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A pandemic shakes our pedagogy: Attempts to honour the integrity of a South African tertiary institution's Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum in online learning platforms as a result of COVID-19

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A pandemic shakes our pedagogy: Attempts to honour the integrity of a South African tertiary institution's Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum in online learning platforms as a result of COVID-19.

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A thesis submitted to the Wits School of Arts, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

A pandemic shook our pedagogy. The arrival of COVID-19 changed the face of higher education in South Africa and in many parts of the world. As an Applied Drama and Theatre department whose work is predominantly embodied and experiential, we were faced with the question: How do we migrate our kind of work online and honour its fundamental objectives? A characteristic Applied Drama and Theatre practice is embedded in principles of participation and collaboration, reflection through praxis and immersion in social contexts. All of these are largely experienced with physically present bodies in a common space for the purposes of social transformation and education.

Due to the pandemic, the effects of the digital divide were rapidly exposed and its limitations on access, connectivity and synchronicity delayed the progress of teaching and learning. Can we honour the integrity of the complete Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy online and remotely, especially when the digital divide impacts connection with students and the marginalised communities that the pedagogy is suited for? While we acknowledged that digitising our educational practices had become a progressive necessity, would online learning alone be sufficient for the teaching and learning of embodied curricula?

Through ethnographic case study and as teaching assistant, I observed University of the Witwatersrand's Drama for Life department and their Applied Drama and Theatre educators during their encounter of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown periods of 2020 and 2021. By use of interviews, field notes and documentation, this study inquired how we reacted to the pandemic and its anticipated implications on the pedagogy and the academic programme. Furthermore, I established the evident threats that online learning poses to the pedagogy and investigated the disconcerting effects of the digital divide on student access and content delivery.

Central to the study is the exploration of these educators' practical strategies and collective approaches in maintaining the integrity of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. Through a journey of trial and error, the department and its educators were tasked to re-envision the pedagogy and negotiate appropriate multimodal online modes

of delivery, in efforts to save the academic programme and achieve its pedagogical intentions.

Even though the data and literature demonstrate the possibilities of migrating similar pedagogies online, remote learning has certainly compromised the practical and physical demands of a conventional Applied Drama and Theatre experience. Additionally, even though the theoretical components could be negotiated online, the findings highlighted that the pedagogical objectives as a whole were fragmented. Thus, in the case of the professionalisation of students and the provision of the full Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy – the educators' efforts fell short.

The pedagogy, though shaken, still stands. The study concludes that the pedagogy is highly dependent on uninterrupted physical presence and even if the digital divide is managed its integrity remains tainted without connection. The findings emphasise that we cannot do away with contact teaching post-pandemic and any idea of a pedagogical utopia requires a carefully negotiated balance of appropriately designed online and offline approaches.

The discussions and findings in this study do not only impact the Applied Drama and Theatre fraternity, departments and practitioners alike, but also shed light on the available possibilities for other multidimensional pedagogies. Institutions are encouraged to take the full repertoire of the pedagogy into account when designing their Learning Management Systems, to provide adequate support for staff and student training and their digital affordances. Moreover, it is noteworthy to address the feasibility and equity of online learning within a particular South African context as a whole.

Key terms: Applied Drama and Theatre, pedagogy, online learning, Drama for Life, COVID-19, embodied, participation, collaboration, praxis, immersion.

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

School of the Arts

I, **Moratoa Trinity Mokoena (545383)** am a student registered for **Doctor of Philosophy in Drama** in the year **2020-2023**

I hereby declare the following:

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- I declare that I have not previously submitted it either fully or partially for any degree or university award.



15 March 2023

M. T. MOKOENA **DATE**

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Abbreviations

4IR	-	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AR	-	Augmented Reality
CLTD	-	Centre for Teaching and Development
ERT	-	Emergency Remote Teaching
HEI	-	Higher Education Institution
HOD	-	Head of Department
ICT	-	Information Communication Technology
LMS	-	Learning Management System
PLT	-	Plan for Learning and Teaching
TUT	-	Tshwane University of Technology
UCT	-	University of Cape Town
UJ	-	University of Johannesburg
UNISA	-	University of South Africa
UP	-	University of Pretoria
VR	-	Virtual Reality
Wits	-	University of the Witwatersrand
WSOA	-	Wits School of the Arts

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Background

> This morning, Thursday March 5, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) confirmed that a suspected case of the Coronavirus (COVID-19)[1] has tested positive (National Institution for Communicable Diseases, 2020: npn).

