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Title: Embedding digital documentation in creative and pedagogical processes

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Example citation: Preece, K. L. (2015) Embedding digital documentation in creative and pedagogical processes. Paper presented to: *Digital Echoes 2015, Institute for Creative Enterprise, Coventry University, 13 February 2015.*

Version: Presentation notes

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/7338/>



Slide 2 - Introduction to DECO

My presentation today reflects on part of a larger research project, Developing Choreographic Practice Online or DECO. DECO is a pedagogical project funded by the Institute of Learning and Teaching at the University of Northampton. The aim of the project is to develop an Open Educational Resource to support the development of choreographic practice. The creation of this resource draws on my developing choreographic practice, my choreography teaching practice and my existing practice of documenting, archiving and reflecting on my choreographic work on tumblr. The project specifically aims to investigate how 'tagging' can be used to catalogue, arrange and rearrange materials to create an interactive, non-linear OER.

Existing resources on choreography, both in print and online, focus on either the specific processes or practices of a particular artist, or generic processes and methodologies. Digital archives and resources are an increasing trend in dance, including Synchronous Objects, the Siobhan Davies Replay archive, and the on-going MotionBank project. Although useful in the teaching and study of dance and choreographic practice, they are focused on *documenting an individual's practice* rather than *developing an individual practice*. Similarly, the majority of texts on choreography teach generic processes and methodologies (such as Blom and Chaplin, 1995, Smith-Autard, 2010) or give guides to established practitioners (such as Spier, 2011 or Burrows, 2010) which tend to be idiosyncratic. As such, this presents teaching and learning challenges, as students are encouraged to regurgitate the practices of others rather than identify and understand their own practice through these learning resources. The project is addressing this by developing an OER that provides students with strategies for developing an individual practice. This will include tasks to explore choreographic practices and approaches, strategies for reflection and examples in practice, to facilitate students in understanding and developing their own practice.

The exploration of tumblr as a platform to house an OER is an extension of my existing pedagogical research exploring social media applications as alternative educational interfaces to traditional Virtual Learning Environments. This research, briefly, questions the efficacy of in house Virtual Learning Environments in relation to educational theories of experiential learning, and the role of the learner (beginning with Kolb, 1984.) Tumblr is an appropriate platform for an OER on choreographic practice because of the facility to include multimedia resources, and also because of how tagging can enable non-linear navigation, as creative processes are in and of themselves non-linear. (Tharp, 2006) 'Tagging' content (for instance as studio tasks or reflection strategies) will allow the user to arrange and re-arrange the OER materials according to their immediate learning goals.

Slide 3 – Context

Development of the OER will, in part, draw on my own developing choreographic practice. As a Lecturer in Dance at the University of Northampton, I regularly make work on students as part of taught curriculum and extra-curricular activities. We recently revised the Choreography strand of our degree to give further emphasis to students learning about choreography 'from the inside' - being involved in tutor-led choreographic processes. The first term of our first and second year choreography modules involve staff making a 15-20 minute original work on/with the students. This approach allows students to learn about choreography from within, critically engaging with and reflecting on the different tasks and decision-making processes of a choreographer.

Although I make regularly, with various pedagogical and time pressures I have very little time to reflect formally and engage with my processes of making on a deeper level: both of which I consider to be vital in developing and honing my craft. As part of the DECO project, I am approaching my making as action research, reflecting on and engaging with my own choreographic practice as a basis from which to develop materials for the OER. From September-December 2014, the DECO project gave me time and space to document and reflect on the making of the work *Fall and Swell* on first year students at the University of Northampton as part of the module *Foundations in Choreography*. Alongside our taught sessions in the studio making the work, I kept a blog on tumblr to document the process of making, and reflect on my practice. The tumblr blog therefore acts as a vehicle for documentation and reflection on my own practice, but also as a blended learning resource for students.

This presentation will give a rationale for and report on my use of tumblr to document and reflect on my work in this stage of the project, and will conclude by providing some interim thoughts about the DECO project moving forward.

Slide 4: Rationale Reflective Practice

Keeping a reflective blog sits within two traditions: reflective practice, and the emerging field of 'digital reflection'.

According to Kinsella, and I quote 'Reflective practitioners think about their experiences in practice and view them as opportunities to learn. They examine their definitions of knowledge, seek to develop broad and multifaceted types of knowledge, and recognise that their knowledge is never complete. Reflective practitioners are concerned about the contexts of their practices and the implications of action. They reflect on themselves, including their assumptions and their theories of action of practice, and take action grounded in self-awareness. Finally, reflective practitioners recognise and seek to act from a place of praxis, a balanced coming together of action and reflection.' End quote. (Kinsella, 2001: 197)

The blog was a form of what Schon (1983, 1987) termed 'reflection-on-action', which, and I quote 'takes place when the practitioner has left the arena of venture and mentally reconstructs that arena to analyze actions and events.' (Tembroti and Tsangaridou, 2013: 3) After each studio session I wrote a reflection on our work, which engaged with a range of the operations of the reflective practitioner outlined by Kinsella. In critically questioning my approaches to devising tasks and decision-making in the studio, for example, I was thinking about my experiences and viewing them as opportunities to learn about and make improvements to my practice and ways of working. Although my blog posts often provided description of what we did in the studio and why, discussions often returned to the contexts of the work and implications - in this case reflection and questioning of the work as a whole, and my practice generally.

