Chapter 3

‘Brave New World’ Revisited: Drama Education in a Virtual Landscape

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Abstract

In ‘Brave New World: Decolonising Shakespeare in the Drama Education Curriculum’, which dealt with curriculum prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we gave an account of an extra-curricular Drama Education project using interactive workshopping and syncretic theatre, and recommended teacher agency as a powerful mechanism for transforming university curricula from within. It is our view that curriculum is a lived experience for lecturers, teachers, and students, and involves the community as well as the university; we have personally experienced, in curricular *research and practice, the fact that the context determines the form which will be taken for* instruction, assessment and eventual real-world application of the competences learned. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the context overnight, and, at the time of writing, we have had two years’ experience of the shock and dismay with which university educators greeted and addressed the changed circumstances. Not only Drama Education, but the real-world phenomenon of drama itself, was affected, with many theatres closing down. We critique the approach described in our earlier chapter from the point of view of its feasibility in

the virtual landscape to which we were forcibly exiled by the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a landscape, we believe, which is devoid of the very characteristics which make Drama Education viable, in particular, a sense of personal presence and care, as well as the intense group bonding which characterises amateur and professional dramatic productions. We then look at the Drama curriculum situation as reflected in the experiences of those Drama educators who lived through the first two years of the pandemic in order to ascertain what, if any, strategies they found to work in practice, and what implications these have for Drama Education curricula as well as curriculum theory in general. A theoretical framework for curriculum design is provided by a systemic model of teaching and learning which suggests how input in the form of contextual factors can materially affect the carrying out of various activities, as well as the overall effectiveness of the teaching or learning process.

Keywords: *Drama Education, COVID-19, virtual learning, theory, practice, systemic modelling*

Introduction

In 'Brave New World: Decolonising Shakespeare in the Drama Education Curriculum' (Ngcongo-James & Pratt, 2021), which dealt with curriculum transformation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we gave an account of an extra-curricular Drama Education project using interactive workshopping (Oshionebo & Asen, 2017) and syncretic theatre (Balme, 1999), and recommended teacher agency as a powerful mechanism for transforming university curricula from within (Biesta & Tedder, 2006; Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012; Toom, Pyhältö, & Rust, 2015). It is our view that curriculum is a lived experience for both lecturers and students (Pinar, 2011), and involves the community as well as the university. We have personally experienced, in curricular research and practice, the fact that the context determines the form which will be taken for instruction, assessment, and eventual real-world application of the competences learned (Branch &

Dousay, 2015; Cornbleth, 1988; Duran, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic changed the context overnight, and, at the time of writing this chapter, we have had two years' experience of the shock and dismay with which university educators greeted and addressed the changed circumstances. In this chapter, we critique the approach described in our earlier chapter from the point of view of its feasibility in the virtual landscape to which we were forcibly exiled by the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 'Brave new world' we envisaged in 2020, full of hope and possibilities, then became a barren landscape, and not an ecosystem in which professional skills or research could flourish (Biesta & Tedder, 2006, 2007). It was a landscape, we believe, which was devoid of the very characteristics which make Drama Education viable, in particular, a sense of personal presence and care, as well as the intense group bonding which characterises amateur and professional dramatic productions (Davis & Phillips, 2021; Lehtonena, Kaasinena, Karjalainen-Väkeväa, & Toivanena, 2016). In fact, the lack of opportunity for group bonding has been identified as an integral part of university functioning, not just for social activities but for effective carrying out of curricular activities (Mitchell, 2020; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006; Tan, 2021). Not only Drama Education, but the real-world phenomenon of theatre itself, was affected, with many theatres closing down (Fischoff, 2021; Moon, 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020; Toczauer, n.d.; Yezulinas, 2020). Thus, it was not only Drama Education which suffered, but the real-world theatre experience, which appeared to be in a decline just as people worldwide had become desperate for safe (ie, at home) entertainment to inject some form of intimate social experience into their lives through television and mobile devices. It must be noted that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for entertainment in digital format had become insatiable (Glenday, 2019; Sayal, 2019).

After critiquing the approach described in Ngcongo-James and Pratt (2021) in terms of how it would fare in a virtual landscape, we look at the Drama curriculum situation as reflected in the experiences of those Drama educators who

lived through the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to ascertain what, if any, strategies they found to work in practice, and what implications these have for Drama Education curricula as well as curriculum theory in general. A theoretical framework for curriculum design is provided by a systemic model of teaching and learning (Pratt, 2011b), which provides the basis for a tentative framework for analysing curriculum to show how input in the form of contextual factors can materially affect the carrying out of various activities, as well as the overall effectiveness of the teaching or learning process. It is hoped that an explication of the framework will provide insight into how curriculum theory and practice are related in Drama Education, the difference between theory and practice, and the main points of difference in curriculum theories and models of virtual learning currently available.

We concur (gratefully) with the authors, who state that it is near impossible to define the term 'curriculum'. Our working definition of curriculum is a 'course of study' (Merriam-Webster, 2022), the nature of the course and its subsections depending on what kinds of know-how are required and what methods of instruction (including practical) and assessment are thought to best fit the desired outcomes. The desired outcomes and the nature of the curriculum designed to achieve these are decided by context (Brady & Kennedy, 2010), including historical period and socio-political context, as well as the educational history and current stage and status of various institutions, and the greater community in which educational institutions are situated. In South Africa, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, curriculum transformation involving postcolonial or decolonial theories was well in progress (Lowman & Mayblin, 2011). A decolonising approach was preferred for the 2019 Curriculum Project (Bala, 2017; Grosfoguel, Hernández, & Velásquez, 2016; Mignolo, 2011). This was because postcolonial approaches tended to be text-focused and reactive (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffen, 2013; Földváry, 2013; Jeyalakshmi, 2019; Loomba, 2005; Loomba & Orkin, 1998), and we saw decolonisation as an interactive, multifaceted process. Furthermore, we believed that all

stakeholders should be consulted, and that a curriculum should not be imposed from above; also that constant regular consultation should take place to check the quality of both curriculum and delivery and ensure that changes are made if necessary (Le Grange, 2016). This means that curriculum is negotiable, and that all role players may not actually like it, but that it fits what they have agreed on. Values and beliefs, as well as the nature of the physical and social world for which the curriculum is designed, will always play a key role in curriculum construction. The only 'given' is that whatever curriculum theory is applied will change with the context, particularly in the virtual landscape of our 'brave new world'. To what it will change, we cannot predict: we can only affirm that, for Drama Education, curriculum is not about 'words on a page', but 'people on a stage', whether in an actual or virtual landscape.