Following the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize's announcement above and President Cyril Ramaphosa's address ten days later, infections had increased to 51 and this was beginning to cause nationwide panic. Whilst some of us were anxious, others were perplexed and an alarming majority were in denial; a nation was called to inhale, exhale and remain calm. Rapidly, as the nature of the virus would have it, the realisation hit: w*e are going to need more masks!*

A national lockdown[2] was then introduced and the nature of physical contact and human interaction was changed indefinitely. Like many other sectors, the uncertainties brought by the global pandemic fuelled unending questions in the educational fraternity: Can students learn effectively from their homes? How will students afford data for connectivity? Will educators be trained to make a full online transition? How do educators support students who are without a smartphone, tablet or laptop? What is the most equitable teaching and learning solution going forward?

A question which caught my attention and had a direct impact on my field of interest set me on a path that led to this research project: How can educators teach the more human contact-reliant aspects of an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum online?

In my Masters research titled, *The role of Drama in Education in fostering a soft skills curriculum in the paperless classroom of South African primary schools*, I noted that various socio-economic politics (poverty, crime, lack of access) in our country delayed the progression of the Fourth Industrial Revolution's influence on teaching and learning

[1] The disease, COVID-19 which can be transmitted through human contact and inhalation, causes respiratory problems such as dry cough, shortness of breath and fever and related comorbidities result in death. (Health24, 2020: para. 4).

[2] Individuals will not be allowed to leave their homes except under strict and controlled circumstances (South African Government, 2020: npn).

practices. Moreover, shifting to paperless classrooms and digitised learning was slow and the transition would be difficult to navigate (Mokoena, 2019: 4). I further argued that educators were not adequately prepared for the migration in learning from paper to digital/paperless due to lack of training (Mokoena, 2019: 5). Now, with the entrance of COVID-19 and its restrictions on physical contact, there was a sudden expectation to shift to online systems of learning. Considering these existing complexities, a new dynamic was presented and I questioned how we would support a pedagogy based on embodied experiential learning effectively.

In 2020, I was contracted as a teaching assistant at the University of the Witwatersrand's Applied Drama and Theatre and Drama Therapy department, Drama for Life. Being a part of the department had me experience the pandemic as staff member while observing as ethnographer. The case study will be referred to as Drama for Life or the department. The collective experience as teaching assistant coupled with my interactions with staff and students were catalytic in discovering the hunch for the research. The study focuses on five Applied Drama and Theatre educators[3] at Drama for Life as they navigated the teaching and learning of the curriculum during the pandemic.

Another crucial dynamic to declare, which bears potential impact on the findings and discussions of the research is the intertwined roles that Dr Petro Janse van Vuuren holds as both my supervisor and Head of Department of Drama for Life. While these roles have been clearly defined, it was important that both she and I remain impartial and critical for the purposes of the research findings. This relationship had the potential to invoke unconscious gratification of the department or manipulating the results of the study in its favour. Throughout the journey I have had to continuously identify and reflect on the aspect of potential bias and appropriately address it. These reflections have been included in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Since March 2020, Drama for Life and its educators grappled with the dynamics of online learning (or semblances of it) by exploring every digital avenue at their disposal. These

[3] I will refer to them as educators and not lecturers. The latter term (although commonly used in Higher Education) and its connotations of being instructional goes against the grain of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy.

studious efforts were paramount to achieving the core objectives of the conventional curricula. This unfolded while we dealt with the magnitude of a global pandemic and its impact on our lives. Still, after all these efforts and significant strides, certain core aspects of the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum were difficult to achieve virtually and remotely. Priorities to ensure student proficiency with online learning platforms and accessibility to data and devices were met with an equally formidable opponent: the digital divide. Witnessing all this manifest and upon an electrifying impulse, the researcher journaling began.

