



Thomas Velissaris

## **Developing a Movement Training Course for Actors and Pedagogues**

A Diary - Based Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

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This diary-based Thesis describes pedagogical approaches to movement training addressed to actors and Performing Arts Pedagogues. The research was conducted with students following the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program at NOVA University of Applied Sciences. Since, the students are prepared to follow careers as performers, actors, as well as pedagogues, the author of this Thesis was challenged to plan, address, and assess a movement training course saturated by pedagogical concepts. Based on the author's background as student and teacher the main point of reference regarding pedagogical approaches is Critical Pedagogy, developed into concepts of a Critical Acting Pedagogy. By creating an in-class atmosphere aiming at flattening the power structures that shape the relationships between teacher and student, the study proposes a Critical Self Reflection process empowering students' autodidactic learning journey.

For the students to feel supported and safe in the pedagogical environment alongside the Critical Self Reflection approach, the study proposes a learning environment saturated by the Ethics of Affirmation and Joy, as a feminist intervention in the movement training classroom. Together with the above concept the research integrates Engaged Pedagogy and Via Positiva as educational approaches enhancing the learning environment driven by the Ethics of Affirmation.

Data was collected by the author's working diary, the students' reflection journals, and an interview the author had with the current leader of this program.

The study shows that this approach to movement training enhanced students' critical thinking and self-awareness, offering them pedagogical approaches useful in both their future professional endeavors as actors and pedagogues. It shows that especially students lacking traditional movement skills were emancipated by notions such as "good" or "bad" "wrong" and "right" enabling them to structure their individual approaches regarding movement technique and physical expression.

The study also proposes future steps in movement training and acting pedagogy saturated by concepts such as Educational Relationality that could foster this pedagogical approach to movement training and acting pedagogy.

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Keywords: movement training, critical pedagogy, engaged pedagogy, critical self reflection, ethics of affirmation

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The first starting point of this research's background is the experience of the author as a student in the Drama School of the National Theatre of Northern Greece, in 1995. Students were expected to "kill" their egos before entering the School in order to achieve perfection as future actors in the industry. The industry was, and still is, in need of obedient subjects as objects always ready to do whatever they are asked without questioning the Authority of the teacher or the director. Having a formed personality was considered a disadvantage for pursuing a successful career. Especially thinking was always considered a flaw for the efficient students and future actors, with teachers always pointing out that the students "should get out of their heads" or that they "think too much". (Steiger, 2006; Seton, 2010; Peck, 2021.)

In the Drama School in 1995, several "exercises" inspired by militaristic ideals as well as practices were initiated by the male Director of the School, for students' egos to be submerged. We were not allowed to enter the School from the main entrance of the building for example, or our acting courses always began with one hour running in a circle, with the Director of the School yelling: "Change! Arms up! Arms down!" and this was supposed to be a method for our egos to vanish before the actual class. In retrospect, and after years of teaching, I am astonished by the lack of pedagogical aspects in these "approaches" and "methods". Acting Pedagogy was not even a term in Drama Schools in Greece of the mid 1990's; the actual word was training. Even today this is the view on acting pedagogy.

The second point where this research's background lies is the experience of the author as a teacher in acting, movement technique, and voice training. Although with regard to acting training, I began using pedagogical references in my teaching, such as Socratic Circles (Copeland, 2005), I was never challenged to develop a pedagogy regarding movement training. The way of transferring embodied knowledge, was modelling a technique. As a student I was expected to mime the body postures and training practices of my movement training teachers. As a teacher I was modelling body postures and movement training techniques, and I was expecting students to mime these physical representations. Developing a pedagogy for movement training, alongside the actual physical training, has never been a challenge.

The third and final point, emerged when the author began practicing research as a Master's student in the Education Entrepreneurship Degree Program (OAMK) working at the same time as a guest teacher at NOVA University of Applied Sciences. The author was invited to teach movement training to the students of the Performing Arts Pedagogue (Scenkonstpedagog) Degree Program. Graduates of this program are prepared to work as performers, theatre pedagogues, or both. This year the author was challenged to research for ways where the notions of Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1968), Critical Acting Pedagogy (Peck, 2021), and Bodystories (Olsen, 1999) could be integrated into movement training. Since the students I was working with, are educated to be professional actors as well as performing arts pedagogues, I wanted to plan, teach, and test a pedagogical approach to movement training; an approach beneficial for students' both future professional endeavours. Based on my past experiences as a student and as a teacher, Critical Pedagogy resonated with my concerns regarding a performing arts pedagogy liberated from patriarchal figures which mainly propose "no pain no gain" approaches to actors' training (Peck, 2021).

Research in NOVA University of Applied Sciences, with 8 second year students, was conducted in two phases. First, from September until December 2022 (eight classes: 32 hours) and second, from February until April 2023 (eight classes: 32 hours).

During the first phase, the psychophysical (Zarrilli, 2009) regeneration and expression of Basic Human Emotions (Ekman, 2003) were explored, in combination with students' individual assignments where these emotions (curiosity/surprise, anger, fear, joy, disgust, sadness) were represented in a movement-based performance context.

During the second phase, students were asked to create original solo movement-based performances representing memories, emotions and desires combined in the following given themes: my happiest childhood memory, my saddest childhood memory, my first love, my biggest desire, and my biggest fear. Through these solo-performances the students had the opportunity to explore the intra-connections among memory, imagination, emotion, and embodiment as a method for restructuring a personal movement training technique.

The basic pointer for planning, testing, and developing a movement training pedagogy, was the quote one can find in the first page of the online presentation of this program:

“Make the world a little better with the tools of theatre!”

In general, and challenged by the above quote, the main goal of the author was to create an educational context driven by the Ethics of Affirmation and Joy (Deleuze, 1989; Braidotti, 2018); as well as a pedagogy based on the *Via Positiva* as Feminist Intervention (Peck, 2021) in the pedagogical approach of movement training. I was challenged to create an educational context where notions such as “right” and “wrong” “good” and “bad” would gradually been used less so as the students would begin replacing this vocabulary of dualism and binary oppositions; replacing it with a vocabulary based on interest and empathy as symbiotic preconditions for “[e]ver new possibilities of living justly” (Barad, 2007); as ways towards “making the world a little better”.

This diary based report, describes in-class practices during this course, the theoretical background of each practice, the students’ reflections on these methods, and the current leader’s of the Performing Arts Pedagogue program, feedback. However, in this Thesis, actual movement training practices are not described since, the goal of this research project is to investigate whether there is “space” for pedagogical aspects to be integrated into actual movement training methods. Data collection was based: first on my working diary, where descriptions of practices, theoretical framework, and informal in-class interviews are presented; second, on students’ reflection journals, where their opinions on the teaching methods are presented; third, on an interview the author had with the current leader of the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program.

The research questions are based on the already mentioned professional challenges:

- How to develop a movement training course as movement training pedagogy addressed to future actors and pedagogues?
- How to integrate Critical Pedagogy and Critical Acting Pedagogy into a movement training pedagogy for the future actor and pedagogue?

The main goal of this research project is to propose a pedagogical approach to movement training. Not only addressed to future actors, or future pedagogues, but also to the future actor as pedagogue. The study also proposes future developments in this area aligned with relevant research in the field.

## 2 CONTEXT

The following section, and especially its first two paragraphs, is based mainly on information the author received by interviewing the current leader (Alisch, discussion 22.5.2023) of the Performing Arts Pedagogue (Scenkonstpedagog) Degree Program at NOVA University of Applied Sciences. The current leader of the program witnessed the whole story line and the gradual development of these studies since she have been there almost from the very beginning. Interviewing the leader of the program was the last step of this research project. Through the interview the author understood more clearly the whole historical and social context in which the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program developed according to the needs of the surrounding communities mainly in Ostrobothnia, Finland. As the local social impact of the program increased, from being an education addressed mainly to the surrounding Swedish speaking communities, it gradually developed to being an education of National and even International interest.

### 2.1 Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program and its history

In Finland and especially in the wider Ostrobothnia area, there is a strong tradition of (summer) amateur theatre. Several amateur theatre groups are actively staging plays in outdoors theatre venues every summer. According to the Amateur Theatre Association of Finland (ATAF) there are about 500 amateur theatre groups in Finland. It is interesting that the ATAF was established in 1948 and since then it actively supports and coordinates several organisations and independent artistic groups related to amateur theatre (<https://shti.fi/>). The Amateur Theatre Association of Finland (Suomen Harrastajateatteriliitto) in its website is referring to the Annual Amateur Theatre Summer Festival as its “flag ship” supporting the significance of these groups’ summer activities.

Until 1997 the leaders, directors and/or instructors of these amateur theatre groups were mainly themselves amateurs and although they were committed to their tasks with enthusiasm, they lacked knowledge in the field; knowledge that would be helpful for the members of these groups to develop their expressive skills and address a higher level of performances to their (summer) audiences.



According to the leader of the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program, in 1997 the Folk High School (Folkhögskolan) in Vaasa, initiated a three year Degree Program to meet the needs of the ongoing development of amateur theatre especially in Swedish speaking communities. This program's scope was to educate future instructors and leaders of amateur theatre groups in order to heighten the level of these groups' work regarding their rehearsals and performances. The name of the program was Amateur Theatre Leader (Amatörteaterledare) and although a Folk High School usually offers one year study programs, attended by young people who are not ready yet to choose their educational and vocational path, this particular program interestingly began as a three year vocational studies degree.

Already in 1998, this program was integrated in the studies offered by the Swedish Higher Vocational School in Vaasa (Svenska Yrkeshögskolan) and changed its name to Drama Instructor (Dramainstruktör) becoming a four year vocational studies degree program. In 2000, the current leader was invited to the Drama Instructor Program as full-time teacher in acting. By the year 2002, four full-time teachers were employed as lecturers in the degree program dividing the educational activities into two study lines: a physical theatre line that mainly prepared professional actors and a drama and theatre line that mainly prepared future instructors, leaders, and directors for (amateur) theatre groups. The current leader became, in 2006, the leader of the drama and theatre line and by the year 2008 she became leader of the whole program, including the physical theatre line. It was also a time of general changes in Higher Education, when the Swedish Higher Vocational School and the Sydväst (Southwest) Polytechnic merged to form the current NOVA University of Applied Sciences. Then, the name of the program changed from Drama Instructor to Performing Arts Pedagogue (Scenkonstpedagog) since, according to the current leader, the former name gave a wrong impression with regard to the level of education offered by the program. According to the current leader of the program, the upgrading of the Degree Program had an impact to the Curriculum of Studies as well; the general study plan changed and reformed to a more concrete, relevant, and competent Curriculum aligned with the needs of the market and the general changes made in the local, national, and the European Union's Higher Education.

Before 2008, the artistic courses related to acting, movement and voice training as well as general courses regarding acting technique was mainly taught by guest teachers. These teachers often tended to repeat information given to the students since they were unaware of a concrete study plan with independent as well as interconnected learning outcomes. Thus, together with the merging of the two Polytechnic and Vocational Studies Schools and the change of the name of

the program, a new Curriculum of Studies was planned in order for a more efficient and meaningful learning environment to emerge.

Alumni of the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program are currently pursuing careers in both artistic and educational disciplines. They graduate as both actors and pedagogues, with leading and directing skills as well, and they are working all over Europe, and not only in Finland. One can find alumni of this program pursuing careers in acting and theatre education in France, Germany, England, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

According to the current leader's opinion the graduates of the program who follow a career in acting have a different quality in their performance than actors trained exclusively for being on-stage artists. Their pedagogical training makes a difference in their acting skills, especially with regard to their level of communication with the audience and their colleagues. The current leader believes that their pedagogical education supports them as actors and at the same time as effective public pedagogues; it empowers them with a balance between the inherent narcissism of the actor and the humbleness of an effective pedagogue.