Shakespeare in a Virtual Landscape

From glorious summer…

The 2019 Curriculum Project (Ngcongo-James & Pratt, 2021) consisted of an extra-curricular project in which a group of Drama Education students workshopped excerpts from *Julius Caesar* in ways which were accessible to local viewers (the 'Durban view'). The students became a 'theatre crew', experimenting, scriptwriting, rehearsing and finally enacting an excerpt of the play which was filmed and posted on YouTube, adding to the rich repository of Shakespearean plays already on the Internet (Marowitz, 1991; Mondello, 2006). It also engaged the student teachers in experiential group learning about the theatre-making process, which they would need so as to be able to teach Drama Education as a lived experience, as well as running school theatre productions or adaptations of the usual prescribed plays. Ngcongo-James' 'double consciousness' (Du Bois, 2007; Fanon, 1986) made it possible for her to see a Shakespearean text in the context of the Western tradition as well as its potential for local interpretation 'by the little people' (see Figure 3.1).

It enabled her to develop a pedagogy which empowered young black students, because she had the empathy to understand *their* disempowerment as well as the means whereby they could be empowered, that is, by acquiring *her* professional skills.

Figure 3.1: Two Sides of the Same Coin: Nellie's Double Consciousness (Figure 2.1 in N. N. Ngcongo-James, 2021, p. 37)

Ngcongo-James used a constructivist pedagogy informed by Paulo Freire's (2005) critique to 'decolonise Shakespeare', which shifted the Shakespearean text from a position of colonial elitism to a vibrant process in which students celebrated 'their' Shakespeare. In our previous chapter, we describe this process as an example of agential curriculum transformation, and suggest that Ngcongo-James' model (Ngcongo-James & Pratt, 2021, p. 184) might be adapted for use in other academic subjects in order to effect curriculum transformation at grassroots level, in the process, decolonising the curriculum (Grosfoguel *et al.*, 2016; Langa, 2017; Le Grange, 2016; Sithole, 2016). We cited this process as an example of the robust nature of syncretic theatre (Balme, 1999), where traditional Western theatre texts can become infused with the vigour of local indigenous culture (Ngcongo-

James & Pratt, 2021, p. 188). Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the elements which made this curricular innovation work were as follows:

- As with professional theatre-making, it was interactive and collaborative: planning and production involved all participants. The group of diverse students (not all from the same year or class) 'bonded' like a real-world theatre crew.
- The workshopping process challenged traditional Western theatre practice by a 'grassroots' approach instead of a top-down imposition of the 'Western canon'.
- Theatre-making involved local themes and interpretations, making it 'their' Shakespeare for the students.
- It was a form of self- and other empowerment.
- It was a form of decolonising and curriculum transformation: the 'Durban view' triumphing over the Western canon of supposedly 'universal' (but really oppressive) Shakespeare.
- It made student teachers realise the empowering potential of this kind of interactive grassroots theatre, so they could 'pay it on' to their school pupils in not only Drama Education but other subjects.
- It even made students interested in the original Shakespearian texts, so that they could show a genuine scholarly interest in traditional dramatic texts and not just pay 'lip service' to Shakespeare's achievements.

In both the *Shakespeare Project 2016* and the 2019 Curriculum Project, digital technology was used as an innovative strategy (Anderson, 2005; S. E. Davis, 2010; Nicholls & Philip, 2001, 2012; Philip & Nicholls, 2009). The students, while predominantly isiZulu-speaking, were city-smart millennials familiar with online learning (ie, on the institutional LMS) and familiar with YouTube and social media applications ('apps') such as WhatsApp and Instagram (Lupson, 2017; Proserpio & Gioia, 2007; Sandpearl, 2016). While cell phones and Moodle (in computer labs) were used for the *Shakespeare Project*

2016, tablets were provided for workshopping in the 2019 Curriculum Project to facilitate online viewing and sharing of dramatic moves and rehearsals on Instagram and small group communication on WhatsApp. This was necessary for the second project because of time constraints on contact time. While students in both projects expressed a marked dislike for Moodle, Figure 3.2 below shows how the presence of an animated lecturer in the Drama Computer Laboratory (at the Durban University of Technology) could bring the Internet alive and not make students feel that they were being deserted (Bhorat, 2014, p. 26).

Figure 3.2: Nellie bringing the Internet alive in the computer laboratory

It must be stressed that these projects used blended and hybrid approaches very successfully before the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 forced a switch to what Czerniewicz *et al.* (2020, p. 946) termed 'Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL)'. As we will suggest in this chapter, it is not the use of various forms (partial or total) of online learning which are the problem, but the features of the current context in which they

are applied, including serious deficits in preparedness and the infrastructure necessary for use. To this must be added the state of deprivation, distress, and despair which many South Africans experienced, and which could not be alleviated by cosmetic changes in curriculum design. It is clear that teaching and learning in universities needed to be thought through as a matter of urgency, in both accommodating the needs of a traumatised nation and making the curriculum both equitable *and* viable. It is in this context that we asked how Shakespeare would fare when exiled to a virtual landscape.

