

Embodying music theory: A performative approach

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Background in embodied cognitive sciences and somatics applied to music education/music theory. Western classical music theory is often taught in a way that is disembodied from the performance of musical practices. This research aims to address this mind-body disconnect by utilising embodied cognition (Dewey, 1916, 1934, 1997, 2011; Schusterman, 2008; Bresler, 2013; Cox, 2016; Vass, E., & Deszpot, 2017) and somatic practice (Adler, 2002; Davis, 2007; Hartley, 1989; Hanlon-Johnson, 1995) to investigate and develop a unified and bodily approach to teaching and learning that is called a performative music theory approach. The experience of this performative approach towards teaching and learning Western classical music theory uses arts practice methods to capture the embodied understanding and perspective from the perspective of teacher and students during a performance based assignment. Reflective and reflexive practice (Schön, 1984; Howard, 2003; Westerlund, 2012; McLeod, 2017; Kolb, 1984; Smith, 2001) used by both the teacher and students provides insight into the embodied experiences and implications for teaching and learning during this performative music theory approach. This paper includes of one performance that was part of this arts practice PhD research project that demonstrates the performative music theory approach.

Background in arts practice methods and documenting embodied experiences. Arts practice is an emerging approach to research that places embodiment at the forefront of the research endeavor for new avenues and perspectives to be explored. This paper begins a dialogue between arts practice methods and music education literature to document the lived engagement with a performative approach to teaching and learning music theory in an Irish higher education setting. Arts practice literature and methods used in this research include performance studies, performance practice, narrative inquiry, autoethnography and ethnography (Schechner, 1988, 1989; Melrose, 2002, 2007; Gallagher and Zahavi, 2012; Wall, 2006; Barleat, 2009; Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, 2000; Emerson et al., 1995; Barton, 2014). Through these methods, the practices of both teacher and students develop a creative, experiential, partnership, practice-based model of teaching and learning.

Aims. This article aims to explore the implications for using arts practice methods in collaboration with embodied cognitive sciences and somatic practices to capture the embodied experiences of teacher and students with particular reference to the performative music theory approach.

Main contribution. Western classical music theory is understood as a tradition of analyzing and teaching music that incorporates elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, genre, texture, and form. This project uses literature from embodied cognitive sciences and somatic practice to connect the mind and body through a process of performative engagement with music theory that is explored using arts practice methods as an embodying process of conducting, documenting and experiencing research. The approach developed in this research, namely performative music theory, uses Schechner's (1988, 1989, 1998) broad-spectrum interpretation of performance in the development of an embodied understanding and application of music theory concepts. In the context of the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick, Ireland, students attending undergraduate music theory classes come from a multitude of backgrounds including but not limited to traditional Irish music, popular music, Traditional Irish dance, contemporary dance and other informal musical or dance backgrounds; however, many of these students come to university with little prior experience of

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Western classical music theory. In order to make connections with Western classical theoretical concepts, a performative music theory approach to teaching and learning was used to build upon their previously embodied understanding of music to embed the new Western classical theory concepts through their own specific performance practice. This research is influenced by Swanwick's (1999, 2003) ideas of musical development and previously embodied musical knowledge, but aims to offer additional insights into teaching and learning through an arts practice approach. The use of arts practice methods allows for the performance practices of both teacher and students to engage in the development of a creative, experiential, partnership, practice-based model of teaching, learning and research. The first performance depicted in this article provides reflective and reflexive insights from the different perspectives of the participants that form the data used to determine the effectiveness and challenges of this performative music theory approach.

Implications. The findings of this research posit that an approach rooted in creative, collaborative and embodied teaching and learning experiences aids in student understanding and application of abstract theoretical concepts. In addition, the performative music theory approach explores and negotiates hierarchical relationships in the higher education classroom. This research highlights future implications for the use of arts practice research methods, for music education research in a wide range of contexts.

Keywords: Embodiment, Music Education, Arts Practice Research, Music Theory, Performative Music Theory

The teaching and learning of music is a lifelong process and phenomenon shaped by a number of factors including but not limited to personal, social, cultural, educative/institutional and contextual experiences. The practice of Western classical music has created a particular culture for those who engage in learning and teaching this art form. Western classical music theory is a dominant element of a musical landscape that includes diverse musical practices. Western classical music theory's reliance on symbolic notation and literacy can create pedagogical distance from the performance and practice of music. As a result, this has created implications for teaching and learning. When referring to Western classical music theory, I will be discussing a tradition of analysing and teaching music that incorporate the elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, genre, texture and form.

Within the context of music education, and specifically higher education, the repertoire and discourse of Western classical music dominate. However, reflecting changing musical landscapes and globalisation, there has been a shift in music education away from the aesthetic approach, in which students are introduced to different cultures through listening, to David Elliot's praxial music education model, in which students are introduced to variety of music through the practices of these different cultures (McCarthy and Goble, 2002). The praxial approach promotes the further development and enhancement of musical knowledge, through a kinaesthetic approach to musical learning. This research aims to further expand the praxial approach by utilising embodied cognitive sciences (Bresler, 2013; Cox, 2016; Vass, E., & Deszpot, 2017), somatic practices (Adler, 2002; Davis, 2007; Hartley, 1989; Hanlon-Johnson, 1995) and arts practice methods (Schechner, 1988, 1989; Melrose, 2002, 2007; Gallagher and Zahavi, 2012; Wall, 2006; Barleat, 2009; Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, 2000; Emerson et al., 1995; Barton, 2014) to investigate the embodied experiences of teacher and students during a performance based assignment using the performative music theory approach.