A pandemic shakes our pedagogy. An Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy that has always been practised in contact[4] *meets face-to-face with the need for virtual accessibility. How will it embrace this change and rise to the challenge?*

Consequently, January 2021 also saw the academic programme continue online but this time around the chaos proceeded with more structure. Slightly more prepared, yet anticipating the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, Drama for Life and its educators forged ahead with the new normal. Would they continue on a trial-and-error path as in 2020 or would they further re-define and re-configure the core intentions of the pedagogy that could still not be experienced in contact? What did they learn from 2020 that was salvaged in 2021 or would emergency panic mode continue? How much progress would there be in 2022? This study sought to answer these questions.

Therefore, the prompt for the research was the entrance of COVID-19 and the pandemic catalysing an instant migration of teaching and learning online. The Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum (which relies on practice and embodiment and is conventionally taught face-to-face[5]) was placed under immense pressure. Inherently, in a South African context where disparity exists, the digital divide added to the challenge of not only effectively migrating the teaching and learning experience online, but it also threatened student access and connectivity across the board.

[4] Although the pandemic has altered previously understood definitions of “face-to-face”, ”live” or “contact”, throughout this thesis, the use of the term “contact” will refer to being physically in-person.
[5] Similar to footnote 4, the use of the term “face-to-face” will refer to in-person engagement.

1.1. Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy

Drama for Life's curricula are rooted in the practices of Applied Drama and Theatre in social contexts for educational and transformational purposes, as well as therapeutic purposes which relate to their Drama Therapy stream. However, the study directed its focus on their Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy only. Its foundational principles will be expanded on later in the conceptual framework. Drama for Life's stance on education is learner-centred, interactive and their attitude toward praxis is guided by Paulo Freire's (1973) principles of informed social action, that is based on experiential knowledge of the world that encourages dialogue and critical reflection that yields social transformation (Drama for Life, 2020a).

The lockdown period in 2020 called for a repositioning of the department's entire academic programme. Contact-based practical placements[6], site visits and physical engagements with communities, schools and various other stakeholders were cancelled. Experiential and immersive fieldwork and collaborative experiences (including performances, conferences and festivals) were refocused to virtual formats and the teaching of the practice-heavy components of the curriculum was adapted, redesigned and continually negotiated. This also continued in 2021 as they could not return to full contact teaching.

Speaking to their departmental mandate, Drama for Life (2020a) describes their priorities as follows:

> Our discourse is framed by theories of critical pedagogy; our professional development is underpinned by a reflective humanism; our praxis is determined by the extent to which we can integrate theory and practice through an embodied, conceptual performance-based research.

Clearly articulated above, Drama for Life's priorities affirm the human experience and value (both as individuals and in the presence of others), emphasise the importance of

[6] A coursework-based designation of students to a particular community (school, centre, location) for the purposes of practical engagement, theoretical exploration and on-site learning. The process and completion thereof may be assessed and examined by the course lecturer for their academic progression.

reflection (pre, during and post intervention or process) and prize their inputs and outputs on vigorous combinations of theory and embodied or performative practice. Now looking at these priorities expressed in the mandate, the study explored how this fully encompassing pedagogy could be navigated virtually and remotely.

Further expanding on the above mandate, the specific intentions for the 2020 academic year (as discussed in a staff meeting), where both Applied Drama and Theatre and Drama Therapy curricula are concerned, were grouped into five key areas (Drama for Life, 2020a). I identified the following three areas to be directly aligned to this study in particular:

- A) The implementation of teaching practice that focuses not only on content (methodology) but also contexts which enrich the learning experience, study and practice.
- B) The integration of the curriculum on both horizontal (outward practice-faculty, school, communities and partners) and vertical (inward practice-staff and students) levels of the department.
- C) Documentation and sharing the role and value of fieldwork as part of the curriculum.
  (Drama for Life, 2020a).

I then gathered that intention A) speaks to the role of praxis, B) addresses the collaborative and participatory nature of our work, and C) denotes the integral part that immersion in context plays in the learning and teaching of a typical Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. Additionally, all three intentions by design highlight that practical, performative, interactive and embodied engagements are pertinent to accomplishing the objectives of an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum, and that the theoretical grounding therein plays an equally important role.