Slide 5: Rationale Digital Reflection

The use of blogging is drawn from the *Digitalis* project, 'Using Digital Technologies to Enhance and Embed Creative Reflection' at the University of Leeds. (Digitalis, 2014) The project produced a model of digital reflection in relation to arts pedagogy that traverses through using digital devices to capture creative practice (i.e. video), archive and document creative practice (i.e. uploading to a host such as YouTube or a blog), and finally to digital technologies that allow you to frame or re-frame creative practice in some way (i.e. through discussion, blogging or digital storytelling). (Kirk and Pitches, 2013: 226) In their article on the project, Kirk and Pitches outline how traversing through the model involves increasing levels of reflection with mechanisms such as blogging about creative practice at the far end prompting 'the process of making sense' of practice. (Kirk and Pitches, 2013: 227) Although they propose blogging as limited due to its linearity (ibid.), I would argue this criticism is mediated through the use of tumblr where as with more creative expressive digital mechanisms, material can be framed and re-framed through the use of tagging (as discussed by Kirk and Pitches (2013).

Slide 6: Blogging and Tagging

I consider the process of reflective blogging to be a process of documenting the work. Rather than focusing of external documentation – defined by Angela Piccini as that which is, and I quote ‘produced around and – in its final form – after creative practice’ end quote, the reflective blog sits as a form of integral documentation – trace materials from the process, that have to quote ‘a roughness hewn from the real work of the studio’ end quote. (Piccini cited in Ledger et al., 2011: 166) Although not the ‘final product’ I would argue the latter are more conducive to an engagement with choreographic process, particular reflections on and documentation of studio practice. If the purpose of documentation is, to quote Reason, ‘...preserving and making present to see and know something that without being recorded would be inaccessible and unavailable.’ End quote (Reason, 2006: 80), I would argue the ‘product’ is less intangible than the ‘process’, and has more educational value for artists and for dance students.

Although written reflections on studio sessions were an important part of the blogging and reflective process for *Fall and Swell*, these are not the only forms of documentation that exist on the blog. These include, but are not limited to:

- Ideas, stimuli and research for the work
- Videos of raw material
- Reflections on devising sessions
- Rehearsal notes for the dancers
- Performance notes and tasks for the dancers
- Research materials and presentations on choreography

The process of documentation, of *what* to document was guided by my own reflective aims (documenting and reflecting on studio work through writing) and the intention to give pedagogical insight (particularly in to choreographic decisions making and stimuli and research). Although not formally ‘planned’, the process drew on my experience documenting my pedagogical research on tumblr, and documenting other choreographic works. Previous examples of the latter lack the extensiveness of materials and reflective element of the blog for *Fall and Swell*.

As I posted on the blog, I ‘tagged’ each post using tumblr’s hashtagging function. This started rather haphazardly (and resulted in my ‘cleaning’ of tags once the blog was complete), but as the work and blogging progressed I began to develop an index of tags to organise materials. These included names of sections of the work, functions/stages of the process (devising, ideas, refinements, structuring) and type/content of posts (rehearsal notes, raw material). Each post has multiple tags.

DEMONSTRATION

As part of the DECO research project, I am exploring the use of tagging as a navigation tool for the OER. It’s use here highlights the potential for framing and re-framing of materials – as I move forward with the next stage(s) of the project, I am able to look at this

example of my process from multiple angles. I can see the development of an entire section, using the hashtag of its title, or all of the devising tasks used in the process. This enables me to focus and reflect on specific aspects of my work and practice, and to navigate what has become a dense and rich archive with ease and clarity. I would also argue that the inherent organization of materials and reorganization via the hashtags enables the blog as a documentation of process to become an archive of organised materials, rather than a collection of disparate documentation. Without the hashtags, I am certain the blog would be unfathomable to an outsider, and also to myself – more on this shortly.

Slide 7: Blended Learning Tool

Although the function of the blog as a blended learning tool was, in some ways, secondary, I was interested in reviewing its efficacy for the students, and to provide potential insight for the OER. As such, I conducted written questionnaires asking the students to reflect on the project as a whole, their learning, and the role the tumblr blog played in this learning.

Questions included those intended to generate statistics about access (how often did you access the tumblr blog? and when did you access it?) alongside more open questions, including:

- What did you use the blog for?
- If you were looking for something specific, how did you find what you were looking for?
- Did the blog provide you with any additional insights in to the choreographic process? If so, what specifically?
- In what ways has the blog contributed to your learning on the module?

These questionnaires revealed, unsurprisingly, a student focus on using the blog primarily as part of their preparation for a written assessment on our work. However, there were other points of learning that I found interesting and would like to address here in terms of pedagogy and blended learning, and with view to the OER.

