Technology, Creativity, and Social Interaction:

Blogging the Choreographic Process

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When learning about the process of creating movement for a dance piece, choreography students are often asked to document their own choreographic process. This is a way for both the instructor and student to monitor the evolution of the piece (e.g., inspiration, development of meaning, specific steps and movement phrases, formations and patterns, modifications, and final product). The traditional documentation method is a handwritten journal, continually updated by the student as the course progresses, and finally turned into the instructor for evaluation. While this is a common and completely valid method (I found it quite meaningful when asked to do this in my college choreography class), it neglects an aspect that has great potential for enhancing creativity: social interaction. Receiving peer feedback during the choreographic process is a way for students to be exposed to new perspectives and find out whether their intended message is coming across as desired. Web 2.0 technology has made educational social interaction such as this easily accessible, especially in the form of blogs; and Budge (2012) states that "[y]oung creatives in particular are choosing to work with a social approach to creativity" (p. 45). While I currently do not have a classroom, from experience I see the potential of choreography blogs in dance courses from middle school to graduate school. In this paper I will focus on the college level as my audience. Though some challenges exist with using this technology, overall, blogs allow for undergraduate choreography students to easily and creatively document and reflect on their choreographic process, as well as to enhance their creativity through social interaction.

Blogging

As explained by Manning and Johnson (2011), a blog is a type of Web page on which an author "records events and insights on a regular basis" (p. 82), and readers can comment, making it interactive. There are many types of blogs, but the one I chose for choreography is considered

both individual and academic. This means that students are in control over their own information and their posts may receive commentary; and posts are written primarily for learning purposes and meant to reach out to connect with fellow students (Bartholomew, Jones, & Glassman, 2012; Deng & Yuen, 2012). Examples of free blogging tools available are WordPress, Edublogs, and Google Blogger. Deng and Yuen (2012) state that "[b]logging is acclaimed as a flexible tool that can be used to support both individual and community learning" (p. 49). Much of this acclaim comes from its ease of use, multimedia capabilities, and possibility for social interaction.

Ease of Use

The fact that a blog is an easy tool to utilize by students is one reason why I selected it as a method for documenting the choreographic process. According to Manning and Johnson (2011), "publishing a blog may require an understanding of blogging technology approaching that of an intermediate user" (p. 83), while just reading a blog can be accomplished by novices. Therefore, at the undergraduate level, students should be able to quickly master this tool. Blogs are also considered to be accessible by all users, with the possibility of being navigated using a screen reader and/or pointing device if necessary (Manning & Johnson, 2011).

Multimedia Capabilities

Yang and Chang (2012) clarify that the capabilities of blogs appeal to experts as well as novices, and explain that a blog is "a type of website, typically maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or videos" (p. 126). In comparison with a handwritten choreography journal, a choreography blog allows for a wide variety of media formats to be integrated. For example, in addition to writing text that describes their creative process, students could include a photograph of what inspired a certain idea or emotion, a video of a newly created movement phrase, or a link to a website that explains how to perform a particular lift they would like to incorporate into their piece.

Social Interaction

Not only can students be more creative with the content of choreography blogs, their creativity has the potential to grow as they interact with each other by receiving comments on their posts, replying to those comments, and commenting on others' posts. To be specific, this interaction would be labeled as student-student, and when the instructor is involved, instructor-student interaction. Both of these types of interaction are interpersonal and occur within an educational context (Woods & Baker, 2004). In regard to their study involving undergrad and graduate student blogging, Yang and Chang (2012) conclude that "engaging in dialogues in the form of blog comments is associated with positive attitudes towards online peer interaction and academic achievements" (p. 134). This positivity is echoed by Budge (2012) concerning her experience in a blogging community of artists: "If I was not… receiving feedback and advice on a relatively regular basis my creative experience would be a lot more isolated and alienating" (p.49). Blogging communities, like other Web 2.0 communities, "offer the possibility for new avenues of thought by promoting the search of information that either supports novel ideas or sends them in new directions" (Bartholomew et al., 2012, p. 19). Part of the choreographic process is being open to growth/change of one's work, and interacting with fellow choreographers through blog commentary is a way to foster this aspect of dance creation.

Integration

The actual creation of a dance piece usually does not occur solely in a classroom/studio setting, but occurs wherever and whenever the choreographer becomes inspired. Choreography ideas can come in many ways, from sitting and thinking, to moving freely without thought (improvisation). In integration of the choreography blog for a course, then, it is important to account for this unpredictability, and allow students to record and update their blogs at any time they need to. Fortunately, this can be easily accomplished with computers or mobile devices and

internet access. The instructor will focus regular class time for students to learn various choreographic methods, view and analyze dance pieces by celebrated choreographers throughout history, participate in movement improvisation activities, and rehearse pieces once completed. Even though the choreography blogs are mainly considered an out-of-class activity, it is also important to effectively integrate instructor involvement and assessment.

Instructor Involvement

While the principal interaction in choreography blogging should consist of students reading and commenting on each other's blog posts, instructor-student interaction should also be incorporated, especially when "the motivators with respect to the individual and/or social dimensions are not strong enough" (Deng & Yuen, 2012, p. 61). In light of their research, Deng and Yuen (2012) argue that "students' engagement with academic blogging might be enhanced if the instructor could be more active in posting and responding to students' blogs" (p. 61), and that the instructor's messages and weekly blog summary were appreciated by students and increased a sense of community. Overall, Deng and Yuen (2012) believe that instructors' involvement in their class blogging community helps to "maintain students' motivation, provide feedback, encourage students to think deeper, and engage them more as active participants" (p. 61). Additionally, instructors are responsible for assessing students' blogging participation.