Thus, as ethnographer, I studied the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy through Drama for Life's lens and from there, I investigated how its Applied Drama and Theatre educators honoured the definitions and intentions thereof as teaching and learning went online. In addition, I debated the sustainability of those efforts for a post-pandemic future based on the realities of the digital divide and the nature of the pedagogy as a whole.

1.2. Implications of the digital divide

An unavoidable aspect that directly impacts the ability to successfully meet the department's core mandate and intentions, is the digital divide. Reiersgord (2020) reflects that "the current necessity for a shift towards online learning reminds us that although we live in the same country, we do not share the same resources". According to Kelvin Bomah (2014), the digital divide can be defined as the gap between demographics and regions that have access to modern ICTs and those that do not, or have restricted access. These ICTs can include and are not limited to televisions, telephones, personal computers and the internet. The pandemic has since revealed how crucial it is to confront the inequalities that exist in South Africa and its education system. With the outbreak of COVID-19 and the consequent inability to learn face-to-face, the pedagogy saw a forced shift and the learning experience became altered.

Taking into account the nature of disparity in South Africa, the wealthier student was able to switch to online quicker than the financially poorer student as soon as the lockdown period began. As such, the poorer student even went on to battle with high data costs and this made their attempts at winning futile (Graham, 2020). In efforts to narrow the digital divide, students were loaned laptops, tablets and cell phones for their learning, and data and airtime was made available to use specifically for learning purposes. Another agent that assisted with digital access was the provision of zero-rated[7] internet access on specific sites by cellular network providers.

> At best, the COVID-19 pandemic has given us the opportunity to explore alternative methods of education, expanding the uptake of digitised learning and teaching for the future (Mtunzi-Hairwadzi in MTN Business, 2020: para. 11).

Even though these efforts mediate the connection between the educator and the student, the digital divide not only affects the teaching and learning but also the necessary connections that are made with marginalised communities that the pedagogy is intended for. Van Dijk (2020: 3) explains that "the digital divide is about absolute inequality, as it is

[7] 'Zero-rating' is when no price is charged for the data used to access and use an application or website (Gillwald, 2020: para. 20).

framed in the concepts of inclusion in and exclusion from society". This shows that it has the potential to further marginalise and disconnect these communities and stakeholders from pedagogically reliant collaborative interventions. Online learning platforms and Learning Management Systems – albeit essential in the dissemination of content and resources – are unable to support certain aspects of the entire Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. Although a praxis-led lecture could be undertaken via Zoom, one begins to further examine the capability of online learning platforms and Learning Management Systems to effectively maintain the characteristically embodied sensory encounters of the pedagogy.

The digital divide is an important agent to consider because not only did the entrance of COVID-19 exacerbate it, it also posed a direct threat to the Applied Drama and Theatre educator's efforts in maintaining the integrity of the curriculum. Moreover, the divide resulted in the fragmentation of numerous aspects of the pedagogy as the institution resolved the connectivity of all students. This study tracked the adjustments to the curriculum made by this group of educators at Drama for Life during COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 and 2021 amidst the digital divide. Later in this thesis, I will also share the themes and trends that lead to lasting changes in how the department teaches the curriculum going forward both online and face-to-face.

1.3. Problem Statement

With the national lockdown in place from late March 2020, institutions across South Africa and departments alike began to integrate their curricula online. Apprehension flared up in discussions regarding the shift in coursework content delivery and exploration. What intensified these valid feelings of concern were three clear factors: the digital divide, the dynamics of teaching and learning remotely and maintaining the integrity of the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum, online.

Referring back to Drama for Life's intentions of participation and collaboration, immersion in context and praxis as introduced on page 14, I considered whether online platforms would adequately honour the components of our critical pedagogy, which thrives on embodied and experiential modes of exploration. Firstly, when considering the role of

praxis, I recognized that during a dramatic process, reflection relies on practice and participation, just as much as theoretical underpinning. While the educator may attempt to honour the theoretical aspects online, could the practical ones be achieved with the same vigour?