Currently the program offers both practice-based education in Performing Arts, as part of the NOVIA University of Applied Sciences, Art and Culture Study branch (located in Jakobstad) and education in Pedagogical Sciences offered by Åbo Akademi University (located in Vaasa). The teaching staff working in Jakobstad's Campus Allegro is coming mainly from artistic disciplines. Especially in the Performing Arts Pedagogue Program, the guest teachers are mainly active actors, performers, stage directors, dancers, acrobats, voice coaches, yoga instructors, clowns, etc. Some of the guest teachers together with their artistic competence have also been trained pedagogically and their professional careers are also related, for example, to Community and Applied Theatre, Play-Back Theatre, Drama Education, Drama therapy, amateur and student theatre leadership etc. The author was invited to teach to this program as a guest teacher in movement training.

## **2.2 Stakeholders and their interests**

The Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program has many stakeholders with a local, regional, and national background. The author will refer to these stakeholders as internal and external.

### **Internal stakeholders**

The students attending the program are considered to be the main internal stakeholders that keep this program active by supporting its ongoing development. The students interested in this education are coming from different parts of Finland. The academic year 2022-2023 the program had students from the surrounding (Swedish speaking) communities, from the wider area of Ostrobothnia region, from all around Finland, from Helsinki, and one student from Stockholm, Sweden. Although the students' mother tongue is mainly Swedish, one can also apply to the program even if they have a different mother tongue – that would be mainly Finnish – so long as they can prove knowledge in Swedish through a language test. The previous year there was also a student with almost no Swedish speaking skills, and the program offered them a Swedish course to be finalized during the first two years of their study. The students attending the program are mainly interested in having an education of a higher level regarding theatre and performing arts. According to informal in-class interviews the author understood that most of the students are mainly interested in pursuing an on-stage career as performers and actors; or at least their starting point of applying to the program is that they want to become performers. According to these needs, the program gives the opportunity to the students, through the mandatory professional internship during the third year of their study, to work also in theatres as performers and actors. According to the current leader of the program, it is in school and during the studies that most of the students become engaged to the idea of pursuing careers as pedagogues, leaders, directors, or group facilitators in (amateur) theatre groups.

Internal stakeholders of the program are also the guest teachers as well as the full-time teaching staff. As already mentioned above, the guest teachers are mainly active performers and some of them are also active performers and performing arts pedagogues. One can be interested in teaching to this program for professional development, new career opportunities or even interested in combining work with research opportunities as the author was. Guest teachers are offered mainly a 32 hours contract during which they are called to address basic principles and training regarding their artistic disciplines. The courses usually end with a demonstration of the learning

outcomes. For example, if the course is about clowning, the teacher is an active clownery performer and in the end of the offered 32 hours the students present a small-scale clown performance. The author was offered twice the 32 hour contract (64 hours in total) to address movement training courses.

A partner of the education offered by the NOVIA University of Applied Sciences, as well as an internal stakeholder should be considered to be the Åbo Akademi University which is responsible for the pedagogical training of the students. Åbo Akademi University has a strong tradition in pedagogical studies as well as teacher training, early childhood education, and educational research. Having a partner and stakeholder of this status, the education offered by the Performing Arts Pedagogue program becomes more significant and attractive for future professionals and stakeholders in the general field of performing arts and pedagogy.

### **External stakeholders**

According to the program's web page (Yrkeshögskolan Novia, search date 05.05.2023) the external stakeholders (referred as partners) come from various locations and backgrounds. These are:

- **The Vaasa Swedish speaking theatre** (Wasa Teater) where students can work during their internships as performers, as assistant pedagogues, as assistant production managers, as assistant directors or as employees with various responsibilities related to the theatre's general activities. Throughout the history of the Performing Arts Pedagogue Program, Wasa Teater developed a close connection with the program's development. Having in its dynamic also employees who graduated from this program working mainly as actors and theatre pedagogues, addressing educational projects in (Swedish speaking) schools in the Vaasa region, Wasa Teater is considered to be one of the main stakeholders of this educational program.
- **Vaasa City Theatre** (Vaasan Kaupunginteatteri) where students can work in all the above mentioned activities as well. Vaasa City Theatre is mainly interested in recruiting graduates of this program who have Finnish as their mother tongue, since it is a Finnish speaking theatre.

- **UNIARTS: University of the Arts** in Helsinki (Taideyliopisto) where many of the program's graduates are admitted to Master's Degree programs. For example, students who are interested in further developing their skills in acting follow the Master's degree in acting offered by UNIARTS, or if they are interested in further developing their skills in theatre direction they follow the equivalent Master's program. Offering a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in acting in Swedish, UNIARTS is interested in admitting students from the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program ensuring the continuity of its offered education in Swedish language.
- **Unga Scenkompaniet** (The Young Stage Company) being an artistic entrepreneurship established by two graduates from the Performing Arts Pedagogue program, is an important stakeholder. Being a really successful company in the area of theatre for children and young people - having received as well the 2022 State Award for Children's Culture - Unga Scenkompaniet functions as a paradigm of the high level of education offered by the program as well as a paradigm of entrepreneurship opportunities for future graduates.
- **Primary Schools in Central Ostrobothnia and Vaasa region**, having a strong tradition in afternoon Drama Clubs and supporting actively supplementary education based on performing arts (as) pedagogy are significant stakeholders of the Degree program in Performing Arts Pedagogy. Having worked during the academic period 2022-2023 also in kindergartens and schools as employee of the Vaasa City Culture Services (Vaasan kaupungin kulttuuripalvelut) the author noticed the strong interest of all the communities living in the wider Vaasa area for Drama and Theatre Education. Since, Finnish Schools can shape their Curriculums according to the needs of the local society, many Principals in Primary and Secondary Schools are integrating supplementary afternoon education in the arts. Additionally the principals as well as the teachers are willing to engage their classes to educational initiatives based on the arts even in their weekly schedule. This heightens the significance of the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program, since schooling and mainly primary education are the main stakeholders interested in a high level of educational projects beneficial for their pupils.
- **The Wava Institute in Jakobstad** (Wava Institutet i Jakobstad) offering mainly artistic education to children and young adults, is a significant stakeholder interested in offering

work opportunities to drama and theatre pedagogues enhancing the Institute's activities and educational services in Jakobstad.

### **2.3 Competence requirements and the author's stage of professional development**

Being a guest teacher in the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program requires a strong background in practice-based teaching experience. Depending on the course one is teaching, artistic and on-stage experience is considered to be an additional merit. Most of the guest teachers are practitioners in the performing arts and their teaching experience is mainly practice – based; they are active professionals who also transmit their artistic experience to the students as they are prepared to be future performers as well. It is rare in performing arts education to encounter teachers with pedagogical backgrounds, such as higher education in pedagogy and/or training in teaching and learning. Practice-based experience in teaching preferably in Higher Educational Institutes is the basic competence requirement in the Performing Arts Pedagogue Program for guest teachers in artistic disciplines.

In 2022, the author was invited to the program, by the current leader, to teach movement technique as a practitioner with 24 years of experience. I am an active actor and stage director since 1998 and an active teacher in Higher Schools of Dramatic Arts in Greece, since 2007. I began my educational career as a teacher of voice training and vocal orthophony at the Higher School of Dramatic Arts of the National Theatre of Northern Greece. Gradually I developed an educational approach to movement training that integrated voice training and vocal orthophony into movement training techniques. The movement training techniques I was taught and I began using as a teacher since 2010, combined with voice training, are based mainly on Martha Graham's technique (Heil, 2016); on Jacques Lecoq's movement, mask, and mime technique (Murray, 2004); and on Tai Chi as psychophysical actors' training (Zarrilli, 2009; Kapsali, 2013).

The author's contribution to these techniques regarding physical training and acting is a method based on the physical and vocal expression and regeneration of the Basic Human Emotions (Ekman, 2003). Through breathing and the moves of the thoracic diaphragm the human body generates emotional states supported by facial expressions and the spine's postures. This method is interconnected to Alba Emoting as a psychophysical approach to the expression and

regulation of human emotions (Bloch & Lemeignan, 1991) also used to support actors' training (Bloch, 1993). Developing my approach to actors' physical training, I encountered Alba Emoting in theory in 2013. The method I am still developing as a holistic acting pedagogy is called Process Mimesis.

As a student in acting training with lifelong learning aspirations, I was also introduced to a feedback method based on Socratic Circles as an approach that fosters critical and creative thinking (Copeland, 2005) enhancing actors' training. I have been using this method and pedagogical approach as a teacher especially with regard to actors' training courses in professional drama schools. It is a concept through which each student's development is basically depended on the feedback s/he would receive by the fellow students and the teacher. These Socratic Circles was the first genuine pedagogical reference of my learning and teaching experience that led me to research for pedagogical methods related to the dialogical or dialectic structure of the Socratic methodology.

In 2010, fascinated by the perspectives of Socratic Circles as pedagogy enhancing actors' training, I followed several seminars and lectures on Non – Directive Intervention (NDI) as an approach for facilitating learning communities based on dialogue, criticality, and problem posing. NDI is a group facilitation method as well as a pedagogy initiated by Michel Lobrot (1974) who had strong connections with Greek pedagogues through the work and efforts of Kostas Bakirtzis. His book "Communication and Pedagogy" (2000) arguing on the necessity of NDI as a relevant pedagogical method that should be integrated into formal Greek schooling - especially into early childhood education - became my main point of reference of what pedagogy could offer to actors' training and beyond. As a group therapy method as well as a pedagogical approach, NDI in general questions the power structures that shape the relationships between facilitators and clients or between teachers and students (Lobrot, 1974). Additionally, Lobrot (2015) proposed NDI as an approach that could be used in all our daily encounters, promoting a philosophy that flattens power structures by supporting and encouraging the acknowledgement of difference and desire. By respecting, promoting, and supporting difference and desire, Lobrot believed that the daily practice of coercion - present in his opinion in all our inter-personal, societal, national, and international relations – could be degraded.

Socratic Circles and general critical and dialectic methodologies as well as NDI which is based also on dialogical and dialectic structures of group facilitation, led me eventually in 2020 during

the pandemic crisis and the lockdown, to Critical Pedagogy. Especially the basic principles of NDI as a method aiming at flattening power structures regarding human inter-actions became a direct link to Critical Pedagogy; especially to Paulo Freire's critique on the privileged elites that shape and reshape reality through an unquestioned formal education that supports oppression and social inequality (Freire, 1968). In a way, Lobrot's and Freire's ethics resonated with the author's informal research on methodologies that could support an acting pedagogy based on criticality; through a constant questioning of commonly accepted truisms (Burbules & Berk, 1999) acting pedagogy could foster an actor's critical and creative thinking into reshaping the reality of the stage as a space of equality and emancipation. Thus, the art of acting and performing could transform the stage to a space of "[e]ver new possibilities of living justly" (Barad, 2007).

Beginning in September 2022, my courses on movement training in the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program, my starting point was based on the above mentioned concepts, methodologies, and research needs; namely: the Process Mimesis and all its movement training references, NDI, and Critical Pedagogy as theory.

## **2.4 The author's development needs**

Regarding movement training and actors' training, until September 2022, I had mainly taught future performers, actors, and stage directors. Although in actors' training I have been using Socratic Circles and feedback methodology, I was never challenged to initiate pedagogical approaches to movement or voice training. Modeling technique and waiting from students to imitate my body postures in their own physical interpretations was the only educational context for physical training I was introduced and actively followed.

