience.

During Cycle Two, the decision to discuss some of my own experiences as a dance student and to reveal more to the students about my beliefs and values as a teacher was particularly exposing. Furthermore, inviting the students to talk about their perceptions of the beliefs and values that I perceived as so important forced me to confront some difficult realities, and at times, it was hard not to take this personally. A big learning curve was understanding how to sit with some of these difficult feelings and to let go of the need to control events by 'fixing' things for the students. However, all of these critical incidents were important events in paving the way for my own sense of agency to develop. Once I realised that regardless of our titles, we were all simply subjects of the discourses, I became attuned to the dialogical nature of our collective agency and it became less about me and them, and more about us.

For example, the students' willingness to explore and play with different movement possibilities during Cycle Two gave me licence to be more playful with the movement that I was offering during our technique classes. This was a reciprocal process; the more explorative they were, the more confident I became to let go of what I thought the students' expectations were and the more I could explore the parameters of the learning environment. Through this process, it seemed that new variations of the doxic agreement were continually constructed and re-constructed. On reflection, this could be why there was

such a dramatic shift from the codified technical style of Cycle One to the more fluid, release-based style of Cycle Two; I am sure that this was not a coincidence but a shift in my own habitus, which changed in response to how the doxa was operating. My evolving habitus afforded me with a greater sense of agency and an ability to be less concerned with adhering to the rules of a specific technique. Instead, I felt able to construct new rules of engagement, in dialogue with the students. As such, throughout this research, I began to view my subjectivity as a teacher as continually shifting and unfolding (Barnes, 2000) in response to the subjectivity of the students and a doxa that kept evolving each time a rule was questioned or broken.

However, although the relationship between the students and me was more dialogical during the second cycle, I learned that maintaining open communication channels does not necessarily make things easier. In fact, it often seemed that the more I knew about what the students were experiencing, the more things seemed to jar with my assumptions about the conditions of the learning environment. Consequently, it was during the instances where I was challenged that I found I had to be the most agential. For example, when activities took me to a place that seemed unfamiliar or uncomfortable, it led me to feel like a fish out of water; this was a strange phenomenon to experience as the individual who was perceived by the students as holding the authority and therefore, being in control. However, it was during these instances that I had to work harder to make sense of the ever-shifting rules of the doxic agreement, trusting that some sense of order would eventually emerge from the messiness of undoing things[140]. Being challenged in this way commanded greater levels of resilience from me and forced me to be more resourceful and creative, characteristics that could be aligned with agency (Noland, 2009). Furthermore, it was also useful for me to be reminded of the uncertainty that the students must have been experiencing when navigating the relationship between their own habitus and the doxa of the learning environment. Remembering this allowed greater compassion and understanding on my part.

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[140] Messy processes is a key idea within action research, as discussed by McNiff (2013) and explored in Chapter Four.

During the course of the action research, I often used to think that I could not wait for my teaching practice to return to 'normal' because the turmoil of continually questioning it felt like a burden. However, I now see that it is by accepting the 'normal' that the dominant discourses continue to thrive. To allow events to simply unfold without question would be undermining the value of reflection, an approach that I have argued so adamantly for. Action research scholars Carr and Kemmis (2005) comment on this by discussing the importance of 'staying critical' in the postmodern world, proposing that it is the duty of the teacher-researcher to keep asking questions. Not only this, but as demonstrated in this PhD study, agency is mobilised through engagement with theoretically-informed critical reflection and scepticism, more extreme forms of questioning that have a direct impact on an individual's actions. Going forward, I will continue to ensure that my teaching allows space for learners to exercise scepticism through the reciprocal relationship between reflective thought and physical action.

Recommendations for future research

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that through the use of cognitive reflection, Level Four contemporary dance technique students were able to exercise agency to varying extents during both cycles of research. However, further work needs to be undertaken to understand more about the use of cognitive reflection as a learning tool in the contemporary dance technique class. To ensure that reflection does not evolve into an authoritative discourse that becomes silently embedded, more needs to be understood about the way undergraduate dance students view cognitive reflection as a learning strategy for dance technique. Although this research has attempted to encourage a fluid and reciprocal relationship between the body and mind, it seems that there is a still a hierarchy of importance when it comes to assessing the significance of specific activities in the dance technique class. The findings in this study suggest that although the students viewed a reflective approach to learning dance technique as important, the dominant perception appears to be that physical 'capital' (Bourdieu, 1977) is viewed as having greater

value than the reflective ability of the mind. Not only does this perception situate the body and mind in opposition to each other[141], but it highlights the need for the western dance education community to nurture, and stabilise, a reflective disposition in dance students, much earlier in their educational journeys. Doing this may help to embed reflection into the 'normal' learning culture of the dance technique class and ensure that it is not met with surprise or resistance.

In spite of this dominant perspective, data analysis does show that some students were able to recognise themselves as subjects of the different discourses at play, including the reflective discourse; this was more prominent in Cycle Two than in Cycle One. However, although this was the case, none of the students explicitly stated that they viewed themselves as 'agential'. This could be because the term 'agency' was not within the students' vocabularies, so even though agency was being displayed, it was not something that was defined as such; to a certain extent, the same could be said for my own understanding of agency. For example, throughout this thesis, I have spoken frequently about my assumptions in the initial stages of this study. I knew that I wanted to explore how cognitive reflection could enable dance technique students to develop a sense of ownership and autonomy in relation to their learning. I knew that this had something to do with what I perceived to be a hierarchical relationship between teacher and students, but at this point, I did not understand that I was dealing with the notion of agency. This is something that came with time and happened through my engagement with social and cultural theory, as well as through discussions with critical friends.

Once I had grasped specific terms such as agency and discourse, I gained the 'textual control' (Adams, 2008) to situate my ideas within a specific field and to articulate my insights. The same could be said for students of dance technique; by enabling them to have

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[141] Here, I acknowledge once again that the notion of 'cognitive reflection' could be viewed as problematic in relation to reinstating a binary between body and mind that this research is attempting to disrupt. However, as discussed in Chapter One, in searching for a word to capture the reflective (as opposed to pre-reflective) thinking processes that happen after the act of dancing, the word 'cognition' has been adopted throughout this thesis.

more awareness of the pedagogical values that inform their learning, they can become empowered learners. Similarly, by enabling students to understand and utilise terms such as 'agency', they are more likely to view themselves as agents. By silently embedding (Dragon, 2015) these ideas so that they are hidden away from view, it is difficult for learners to mobilise beyond what they already know; this is how dominant pedagogical discourses are able to maintain their position. Although this study was successful in enabling students to mobilise agency and to reflect on the act of doing so, a third cycle of research could focus on supporting students in gaining the necessary vocabulary and textual control to reflect on themselves as agents.

Although this study has not explored the role of theory in relation to the students' engagement with the reflexive-dialogical approach, further research could investigate how accessing theory allows learners of dance to develop a sense of agency and to articulate their lived experiences of exercising agency in words. This relates to a further point, which was raised in Chapter Six concerning the students' ability to articulate, in words, the experiences felt on a bodily level. Although this study has explored how cognitive reflection can take place in a verbal discussion format[142] during class time as opposed to being an activity that only happens in private, it has not examined the challenges of transposing bodily experience into words and the potential for movement and words to jar with each other. Furthermore, although dance students are regularly expected to produce written reflective accounts as part of their learning, even for the most skilled writers, there are not always words available to express how something feels on a bodily level. Therefore, further research could focus on enabling students to grasp specific language in order to broaden their vocabulary for reflection, thus, nurturing the ability to write detailed reflective accounts.

An additional area that would benefit from further exploration is the desire for agency amongst the student body. Even though the students in this study appeared to exercise

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[142] Here it should be acknowledged that during both cycles, the students were encouraged to write in reflective journals, but these journals were not used as a source of data, as discussed in Chapter Five and Six.

agency in different ways, there were only some instances where particular students referred to this as a beneficial process. Thus, at times it was hard to gauge whether the students actually wanted agency at all, or whether they just said they did because this was implied by the pedagogical discourse. The appetite for agency amongst the student body is an interesting topic for consideration when viewed through the lens of the current socio-cultural and political climate. For example, political movements such as 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Me Too' demonstrate that social actors can question, update and change hegemonic discourses through their actions, thus, cultivating new discourses. These ideas can also be viewed in relation to the recent move towards decolonising the curriculum in higher education and the need to do this in the area of dance studies by building on the work of scholars including Cruz Banks (2009) and Loot (2021) to examine how specific, non-western dance forms have been marginalised and oppressed by the dominant discourses of western dance education. Not only this, but the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, especially for the performing arts sector, has situated artists in a position of friction against the dominant discourse, which views art as non-essential and as lacking value. As such, artists have had to reinterpret their ideological identities in relation to a Covid-19 world. Therefore, perhaps agency is not something that is necessarily desired by the subject, but emerges as a form of social survival in response to the conditions of the external environment.

Resonating with Turner and Campbell's (2021) proposal that psychophysical practices produce a non-linear kind of learning that occurs through the 'constant slippage' between different practices that invite different engagements of the body-mind, this would certainly be the case for my own sense of agency, which has been a gradual and emergent process, unfolding over a period of time. Through the interfaces between significant life events, and my reflections that have been interwoven throughout, I have eventually arrived at a place where I am significantly more agential than I would have been as an eighteen-year-old undergraduate student. While formal education has played a key role in this process of transformation, other life events such as becoming a mother, traveling and experiencing other cultures, and being made redundant from a long-standing form of employment have

all acted as catalysts for bringing agency to the fore. Such events are located within their own respective discourses that offer guidelines as to how subjects should behave. In questioning whether to passively accept or question such guidelines, I have been able to explore what scope for action I have in relation to the discourses.

Furthermore, over time, reflection has allowed me to recognise that events I had initially perceived as unrelated are in fact deeply connected. These observations demonstrate that while the agency I once possessed may have been more discrete, my reflexive capacity has determined a sense of agency that is now much more evident. This emergent sense of agency is also apparent in this thesis, that has been written over a period of six years and during which, several shifts in thinking have occurred. Therefore, in the chapters written more recently, there seems to be a stronger sense of security and authority in the way I articulate my insights. Thus, it could be said that I am the embodiment of the aim of this research, which is to draw upon critical reflection to empower dance students and educators to exercise agency. My own sense of agency has allowed me to navigate a complex professional sector, which I perceive as a constantly evolving trajectory. By adopting different points of perception along this trajectory, knowledge and insights have emerged regarding the construction of my own identity. Although I may be further on in this process than the students who participated in this action research, I offer an example of how reflection can be used as a tool to stimulate agential action and lifelong learning.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

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Appendices.

Appendix 1. Example of a Participant Information Sheet

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

MMU Cheshire

Department of Contemporary Arts

Information Sheet for Participants (ISP Template)

Title of Study: Making material meaningful: nurturing the 'thinking dancer' in the Higher Education dance technique class.

Ethics Committee Reference Number:

The Ethics Committee's reference number will be assigned to your study when it is approved.

<u>**Participant Information Sheet**</u>

1) This is an invitation to take part in a piece of research.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

2) What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of this research is to enable me (your dance Lecturer) to experiment with different ways of teaching dance technique that will give you (the students) the opportunity to improve your dancing. The aim of these experiments is to enable you to develop a greater understanding and sense of ownership in relation to the dance movement you will be learning in your classes (a 'thinking dancer' approach).

3) Why is the study being performed?

Recently, there has been a lot of research conducted looking at the teaching methods used by dance technique teachers in Higher Education. In order to offer new insights into this research area, my research project will investigate some of the key issues with the intention of improving dance training in Higher Education. Your valuable participation in this project will benefit both your understanding of dance technique and will contribute to the development of dance technique teaching at Higher Education.

4) Why are you being asked to take part?

Higher Education dance students are central to this study, and without you the study would not be possible. You are the best people to conduct this research with in order to gather genuine and reliable feedback data. Your level of expertise will enable me to carry out the best study possible, while also enhancing your learning experience. (Please understand this is without any extra effort on your part – see points 5 and 6 below).

5) Do you have to take part?

You are not obliged to take part in this research project, however, even if you don't you are still required to attend all the unit classes as normal. The type of research being used in this project is called **'action research'** – this is a popular way for teachers to research their teaching practice in the usual classroom setting, with their students. In this way, my research is running parallel to your dance studies, and will not require you to do anything more than you would normally do by coming to class.

