

Individual learning path based on self-analysis using video



AUTHORS

Dora Djamila Meser, In Touch



WHERE DID THE PILOT SESSION TAKE PLACE

Amsterdam



WHEN DID THE PILOT SESSION TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WAS IT

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“I THINK IT’S A REALLY FUN AND PLEASANT WAY TO ANALYZE YOUR PROFESSIONAL BEING. I WISH EVERYBODY WOULD BE OFFERED THIS OPPORTUNITY”



The aim of the pilot was to test art-based methods how to improve voice, movement, body awareness and presence in the work of educators: trainers, teachers, facilitators. The work was based on self-observation, diaries of the individual journey and weekly check-in sessions with a facilitator.

USED METHODOLOGY AND SHORT INTRODUCTION OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

“I work as a trainer, community builder. In my work both mental and physical presence is crucial, but sometimes hard to find the good balance because there are ‘too much’ stimuli around me I must listen to. This makes me sometimes too tired, stressed and therefore I ‘forget’ to enjoy my work. During this learning process I practiced how I can become more aware of my physical presence and keep a healthy balance with my ‘inner’ well-being and presence for others.”

We used two main methodologies as source: one is Intimacy, Interaction and Power developed by In Touch where beyond the main pillars – empowerment, intimacy and social interaction – important elements are process oriented learning, critical thinking, inclusion and systemic approach to help people building and maintaining healthy and positive relationship with themselves and with others. We combined this methodology with the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System, which is a method and a language for describing, visualizing, interpreting and documenting human movement. Before leading our readers step by step through the pilot introducing what we did with our participants let us give a short account that might help understand the essence of our combined methodology:

One way of learning feeling grounded is learning bodily connected in a joyful way. By enjoying being in your body you can achieve a special quality of awareness. You can practice it in very easy ways; like beginning the day with a

physical activity / ritual – making a tea, doing morning exercises, yoga, meditation, walking, walking barefoot, swimming or gardening – activities that help to organize your body and mind for the day. You learn how to become more aware what is happening in you at a body level; if you are stressed – like running, shaking, dancing – these kinds of movements literally shaking the stress out of your cells. Or when you need to ‘slow down’, you can ‘force’ yourself – like walking barefoot you have to slow down. Being in nature - which can be a garden or a park - even for a short time – can help feel easily connected; breathing nature to your lungs – gives fresh oxygen and good circulation, ‘breathing’ nature to your eye’s – gives harmony, ‘breathing’ the voices of nature in your ears – gives a ‘higher level’ connectedness and relaxes about everyday problems – feeling the ground under your feet or lying in the grass – gives the energy of the earth. This attention and active reaction to your physical needs helps to keep a joyful ‘presence’ experience.

“Somehow my mood and ‘vibe’ has changed since I am practicing; I am more relaxed and easily connected with others. I got feedback from my colleagues and clients of that too.”

Through this practice you become more aware of your body position in each moment. Very simple ones; reading, talking, teaching, doing physical work – how you stand, sit, breath, organize your body. You learn not to force, not to expect anything – just observe and accept what is the best for your body at that moment. If you have tension, pain somewhere – listen, try not to judge, not wanting to get rid of it – just do something different what helps feel better. You become more aware of others body, 'language' and how that affects your comfort or presence. Do you want to keep a bigger distance? Do you want to change the level – I'm sitting the other is standing, etc.? How do we tune our rhythm, movement, vibe to each other? This relational awareness helps a lot to organize and maintain a better balance of your energy level in physical, mental and social presence. You also became much less judgmental and strict with yourself and more critically aware of social expectations. This new quality in your body presence may change your voice as well.

"I am more comfortable how I speak – also in foreign languages – I enjoy more my charm, humor through the language – this somehow set me free – I am more eager to interact, to play, be less stressed, much less controlled in social interactions."