In the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree program, the author was for the first time in an educational context that prepares students for pursuing careers both as actors and pedagogues. In this context, I was challenged to research, plan, develop, and document a movement training course based on pedagogical concepts; pedagogical concepts related to my past interests and my future development as a professional (movement) teacher. I was challenged to combine my pedagogical aspirations as described in the previous paragraph, with a movement training course assessing the outcomes in collaboration with the students and the current leader of the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program.



In September 2022, the author's development needs were related to the development of a movement course for future actors and pedagogues, by providing stimulations emerging by pedagogy and actors' physical/movement training. The professional challenge and development needs were based on planning and addressing an engaging course for students to find interesting aspirations for their future work either as performers or pedagogues or both.

## **2.5 Developing a movement training course based on Critical (Acting) Pedagogy**

Researching for relevant acting pedagogies that could inform my current teaching concerns and my new professional challenges - before beginning the actual in-class work - I encountered Amy Steiger's Doctoral Thesis (2006). In this work, the author proposes methodological approaches to integrate the basic concepts of Critical Pedagogy into actors' training. This work led me to re-search for theory and applied methodologies in actors' training and beyond that could be useful for my teaching and my pedagogical research concerns related to my teaching in the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program. Lisa Peck's book "Act as a Feminist, towards a Critical Acting Pedagogy" (2021) became a crucial starting point through which a whole world related to acting, movement training, pedagogy, (educational) philosophy, and sociology began to unveil. Throughout the Academic year I was reading theory, I was planning my courses, and I was researching for ways to apply theory in the movement training. The research aimed at planning, applying, and testing a movement training pedagogy beneficial for the students of the program as future performers and pedagogues.

The core pedagogical and philosophical concepts explored were mainly encountered in Lisa Peck's book, where the author argued on the necessity of a Critical Acting Pedagogy saturated by Feminist Theory and Feminist New Materialism(s). My research began by exploring concepts such as the previously mentioned related to progressive and critical pedagogies and contemporary (educational) philosophy. These concepts are: Ethics of Affirmation and Joy (Deleuze, 1989; Braidotti, 2018); Engaged Pedagogy (hooks, 2009); Critical (Self) Reflection (Fernández-Balboa, 1998); Via Positiva (Peck, 2021) and Problem Posing (Freire, 1968; 1974). Thus, several core concepts were gradually used in the development of this movement course based mainly on Critical Pedagogy and on Peck's book arguing on the need of a Critical Acting Pedagogy.

As the process of the course and my theoretical research was developing, I encountered literature related to pedagogy as mentioned above from the fields of Feminist Theory and Feminist New Materialism(s), from Quantum Physics, from Posthumanism, and Post-structuralism. I became fascinated by the works of authors such as Rosi Braidotti, bell hooks, Simon Ceder, Karen Barad, Karin Murris, Donna Haraway, to name a few. Throughout the academic year, all the discussions we had in class with the students were saturated by the theoretical background informed by the ongoing emerging literature.

### **3 PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES**

In this section the author describes the purposes of this study, the research questions, the anticipated learning objectives, and the structure of the diary. The author followed a documentation of the teaching and learning process by keeping a working diary. The students participating in the courses and the research process were keeping personal reflection journals shared with the author. Another part of the process was in-class informal interviews with the students as well as email correspondence. The students were informed that part of our classes would be a research project related to my studies at OAMK. Especially the Critical (Self) Reflection process would be documented in my working diary, and I asked them to reflect on these processes as well. Their participation in this research project was voluntary and in no way affected their studies. The interview with the current leader of the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program was the last step of this process.

#### **3.1 Research questions**

As mentioned in the previous section, before starting the actual work as a guest teacher in movement training in the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program, I had little experience regarding theory and especially educational theory. Moreover, I had no experience on how to apply theory in a movement training context. Since movement training is mainly considered to be a physical practice having nothing to do with intellectual processes, I was never challenged to develop a movement course informed by theory. Having a background in ways of applying Socratic Circles in actors' training, I began forming my research questions based on my past experiences, my current professional challenges, and my future development. These questions were shaped and reshaped throughout the whole process but the main concern was on:

- 1) How to develop a movement training course as movement training pedagogy addressed to future actors and pedagogues?

and,

- 2) How to integrate Critical Pedagogy and Critical Acting Pedagogy into a movement training pedagogy for future actors and pedagogues?

The first question is a concern on how to develop a movement training pedagogy informed by theory and relevant literature that could empower students to be effective in both their future professional careers. The second question explores whether Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1968) is a relevant way of approaching movement training as a movement training pedagogy. Both questions throughout the research were intertwined, interconnected, and intra-related following and supporting a process of intra-actions (Barad, 2007) between theory and physical practice.

As already mentioned, on the web page that presents the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program we find the following quote:

Make the world a little better with the tools of theatre!  
(Gör världen lite bättre med teaterns verktyg!)

The current leader of the program was using this quote often during our interview as well as in our informal discussions about my course and the students' general education and development. Based on this quote and the current leader's underlining of its significance, I chose to explore Critical Pedagogical perspectives in movement training within a broader context including literature that attempts also to conceptualize a Critical Acting Pedagogy (Steiger, 2006; Peck, 2021). I chose Critical Pedagogy as a more relevant educational context for the future actor and pedagogue that would enable them to conceptualize, form, and actualize their approaches to theatre pedagogy; to create their own approaches regarding their art and their teaching as open-ended methods towards a theatre Pedagogy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; a performing arts pedagogy that aims at "making the world a little better". I chose Critical Pedagogy as a more efficient educational path for future actors and pedagogues. A path resonating with an artist's and pedagogue's main concerns related to creativity and criticality. Creative and critical pedagogies having a focus on the transformation of mindsets (Jones & Pruyn, 2018) could be beneficial for the future actor and pedagogue to create new ways of intervening into given realities; innovative ways of reshaping knowledge and the world (Ceder, 2019); innovative ways to make the world a little better. Thus, Critical Pedagogy was chosen mainly for two reasons: first, it was my most recent point of reference resonating with my past experiences as student and teacher; and second because it is a relevant pedagogical approach regarding open-ended approaches to education in general. Moreover, Critical Pedagogy as an educational approach encourages students and teachers to follow a life-long learning experience through a constant questioning of reality. Thus, pedagogy, teach-

ing, and learning can become a life-long creative process and creativity is one of the main skills for theatre, performing arts, and pedagogy.

The main purpose of this research was to explore ways of accompanying the aims of a movement course, such as physical awareness, with educational theory and practice; moreover, to propose a movement training pedagogy as a relevant and an efficient way of teaching a traditionally practice-based course.

According to Lisa Peck (2021, xiv) pedagogy refers to the “[c]hanging consciousness between the person controlling the learning environment [...] and the learner [...] and the changing knowledge that they produce together”. For Peck, pedagogy integrated into actors’ training could unite research, methodology, and praxis producing new paradigms for training emerging by an active relationship between teacher and student. Moreover, Peck (2021, 57) summarising the features of Critical Pedagogy, points out that Critical Pedagogy is about “[r]ecognising that how you teach something is as important as what you teach; flattening power structures; individualising learning with a commitment to develop the individual’s political, personal and social awareness; recognising the complexities of problems as opposed to seeking conclusions; taking notions of difference and particularity as productive sites for resistance”.

Since, the students of the program were going to be both actors and pedagogues I was challenged to research on ways of approaching movement training that would be beneficial for the students in both their future professional endeavours.

The anticipated learning objectives have to do with findings that would support this process as a relevant way of approaching movement training for the actor as a movement training pedagogy for the actor and pedagogue; a movement training pedagogy for the actor as pedagogue. I consider the actor to be a public pedagogue in the way that Amy Steiger (2006; 2011) considers the actor to be an Embodied Public Intellectual. The learning outcomes could be specified and outlined as follows:

- How did the students experience this pedagogical approach to movement training?
- Using the theoretical background, in what way I understood better the needs of the students regarding their movement skills and their future development?
- In what way Critical (Acting) Pedagogy facilitated the teaching and learning experience?

- In what way this course could be beneficial for the students as future pedagogues themselves?
- In what way the students could use this course as a point of reference regarding the main quote of this program's scope on "making the world a little better"?

### **3.2 Structure of the diary and reporting plan**

The structure of the diary is topic based. A chronological description of each topic throughout the academic year is integrated as well, in the main topics. The topics of the diary are chronological, in a way that promotes a process in which each topic is intertwined and interconnected with the other. Although, the process was not linear, but mainly cyclical since every topic was "visited" in almost every class, I use chronological descriptions to present how each topic was initially encountered and developed. I tried to divide the topics based mainly on the literature which was also a pointer for the whole process and a basis for this report to be presented in a more rational and comprehensive way. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the research questions are intra-related. The diary entries are intra-related as well, since this educational process could not be documented in a merely linear chronological report. The students' learning outcomes as well as my professional development could not be exclusively documented as a linear story-line. Following Karen Barad's (2007) "entanglements of matter and meaning" our in-class activities and intra-actions didn't even have a starting point, moreover an ending one. Even though the course began in September 2022 and was finalized in April 2023, the learning outcomes, the research concerns, and our actions on and off stage, in and out of educational contexts, lie in our personal and our intra-related stories embedded in the various locations of our childhoods, of our present existence, and of our future selves (Murriss & Bozalek, 2023). This course and its reporting plan as it is presented in this diary-based Thesis, is the outcome of our various entangled intra-relations; our learning outcomes and development continues and will continue in all our possible future encounters. As Karen Barad (2007, ix) points out:

"Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra- relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra- action, thereby

making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future”

## 4 DIARY ENTRIES

The three topics covered in this diary-based report are:

- 1) Critical Pedagogy and the Ethics of Affirmation
- 2) Bodystories as embodied Critical Self-Reflection
- 3) Towards a Movement Training Pedagogy

The first topic is divided into diary entries that present chronologically in-class activities inspired by theory as well as practices that triggered theory; extracts of the author's working diary and the students' reflection journals; and an analysis of the interview I had with the current leader of the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program. The current leader reflected on my teaching methodologies – since she attended several courses – as well as the learning outcomes of the students. The second topic is structured as an entity without being divided in sub-entries. It also presents in a chronological way descriptions of practices, reflections related to the topic, comments, feedback, and conclusions of the author, the students, and the leader of the program. The third topic describes an activity we shared with the students (the current leader was there observing as well) outside of the school. I was holding a mime acting public class, and movement training as public pedagogy, in Vaasa City Library. It was an open event for children, families, and adults to attend. With the students we shared activities as movement teachers and theatre pedagogues. Conclusions drawn by this experience regarding movement training and pedagogy, and movement training as pedagogy are presented in the last topic.

### 4.1 Critical Pedagogy and the Ethics of Affirmation

Following Fernández-Balboa (1998) during our first courses I used Critical (Self) Reflection as the actual practice of Critical Pedagogy. Accordingly I tried to integrate Freire's (1968) Problem Posing approach to education into movement training. Following Lisa Peck's (2021) suggestion on a Critical Acting Pedagogy saturated by feminist interventions, I chose to follow a general in-class attitude promoting *Via Positiva* as an educational approach aiming at creating an in-class atmosphere of Joy and Affirmation.



#### **4.1.1 Critical (Self) Reflection: September 2022 - October 2022**

Critical (Self) Reflection as an approach enhancing the relationships within a group is our starting point in the learning journey. Since, it is related to my past methodologies regarding actors' training I choose to begin the movement training course by a familiar approach. It is obvious from the very beginning that this approach could help students identify their embodied experiences as starting points for their physical expression to unfold.