Embodied cognition provides useful concepts to further explore practical approaches towards music teaching and learning in a classroom that embraces previous students' embodied, musical experiences (Swanwick, 1999; Swanwick, 2003) from outside the classroom – of all styles – as a basis for new musical knowledge. As indicated by Swanwick (2003), we develop musically in a spiral, different levels of engagement and process. A great deal of this research resonates strongly with critical pedagogy, whose ideals support using the tools of philosophy and pedagogy alongside theory and practice to build a deeper connection to abstract concepts such as those presented in music theory (Abrahams, 2005). The work of Van der Schyff (2015) regarding enactive music pedagogy describes “an ontologically continuous and radically non-reductive approach to cognition that embraces complexity, difference, and the feeling-emotional body” that supports learners' integration of body and mind rather than Cartesian separation of the two.

Arts practice methods are used within this research to illustrate the symbiotic relationship between embodied cognition of performance and teaching. The project involved reflective practice (Schön, 1984; Kolb, 1984; Howard, 2003; Westerlund, 2012; McLeod, 2017; Smith, 2001) by students and teacher involved in a reflexive performative pedagogical approach to music theory designed for students who come

from a non-Western classical music background. The data collected for the current study are from one performance based assessment that was given as part of the performative music theory approach. Reflections from before, during and after the performance assessment provide a sequential insight into the development of embodied teaching and learning during this approach.

Embodied cognition in music education

Bodily experiences in education

Music theory teaching and learning is often far removed from the kinaesthetic performative knowledge it enhances. This research draws from both the educational philosophy of Dewey (1916, 1934, 1997, 2011) and a phenomenological understanding of experience to describe the particular embodied learning experiences reported here. It is important to note the influence of several musical pedagogues on this research, such as Zoltan Kodály, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, and Carl Orff who have developed methods using kinaesthetic experiences in music theory teaching (Comeau, 1995). In addition to these musical pedagogues, educational philosophers, including Dewey, have commented on the importance of physical experience in the educational process for students.

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile. (Dewey, 2011, p.40)

The statement by Dewey emphasizes the responsibility of the teacher to shape a kinaesthetic learning experience that is responsive to the students. Within these kinaesthetic learning spaces, an “embodied metaphorical reasoning” occurs, as a way of physically engaging with the world that influences our cognitive understanding (Cox, 2016, p.108). For many music students in higher education, the experience of learning music theory is often abstract, with little connection to their physical performance of music, despite the direct correlation of the concepts taught. This way of teaching promotes the separation of the body and mind in the educational environment (Davis, 2007; Bainbridge-Cohen, 1993; Shusterman, 2000, 2008; Hartley, 1989; Hanna, 1995). The theory of embodiment disputes this separation, stating that the development of knowledge begins with experience and, therefore, is directly informed by the body. Current research in higher education music classrooms (Vass & Despot 2017) looks to the Kodaly pedagogy (an extension of Kodaly pedagogy) as a means of developing embodied forms of creative connectivity linking experimental teaching and assessing this through student understanding and engagement. Bresler (2013) provides an expansive resource for expanding the term embodiment as well as its application in a variety of teaching and learning contexts from music to dance education. Corness (2008) further expands upon the theory of embodying knowledge:

The theory of embodiment developed by philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and cognitive scientists such as Varela argues against mind-body dualism, suggesting that the natural state of human experience is a unified body. These writers put forward the idea that knowledge starts with lived experience. This knowledge includes the body knowledge understood to reside in the body, such as muscle memory, habit and instinct, but has at its core the process of perception in which the body and mind are unified in the sensing and understanding of the world of which we are a part. (Corness, 2008, p.21)

Johnson furthers this discussion regarding bodily understanding and meaning, indicating that “understanding is the way we ‘have a world’, the way we experience our world as a comprehensible reality” (Johnson, 1974, p.102). Our understanding and application of our knowledge of the world is directly influenced by our bodily interaction with new information. This understanding of the body and of experience is common point of research within dance practices and somatic practice (Adler 2002, Davis 2007, Hartley 1989, Hanlon-Johnson 1995). Embodied cognitive sciences and somatic practices are used to theoretically situate the performative theory approach that uses arts practice methods to capture this particular phenomenon of embodied research through music. As musicians, we engage with our practice as a unified mind-body experience and “if our body is our primordial instrument in grasping the world, then we can learn more of the world by improving the conditions and use of this instrument” (Shusterman, 2008, p.19). Shusterman furthers this connection between the mind and body stating:

Since we live, think, and act through our bodies, their study, care and improvement should be at core of philosophy, especially when philosophy is conceived (as it used to be) as a distinctive way of life with critical disciplined care of the self that involves self-knowledge and self-cultivation. (Shusterman, 2008, p.15)

This philosophy of developing and using a bodily understanding as a tool in teaching and learning aims to develop self-knowledge and self-cultivation that is applied within the context of this research. A performative music theory learning experience is situated within the body for students to further contextualise their knowledge and application through their specific performance practice. However, this unification of mind and body through the performance of music is often segregated in the music theory classroom experience. Performing is a unique physical experience that is developed through repetition and consistent practice. Music theory, as a cognitive experience, is equally, better-understood and applied through repetition and consistent practice. It is thought that by creating the connection between the practice of performance and practice of theory in an embodying experience that the two areas of understanding and application will improve symbiotically. In his philosophy of teaching, Dalcroze supports this approach towards teaching:

To be completely musical, a child should possess an ensemble of physical and spiritual resources and capacities, comprising, on the one hand, ear voice, and consciousness of sound, and on the other, the

whole body (bone, muscle, and nervous systems), and the consciousness of bodily rhythm. (Dalcroze, 2000, p.36)

However, this connection will be different for students dependent upon their particular performance practice. Students involved in this research come from a mixture of Western dance and music traditions. There are two distinct disadvantages for students who are involved in learning music theory from these backgrounds. Firstly, many of the dancers, who have had little previous training in music, struggle with the practical application for their practice, but also the abstract nature of many of the music theory concepts. Vocalists, distinct from instrumentalists, have an added challenge, in that they lack the gross-body physical engagement of performing that is part of instrumental performance. The design of the performance and assignments takes these additional challenges into consideration.