If, after reading this information sheet and asking any additional questions, you do not feel comfortable taking part in the study you do not have to – however, you will still be expected to attend all classes as normal. If at some point you wish to withdraw from the project, you are free to take any personal data with you and this will not be included when the research is reported. If you decide not to take part or withdraw from the study this will not affect your relationship with any of the staff at Manchester Metropolitan University.

If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign an informed consent form stating your agreement to take part and you will be given a copy together with this information sheet to keep.

6) What will happen to you if you agree to take part?

Participating in this project will not require you to do anything beyond your regular timetabled classes. You will be asked to attend all of your dance classes as normal, so in this way, nothing will be different. When you are in class, you will be asked to engage with a range of creative and technical tasks that may be new to you, but this is no different to any regular dance class. The only thing that will be different is that all technique classes will be **<u>filmed</u>** for research purposes. You may also have the opportunity to participate in additional **<u>free</u>** workshops outside class time – this would depend on your availability, but would of course be an excellent way to further develop your dance skills.

You may also be invited to participate in focus group discussions and interviews about your experience of contributing to the project. You are not obliged to take part in these, but if you are willing to, I will be very interested to learn about your experiences, as it will help me to develop my research. I may also ask to look at your reflective journals at some point during the term, as this will help me to get a sense of how you are engaging with some of the tasks we will be exploring in class.

7) What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The aim of this study is to help you as dancers improve your dance technique and to become confident, independent learners – the study is specifically designed to benefit you as a dance student. The results of the study will be shared with the wider dance community, with the intention of benefitting anyone who is engaged with dance at HE level.

9) Who are the members of the research team?

Rachel Rimmer[143] is the lead researcher for this project.

10) Who is funding the research?

As this research is part of a PhD project, Manchester Metropolitan University will be funding it.

11) Who will have access to the data?

All information collected during the study will be kept confidential and will only be used for educational purposes. This includes any photography, film footage and anything you say in focus group discussions, interviews, and in your reflective journal or essay.

The results from the study are likely to be communicated at conferences or published in academic journals, but this will be done in a way that does not allow any individual's identity to be determined – all information shared will be done so anonymously. It is

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[143] Please note – Rimmer is my maiden name and the name I was known by when conducting the action research.

possible that selected photographs and/or film footage may be used for research presentations or conference presentations, but again this will only be for educational purposes.

You have the right to obtain a copy of any publication that results from the research.

12) Who do I contact if I feel my rights have been violated?

If you wish to make a complaint regarding your involvement with this study, the address for the MMU Ethics Committee is:

> **Registrar & Clerk to the Board of Governors**
> **Head of Governance and Secretariat Team**
> **Manchester Metropolitan University,**
> **All Saints Building, All Saints,**
> **Manchester, M15 6BH**
> **Tel: 0161 247 1390.**

I confirm that the insurance policies in place at Manchester Metropolitan University will cover claims for negligence arising from the conduct of the University's normal business, which includes research carried out by staff and by undergraduate and postgraduate students as part of their course. This does not extend to clinical negligence.

13) Finally, thank-you very much for taking the time to read this document, and I look forward to working with you!

> ESS Ethics Stage 1 ISP form. Use this ISP form for all Stage 1 reviews
> from September 2012 onwards.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

Appendix 2. Example of a Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Title of project: *Making material meaningful: nurturing the 'thinking dancer' in the Higher Education dance technique class*

Principal Investigator: Rachel Rimmer, Department of Contemporary Arts, MMU Cheshire

Student name:

Student ID: Tick box to indicate

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated ………………..for the project in which I have been asked to take part in. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason – however, I understand that even if I withdraw I am still expected to attend all of my unit classes as normal. ☐

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis and publication. I understand that all personal data (interview, writing, recordings, pictures) about me will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes. ☐

4. I understand that the data being collected during the course of the project (eg. Photographs, film footage, things I say during discussions or interviews) may be used for additional or subsequent research including, but not limited to, research papers. ☐

5. I understand that the investigator(s) must adhere to the Ethical Code of Practice set down by MMU. ☐

6. I agree to take part in the above research project. ☐

------------------------   -------------   ----------------------------
Name of participant   Date   Signature

Contact details

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Researcher   Date   Signature

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

Appendix 3. Map of the units on the Single Honours BA Dance Programme at Manchester Metropolitan University taken from the 2011 Programme Specification document

APPENDIX 2   ASSESSMENT – LEARNING OUTCOMES MAPPING EXERCISE

Dance Curriculum Outcome Map – Level 4 units

(Programme learning Outcomes, Unit Learning Outcomes, Employability and Sustainability Outcomes and Assessment type)

Programme Learning Outcomes (PLO)	Unit learning Outcomes (ULO) cross-referenced to Programme Learning Outcomes (PLO)	Assessments (cross-referenced to ULO and ESO)
PLO1. A knowledge and understanding of key concepts and practices that inform the study of Dance **PLO2**. An ability to engage critically and creatively with dances and their research contexts **PLO3**. A conceptual and practical understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in dance **PLO4**. An ability to apply a range of skills within different professional contexts necessary for employment in Dance **PLO5**. An embodied understanding of choreography and performance **PLO6**. An ability to apply research skills to the development of extended projects	**Unit Title: Dance Practices 1 814Z2101** **Level: 4** 1. reproduce movement from technique class and dance performance with consideration to movement quality and style **(PLO1, PLO3, PLO5)** 2. manipulate movement material through various devising strategies including improvisation **(PLO2, PLO3, PLO4)** 3. identify and reference anatomical information **(PLO3)**	**Assessment 1 Weighting 30%** **Type** - Coursework. Assessment of ability to identify and analyse anatomical information **ULO3** **ESO6** Find, evaluate, synthesise and use information **Assessment 2 Weighting 70%** **Type** - Coursework. Assessment of ability in dance technique, devising sessions and performance in production **ULO1, ULO2** **ESO2** Demonstrate professionalism and ethical awareness
	Unit Title: Choreography and Screen Dance 1 814Z2102 **Level: 4** 1. use devices such as different speeds, levels and directions to generate dance materials **(PLO1, PLO3, PLO5)** 2. select and employ basic compositional strategies relating to working with dance for camera. **(PLO4, PLO5)** 3. use technical equipment such as video cameras and editing software in the creation of dance for camera work **(PLO4. PLO5)** 4. the capacity to work and learn, in pursuit of specific objectives, under their own direction and motivation **(PLO4)** 5. to work productively in groups through the collaborative creation of a new work **(PLO4, PLO5)**	**Assessment 1 Weighting 50%** **Type** - Coursework. The creation of a short movement study (approx 2 mins) with an identified research focus (normally solo). **ULO1, ULO4** **ESO5**: Manage own professional development reflectively **Assessment 2 Weighting 50%** **Type** - Coursework. students will create a Screen Dance project of 2-4 mins length (normally working in groups) **ULO2, ULO3, ULO5** **ESO4**: Apply teamwork and leadership skills

PLO1. A knowledge and understanding of key concepts and practices that inform the study of Dance **PLO2**. An ability to engage critically and creatively with dances and their research contexts **PLO3**. A conceptual and practical understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in dance **PLO4**. An ability to apply a range of skills within different professional contexts necessary for employment in Dance **PLO5**. An embodied understanding of choreography and performance **PLO6**. An ability to apply research skills to the development of extended projects	**Unit Title: Choreographic Perspectives 1 814Z2103** **Level: 4** 1. demonstrate knowledge of the principles of dance technique **(PLO1, PLO5)** 2. demonstrate knowledge of choreographic style **(PLO2, PLO3)** 3. identify and manipulate appropriate source materials **(PLO2, PLO3)** 4. analyse choreography and present written critique in academic format **(PLO2, PLO3)**	**Assessment 1 Weighting 50%** **Type** - Coursework. 1. Continuous assessment in technique class; 2. Repertoire study **ULO1, ULO2** **ESO5** Manage own professional development reflectively **Assessment 2 Weighting 50%** **Type** - Coursework. Essay or equivalent, incorporating research, analysis, critique **ULO3, ULO4** **ESO6** Find, evaluate, synthesise and use information
	Unit Title: Dance Project 1 814Z2104 **Level: 4** 1. perform accurately and with awareness of professional practice **(PLO4, PLO5)** 2. demonstrate knowledge of technological media such as film **(PLO4)** 3. contribute creatively to production processes **(PLO2, PLO3, PLO4)** 4. work effectively with others **(PLO4)** 5. reflect on own practice and present work in academic format **(PLO2, PLO3)**	**Assessment 1 Weighting 70%** **Type** - Coursework. 1. Presentation of a dance production, including technological media as appropriate; 2. Continuous assessment in class **ULO1, ULO2, ULO3, ULO4** **ESO5** manage own professional development reflectively **Assessment 2 Weighting 30%** **Type** - Coursework. A portfolio, that may take the shape of a reflective log (including reflective writing, annotated bibliography, illustrative material etc) or similar/equivalent document **ULO5** **ESO3** communicate effectively using a range of media

Employability and Sustainability Outcomes (ESO)

ESO1. Analyse real world situations critically	**ESO6**. Find, evaluate, synthesise and use information
ESO2. Demonstrate professionalism and ethical awareness	**ESO7**. Work within social, environmental and community contexts
ESO3. Communicate effectively using a range of media	**ESO8**. Use systems and scenario thinking
ESO4. Apply teamwork and leadership skills	**ESO9**. Engage with stakeholder/interdisciplinary perspectives
ESO5. Manage own professional development reflectively	

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Appendix 4. Example of a session plan utilising the reflexive-dialogical approach

DP1 Technique class plan: 19th January 2016: 2 hours
NB: Give attention to opportunities to explore students' questions more deeply.

Activity	Notes	Timing
1. Warm-up	Anatomical exploration of the spine from floor to standing: consider the movements available in your spine – trigger words to inspire movement: *Arching, curving, spiraling, opening, closing, lengthening, extending, contracting, twisting.* Allow movement to grow and evolve – follow your intuition and be curious.	15 mins
2. Choreographed floor warm-up exercise preparation	Spend some time re-visiting the movement learned last week – buddy up with a partner and discuss key elements of exercise.	5 mins
3. Choreographed floor warm-up exercise	Using 'buddy' system, split the group in half – one partner dances and the other observes. Feedback time in between to receive partner's reflections on performance.	15/20 mins
4. Arm swing exercise	Perform this exercise with changing 'fronts' – continually shifting the front of the room.	5 mins
5. Arm swing exercise with peer feedback/reflective activity	With a different partner, observe each other do the arm swing exercise. As a group, decide on three key ideas to look for in more detail.	10/15 mins
6. Written reflective task/break	During the break, take some time to note down key reflections that have emerged from today's session so far.	10 mins
7. Preparation for weight shifting phrase	Improvisation – falling on and off the central axis of the body. Explore this idea through a structured entrance and exit improvisation game.	10 mins
8. Group discussion	Reflect on the sensations experienced by the body – what did you notice, become aware of? How can you take these ideas forward (or not) into the extended phrase?	5 mins
9. Extended weight shifting phrase	In small groups, perform extended phrase. Alternate from one group to the next. Encourage students to observe from sidelines – what do they notice about their peers' performances? How does the act of observing resonate in their own bodies?	20 mins
10. Individual reflection	Take some time individually to reflect on what felt important during your performance of the phrase. Did anything come to light that you haven't experienced before? Were you curious about anything in particular? Is something to the fore in terms of how you would like to develop going forward? Allow information to filter through the body and settle.	2 mins
11. Cool down	Group cool down – directed cool down evolving into following individual needs/desires for allowing the body to reset.	5 mins
	Total time:	approx. 1 hr 52 mins

Appendix 5. Transcription of the focus group interview from Cycle One (20.3.2015)

Facilitator: Rachel Rimmer-Piekarczyk
Participants (using pseudonyms): Roxanne, Ruth, Sarah, Rory, Kiera, Poppy and Callum.
Timing: 1 hour, 8 mins and 54 seconds

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: I'm hoping not to keep you longer than an hour, it may not even take that long. But just a little bit of background on what we're talking about here today. Has anyone ever participated in a focus group before? No – me neither! This is my first time too, so I'm finding my own way as well. The reason that I invited you here was to talk about your different experiences, predominantly in the technique part of the unit, so both CP2 last term, and also DP2 this term. So it's kind of like a discussion really, and there are questions that I plan to ask, but I may not ask all of them because you may answer them anyway, just through the discussion.
(Then I lay out the ground rules – confidentiality, respect what other people say, anonymity, try not to talk over each other, honesty of responses – trying to be as honest as possible in their responses, does anyone have any questions? No questions asked.)