…to the winter of our discontent

What computers and the Internet can do is enhance communication and instruction in various ways by expediting access to messages and resources and presenting them in ways which are more vivid, interesting, animated, and organised than textbooks, an aspect explored on different applications by digital Drama pioneers Jennifer Nicholls and Robyn Phillip. But a computer or the internet[1] cannot teach any more than a filing cabinet can, so that seeing online learning as a solution to the lockdowns or constraints on campus attendance caused by the pandemic depends entirely on what we, as educators, set these mechanisms up to do. This requires not only expertise in curriculum and course development, but a recognition of what it is that online courses can and cannot do in instructional delivery, and finding work-arounds, if *possible*, for any deficits. The curriculum needs to take cognisance of not only the general givens and negotiables of instructional delivery on the Internet, but also the specific and unique nature of the discipline in question. This is where we feel that the field of Education has let us down, by paying lip-service to interactive learning and learner engagement but providing curricula which are little more than 'words on a page', delivered as such, and regurgitated (undigested) as such. The Education Department's obsession with 'saving time', and the fact

1 We mean the internet as a techno-system, not the World Wide Web, or collective human denizens of virtual space, who can, of course, provide instruction.

that total online earning lacks physical presence (Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006), exacerbates this problem, and leads to the 'writerly' type of education that, as Melrose (2003) points out, is completely at odds with the nature of the performing arts. In Drama Education, it leads to lack of integration of the competences needed for production as well as a focus on verbal analysis of dramatic texts, rather than interpretation by performance, or true theatre making:

> *Unlike in the more "scientific" disciplines, the content of performing arts subjects such as Drama is not content in the knowledge-content sense. The performing arts require knowledge of "how to" rather than knowledge 'about', except inasmuch as the latter might inform the former (Pratt, 2011a, p. 40). Knowledge of 'how to' perform or manage and produce performance(s) involves a highly complex, layered, and emergent set of competences which are sensed and lived rather than observed or measured. (Ngcongo-James & Pratt, 2021, p. 181)*

Melrose (2003, p. 14) terms this kind of expertise 'knowledge-practice', which is sensed rather than observed, and is typical of the arts (Melrose, 2003, p. 2). This type of knowledge-practice was catered for in the 2019 project before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic for the reasons given earlier. What we see as being problematic for a project such as this in a virtual landscape is as follows: the main obstacles are lack of *physical human presence* and face-to-face *interactivity*, which would mean that students could not *interact and bond* with each other as a theatre crew and cast do. Yes, we know that crews and casts of TV series have to some extent overcome this challenge, but they are professionals, have usually met at shoots and locations *before* the pandemic, and are to some extent used to bonding and emoting with cast members who are not physically present, as they are experienced screen performers rather than theatre folk (although some are expert in both fields). It is not just bonding which is the issue, or having a move demonstrated, but interacting with a co-actor who is not physically - or temporally - present, which requires not only specialised technology and filming techniques but also the

ability to carry out half of an interaction with the reciprocal half missing: *"work-from-home acting posed challenges, even for seasoned veterans"* (Stevens, 2021). We cannot expect this level of professionalism and experience from Drama Education students, who are prospective educators, not actors.

Next, the project used social constructivist pedagogy, where *knowledge is created in the interaction* (usually in small groups) *with immediate feedback* (Matola & Fomunyam, 2021). A constructivist approach is considered effective in breaking down social barriers while working towards decolonising (Bignall, 2010, p. 188). While WhatsApp is good for one-on-one or small group remote communication, and Moodle does have group discussion forums, these applications can in no way even approximate the excitement of live workshopping (Grainger, 2013; Kerr & Chifunyise, 2004). The interaction is not just in the mind, as in 'book learning' - it is visceral and 'felt' in the room as a palpable energy force. As Thurman (2015a, 2015b, 2016) has emphasised, Shakespeare is meant to be performed, not studied. Brook (1996, p. 9) has admitted how 'excruciatingly boring' a study of the written text is. As for group meetings on Microsoft Teams or Zoom, it is the *lack* of presence which is felt (tense silence, followed by: 'Hello – are you *there*?'). There is also the issue of *feedback*, which is very much dependent on *visual* prompts. Good teachers know how their words are being received and responded to by mainly *nonverbal feedback*; students also read a lot into the nonverbal messages of their lecturers: mood, intention, caring, *interest* **(**in the subject and in the class), leadership and control, and whether *the teacher is aware of them* and *listening* to them. This is why teacher presence is acknowledged to be a critical factor in teaching, more particularly so in teaching Drama (Lehtonena *et al.*, 2016). On the Internet, lecturers cannot see how students are responding to the lecture or their instructions, or if students are even *virtually* present; they cannot see their students' responses or reactions - just the end product in terms of work produced (or not produced), and can have no idea as to what difficulties their students might be experiencing along the way. The COVID-19 pandemic caused

widespread fear and anxiety amongst staff and students (Czerniewicz *et al.*, 2020, p. 946; Mthethwa & Land, 2022, p. 30).

COVID-19-Coping Strategies of Drama Educators

A look at some of the experiences of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that the term 'completely online' is a misnomer and exists only in the confused minds of certain senior university managers (Czerniewicz *et al.*, 2020, p. 960). The term 'multi-modal teaching and learning' (South Africa, 2020) is deceptive in suggesting that it might be advantageous to allow institutions to use any combination of delivery modes which could be seen to work. The reality is that most universities in South Africa do not have the expertise, experience, or infrastructure (including funds) to provide such a veritable cornucopia of diverse options for students, let alone any way of deciding which combinations of modes might work *in their specific context*. The reality as reflected in the literature both overseas and in South Africa, is that, so far, there has been a diverse interplay between Drama being learned in traditional face-to face interactions and though the use of digital media, the latter found to be prolific in resources but allegedly lacking in the immediacy given by the physical presence of participants, and in particular, a live audience.

In the accounts we consulted, mostly hybrid forms were used, ranging from predominantly live, with strict COVID-19 pandemic precautions being taken, to predominantly online or via digital applications. In the former case, precautions involved not only face masks and physical distancing, but ensuring that equipment was sanitised (or not shared) and spacing out the times that smaller groups worked together, as well as precautions against vocal trans in speech, singing and wind instruments. The latter option required access to specialist digital equipment or programmes which required training or prior knowledge, as well as computers (or tablets) and data for personal use and a suitably equipped venue (ie, home or studio) as well as Internet connectivity. The

wide range of work-arounds in Drama Education is noted by Mitchell (2020):

> *Convinced that the show must go on, schools have livestreamed shows via social media, hosted outdoor performances, staged socially distant plays in near-empty theatres, and are planning for radio renditions of Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol' and other holiday classics to keep Drama students and audiences engaged.*

However, Mitchell adds that, because of the precautions needed for live productions, much of the 'magic' had gone: *"Classrooms that once thrived on interaction have become sterile and rigid, according to high school Drama teachers"* (2020, p. 1).

