

# Dramatic Arts Pedagogy & Online Learning: Potential Tool for Learning in a Knowledge Society?

## Pedagogía del arte dramático y aprendizaje en línea: ¿una herramienta potencial para aprender en una sociedad del conocimiento?

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### Abstract

This paper presents some evidence that online learning has not differentiated itself significantly from face-to-face learning and that both largely rely on didactic, lecture-centered pedagogy. It then presents as an alternative the use of pedagogies such as dramatic arts pedagogy that aligns nicely with 21st century skills and suggests that there are opportunities for further research on the application of such pedagogies to teach 21st century skills online.

### Resumen

Este artículo presenta evidencias de que el aprendizaje en línea no se ha diferenciado significativamente del aprendizaje presencial y que ambos se basan en gran medida en la pedagogía didáctica centrada en el aula. Por ello, se presenta como alternativa el uso de propuestas pedagógicas como la pedagogía de las artes dramáticas, que se alinea muy bien con las habilidades del siglo XXI y sugiere que existen oportunidades para futuras investigaciones sobre la aplicación de dichas aproximaciones para enseñar habilidades propias del siglo XXI en línea.

### Keywords

Dramatic arts pedagogy; online Learning; Efficacy; Instructional design

### Palabras clave

Pedagogía del arte dramático; Aprendizaje en línea; Eficacia; Diseño instruccional

## 1. Introduction

In a knowledge economy there are two discrete but inter-related questions that we face when it comes to learning. The first is what to teach in a knowledge society and the second is how to teach it. For a generation now, we have been excited as an intellectual community about the possibility of digital technologies to deliver learning effectively at scale. This paper first explores the notion that we may have collectively made a specification error with respect to how we teach, particularly online, using some analysis to support the argument and then posits some potential avenues for further research and exploration based on an example from the pedagogy developed for the dramatic arts.

Our review of the literature for online learning shows an evolution in its perceived purpose and power;

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though it isn't clear whether that evolution is based on empirical work or aspiration (Patrick & Sturgis, 2015). In the early days of online, a prevailing perception was that it was going to increase access by removing geographical and temporal barriers (Lorenzo & Moore, 2002; Gros & García-Peñalvo, 2016). Indeed, the Consortium for Online Learning was originally named The Sloan Foundation Asynchronous Learning Network and its five pillars of quality for years were the gold standard and focused largely on access with a goal of no reduction in quality.

More lately there is some recognition that online may actually provide the learning process some affordances. We know there has been an increased use of technology to facilitate learning in both online and face-to-face instruction (Toven-Lindsey, Rhoads & Lozano, 2015). Online courses and programs use the latest advanced technology to provide students with a wide range of learning opportunities with interactive platforms. These interactive platforms allow students to foster their skills through active and collaborative participation by the use of forums, online discussion, posts, blog, and other media resources (Toven-Lindsey, Rhoads & Lozano, 2015). A current intriguing technology put forth is using artificial intelligence to improve outcomes; millions are being allocated to experiment with these sorts of technologies (DeMink-Carthew, 2017). Even critics like Zemsky have embraced the power of online learning (Zemsky & Massey, 2004). According to our review of the research, there are significant differences between online learning versus traditional instruction. Soffer and Nachmais (2015) found that online students tend to report better understanding of course structure, more engagement and satisfaction of the learning process, and had more communication with faculty compared to face to face students in the study. Also, other research studies have found these similar results when comparing online learners to tradition learners (Swan, Shea, Fredericken, Pickett, Pelz & Maher, 2000).

But for all the excitement about its potential we echo the economist Solow when talking about other technologies that the productivity has not been realized (Triplett, 1999). There is little evidence of either better learning or more learners completing as a result of the introduction of online learning in the United States (Nguyen, 2015). Given that pedagogy is not the driving force for success in face-to-face university learning, moving to an online format may marginally improve from a very low bar. Our review of the literature suggests that this didactic lecture is still the prevailing learning strategy at universities (Figlio, Schapiro & Soter, 2015; Hazelkorn, 2015; Hersh & Merrow, 2015). Have we not all flown in to lectures to sit in a room with peers to listen to someone lecture about how the face-to-face didactic lecture is dead (the irony does not escape us). This specification error in the engineering of online learning might also be exasperated by the notion that online students somehow differ significantly from face-to-face students. There is at least some demographic evidence to support this notion (Guo & Reinecke 2014).