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Starting with Rory, could we work our way round the group, and could you give me a brief introduction, just say your name, how old you are, and then maybe talk about any prior dance experience before you came to University. Anything that you feel is important to say.

Rory: I'm (states real name), I'm 19, I stared dancing at school, and then kind of realised I'm fairly good at it, so thought I'd take it to GCSE, started to really enjoy it and then erm, ended up getting an A, so then I did it at college and ended up getting distinctions. So yeh, thought I'd do it at Uni.

Poppy: I'm (states real name), I'm 19. I've danced since I was 3, started off, you know at the local dance school as you do as a kid. Your local dance school, doing ballet, tap and modern. And I still do that now, and I'm doing my intermediate exam on Monday, and I'm going to do my associates to teach as well. I also work in two different dance schools, teaching in the week. Erm, I got into contemporary dance at high school, and then I took it at GCSE, and then I originally didn't take it at A Level, until I was gonna be a translator, then the "courses?) were too full, so I just said 'Mum I want to do dance' and it just kinda escalated from there. I think I'm good at it, and I enjoy it. I'd rather do something that I enjoy than be stuck in an office so I thought, I want to be a dance teacher, so I came to do that at Uni.

Sarah: I'm (states real name), I'm 19 and I started dancing when I was 7 at like, community classes, doing street and contemporary. Then I decided I wanted to do it at college. So I did it at college, and then I got into like, cheerleading for Warrington Wolves.

Ruth: I'm (states real name), I'm 19. Erm, I started dancing when I was 4. I'm a professional ballroom and latin dancer. Never done anything like this in my life. Erm, danced all over Britain, doing ballroom and latin. Teach professional freestyle. Erm, I opened my own dance school when I was 16, which is quite successful. I teach adults and kids. About it really. Oh I did dance at college, but it wasn't like this, it was a bit crap really. So this is all new to me. I didn't even know what a plié was when I got here!

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: You do now, and that's the important thing!

Callum: I'm (states real name), I'm still 18. Erm, I started out at school, my tutor actually influenced me to do dance, so my school had a link with LIPA, so I sort of did a little bit with them, then took it onto college, so that's about it.

Kiera: I'm (states real name), yeh I started dance when I was small doing the tap modern sort of stuff. I kinda like, grew out of it, and then I started doing drama quite a lot. Then I took a gap year to get my grades up to come to Uni, and I took an extra A Level in dance, to help with my drama, and then I realised I liked dance more. So I decided to dance in Uni. I completely changed my decision last minute, yeh I'm 20 by the way.

Roxanne: I'm (states real name), I'm 21. Erm, I danced when I was younger, but then I decided it hurt too much and that I didn't like my teacher. Then in year 9, we had to choose, because my school was an arts college, so I picked dance and just really enjoyed it, took it to year 10 and 11, we did BTECS and then went and did my A Level. Then I took a few years out and worked at a high school in the dance department and supported 9, 10 and 11 with GCSEs, and then came here.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Thank you. Such a kind of range of different experiences. So some people started dancing at quite a young age, some people coming into it a little bit later. Some people running their own schools. I didn't know that – it's really interesting to hear what your backgrounds are. Ok, so next question and anyone can answer this, ahmm, what I'm interested in is why specifically you chose to come and study dance here at MMU. What was it that interested you about the programme, or I don't know, may not have been to do with the programme, could have been to do with the location, could have been anything really.

Kiera: I mean for me, because I combine with English, there's only a few Universities that allow you to. And I quite liked the course here, I liked the English side as well as the dance side. So, that's what drew me to it.

Rory: I kinda had loads of Unis in mind, and then narrowed it down to ones that I thought you can choose options in your third and your second year, and I thought like, I wanna do something choreographic, so I pushed the ones that was more performance based out and then came for my audition, and I just really liked where it was. Like the feel of it, and the audition, so I chose this one.

Poppy: I kind of was the one, I researched everything and then wrote down the pros and cons of all the different Unis, and I think what sold it, I'm a right swot me with my lists, I think it was the audition, because obviously I get a gist of how they dance, and my dad used to come to auditions with me and be like - you don't dance like and airy fairy like them, and I was like noo! And then when I came here for my audition, it felt like me, and I liked just the way they danced, and I fitted in well, and I was like oh, this is the kind of dance that I want to do rather than some of the ones like 'oh you bump me, and oh I headbut you' – I thought, I don't want to do that for three years. But like the audition sold it and also I wanted to University life. So the fact that I could live there and like peter over to the dance studio for however long I wanted it, that sold it to me as well. More of a University life, as well as going home, because I wanted to stay close to home as well. So I live about an hour away - and also at Booth and it's so easy to just come over whenever you want when the studio's free.

Sarah: I originally didn't apply for dance at all - I applied for primary teaching at the Manchester campus. And then up until like June last year, I was like I really don't want to do primary teaching at all, I wanna do dance. So then I came here to this campus on the open day, and then I asked if they could swop the courses to here. And they were like, we're not really sure, and then I got in touch with Lecturer A and she said to send a video, so I sent a video in.

Ruth: Mine was a little bit different! I was gonna do Law at Keele, 'cos obviously with my dance school, and at the time I had horses and everything, so I had to find something that would fit around my life. Originally I wasn't going to come to Uni, it was just going to be train, I was going to train kids to enter competitions, but then I thought, well the more strong I've got to my bow, the better, so I thought, well I'll do Law, and I thought, well I don't wanna do Law. And I was like you (points to Sarah) and this was July, and I thought where does dance that's local. 'Cos Staffs doesn't do it, Keele doesn't do it, but Manchester Met does it…So I had a phone call of Pete the techy, because he knows I'm a dancer and that, and I think he said there's one or two spaces left on the dance course. So Bev rang me, and said I heard you want come on the dance course and I said I'm thinking of it but I'm still signed up for Keele - I didn't have to do an audition or anything like that, didn't even have to send a video in, they were just like, 'if you want a place' then fill these forms in and ring Keele, so it was a bit manic really.

Callum: Well at college I realised that I preferred contemporary, and I wasn't the strongest in ballet, so I was like I need to push that a little bit out more. And seeing as this is pretty local as well, like what everyone else said, it's easier for me to go and to at weekends. And it was either here or Chester, and I preferred the audition here, so I was like right OK, sways me one way.

Roxanne: I applied to quite a few, because I decided that I wanted to teach dance, from working in a high school, and I applied for a few but a lot of them were just dance. And

when I was working, there's just not that many dance teacher jobs, so they might teach dance and then they might teach something else as well. So I thought, if I can combine, then it kind of gives me that edge, or like, I needed something a bit extra, and it's something I enjoy. And this is where it offered it. One of the girls that I worked with, (states the name of a student who has since graduated), she came here and she told me what it was like and what the course was like, and she said she really enjoyed it. So I believed her.

Poppy: I think another thing for me was the lectures, you know I kinda think, I'm gonna be with these people for three years and you meet them at all the different Unis at the auditions, and you all seemed nicer and like I think that was it as well, that sold it.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So it sounds like the audition for some people, was quite an important part. Other people didn't necessarily come through that way, but for those of you that did, the audition was really kind of like the deciding point that – can I just unpack what you said Poppy about the teachers, can you talk about that a little bit more? What was different? What felt different here, than at other places?

Poppy: I think it was just the way you introduced yourselves, I think I remember at all my different auditions how you get an impression of people, and how you are drawn to people who are kind of more like you, if that makes sense. I think, I want you to teach me. Like in the audition as well, the kind of dance and the way they teach. I know it sounds really bad, the way people speak to you, there were some people who were just (puts high pitched silly voice on) "hhmm, hhm yeh' like speaking to me like I was a child and just away with the fairies.

Rory: It seemed more personal here, like I applied for Sunderland, and the guy just like, said get on with it and then just watched and didn't really say much, but here they kind of like spoke to you more, and taught you, do this, kind of thing.

Poppy: It wasn't like a boot camp. Like with numbers, 'cos I went to one with just like a number, and then shouted at you, like 'do ten press ups, go'. But then (here) you kind of introduced yourselves, and like had questions.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So something perhaps a little bit more human about that communication maybe. Because I - like I remember you Callum from your audition - I often remember people from their audition. I think it's because we have that kind of dialogue, which is quite nice, and yeh you do remember people because you chat with them, and it's important I think.
OK, so let's go back to sort of pre-University, and thinking about dance technique. In fact, maybe I can put that out to you as a question: what does that term (dance technique) kind of bring to mind? What kind of images does that bring to mind, or how would you explain what that is? To you? No right or wrong here.

Roxanne: Pointed toes.

Rory: Straight away, I'd say ballet, as a technique. I think it just stands out more than anything else. Like contemporary is so broad. Like you could go Graham, Cunningham, even though they're all a little bit different in so many ways kind of thing. Ballet's kind of the grounding. I think coming here, you learn different techniques. Like, we've started doing a bit of flying low technique, us three have. Things like that I find more interesting, more like exploration, rather than, this, this, this. Personally.

Ruth: See, my technique's totally different, like with me, I'd never even heard of any of these. But, from the technique I've done, I can relate certain things. Like with the turnout. Obviously in Latin, you've naturally got a slight turnout. So I can relate to that. But it's so hard to get out of that, because obviously I've had that drilled in for so long. There's different things like, when you do plies, my back's always curved, or I'm always arched, because it's different technique. For me, I find the technique really hard. Especially with the feet, because my feet are so used to being placed in certain positions. People don't realise when they say, 'oh that's easy', people say to me in class, 'all you have to do is this'. It's like, yeh well, when you've come from such a different background, you're told to keep your hips in line, my hips are never in a line, there always out there or somewhere. Because I've always been told, push your hips out, move your hips back, or whatever - and now it's like, don't move your hips, I'm like, I can't! If my foot goes forward, my hips move! People don't realise that people from different background find it so hard - so technique for me is really hard.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So do you mean, Ruth, that a different previous training, a training in such a specific technique, like Latin for example, then coming here to University, those technique experiences have been quite different?

Ruth: Yeh, it's like how Lecturer B was saying with your muscles, things are programmed to your muscles, if you do something, your muscles automatically do it. That's how it is for me I think. It's hard to get out of that mind frame. It's one of those, it's a long process.

Rory: I think with me, both school and college, you do a little bit of ballet and a little bit of jazz, a little bit of urban. But it'd be mostly contemporary. So like, we did a lot of floor work and stuff, that I feel comfortable with now, but then doing more ballet, plies and everything - I don't think my technique's ever been that strong, 'cos I've mostly done like flowing, and that kind of movement. Here, with you and Lecturer B, a lot of the time, it's ballet things that I just find so hard.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So just to kind of summarise that, Rory, so your previous experience, school and college was, would you say it was quiet integrated, is that what you mean? So you were doing different types of techniques sort of blended?

Rory: Yeh, it'd be mostly kind of contemporary kind of things, like at college, we'd do like an hour of ballet a week, or like two, and we'd do a term where we'd do a bit of jazz per week. But it was mostly contemporary kind of stuff.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: That's really interesting – when you use that term 'contemporary technique', this might not be just for Rory to answer, what kinds of things come to mind? What do you mean when you say that word?

Rory: It's changed since I've been to Uni. Definitely. At school and college, it was pretty much similar. It wasn't very technical, like 'your foot has to be placed this way', you'd kind of just like throw your leg and you could use pointed or flexed (foot) - roll across the floor - gliding through the space kind of thing. But now I'm here, it's still floor work and stuff like that, flying low really interests me at the moment. It's so different to what you do at college. Just like, with Lecturer A (she's a bit loopy), 'cos like, you do things that's just not natural, and it's contemporary dance. Like she'll give us weird stuff to do, and she'll be like, right do it all again and perform it, and it's like a ten minute piece. Or we do a lot more improvising, or just standing still for ages, it's contemporary.