In our first class in September 2022, instead of beginning our movement course with actual movement training, we begin by sitting in a circle. The first lesson we have begins with small in-class interviews. Our names, our happiest childhood memories, and our biggest future desires are shared within this circle "of trust". I begin by asking the students about their happiest childhood memory; I understand that they are surprised by the question. Maybe, they are waiting for a traditional movement course; a course that begins by actual physical training. I choose to begin that way unaware of how significant these memories and desires will be for our course throughout the academic year. But, I strongly believe that I need time to understand the needs of the people around me. I need time to help them develop their own way of approaching their bodies and their movement technique.

Mainly, the happiest childhood memory is in relation with something or somebody. About a family trip and how significant it was for the family relationships and ties. About the moment a student met their puppy for the very first time. About the very first time a student was on stage acting during a children's performance and how they experienced the inter-action with the audience. Relations deeply rooted in their bodies holding the history of the self and its "[f]uture unfoldment" (Fraleigh, 1996). It is really important for the movement course to understand who are these students and where do they come from, as psychophysical entities (Zarrilli, 2009).

During our classes between September and October 2022 every class begins with this circle. The first questions, about memories and desires, are replaced by questions such as: How was your week? Did you experience anything memorable? Do you have any new conclusions on the previous week's class? This assessment, this "who am I teaching" process, never takes a student's background for a given. Every week we are different and the same. In every class the teacher/facilitator should take time to assess the condition of all the participants. This condition is our psychophysical starting points for the movement training. If I want to engage the students to the

process of learning, an active relationship between me and them should be encouraged. This active relationship will resemble as well the active relationship needed between them and themselves in order to become life-long “autodidacts” as future performers and pedagogues (Peck, 2021). I follow hooks’ (2009, 19) definition on her Engaged Pedagogy. Since, I am in denial of beginning my courses by merely executing practices and waiting for the students to mime my body’s postures, I try to go beyond the surface of our institutionalized relationships. Relationships mainly based on Freire’s “banking concept” of education (1968). I am the teacher, you are the students. Do what I do. I will make my “deposits” to you as if you were my bank account. You will imitate me since I am the keeper of the keys to knowledge.

In some classes, after the Critical (Self) Reflection performed with us sitting or standing in our circle, I encourage them to show “how was their week” by using only movement and no words. These physically expressed experiences become the starting point for the movement training. They “dance” their week. I dance mine. We interact physically sharing our experiences as embodied inscriptions. The physical impact of what was meaningful, significant, and memorable throughout the previous week. In one class I ask them to show me and their fellow students, how they feel right now, by using only one hand. No words. Just to use all the possible moves of their hand to express and share their present emotional state. They seem to enjoy all these exercises. I sense that they find the lesson different than they expected to be. Most of the students agree that the Critical Self Reflection and the embodied way of expressing their criticality made the course really different than what they expected. Words, such as “joy” and “pleasure” can be found together with words such as “confusing” and “surprising” in their reflection journals. I know that it can be really confusing to begin a movement course with (embodied) theory. But it proved to be at least an engaging way for beginning the courses. The students in general appreciated this approach. One student having “an unhealthy relationship” with their body refers to the course as their favorite and the first time they enjoyed that much a movement course. Part of it, I believe, because this course took under serious consideration the individual needs of every student. Without setting general physical goals for students to try to achieve, each student had their own path to follow regarding their physical skills and their development needs. I used bell hook’s Engaged Pedagogy as a useful framework to begin every class as psychophysical approaches to movement training. My understanding as well of engaged pedagogy has to do a lot with joy and pleasure throughout the beginning of every course. I was sharing as well, my happiest childhood memory (going to the kiosk to buy my weekly comics) my biggest desire, or the most memorable moment I had the previous week. According to hooks (1994; 2009) sharing as well my vulnerabili-

ty, my biggest desires or my happiest childhood memories, is a way to create this reciprocity between the teacher and the students as equal members of a working group; equal members growing –up together.

But, during the first two months of our classes we don't only begin by sharing experiences. We close every class by sharing experiences as well. What happened to this or that exercise? How did it feel? What do you think of yourself? What would you change? Did you experience any change between the person you were before the class and the person you are now that the class is ending? The students ask me why we are closing the course by reflecting. Bakirtzis (2002) citing Lecuyer (1990) refers to the process of learning as the "[p]rocess of changing the way the developing individual perceives the phenomena of the environment". Learning is a process of change. I choose to close every class with Critical (Self) reflection, so as every participant would realize what changes have been made between the beginning of the lesson and the end. How was I at the beginning of the lesson and how I am now that a new experience was inscribed in my body; the new experience of this – and every – lesson? What changes have been made regarding my perceptions? Acknowledging learning as a process of change could be the first step towards accountability for social change (Freire, 1974). In class by beginning and ending with Critical (Self) Reflection one of the aims are for students to realize the significance of criticality in the learning process; as future artists and pedagogues. One student refers to this reflective process as a process that helped them "[t]o understand what they were actually doing during the course". Why did they choose to make this move or to perform that memory or to share with the group that event? Another student refers to the critical self-reflection as a method that helped them and will help them in the future to create their own approaches to teaching, learning, and performing on stage.

In October 2022, during the reflective process at the end of one class, we discuss a lot about drama, and theatre as a process of change (Heathcote, 1997, 2008). The theme of change emerged as a constant situation and ontological location where an actor is embedded. A class is a process of change in the way students/actors/teachers are experiencing their relations and the phenomena of the environment. We enter the classroom as formed subjects within our individual perception of reality, and through our intra-actions (Barad, 2007) we exit the classroom as re-formed and transformed subjectivities of becoming-other (Braidotti, 2011); changing the perception of the world with new descriptions. Whether this is a conscious choice of being in-class or

not, intra-actions and intra-relatedness (Ceder, 2019) are there “working” throughout the class recreating spaces in-between subjects as relations.

By questioning their reality as a first step towards change, students were asked to acknowledge learning as a change to their perceptions. A student refers that this approach of Critical Self-Reflection, helped them to change the relationship they had with their body. Another student points out that:

- It was the most interesting movement course so far, it was so different and helped me to think and do things in a whole new way.

#### **4.1.2 Problem Posing: November 2022**

Using the outcomes of the first two months, in November 2022, I give an assignment for the next time: only by using movement and mime acting, show us a small story about a happy childhood memory. The goal is for us, as audience, to understand the story. But, you have to use both descriptive physical narration and abstract. Descriptive physical narration refers to show what happens to the story by describing naturally inter-actions with objects, and subjects. For example: I open an invisible door, I hold an invisible glass of water, I watch television, I shake hands with an invisible other, I walk an invisible dog, etc. “And what it means to use abstract physical narration?” a student asks. “I don’t know” I answer. “Let’s find out!”

Either, I really don’t know the answer or I am really efficient in convincing myself that I don’t know the answer. But, I really want to find an answer together with the students and through feedback, critical reflection, and in-class discussions to create our own theory. I try to apply Freire’s “problem posing” education in movement training. Paulo Freire (1968) contrary to the “banking concept” of education, proposes the “problem posing” education. The teacher poses a problem - in this case related to “what is an abstract physical narration” - within the reality that shapes people’s lives and together with the students, through Critical Reflection and creative dialogues, examines the problem. This examination creates new knowledge in a process where teaching and learning are interconnected terms aiming at reshaping reality. Knowledge is created within a process involving intra-related subjects.

We already know by Bertolt Brecht (1964) that by describing a physical action naturalistically the audience will follow the story without actively participating. The audience can just sit and watch, with no other effort required. I and the students also know very well what a naturalistic representation of reality means for the actor. Even if we don't use objects, we perform as if we are using them. We use mime acting to "open invisible doors". But, if one goal of our course, additionally if one goal of theatre is to create new knowledge and new perceptions of reality (Brecht, 1964) we must try to create new perceptions and new realities; for teachers, students, and audiences to participate actively in the shape of knowledge and the world.

"Problem posing" in the movement training course had the most controversial comments in students' reflection journals, in my working diary, in our discussions, and in the interview with the current leader of the program. During the November 2022 lessons where "abstract physical narration" was examined, I encountered mostly frustrated students. "It is really difficult for me to do something if I don't know what to do", a student points out. "I felt insecure, because Thomas wasn't explaining us what he wants from us".

But, one day at the end of the month, a student performs a trip to Africa. And, although the student was narrating the story naturalistically - sitting in the window waiting for the siblings to come, going to the airport, sitting on the aircraft's seat etc – the student suddenly performs the airplane itself. The student describes the flight by being the airplane itself. I point out that, this idea could be described as "abstract" narration. Even though somebody shows that is an airplane, we experience a "gap". A cut between a narration during which we watched a story performed by a human being, and a story about a human being; and a narration, where suddenly we are transferred in a world of "ideas". Being an airplane is me showing my idea of an airplane. I can't be one. Maybe this is a way of abstract narration. An idea cannot be performed. But it can be represented. Although we came up to a first "conclusion" most of the students in their journals are referring to this experience as "hard" and "difficult". A student points out that "I didn't understand why we were wasting so much valuable time to one theme that doesn't lead anywhere". Some of the students point out that they really need more time to evaluate what happened. But, they don't really seem to have issues with this approach. Two of the students, who in the current leader's opinion faced the biggest problems regarding movement, are trying to understand without questioning this approach. But, the goal was to do the opposite actually.

#### 4.1.3 Via Positiva and Practicing Joy: December 2022 – February 2023

From December 2022 until February 2023 our physical warm-ups were more related to acting than movement training; acting mostly in a childlike movement approach. I tried to apply an approach based on Via Positiva as a feminist intervention in the movement training class.

A physical warm-up, traditionally promotes a structure where the teacher models moves (deriving from a method) aiming at preparing the body to be trained and the students mime the teacher's postures. The teacher often uses phrases such as: "Be careful not to..." or "Do that, because this is not right" or "Don't walk that way, it is as if you are..." etc. The teacher's voice is often "serious" and the environment within the classroom where the physical warm-up is taking place could be considered "serious" as well. Students are moving and waiting for the teacher's affirmation whether they are moving "right". According to Andrea Olsen (1999, 12) physical warm-ups and training techniques, as well as medical practices "[c]an lead to a view of the body as a machine, needing to be repaired by someone else when necessary. There is often a sense that one is either the master or the victim of one's own body. When communication breaks down, we are left polarized within ourselves"

Contrary to this approach, the author used creative "as ifs" in a general concept of creative movement as a warm-up and general movement training; as a movement training approach for the future actor – and pedagogue - aiming at reshaping the classroom from a space of detailed examination resembling anatomy classes in sterilized rooms, to a space of joyful play. In the first lesson during the spring term (February 2023) instead of a warm-up, we all stand up in a circle and we are all witches around a caldron preparing a potion. We move as if we are throwing herbs, bats, frogs' legs or whatever comes to our minds.

I put music that could be inspiring and supporting for the general atmosphere. The students hesitate at first to let themselves just "be" in the situation. I begin by making a fool of myself. I am moving as a child, playing "pretend". This creative situation takes away any strictness and seriousness. Eventually everybody enjoys the situation. A student in their reflection journal, points out:

- It feels a bit lame to say but I genuinely think that one of the reasons the course "makes sense" is because I adored playing pretend as a kid. I loved playing pretend and I espe-

cially loved pretending to be characters with superpowers or magical abilities. I knew that using magical powers needed intent to be clear and energy (or mana or magica of some kind) needed to be spent. You can tell that a character has used a really powerful spell or pushed the limits of their powers by how exhausted they are after. (“Wow, that character just literally moved a mountain with their brain and then collapsed. That must have been a really hard spell to cast”). I, wanting to be cool like the characters from my favourite books, movies and shows, naturally picked up on it and incorporated it into when I played pretend with my friends – not always as dramatically, but still.