Assessment

Bartholomew et al. (2012) advise that a "course blog thrives best when participants work towards assignments that provide reinforcement through commentary and grades" (p. 24). In order for the instructor to assess and grade students' participation in the choreography blogs, students should be required to post at least once per week (and comment at least twice per week on others' blogs) throughout the course duration until a deadline set by the instructor for the final choreography assignment of a finished piece. The instructor will read posts to make sure they are

on task (even if a student experiences "choreography block" one week, they would be expected to blog about it), comment, and send messages to the class to keep everyone engaged. A valuable aspect of blogging is that it naturally integrates self-assessment. For example, Sandra Chatterjee, a dancer in a collective which blogs their choreographic process, says of their posts: "I find they become extremely valuable when reflecting, evaluating and considering feedback at milestone moments or upon completion of a project" (Koch, 2012, par. 23). Similarly, Yang and Chang (2012), state that "composing blog comments involves stepping back, reflecting, and analysing, which enables individuals to become more thoughtful and mindful of their work" (p. 127).

Challenges

Despite the numerous positive aspects of blogging, there are some challenges that come with using this technology. A general concern for blogging in education, as Manning and Johnson (2011) point out, is maintaining student privacy. Even though my intended audience is undergraduate level, and therefore adults, basic precautions are still needed (e.g., reminding students not to post any personal/contact information). Other potential challenges I expect would arise include lack of student engagement, inappropriate feedback, and idea theft. However, I believe there are ways to address each of these issues effectively.

Student Engagement

Engaging students in the blogging experience is a must in order for meaningful learning to occur. Deng and Yuen (2012) state that "in a learning environment supported by Web 2.0 technology, students' motivation for online participation and engagement has become an issue of critical importance" (p. 48). Likewise, the chief danger for course blogs as seen by Bartholomew et al. (2012) arises near the course beginning "when the students stop writing or participating seriously on the blog in general" (p. 24). However, they also found that this is often a self-correcting problem, as during the progression of the blog, students become more comfortable with having

their own voice so begin creating longer posts and taking their posts more seriously. A precaution I would take, though, would be to include effective instructor-student interaction, as discussed earlier, in the form of weekly commentary and summaries. If student engagement still becomes a challenge, I would follow the suggestion for instructors by Bartholomew et al. to select two interesting/provocative posts each week to discuss in class. This "public sharing of interesting posts can positively reinforce the students who wrote the posts and offer other students in the class a vicarious learning experience" (Bartholomew et al., 2012, p. 24).

Inappropriate Feedback

While student-student interaction through commenting is desired, a potential challenge is making sure this feedback is appropriate. Encouragingly, Budge (2012) found that within a blogging community of artists, positive feedback via reader comments was given when an artist created a particularly effective piece, and also found a "strong sense that individuals in the community want each other to flourish and succeed" (p. 48). However, to help prevent potential unsuitable feedback, I would implement a "zero tolerance policy" as seen in the studies by Bartholomew et al. (2012) which forbade "the use of ad hominem attacks, unacceptable vulgarity, or establishing personal social relationships through the blogging process" (p. 21). The instructor would be in charge of monitoring student-student interaction, but according to Bartholomew et al. (2012), their research found that "[i]n sum, little policing was necessary as the community of students worked through differences that took place on the course blogs" (p. 21).

Idea Theft

Along with policing for inappropriate commentary, instructors should be aware of the chance of idea theft, especially as creative ideas are central to choreography blogs. Yang and Chang (2012) address this issue as one that may need further research: "The dark side of social learning could be its openness to potential plagiarism under the disguise of peer learning" (p. 134). On a

brighter side, research by Budge (2012) within an artistic blogging community revealed willingness by each artist to share their creative practice, including "techniques and methods via tutorials for anyone to view and replicate" (p. 49). This open-source philosophy allows for creative collaboration. I believe this way of thinking should be encouraged to an extent regarding choreography blogs. When asked about their open-source policy for blogging, dance collective members replied, "It's like [others] have access to the source code and blueprints…but not always the final products" (Koch, 2012, par. 26). If instructors make students familiar with the college's plagiarism policy and of the open-source philosophy, and don't require the posting of finished products, I believe the issue of idea theft can be effectively addressed.

Conclusion

Despite the potential challenges to maintain student engagement, and discourage inappropriate feedback and idea theft, integrating blogging into a choreography class can foster learning and creativity. Bartholomew et al. (2012) contend that course blogging may "diminish the passive learning that is often inherent to traditional educational models, empowering students to become participatory innovators in their own education" (p. 19). Innovation is an important aspect of choreography; and as Budge (2012) states, "[t]here is value in understanding and promoting social approaches to creativity because this enables the complexity of what stimulates and nurtures creativity to be explored and highlighted" (p. 51). With proper instructor guidance and support, along with blogging's ease of use, multimedia capabilities, and incorporation of social interaction, undergraduate students can enhance their creativity through blogging and reflection on their own, as well as their classmates', choreographic process.

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