Poppy: But I think we need that, like when I came, if you've done like college, you're fixed into this 'I can contemporary dance' and that was not like anything near contemporary dance. When we all came into Lecturer A's class, we were like, oh my god I can roll on the floor for fifteen minutes, just all the way down. I think you can see it as well, from the single honours, to the combined, the difference between. 'Cos we'll all stand there on the stage for ten minutes and do nothing, and this is still contemporary dance. I think the way the course was structured with her lessons first, but then paired with yours as well, it kind of worked me in. Because I did ballet outside school or college - so I had basic training - so I'd kind of know what you say with the ballet terms, but then college kind of weened me into it a bit, and it was a bit more contemporary than what I was used to. And you come here, I was used to, you know in our technique class, that's what I did at college, so it feels natural to me, the precision of it

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Do you mean the one with me?

Poppy: Yeh, in your technique class, it's kind of normal, I feel comfortable with it. And it'd be juxtaposed with Lecturer A's classes where I'd just be thrown completely out of my comfort zone. But I think I've grown as a dancer.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Would you say then, and I suppose this only really applies to single honours students, that having that kind of more, the things perhaps in my class that felt a bit more familiar, perhaps not for everyone, but for you in this instance Poppy, and then having that running parallel alongside Lecturer A's class, which is perhaps a bit more experimental, was that good in that way, was that positive?

Rory: It kind of felt like, before, ballet's like this, jazz is like this, contemporary is fairly broad, now I'm here, it's so much broader! But I think I felt more comfortable with Lecturer A's classes, I always liked choreographing, and trying to be more creative, she kind of would be creative, outside the box. In like a completely different way with Lecturer A. But then again, with you, we do more technique - and it would link it to ballet in a way, so we'd have turnout, and plies and things, which I was used to, but I wasn't great at it kind of thing. So I'm still tryna learn that.

Sarah: I think as well like, with Lecturer A's, you feel like you can't really go wrong with it, because it's so broad, and like, anything you do, is OK. Whereas in technique classes, it's this is what you do, this is how you do it. And I think with me, my confidence is better when I'm choreographing, because it's something that I've come up with myself, dya know what I mean? Instead of it being, so, set.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: (Explains to CH students what Lecturer A's unit is, and that it has a very choreographic focus. Explains that due to CP1s performance focus, the technique is there to support that performance. Explains that due to CSD1's experimental focus, technique may not function in the same way).

Sarah, you said something that's really interesting, that's taken me off in a bit of a different direction. You said, and correct me if I'm wrong, you said something like 'technique is this and that', is that what you said? I'd like to explore that, that idea of, it's this or it's that, or it's right or it's wrong, or it has to be done this way or that way. What do we think about that?

Rory: I don't like it. Personally, I just don't like being set something so rigid. Maybe it's because I'm not very good at it. I'd rather just be more experimental kind of thing.

Poppy: I do, I'm the complete opposite. I hated improv. Make me improv, I'd stand there and go, no. If I've got a fixed dance, I'll do it beautifully, and perform it out, and let everyone watch me. But as soon as the improv – I think it was the first week when Bev went, improv, and I went (flinches and does funny arm action), I did something really stupid, and then looking back, now, I think because we did the technique, like the more fixed exercises, and then we went into kind of improv games, also paired with Lecturer A's, because we'd been made to improv where you feel a bit stupid, but it's not wrong, think that could help me timing wise. 'Cos I'd done all the feet, so yeh I know, I feel confident with all this. And then, I knew the material well enough, it kind of helped learning the material and then being able to play with this. I'd never done anything like that before. But then it kind of weened me into improvisation a bit. It made it easier than, 'dance!' (as though an instruction).

Rory: I think everyone from SH has improved at improvising, dramatically. 'Cos, it was set material that you could do, in the space, which kind of like, eased you in. And then we did a flocking game (in Lecturer A's class) where you'd have one person dance, and then someone would fit in behind, and then you'd kind of find opportunities where you'd use someone

else's material, or you could make you own, so it kind of weens you in slowly. Not, I think if someone said improvise, I think 90% of us would be fine with it.

Poppy: I think it's interesting to see, 'cos obviously you hear off other people. In SH, there's a very clear divide of which side you prefer, and which side you don't. 'Cos obviously attendance is a big issue in our class. So usually, you would not see people in Lecturer A's class, for what five weeks, and then miraculously they'd just get better on a Monday afternoon for your lesson! And there'd be some of us that'd always be there, and do both, so open minded, but people were very clear on which one they preferred, and were like 'I like technique, I like fixed stuff, I'm coming to this class, I can do it' but also people were like, I like to improvise, I like the freeness of it. But I find a lot of people in SH, I heard that they liked the fixed technique and the rigid set, because it's what we're used to a lot of us.

Rory: I think it depends on the teacher as well though, 'cos I was speaking to someone the other day, and they said, because they missed a lesson with Lecturer A, they felt that Lecturer A didn't like them. But we were speaking with the third years, and they were saying, you need to get in Lecturer A's good books, come into lesson, keep going, don't stop.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: OK, so it kind of goes back to that thing we were talking about earlier, you know that human, the response that you feel to a teacher. Connecting with different people in different ways. I'm gonna swing us round here (to the rest of the group) because that's all really interesting and informative, because I'm hearing the term, 'fixed technique' quite a lot, and that idea of things being fixed. Would you guys like to comment on that at all from your experience? If we try and think about this in the context of my class, the difference for you (SH) is that you've got two experiences to compare, whereas it's different for CH. I'm just really interested in what you think about that idea of things being fixed in that sort of way?

Kiera: I think, it's fixed, but within ability. Like with the grande battement, like I know that I can't get my leg light right up in what would be the "correct" (uses finger quotation marks) way, but if I can get it to like there, with the right technique, I feel like I'm on the right tracks. I think I feel a bit more comfortable with technique because you know what you're doing, like everybody's doing the same sort of thing. Whereas if I was in Lecturer A's class, I would feel like, oh my god I feel a bit like I have to rely on myself and be OK with what I'm doing, it's like, I hate improv, I find it really hard, 'cos I'm not confident in myself, I feel like I look stupid…I feel like I kind of know where I stand with technique, even if I can't do it correctly, I feel like, well everybody's finding it difficult, everybody knows what it's meant to look like, but now everybody can do it. I feel like I'm in the same sort of realm as everybody. Whereas improv is so completely everywhere - and it's going to be different interpretations of it.

Roxanne: I think your experience before Uni, impacts whether you prefer improv. Just like listening to you guys, like Poppy has got the background of technique, and the confidence within a technique class is there because you understand it more. Because, when I was

teaching the school - you only have them for like a double a week - and it's just not that long to do a proper technique class and get pieces done. So you're like missing out on that side, if you don't supplement it outside of class, you don't have that technique. So when you come in, it's the confidence, like I've taught, and some of the words you use and some of the language, I didn't have a clue what it meant. Like coming back as a learner, and you're doing your technique, I think it's making sure that you're doing movement safer. Do know, so it's like a safety. So like even when you are improvising, because you've got that base of technique, you know that when you bend your knees to know that your alignment isn't all off, it's having that base, so even if you're not confident in it, you'd be more aware of your body. Because in technique, you take more time in exercises to think about - if your legs going up you know that it should be in turnout.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So in that way, just to summarise what you said there Roxanne, it's almost as though the technique work can then support you in the improvisation because it helps you to understand your body in different ways, so therefore, when you throw yourself into an improvisation - there's sort of like - you kind of have to have that knowledge don't you, because otherwise, what kind of material have you got in a way to bring into the space? Is that sort of what you mean? And also that safe practice of dancing.

So, what I'm getting here then, and this could be wrong, correct me if I'm wrong. It seems like the consensus is that improvisation feels more open, and there's no right or wrong with that, whereas technique feels like there are rights and wrongs. Would you agree with that? Does anyone want to comment on that? How those things feel different?

Kiera: I agree, but then I think that even if, in improvisation, if you sickle your foot, it's not enjoyable to watch. Like you'd still - like that's wrong. I don't know whether that's because, like if you think in the mind-set of technique, like watching a dancer, you expect to see a certain technique within it, even if they're improv-ing crazily. I feel like they support each other. I feel like there is still right and wrong in improvisation as well. Like things that might look uncomfortable to see.

Rory: I think it depends on who you're improvising with and what kind of thing you're going for. Like, your classes, our improvisation is all very extended, and shapes I feel, then with the dissertation we're in, or Lecturer A's class, it'd just be weird like morph (tells a story about rugby tackling another students, and being arched over someone's back barely breathing).

Poppy: It depends what it is.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So it's context? Is that what you mean?

Poppy: 'Cos someone could make a dance about sickling feet – you know, go for that effect. I think Roxanne summed it up, you know like in your improv, the technique makes

improvisation, like it's the basis of everything, I think technique, as a dancer you need good technique to be able to do anything.

Roxanne: 'Cos like, the sickling thing, that goes back to the safe, like every time you're on a rise, is a danger like what you're doing might not be wrong, but just that bit, like your technique helps you and supports you. Like even if you're throwing yourselves round, if you weren't being safe… It's trusting each other, if you were lifting someone and they weren't using the right technique to be lifted, it could be dangerous.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So again, it kind of goes back to that knowledge of the body, that understanding of your body to be able to do a rugby tackle and to be able to do that well.

Rory: Sometimes, I like watching something a bit more uncomfortable sometimes. Not necessarily like, pain, but just, something that makes you stop and think how could you do that?

Poppy: Like my arms behind my head and someone's just jumped on top of me, and how you get out of it.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Pushing the body to it's limits.

Rory: We've been looking at Elizabeth Streb. And she says, sometimes, you need a bit of pain. If you don't try anything new, then you can't get anything out of it. The dancers kind of expect they will get hurt. They are scared to do stuff, but they've got to do it in a safe way even though they might get bruised all the way up the side of their body. (Gives examples from Streb's choreography of moments when risks take place).

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So it's kind of going to that edge isn't it, of finding out.

Poppy: I think Lecturer B summed it up as well. Because he watched the diss, I think it's the first move that we do when I run up to Rory and just jump on him, and he's like 'you can tell the able bodied dancers' so as an audience, you can tell they've got the technique to be able to do it. So as an audience member, you feel comfortable watching, you feel, they are dancers, they won't have sickled feet to hurt themselves. So I think that's why your technique class is important, because I think, for me, you were the first one that brought ballet back, and I was like, yes! She's speaking French! I can understand!

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Ahh, Ok. So something familiar about that…

Poppy: I was like, Ballet's back! And I felt like it was technique again. Because I think no matter what we're doing, creative wise, and other technique, we always need that kind of technique class to keep going. Because it does make you feel aware about your body and where you should be.

Rory: Sounds like we're saying, don't be safe, just jump at someone…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: It sounds like technique is really important in terms of building strength up in the body, building that understanding of the body up to be able to do those crazy things in a choreographic context and go to those edges. Ok, so I'm gonna bring us back a little bit then now, because there were some interesting things that came out around improvisation, can be open, there's not necessarily a right or wrong there, and different opinions about this.
So, thinking about *my* technique class predominantly. The way that that technique class is taught, the way that that material is delivered to you by me, do you feel that there is room, that there is openness within the technique? In the same way that there might be within improvisation? Maybe you might feel that at different points in the class or maybe you don't feel that at all, maybe you feel that it is very fixed, or perhaps you feel this no, it is actually a bit more open here, or there is a bit more room here for me to input and take ownership. I'm kind of just interested in what your response is to that.

Ruth: I think there is yeh. Can't remember if it was Poppy or (states a student's name who didn't participate in the focus group), when I was sat out watching one of the technique classes, my turnout is horrendous, put me in three inch heels and my balance is fine. I can stand on one foot all day. Take me out of my heels and I can't even stand on one foot for ten seconds. And I was watching, I'm sure it was you (points to Poppy) and your turnout is like that (imitates flat turnout with her hands)… and it was on, can't remember what it's called, where you flick one leg into the air and I was doing it and my foot went from there to there (imitates one foot coming from turnout into parallel) I couldn't do it. I'm sure it was you, (Poppy) you kept your turnout like that. (Goes on to suggest that technique must be quite open to accommodate different levels of turnout, such as her own). Instead of saying it's fixed, I don't think it is. I think the idea of what you've got to do, turnout or parallel ort whatever, I think that's set, but same as you said (Kiera) about your leg being 180 degrees or whatever, it's not fixed. I think it's your body's capability. Because I physically cannot do that (imitates open turnout with her hands) but it's open.