The student interestingly connects movement training, with acting when refers to “characters”. They also make a really interesting connection between movement training, joyful play, and childhood. Lisa Peck (2021, 57) refers to the joyful play as the need for pleasure in actors’ training, with special reference to “the idea of pleasure” in movement training. This idea of pleasure she calls it “jouissance” as a material deriving from feminist perspectives when it comes to Critical Acting Pedagogy. The childlike play, echoes as well Murris & Bozalek’s (2023) “childlike questioning” as a Q&A method for addressing questions (and drawing answers) regarding “given” adult realities. A childlike questioning could resemble a critical questioning of reality. Accordingly the above student’s reflection on childlike movement training, could as well aim at innovative physical representations, by questioning our “given” adult perceptions of what an actor is actually doing on stage.

The same student point out as well:

- I’m surprised that I’ve enjoyed the course as much as I have, since it keeps touching on topics that are uncomfortable or tough for me to interact with. I have to be physical; I have to have people watch me be physical, I have to be aware of my body and what it’s doing, I need to be in contact with my emotions.

When you are “playing pretend as a child” is really difficult to be caught by feelings and emotions deriving from comments such as “good and bad” or “interesting and indifferent”. A child doesn’t really care how it looks when pretending to be someone else. This particular student is giving the impression that these warm-ups, and the general attitude in-class, emancipated them from the restrictions of commonly accepted “aesthetics” as unquestionable truisms regarding an artistic result.

During this first “we around the caldron” warm-up, the vocabulary I am using aims mainly at “polishing” students’ movement proposals; and by making playful interventions aiming at supporting students’ physical uniqueness as starting points of their “auto-didact” journey, I am proposing euphoria as an antidote to atmospheres driven by strictness and negativity. I participate actively: I am one “witch’s” assistant, or another one’s favourite goblin etc. The students seem to enjoy playfulness and some of them are totally “lost” in the given condition, moving in unique ways, making strange sounds, laughing “as if” they are actually witches around a caldron.

- We are on a mountain crossing a bridge. The bridge is really unstable. From time to time it feels like it is going to break. Beneath us a waterfall roars.
- You walk to your home when suddenly a really big bucket of water falls on you. How does it feel?
- You are entering a room realizing that the room is in another dimension, what happens?

At first, I realize that all these creative imaginary situations mostly make them feel awkward. They gradually let themselves just “be” but awkwardness had been there for at least the first 3 or 4 lessons. Some of the students felt ridiculed, or that they were treated as children – implying that they didn’t feel treated as future professionals in acting. A student points out that at first they felt ridiculous when performing this creative “as if” situations. But, gradually they began feeling free, and full of ideas that could support their physical participation in the training. As another student points out:

- I’m not uncomfortable to make a fool of myself anymore, it’s actually quite fun and have helped me to be better in acting and to enjoy what I am doing.

Another student is referring to these creative “as ifs” as being really helpful in character building, and the significance of the use of music. Interestingly they refer to these exercises as “choreographies” underlining the reciprocity between movement training and acting training.

- [w]e did several choreographies where we always used music. Music can help to imagine, for example, where we are. For example, music combined with imagining being in a place that it is really windy, it makes you move and walk “like a king” and there you already have a character! Music helps to imagine these three things: Where I am; Who I am; What do I want.



Closing this entry I cite one student's reflections:

- The easiest way to describe [this movement lesson] is to compare it to [another movement training course] we've had in school before. Both courses were courses I enjoyed but struggled with due to my unhealthy relationship to my own body. [The other course] felt more difficult due to there being very clear things that I couldn't do or couldn't do quite right, and it was easier for me to compare myself to my classmates. With this course there was never really that strong of a "this is right, and this is wrong", so I couldn't get caught up on doing something wrong because it didn't exist. Things could be polished or made better, but it wasn't ever wrong or worse than what someone else was doing. There was also emphasis put on the fact that people move differently because our bodies are different and that's just how life is.

I sense, that when there is not a common (physical in our context) goal that the students have to achieve, learning becomes pleasant. People are developing according to their needs, and according to their own bodies. A common goal restricts individual development as the only way for people to become them. A mentor projects to the students a method to be achieved, unfortunately according to the mentor's needs.

#### **4.2 Bodystories as embodied Critical Self-Reflection: February 2023 – March 2023**

Combining Critical (Self) Reflection, Problem Posing, and Via Positiva, the main project of the teaching methods applied to the movement training course I proposed, was *Bodystories*. Bodystories were drawn out of a creative reading of Olsen's (1999, 14)) book on experiential anatomy. She proposes the following "exercises" to be written down in a diary, helpful for the individual to create a better awareness of the body regarding its structure and posture:

- 1) The story of your birth (pre-birth if possible; the health and activities of your mother affect life in the womb)
- 2) Your earliest movement memory (earliest kinesthetic sensation you can remember. Examples: being rocked, learning to swim, bouncing on your parent's knee, falling from a tree, riding a bicycle)

- 3) Training techniques (sports, dance, gymnastics, musical instruments)
- 4) Environment where you lived (mountains, plains, forests, oceans all affect how you move, how you perceive)
- 5) Comments you heard about yourself which shaped your body image
- 6) Attitudes towards sensuality, sexuality, gender images
- 7) Injuries, illnesses, operations
- 8) Nutrition, relationship to body weight, strength, flexibility
- 9) Anything else that interests you.

During spring semester in the movement training course we had with the students at NOVIA, students were asked to create original movement-based solo performances based on the following themes:

- 1) My happiest childhood memory
- 2) My saddest childhood memory
- 3) My first love
- 4) My biggest fear
- 5) My biggest desire

The physical representation of emotions was at the core of this movement training. Combining memories with emotions echoes Stanislavsky's Emotion Memory (Whyman, 2013). For Stanislavsky, cultivating an actor's memory was a way to draw convincingly expressed emotions. This method was mainly cognitive-based. With regard to a movement training aiming at developing a holistic actors' training, the Emotion Memory could be based mainly on the physical representation and regeneration of the Basic Human Emotions (Ekman, 2003). Thus, throughout the training with the students we were trying mainly to mime convincingly the physical/corporeal expression of these emotions. By using the moves of the thoracic diaphragm we were generating the basic human emotions and they were expressed by our bodily postures.

In this diary entry I am taking two students' solo performances and their development as paradigm of a sort of an embodied Critical (Self) Reflection. I am using as I have already done in the previous entries, extracts from my working diary, and students' reflections and comments.

A student who had to face the biggest issues regarding movement - according to the current leader's opinion as well – the first time they attempted to represent the “saddest childhood memory” they performed a child sitting on a chair. And that was that. They were sitting on this chair for about five minutes, trying to represent sadness, depression, and an anxiety regarding interactions with other “people”. Through Critical (Self) Reflection, and the feedback they took from fellow students and me, by the end of our course this moment developed as follows:

- A child enters the stage (enters the world?). It is pulled and affected by several triggers, stimulations, events etc. It moves without any pause, towards all the stage's (the world's?) possible directions; the child seems anxious, overwhelmed, and its feelings are mainly exacerbating as time goes by. The child finds someone or something that makes it feel secure. We see that the child is relaxed, calm, and nurtured. Someone has embraced the child. Now, it feels as if the child is moving more stable, secure, and safe. Suddenly, something happens, and the “other” who embraced the child – is suffering (?) or is unable to nurture the child anymore. This other goes below the scene (in the ground / dead?) and the child with movement begins “digging” the stage; we, the audience, experience feelings of anger, sadness, and passion.

The student refers to this process as crucial for their development as actor, especially regarding movement. The student has developed a whole new relationship regarding acting throughout all this process. They refer to this (embodied) Critical Reflection approach, as a method where they realized the body is mainly moving *related* to something or somebody. That movement is praxis, related to something. Movement is a re-action. It doesn't depend on my abilities, or body structure and posture, my movement depends on the degree of the recognition of the body “as related to”. This student's comments can easily be found as claims for an education based on relationality (Ceder, 2019). The student refers to the Critical (Self) Reflection, as a method that helped them understand the relation with the self, with the past, with the stage, with theatre, and mainly the relation with the audience. They referred to this relationship as:

- I was never challenged before to reflect on my relation with the audience. What do I want from the audience? Why am I acting on the stage? On the benefit of whom, I am acting?

Another student reflects on the regeneration of the basic human emotions and the Bodystories practice:

- Something I wasn't expecting to happen but happened at least three separate times during the course is we did exercises around memories that weren't emotionally impactful on me, but as we did the exercises I realized that the memories actually were very impactful, I just hadn't comprehended it before. As we worked on them, I realized that they actually have had a lot of weight and a lot of impact on my life and who I am. It could be due to me sitting down and thinking about said memories for longer than I've allowed myself to, but it's also from interacting with them again more closely than through just thinking about them.

A student who began the assignment as a really introvert person, scared to be exposed, reflects:

- With the last assignment it was a little bit scary to perform the biggest fear because it's something I don't even want to think. But then again I thought that what if I sometimes have to act that kind of role so I did take distance from me and tried to be in a role who wasn't I. We did these choreographies on last day at demo [on the stage] and my feedback for that day was that I have to be extrovert on the stage and have self-confidence and think that it's my last musical show. So I took the distance from myself and I did manage to have the energy to fill the whole big stage but I also was extrovert on the stage and did manage the darkest fear scene with distance. It was pretty cool when your body still remembered what to do but I didn't have to cry or have a mental breakdown for real being in my own shoes. And this is also what acting is – you have to always have a role in order to feel safe on the stage and have the double perspective.

The second student's solo performances I am presenting as a paradigm, is one student's assignment that had the most "adventurous" childhood, they reflect on the general training of emotions as:

- I loved working with feelings in this course, I had kept my feelings hidden for so many years and this gave me anxiety, I had started working with being comfortable with them before this course but during this time I have learned to really feel the feeling on stage and not holding back, I have become open so that the audience can feel what I feel.

This student faced issues regarding their childhood, and I was really anxious whether this method would help the student develop, or it would totally “shut” their emotional and physical expression. The student reflects on the lesson:

- The saddest childhood memory performance was something that I totally loved. I have talked about my childhood with therapist's and friends but to actually be in the situation again and let myself feel the sadness and what it lead to was worth so much in my personal journey in healing from my past. It made me so happy and free afterwards and this is something I am going to use in my play about my life.

[My note: The last assignment that the students in the Performing Arts Pedagogue Degree Program have to do, an assignment that also leads to their Degree, is to create a performance of their own]

- I was so excited that I wanted to start a therapy group for people with traumas and use this method. Then I become aware of that this can be really hard for some people, my personal thought is if you haven't talked about your past, maybe even thought about your past it will be really hard to do something like this. And it is okay, I was there for many years and I'm just sad because it will weight you down, accepting and letting go is so much better, at least for me.

In the above entry, we also understand, that this method triggered another aspect of theatre pedagogy, that of applied theatre pedagogy for therapeutic reasons, such as Play – Back theatre. We can realize that this pedagogical approach to movement training triggered this student's concerns on How to apply Theatre Pedagogy to other contexts as well. I am closing this entry with another student's reflections:

- We had a choreography assignment were we had to think from our childhood a happy and sad memory, the first time we fell in love and also darkest fear and desire. I thought that I knew pretty soon which memories I will use and how. I thought that I might cry when I show it but I didn't think that I would be crying so much. Thomas said in another lesson that sometimes when we try to remember something [we could just] start moving; our bodies will always remember every event even when your brain doesn't. And this is

something that has been also on pedagogic lessons. Your body remembers every trauma even when your brains block them. I also had a breakthrough in this lesson[...] So I'm really happy with this course finally because I think I had mixed feelings about this but I worked myself and didn't give up and took everything I could with me.

This student is making direct references regarding this course, to pedagogy. They connect pedagogy with “choreography” and they argue about the significance of “working myself”. Interestingly this particular student “interprets” all the methods used in this movement training course with examples from pedagogy.