We used the video as a self-learning and self-assessment tool, but during our work turned out that the video as a tool has more opportunity than a self-assessment ; but in some cases it was also a great way of playing and source of self-empowerment:

"I would love to make professional prenatal yoga videos that maybe I could also sell online, I would like them to be shorter than my weekly online classes that I also sometimes record but also better in quality and more professional looking. I have never done anything like this before, have never received this kind of feedback, where it is not coming from a participant from my group

sessions/individual whom I am coaching. I would love to know what areas I need to improve in."

"1st video: it is not just me talking, but it is recorded. Interesting to see my body language. It was quite heavy. The camera felt like I am my own witness. My make-up: how I can present myself today. Very brutally honest in a way. It is very difficult to see myself in that position. Very physical and very embodied. When I say: "I am tired" : The body was speaking more. My body was a diary. "I am tired – and my whole fucking body was collapsing". That was really difficult. It was kinda therapeutic: It makes me question is that the best way how I present myself – it is a constant frictions, it crashed, is it healthy? It was just a road accident – there is something that's not sitting right there – doesn't feel right. I was not faced with my face, I was not faced with my mind but my body, That was a journey

I am so confident by hiding.

What my own image does to me. I am a control freak. I am so much controlling how I act, how I talk, how I present to the world. It was such as juxtaposition – the way how I present really strong, but underneath the surface was very vulnerable, or sensitive. Hiding what it actually is."

"Filming is a great mirror to analyze the use of voice and body, to get a better picture of my presence in front of students. It helped me to see if and how I could incorporate small changes into my daily work/activities. I would like to keep on filming myself from time to time, because it turned out less scary than I expected."

STEP BY STEP - INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PATH – WHAT WE DID

First, we organized sessions where we introduced participants the Laban System and the main dimensions through which we were about to observe our body presence: voice, breathing, grounding, movement and relating use of space? After these sessions we followed a 4 week-long individual learning path with each of the participants. Everyone filled in a preliminary questionnaire with guiding questions to learn and observe the level of awareness of the initial phase of the learning process. We asked questions like: "What makes an effective trainer/educator?" "What is your motivation to learn to observe your body presence?" \ "What do you think are your strengths in your body presence?" But also questions like: "Where do you have insecurities as a trainer/educator?" "Do you have any strategies on how to prepare (physically/mentally/ practically) – if yes, how – to align to the present moment?" (you can find the full questionnaire in the self-assessment tool – click here). We started the self-learning process to discuss together the questionnaire

and decide together in which working moments would be the most useful to take the first video. We analyzed the video in an individual facilitation setting and then participants got customized homework. The homework varied from self-observation through making more videos to daily movement- or breathing exercises. It was a crucial element to understand in detail the physical activities, practical work, and daily routines of each participant so we could create exercises, sometimes very small observation tasks which best fit their daily life and already existing practice. We didn't want to introduce something radically new but to find easy and small steps that provide a simple way being able to get further into self-development. After the 'real-life' practicing / observing coaching process participants got back to their preliminary questionnaires and did a self-assessment what has changed what do they see differently than at the beginning of the process.

WHAT DID WE WANT TO LEARN?

Our focus was to learn more about how the self-assessment tool makes sense to the participants, how we can create an art based, individually customized methodology that helps each participant to improve their body presence in their work as educators.

We wanted to :

1. Explore how to merge the methodology of In Touch (Intimacy, Interaction and Power) and the Laban System (used by Katharina Conradi) in a useful and accessible way;
2. Work out a learning method which makes the Laban system (the self-assessment tool) easily and realistically adaptable in the working environment of

participants so that get more awareness on using your voice and body – to learn to improve;

3. Understand better how we learn skills through doing, experimenting not in a training/ workshop environment but directly in our working environment;
4. Last but not least to explore how the online learning tool can be an effective support in the learning process – to what extend a follow-up / coaching is needed and a living connection with the other participants following the same pathway.