Literature from music education connected with arts practices provides many avenues to explore this performative music theory approach, which engages the whole musician body and mind. Additional challenges are presented in the higher education classroom, such as negotiating and utilizing the prior experiences of the students or teaching students from diverse performative backgrounds within the same educational setting (Swanwick, 1999, 2003). However, it is important that, within the higher education institution, a teacher not only prepares the students for their future careers in the arts, but also ignites motivation for self-directed learning. Burnard echoes this:

Higher music educators can significantly influence attitudes towards music learning and learners' motivation to learn, not only through developing their creativities, but by understanding what we consider to be the most important aspects of higher music education for understanding the music profession are, and by preparing musicians for careers in music. (Burnard, 2014, p.4)

The design of the current project on performative music theory involves embedding the taught practical elements into the students' current and prior performance experiences. This experience renders a researchable, data-producing performance that provides multiple perspectives upon the relevance and impact of this approach towards teaching.

Arts practice research and methods in music education

Understanding performance, understanding practice

Arts practice investigations use performance or practice as part of the data creation and/or collection process. Arts practice, or arts-based research has its roots in performance studies, which developed in New York University under Richard Schechner in the 1980s. This basis of performance studies – including the writings of Richard Schechner as well as Susan Melrose, Mark Johnson and Shaun Gallagher – underpins the theoretical understanding and application of performance and practice applied to this research.

Schechner, a leading scholar in performance studies, calls for an open approach to understanding the phenomenon of performance. As he states, “performance-as

distinct from any of its subgenres like theatre, dance, music, and performance art-is a broad spectrum of activities including at the very least the performing arts, rituals, sports, popular entertainments, and performance in everyday life” (Schechner, 1988, p.4). By employing this understanding of performance, other activities, typically disregarded as not being performance, are now included in the definition – raising implications for viewing teaching as a performance, as well as the implications for teaching through the act of performance.

Over the past 25 years theatre and dance departments, obsessed with 'professional training', have let the intellectual aspects of performance studies, historical, political, philosophical, theoretical pass into the hands of social scientists, literary scholars, and historians. . . . To correct these imbalances, the scholarly study of performance must not shrink further but expand to include an awareness of the full range of performative genres, an understanding of the various historical and cultural contexts. (Schechner, 1989, p.6)

Performers should, then, reclaim the study of performance as a forum for their perspective to add new vision and understanding in academic studies. Melrose (2002) further expands on whose perspective to include in the research process, addressing two key concepts within this analysis of teaching as performance: what she calls, expert disciplinary practice, and spectator studies. She asserts that performers are experts in their disciplinary practices and are able to provide key insights into a performance that might be overlooked or unknown to others. Melrose refers to the practice of performers as a critical meta-practice that is “a disciplinary practice or practice which both maintain conventions specific to the discipline (and the judgments it entails) while challenging and/or interrogating certain aspects of its practice” (Melrose, 2002). It is through the combination of Melrose’s idea of a critical meta-practice, with Schechner’s statements about the need for performers to add their voice into the academic debate around performance, that this research is predicated. She posits that there is a distinction between those in academia, who are expert practitioners, and those who are expert spectators. She further explores the questions around practice-based research:

Embedded in these questions, I later observed, was my own crisis of representation: what does my use of ‘we’, three times above, represent? What might my own engagement be, as expert writer/educator, when it has increasingly seemed to me, over the past decade, that one of the problems confronting expert arts practitioners who have entered the research contexts of the university, lies in the demonstrable fact that many highly skilled writers, in that same university, use models of knowledge, ways of seeing, doing and knowing, along with approaches to the performance product, that are specific to the positions and activities, in the (performance) event, of ‘expert spectating’? (Melrose, 2007)

Melrose highlights that practitioners are uniquely situated, allowing an insider view, thus making them expert spectators in performance. However, this then begs the question of how the separation between expert practitioner and expert spectator is

decided. Can they be one and the same, or must a person be one or the other, in a particular moment? By using Melrose's concepts of expert disciplinary practice and spectator studies, we can regard teaching as an expert practice in which the practitioner interrogates their work, daily. However, if a teacher is an expert practitioner, can they also be an expert spectator of their own practice? In addition, if they can be regarded as an expert spectator of their practice, how do we capture these ephemeral moments? This question addresses the need to capture the phenomenon of the actual teaching *experience*.

The study of experience through phenomenology "is concerned with attaining an understanding and proper description of the experiential structure of our mental/embodied life" (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2012, p.9). Phenomenologists are interested in understanding how people experience phenomena. Gallagher and Zahavi posit that, "phenomenologists are not advocating a strong thesis concerning total infallible self-knowledge; rather, they are calling attention to the constitutive link between experiential phenomena and the first-person perspective" (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2012, p.53). By understanding this characteristic of phenomenology, it is clear that, during the moments of a particular phenomenon (such as teaching), the experience described by one subject in the first-person perspective can be different from how an 'outsider' might characterize it. Arts practice allows for a number of different modes of writing and research methods that inform and depict the research process. By using arts practice methods to develop a performative approach, music educators are capable of harnessing the living of experiences of both the teacher and the student directly into the research framework.