#### **4.3 Towards a Movement Training Pedagogy: March 2023**

In March 2023, few weeks before ending our course, I was holding a public event in Vaasa City Library. It was an open class regarding mime acting and movement training addressed to children and their families, and anyone interested in attending a movement training course. It was an evening event regarding public pedagogy as part of a larger-scale project I was working on called “The Festival of Emotions”.

About 70 people attended this open class, from 2 years old to 82 years old. People with diverse cultural backgrounds, and nationalities, with different mother tongues were sitting in a circle in the Drama Sal. I invited my students from NOVA University, to participate as well, as performers and pedagogues. I thought that it would be a really good opportunity to use approaches, methods, and techniques that we were using throughout the academic year in the movement training course. So, in the above mentioned circle, my students were also sitting, with me. Another circle was surrounding our circle with people who wanted to watch, and if they felt like it, they could as well participate in the training. The current leader of the Performing arts Pedagogue Degree Program, was sitting in that circle. In retrospect, I realize that the structure was a straight reference to the structure of Socratic Circles.

Together with the students we began a small physical warm-up, and we were sharing the facilitator's place. People attending the event began stretching, yawning, laughing. Especially children were really engaged since I and the students were making funny sounds, funny body postures

etc. The students were gradually developing small practices, as small “bodystories” for children to follow. They were trying to put together some really big cubes, for example. Several gags and slapstick comedy sketches emerged. Everything was totally improvised according to the needs of the participants. Neither me, nor the students have prepared anything.

At some point I stood up and acted out by using only mime and movement, a small story. I asked if anyone wanted to make a story by using only movement. I repeat that we didn’t really share a common language. English were switching to Swedish, to Finnish, to body language, to gestures, facial expressions etc. Gradually 5 year olds began interacting on stage with their parents or even “grandparents”. People from diverse cultural backgrounds were showing, improvised, small stories without words, like small pantomime pieces. My students were encouraging, supporting, and helping as performers as well, throughout the whole event. The atmosphere was gradually developing into a space of joy, of co-existence, of cooperation, of support, and solidarity. Older people were supported by younger people, for example. Even infants at some point were on stage in the arms of their parents, performing small stories about an ice-cream, about a walk in the “park” etc.

As time went by, and without any preparation, guidance, or directions (as in NDI, for example) the people were divided into smaller groups, making their own creative groups; they shared small activities, choreographies, stories. Some people during these activities found the opportunity to get to know each-other. So, you could watch people dancing or “opening invisible doors” and at the same time talking about themselves. My students followed one group each, helping in these activities, proposing “solutions” encouraging, and supporting. They were posing as well, mainly to children, small problems that needed solutions. Where to put this chair so as to be in perfect relation to this wall? How we could make a fortress by using our giant colored cubes?

The last 15 minutes of this event, we experienced something almost magical. All the participants were scattered in the previous mentioned circle, reshaping it into an abstract-shaped space, and they were dancing together, moving, holding hands, infants were laughing as parents were twisting them, my students gradually “transformed” into a group of “clowns” and the current leader of the program told me that she “could stay here at this place and moment for days”. During the whole event there was a little girl, about 6-7 years old, who was so enthusiastic with the pantomime stories, that she really shown us about 5 different stories, with really creative storytelling and really expressive physical narration. A student told me that this girl during that event “might have found out what to do in her life. Her eyes are almost expressing a miracle unfolding in front

of her". The event officially was coming to an end. But, nobody really went anywhere. People kept on moving, playing, dancing, discussing. Following Karin Murris', Karen Barad's, Rosi Braidotti's, Donna Haraway's, and Trinh Minh -Ha's theories and creative philosophies, we are still there, moving, playing, discussing, and dancing.

In retrospect I realize that during this event we experienced as well, practical applications of almost all of our pedagogical references; Socratic Circles, NDI, Problem Posing, Via Positiva, the Ethics of Joy and Affirmation. It was as if we were experiencing a small fest of human relations. We experienced in a way what humans need to realize that they have a body and how they want to "celebrate" having it.

[Two months after this experience, I found myself in a concert. At the end of the concert we, the audience, were playing with a giant balloon waving to the rhythms of our favorite band. It was an anti-war concert as well. It was as if humans are in a need of a giant balloon, music, dance etc to be humans.]

I believe that during the event in Vaasa City Library, we witnessed in a way a lived experience of how theatre pedagogy can "make the world a little better". In in-class interviews, although the students were having a really full schedule, they shared with me their experience of that event. They were mostly astonished by the little girl's participation, willingness, passion, enthusiasm. This triggered a conversation on how important it is to be an open pedagogue. With no preformed assumptions about people, pedagogies, methods, projects etc; to be open to every intra-action (Barad, 2007). To let yourself as a pedagogue, be shaped by the way you relate with students, people, children, infants etc. To invent activities as part of these intra-actions, or even to let you to be invented by these intra-actions. We concluded that if we knew what we were going to do during this event, we might have never realized that girl's need to be on stage. And of course, regarding the last collective "dance"; exactly who would have imagined it? And in what way s/he would convince 70 strangers to do it?



## **5 REFLECTIONS**

This section follows the structure of the diary entries, reflecting on the methodologies, outcomes, comments, and feedback by the students and the current leader of the Performing Arts Pedagogogue program.

### **5.1 Critical Pedagogy and the Ethics of Affirmation**

#### **5.1.1 Critical (Self) Reflection: Reflections**

For Fernández-Balboa (1998) Critical Self Reflection is the actual practice of Critical Pedagogy; an educational process as Praxis for Critical Consciousness that aims at “making the world a little better”. Making the world better requires willingness for change. To be critical is to be aware that commonly accepted truisms, should be constantly questioned regarding the motives that shaped them (Burbules & Berk, 1999). To be critical is to learn to be sceptical towards an unquestionably accepted reality. Criticality requires movement as a praxis that will affect change (Burbules & Berk, 1999) which is aligned with changes that occur in the world. Critical Consciousness, meaning what it is to be critical, can be cultivated as awareness of one’s own situation within the world. The ability one has, through the questioning of reality, to play a significant role into reshaping reality. Education for Critical Consciousness (Freire, 1974) facilitates the path where one becomes aware of reality as a process and not as a formed result. Moreover, one becomes aware that reality is a process undergoing constant transformation and change. Freire (1974) points out that one should be aware of the capacity s/he has into playing a significant role in these transformations and changes so as not to be carried along in the wake of change. Education for Critical Consciousness facilitates the experience of becoming aware that processes of change and transition is a constant situation within the world. This kind of education reminds students that learning is a process of change for them. And in order to experience and accept change, a desire for change is required. If the subject is unwilling to accept change as a constant situation in the world and in the self, intervening in the transformations and mutations of reality becomes impossible and thus, change is always a situation that the student is carried along in its wake.

Questioning one owns reality is a step towards reshaping one owns reality as a not given and stable situation, but as a flowing relationship between one's own self and the world (Balboa, 1998). A second step would be for one to understand and accept that the surrounding reality can be accordingly reshaped, towards "making the world a little better". That the surrounding reality and "the commonly accepted truisms" are not stable conditions formed on the benefit of some people, but flowing situations that can be reshaped for the benefit of all the people.

In education, the commonly accepted truisms are represented by the Authority of the teacher. According to Paulo Freire (1968) the classical mode of teaching is structured as teacher-centred; with the teacher depositing information as knowledge to the students in the general frame of a "banking concept" of education. That way, opportunities for questioning the represented reality by the teacher as Authority, are submerged. And if the students perceive the themes of reality through commonly accepted truisms, the constant transformations and changes of this reality will not be shaped according to the needs of the students but only according to the needs of the people who have the power to shape reality. Education for Freire becomes a tool to serve those who have the power to shape reality according to their needs; those having such power he calls "the oppressors". Thus, teachers become advocates of those in power, by educating students to accept the oppressors' reality. That way, students as individuals in a process of becoming will always be carried along in the wake of change (as the oppressed), unable to contribute to the themes that shape their reality.

A common reality in the Performing Arts Education is promoting "what a student is good at"; promoting the student's skills as if they were products. Camilleri (2009) refers to ethical pedagogical practices promoting performing arts education as a process and not as a product. Although the "industry" is in need of products, students are in a process of becoming; performing artists are in a process of becoming. Accordingly we all are in a process of becoming. Commodifying one's own skills on the benefit of the industry presents ethical issues (Kapsali, 2014) regarding what a human represents.

The current leader of the Degree Program in Performing Arts Pedagogy observed that during my lessons she has seen significant change in movement and acting, especially by students that had the biggest problems regarding movement, somatics, and acting. Since, throughout the whole process the students had to work a lot with them, also with Critical Self-Reflection, the current leader believes that some of them established a whole new relationship with themselves. Espe-

cially students who were almost frightened of being physically exposed, during the courses changed and pointed out that they are almost anticipating for other movement courses to begin. I would venture to point out that critical reflection enabled them in a way to begin establishing a relationship of trust with themselves.

About pedagogy as a process of change, Freire (1995) points out that: “We learn things about the world by acting and changing the world around us. It is to this process of change, of transforming the material world from which we emerged, of which creation of the cultural and historical world takes place”.

Accordingly, we learn things about ourselves by acting and changing ourselves. By tasting new experiences and assessing them. And this process of change is the actual self as a subject in a process of becoming. A human being constantly changed and transformed by constantly changing and transforming knowledge and the world.

### **5.1.2 Problem Posing: Reflections**

About the “Problem Posing” attempt during our courses, related to “what is an abstract physical narration” the current leader of the program explains that the students needed a pointer to know where to research for the “abstract” narration; or at least to explain them why we are researching, instead of learning, in a more traditional way. Even though they were informed about my research project, again, to articulate the research goal would be helpful: We are researching for new knowledge. I understand now that they were right. In that process of creating new knowledge, I should have informed the students that we are in an actual search for new knowledge. By “admitting” that I don’t know the answer to the question of what an abstract narration is, I only created confusion. But, I do understand that this is the teaching style I learned as a student myself. The teacher, as “mentor” – most of the times, a male - must create an atmosphere of mystery and anticipation for students to know who has the power in and out of the class; who holds the knowledge and who has the power to constantly fail the students. As Peck (2021, 11) points out: “The male domain of training can be seen to espouse a guru tradition, built on the premise that the master holds all the answers and that the student is in their thrall, dependent on their instruction”. I, having incorporated these teaching styles, couldn’t escape the trap of in-class power structures. If we

want to cultivate equality, sharing every little detail, and every little goal, could be a good starting point for creating an atmosphere of respect, trust, and liberation from power structures.

White guru-type males (Peck, 2021, 9) advocate training methods aligned to the “needs of the industry” which promotes narratives of physical and emotional endurance as prerequisites for the young actor. By entering the Drama School and becoming familiar with training methods that follow the guidelines of the industry, training that “[r]einforces the status quo by preparing artists disciplined and passionate enough to accept the industry’s working conditions” (Kapsali, 2014) the young actor learns to not to question this “reality” but merely to accept it and adapt. And the more one suffers for the art as a result of this adaptation, the more competent they become in their art. As Lisa Peck (2021, 9) points out: “If the actor is not ‘suffering for the art’ then they are not evidencing the necessary qualities of sacrifice and this acting mythology is borne out through the psychological exposure of the American Method system or Eastern traditions of durational physical stamina. These traditions have grown from guru-type male lineages, which neuter the actor’s body”.

The above statement could be useful if it was referring to educational systems such as the one I was educated. It seems that the Finnish Educational System promotes equality in teacher-student relations from the beginning of Primary School. My students at NOVA University of Applied Sciences were coming from a completely different educational background than mine. Having taught as well in Primary Schools during the academic year 2022-2023 as an employee of the Vaasa City Culture Services, I have mostly witnessed equality between teachers and students in every - day life School encounters.

