

Beyond Tero Saarinen Technique: Method of Hybrid Pedagogy in Action.

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ABSTRACT

Current neurocognitive research on dance and motor learning recommends the use of hybrid teaching methods in which explicit and implicit learning complement each other. This article describes experiences of hybrid teaching and offers an overview of two Tero Saarinen technique—and–repertoire master classes pedagogically designed according to hybrid teaching and motor learning. This article discusses the participants' feedback and shares an encouraging example of hybrid teaching.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Nykyisen neurokognitiivisen tanssitutkimuksen mukaan hybridinen tanssinopettaminen, jossa yhdistyvät toisiaan täydentävät eksplisiittinen ja implisiittinen oppiminen on suositeltavaa. Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan kokemusta hybridiopettamisesta, joka toteutui kahdella Tero Saarisen tekniikka- ja repertuaarikursseilla, joiden pedagogisessa suunnittelussa tavoiteltiin hybridistä motorista opetusta ja oppimista. Artikkelin sisältönä on näille kahdelle kurssille osallistuneiden tanssijoiden palautteet ja niiden pohjalta muotoutunut kannustava esimerkki hybridisestä opettamisesta.

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Introduction

Tero Saarinen is a Finnish dance artist and choreographer and the artistic director of the Tero Saarinen Company, whose workshops are based on his movement technique. Displaying features of ballet, butoh, martial arts and contemporary dance, his style resembles organic, an inventive mixture of grotesqueness and beauty and like butoh with wings. The Tero Saarinen technique is based in his words on a holistic approach, and the aim is to activate every cell in the body to resonate and become 360-degrees alive. This goal leads to interpretations that are constantly vital and surprising, like flora and fauna (see <http://www.terosaarinen.com/en/>).

The fundamental elements of the Tero Saarinen technique are defined as awareness, alertness and attentiveness. In short, awareness is being present and aware when moving, being mindful of the moment. Alertness refers to an awakening of all the senses to enable them fully ready for action and attentiveness to being attentive to different layers of awareness and to learning new information. Paying attention to the various changes in the quality of movement is also essential. Altogether, Saarinen's technique concentrates on awakening the sensing of the feet, along with general alertness and focus. The goal is to make full use of already-learned techniques and to find, liberate and nourish the potential capacity of every dancer. In addition, the Tero Saarinen Company's workshops attempt to recognise the polarities of physical and mental existence and to make use of these bidirectional qualities, such as anima/animus, inherited/present, learned knowledge/

intuition and grounded/elevated. Dance classes in the workshop have varying different themes according to the fundamental elements, and structure of each class includes a warm-up and awakening of the senses, followed by basic exercises according to TSC style with focus on technique and improvisation, and expand to repertoire to conclude.

This article offers an overview on two Tero Saarinen technique—and—repertoire master classes (see <https://vimeo.com/154567489>) that we three teachers (Tero Saarinen, Sini Länsivuori and Hanna Pohjola) pedagogically designed to promote hybrid teaching (e.g. Raab 2015; Karin 2016) which is a novel approach on dance teaching to enhance motor learning. We collaborated throughout, prior and after the workshops and brought complementary perspectives within dance pedagogy: the perspectives of artists and choreographers (Tero Saarinen), the experiences of dancers (Sini Länsivuori) and the biomechanical principles of movement patterns (Hanna Pohjola). This article discusses hybrid teaching from the learners' perspective, and is based on feedback from the participants.

Hybrid teaching and workshops

Hybrid teaching ideally combines the benefits of both explicit and implicit learning and implements them during dance classes (e.g. Raab 2015; Karin 2016). In short, explicit learning consists of the conscious introduction and recollection of movements, is specified, uses declarative forms of control and depends on working memory (e.g. Lam et al. 2009; Kantak et al. 2012). In turn, implicit learning is more

welcoming of disruption, stresses working memory less and enables motor learning in cognitive stages of lower consciousness (e.g. Karabanov et al. 2009). According to current neurocognitive research on dance and motor learning, hybrid teaching and learning methods are beneficial for enhancing learning and, thus, are encouraged (Karin 2016).