Responses by Drama educators to the exigencies of operating during the COVID-19 pandemic all touch on the same themes, as follows:

- The physical and emotional safety of students and educators.
- That face-to-face and Internet delivery can complement each other but do not work so well in isolation.
- The nature of teaching and learning both in general and in specific disciplines (in particular, that the performing arts do not lend themselves to 'book learning').
- The importance of 'presence' in theatre as well as in teaching and learning.
- The fact that physical presence has important attributes for education in the performing arts, including visual and nonverbal communication cues, which do not appear as yet to be virtually replicable.

Rather than trying to categorise Drama educators by any one theme or mode, as responses show that actual practices are varied and multi-modal, we have instead grouped them as follows: *Super Troupers*, *Virtual Space Troopers*, *Earthlings*, and *Those Who Madly Teach*,[2] and the strategies used will be

2 The 'madly teach' label is a pun on Chaucer's description of the Monk: "And gladly wolde he lern and gladly teche". It was used in the title of a Science Fiction story by Loyd Biggle

discussed under those headings. It must be noted that the authors are not making value judgements about these ways of thinking, and that we have occupied all of these positions at one time or another ourselves.

Super Troupers (apologies to ABBA)

According to these staunch supporters of live theatre, 'the show must go on', and they virtually 'break a leg' to make this happen. Of the accounts provided by Drama educators, that given by Brian Cyr (2021), a member of the National Association for Music Education, demands special attention, if not vociferous applause. His background in music no doubt helped him to orchestrate a musical production of *Little Women* at Maloney High School in the face of the pandemic; the state and community provided support and co-operation. Realising that 'normal' theatre was no longer an option, Cyr decided that the students instead had to make a movie. However, this was planned and rehearsed live, taking all COVID-19 pandemic precautions: physical distancing, face masks (using special microphones for voice clarity), wider physical distancing for a live orchestra, and use of 'in-ear monitoring' for rehearsals, to work towards a high-quality sound recording. Set construction, as well as costuming, set dressing, and technical work all took place at night in small groups at separate times, with physical distancing, face masks, and attendance logs for contact tracing. A local recording studio provided audio software connecting the cast with musicians at home for rehearsals in real-time (ie, synchronous). Final taping took two nights, and lead actors were allowed to remove face masks (but stay physically distanced). Filming was conducted by three camera operators at a safe distance (30 feet) and the film was edited and produced with the help of the recording studio. A premiere viewing was held in the school theatre with

(1966), who showed how a shrewd, elderly 'schoolmarm' transformed remote learning by introducing live students into her transmission studio, thereby making what had been total online learning more interactive and interesting to learners, and motivating online attendance.

cast only invited (with face masks and physical distancing), and the production was then made available for viewing online. Cyr concludes: *"it became clear that we succeeded in giving our students an authentic, gratifying, and unique theatrical experience"* (2021, p. 6). We agree and celebrate his dedication in doing so!

Virtual Space Troopers (apologies to *Starship Troopers* and *Star Trek*)

These brave souls have *"boldly gone where no one has gone before"*, that is, into the depths of virtual space, simulating virtual presence online ('Beam me up, Scotty!'). It is not so much the use of new technology, but the innovative use of existing technology in order to meet the specific needs of Drama Education, in particular, the need for physical presence:

> *Our field requires live action, and participants need to co-create socially in a shared space. From one day to another, we found ourselves in a situation where we had to create theatre and drama from an isolated room, where we were sitting on our own and seeing others only through a screen. Space was not shared any more, and all activities were reduced to two-dimensional images on our laptops. Many thought that doing drama in such circumstances was impossible (Cziboly & Bethlenfalvy, 2020, p. 645).*

A solution offered by Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) was the use of process Drama, building on the work of O'Neill (1995) and its online application in Davis (2009). As neither had access to technology or design teams and had to respond quickly to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, their research focus was *"to identify work forms that do not require too much technical preparation. In other words, we sought easily accessible ways of working together that would trigger the imagination of our participants"* (Cziboly & Bethlenfalvy, 2020, p. 646). They therefore set up imaginary online scenarios in which students could participate and interact with each other in various real-life roles with different forms of interaction involved. Scenario one involved a case based on the alleged vandalising of a Statue of Liberty in a small (fictitious) Italian

town, with roles ranging from the mayor, the perpetrator, and journalists to townsfolk. 'Out of role' discussions took place, with the project culminating in the composition of a poem out of the resulting newspaper headlines. The next scenario "*tested out a Drama lesson that allowed the participants to reflect directly on the lockdown situation within a fictional frame*" (Cziboly & Bethlenfalvy, 2020, p. 646). In Scenario two, participants role-played university lecturers, teacher-trainees, and students during lockdown, while the facilitator played the part of director of a lockdown helpline group as well as switching to the lecture group. The scenario involved the need to respond to a confused video (to decide whether help was required) as well as fabricating various help messages, creating situations for subsequent interviews with the troubled writers, and concluded with participants having to write responses to any of the help messages they had made up.

Apart from the focus on people distressed by the COVID-19 pandemic (which included the participants), the distanced and verbal nature of many of the interactions in Scenario two is typical of real-world helpline work, as well as being a problem in online Drama Education. This research shows not only a concern for staff and students, but a focus on the appropriateness and relevance of course content as well as delivery modes, *given the context in which teaching and learning was taking place*. The researcher-educators have carefully thought through the concept of teaching in a global pandemic. It is not necessarily advanced technology which is the answer, but the creative use of existing technology in ways which transcend the problems. As Davis (2020) comments: "*teaching performing arts online is feasible when learning objectives drive decisions, but the mediating technologies must be utilised intelligently.*"

There *are*, in fact, innovative projects using technological advances intelligently for theatre-making:

> *One innovative programme to emerge in the initial fallout of stay-at-home orders was the NYU Tisch School of Drama's launch of a course, the Brendan Bradley Integrative*

Technology Lab, integrating virtual reality (VR) technology for students to use in practice and producing a play for a tele-audience in a social virtual reality space. (Toczauer, n.d.)

