Chapter 4.6
Video-Enriched Learning Experiences for Performing Arts Students:
Two Exploratory Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

To close the gap between formal education and professional practice, Higher Education (HE) practitioners need to be aware of the importance of offering realistic learning scenarios where students can profit from personalised learning opportunities and meaningful learning. In this chapter, the authors study the extent to which viewing video recordings of the individual performances of dance and music students benefited the learning process. Evidence was gathered from two groups of undergraduate performing arts students at a HE institution in the United Kingdom, and from their corresponding teachers, who independently offered their students a personalised way of accessing visually relevant feedback on their performances via a virtual learning environment. Results suggest that this access to personalised learning facilitated critical reflection and learning from experience. It enabled the students to reposition themselves in relation to their actual performance, fostered their will to learn, and reaffirmed them as potential professional performers.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of personalised learning, video can be used to nurture the student experience, it *"can transport the viewer to places and times that he or she would not otherwise be able to see"* (Pinnington, 1992, p. 11), it can offer just-in-time meaningful visual representations and it can be used to enhance the student's motivation and will to learn (Barnett 2008). For performing arts students this represents a major breakthrough. By viewing video recordings of their own performances, students are able to step out of their bodies and see themselves from the audience point of view, as well as develop a realistic view of their own performance. This enables them to reflect and critically analyse their performance with a view to iterative improvement.

Researchers on video as a learning aid for performing arts students claim that "*students are most likely to benefit from video recordings; these can help them to develop a more realistic and rich description of their practice*" Leijen, Lam, Wildschut, Simons & Admiraal (2009, p. 170). Leijen et al (2009) conducted a study on how streaming video could be used to support dance students in carrying out reflection and concluded that video leads to a more personalised instruction. In their study, they used online peer feedback to help performers reflect on how the audience may perceive their act; build up a professional identity; and ground their experiences in the relevant professional context. Their motivation was to explore reflection of dance students, which despite its relevance and inclusion in educational practices, has been identified as a challenging activity that needs further facilitation (Leijen et al, 2009). Among the lessons they learned from the inquiry, were that students saw video as an effective medium for carrying out self-evaluations and to facilitate students to overcome worries about the judgments of others. They concluded that video in this academic context enhances three processes of reflection: "*describing an experience,*

evaluating an experience, and relating to multiple perspectives" (Leijen et al, 2009, p. 175).

Technology supported learning environments are commonly used in Higher Education (HE) to support students' reflection – by means of forum posts, guided readings, online debating, etc – however students, including those of performing arts disciplines, may lack objectivity and criteria to be able to cope with the task without appropriate guidance (Leijen, et al, 2009). A technology supported learning environment should be a safe atmosphere for the students to get such guidance, trust and opportunities for proactive interaction. It should provide the necessary information and support for students to deal with challenging and even emotional situations (Parizotto-Ribeiro & Hammond, 2003). Students should trust the validity of their experiences without spending a lot of time worrying about the judgements of others (Leijen, et al, 2009) which can result in negative consequences that may even extend beyond the training period (Ende, 1983). A technology-supported environment should provide prompt and objective feedback that students can trust, and embedding feedback in the videoed performance of the students seems to meet these demands.

In this chapter we will examine two cases and explore the extent to which a video enriched virtual learning environment can provide opportunities for personalised learning and be capable of providing sufficient opportunities to: foster performing arts threshold competencies (Meyer & Land, 2003), nurture the students' will to learn (Barnett, 2008), support critical reflection (Leijen et al, 2009), and offer access to realistic, ill-defined and meaningful content for analysis in accessible and flexible ways. This study examines the complex relationship between production of educational video, its use within an academic setting by performing arts teachers and the students' use, and experiences of using, the video resources. The focus is on the academic practice of two performing arts teachers and the experiences of their students as they use video to

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