We also live in a knowledge economy and much has been made about new skills needed. A good

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example of this is Harvard's Center for Curriculum Redesign's 4-Dimensional Learning which has been adopted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Fadel, 2012). Teaching ethics, resilience, and mindfulness may need their own pedagogy. We make this assertion given that there is ample evidence that in addition to content expertise and general effective pedagogical skills, there are pedagogical strategies specific to the teaching of a particular skill or content area (Marks, 1990; McDiarmid 1989). But the prevailing approach to online seems to suggest that the largest differentiating factor is that it is online. There is little evidence that instructional design programs factor into their design the interaction effects among technology, learner, context, and content. One can think about it as an analogy of turning an excellent play into a film. Simply filming the play leads to a derivative experience that will never be as good as the original live performance; on the other hand, reimagining the story as a film and thinking through the affordances and limitations provided by the different media may actually create something as good or even better in terms of conveying the story but it is certainly different.

We posit that most university online learning is no better nor no worse in terms of outcomes perhaps because it simply took a derivative approach to design rather than thinking about all the components that would likely increase efficacy. To that end we elected to do a bit of investigation to test our hypothesis. We developed a short survey and used social networking tools such as LinkedIn to gather some respondents. As a consequence, it is likely that our group does not represent a random sample of people who have completed graduate education. We did not gather demographic information nor geographic information. We simply asked them about the perception of the quality of the program and what pedagogical techniques were employed. We had a total of 74 respondents broken into both online and face-to-face for delivery of the program. The tables with the findings are at the end of this paper. In addition to some descriptive statistics, we then ran several regressions including multiple regression using program quality as the dependent variable.

What we found is that while various pedagogical approaches were used in graduate education, the prevailing approach was indeed the lecture and that faculty quality and peer discussions were the best predictors of perceived program quality. Finally, there were no differences between online programs and face-to-face programs either in program quality or these two most significant variables. We therefore suggest that online may be simply copying the pedagogical approach of traditional university pedagogy – faculty centered didactic lectures. See our tables to make your own inferences. Traditionally, learners would gain knowledge by attending a classroom with other students and an assigned teacher whom is considered an expert on a given subject. In this setting, educators tend to be viewed as the one with power and authority as they use lecturing as a mean to disseminate information to students (Mascolo, 2009). Therefore, instructors would conduct class by using speech and presentations while students actively listened and took notes trying to capture class concepts. At

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times, the teacher can incorporate and facilitate group discussion where students have an opportunity to share their thoughts with the class. However, there are research studies that have found that direct face to face teaching has limitations as it relates to student's engagement, satisfaction, and active participation in the learning process (Schmidt, Wagener, Smeets, Keemink & Van der Molen, 2015). Soffer and Nachmais (2015) stated that students in traditional classroom settings, tend to find readings and supplementary materials to help in understanding concepts as they attend class less often than online students. Therefore, access to class lectures and discussions can be limited for these students whereas online learners can attend class literally anywhere with an internet connection. Our simple survey seems to support this heuristic. Further building on our metaphor of stage versus film and the power film provided for communication once its affordances were discovered one can imagine needing different learning strategies based on content, learner and medium.

If we wanted to move toward a more nuanced approach to online learning, it is important to note several things. First, there are different approaches that instructors incorporate in teaching to help facilitate learning. Traditionally, teacher-centered pedagogy relates to the educator taking control by creating the structure and selecting how to communicate information to students (Mascolo, 2009). In other words, the lecturer relays material to students through direct lecture which makes the student more of a passive participant in the learning process as they take in the information presented. One can think of this approach as the prevalent production function in learning with the learner, her peers and the faculty member being the most predictive variables when it comes to any sort of outcome (Hopkins, 1990). One can think of much of online being in this model with the control between spanned by subject matter expert and instructional designer. However, in student-centered pedagogy, the teacher provides guidance to help foster and support the students as they create their own understanding of class concepts by elaborating on their own thought process (Mascolo, 2009). This method allows students to take on a more active role in the learning process as the instructor facilitates and encourages exploration of class concepts through different activities.

## 2. Discussion

Building on the notion of content specific pedagogy for 21st Century Skills, we look to the pedagogy developed to help actors hone their craft. Actors who have developed the skills to cross mediums can work on both stage and on screen. Many film stars of the silent film era watched their careers expire alongside the medium. Much like the early critics of online learning, the actress Clara Bow was a darling of silent films but said of the new medium, "I hate talkies." Her career ended at the age of 25 (Taylor, 2013). Most actors, whether they prefer stage over screen or vice versa, regard the heart of actor training to be theatre training - the ability to perform live and engage directly with an audience

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with no filters or barriers and no cuts, edits, or do-overs. This “live performance ability so essential to acting also aligns with some of the four-dimensional learning domains and forms an essential core of all live interaction in the human exchange. Understanding theatre training could thus prove valuable for everyone in a knowledge economy; certainly, it could inform online instruction.