The technology laboratory was used by one group of students to create a performance to be carried out in virtual reality for a tele-audience, using avatars to interact with each other in digital space. Another group was directed via Zoom to plan a play which was streamed online. This 'hybrid education model combining acting and technology' shows how the performing arts could work online, but whether it could be used elsewhere is another matter. Use of this model brings into focus the question of whether live theatre is morphing into filmmaking, which some Drama educators see as perhaps an inevitable transition in terms of the pause in the theatre industry caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A caveat is given by Timplalexi (2020, p. 45), who comments that online showing can turn theatre into bland, consumer media content instead of art. However, he concedes that: *"these hybrid intermedial forms may actually be works of art awaiting to be received and evaluated with new criteria"* (Timplalexi, 2020, p. 53).

The sheer scope of projects mentioned so far is, however, beggared by the scope of the hybrid learning pedagogy used at Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA) as described by Li, Li and Han (2021). The pedagogy does not use any technology which was not already known, but it is the formidable organisational expertise in blending the multi-modal mix into a 'hybrid pedagogy' which is truly impressive, as shown in Figure 3.3 below, and which gives this project its stellar rating. As Li, Li and Han conclude: *"this study shows that a good use of information technologies leads to rich and meaningful teaching and learning experiences"* (2021, p. 7652).

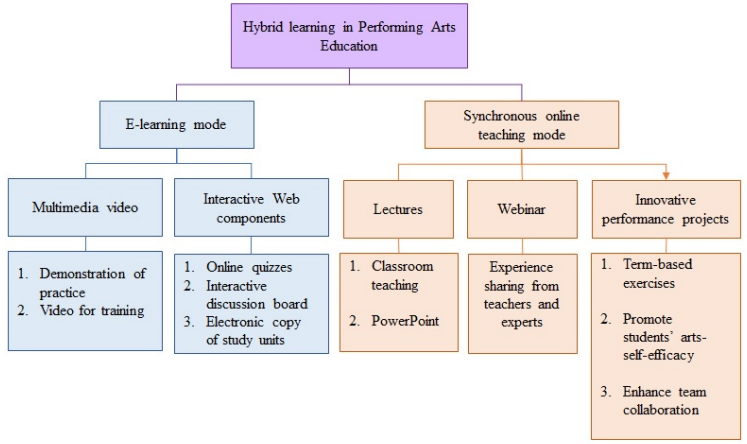

Figure 3.3: Framework of the Hybrid Pedagogy Used at HKAPA (Fig. 1 Framework of the Hybrid Learning in Performance Arts Education, in Li, Li and Han, 2021, p. 7640)

Earthlings

For these folk, it is 'same old, same old': they have been using digital apps and the Internet all along; these devices worked then, and they are working now (what is the problem?). The strategies in this category are not innovations per se, although they may now be used for reasons not thought of (eg, during a pandemic) when they were first introduced. For example, Harvard's hybrid lecture room (Rosenburg, 2022) is a synchronous blend of live lecture room and online participation, which has been a possible option for over ten years. However, it needed to be developed into a working model in anticipation of its future usefulness by acquisition of the necessary technology; it was not just convenient but actually *necessary* during the COVID-19 pandemic; that is to say, for use by First World academics and students. It would not work in South Africa, where is it is difficult to find a working (and Internet-connected) computer laboratory, *supposing* that a power cut were not occurring on campus during the lecture time, as well as at random times around the country, and

note that power cuts affect Internet provision as well, and resourceful thieves are now stealing the cables while the power is off. Harvard's hybrid option is a technical solution, highly desirable, but, like a Lamborghini, way beyond our means. Moreover, it is more suited to a wordy, 'writerly' kind of book-education (Melrose, 2003), and would not accommodate the 'whole body involvement' necessary for Drama Education (T. C. Davis, 2020). This inconvenient truth was already noted by Phillips and Nichols in their extensive pioneering research work on digital learning in Drama Education (Nicholls & Philip, 2001, 2012; Philip & Nicholls, 2007, 2009).

In Simamora's study in performing arts education, communication between participants involved synchronous communication via 'video conferencing, Zoom, Google Meet, and WebEx' as well as asynchronous communication such as 'email, Google Forms, streaming video content, posting lecture notes, and social media platforms' (Simamora, August, 2020, p. 86). However, Simamora was aware of the problems, not only in the operation of these media, but also in the response of students to their use. He notes the need for physical presence when students are learning processes such as dance moves, and concludes:

> *This paper has shown so many responses about the challenges experienced by the students while studying online, such as positive and negative impact of online learning, economic conditions, anxiety during online learning …the risk of user data security, face-to-face class to online learning, ability, finding effective online learning media, and expectations (Simamora, August, 2020, p. 86).*

The curriculum designer then needs to think not only about 'multi-modal' content and delivery, but also how tuition will be experienced by the students. The devices he mentions are not new; neither is the way in which they are used here. However, since they were a standard way of operating during the COVID-19 pandemic and not interesting new methods, resistance to use was starting to build up. This is also not new, and it was already well documented in Oblinger and

Oblinger (2005) that technology-savvy millennials craved live interaction with faculty and peers, and did not want to be fobbed off onto machine learning and being abandoned by teachers (Bhorat, 2014, p. 26). A series of international surveys carried out by Davis and Phillips revealed that "the changes demanded an extensive increase in workload, and teachers expressed concerns for students for whom the digital divide was an unavoidable reality"; and they emphasise the importance of the "embodied, social, and relational aspects of learning... the 'invisibles' of education" (Davis & Phillips, 2021, p. 67).