Methodologies in arts practice

Arts practice research allows for multiple perspectives to be explored and included in the development, application and outcomes of this teaching approach. This investigation uses a mixed method approach including reflective and reflexive practice methods (Schön, 1984; Howard, 2003; Westerlund, 2012; McLeod, 2017; Kolb, 1984; Smith, 2001; Mulder, 2018) in tandem with arts practice methods of autoethnography, narrative inquiry and ethnography to fully document the experience of teacher and students involved in this research. The next section will provide a brief introduction to overview of each of these methods.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography allows the researcher to self-reflect and engage their voice in the investigative process. In her autoethnographic journey, Wall (2006) is presented with the challenge of understanding the knowledge she possesses, and how to articulate that within research. During the course of this journey, she finds that autoethnography allows for different ways of knowing, which allows for stronger connections to be made to the social world we engage in and are a part of. Exploring this notion, Wall (2006) notes:

Historically, writing has been divided into two genres: literary and scientific. The goal of personal narrative as research is to fuse the

form with the content and the literary with the scientific, to create a social scientific art form, thereby revealing the hand of the researcher/author who created the work and demonstrating explicitly the expertise of the author rather than constructing his or her absence. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000, Cited in Wall, 2006)

The use of this method connects Melrose's concept of the expert practitioner and their role in research with their voice in the process. Giving a voice to the researcher validates their expertise, and gives authority to the material that is generated and documented from their practice. The use of autoethnography in this research aims to provide insight into the process of developing the performative music theory approach, as well as document the process of teaching using this approach. Teaching is a process of engagement, an engagement with students, with material and with oneself as a teacher. Looking at this further, Bartleet reflects on her own use of autoethnography, stating that she "was able to explore the differences between what I thought I was doing in the moment and what I perceived myself to be doing in retrospect" (Bartleet, 2009, p.715). The ephemeral nature of teaching makes this distinction difficult without the use of autoethnographic documentation methods.

Narrative inquiry

The method of narrative inquiry is situated between phenomenon and inquiry; the phenomenon of the "story" and the inquiry in the form of "narrative" are used to form the basis of this method. The use of narrative transcends several disciplines but is generally defined as "a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience and its study which is appropriate to (many) social science fields" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p.2). It is the narrative of the classroom experience that I as researcher and author desire to capture and, specifically, the student perspective. Through the use of narrative inquiry, alongside autoethnography, I aim to present the actual classroom experience of the performative music theory approach. *Narrative Inquiry in Music Education* (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009), highlights many uses for the method including the idea that, "narrative inquirers live and work alongside research participants in order to understand the ways in which individuals and communities story a life and live their story" (Barrett and Stauffer, 2009, p.2). Telling the story of this performative classroom experience, from these different perspectives, is vital to assessing the effectiveness and challenges of this project.

Ethnography and other methods

Ethnography will be used in order to gain additional external perspectives from participants and observers. Emerson et al (1995) describe this form of research stating,

Ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives. Carrying out such research involves two distinct activities. First, the ethnographer enters in a social setting and gets to know the people involved in it; usually, the setting is not previously known in an intimate way. ... But, second, the ethnographer writes down in regular, systematic ways what she

observes and learns while participating in the daily round of life of others. (Emerson et al., 1995, p.1)

This research will develop a narrative that uses ethnography, alongside autoethnography, to represent the performative music theory approach phenomenon as it occurs in the classroom. Barton (2014) points out several considerations to be aware of when applying ethnography to education contexts such as:

- The importance of education is rarely denied and formal educational settings are a powerful predictor of people's overall survival
- Educational activities are inherently complex and dynamic and are impacted on by the socio-cultural makeup of its participants
- Educational research has drawn on a number of social disciplines including sociology and anthropology
- While many see education as formal institutionalized school, there is much 'education' that goes on outside of these settings. (Freebody, 2003, cited in Barton, 2014, p.97)

The use of ethnography, in this way, used to document the performative music theory approach is particularly relevant to the issues raised by Barton. This research, not only takes into consideration the complexities of educational activities - the influence of socio-cultural background of the participants and the influence of the education that occurs outside of the research space - but aims to use these elements in the process of developing an approach that uses these potential issues towards the advantage of the classroom experience.

The use of these different methods aims to develop a critical investigation into this performative music theory approach, as it is a lived experience. Clandinin and Connelly suggest that, "experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.19). The characters in this narrative, as Melrose would name them, are the expert practitioners and expert spectators: the students and I. The students/participants are equally expert practitioners and expert spectators within the context of the research, rather than in a hierarchical structure of teacher and students.

Somatic experiences (Davis, 2007; Bainbridge-Cohen, 1993; Shusterman, 2000, 2008; Hartley, 1989; Hanna, 1995) will be documented using ethnography and autoethnography. My somatic experience as the teacher will be documented through autoethnographic journaling. Student somatic experience will be explored primarily through ethnographic journaling and narrative inquiry. This application of somatic practice within narrative inquiry is used, to "say more about how you see knowledge as embodied, embedded in a culture based on narrative unity" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.3). The concept of embodiment that is described through narrative is directly related to the somatic understanding of Johnson (1974), who analyses the use of language to represent this bodily experience.

Cognitive embodiment through this pedagogy is explored and described through the use of autoethnography, ethnography and narrative inquiry. Spry asserts that "embodied knowledge is in the somatic (the body's interaction with culture),

represented through the semantic (language), a linguistic articulation, a telling, of what does and does not go into the body, and why” (Spry 1998 cited in Spry 2011, p.502).