ONLINE SELF-LEARNING: FINDINGS AND QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

"The purpose of studying Buddhism is not to study Buddhism, but study ourselves. It is impossible to study ourselves without some teaching. But you have a teacher for yourself, not for the teacher. The study you make with your teacher is a part of your everyday life, a part of your incessant activity." (Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind).

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING

During the process, we were exploring:

- To what extent participants needed support in their individual learning. Some gave us feedback that the first questions were already awareness-awakening and inspiring. Others needed more dialogues, interactions to achieve their own understanding and what and how they want to learn. Some participants could easily apply the video observation, homework and exercises in their teaching practice for some we needed to become more creative how to find the best applicability.
- What are the individual characteristics of the learning itself – some people are more 'head' driven and want to understand a thing intellectually, some are more embodied. Some participants needed more independence and wanted to guide their own learning and 'used' us as facilitators asking for concrete tips and less guidance whilst others needed more strict lines of a given structure, leading and explanation. Some participants have been inspired by the working process and came up with new ideas, creative ways of using the video and self-exploration.
- We were studying the relational dynamics of the learning process. Although it was an individual learning path participants met and some of them knew better each other. Through facilitators, they got to know how others are proceeding in their process – some of them found inspiring and motivating to learn about the others' process. In this sense group dynamics played a role, but in a less explicit way.

TRUST – INTIMACY – TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

We were observing to what extent it is important to create a trustful and safe relationship with participants. If they can share more personal things such as their fears, anxiety or details of their psychological patterns that could be useful to understand better why they behave and act in a way at the body level. Facilitators' personal experience, involvement and devotedness was also a 'field of exploration', – that can give us further information how much it is possible to develop an online tool with or without this quality of a personal 'student-teacher' relationship.

Some of our pilot participants gave us feedback about how their relations *changed with students*:

"I learned several things by seeing myself on video and through the sessions. For instance, that I sometimes want to sacrifice myself a bit so that the participants have the best experience. (e.g., I will face the sun or endure their chatting through my class so they'll have a good time). In the video it clearly shows that I make weird grimaces because of the sun or I could see from my movements that I look a bit older than I feel, maybe because I try to be so empathic with the older ladies I teach, who also have many problems in their lives. I learned it is better to be my happy, energetic self during the class to pass on the things I want them to experience, and furthermore, to take care of physical and practical needs, like bringing a head for sun protection for instance. If I look back to my previous opinion, what makes a good trainer such having great communication skills, able to give clear instructions, feedback, great interpersonal skills, having welcoming, encouraging attitude to stimulate participants with openness and humor, now I would add: all the above, but also whilst maintaining personal boundaries and knowing how to manage their energy level."

"By getting more conscious about and more comfortable with my voice and my movements/gestures at teaching, I wanted to better understand and improve the dynamics of the student-teacher interactions at my lessons. I think that the quality of my lessons have already improved and I am more successful in keeping my students' focus for a longer time. I am especially happy that the focus and the connection between us have developed with some of the students with whom it has been less effective."

"These were my answer to the "Where do you have insecurities as a trainer/educator? Try to be as specific as possible: Nervousness, talking in front of a crowd. Being carried away with thought pattern. Unsureness of connecting with the audience in the right direction. I am too much in my head – I want to keep the control by planning carefully everything what I want to say to my audience. But I have to focus very hard not to forget what I want to say and not get distracted by questions and even by the presence of other people." - During the pilot I was practicing how to make my presentations more interactive by asking questions, making funny comments, involving my audience – give myself more freedom to let diverted from the original path. What I definitely learned: you are the 'dirigent of the orchestra' but the whole success of the presentation is a shared responsibility. What helped me when we discovered the link between my work as gardener where I really feel 'home', I feel grounded how I move, do things: when I am working in the garden I have these qualities but when I need to give a lecture on permaculture I forget them."