Those Who Madly Teach

This refers to a band of dedicated Drama educators who, having travelled to the outer regions of virtual space and back, have posted resources online, and even educational videos offering guidance on online learning. There is nothing new about posting resources online. However, these have taken a new twist in terms of educators providing not only online learning resources, but advice and guidance on teaching Drama online during the pandemic. According to Barack (2020, p. 1):

> *The Folger Shakespeare Library, for example, offers online resources on how to teach theatre during Covid-19, including lesson plans it built around specific plays including "Othello" and "Romeo and Juliet".*
>
> *The Educational Theatre Association offers tips for those schools that have reopened, such as having students continue to maintain six feet of distance, having them wear masks during all rehearsals, and even washing all costumes and sanitising wigs after each rehearsal.*

Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020, p. 645) found "*many different great examples of Drama games, role plays, improvisation games and other similar activities".* Not only resources and safety tips, but also instructional videos for Drama educators have been made available online. The 'DIVAS' group (Bucs *et al.*, 2020,

p. unpaged) went the extra parsec and produced and uploaded online videos on the following topics:

1. Process and Accountability: Addressing Exercises in a COVID-19-Conscious Classroom or Studio.
2. Teaching Voice or Movement Courses Virtually.
3. Face-to-Face Studio or Rehearsal Practices in the Time of physical Distancing.
4. Virtual Scene Work and Rehearsing Online: Designing Instruction for Virtual Acting (unpaged).

Not only did the 'DIVAS' apply their minds to solving the problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, *but they shared these with other educators*, as only dedicated teachers will, as has Dr Daphne Sicre (2020), the originator of a comprehensive guide to online theatre of over 50 well-organised pages, to which viewers are invited to contribute. Sicre has posted a wealth of information, guidance, and examples of theatre-craft: a living legacy. The guide offers advice to educators on 'Students and accessibility' which South African University administrators would do well to heed. In this category, one final accolade is given to a group of young students who 'paid it forward' closer to home, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Durban. A group of Drama and Performance students (it was their idea) made a three-and-a-half-minute video showing fellow students how to take precautions against COVID-19 infection, using rhythmic dance movements to soften the sinister import of their message; the video encouraged other people to make similar short videos about COVID-19 pandemic awareness and precautions (Mungroo, 2020). The filming was completed in the teeth of the pandemic, a week before lockdown. Their action parallels in digital form the live theatre of a young Ugandan group which gave weekly performances at markets, schools, and places of worship to assist adolescents with life skills (Mbonye, 2020). However, apart from live performances and meetings, their public-spirited instruction was limited to radio talk shows and songs. The UKZN group had the benefit of using technology which could disseminate their message more widely *and* safely.

Coming down to earth with a jolt …

While we celebrate the attempts of Drama educators to deal with running courses during the pandemic, as well as some highly creative COVID-19-coping strategies, we reiterate our contention that virtual learning is definitely not a panacea, in view of the above accounts, which suggest that the nature of theatre-making needs to be re-examined, as well as how it is learned, and the means needed to achieve this. In other words, the Drama Education curriculum needs a re-think, particularly on how contextual factors, including the pandemic and the switch to online learning, might impact on teaching and learning in the performing arts.

A Framework for Analysis

The problem with communication in a virtual world (as in a written text) is not posed so much by asynchronicity per se, although this does cause problems, but by distancing (see Pratt, 2007a, pp. 710-711). What is lost or diminished in distanced communication and, therefore, in the virtual landscape, are those elements we have characterised above as critical: they are not just 'nice to have', but essential prerequisites for learning. The framework for analysis in this chapter is derived from systemic modelling of the communication process (Pratt, 2007b), which was used in formulating an applied model of written communication, but was subsequently found to provide a model of course design (Pratt, 2005, 2007a, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Pratt & Gutteridge, 2006; Pratt & Peppas, 2008). In this chapter it is proposed as a framework for analysing the specific problems caused by contextual factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic which impact on course delivery and need to be catered for in course design. The benefit of using a systemic model is that it has potential relevance for *any* context in which courses are delivered, as it generalises on the functions which must be carried out for teaching or learning to take place

effectively.[3] A disadvantage of systemic models is that they are by their generalised nature vague, and need to be focused on the specific situations in which they are used. This can, however, be achieved by means of an input option. The model discussed in our previous chapter was a personal construct developed from experience and teaching insight (Ngcongo-James & Pratt, 2021, p. 184), and was specifically geared to Drama Education in particular and the liberal arts in general. However, the model used as a framework here has more general application to course design and is based on a system of communicative functions necessary for communication to take place effectively, if at all. As the COVID-19 pandemic put constraints on communication in particular, it is thought that this framework will not only be of use in identifying problems caused by the pandemic, but also in homing in on the specific nature of the constraints on communication and how they might be catered for not only in course design, but also in curriculum design.

The 'system of functions' which was proposed (in research and publications) as being essential for teaching and learning to take place is as follows:

1. Contextual**:** This function relates to the social context in which knowledge is constructed and requires the course designer to decide how learning is to be contextualised.
2. Ideational**:** This function relates to the source of the knowledge to be constructed, or the process whereby knowledge actually comes into being (it also raises the question of course content).
3. Interactive**:** As knowledge is constructed in learning interactions (including interactions with resources), the course designer needs to anticipate how participants will interact in constructing knowledge.
4. Social: The social parameters, conventions, or constraints operating in a given learning situation need to be identified

3 'Effectively' being dependent on the extent to which the course achieves the desired outcomes.

and made explicit to learners, particularly in respect of local assessment criteria.[4]

5. Reflexive: This relates to how participants will reflect on and assess their performance in constructing knowledge, and includes the issue of formal assessment (if any) and how it will be carried out, as well as course assessment. (Pratt, 2005, p. 138; 2011b, pp. 10-11).

The way in which the functions are fulfilled is thought to be a key factor not only in course but also curriculum design, especially in higher degree courses where students are (or are supposed to be) actively involved in constructing knowledge as independent scholars (Clarke, 2002; Conceicao-Runlee & Daley, 1998; Jonassen, 1999). At the time of its formulation, references to the functions could be found in works on online course design: they are echoed in a tutorial by Jonassen in the terms 'active', 'constructive', 'collaborative', 'contextual', and 'reflective' (Jonassen, n.d.), but they had not at the time been identified as the functions necessary for constructing knowledge. Using a framework formed of the system of functions for analysis does not categorise courses in terms of how knowledge is constructed, as with Mason's three models of online courses (Mason, 1998), but focuses rather on establishing exactly how knowledge *is* constructed in any given course: the system of functions is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It is therefore not biased in favour of any paradigm or pedagogy. The reason for this is that the functions were identified within a critical realist approach (Bhaskar, 1998, 2008) which attempted to establish the essence of human communication as it *occurs*, as opposed to how it *should be*. This is not to say that the investigation was value-free, merely that the value was to transcend, as far as possible, socially constructed views of communication to arrive at

4 The term 'social' is used in the linguistic and not the convivial sense and refers to the social constraints operating at institutions. Moreover, what is viewed as 'learning' or 'research' may well not only differ in different universities, but also in different faculties or academic departments of the same university.

what the reality might be, based on, but not *formed by,* human cognition and experience. A detailed account of the systemic modelling process used can be found in Pratt (2011a).