Theatre is the enactment of story instead of just the telling and interestingly has its own pedagogy. Dramatic arts learning is experiential in nature and wholistic by necessity. Students must engage not just intellectually or cerebrally but also physically, vocally, emotionally, and imaginatively. They must introspect, as well as interact with others and with time, space, and environment in order to communicate story. How are said conditions best cultivated? Theatre teaching may be most effective when the teaching follows its own credo and the teacher co-creates the class together with the students. Theatre teacher Viola Spolin regarded the teacher as fellow player to (the) student actors (Spolin 1963). Researcher Bridget Keeger Lee and co-authors offer these recommendations for drama-based pedagogy (DBP):

DBP focuses on an embodied process-oriented approach to learning. Specifically, the major defining features of DBP are the following: (a) it is facilitated and directed by a classroom teacher, teaching artist or other facilitator trained in DBP; (b) it works toward academic and/or psychosocial outcomes for the students involved; (c) it focuses on a process-oriented and reflective experience; and (d) it draws from a broad range of applied theatre strategies. (Lee, Patall, Cawthon & Steingut, 2015)

The writings of many seminal theatre practitioners and teachers affirm that emphasis is placed on practice, rehearsal, experimentation, risk-taking and not forsaking process to rush to results (Spolin, 1983). In theatre, being result-oriented over experience-oriented may cheat deeper levels of discovery and possibility (Harer & Munden, 2009). Director Joseph Chaikin asserted, “you need a laboratory, a workshop, a floundering around in order to develop” (Blumenthal, 1984). This is certainly antithetical to common ADDI best practices for instructional design (Branch, 2009).

Common practices revolve around kinesthetic application with the teacher introducing an exercise then allowing the students to largely self-navigate through the process and to generate their own learning. To illustrate: students may be given an improvisation exercise with parameters then asked to assess how they did in achieving the parameters, decide what to change, and try another version of the improvisation. Practice is a layering process of addition and subtraction, conducted by the cohort. Varied interpretations are encouraged and rigorously examined. As a consequence, each student’s practice informs not only their own work but those of each of her peers. The search for self-expression begets ruthless curiosity of inquiry, empathy for others, and cultivating joy in on-the-floor research and discovery. The holistic work of a theatre students may suggest an avenue through which

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theatre training may equip the students with many of the 21st Century Skills deemed so important more broadly.

In terms of design, theatre pedagogy takes the following approaches (Mohamed, 2013):

- Lecture or one-way communication by the teacher
- Dialogue between students and with the teacher
- Side-coaching where the teacher gives instructions or assists during activities

Lecture is generally relegated to the start or end of classes to provide context is needed for the material the class is covering. Dialogue is most likely to comprise the majority of the instruction, so that learning is interactive. Dialogue is what plays, television, and films are made of and students as active participants in dialogic exchange strengthens their observations of human behavior both their own and that of others and glean character and identity.

Side-coaching is also deemed a valuable instructional form. It can be defined as assistance given by teacher/director or fellow player to student actors during the solving of a problem to help them keep focus; a means of giving a student-actor objective viewing within the theatre environment; a message to the total organism; a support in helping players to explore the emerging plays (Spolin, 1963). Through experiencing in-the-moment adjustments students also gain higher ability to coach themselves and each other. Once the actor has built the grounding of skills in story-telling and the stage, they can then master medium specific and even genre specific skills and techniques (Baron, 2004).

### 3. Conclusion

We suggest that as we collectively recognize the need to effectively teach these 21st Century Skills at scale that we experiment with strategies that keep the film and genre specific metaphor of actor training in mind. We contend that learning design is an intellectual process that needs to be better grounded in empiricism and, in all probability, it is only through the engineering of sound learning experiences that we will successfully achieve education in the knowledge society. These under attended pedagogies certainly warrant more investigation.

## 4. Tables

Education 40.54%	Masters 45.94%	Face-to-face 59.46%
Business 20.27%	Doctorate 54.06%	Online 22.97%
Other 39.19%		Blended 17.57%

Table 1. Type of Program. N = 74

Among the 74 only 6.75% were reported as asynchronous program with one of them being a face to face program which either is an improper response or perhaps a hard science doctoral degree with no coursework. In terms of quality, the mean response for program quality was 8.43 out of 10 and for faculty quality it was 8.46. In terms of pedagogical technique, 63.51% reported that their program was lecture based.