In this article, we present participants' feedback of workshops, where we combined simultaneous explicit and implicit teaching during the workshops. The essence of both teaching methods was the Tero Saarinen technique and its fundamental principles. First, we analyzed the central patterns of movements that are essential in the TSC-technique. Then, we pursued to find a teaching method that would incorporate both explicit and implicit teaching. In practice the explicit teaching and learning were engaged through verbal instructions, visual clues, and use of biomechanical principles of the Tero Saarinen's dance technique. The implicit teaching and learning occurred via tactile information and by offering different imageries (e.g. sensory, visual, motor and kinaesthetic metaphors). Teachers were given specific orientation in the class: choreographer's (Tero Saarinen) viewpoint included artistic implementation to reach for TSC fundamental elements, dancer's perspective (Sini Lämsivuori) offered practical guidance on movements, and biomechanics (Hanna Pohjola) provided both general and individual knowledge on kinetic movement chains related to TSC/technique. We decided on this approach during prior pedagogical planning when we set the main goals, structure and themes for the workshops, synthesising philosophy, biomechanical modelling, artistic values and dance pedagogy. The hybrid teaching model was then pretested with the company's dancers, and their feedback was used to improve the teaching.

The master classes were held at the Kuopio Dance Festival (17–19th June 2016) and the Helsinki Festival (15–19th August 2016). The total duration of the first intensive workshop was three days (with three teachers),

and the second workshop five days (three teachers for three days, two teachers for two last days), with the sessions on each day lasting three to four hours. All the participants were emailed a structured feedback form, which was used primarily for pedagogical purposes. Consent for research and marketing purposes was requested and confirmed via email after sending the form. Fifteen participants attended the Kuopio Dance Festival workshop, and eleven gave feedback and consent for use for marketing and research purposes. The Helsinki Festival had 15 participants, and while thirteen gave feedback, only eleven gave consent, and two denied consent. Thus, there was a total of twenty-two responders ($n=22$). All the participants were dance professionals, dance students or active amateurs.

The participants in the Kuopio Dance Festival answered 11 questions. Six were closed questions with a Likert-type scale (1–3 or 1–5) and assessed the participants' workshop expectations and satisfaction generally and on teaching, applied biomechanics, repertoire and given concrete tools. Five open-ended questions addressed the participants' general impressions, collaboration of the three teachers, subjective importance of the workshop, future suggestions for workshop topics, ideas for further development and other comments.

The participants in the Helsinki Festival answered 14 questions. Seven were closed questions with a Likert scale (1–3 or 1–5) and assessed the participants' workshop expectations, satisfaction, the suitability of the amount of participation fee and the methods by which dancers received information about the course. Eight open-ended questions addressed the participants' general impressions, collaboration of the three teachers, subjective importance of the workshop, views of the participation fee, future suggestions for workshop topics, ideas for further development and other comments.

Not all the participants answered all the questions, and some comments could not be published or used for research purposes. This article focuses only

on questions that addressed a general overview of the workshop, the collaboration of the three teachers and used teaching method and perspectives and the subjective importance of the workshop. Content analysis was used to analyse the feedback forms; thus, conceptual groupings from the data were gathered according to the relevant questions as themes.

Feedback of the workshops

Based on the responses, it seems that the workshop participants found the collaboration of the three teachers and the three different ways of approaching the Tero Saarinen technique to be rewarding, enriching and inspiring. Many participants mentioned that attention was paid to every participant in the class, and that the three teachers could notice all the participants equally and personally, giving them corrections, adjustments and feedback. One participant questioned the value of intensive courses taught by only one teacher, because in his / her view such courses do not allow real possibilities for all participants to receive attention. Thus, it seems that for these participants collaborative teaching provided concrete, individual, professional dance technique related tools that they were able to integrate into their personal dance practice. In short, the participants stated that the combined teaching of the three professionals during the workshops enabled and enhanced the experience of efficient, in-depth learning and dance.

According to participants' responses, the chemistry between the teachers worked well, and although the participants saw different things and received diverse feedback, the teaching appeared coherent with the essence of the Tero Saarinen technique. Consequently, the participants commented that all the teachers and the teaching followed a common goal. In short, the participants reported that they perceived the collaboration among the three teachers as professional, informative, complementary, seamless and, specifically, well planned. For us, the model of three teachers raised

prior concerns about the possibility of overloading the participants' working memory, but this was generally not apparent in the comments.