Applying this framework to the 2019 Curriculum Project to identify problems running the course *after* the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown provides the picture given in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 contains the problems already recognised intuitively, but the framework provided by the course design model allows one to see how the learning process is not just damaged but pretty much destroyed in the given context. On the positive side, by showing the functions essential for learning to take place, the model gives us the option of seeing whether the knowledge-practice we wish students to acquire might be developed in a different kind of course, rather than tossing Drama Education in the bin or running a 'COVID-19-safe' course which is such a travesty that it will put our students off 'live' theatre for life.

Building on the model of course design, we suggest that such a systemic framework based on the necessary functions might prove helpful in showing whether a curriculum will achieve the desired outcomes in any given context, including a context ravaged by a worldwide pandemic such as COVID-19. This framework might also be helpful in explaining the relationship between theory and practice in this particular case. In the process of systemic modelling described by Franck (2011), a theoretical model is formulated comprising the 'system of necessary functions' which, it is concluded, is essential for a phenomenon to occur. The theoretical model is then validated (or modified) by comparing it with an empirical (or applied) model describing how the phenomenon can be observed to occur in actual real-world instances. Figure 3.4 illustrates the relationship between the theoretical model (the system of communicative functions), and the empirical model (in this case, the system of stages in curriculum design: note that these stages are algorithmic functions, not a narrative sequence). An overview of the systemic modelling process

Table 3.1: Problems with Course Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Essential Functions	Problem
Contextual	Recruitment pre-pandemic relied on a personal approach (not viable during the pandemic). PPE and distancing would be needed if in a lab or studio (extra cost and monitoring). If run in mixed mode, we note that students dislike the LMS Moodle (the only free option), and that they do not have connectivity and mobile data for this, if not on campus. Synchronous theatre performances are not possible in a Teams or Zoom setting, only recorded ones (again, recording a live performance would require PPE and distancing). Groups rehearsing or performing at homes are not an option (travelling, PPE, no studio space).
Ideational	Knowledge (i.e., of Drama and theatre-making working from a Shakespearean text) is created in the interaction, and interactivity is limited.
Interactive	Theatre workshopping requires face-to-face, simultaneous group interactions, which are not safe, or easy (or economical) to organise safely, if this is decided, and has agreement of participants, as well as parental consent and university permission.
Social	The nuances of Drama cannot be acquired from the lecturer or more experienced peers because of the lack of face-to-face interactivity and lack of visual cues. The result is that students do not truly understand the social practices and traditions which govern the field or which are appropriate in different contexts.

Essential Functions	Problem
Reflexive	Performance relies on peer and audience feedback, which is lacking because of the lack of face-to-face interactivity and physical presence. Assessment would have to be online, as performance is not safe, and the production could be assessed by the lecturer only, with no audience reaction or even any idea if the performers are watching so that they can understand the assessment. Participants are unlikely to give spontaneous feedback in writing as to what the experience was like for them and what they learned. The students would not see the lecturer's response to see how they were doing as the project took place. Course assessment by faculty or examiners would rely on tick-box written assessment only.

(as well as the nature of the theory involved, the relationship between theory and practice, and the relationship between theory and models).

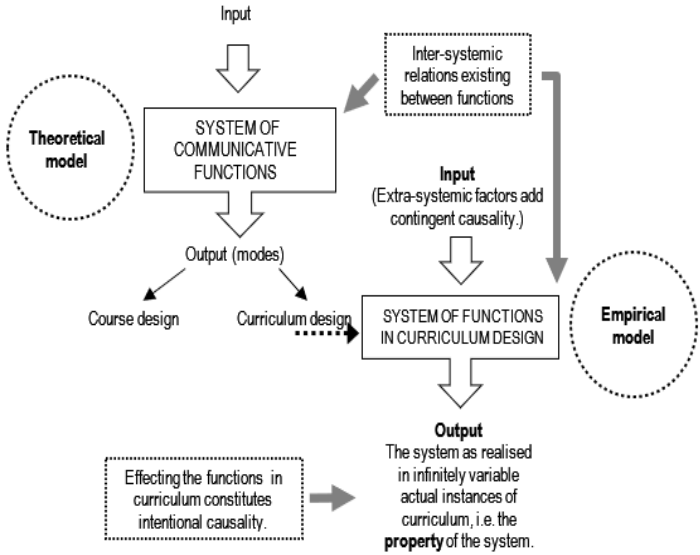

Figure 3.4: The Complex Layers of Systems Involved in the Systemic Model of Curriculum Design (in Pratt (2011a, pp. 37-48)

The system of functions has the advantage of not being limited to any one instructional approach or curriculum theory, but is thought to be generalisable across paradigms, in other words, it offers a generalisable principle of curriculum design. The framework in Table 3.1 is therefore suggested as a possible means of analysing curriculum in terms of how events such as the COVID-19 pandemic might impact on teaching and learning, when viewed as input into the system of functions. The proposed framework can be used to show where and how input (ie, from changed real-life settings) impacts on teaching and learning, and, while all of the above examples relate to the context in which Drama Education is situated, we suggest

that the framework could be relevant in terms of how input impacts on curriculum in other disciplines. It must be noted that some of the solutions or work-arounds provided by our Drama educators reveal that they are working in very different socio-cultural contexts. In the South African context, there are serious problems with totally online learning. Czerniewicz *et al.* (2020) give an account of the inequalities university students and staff experienced in switching to the Emergency Remote Online Teaching and Learning (ERTL) system. They point out that these inequalities existed before the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown but have been highlighted by it, and relate to life expectancy, access to resources and the right to dignity and autonomy. Expecting our students and staff to engage in emergency online learning may well lead to exclusion of the disadvantaged and, at best, mediocre programme delivery for the supposedly more fortunate. Moreover, the 'multipronged, multimodal strategies' announced by the government (South Africa, 2020) have meant that nobody actually knows what they are supposed to be doing. Students do not want to stay at home as this is not conducive to learning and deprives them of the very means whereby they might engage in online learning, namely 'electricity, equipment, connectivity' (Czerniewicz *et al.*, 2020, p. 955). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors wanted to interact face-to-face with students, but DUT and UKZN were opening and closing like accordions all year round, so most staff (including the authors) stayed at home as directed.