Secondly, when one looks at collective participation and collaboration (whether through the classroom experience, placements or performances, festivals and conferences), the relationship between facilitator/educator and participant/student, and the role of being one another's present audience and witness, is what this intention thrives on. This too, speaks to the department's emphasis on community building and development (Drama for Life, 2020a). How then do we honour this dynamic if we cannot be in a common setting and with unequal digital connectivity? Lastly, an essential pedagogical agenda that feeds on the ability for practitioners to immerse themselves in social and community contexts (as well as fictional contexts) becomes limited because the access to the contexts is threatened by the digital divide and the pandemic's impositions on physical contact. Regardless of the significant solutions to connectivity and access over 2020 and 2021, they did not completely match the conditions under which the pedagogy should be explored.

Bresler (2004) buttresses an overarching element into the argument of the study. He states that Applied Drama and Theatre involves the physical/biological body and that our minds, thoughts and feelings form part of how our bodies operate in many settings including dramatic ones, thus the term 'embodied learning'. Therefore, the study problematises the inability to experience embodied learning remotely because 1) learning from home presents a totally different dynamic and limitation to embodiment and, 2) it is difficult to meet the intentions of the pedagogy when the nature of collective embodiment and energy-conscious engagement is disjointed from the learning.

If anything, educators were not as nervous about the 'what' with regards to online education but rather 'how' they were going to maintain the objectives of this complex pedagogy online. A related factor to consider was also the under preparedness of the institution in making the complex transition and the inadequate features of the existing Learning Management System (LMS). In my research journal, I jotted down further

problems that presented themselves: *How are we going to adequately foster praxis without short-changing the practical over the theory? How will students actually immerse themselves in contexts when they are stuck in their home environments and have unequal access to connectivity? What will happen to their imagination into the fictional context when they are surrounded by distractions at home? Are we even going to be able to reach our placement communities or research participants via screen?*

The 2021 academic year continued in an Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning mode, as opposed to completely migrating online or returning physically to campus for contact classes. This further exposed the challenges that South African institutions faced with the move from contact to online from a financial, feasibility and conventional pedagogical stance. The research discovered that the capacity to move fully online was not only inconclusive but threatened the health of the curriculum. The findings revealed that a distant education format would be unsuitable for the specific aspects of our pedagogy. Seeing that the management of the pandemic continued into 2022 as well, the data illuminated that the pedagogy has seen some modifications to its characteristic form and this is what this study problematized. Certainly, some aspects work best with a proficient LMS but others may require physical contact or a blended approach.

A crucial matter identified in the study was that an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum which has been typically experienced in a physical venue suddenly needed to be manipulated to the online space and immediately accessed by all its students from their remote locations. I was also curious about which, if any, of the adjustments remained post pandemic, what aspects of the changes served the teaching of Applied Drama and Theatre, and what has potentially scarred the field and must be healed as we go forward?

1.4. Research Aims and Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the reactions, interventions and strategies that five Applied Drama and Theatre educators in Drama for Life implemented as a result of COVID-19's lockdown in 2020 and 2021. Through observations made as ethnographer and the preliminary research journaling I also tracked the significant events, and teaching and learning discoveries as the pandemic unfolded. Crucially, the impact of the digital

divide on the progress of online learning is acknowledged. Finally, I offer recommendations for other Applied Drama and Theatre departments and practitioners in navigating suitable and equitable teaching and learning strategies as the pandemic continues and in an anticipated post pandemic future.

This study aims to outline the ethical and pedagogical framework of Applied Drama and Theatre as taught in the Drama for Life department before COVID-19. Bearing this framework in mind, the study places a microscopic view on the complexities and difficulties that online learning poses to the pedagogy. In endeavours to retain the curriculum's core intentions and honour its pedagogical integrity, the study looks at the various steps taken by the Applied Drama and Theatre educators as they navigated online learning platforms, amidst a digital divide; including reflections of their discoveries and solutions. Data for the study was collected through observation, field notes and recording of the journey of the five educators through an ethnographic perspective from 2020 into 2021, and as they prepared for the 2022 academic year. I also referred to institutional and departmental documentation in the form of announcements and communiques pertaining to the teaching and learning activities during these periods.

Finally, the research offers recommendations for potential solutions to honour the integrity of a characteristic Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. The recommendations will be drawn from, and guided by, findings in literature and the data collected from various perspectives. These recommendations will also be supported with trialled interventions of similar departments locally and globally whilst considering the visible contextual factors.