It was clear students navigated the blog in a variety of ways, depending on their intention. Some students commented that they used the 'hashtags to be able to browse through' materials, and that 'hashtags helped me to quickly see what the post was about' to see if they wanted to engage with a specific posts content.

In my previous research in to social media platforms as blended learning tools, I have argued how indications of content facilitate the tendency of Digital Natives (a term I recognise as problematic but I use for ease of reference, and which cannot be debated here) to, in the words of Jones et.al, seek 'rapid access and quick rewards.' (2010: 722) Although we might take issue in relation to deep approaches to learning, it seems futile to deny the engagement tendencies of young people who have grown up in a digital age. I would also argue that using the hastags as snpashots of content gives students a sense of agency and autonomy – enabling them to use hashtags as a tool to negotiate which posts they want to engage with, both in terms of their individual interests and their learning goals. Throughout the questionnaires, students articulated which posts they found most interesting – most often reflections on studio work and videos, which provide the most insight and are the most digestible respectively. This is also one of my aims for the OER – to facilitate non-linear navigation where the student can access content through tags according to their immediate learning needs. This is a potential benefit of hashtagging that I had not considered, that is less about navigation and more about indications of content, and is useful moving forward with the project.

In reference to the regular updating of the blog, some students commented they felt there were too many materials to engage with, which echoes my previous comment about the blog's density. Even with the hashtags, students commented that they had trouble 'sifting through material to find what I needed'. I wonder if this was due to the 'text heavy' nature of the blog, as I tended to work through my ideas and reflection through writing. In terms of my own documentation, I perhaps need a more formal structure for what is documented to make the blog materials clearer and more manageable - both in terms of the dancers' engagement, and my own time keeping up with posts. I also need to consider how I document to include a wider range of (non-text based) media such as vlogging.

In the questionnaires students recognised that the blog gave insight into a process from start to finish. This was the pedagogical intention for the studio work (and the module curricula), but of course there is thinking and researching that happens outside of the studio or before the dancers convene. The blog provides this fullness of process, which is important for student learning. Several students commented on how my blogging about ideas, starting points and studio explorations before the module began gave them insight into the depth of research, thinking and engagement needed to make work.

Several students identified using the blog to support learning on other modules. This included comments about developing and broadening their written skills more generally how to write about choreographic processes and also in reference to the module Foundations in Screen Dance, where one of their assessment items is a portfolio in the form of a tumblr blog. Specifically, students mentioned using the blog to help with 'writing screen dance posts' - they post a minimum 100 word critical reflection every week of the module - and 'how to structure' and present it.

Some students focused on how the blog might facilitate their performance of the movement material - asking for videos of phrases as they were made as a reference point for rehearsal and stating that they used the blog to find rehearsal and performance notes. Although I admire the intent, this is not something I would engage with. I included videos of raw material on the blog at the end of the process, as I did not want the students to rely on the videos for remembering material but rather know the work on a physical and embodied level. In this instance, the blog stops being a process of reflection and documentation and becomes a rehearsal tool.

Slide 8: Where do we go from here?

My reflections or interim conclusions on this stage of the project fall in to two categories – those relating to documenting my practice, and those relating to the development of content and tags for the OER.

In terms of documenting my practice, I need a clearer and more manageable structure for what to document to give the process efficacy for me, and to make the resulting reflective archive less dense. This includes some shifts in strategy - using vlogs rather than written reflections, to make the blog less text heavy - and not documenting more functional aspects of the process such as rehearsal notes. Some of this has already been implemented in a blog I kept as part of a choreographic laboratory I ran at the end of January, which functioned as R&D for my next work. I also need to consider the purpose – I have been trying to kill multiple I'm making. This is (near) impossible to do myself time wise, confuses the purpose – both artistically and pedagogically, and makes it difficult to navigate and engage with. I find the process of blogging most useful for working through ideas – in terms of the research phase of a new work, it functions as a place to collect and consider stimuli and ideas, and allows me to see multiple iterations of my thinking. This is particularly evident in the early stages of the blog of Fall and Swell, and for me functions in the same tradition as Twyla Tharp's 'box' - as a collection of inspirations, ideas, books, theories, notes, videos and images that resonates with the central idea I want to explore. Therefore, I propose using the blogging process primarily to:

- Document and work through ideas/research/starting points
- Reflect on studio work and the process of making

In terms of the OER, I am beginning to form ideas for content and sections or tags in relation to the above. This includes tags designating stages of making – devising material, coaching performance – as well as types of content – tasks, advice, strategies for reflection and so on. Overall, the content of the OER needs to facilitate and present options and ways of working for students rather than 'ways of doing'. For instance in terms of critical reflection, the OER might offer information on multiple strategies such as:

- Blogging
- Vlogging
- Digital Storytelling
- Critical Response Process
- Dancers Talking Dance

Rather than describing each process as a singular way of doing, the aim is to offer potential options and frameworks for students to try and to consider what is most useful to them, their way of working, their learning style and their practice.