The knock-on effects on how the curriculum operates (according to the model) were as follows:

1. **Contextual:** Learning was not contextualised in terms of what should happen and how it would happen, and implementation of online learning was patchy, to say the least, with students and staff relying heavily on cell phone connectivity, which supports neither print literacy nor theatre-making (ie, as the sole medium).
2. **Ideational:** As face-to-face interactions were badly constrained and online interactions lacked control, it was unlikely that much learning was taking place. Concerns

about 'saving time' led to syllabus items being left out, and there was a sense that plagiarism was running out of control. Students needed much more attention from staff, who were becoming exhausted as a result.

3. **Interactive:** Learning interactions were negatively affected by lockdowns and recourse to online learning. Internet learning requires more reading and writing, which is particularly exhausting for English second language students and staff.
4. **Social**: How staff and students should behave in an academic context and their obligations came under increasing pressure. As staff were not physically present to model academic behaviour and procedures, students literally did not know what it was that they were expected to do or how to do it. As rules and procedures tend not to be written so that students can actually understand them, and staff were not on campus or responding to phone calls and emails, students were at risk of failing a degree in terms of not conforming to university criteria for graduating. One mature doctoral student, a Mathematics teacher, assumed (understandably) that the university had closed down for two years, and was told he could not graduate as he had exceeded the maximum duration of study.
5. **Reflexive:** Online assessment has loopholes which had to be identified rapidly and blocked, while feedback forms tended to omit the very things students and staff found wanting. In a context where people are present, resentments or misunderstandings can be recognised and sorted out quickly. In a distance situation, things tended to simmer and get ugly, leading to violent protests and vandalism, so that court orders were obtained, and police were called in.

To sum up, the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for what is virtually distance learning put huge stress on students and staff, as well as 'dumbing down' the academic programmes of supposedly tertiary institutions. On the plus side, looking at the problem areas in terms of the necessary functions has suggested ways of remedying the situation. To start

with, it was clear that a lot more effort needed to be put into communicating key information in writing to students and staff, as they were no longer together in a physical context to see what was going on. This meant more use of the press, social networks, radio, and television. Drama Education students and staff could have played a much more prominent role in this if they were networked properly. They could also have played a key role in making online resources and lectures more attractive and interesting. Most importantly, the model of curriculum design could have been applied to interrogate the nature of Drama Education and how the curriculum could have been modified so that it could have been best learned as well as served the community in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic or other factors which might have impacted on the learning context, knowledge content, delivery, operating constraints, or assessment.

Conclusion

As we undertook to do, in this chapter we critiqued the approach described in our earlier chapter from the point of view of its feasibility in the virtual landscape into which we had been thrown by the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic and noted that the transition would not be a comfortable one for us or our students (or Shakespeare). The Drama curriculum situation as reflected in the experiences of those Drama educators who lived through the pandemic showed how creative practice could transcend the forbidding aspect of this virtual landscape, and reach the peaks of creativity, but those were heights to which we and our students ('the Durban view') could not aspire. Interactivity and presence (actual and virtual) have been shown to be key factors in performing arts education, as well as the value of the 'invisibles', that is, the social and relationship aspects of teaching and learning. We suggested that a framework provided by a systemic model of teaching and learning might assist with curriculum design in terms of how input in the form of contextual factors can affect the carrying out of various activities, as well as the overall effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

The modelling process has indicated how theory and practice in education are related, and has shown that the model of curriculum design differs from other curriculum theories in generalising about the 'givens' of teaching and learning in terms of functionality rather than educational paradigms or value systems; it is the practitioners who infuse the performance of the functions with their beliefs and values, which we think is a 'good thing', as educators have very personal concepts of what good teaching and learning is. The models of virtual learning currently available and how they are expressed in practice were shown in the practices of the Drama educators whose COVID-19-coping strategies we described.

In writing this chapter, we became aware of some of the key changes in the field of curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic. The curriculum matters which were currently being prioritised in curriculum conversations were focused on coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. The main change was in hastily gearing education in the various disciplines to cope with the constraints imposed by the pandemic, *either* by changing or adapting the curriculum, *or* by changing instructional delivery. Delivery could be changed in numerous ways, in 'multipronged, multimodal strategies' (South Africa, 2020); a variety of these options has been shown in the strategies used by Drama educators. These concerns about delivery are changing the curriculum experience in that educators are questioning the nature of teaching and learning, what should be taught, why it should be taught, and how it should be taught; also, whether it *can* be taught, given the current context. Theatre educators are grappling with the problem of whether theatre-making is still relevant and viable, or whether it needs to morph to a form more likely to be amenable to both delivery and current and future needs, namely filmmaking. Finally, in terms of the curriculum encounters which are emerging within these times, it has become clear that not just educators and students, but also communities and businesses will need to be engaged, as theatre, like other creative industries, has been hit hard by the pandemic and this has had economic consequences with long-

lasting effects. According to world-renowned epidemiologist, Professor Abdool Karim, the COVID-19 pandemic is not going to go away in a hurry, if ever (Dipa, 2022). So, what can *we* do about it? What Professor Karim says of the pandemic could well be applied to curriculum: "Nobody knows for sure what will happen next but *we can all still be responsible for our own behaviour and there is still much room for improvement*" (Dipa, 2022, our emphasis).

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