Lecture 100%	Small Group Discussion 100%
Reading 100%	Homework 100%
Exercise 95.95%	Simulation 81.08%

Table 2. Pedagogical Tools

For those that reported using a pedagogical technique, the following reported finding the technique useful:

Lecture 71.62%	Small Group Discussion 81.08%
Reading 87.84%	Homework 71.62%
Exercise 73.61%	Simulation 74.19%

Table 3 Usefulness of Technique

SUMMARY OUTPUT	PROGRAM TYPE							
P								
<i>Regression Statistics</i>								
Multiple R	0.092169984							
R Square	0.008495306							
Adjusted R Square	-0.005275593							
Standard Error	1.197667135							
Observations	74							
<i>ANOVA</i>								
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>			
Regression	1	0.884889435	0.884889435	0.616902806	0.434777602			
Residual	72	103.2772727	1.434406566					
Total	73	104.1621622						
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	8.522727273	0.180555114	47.20291262	6.59886E-56	8.162797231	8.882657314	8.162797231	8.882657314
Type	-0.222727273	0.283573097	-0.785431605	0.434777602	-0.78801991	0.342565365	-0.78801991	0.342565365

Talbe 4. Program Type

SUMMARY OUTPUT	Faculty Quality							
<i>Regression Statistics</i>								
Multiple R	0.440757877							
R Square	.194267506							
Adjusted R Square	0.183076777							
Standard Error	1.079652971							
Observations	74							
<i>ANOVA</i>								
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>			
Regression	1	20.2353235	20.2353235	17.35968274	8.48709E-05			
Residual	72	83.92683866	1.165650537					
Total	73	104.1621622						
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	5.220639199	0.781012415	6.684450974	4.19803E-09	3.663719404	6.777558994	3.663719404	6.777558994
FacQual	0.759337697	0.182248545	4.166495258	8.48709E-05	0.396031863	1.122643531	0.396031863	1.122643531

Table 5. Faculty Quality



SUMMARY OUTPUT		Multiple Regression						
<i>Regression Statistics</i>								
Multiple R	0.555570809							
R Square	0.308658924							
Adjusted R Square	0.211439086							
Standard Error	1.060745472							
Observations	74							
<i>ANOVA</i>								
	<i>Df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>			
Regression	9	32.15058093	3.57228677	3.174855341	0.003131757			
Residual	64	72.01158123	1.125180957					
Total	73	104.1621622						
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	3.425423815	1.578111417	2.170584268	0.033679162	0.272783839	6.578063791	0.272783839	6.578063791
Type	0.010831878	0.274637029	0.039440703	0.968661805	-0.537818659	0.559482414	-0.537818659	0.559482414
Nasynch	0.688708706	0.514385679	1.338895569	0.18534105	-0.338894818	1.71631223	-0.338894818	1.71631223
FacQual	0.602636798	0.186711985	3.227627823	0.001969631	0.229636729	0.975636868	0.229636729	0.975636868
Simulations	0.030107206	0.295357212	0.101934894	0.919127054	-0.559936656	0.620151068	-0.559936656	0.620151068
Lecture	0.491671645	0.418081235	1.176019402	0.243943177	-0.343541637	1.326884927	-0.343541637	1.326884927
Discuss	1.0371127365	0.438694965	2.3641196	0.02111894	0.160733424	1.913521306	0.160733424	1.913521306
Exercise	-0.407161644	0.402679261	-1.011131397	0.315761107	-1.211605946	0.397282657	-1.211605946	0.397282657
Homework	0.323575714	0.447210363	0.723542523	0.471982972	-0.569829689	1.216981118	-0.569829689	1.216981118
Readings	0.493490118	1.078804698	0.457441573	0.648902818	-1.661670019	2.648650255	-1.661670019	2.648650255

Table 6. Multiple Regression

We then ran several t-Tests comparing means between online and face-to-face, assuming unequal sample size and variance.

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
Program Quality	<i>Face2Face</i>	<i>Online</i>
Mean	8.522727273	8.3
Variance	1.045983087	2.010344828
Observations	44	30
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	49	
t Stat	0.73921221	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.231652377	
t Critical one-tail	1.676550893	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.463304753	
t Critical two-tail	2.009575237	

Table 7. t-Test Program Quality

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
FACULTY QUALITY		
	F2F	ONLINE
Mean	4.272727273	4.166666667
Variance	0.482029598	0.488505747
Observations	44	30
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	62	
t Stat	0.642629374	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.261417024	
t Critical one-tail	1.669804163	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.522834048	
t Critical two-tail	1.998971517	

Table 8. t-Test Faculty Quality

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