Poppy: It's structured more than fixed. Like we all know it, we all do the same it's in our movement memories. But we do all have different abilities, and that's fine. Like we don't all look the same do we.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yes, I really like that term, structured rather than fixed. What I'm understanding from what you're saying Ruth is that, OK so turnout is the overall aim, but that doesn't mean that every single person has to have 180 degree flat turnout. That's going to be different for different people. So we're talking about different bodies here. That's really interesting. And then, I think the idea of structured rather than fixed, what do you mean by that Poppy? Maybe other people can input into that?

Sarah: I think the structure is like the alignment of it maybe. Not understanding the flexibility of it, because you could still do it well, but not have that flexibility. Like cus my

alignment, I struggle with that I think, like making sure that it's thinking about it, and making sure that your hips are in place.

Rory: It's like - structure is the movement - but you can do it how you feel in a way. So like, when you plié, even if you can't go that far, still keep your back up, don't lift your heels off yet, so kind of go as far as you can, but still do the correct thing. Like with the battement, don't go so far that your leg bends, and you lift off and your hip goes – do what you actually can do... The right technique.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So know what the aim is, so the aim is in grande battement, I'm gonna brush my leg up in front of my body, but go within your personal limitation, whether that's up here, or here. Is that what you're saying there Rory?

Rory: Still do it how it should be done, but as far as you can go, without losing technique, losing the balance or lifting your hip, or…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, I understand that. So I'm gonna lead us on from that to ask what could be quite an interesting question, I don't know, but I'd like you to think about those ideas, in relation to me as your teacher. And I know me and Callum had quite an interesting chat about this the other day. So most of the movement that you do in the technique class, I have taught you that movement. There are parts where you have made the movement yourselves, aren't there, where I've kind of given you tasks and things like that. I'd like to just talk about that a little bit. So, there's a few strands to that question. There's me as your teacher, giving you demonstrations and examples, I'd like you to think about you as learners, what you take form that. And then also, within that, what has it been like to be asked to make bits of the movement yourselves. So what's that been like, so there's sort of two parts to that question I suppose. Again anyone can answer.

Ruth: I think one thing, obviously like, you as the teacher, when you're going through the techniques, and you're saying all these foreign words, like explain them. I'm not sure if it's just me, but I don't genuinely know what any of these mean. So I'm trying to remember them, and going home, I've got like a little pocket ballet dictionary. I don't know what any of them mean! What's grande battement, or what's all this?! I don't know any of the terminology, because with me never doing ballet - I know a plié obviously because of doing freestyle and doing plies, but it's a different kind of plié. So it's like, without trying to sound disrespectful, but explain things. Like I don't know, whatever that thing is where you step behind side front…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Pas de bouree?

Ruth: That's the one! Not just what it is, but what it actually is, cus if I know what they are, I can relate to them. I think (states a student's name who did not participate in the focus group) is the same as me, because she's obviously come from a completely different background as well, we've discussed together, we're like, what's that, what's that mean?

Kind of thing. I think if you understand what it is, you can do it better. If you know what I mean. I think it's sometimes like, should we already know this?

Rory: I'm the same with that. Like in Lecturer B's lesson the other day, he said something in French, and I was like, yeh yeh, Poppy what's that?

Poppy: I'd rather them do that, like I'd rather someone came and asked me. Like you know how they ask each other now. 'Cos, like for me, it annoys me when you go over and over, it's like, you're dancers remember it! Like, you go to auditions, you learn it once, you do it. It's really bad, but slow people really annoy me.

Sarah: It's not being slow…

Poppy: I know I know, like I thought I'd come here and I'd be the worst at ballet, and I came here and I was like wow…. What's going on, like I'd help anyone

Ruth: It's lack of knowledge, it's lack of knowledge. Because like with me, I'm the same, I daren't go and ask other students, because they might think, she doesn't know what she's on about, she shouldn't be here.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Do you feel like you could ask me?

Ruth: Yeh, you or Lecturer B, I feel like I could ask anyone. Like, now I feel a bit more comfortable asking somebody, before, it was like, I daren't as, I daren't ask, because I thought everyone was like yeh I know this I can do this, and there's just me thinking…

Poppy: If you look round at someone else, you can see that people don't know. Like he goes every time, (looks at Rory) 'what's that? What's he doin?', yeh I'd help someone.

Rory: It's kind of comforting that at the beginning of the year, (states the name of a second year dance student) was saying 'I didn't have a clue what I was doing last year'.

Ruth: (States the name of the same second year dance student) is like God over here isn't he.

Rory: But now that he knows what he's doing, maybe I know this year, but next year…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, I suppose it's a bit like that that thing when you were talking about Lecturer A's class, and she's saying stand still for fifteen minutes, and you're kind of thinking, really? It's those unknown things isn't it of - oh OK, what's a pas de bouree? - What does that mean? And these sort of new ideas in a way.

Poppy: I think we need a ballet class, like I honestly do. Like how much ballet, we all need…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: But, can I just ask this then? Because it seems like ballet comes up a lot, so do you see my class as being very ballet orientated? (Some murmers, no definite answer).

Ruth: What might be quite useful - I don't know if we could - but barre exercises. Because I know I find, I don't know about anyone else, when I do them, my ankles are really weak. And I think it's hard to get good technique if you've got weak ankles. Barre exercises to strengthen your ankles. And I think that might be useful. Not all the time, but in some technique classes. I don't know if we've got any barres in this place, but just working on the strength of us because I found with some technique, it's hard to maintain the strength of technique, like especially when we do the rises and that, I'm like the leaning tower of pizza, it's hard to keep the strength in my ankles, and stay up there.

Rory: I'm not sure if it's cos, you're really good at technique. Like, amazing to watch. Whereas my old teachers, they knew what they were doin', but it just wasn't as pretty. (Lots of laughing) Like, my college teacher, she was an urban dancer, so ballet, she knew what she was doing, she was good at it, but it wasn't as elegant in a way.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, so different backgrounds, it kind of goes back to what we were talking about in a way (It's alright Rory, I knew what you meant…let's bring this back round) 'Cos yeh, I mean that's really new for me to know that, because, yes my background is, there is definitely some ballet in there, but I wouldn't think of myself as a ballet dancer in that way, so that's quite revealing for me to kind of. I suppose I do use that language a lot, and I think it's also because at first year, I tend to keep, both Lecturer C and I have tended to keep the class based around the Cunningham technique. Not all of it, but some, it's quite integrated, and of course, Cunningham technique draws a lot from ballet, so that's probably why it feels like that in a way. So even though it's not pure ballet, there is definitely that influence there, but there is also floorwork as well and release techniques, and other things happening in there. Ok, so then what about the bits where in the class…the second part of that question, so there are different points in the class where you were asked for example in the triplet exercise to put in your own movements of the spine, you were also asked to go away and create a short phrase within a group and to bring back and present to the group, so you were kind of given, tasks to do but within the context of technique. What was that like to do? I'm just really interested.

Ruth: Hard.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Hard?

Rory: I found it easy. I think I just like creating choreography. So like, me, (states the name of a student who did not participate in the focus group) and Callum just did it and in flat, ten minutes. And kind of got what we got, straight away. With the arm - the shape one - that was more difficult because, I think it was like, set, like structured but not structured.

Poppy: Restricting, like there's not a lot, you know.

Rory: Cus you can't really be creative, you've got four movements you can do, you can change the arms, but that's about it. But the rotation one…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: The phrase, that felt a bit, there were more possibilities there? What about for you Callum?

Callum: I just felt like the ownership of my movements sometimes was a bit difficult. Because like, erm, when everyone's doing it the same way, it's like, right I wanna make this mine I wanna try and stand out, and then sometimes it's in the back of your mind sayin', right this is my feet and this is the change of the torso and stuff like that.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So did you enjoy doing the phrase task with Rory and (states a student's name who did not participate in the focus group) more than perhaps putting your own input into the…

Callum: I think, since there was just three of us, and we started it like dead simple didn't we, and then we literally just we were like right we can actually go from here to there and just link it.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: (To Roxanne and Kiera) What was that like for you?

Roxanne: I think when you make your own movement, it's easier because you're using movement that you're comfortable with. And so when you're creating it, you're doing things like - like what you said - like you'll do something and then it'll lead onto something else. So it's natural to you, so when you've made your own movement, it's easier to remember, and it's more natural for you. Whereas when you learn it, there might be something where you think, oh I wouldn't have done that, or that feels a bit strange, but 'cos you're learning it, you just have to do it. So, I think that's why it's easier when you make your own because it's movement that you've chosen.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: And do you feel that - and again - this is for anybody, that just taking what Roxanne said, so you're creating something with your own body, maybe in that way perhaps it comes a bit more naturally because you're owning that movement a bit more, do you think you would be able to do that without, again it goes back to that idea of the support of the technique class, do you feel that the technique class helps you at all in that way? Or, I don't know, maybe it doesn't? Does it help you to create phrases?

Roxanne: I think it just adds to your movement vocabulary. Like I think you'll find that you'll do something from the technique class just because you've learned that specific roll, or that particular arm movement. And it like, feeds in, like I think everything that you learn, like all the dances I've ever been in, I'll still find myself doing a bit from, you know just because it's

there in your body, so like in improvisation, I'll find myself doing something from technique, dya' know like it all feeds into each other. I think it just adds to your movement vocab.

Rory: Going on from that, because it was set by yourself, we kind of knew which way what to do with it. Like if Lecturer A said, make a dance about rotation, it'd be different. Same with Lecturer B. So I think it depends, what class it is and who's teaching it. It's similar to your style, like the phrase we did, but then we kind of made it our own. But then with Lecturer A, it'd be something out there somewhere. She's maybe just do like a finger.

Poppy: Internal (imitates internal rotation in her body).

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: That's really interesting, so different styles, would anybody like to add to what Rory said there? What do people think about that? Was it easy to do that task then because you felt that you knew what sort of movement style you were supposed to be…or maybe not?

Kiera: Yeh, I noticed that because if I look at, like we were showing the girls from Lecturer C's class what we created, like our little choreography, then when they showed us theirs, I can see Lecturer C in it. Like it depends who you're taught by I think. Like it really influences your movement, like it's like the sort of stuff you do in class really influences the way your choreography is going to be, or your improvisation, even like, without you knowing.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So even if it's not even intentional?

Kiera: Yeh it's not like - oh I'm gonna do this because it's what I've been doing in class - I think it's just like muscle memory, it's what you're comfortable with. Like I don't think that we would have created what we created in Lecturer C's class, if we had been doing her technique for a term, I think it would have been completely different.

Poppy: Even if like, we go into different classes with kind of different heads on. I don't know, you all have completely different styles, and you kind of go in with that lecturer's kind of style in you, like in a weird way. Like, I don't think I'd be dive-rolling in the middle of a rotation thing, but then, in Lecturer B's it's just like, yeh go for it. And like head standing.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, that's really interesting. So something about the influence of the teacher there, does anyone wanna talk about that a bit more?

Rory: We did a task in both yours and Lecturer A's class that was exactly the same.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Oh really, what was it?

Rory: Well we lie on the floor and we push hips, shoulders and knees and we kind of travel through the space. It felt more relaxed. With Lecturer A, it was kind of, you were going over

your head, and then you'd be upside down for ten seconds and then someone would just leave you, and then like push you again, it felt different.

Ruth: I think Lecturer A's was a lot more, touchy feely.
(Some over-lapping discussion about touching each other in Lecturer A's classes, and this being initially uncomfortable for some group members in the early sessions).

Ruth: It was like, really intense, like it was good that I was with (states a student's name who did not participate in the focus group) because I couldn't have done it with anyone else, but it was like…

Sarah: It was in the first three weeks as well.

Ruth: Yeh, like touch someone there.

Rory: Yeh and the reactions as well. 'Cos like I was with (states a student's name who did not participate in the focus group), and then Lecturer A took over from me, and she was like doing all these things to (states student's name again), it was people's reactions, like I had to leave (because he was laughing so much).