I will close this paragraph by citing two retrospective students’ reflections on my general “not telling much” as teaching approach. This “not telling much” approach was a way for students to explain why I didn’t give any direction on the theme of what an abstract physical narration is.

- It helped me a lot when Thomas didn’t tell us exactly what to do when he gave us this homework, because it took away my thinking about how do I look and helped me to be in the situation.

This student is referring to my approach as not restricting, I find. If they knew what was expected to do, they would have limited their creativity since they would think all the time “how do they

look” instead of committing themselves to the situation and the moment. Another student retrospectively reflecting on this approach, points out that:

- I understand now what kind of pedagogical method Thomas had with us. He's method was not to give us too much information so as not to shrink ourselves or put ourselves in a “cage”. We could do anything and we could be anything. However if I would have understood this method better from the beginning I could have been able to get more off me. But that's because I'm a person who needs to understand things in order to be able to do things. I think Thomas' method is really interesting and it's a very good and welcoming idea. I think this course was also comprehensive learning experience because we got so many skills, tools, feedback and also this new pedagogic perspective.

This student's comment on the pedagogical benefit is really interesting regarding the student's future development as a pedagogue as well. Commenting on the process as “comprehensive learning” the student presents a direct connection of the praxis of theatre (movement training) with educational theory. The above extract also gives new perspectives in this “not telling too much” approach. The reference about “understanding this method from the beginning” though, restricts my learning as a teacher. I didn't know from the beginning my intra-connected learning outcomes since the approach developed according to the students' development. It has been mainly a pedagogical approach to movement training aiming at proposing a movement training pedagogy. I am reciting, Lisa Peck's (2021, xiv) definition of pedagogy: “When using the term ‘pedagogy’ I refer to the changing consciousness between the person controlling the learning environment (in this case the teacher/ director) and the learner (in this case the actor), and the changing knowledge that they produce together. I adopt this understanding of the term, as it neither privileges one agency over the other, nor denies the teacher/director as a neutral transmitter or the student as a passive receiver. In this way pedagogy is a fruitful site for uniting research, methodology and praxis as through pedagogical practices new paradigms for training are produced”.

### 5.1.3 Via Positiva and Practicing Joy: Reflections

An Embodied Critical Pedagogy (Johnson, 2007) for the actor could manifest embodied knowledge as a constant state of changing the descriptions of the world since no physical form “exists before the constant flux of molecules” (Ceder, 2019, 14). A manifestation that could liberate the young actor from notions such as “right” or “wrong,” “good” or “bad,” empowering the self as a potential agent of change in the “dawn of the third millennium” promoting processes of becoming aiming at liberating teachers and students from the dualistic grip (Braidotti, 2002).

About the warm-ups being mostly a childlike play than actual movement training, the current leader of the program, believes that these creative “as ifs” as a method for warming-up and as a general approach to movement training for the actor was really beneficial. Since, it wasn’t a method as she calls it “gymnastics of theatre” but a method cultivating somatic imagination it helped students to be more expressive on stage in their actual acting classes.

These creative exercises based on imagination and playfulness seemed to emancipate students from a movement class where notions such as good, bad, or right and wrong are always present. I have never used such words during the lesson. Not in the physical warm-ups and the actual movement training and not in the students’ individual assignments. A student points out that they enjoyed these classes, partly because it didn’t feel like you “should be good at it”. Another student, who faced a lot of problems regarding my approach, points out that:

- The whole aspect of not telling what’s wrong or right, stepping away from normal school discipline, is appealing to me; at least on paper. But I realise now that I’ve grown up in this society that applauds if you do things right and it has, unfortunately, become a big part of me and how I operate. I think I am willing to do something similar with my own groups but I would definitely try to keep everyone feeling at least a bit safe.

This student’s comment interestingly is referring to the usefulness of my general approach as pedagogy. They are willing as future Performing Arts Pedagogue to “do something similar” with the groups they are leading and will lead in the future. The student also refers to how difficult it is to accept a pedagogical approach that doesn’t depend on results as educational products (Camil-leri, 2009). If a learning outcome is not graded as good, really good, exceptional, or wrong, bad, or indifferent, it cannot be priced in the market; and the future actor, performer, or teacher cannot

be priced as the embodied product deriving from these pedagogies and traditions. How can I sell myself as a marked, graded, and priced product available to the industry?

Another student regarding the pedagogical approach and its significance as movement pedagogy to be used at Schools points out:

- [I] am also wondering if this kind of method could be easier to deliver to kids or teenagers. Maybe they don't question everything like an adult. I'm also thinking this society and school system and how we are raised in the school. It's very different from this method because we are used to be either right or wrong and we absolutely are used to do what a teacher says. So this new method is really refreshing and good but it can be difficult to take at this age. But now after all these lessons and understandings I could get more off me. But that's maybe something for me I've learned and what I could take with me to the future. To jump deep in without any questions.

As I have already referred to the Finnish educational system, I am surprised that an innovative schooling system promotes binary oppositions as a teaching and learning method. Having informal discussions with educational researchers, I understood that even in Finland, it depends on the willingness of the teacher to apply innovative approaches to “normal” schooling. There is a strong tradition in educational research and innovative schooling but still, applying educational innovation is not an easy task even here.

Lisa Peck (2021, 10) towards a Critical Acting Pedagogy among other approaches proposes a feminist potential in acting pedagogies as “[a] vital antidote to patriarchal systems, which reduce acting to ‘another branch of study of the dead white males’”. The most common methods or systems in acting as they were developed by dead white males gradually became myths and famous educational products promoted by the industry. The vocabulary used in the classes where methods or systems are taught is mainly driven by binary oppositions and actors are used at notions such as inside/outside, individual/ensemble, external/internal, objective/subjective, self/other, physical/cognitive, emotion/reason etc. The vocabulary of dualism supports the Authority of the guru-type teacher since students - as well as actors - are in a constant anticipation of their mentor’s “verdict” whether what they have done is good or bad, right or wrong, internal or external, emotional or rational, physical or intellectual etc. Peck (2021, 27) suggests that: “[f]eminist epistemologies of difference invite us to think in the gaps between”. Rosi Braidotti’s (2011) nomadic

subject as a subject being constantly in a process of becoming is also used in Peck's theory towards a Critical Acting Pedagogy saturated by feminist interventions, as being a subject embodying these in-between binary oppositions spaces.

Maybe even in Finland the normal – compulsory – schooling is driven by these traditions of binary oppositions as well. Throughout the academic year I am trying to teach movement training as a method in between binary oppositions. In my retrospectively structured reflection / working diary, I am reasoning that:

Peck (2021, 57) proposes *Via Positiva* as an attitude that “[a]llows pleasure and discipline to operate beside each other and opens up the possibility of endurance and sustainability as affirmative experience”. She proposes the *Via Positiva* as an alternative to the *Via Negativa* that i.e. Grotowsky and Lecoq used in their teaching. The notion of *Via Negativa* used by masters that observe and failing students attempts, presents ethical problems though, since students are placed into a position of “habitual vulnerability” (Seton, 2010). A vulnerable subject educated in failure is always in the need to be accepted by the master's Authority. Learning becomes equivalent to suffering and self-loath. And a subject immersed in suffering cannot participate actively and equally in a process where knowledge is intra-structured by both teacher and learner; in processes driven by the love for life (Freire, 1968) aiming at reshaping the world. A subject educated in identifying pain with learning cannot easily accept an (unconscious) desire for change. Thus, processes of becoming and processes of change as intra-active (Barad, 2007) and intra-relational (Ceder, 2019) spaces become unfamiliar to the future artist; the awareness that the young actor could actually play a significant role into reshaping and reinventing reality, vanishes in narratives that promote low self-esteem. The actor becomes not only the subject adapting to a given reality, but the subject anticipating to be accepted as part of the reality that the Authority manipulates. On the contrary “[t]he *Via Positiva* ensures that the nature of the learning is made explicit and facilitates the actor as auto-didact in a productive creative exchange” (Peck, 2021, 56). For Peck, a Feminist (Critical) Acting Pedagogy is proposing pleasure as a starting point for recreating knowledge; as a starting point driven by the Ethics of Joy as prerequisite for the students to explore alternative physical figurations to the dominant poses shaped by the “industry”. Joy integrated into acting as a playful sense of learning without “verdicts” and binary oppositions could emancipate the young actor from “traditions”, “methods” and “systems” towards a concept of knowledge as a collective recreation aiming at simultaneously to recreate the world.



Working towards a Feminist Pedagogy in Performance saturated by Freire's Pedagogical concepts, Rhonda Blair (1992) in her article "Liberating the Young Actor" points out that a feminist pedagogy in performance requires honesty on behalf of the teacher as leader and partner of their students; honesty aiming at liberating actors from stereotypical representations and figurations of theatrical and/or social roles. A feminist pedagogy of liberation should aim at providing students with critical materials towards their individual development as subjects accountable for their being; giving them space to explore their ability to reshape themselves within a context encouraging and supporting them to reshape the industry's reality. Blair (1992, 16) points out that we should "[a]id our students in developing a directness, immediacy, vulnerability, and joy in their work, based upon a secure knowledge of who they are (rather than upon someone else's sense of who they ought to be)". Methods and systems as patriarchal narratives aiming at creating unquestionable "realities" invite students to adapt in their contexts and if someone cannot fit, one must change in the way the "mentor" imagined for their future. In this context the student loses their ability to structure self-knowledge and develop their individuality towards liberation from the "industry's" grip by articulating alternative figurations towards reality. Blair (1992, 21) proposes a form of Critical Acting Pedagogy fostering students' development as "[i]ncreasingly autonomous and socially responsible beings".

Applying a feminist approach to Critical Pedagogy such as practicing joy, Via Positiva, and proposing in between binary oppositions verbal approaches, a student retrospectively reflects on their general feeling about my teaching as follows:

- Your teaching was very kind and you did see all of us, I felt respected and that you encourage me and you made me respect you as well. I sometimes felt that you gave too much time to one student, when discussing a performance and I felt it took away time from us others. Then again from another point of view you really saw when a student needed extra time to discuss something and you did really offer your time to see that person and meet the needs of every individual. It's always hard to teach a group because of the different needs of every individual. You really pointed out our strengths and also what we need to work on and how, without making us feel bad. At least that is my experience. I felt safe during your lessons and didn't feel that you are "above" us, you made me feel equal with you as a human being and yet gave the safe feeling that you know what you are doing.

However, another student retrospectively reflects on this approach:

- I got really frustrated with this pedagogy. I got mad because I never knew the reason behind the exercises or homework. I couldn't just let myself be, and learn what came to me, when I didn't know why we were doing it. My time felt precious and I didn't want to waste it. I wanted a goal, something to work for. I got really restless when I didn't know anything, I had a really hard time being in the moment and trusting the teacher and the process. Then came the other crash, I didn't feel safe. When performing homework during class I felt like some of us got feedback and other didn't and that made me question if everyone did okay or if the teacher was unhappy with some results.

However the same student closes their reflections, with:

- But as time went on I think the group and the teacher found each other more, how to work together.

It seems that applying new methodologies to teaching needs time; time for relationships to grow and for students and teachers to begin developing their intra-related learning together. Traditional educational environments, by offering restricting time-schedules and pre-formed Curriculums, have other measuring regarding time. It is valuable, measurable, and it costs. It seems by the students' reflection journals that in general, the problem was not only in my approach, when things became "difficult" or "tough", but in the context itself. We didn't have time. Moreover, we didn't have quality time to establish, develop, and enjoy an active relationship without the limits, restrictions, and boundaries of time. Since, teaching and learning is about creating active relationships that lead to creating new knowledge (Ceder, 2019; Peck, 2021) trust is a prerequisite. But, trust is build upon tested relationships through time. Without time we can only give tastes of how things would have been if we had the time to actually taste them.