Performing music theory

Theory, then, is not just something to learn but is also something to do...Music theory...is not a subject like pharmacy with labels to learn and prescriptions to fill, but is an activity-more like composition or performance. (Rogers, 2004, p.7)

Rogers highlights the need for music theory to be taught in a way that allows it to be experienced (bodily engagement) rather than simply studied (cognitive engagement). This research explores and mitigates the student’s disconnect between the theoretical concepts in music theory with their own performance practice. It is this binary opposition of music theory, as a conceptual skill, rather than a practical, kinaesthetic learning experience, that this performance aims to interrogate, by reflecting the processes performed in the classroom. This research uses reflections from the teacher and students to weave a multi-perspective narrative that illustrates the impact from an embodied approach to teaching, learning, and research demonstrated through arts practice methods. The next sections will outline the participants involved in the study, the data gathered and presented through narrative reflections and lastly results from this study.

Setting the stage: Irish world academy of music and dance, University of Limerick, Ireland

The University of Limerick, in Limerick, Ireland (UL) was established in 1972 as the National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick and classified as the University of Limerick in 1989. The University of Limerick is an independent, internationally focused university with over 13,000 students and 1,400 staff. The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (The Academy) was established in 1994 by founding director Professor Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin. In 1994 the Academy began by offering Master level programmes, but has grown into a vibrant centre of arts practice and academic study of music, dance and related areas. Currently the Academy offers programmes ranging from undergraduate to PhD level (Phelan, 2012).

Participant: *Student performers: Bachelor of Arts in voice and dance*

The students involved in this research are from the Bachelor of Arts in Voice and Dance (BAVAD) established in September 2008. This four-year degree programme provided students with the opportunity to specialise in either voice or dance; to study it as their primary discipline and also to develop skills to perform utilising voice and dance simultaneously. The students in this degree were from a wide variety of vocal and movement backgrounds. During their degree students engaged with genres including but not limited to: world music and dance, popular music and dance,

contemporary dance, early music and chant, Irish traditional song and dance. A primary aim of the degree is for students to explore the connection between song and dance through body-based techniques (*Irish World Academy BA Voice and Dance*, 2014). Since 2017 the BAVAD degree programme has been phased out in favor of the new Bachelor of Arts in Performance where students choose to specialise in one of the five areas: world music, Irish music, Irish dance, contemporary dance or voice.

Participant: *Teacher/performer: Voice in the research process*

I (the researcher and author) am a classically trained saxophonist from New York, who trained in music education at Ithaca College. After completing my studies in Ithaca, I moved to the University of Limerick in Ireland to study Ethnomusicology, where I began working with local brass and reed bands. I have now lived in Limerick for over ten years, where I have started a local music centre, worked with local and national music education providers, performed in various ensembles, taught children and adults at all levels of their musical journey and completed a PhD at the University of Limerick. Conducting this research through arts practice methods has made me aware of how all of these various elements have impacted the development and scope of this research. Arts practice research and methods provide the researcher with their own voice during the investigation process. Because of this, my lived experiences as a teacher, researcher and performer influence the way the research has been conducted, articulated and documented.

Performing teaching, teaching through performance

The performance discussed in this article aims to explore how students utilise their own practice in order to reflect their understanding and application of music theory concepts through the performance of compositions, arrangements and choreography. Additionally, it was important for this performance to also reflect the performative music theory approach process as it was presented in the classroom. Musical examples performed in class used to teach theory concepts included in this performance to highlight the performative theory approach used throughout the teaching and learning process. It is an aim of this performance to explore how other performance skills (of both teacher and students and outside the norm of piano) are translated into teaching and learning of music theory. For this performance students were asked to prepare a short piece of composed, choreographed or arranged material that reflected their understanding and application of music theory concepts covered throughout the classes. Figure 1 below is the handout given to students regarding the performance-based assessment. One of the main challenges in preparing for this performance was addressing the ethical issues of working with the final year BAVAD students that I am responsible for grading at the end of each term. Ethical clearance was granted, with provisions put in place that removed me from the position of examining the students on all assignments and materials that related to this performance. Each student involved signed an ethical clearance form, prior to the beginning of all elements of this performance. This particular cohort of final year BAVAD students includes 15 students, 5 dancers and 10 singers all of whom are

female. As described previously, as part of this degree students with have engaged with different methods of embodying practice throughout their studies. As indicated in the handout, each student had a choice of how they wanted to demonstrate their understanding through their own specific performance practice. This performance-based assessment was designed to be transferable to any class regardless of the gender balance or differences between the student backgrounds. The next section will explore the narrative of the performance told through ethnographic writing, photos and journal entries by both the students and I as we engaged in this performance. One of the pillars of arts practice research is to provide a lived experience of the research process. The reflective journal entries by the students and I provide insight into the transitional process of uncertainty, clarifying, engaging, embodying and lastly the reflexive thought process involved in the performative music theory approach.

Dear 4th year in B.A. in Voice and Dance students,

As part of an assignment for your assessment at the end of this term you are being asked to demonstrate your understanding of music theory concepts through performing pieces studied in class as well as your own student composition/arrangement/choreography.

The pieces that are presented in class will form one part of the assessment and the student compositions the other.

Students will be asked to select concepts from music theory that will be highlighted in their performance this may include the following: Key/tonality changes, modulation, particular harmonies, rhythm, time signatures, form, style/genre.

Students will be asked to provide a short description of their piece to be put in a programme for the examiners. This includes listing any of the concepts presented in music theory classes that inform the composition/arrangement/choreography.

