

# Turning Virtual: Changes in the Curriculum for Dance-Teaching Instruction in the Coronavirus Era

Shlomit Ofer, the Department of Dance,  
the Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology, and  
Arts, Tel Aviv, Israel

## Background

Spring 2020. Corona days. Along with the entire education system in Israel, the Dance Department at the Kibbutzim College was required to transfer its curriculum to distance teaching.

Unlike learning in other domains, where there is a significant mediation of processes and outcomes - through words, tools and materials, the learning in dance is characterized by the interaction between the present and active body and its environment, both physical and social. Under the Coronavirus circumstances, such interactions were not possible.

## Research Question

What were the challenges faced by the students, instructors and the management of the dance department, and what actions were taken - in order to enable the continuity of significant learning despite the irregular circumstances?

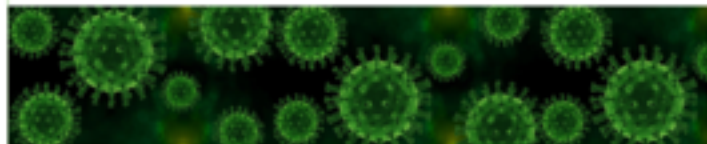
## Methods

The research is in its initial stages and is based on qualitative analysis of correspondence of instructors and students with myself, the department head, were they expressed their needs and difficulties; of drafts of class schedules prepared at various stages; and personal notes taken throughout the period.

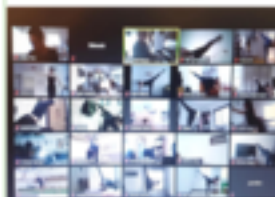
All involved expressed consent to use the information for the benefit of the study. Later on, a series of personal interviews with some of those involved (lecturers, students, administrative staff) is also planned to deepen the insights and to allow a reflective view of the events.

## Participants

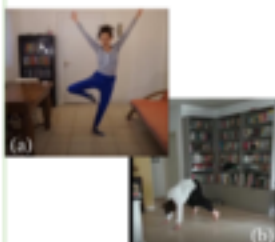
- About 120 undergraduate students of the 4 year program, who participated in classes and provided their feedback through emails, text messages and via each class' instructors;
- About 35 instructors of both theoretical and practical dance classes, who kept close contact and open communication channel with their students in order to design the most appropriate learning environment;
- Three department management personnel, who coordinated, designed and led the changes in the curriculum: the department's academic secretary, the artistic director, and the head of the department (myself).



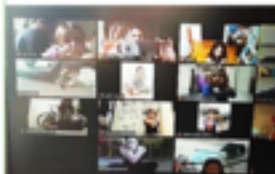
## Main Findings



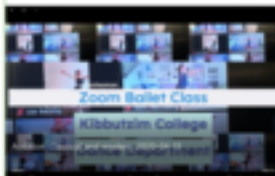
1. An example of distance learning in dance: Classical Ballet class with instructor Talia Paz and pianist Alexander Faifman via Zoom. Each participant is at his/her own home all over the country (screen capture).



2. Instructor Michael Hirsch (a) teaching from home, and student Carmel Hartman (b) at parents' home - sharing Modern dance class via in distance teaching conditions (photos by participants).



Student practicing dance teaching for 1<sup>st</sup> grade pupils via Zoom; supervised by tutor Tami Roset (screen capture).



Ballet teacher Marjolein Gottesman presents an exercise as part of the filmed audition (screen capture; edited by Shai Gottesman).

### a. Students:

- Disconnect from daily routine, fear, loneliness, and for some of them - moving back to their parents; home far away from Tel Aviv;
- Practical dance studies take place in confined spaces and in unsuitable conditions (noise, lack of privacy, inappropriate floor and the like; see Figure 2b);
- "Submitting homework" in the practical dance classes through video - a requirement for new technological skills, such as video editing;
- A learning process that has become largely theoretical and requires extended sitting for hours in front of the computer, while these students' natural tendency is for physical experience-based learning and interpersonal interaction;
- In the beginning - difficulties in understanding and internalizing learning tasks and difficulties connecting with instructors. These aspects have improved over the time period;
- Student-teachers: The students who prepare themselves to become dance teachers required to remotely teach their own students - children and teens (see Figure 3).

### b. All instructors (of both theoretical and practical classes):

- Demand for rapid learning and implementation of digital tools for distance learning (e.g., Zoom app, video editing and uploading to online platforms);
- Adjustment of requirements to students' learning conditions;
- Reducing the scope of planned learning materials and focusing on the core issues, in light of the students' difficulties.

### c. Instructors of practical dance classes:

- Difficulty in communication with the musical accompanist (pianist, drummer);
- Moving the teaching focus from demonstrated physical activity to spoken language explanations;
- Adjustment and implementation of theoretical assignments in the practical classes;
- Major adaptations in classes such as Contact-Improvisation, Composition, and Contemporary Dance that could not be implemented in accordance with their original or mode of teaching.

### d. Management crew:

- Coordination between all involved, mediating between instructors and students concerning both personal and professional difficulties;
- Ongoing search for teaching alternatives that will enable continued meaningful learning;
- Creating an hourly schedule that changed almost every week, due to government policy changes;
- Planning and preparing for enrollment for the next school year, including "campus visit day" via Zoom, as well as preparing filmed auditions (entrance exams).

### e. Key benefits of the process:

- Alongside the many difficulties we gradually developed better communication among all involved, and all - learners and teachers - improved the technological skills and expanded their modes of teaching and learning;
- Students improved their communication skills, including in in phrasing requests and in written assignments;
- Especially in the practical dance subjects, new directions of instruction emerged, and the ability to verbally teach and learn patterns of movement improved significantly;
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there emerged an increased sense of mutual support and shared responsibility - for teaching, learning, as well as for the health of all involved!

**Summary:** The physical-bodily experience that characterizes teaching and learning in dance during the Corona era was very challenging for all involved. As educators, the frustrations and successes we have experienced will help us to prepare and develop a variety of appropriate teaching tools for an unknown future, and have already enhanced important aspects of teaching, whether remote or not.