PRACTICING BODY AWARENESS IN THE WORK OF EDUCATORS

We worked with a wide diversity of professionals regarding gender / age and working area. Regarding age, they are from 30 to 55. There were the following profiles: music teacher, sport & language teachers, yoga teachers, gardener, adult training educator, gender studies trainer, teacher working with children. It was also a diverse group regarding body awareness – some of them had a more extended knowledge already of the Laban Movement Analyzing System while others had no previous training experience in movement or voice. Here it comes some personal quotes about their self-learning process:

"I noticed the need for a more playful and energetic attitude and bigger movements in the (sports) classes and used a hula hoop and loads of relaxation and grounding exercises to loosen up and relax. I gained more awareness on the need to keep on doing these kind of exercises, not mirror

my students too much, as well as the need to keep my personal boundaries during classes."

"I learned shaking out whilst standing really helps me both physically and mentally to be more relaxed both on beforehand as well as after classes. And I try to give myself more face massages as it helps me to feel relaxed. And in general, participating in this pilot helped me to remember actually doing these things."

BEING MORE AWARE OF SPACE

In the long list of the competences that educators are supposed to have, we can find observation and memory. Unfortunately, those are not gifts that everyone is born with; luckily both of them can be trained.

One of the observation dimensions is space. We were exploring space from very diverse perspectives: The awareness on how we use the physical space; our own personal space (the kinesphere), the distance from the students or the general space in the teaching context.

"I become more of aware of the physical space – regarding sitting position, eye contact, use of space, measurements of the space – how big is the space, how neutral is the space, is there animal(pets, cats) there, distraction, is this a shared space, how the instrument is used... etc. The piano is a fixed instrument but there is a lot of 'space' to experiment how we can use it. Now I can react faster to come up with solutions how I would change things so that that helps the interaction / teaching. I am also more aware that we need time with my private students (children) to make a good shift that helps them to focus. Sometimes they are tired or need to come out of another activity (some pleasurable play) for the sake of the piano lesson. I want to experiment later to invite them make some funny body movement before I start the lesson at the piano - how to help the transition to 'arrive' to the piano lesson. I also want to put more focus in the future how to work with the energy level; warming up, make a little break, etc."

"It was really helpful to create a link between my teaching areas as a language teacher and as a sport trainer. During the pilot I started to use the grounding, warming up activities that I use in my sport classes: that helped a lot to feel more connected faster with my language students and prevent the some awkward 'warming-up' moments with students we usually work sitting at a table."

"I never thought of giving a lecture in a way that I can walk and even go into the audience. I have been raised in a more conservative environment where the teacher stands in front of the class and gives a lecture."

"I discovered the link between my physical work and my online work. During the pilot we learned that in the online yoga classes my voice is more important than I thought. My body should be seen from a distance – there I have to be more aware – like wearing dark color clothes in front of a simple white background. But based on the feedback of my online students I have learned that the grounded energy (my confidence) comes through my voice."

After this pilot our next step will be learning and analyzing how online learning tools, group activities (workshops) and individual learning paths interplay and can provide a useful support for educators to improve their voice, movement, body awareness and presence.

SHORT PRESENTATION OF THE ORGANIZATION AND FACILITATORS

In Touch is an Amsterdam based NGO with the aim of fostering healthy relationships at an interpersonal, group and societal level. We help people find connection across cultures, languages, generations, social and cultural background. We develop our projects in the personal domains of life, such as birth, growth, shelter, healing, sexuality, transition, mourning and death. We create and hold all kinds of learning and creative space for our target groups where they feel safe and brave to explore, learn, connect and grow. In the VOICE project we work together with Katharina Conradi dancer/ choreographer, certified movement analyst and somatic movement educator and therapist.

Katharina's view on dance gives us an explanation how we connect to the VOICE project:

"To me, dance ranges from taking a breath, moving one arm or perform a complex dance performance. Movement allows us to connect to our inner world, to understand that we are part of this world; part of the earth, part of gravity and part of everything and everybody that is alive and interact and communicate from this embodied place. Our body has many stories to tell. I believe that the life story of a person is reflected in the body. Through dance and movement, we can connect with our stories, get aware of our patterns and develop and change ourselves if we wish."

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