Students who are doing compositions/arrangements will be asked to provide a working manuscript of their composition before the assessment. Students who are doing a dance performance will be asked to provide a maximum 1-page description of their choreographic process.

After the performance students are asked to write a (1 page-double spaced) paper detailing their process of the experience of writing their piece as well as the performance of their piece.

There will be a selection of 2-3 pieces to be performed from the class materials.

Student grade scheme:

Exam 1: 25% Written

Exam 2: 25% Written

Continuous Assessment: 50%

- Class Assignments: 20%
- Performance of class pieces (group assessment): 10%
- Performance of student composition/performance/arrangements: 10%
- Performance written material: 10%

The performance of the class pieces will be assessed as a group.

This performance will also act as the first part of the first PhD performance for Shannon Burns. She will not be assessing the final performance but will be present for it. Examiners for this performance will be discussed at a later time.

Figure 1. Handout presented to students for the performance based assessment

The assignment was given to the students over a month prior to the performance. Nevertheless, as much as I had prepared the students for this performance assignment, many seemed confused regarding the assignment. My own feelings of uncertainty is described below,

I gave out the handouts for the performance assignment today. I thought I had been as clear as possible in the assignment sheet. But apparently I wasn't clear enough as many of the students were confused and seemed distressed by this assignment. I thought it would be a new and exciting way for them to engage with music theory through their own practice in a way that they have never done before. I wonder if it is more my teaching that is confusing them or the material. By the end of the class they had a better understanding of what I was asking them to do, but were more afraid of being given limited directions! They were afraid of trying to be more creative with this project than anything! (Journal, Teacher, April 2014)

This feeling of uncertainty around this performance assignment was also expressed by at least one student reflected in a journal entry below,

I felt very confused today and didn't know how to react when Shannon asked us to create something based on what we had learnt in music theory class. I just kept thinking 'how the hell can I apply this to dance?' I wrote out the different musical forms and tried to figure out how I could do it with just dance. I started messing around with music but just did not think that my choreography was portraying anything. (Journal, Student, 9 May 2014)

However, leading up to the performance, the students developed a clearer understanding of purpose of the assignment. They began to experiment with different ideas and ways of creating that embodied connection between music theory and their own individual performance practice. Below, are two excerpts of journals from dance students beginning to engage with the task,

It's gotten me thinking about what other theories I can use in my practice and how I can link the two together. So now that I've played with form and found that it was a beneficial and useful way to create a dance piece, what else can I draw on to use in my practice. Even within one theory [class] there is so much to play with-like triads. I could pick three body parts to combine to form my triad and adjust those to indicate minor, diminished, augmented and so on. (Journal, Student 2 May 2014)

I choreographed about 50 seconds of movement today. I had no interest in it, it bored me and I was just doing it for the sake of it. I decided to choreograph from a piece of music using the elements of narrative, dynamics, beats and rhythms. From this piece of music and using the tools, I intend to make an A, B and C section. (Journal, Student 11 May 2014)

A primary purpose of this assignment was to change and challenge the way in which each student thought and engaged with the concepts of music theory through an embodied approach. With the performance swiftly approaching students began to get excited and nervous. The space used for this performance was a small open theatre space indicated in Image 1.



Image 1. Performance Space-Tower Theatre, Irish World Academy, University of Limerick

The morning of the performance, I arrived early to set up all the materials, including programmes for the examiners, grading sheets, student descriptions of their performance and, lastly, to rearrange the space. There was a chill to the theatre that morning, but I was able to make sure that there was a bit more heat in the room so that the students and examiners would be a bit more comfortable. It was a very busy morning, as described in my journal entry below:

I'm running around like a lunatic trying to do everything from photocopying to making sure the cameras are all set up properly! There are always more elements to a performance to consider than you think of! I almost forgot about having someone else working the cameras for me! Thankfully a friend Hannah was able to help out this morning. It thought it was important that I wasn't showing my own nerves to the students because it was clear they were nervous enough. I tried my best to make them feel as comfortable and relaxed as possible trying to downplay the importance of this performance for them (and me!). They are prepared, I know that. But there is still the part of me that has such difficulty in relinquishing control of something this important to others. Part of my PhD success or failure is dependent upon others rather than me. That is incredibly terrifying. I know that the students will do well and I will get over this fear when we are in the middle of the performance, but until then I will be

running around putting up the façade that I'm not nervous and that I'm in control of everything. (Journal, Teacher, May 2014)

We started with the group piece, *Geographical Fugue* (Toch, 1957) because it involved everyone and a bit of choreography that was developed during class. While in class we used this piece to perform, discuss and analysed the concepts involved in the fugue composition. Students learned about the subject, counter-subject and motivic development in fugues through not only reading the music, but by actively performing it. By teaching music theory through performance, “the development of musicianship happens in action, through action and within action”, by enhancing the understanding and application of concepts within the body of each student (Westerlund & Juntunen, 2005, p.112). This is one of the primary applications explored using performance to situate theoretical learning through an embodied experience.

We began to perform *Geographical Fugue* with the choreography developed in class, each group moving to represent the four different entries from different positions around the room. One concern that arose during this piece was the ability of the students to maintain a steady pulse as a group. Collectively we decided to negotiate this issue was by adding me into their performance of this piece. My role was to help the students maintain this steady pulse by either clapping or stomping in the middle of the room. Image 2 below depicts the start of the piece, with all of us in our respective positions.