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So, it sounds then like different approaches with different teachers can bring different things out in you, would that be fair to say? So the teacher kind of has quite a big influence there in terms of the type of material that you might produce in a particular context, or I'm gonna use this word 'expectation' maybe, there's expectations attached to that, so if I do this, I like what you said about the different heads Poppy, if I do this in Lecturer B's class then that's OK, but maybe I wouldn't do this in Lecturer A's class. So these things feel perhaps a bit, maybe separate's not perhaps the right word, but different experiences.

Rory: It's as you get used to who's teaching you kind of thing.

Poppy: It's the human thing again.

Rory: Like we had to do a solo for Lecturer A, and I showed her the movement that I'd normally do, kind of with what I was aiming for, and she was like, OK do it again, but on your knee. It's weird, like why would I do that. Do it again internally. Or do it again, but as small as you can. I was like jumping into the air and landing on the floor, and my leg would flick and she's be like 'do it smaller'. In front of everyone, the whole class. She made me do it for ten minutes. Smaller than that, smaller than that, and it was so awkward, but I ended up getting a first so.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: The awkwardness was worth it.

Rory: Doing something completely different for Lecturer A, whereas the first thing I did would've probably been OK for you. I think you'd have liked it (Rimmer-Piekarczyk laughs).

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: I'm not sure if that's an insult, or whether to take that as…

Rory: No no, it's good for me (said in a jokey way).

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: But I suppose what we're saying though is that…maybe if I was teaching that unit, it might, well it probably would produce very different solos than Lecturer A would. Because it's about that interaction isn't it, between. And probably if Lecturer A taught Dance Practices or Choreographic Perspectives, you know the experience would be really different wouldn't it because it's about what that person brings to that environment.

Ruth: Like when we did Lecturer A's she couldn't stand my hips moving. She absolutely hated it. Like she'd come and she's hold my hips and she'd stop me from moving. But like in Lecturer B's class, he absolutely loves it. I do like a bit of a salsa step, and he loves it. 'Do it again, do it slower, do it again!' He made me do it about three times when we were doing individual group things. Do it slower, do it like this. He loved that**.** But then with Lecturer A's, I felt like it restricted me, because I felt like – eurgh - but with Lecturer B's, it was totally different… Again like you say, it's difference in teachers.

Rory: We watched the third years, because they've got a project they're doing that Lecturer B choreographed for them, and now Lecturer A's doing the exact same thing, but her style, and it's so different, it's unbelievable.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, and I guess that's good in a way isn't it, because it means you're getting that rich experience. Wouldn't it be dull if it was four Lecturer Bs or four Lecturer As. In the same way that different students bring different experiences and backgrounds and all of those things, what it creates is a really rich learning environment, where we can really learn from each other in different ways.

Doxic agreements and the mobilisation of agency: examining students' engagement with cognitive reflection in relation to the dominant pedagogical discourses of western dance technique education.

Appendix 6. Photographs of the reflective tags used in Cycle One.
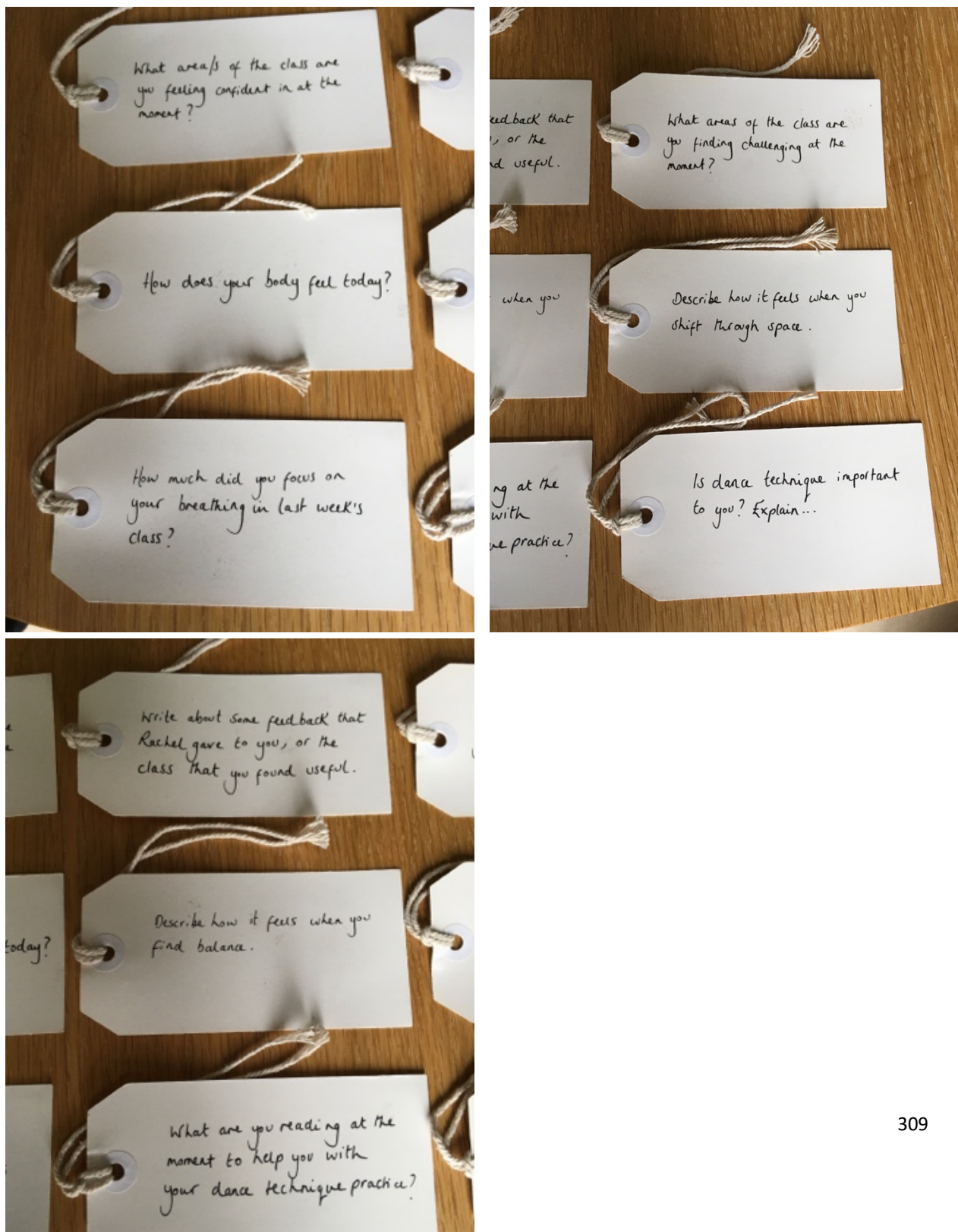
Appendix 7. Transcription of the focus group interview from Cycle Two (9.3.2016)

Facilitator: Rachel Rimmer-Piekarczyk
Participants (using pseudonyms): Ellen, Tamara, Dominique, Fiona, Michelle, Naomi and Gina.
Timing: 56 minutes and 52 seconds

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: What does that term 'dance technique' mean to you? Why do you think it's so important?

Michelle: For me, I see technique as building my strength of my body, so when I do choreography, I can do the moves so, 'cos I'm not someone who loves technique so much, but I do see the benefits of it, because I know I'm going to be able to do the moves. Like I wouldn't be able to do the floor because I wouldn't have the strength to do it, 'cos I think technique is – it is a necessary step to take you on to do other things – yeh.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Thank you.

Dominique: I believe that if you don't do any technique or don't have any technique in your body you can't be considered as a dancer, so, of course, it's necessary for our training and – yeh – it does build our strength, I've noticed that as well, 'cos while we're doing choreography – it comes out – technique.

Tamara: I think technique – it gives you like the foundation for, not just in contemporary, any other styles that have stability and strength – erm, when you're doing the different exercises it helps you to strengthen, but be focussed on the different exercises.

Ellen: I think this is the most important thing – technique – and I prefer it to choreography – er – I like how the exercises are – it's like small choreographies – is technique – I enjoy that a lot.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: We've established then it seems like the common consensus is that technique is really important for building strength, for conditioning the body if you like - to then support you with more creative choreographic work, and Ellen you raised the point about almost preferring the experience of being in technique class. Would you say that kind of summarises what you've discussed there? Yeh? Okay, so, with that in mind then, thinking about the technique classes that we've had together this term, how would you describe the

technique that we've been doing? How would you describe the techniques that we've been doing? What kinds of techniques have we been looking at? I suppose what's interesting is that we don't just study one thing do we? Certainly the way I teach – I teach in quite an integrated way, so what are your experiences of those techniques?

Gina: I think for me it's been more of an exploration of what my body can do, or is doing. I'm certainly looking at what I should be doing, for example when we're doing the parallel or reverse stuff, but for me it's learning what my body wants to do. That's probably what I've got more out of this than typical – 'you must be in this first position – your arms must be in this bra bas position', so on and so forth .

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Anybody want to add to that?

Michelle: I agree with what Gina says. I feel this technique explores your body and your little habits and things. Like, for example, you know when we say about the arms and if you're pushing, in a normal technique class like your arm's here and then it goes to here, but in yours, it's kind of do what you want, do what your body tells you to do. We have a lot of improvisation as well, so that's all of what your body wants to do – if that makes sense. 'Cos, I think technique is – when I've done it before - it's really strict, like you have to be here at this count, but with yours it's – it is free and it is exploring what you want to do and where you want to do it. I agree with Gina.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Thank you.

Naomi: Yeh, I think technique helps you become aware of your body, but also I think it helps – like, the risks in your body, like if I was, before the technique class, doing something wrong that could, like, affect in the future. So, I feel like, doing it as a whole, you've given us like feedback, in saying 'do this', but not saying 'you have to do this' but how you feel as well. Like, I feel that it really helps, like, if I was turning my knees in and I thought I was doing it right, but if you told me to move out, I'll carry on doing that, but then I'll understand that I was doing it wrong and I should be doing it the right way. It does help.

Tamara: I think sometimes when we're exploring what the body wants to do – personally, it doesn't give me the opportunity to stretch myself, like I wouldn't get higher on that jump because I've never had that, I'll do it higher, if that makes sense. So, on the one hand it's good because it lets you express your natural habits, but then on the other hand I would like to be pushed to do something different and be more disciplined in that way, because I would like to have the balance.

Fiona: I agree, with that, I feel like when it comes to technique, I feel I try and do something that I'm not used to doing so I push myself even further, so if I'm not comfortable with something, like Nicky was saying, if I'm doing something wrong and you're telling me, I'll push myself to do that thing right.

Ellen: It's a good thing though. For me, it's like you get to know your body. Before I came here I didn't know a lot of stuff and when I started technique – like - I am exploring my body every time and I'm getting better in my moves and I do my head, move my knees, my turnouts, I didn't know how to do that before. So, it helps me a lot.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Interesting what you say – it's about getting to know my body (closes door). So, in a sense, the technique classes have been an opportunity for you to develop your understanding your body in that way and to develop your understanding of how your body likes to move. I'm interested in what you're saying. It feels like there has to be a balance between the teacher kind of pushing you to do something different, that's kind of outside of your comfort zone – but then also being given the opportunity to have creative expression and how do those things play out within technique class. How do they function together? Can they co-exist together? Yeh, and also, something else that comes out of that discussion is this idea of 'rights' and 'wrongs'. Could you talk a little bit around that idea of 'rights' and 'wrongs'? Do you feel that when it comes to dance technique that there are definite 'rights' and definite 'wrongs' or are there some grey areas? How do you feel about that?

Dominique: I believe that right and wrong – exists in classical technique. In contemporary though I can still see something that's wrong, but it's wrong because it might be dangerous for our body. We can injure ourselves. I don't consider many movements wrong in contemporary dance because it's contemporary, it could be anything.

Tamara: I see things 'right' – if that's the way you've choreographed it, that's the way you dance it. Like saying you don't put your hand up, you put your hand down and that's how I see it, just like doing exactly what you showed us.

Fiona: Yeh, whenever I get taught something I try and do it exactly like the choreographer, because I feel like it's their work, I should execute it the way they want.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Of course, that's something I've deliberately played with over the course of this term – trying to give you choice in that – to use your example, Michelle, of the hands, kind of brushing across the floor - that's something that I've kind of tried to give you some flexibility in, in a way, to try out different possibilities . How has that been for you as students – to be given that kind of autonomy to make a choice? I'm really interested in that. Is that something that is interesting for your or enjoyable – or is it confusing or unclear? Are there any thoughts about that at all?