The study searched for answers to the following key questions:

1. What, in the opinion of Drama for Life's Applied Drama and Theatre educators, tend to be the most essential aspects of the characteristic pedagogy?
2. What core principles of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy did Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators identify as potentially seriously threatened by the movement to online learning platforms?
3. How did the Applied Drama and Theatre educators set about honouring the core mandate and intentions of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy (especially

amidst the challenges of the digital divide) during the move to online learning platforms?

4. Following the first year of COVID-19 (2020) and the second year (2021), what discoveries were made as the Applied Drama and Theatre educators continued in their attempts to honour the pedagogy through the curriculum?
5. Based on the experience of implementing an online pedagogy, what lessons have Drama for Life's Applied Drama and Theatre educators learnt that might be useful to others aiming to honour the basic principles of the pedagogy in future?

These questions were built into the research tools to establish the collective efforts by Drama for Life as a whole and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators as they endeavoured to continue with a fully encompassing academic programme and leverage it remotely. The full report of my interaction with the participants, presented in Chapters 4 and 5, provides insightful revelations from my observations and the educators' experiences.

1.5. Rationale

> I wish more people understood this. Online education is not just about using the internet. It is an actual practice that requires technology and expertise. Campuses are improvising but it is not something that can be scaled with an announcement (Gabriel, 2020).

For online learning to take flight, collective attempts are needed to navigate the shift in teaching and learning. These require patience and technological savvy. Our work as Applied Drama and Theatre educators is three-pronged and like Gabriel's (2020) tweet[8] above suggests, it goes beyond moving to internet-based learning. Our role in 2020 and 2021 included 1) using technology as a medium to disseminate curricular information, whilst learning how to navigate various tools to acceptable proficiency levels; 2) delivering content in a way that takes into account the abilities and shortcomings of the students, as a direct result of the digital divide or their capacity (as distance learning is not the norm) and the learning platforms; and, 3) ensuring that the tools of the platforms and LMS are

[8] A post made on the social media application Twitter.

effective in relaying the curricular content and that core concepts are grasped above a satisfactory level – as they would have been in a normal contact class environment.

What is more, educators were required to ensure that they model the intended message of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, in the way the teaching and learning continues remotely. The second and third prongs above are interconnected tipping points of this study. It is imperative that the digital mediums chosen to teach and learn from are accessible and functional, and are appropriate for the particular intentions of the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum. Digital access or the lack thereof has a cumulative effect on the full accomplishment of the curriculum.

This research is noteworthy to undertake because it brings a sophisticated pedagogy to the fore and warrants that all partakers of it experience it to its full capacity as we navigate the pandemic. The practical significance of the study offers a window into the complexities of migrating this curriculum online and equally preserving its multifaceted functions – while welcoming the prospects of a reimagined multimodal approach in the future. The findings sought to expose whether the integrity of the pedagogy can be maintained fully online or in a combination with face-to-face learning. Applied and Performing Arts based educators from departments and/or institutions can benefit from the results of the study, further implementing or questioning their stance toward achieving the objectives of their curricula remotely. In an online newspaper article, Reiersgord (2020) states that:

> Teaching online is different than in a classroom, which means teachers need to think critically about what content is included and excluded when moving courses online. Redesigning a course's syllabus to suit online learning platforms afford teachers an opportunity to revisit the learning outcomes of their course and review whether all of the content aligns with them.

The notion that some aspects of the pedagogy could be potentially excluded from online learning platforms is what the study finds problematic and is paramount to the research. Applied Drama and Theatre educators were challenged to discover how they could manipulate online learning tools to encompass the diverse aspects of the curriculum. I maintain that redesigning the curriculum should in no way result in the elimination of certain aspects of it and that instead educators are to facilitate ways of honouring the

integrity of the complete pedagogy from a practical and theoretical perspective. However, until the digital divide is addressed, this will be difficult to achieve.

The pandemic, providing Applied Drama and Theatre educators the opportunity to redesign the curriculum, was a call for them to explore answers to the following questions: What does embodied work look like via video conferencing? How do my students play as a group without having physical contact? How do I facilitate Applied Drama and Theatre interventions via screen and maintain immediate and effective response? How do I capture the experiential nature of learning in my lesson online? What happens to a body that is isolated from other bodies in an online process? How do we operate as a collective body online, when our connectivity and digital experience is unequal? All of these have been incorporated into the focused research questions presented in 1.4.