## **5.2 Bodystories as Embodied Critical Self Reflection: Reflections**

Developing a pedagogy for movement training, a goal was for the students to recreate, rethink, and regenerate the basic human emotions based on their experiences, memories, and desires by

“reliving” them, meaning by representing them as solo performances; to develop a critical relationship with their embodied experiences, aiming at changing the perception of the self, and the perceptions of reality. In what way the perception of me as a happy child changed throughout this course, and my solo-performance? In what way my relation with love, fear, or desire changed regarding my Bodystories? In what way my relation with my own body changed? What new perceptions of (my) reality are drawn based on my Bodystories experience? I proposed an approach that would be beneficial for them as future actors as well as pedagogues. The project was referring as well to Critical Pedagogy, using a sort of an embodied Critical Self-Reflection. Andrea Olsen (1999) proposes Bodystories as a way to build an experiential relation with our anatomy. I used bodystories for students to build an embodied Critical Self-Reflection method that would help them to understand their relation with themselves; an experiential “anatomy” of one’s own life by understanding where their Basic Emotions derive from.

According to Sherry B. Shapiro (1998, 12) “Critical Pedagogy refers to this process as giving voice to one’s own experiences by articulating the “reality” of one’s life; coming to critical understanding of the sociocultural mapping of consciousness; and using individual voices collectively to struggle in the retelling and remaking of life stories”. We used Bodystories as starting points where the above understanding of Critical Pedagogy could be applied to our courses. Applying this understanding as a sort of critical self-reflection for the body, a movement training pedagogy could aim as well at retelling and remaking “Bodystories”; i.e. retelling and remaking life stories inscribed on our bodies as attitudes, postures and/or even structures. For Andrea Olsen, structure is our physical body and posture is the way we live in it. Both are intra-related able to affect changes in structure and in posture. In her book “Bodystories: a guide to experiential anatomy” Olsen (1999, 9) points out that: “Our bodies are dynamic entities. Our cells are reproducing, processing, and dying constantly as we live. Within a year, a month, the time it takes to read these words, we literally are not the same person we were before. **Change** is constant throughout the life cycle of the body”.

The current leader of the program, regarding the Bodystories assignments, reflects:

- The students worked a lot with themselves and tried to create their one movement out of their life experiences. In theatre education, I believe that we meet ourselves, and with regard to movement, it is almost therapeutic that one can express this meeting with the

self. And this was really obvious especially with students that had to face difficulties. Especially students almost frightened of expressing themselves through movement. And these lessons helped them to come over this fear of physical exposure - when they had their lessons with [another movement course] one student commented: "I can go now to these movement lessons without fear and I am really looking forward to them". After these courses this particular student began as well to transform them self because before these movement courses they played mainly one character one stage related to the scared self. Now this student has more colors (like physical qualities) and acting scales. Taking this student as a paradigm, I think that this kind of changes happened to most of the students participating.

A theme in the leader's interview recurring throughout our interactions is that the particular course helped mostly, and more obviously, students who were facing the biggest problems regarding movement: with "closed" bodies, with stable postures, with limited skills to transform their bodies etc. It is really interesting when it comes to integrating Critical Pedagogy into movement training, that the most supported people where the most "vulnerable". It is really interesting, how the questioning of what is useful to the industry, can emancipate students who don't have the traditional "skills"; the commonly accepted skills shaped by the industry as the products required to be accepted by the industry. As soon as these given skills are being questioned, new perspectives regarding realities, industries, skills are manifested.

### **5.3 Towards a movement training pedagogy: Reflections**

I am citing students' reflections on these pedagogical proposals with regard to movement training:

[about movement being a reaction, and an inter-action]:

- One part of me does feel that what we've done during the course "makes sense". The fact that I can't quite phrase why or how it makes sense makes me feel like I've misunderstood something.

To put it poetically, it's breathing life into action. Within an interaction, whether it's interacting with a physical object (that isn't there) or interacting with a feeling, it emphasizes the physical reaction the body has within said interaction. Picking up an object without showing your body reacting to the action isn't believable to other people watching it or yourself.

Another student generally reflects:

- The feeling I had in the beginning about the teacher's method being not having a method was correct.
- As a pedagogue you have to be totally open, you can't have any prejudice towards the other persons.
- On stage you have to be true to yourself to be able to perform. But being a pedagogue is taking it to the next level.
- I haven't felt safe during this process, this course. Thomas said that a part of the creative journey is always unsafe. But I still feel stepped on and a bit overlooked.
- I thought it was too big of assignment to work with as much as five huge, personal topics.
- Thomas said that we need to work with all these five big topics to be able to do theatre and work with groups. But I would have preferred to take it in smaller portions.
- If Thomas, in the beginning of the course, would have told the goal of the course it could have helped me but maybe not [another student]
- If you see that one in your group benefits from the type of pedagogy then it's also beneficial for the whole group. But how am I supposed to just put aside my own hurt heart and ego?
- I have learnt what safety means in a group and how the lack of it feels and what it may do to someone in the group.

Another student reflects on the significance of this course as stimulation towards creativity:

- My dream have been to do something about all of the troubles I had in life, and here in this course I really found something interesting to do. I was so amazed of how much a person can tell to the audience without saying something and without anything else on the stage but herself.

In a last general question and in-class discussion on whether this proposed movement training pedagogy could be beneficial, or not, to the students as pedagogues they answered / reflected:

- I might use some things we did as actual exercises with groups, but outside of that I think that it is more on an intellectual level that I learned something. I learned how very important it is for me to feel safe in a group and that will massively impact my teaching from here on. I will do whatever I can to make the participants feel safe in order for them to be able to express themselves freely. I did not feel supported during this course and I want my participants to feel that I am there for their support and that they are free to be themselves. The course also started a process in me where I reflect on my own upbringing in school settings. How can I make a safe space for my participants without going to my "default settings" as a teacher and "pupil from a Finnish school system"? I want to blend this all together, not me being over everybody else and shouting out rules (to exaggerate). Rather I, as teacher, being the creator of the safe space in union with the participants and letting them walk the learning process in their own shoes (with me as a guide if they want to). I want to be able to validate their feelings in this safe space as the course would be, but not continue in the typical cycle of validating their accomplishments. Through this I think I will be closer to the kind of teaching I want to stand for: Feelings and exploration ahead of accomplishment.

Regardless of the student's opinion about the general approaches (not every time so successfully addressed by me) this student actually reflects on this pedagogy as beneficial for self-awareness. Based on this student's actual in-class experience, they are willing to follow a general "feminist" pedagogy; a pedagogy aiming at cultivating feelings and a desire for exploration. The student as well is referring to a process of reflection, which this course also triggered. One of the aims of this course was to help students to change their perceptions regarding (their) reality. To help them conceptualize their own theories. To offer them a context in which they could reflect on their lives, and dare to imagine a "better" future. In general the above extract is a positive outcome for this student.

Another student reflects on the "not telling too much" approach, as useful for them to use as an approach in teaching/learning contexts:

- [I] think that these lessons gave me different point of views to think. That the teacher can give more space to the students and by that I mean that the teacher doesn't have or say expectations loud to the students. Usually we think that this student is like this and this is like that so then the student start also to think like that and they can't get their whole po-

tential in use. But this way the teacher doesn't have any expectations and it can be overwhelming for the students but also freeing. How could the student or teacher even know the full potential without trying everything without boundaries? So I would say I will be freer as a teacher and I will let the students to find their creative way more on their own.

## 5.4 Conclusions

According to this diary-based Thesis report, developing a pedagogy for movement training, seems to be a goal that could be approached in two parallel ways; first, with the actual movement training and second with a method of Critical (Self) Reflection. The main pedagogy proposed by this report seems to be a Critical (Self) Reflection approach in a form of embodied critical self reflection as well. It seems that this approach helped students to understand better the origins of their unique individual corporeal expression. And by understanding better – as psychophysical entities - “where do they come from” and why, they felt confident to develop their own approaches to movement training; they felt better within their bodies; they developed a critical self - awareness of how to keep on developing according to their needs. This experience gave them a lot of stimulation as future pedagogues themselves, as well. Without preformed assumptions, a pedagogue is called to accompany students to their learning journey. To offer “tools” for self development and critical perspectives to actor’s training. The author believes that the most significant pedagogical tool offered during this movement training course, is Critical (Self) Reflection.

A way for supporting the above mentioned pedagogical tool seems to be the creation of a supportive atmosphere, where notions driven by binary oppositions can be gradually replaced; replaced by a vocabulary in-between binary oppositions. The Critical (Self) Reflection requires an in-class atmosphere of Affirmation and Joy, in order for the students to feel safe and supported when self-reflecting in public. The Ethics of Affirmation and Joy as a general philosophy promoting acceptance seems to be a relevant pedagogical philosophy for students to feel safe, appreciated, and acknowledged as equal members of a learning community; to feel that they have a voice and the most significant interest in their development.

This study also proposes the Via Positiva as a philosophical “tool” saturated by Feminist New Materialism(s) to be used as material to create the above mentioned atmosphere; the atmosphere that promotes the Ethics of Affirmation.

Thus, the pedagogy proposed as a Movement Training Pedagogy is based mainly on Critical (Self) Reflection supported by the Ethics of Affirmation and Joy saturated by the Via Positiva as a feminist intervention. This study mainly, according to its findings as well, supports this pedagogical approach to movement training.

Regarding Critical Pedagogy, the main tool proposed is the Problem Posing. This tool was not really well accepted by the students. It seems that the way the author used Problem Posing was problematic itself. It could be accepted by the students if the Problem Posing was also driven by a feminist intervention. The author as leader of the learning environment affected by his learning experiences, created a “false” atmosphere of negative anticipation. The study shows that if the students are treated as students and not as equal members of a learning community where teachers and students are “growing up together” lose their trust.

This study mainly shows the significance of creating a context within active relationships can be supported. The content of the education can be reshaped according to the significance of the context. In a context where Affirmation, Joy, acceptance and equality are cultivated, the content, regardless of the learning objectives, can be shaped in the needs of the actual participants. The study underlines the significance of human relations for the shape of a pedagogical context. Mainly, the pedagogy supported in this study is also a relational pedagogy.

Interestingly, Critical Pedagogy, Critical (Self) Reflection, and the Ethics of Affirmation and Joy, were immediately well accepted and appreciated by students with the “biggest problems”. All the students eventually appreciated the approach, but it remains an interesting aspect, how significant this approach was for more “vulnerable” individuals. It seems that the students, who faced difficulties regarding their ability to physical expression, appreciated an approach that didn’t set general movement goals to be achieved in equal standards by all the students. A physical move when it is modeled as the absolute truth to be absorbed by everybody creates “winners” and “losers”; creates good and bad, right and wrong, better or worse. Eventually it makes people lose their uniqueness; an important uniqueness in the shape of small or big communities. Actors don’t have to achieve a commonly accepted “truism” in a better, best or worst way. They can create their own realities based on their own individualities. Accordingly pedagogues don’t have to follow the “book”. They can create the educational contexts in collaboration with the students. They can create open-ended approaches by following the needs and desires of the students. The study shows that realities, the world and knowledge are flowing materials shaped and reshaped according to the needs of the people aligned with the shaping and reshaping of reality.



Future development regarding a movement training pedagogy would be ways to integrate intra-relationality and the theory of Educational Relationality (Ceder, 2019) into movement training further supporting and developing a Movement Training Pedagogy for future actors and pedagogues and actors as (public) pedagogues.

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