Image 2. Prior to beginning the performance of Toch (1957)- *Geographical Fugue*

As the piece progresses, we begin to relax and ease into the performance. Each part enters and moves towards the center, until a complete circle is formed around me. This circle allowed them to listen and fit together as the different subjects and counter-subjects of the fugue. This gradual movement towards the complete circle is shown in image 3 below.



Image 3. Performance of the Geographical Fugue with choreography

From the middle of the circle, I was able to keep eye contact with all the different students and smile. In this moment, I wasn't their teacher, teaching them, but rather part of *our* performance. We were demonstrating *our* embodied learning as a collective, through a joint partnership between teacher and students. After the fugue, the performance moves quickly into each student's individual composition, arrangement or choreography. Each student prepared a short programme note for the examiners to explain their work. The dancer pictured in image 4 below wrote this about her performance.



Image 4. Dancer performing her original choreography

For my piece, I chose to do a dance in 'ternary form'. This consisted of an A section, a B section, and back to the original A section. I was originally planning on doing 'rondo form' but because my movement and choreography can be quite detailed and dynamic I didn't want the piece to be too 'busy'.... I used specific beats and rhythms from this piece to create the dance I performed on Wednesday. The A section I concentrated on leg and floor work,

I wanted to portray the movement of the music and the rhythms of the music through my body. For the B section I mainly concentrated on detailed and very specific hand movements and gestures, here I was portraying the quick and sharp beats of the music. I also used the narrative of the song to structure my choreography; this added an extra element to the piece...I decided to perform this piece in silence with no music; the reason for this is because I didn't want the music to take over the piece. I wanted the audience to see and experience the detail and the different rhythms and beats in my movement. I also wanted to see if the audience could pin point particular rhythms, narratives and dynamics I specifically chose while choreographing. (Student Assignment, May 2014)

As the performance progressed, it became evident that each student took a unique approach the assignment. It was quite informative to see students creatively engaging with music theory through their performance. Many of the students took the assignment very seriously, putting a great deal of work and thought into their finished performance. For example, one student performed and notated her composition wrote this about her piece:

Ok so I wrote the lyrics last semester. I suppose they were influenced by all the driving. I was just feeling so weary and tired and began singing whatever came to mind. I recorded what I did in the car and this is the result. Again the minor key reflected my feelings at the time and when I fleshed it out at home I found I really liked the minor sound and thought it fitted the words. The piece begins with a 16 bar verse, this would be labeled A. The chorus is a further 9 bars, labeled B. The second verse I would label A1 as it is only 8 bars and the last bar slightly different to the last bar of the 1st verse. The second chorus I would call B1 as the melody rises in bar 5 of that chorus. I have applied my knowledge of music theory through transcribing the music. I found this difficult as it is not something I am familiar with. I was unsure of time signature and key until I attempted transcription. I have used my knowledge of rhythm, minor keys, both bass and treble clef, chords, cadences and inversions. I have transcribed for voice in the treble and piano in the bass clef. I also wrote in chords for guitar, which I will play while singing. Susan will accompany me on piano improvising around the chords. (Student Assignment, May 2014)

This particular student was clear to identify her difficulties around the project, but also her willingness to engage her performance skills in several different ways including the collaboration with another student. Next in the performance was the second group piece, a female a cappella arrangement of “Here Comes the Sun” (Harrison, 1969) was performed and analysed in class to engage with the music theoretic concepts of form, phrase structure, harmony, cadence and metric changes. The group performance pieces were included to reflect the classroom experience teaching, learning and application of music theory concepts through the performative music theory approach. The performance of this particular piece again emphasised the importance of the education process, over the product of an exam quality performance. This shift in the embodied understanding and application of music theory in the room is reflected in my journal entry below.

As the performance progressed from student to student through the group performances, I finally began to relax a bit. As to be expected, some students took great pride in their work and really did me proud. They really got what I was asking them to do! Maybe, there is something more to this way of teaching if they are performing their knowledge as well as they are... (Journal, Teacher May 2014)

In just over an hour we came to the final piece, an arrangement by one of the students of “Happy” by Pharrell Williams. This particular piece was very special to this group of students who had formed their own student run vocal ensemble this year. I was unaware but it was one of the few times they had been put in a position to perform in front of each other. Many thanked me afterwards for the experience but also for the way it prepared them for their final performances coming up in a few weeks’ time.

Findings from an embodied, performative approach

Throughout this investigation one goal was to reflect the embodied experience of teaching and learning as a lived, researchable experience. The engagement with the material collected around the performance utilised an ethnographic, thematic approach to interpret the data. From this work a number of key findings emerged around the performative music theory approach. Student reflections on the process indicated an enhanced understanding and appreciation of the potential for somatic engagement by both music and dance students in the acquisition of music theory learning. Many of the students regarded this performance as a very positive learning experience that brought together their understanding and application of music theory concepts through this performative music theory approach. One of the singers had this to say about her performance:

My reflection of the whole process is that using theory in this way helped me to understand music theory to a fuller extent that just looking at it on paper. I especially took the time to start understanding form and structure better... I was nervous to perform a song that I had composed but, by undergoing the process, I felt that analysing music is now not as difficult as previously thought. I also felt that composing music is not as much of a daunting task as previously thought. I feel now that by using the techniques we have gained through doing music theory and by applying them to our own creative skills, a great piece can be created. Four-part harmony is a key part of this creation part for my piece. I thought about the aspects that we learned in class to try to create the harmony in the piece. (Student Assignment, May 2014)

Equally, many of the dancers in the class had similar positive reflections on the performance experience. One dancer in particular took a great deal away from this performance and the application of music theory within her practice:

This semester we have been focusing a lot on form, so when we were told about this part of the assessment (individually applying a theory to our practice) I was interested in the theory of form being applied to dance. I realised that it was a theory that could be easily applied to and useful for choreography. Using a form to structure a piece of dance is quite an obvious aspect of choreography (to structure a dance in some way – a beginning, middle, end and so on), however applying the theory I learnt opened my eyes to the options I have when it comes to form, such as binary, ternary, fugue, sonata and rondo... Performing this I was most interested in whether the audience could pick up on what I was trying to achieve. In music the form can often be relatively clear due to the sheet music and differences in sound. I wondered if this was the same in dance as there is no sheet music to symbolically indicate movement from one phrase to another. However I then realised that to me that was not the point, the point was that regardless of how it appeared it was still an interesting and new way to allow me to choreograph. Applying a theory to my own practice has not only given me new ideas choreographically, but also highlights the benefits

of applying aspects of music theory to practices outside of the class.
(Student Assignment, May 2014)

Finally, my own perspective on this performance:

It is a relief that the performance is over. It was difficult to try to capture all the different performance elements in such a short performance, but it did provide a small glimpse into my method of teaching. I was extremely nervous before and began to relax, but then after I began to worry again, about how the whole performance was perceived by those examining, as well as the students. Did the performance make sense? Was my message or method of teaching through performance portrayed accurately? What were the important elements that came out of this performance? (Journal, Teacher May 2014)

The second finding indicates that the use of arts practice methods to document an embodied teaching and learning experience provides a useful model for exploratory, co-learning and co-teaching between students and teachers. This performance provided the space for both the students and me to investigate, document and engage in an embodied approach to teaching and learning through the performative music theory approach. Through each of our reflections, it is seen that the process allowed us to develop a deeper, more embodied approach to our teaching, learning and engagement with the concepts of Western classical music theory. The purpose of this approach to music theory pedagogy is the development of an embodied understanding and application of concepts and skills. However it is important to note that and avoid the danger of, “developing musicians who study rudiments, harmony, counterpoint, form and other sub-disciplines of music theory without previous or concurrent training in the appropriate kinds of aural skills are usually condemned to thinking about music without learning how to think in music” (Karpinski, 2000, p.4). The key to developing a student’s ability to think in music, rather than thinking about music, as Karpinski states, is in the embedding of theoretical knowledge upon previously embodied experiences of the student. As a teacher it is our ultimate goal to awaken and to develop a student’s ability to cultivate his or her own understanding in order to think and engage from *within* and *through* musical performance.

Conclusions

This research aimed to use the performative music theory approach to link the ephemeral moments between embodied cognition, embodied practice and embodied research by using arts practice methods to capture these experiences. The performative music theory approach is predicated on the development of musical experiences, in which theoretical knowledge is situated and built upon previously embodied performance knowledge. The performative music performative approach falls directly inline with embodied pedagogy. Nguyen and Larson (2015) define embodied pedagogy as,

Learning that joins body and mind in a physical and mental act of knowledge construction. This union entails thoughtful awareness of

body, space, and social context. Through our analysis we argue that by discerning fundamental elements of embodied pedagogy educators can design curricula that facilitate powerful experiences of shared knowledge construction for learners. (Nguyen & Larson, 2015, P.332)

Within the context of this research, it is clear that the educational journey is, not led by the teacher or the student, but rather that the journey is a shared, lived experience. It is within these shared spaces during the education process that this unique type of learning has the potential to happen. By engaging students in these shared embodied teaching and learning experiences we empower them to take ownership and direction within their own learning journey as echoed by Nguyen & Larson (2015) who state that,

[By] connecting academic interests and embodied learning experiences provides one venue for engagement in conversations that traditionally might not find their way into the discourse. In doing so, the empowerment of students will often reveal ways of learning and knowing seldom considered and push learners to explore beyond conventional boundaries imposed through normative academic discourses. (Nguyen & Larson, 2015, P.336)

Arts practice methods provide a clear path for embodied cognitive sciences, somatic practice and embodied pedagogy to intersect, overlap and investigate a performative approach to teaching and learning music theory within the context of the higher education classroom. Conducting research into music education using these methods opens up many avenues for exploration into teaching and learning through the practice of teaching, performance, dance or other practices. Burnard (2014) further addresses the possibilities for the use of arts practice research asserting,

Practice-led research, where methodologies feature doxas¹ of data 'creation' rather than 'collection', also places the practitioner-research at the interact of practice and research, where the discourse is about artists and their tools, as well as the techniques used in the development and making process. Practice-led research attempts to conceptualise the contribution of creative practice, making the invisible visible." (Burnard 2014, p.137)

Further investigations

This research opens the door for future investigations that combine arts practice research and methods within music education. There is a wide scope for the investigation of discipline specific adaptations of the performative music theory approaching, including, but not limited to: dance, traditional music and jazz. One topic that was not discussed in this research was the role and impact of gender in the

¹ The reference to doxa or doxas is a reference to the concept of Bourdieu earlier in the article. She asserts that doxa is 'the universe of tacit presuppositions that we accept as the normal of certain society which, he suggests, operates within disciplines, defining perceptions and opinions and challenging the traditional models of professional status' (Burnard, 2014, p.137).

performative music theory approach. In the analysis of the performances there were mixed responses and levels of engagements from the BAVAD dance students involved in this research. A future investigation into the development and understanding of a specifically dance student application of performative music theory is possible. This research also opens up further areas of exploration including, the possibilities for a performative approach towards the development of curriculum in music education and teacher education, the implications for using a performance lens in music education research, the influence on student learning in performance-based experiences and the development of teacher training programmes that reflect the creative use of performance in the classroom.

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Biography

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