Dominique: It is interesting 'cos by doing something we choose, we have to – not justify why we're doing it, so we have to think.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: You have to think?

Dominique: When we're given something, we don't have to think we just have to and when I have to choose between something – I have to justify why I choose it.

Ellen: And I think it's not stressing you out because when you say 'do whatever makes you feel good', you don't have to think, I have to do that, I will do it wrong and you can find different parts of your body- how you can explore them more. You are more free to do what your body wants you to do. It's not like you have given me something - you have to do it that way.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So there's almost more flexibility there in a way?

Ellen: Yeh, it's interesting.

Gina: I think it's good that we're treated as intelligent dancers and given that opportunity to play and explore, but I think it's sometimes, maybe because it's just the nature of dance, that you want some more clarity. Like, I want to know exactly where my hand goes or I want to know that, just so it's not something that's a question mark in my own mind. Sometimes it's like, or I feel two ways about it, it's yay or it's ooh.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, yeh. I can understand that definitely. Do you feel like there have been occasions in class where – sometimes I've left things a little bit greyer, not greyer, but I've allowed you or enabled or tried to enable you to make a choice about something? Do you feel like on other occasions I've been able to offer that clarity?

Gina: Yeh, but for one thing it's like the lack of counts, that's a new way of approaching dance and sometimes I personally feel irritated myself if I'm not with the group and I'm trying to listen to the group, but because I haven't got the counts that registered I'm trying to go with what I think it is or what the group thinks it is and sometimes that's just learning to work in that dynamic – it's just a little bit challenging sometimes.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, sure, I understand that definitely. Would anyone like to add to what Gina's saying at all?

Michelle: I think about the clarity – say – sometimes – say Gina asked a question – erm – you might answer the question with a question – which at first you're like 'what?' – so, am I doing that or not? It makes you work harder because then you have to go and figure it out yourself, which I guess Uni is all about - you're not spoon-fed it and then you go and make the choice and that choice is better for you, but at first, sometimes, you're like – then you look around – it is a challenge, but I think that challenge makes you a better dancer.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: That's something else that I've been doing deliberately – is when people ask questions – I've become really interested in – how do I answer those questions – do I just offer an answer – but then that's only one answer isn't it? Kind of how you were saying Dominique – it's contemporary dance, so there could be lots of different answers.

And I think sometimes, you do just want the teacher to say 'look just tell me what it is, tell me what it is'. But I've been almost just trying to play with that expectation and to put that back to you and say 'well you tell me actually' or 'you talk about that with each other and then tell me'. How is that experience? I'm really glad that you've raised that Michelle because it's something I wanted to talk about. How has that experience been for you – to be kind of passed the question back to you or to have the question answered the way that you're not necessarily used to?

Dominique: You let us figure the answer out and that makes us think and to explore and when we come to the point that we're not sure – when we work alone, we're not sure if that's what's supposed to be. Then we do the same procedure and we find the answer and that's really good for us and for our career later when we're going to work independently.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Anybody else?
Ellen: What I notice is – when we have choreography classes, we talk more than we have in technique class. When we have technique class, it's more intensive and I like that. When we have choreography we have more breaks to talk about it. I don't know – not why – it's good to talk in some things, but not to push them that much in the class. Do you know what I mean?

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Kind of. Are you saying that you would prefer more talking in technique or less?

Ellen: No, I mean in choreography we talk more – to reflect the things that we're doing and we're not dancing that much – like in technique. I prefer to do more practical than talking.

Tamara: I think people – different people can explore the question in different ways, rather than talking – because we're all like – we're movers – I think the best way to do it is through movement. I think if we sat down and talked continually, it stops the flow – of being creative. Sometimes when we keep stopping - I'm like I just need to do it, for me, as a dancer, I need to keep doing it and keep doing it rather than, oh let's talk about, because I don't want to talk, I just want to dance. But, I understand the importance of talking about it because it makes you more thorough, it makes you more – understanding what you're doing, but sometimes I need to just do it to get it – if that makes sense.

Gina: Sometimes it's feels like – I actually appreciate the talking side – but I suppose going back to that kind of mind-set, that sometimes I have it in my mind that - do I have the luxury to talk about it now or do I have the luxury to think about it later and do it now? – because we do have so few dance classes, so to take a question and answer it later is probably more preferable in that sense and maybe exploring it through movement.

Ellen: Yes, because personally, when I go home I write like notes of all the classes that we're doing and what we said and all that and I prefer that because I stay alone on that kind of – and then think what…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So you can reflect on it retrospectively rather than…

Ellen: I'm doing it the whole time, I don't know if other people just take notes – but I do that.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So, something about – we've kind of taken the discussion in the direction of – almost like thinking about the role of discussion in dance technique, which is also something that I'm really interested in – I find myself as a teacher, that sometimes it feels like an appropriate opportunity to talk about something, but other times it feels like that talking just gets in the way actually and I agree with what you're saying about – 'I just want to explore it in my body' and I think that can be really difficult as a teacher to try and navigate how those different things sit alongside each other. So, if I kind of try and formulate a question from that - what do you think the role of discussion in dance technique learning is? Do you think it has a place within the dance technique classroom or do you think it should sit outside of the classroom?

Gina: I think it has a small place in the technique classroom and I think questions should be encouraged and maybe the writing down of those questions at the end of class, but I think the majority of it – just because we have so few dance classes, I don't feel we probably can afford to do that – we'd love to, but we don't have classes, we have two, so within the limitations of those time frames we are able to take your teaching then, but we're not able to take your teaching back home .

Dominique: It's important though to talk about – it's not just doing it, it's understanding what you're doing – why, so I find it important.

Tamara: I think it's important when we're doing the peer assessment when we go to partners and one partner dances and we watch and do it like that, rather than talk, dance, talk, like we have that flow.

Ellen: And sometimes you're giving us like five minutes before class to write the notes – I like that. We're going to finish, so we're going to do more practical – then I can sit down those five minutes and I can write what I did and then I can – I will go home and I will write my notes – I prefer that.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So, a moment to reflect at the end of the session – to jot some notes down, summarise for yourself things that have come up in discussion, that feels quite useful?

Ellen: Rather than talking during the class, I like the partner that Tianna said, I like that, because it's not long…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Quick exchanges to share feedback. Maybe we could just talk about that because there's been quite a lot of occasions where I've asked you to work with a critical friend to give each other feedback. How's that been working for people in terms of enabling you to reflect on your own practice?

Michelle: I think it's really useful because I think with dance, you do learn from watching. So, for example, if I watch Gina and Gina doesn't move and I like it, I automatically copy her because I want to do it exactly how Gina did it. But if I didn't watch Gina I would never know, I would never learn and I think in dance you learn your moves from other people doing them – and then also – for example, Gina gave me a comment yesterday – on that move and then we swing, so if I do that move every time, I know I'm doing it good, so I go even further, because I know it's the one strong part of my moves – you know what I mean. But I think watching other people helps – not like, not a competition, but if I've done it and I'm like that was a bit rubbish, but then I see Gina do it really good – I want to do it really good – dya know what I mean? Not in the sense that I want to be better than Gina, but I want to do it how Gina did it.

Gina: It challenges?

Michelle: Yeh, it does It's like if I see Dominique do a handstand – then I'm 'I really actually need to learn to do a handstand' – so I think you do learn from watching and that is an interactive – kind of talk as well, 'cos it's not just sitting and talking, yeh…

Ellen: Yeh, the other thing we did once and it was very helpful for me – we had partners and they were videoing – they gave us feedback, but they were filming us and then I went home and I saw like my mistakes in what she told me – I think it's very helpful to record yourself.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So, something about – with both of these examples – your example of watching a partner dancing and then thinking about how that then reflects back on you…

Ellen: It's the same but…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: It is … but then, your example of standing outside of your own practice – it seems like both of these examples require you to kind of position yourself on the outside in a way … in order to then be able to then reflect on your own practice. Would you agree with what I'm saying there? Does that kind of summarise what you're getting at? How easy do you think it is to reflect on your own practice without any kind of input from the outside?

Gina: Not always easy. People give you feedback that you hadn't even considered and everybody looks at things differently. Dominique gave me some fantastic feedback the other day that I hadn't even considered and no-one had highlighted it to me and it was just a simple thing that I'm going to break my fingers if I do that (Presses fingers on knees) in my handstands, so I really concentrate on that, but every person when we've gone into a pair

has given me completely different feedback and so it's nothing that I would have intelligently thought of … I'm just like, oh yeh, that makes sense – a new thing each time, so yeh, I think it's very difficult to get another person's head and their mind-set when you haven't heard that feedback.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Of course, yeh.

Dominique: I think we can understand some mistakes or habits we have, but we can't really watch ourselves dancing really, so it's really important that somebody else can watch us and tell us 'that's wrong, that's ugly' or something.

Ellen: And, to be honest because some people, they're shy and they're like 'you're really good' and you're like, I just went wrong, 'you did good' and…

Dominique: We're here to learn and improve, so.

Fiona: I feel like when you're doing the dance you don't realise sometimes what your body is doing because you can't see it, so you might be doing something completely different to someone else and then someone picking it out and then when you're doing it again, you realise that, oh yeh I am doing that and you might change it slightly, so I think it's good.

Tamara: It just heightens your awareness.
Rimmer-Piekarczyk: 'Heightens your awareness'. That's a really nice way of putting it, having that kind of outside eye – whether that's the teacher's eye, or the camera or a peer or whatever, it sounds like for you and your reflective processes, that's been really useful to have those different modes of seeing your practice I suppose, in a way.
I'm just interested maybe to talk about how you perceive the role of the teacher in dance technique learning. Whether that's your experiences here at University here with me or Lecturer A or outside of University. What do you think the role of the teacher is – what do you think the relationship between the teacher and student is?

Ellen: Before I came here I thought that everyone is going to be strict and when I came here I thought 'Wow' they're so friendly with us. I thought it was going to be more strict and I was … Maybe I had like a training school in my mind, because they're quite strict – I like that because you're not stressing out, so you can be more free to do, to move and when you're doing a mistake, you're not going to say 'No, you did a mistake', you say 'you can improve that' – I like that.

Dominique: I believe there should exist a distance between teacher and student, not just because of the age difference, but because, yeh, my whole life I was afraid of teachers because they were usually aggressive sometimes when you would do something wrong – in my experience – but, when I got here I was so relieved that the teachers were going to help us and I wasn't afraid to ask – so, yes, it's nice now we have a real relationship in the class, but I still believe that there should be a distance.

Ellen: Respect…

Tamara: So, you don't take it for granted.

Ellen: If I have a problem, I'm not afraid to tell you – that's good.

Michelle: I think I agree with everything that's been said – for example, like in technique classes before say you had your leg up and you dropped it and you'd be shouted at for being lazy or you fell over or something – it's kind of – you don't get scared of coming to lessons – like, you just don't want to go but technique isn't a pain here, it's just an enjoyable class erm and about the teaching thing as well like – on the first day when you showed us your wedding photo – straight away it's like 'aah' , dya know what I mean, like before I would not know if my teachers had children or anything 'cos I think straight away there is a boundary that's been knocked down and then again, in technique, usually, the teacher would just kind of walk round the room saying the exercise – you kind of do it with us, you stand in with us, so I think that's kind of why the barrier's down – because, I don't know, you seem like a normal person – you don't seem like a teacher (group laughs).

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: And do you think in terms of your learning experience then, does it make a difference if the teacher seems more human in a way? Why does that make such a big difference?

Michelle: Because you're not scared to like fail, fall over 'cos you're not – I don't know, I don't know how to put it.

Fiona: I think you're saying, you're not afraid to push yourself to the limit when you kind of fail and then you have to pick yourself up, that you won't get mad at us for doing that.

Dominique: Well, now I'm thinking … (group laughs) … maybe the fact that you're so good with students and we're not afraid of failing, does that make us feel comfortable with failing?

Michelle: No, but erm, for example, say you were doing something and you fell over in technique class or your leg fell down and you physically, dya know when you hold your leg and your leg is shaking and you just want to put it down, I know if I put it down in your class I'd just put it straight back up again, but if I put it down in the technique classes that I had at college my name would be shouted and it'd be like 'what are you doing?' and I'd go out of the class hating the class, like, in pain physically.

Tamara: It's like your dancing for your own expectations rather than the teacher's.