The participants described the general atmosphere of the workshop in multiple ways using words such as safe, caring, warm, open, positive, excellent, very good, encouraging, awesome, happy, trustworthy, inspiring and positive. According to the feedback much attention and many helping hands were available, and that this gave room for personal insights. One participant commented that a special feature of the general atmosphere was the convenient balance between mental and physical ways of working, the connection of body and mind.

The subjective importance of the workshop emerges in two complementary themes: 1) the connection and continuity between technique and repertoire; and 2) the given time. The first of the themes refers to structure of the class where the technique and repertoire were intertwined: thus, technical aspects were preparing in detail for the repertoire. Participants appreciated proper assistance with biomechanical alignment, technical focus and awakened technical abilities throughout the classes, and noticed their essential connections to the repertoire. These aspects enabled connecting to a deeper part of one's self as participants described their sensation. In addition, they mentioned that flow of energy was present in the movements instead of just the shape of movement.

A special theme in the feedback was the concept of time. Much time in the workshops was devoted to the essence of being present and alive, and an in-depth focus was placed on basic, elementary things. Consequently, the participants reported that they had time to get acquainted with the technique with the aid of imaginary metaphors, the slow progression of the class and encouragement from the teachers to find the elementary aspects of their own bodies. This timeframe also permitted possibilities for technical discoveries and insights (e.g. feet, landing, fingers, back, space,

rooting). Thus, the workshop seemed to have helped the participants in understanding their own movement, acquiring a deeper personal experience of movement and discovering the quality of movement that arose from physiological aspects. Additionally, as participants reflected in their writings, the workshops enabled them to trust on one's own doing, and to seek the profound details of movement to strengthen one's own ideas and experiences. The participants found that this was empowering and increased their self-confidence.

Concluding comments

Based on our experiences and the previous literature (e.g. Raab 2015; Karin 2016), hybrid teaching can be regarded as a recommended method for dance teaching. As a summary, participants' responses were positive and encouraging concerning the implementation of different teaching methods in dance classes. The intensive days of the workshops saw the discovery of many valuable insights, such as in-depth learning, the empowerment of self-esteem, the profound quality of movement and the unity of the body–mind connection. Thus, the feedback presented in this article encourage for further implementation on hybrid teaching.

The teachers' prior concern about overloading the participants' working memory did not materialise in the feedback. This might be due to pedagogical decisions concerning the classes, which the participants noted and described as logical and progressive, particularly the relation of connection and continuity. The participants were also given time to reflect on their learning during the classes through daily orientation, summarisation and individual movement searching (i.e. taking time to 'inhabit' the movements individually). To conclude, our experiences indicate that hybrid teaching seems to require carefully conducted prior planning, goal setting and both reflective and reflexive pedagogy to fulfil its potential.

Notes

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BIOGRAPHIES

Hanna Pohjola (doctor of arts in dance) is a Finnish dance artist, teacher and choreographer. Her doctoral dissertation on the identity of the injured former contemporary dancer was published in 2012. In addition to a master's degree and doctorate in dance, Pohjola holds bachelor's and master's degrees in health sciences (exercise medicine). She has also graduated as a physiotherapist. Currently, Pohjola works as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Eastern Finland and teaches part time at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki, Finland.
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Sini Länsivuori is the head of artistic development for the Tero Saarinen Company and a Finnish dancer, dance artist and teacher. She started her career in 1984 at the Finnish National Ballet and has danced in contemporary works by artists such as Carolyn Carlson, William Forsythe, Jiri Kylian, Ohad Naharin and significant Finnish choreographers. Since joining the Tero Saarinen Company in 1998, Länsivuori has danced in many of Saarinen's creations and served as a choreographer's assistant. As a dance teacher, Länsivuori is the company's head of artistic development, responsible for the teaching and development of Saarinen's movement technique. In 2007, she received the Finland Prize, and in 2014, the Central Organization of Finnish Theatre Associations recognised her 30-year career with the Finnish dramatic arts Medal of Honour.