Michelle: Yes, that's a really good way to put it.

Gina: I think it gives me more of a respect for you than other teachers in the past because I know the responsibility is coming down with me. It's almost actually by knocking down that barrier, you're giving me more responsibility and there's actually, in a weird way for me, more of a pressure, because, even though there isn't that strict 'you have to do this', it's like 'well, if you don't do it, you don't do it, but you're not going to improve and that's fine, I'm not here to mollycoddle you, that's your responsibility' and I kind of like the fact that it's on our shoulders and it's not in any patronising way – I can never imagine you saying that, but that is the feeling I'm left with – it's like, well this is my course, so I make of it what I want to make of it and if I don't get that result, I can't blame you, I blame myself, because you've given me the opportunities, so that's all I need to do.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: That's interesting – yeh – because I'm really kind of hearing what you're saying Michelle about your experiences at college and for myself, as well, as a young dancer, a young person, I can remember being in classes and being terrified of teachers – technique teachers, you know, there is that real kind of hierarchy between teacher and student in some of my own learning experiences. I suppose that's kind of led me as a teacher to question how effective is that really, does that really motivate students and give the students the autonomy and the kind of independence to do as exactly as you're saying Gina to take more responsibility and to be more confident and more comfortable with failing – if you want to call it that – or – because that's how we learn about ourselves isn't it – when things don't quite go to plan or we do the movement and it doesn't quite work that time – but d'ye know what – I learned something from that and I take that forward with me – you know that's something – that kind of philosophy I'm really interested in as a teacher. Wow, that's really interesting. Thank you for sharing some of those experiences. Is there anything else that anyone wants to add?

Naomi: I really like how, instead of you telling us – like, coming over to us saying 'you're doing this wrong' – like, how you watch us dance and then you come over to us, but you don't say 'oh, you're doing this wrong', you just say 'can everyone just watch Naomi just do this move' and when I was doing it, I knew I was doing it wrong, but I didn't know how to improve, but you were just like 'so, what is she doing wrong?' and then Dominique came along and told me and I really like that 'cos I was comfortable with Dominique telling me I was doing it wrong – instead of you coming over and saying 'you're doing it wrong', you give us the opportunity of other people seeing me doing it wrong – so they can – if they were doing the same as me, they'll know as well, that's what I really like. So, if I was doing the same as Michelle and then you picked Michelle out to do it – I'd be then, I was doing that as well, so then I'll do the same, d'ye know what I mean? I really like that. You get other people to watch us, because it helps other people watching us as well as yourself.

Tamara: See, I think I would want more specific – 'Tamara you're doing it wrong', so I'd know, rather than it being a broad, 'cos I wouldn't know if it was me or not, if that makes sense. So, I don't mind if it was 'Tamara, do it like this', I think it's better 'cos I'd know where I am.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: So, more individuated feedback. Any other comments about that?

Gina: I agree with that, but what I was going to say was, in terms of, not the individual feedback, but in terms of giving us the responsibility, so then you've asked us to do it, but if we haven't done it you're not going to come down on us like a ton of bricks – I respond better to that now, but had I been 15 or 16, I wouldn't have responded better to that, because if you were going to come down on me like a ton of bricks, I'd have been going home playing on my play station, but that's just the reality, but now I suppose it's just a different mind-set, so I think at University level that approach works better.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, definitely, that's it and I think there's a certain maturity that comes with that and we do expect different levels of engagement at University and we do expect that you'll take more ownership for your own body and your own practice. I suppose in the first year we kind of plant those seeds and then by third year you're really kind of flying with that – that's what we hope anyway. I think it's always an interesting one – you know more indiviuated feedback and more generic feedback to the whole group and that's often something that I'm thinking about a lot – in my teaching is … have I, did I give Tamara more specific feedback this term or has it been a bit too general and again, it's one of those things - it's a balance isn't it – and, I guess, that's something for me to think about, definitely, for sure.

We're coming into the last 10 minutes now. We've talked a little bit about discussion, we've talked a bit about feedback. Can I, just for the last part, I just want to return to this idea of questions and the kind of, the potential of questions in dance technique learning and how they can be used to kind of instigate further inquiry or further exploration. Is there anything else that anybody wanted to add into that discussion at all, or onto that topic?

Michelle: Erm, the other day when we were – last Tuesday – when we were with Ben, Harriet and Sarah (three third year students who came to observe the class and offer feedback), Ben said that Naomi looked around and just looked to see if she was in time – I think that's a really acceptable thing within this class – that you can actually just look and question what you're doing. For example, like when we were doing the floor work the other day I was totally lost, so I just sat up and looked around – it was fine and then I carried on, so I think there is a sense that you can just take a pause and question anything, which I think is nice and again, going back to the whole teacher thing, there is no sense of 'why are you stopping?', so it is okay to just go and look at your notebook and just take a minute to question kind of what's gone on and what is going on, so I think that's a nice sort of thing.

Gina: I think the more questions we have, the more answers we get and the more we learn about ourselves and the more we kind of focus in on what we're doing and why we're doing it - and it can just be anything from – all of a sudden you realise you use imagery for everything and then it's like, well why do I use imagery and then that leads onto another question and then you start to find answers about yourself and what direction you want to go in. So, like I found this term very helpful for my own questions because I know or I feel I know more why I'm doing dance and what I'm using that music for and it helps me with that

– but that's because the more questions I get asked and the questions I wouldn't ask myself as well, when it is a question, it's like 'why are you doing this?' or 'think of it like this' or just, and if something works, then I'll think, well why did that work and that didn't work, why did the imagery of organising myself work better than the idea of pulling myself up or whatever it might be. So, I like that.

Ellen: For me, it's very important to feel good inside first – like – I'm waking up every day and I want to come to the class – so, it not like I'm having to come to class now, I hate the teacher, I hate everyone, I kind of want to come to the class and because, for me it's different because I'm in a different country, without my family, it's a different experience and it's important for me to feel good inside, because I notice when sometimes I have my problems I'm okay I don't function in the class, I'm not concentrating - erm, for me, it plays a lot of erm, yeh…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Thank you. I'm interested in what you were saying there Gina about questions. I can't remember who it was that said this now, but there's quite a famous quote that says it's not about finding the answers to the question, it's about the questions themselves – asking the question is actually the most important thing – more than necessarily going away and finding all the answers and I think you're absolutely right that, you know, one question can act as a stimulus in a way for then more questions to come and when you sort of get into that level of engaging with your practice in that kind of way, I think often you find – you know, like I'm doing my PhD at the moment – and I actually find that I have more questions than answers and I think when I started this study I thought 'I'm going to find loads of answers to this', but actually what I've ended up with is just more questions, but I think that's an important place to be at with your practice, where you're really kind of interrogating what you're doing, really thinking about 'why do I do this in this way?' and 'what does that tell me about myself – what do I learn from that?' Any other kind of closing comments on that at all? Is there anything that anybody would like to just raise that's kind of an aside thing that's unrelated to any of the discussion that we've just had?

Dominique: I want to ask, when we're having new material, for example and we have to do it, do you prefer to do it (hesitates), even if we're doing it wrong, to keep going, even if we're not in time or whatever or do you prefer to take it slow and do it right even. I can't explain that?

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: I think I know what you mean – are you asking whether I would prefer you to just kind of give it a go and keep going even if the material's not that clear or to stop and go slower – is this about learning new material and how you manage that?

Dominique: Yeh, for example, in an audition, what we should do or what's better and what the teachers prefer to see?

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: I think different teachers would have different expectations around that. For me, I'm much more interested in, if I give some material to an individual, I'm not really interested in seeing them do a kind of replication - a copy of what I did – of course, there are going to be things that look the same because it's dance isn't it and that's what we do, as you've already mentioned – we copy each other, we work in quite a visual way, but I'm much more interested in seeing that person bring something of themselves to that material because we're all different individuals we will bring something unique to that space, so what I'm looking for is an interpretation, but I think you'll find that different teachers, different choreographers have different ideas about that. But, in a learning context, for me I think it's much more important that somebody is just able to kind of throw themselves into it, to give it a go, even if it's – perform it – even if it's not exactly, perhaps what I did. I think that that would show that somebody had the confidence to just kind of say 'dya know what, well that little bit's a bit unclear to me, but I'm just going to do it in this way'. I mean that – for me, personally, but maybe people might want to answer that question or do you have thoughts about that at all?

Gina: I agree with what you've just said – yeh, confidence and just performing, trying…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Committing to it, even it's not that clear at this point? I think as well, particularly I know that you're doing a lot of auditions at the moment and auditions are very pressurised situations aren't they, where you're given material very quickly, you have to learn it very quickly, so that in itself is a skill isn't it – how do you manage that and I think the best thing always is to – if you don't have it, just to improvise and just show what a great improviser you are, rather than stopping half way through and kind of freaking out, you know (Rimmer-Piekarczyk pulls face) – that would be what I would say. And I know that's what we look for here in the auditions that we run for this programme. Anything else that anybody wants to add? Has it overall been a positive experience this term? Has dance technique been a positive learning experience?

Tamara: I just want more. I don't feel like I have enough, I feel like after the class I've warmed up – I'm just 'ah' and then we stop.
Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, I know what you mean, it's really hard isn't it, to get a momentum, I find that myself as well, that the session just goes so quickly, there's so much that I want to do and I can't get it all in there and yeh…

Gina: I feel like this term's been faster, but also more slower in the sense that it's been more relaxed and that might just be my own mind-set probably, but, so it just seems like (clicks fingers) just breezing by and ooh that's gone fast. I also wanted to say that in terms of the feedback that – something I really like that we do is when you encourage us to touch each other in terms of like feel the vertebrae, so you feel something that you can't reach yourself and you get in touch with that muscle and also it gets us past that point of – ooh I can't touch you – it gets you working with your body, so I like that.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yes, so the touch aspect has been really useful for you?

Gina: Because you sometimes don't feel something until someone just goes 'there' and…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: It brings your awareness to that point in the body. Has anybody else experienced that at all?

Tamara: I would like as well, just like if we had more theory, like actually like in a lecture theatre and you showed us, like, how the body works – I dunno, so I could understand how to approach my studies in another way and you would do it or any other teacher – like sitting there and actually learning would make me feel – okay, I'm actually doing my theory, if that makes sense. Or, maybe just in the studio – I dunno – even if like we had like a mock test or something so I would know that I'm actually learning the correct words and … something to back it up.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Yeh, 'cos, I guess a lot of what we do is like applied anatomy in a way where we're talking about it as we're doing it – I'm asking you to be aware of your pelvis as you're moving, but it sounds like what you're saying Tianna is you prefer a little bit more separation in a way where…

Tamara: I like how we do it in class as well, I'm just saying…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: To complement?

Tamara: To have something to refer back on and oh yeh…

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Okay.

Ellen: I hate theory (group laughs out loud) – but when I started researching for my essay it was so interesting and I learned so much stuff, like alone and I would like to have like anatomy sessions and all that to learn your body. I was so interested in that and I was so 'wow' – for me, yeh, I like that, because you're learning about your body.

Tamara: And it's like, I went back home a couple of weeks ago and I was 'oh yeh Mum I did a bit of this with this muscle and da,da,da,da,da' and my brother was like 'see, that's what education does to you'. And, literally, they were really surprised that I could articulate some muscle, they think I'm just dancing around, but the fact that I can speak what my body's actually doing and I enjoyed that – it felt like a light bulb switched in my mind. I was like 'ah, I can actually learn'.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: That's fantastic- wow.

Ellen: Before I started researching for my essay because I have more curves (shrugs shoulders) and I'm like that, I thought it was bad. But, when I was reading anatomy books, it was writing that it's good to have curves and to embrace them and – yeh – I was glad.

Rimmer-Piekarczyk: Relieved that your spine has some curves in! That's a good thing. Maybe, to end on, I don't know if you're all aware, but our kind of punchline for our programme is 'the thinking dancer' and it sounds like what you're talking about here today – is whether that's thinking in anatomical terms and getting to know your body or thinking in reflective terms or thinking critically – you know – I think what we've talked about here has been – there's been a lot of that – real, intelligent thinking around what we're doing. So, thank you very much for giving your time up this afternoon. It's been really, really useful for me to get some insight from your perspective of what your learning experience has been like. Lovely. Thank you very much.