The questions above can be classified under the theoretical significance of the study. The study validates that an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, undoubtedly timeless, should evolve and extend itself beyond its pre-COVID designations. Failing which, it would be assumed that these educators were unable to meet its pedagogical goals and that students were robbed of their academic endeavour. The study, choosing to observe the practical attempts by the educators in achieving the core intentions of praxis, collaboration and immersion, is imperative in a time such as this, where such curricula and education as a whole have been stretched and shaken.

On the Drama for Life (2020b) website's *About Us* section, they state that a central aspiration for their academic programme is "to educate professional artists, therapists, facilitators, and educators in drama for social transformation". They further promote the competence of critical pedagogy in fostering students who become skilled and valuable professionals in their prospective career fields of influence. It is imperative to revisit this central objective and consider how it was achieved amidst the chaotic nature of the pandemic and the digital divide in South Africa. More specifically, with the support of various stakeholders (the institution at large, government/higher education ministry and cellular network providers), Applied Drama and Theatre educators might be able to foster revolutionary changes to the curriculum going forward. Similar departments and institutions globally have been challenged to introspect whether or not their fundamental

intentions can be fulfilled online and the study makes a collective effort in recording such ground-breaking events and results.

Polity (2017) explains that the integration of ICT is crucial for students in South African tertiary institutions. Before one can consider Learning Management Systems, virtual tools and training etc., the pandemic reminded us that we were not as prepared as we thought we were (Graham, 2020). The unequal access to ICTs in South Africa affects the manner in which students can access course material and submit assignments, their ability to work during the day and attend the classes remotely or virtually, and their capacity to bridge their geographic limitations and distractions. Although a daunting experience, all educators at Drama for Life were on board with the migration and the institution made concerted efforts to face these obstacles. Therefore, the study plays a pivotal role in shining a light on the fundamental challenges impacting our pedagogy under these strenuous conditions. Moreover, it cannot be stressed enough that digital systems serve as both enabler or change agent, and justly, a possible disrupter of the pedagogy.

The closure of schools and halting of face-to-face education will not only have a negative impact on educational activities, but also be deprived of certain curricular aspects that are reliant on physical contact and bodily presence. Our bodies operate within social and cultural contexts and these manipulate the ways in which we respond, reflect and share ideas in an Applied Drama and Theatre engagement. In the case of the participatory and collaborative nature of the pedagogy (with all bodies present in a space), the study highlights the limitations placed on them by inadequate and under resourced online learning platforms. Remote learning from ill prepared and restrictive LMSs pose a threat to the maintenance of embodied and practical aspects of any curriculum and diminishes the student's holistic learning encounter.

As ethnographer and staff member, I observed the department in constant question and reflection upon the efficacy and the relevance of the work they do, whilst exploring ways to enhance the voices of the communities they engage with. Because the work is rooted in the African context (Drama for Life, 2020a), I believe that the humanistic principles of

the pedagogy cannot be separated from the African concept of humanity: Ubuntu [9]. I would argue that the presence and connections of the self and the other needs to be honoured in the online space. The notion of Ubuntu should include no one being left behind regardless of the digital divide, lack of facility, poverty etc. Ubuntu requires that we consider the most viable solution as we embark on a post-pandemic reality. This solution should remain conscious of the pedagogy by continuing its commitments to a student-centred approach.

Providing additional support and resources, Drama Resource.com (2020) is an online repository where all Performing Arts educators globally collaborate and share how they attempt to teach drama and related curricula online. In response to the challenges wrought by the pandemic, educators are free to contribute to the site and share their approaches, tools and strategies in effectively teaching performance and/or embodied aspects of their pedagogies online. Even as students are brought back to campus in smaller groups, the site includes ideas toward socially distanced physical/embodied experiences.

I hasten to notice that the contributions on the repository are mostly made by educators from countries with increased digital accessibility. They also do not deal with a particular pedagogy as a whole, but rather tackle activity-based content. Nevertheless, the emergence of such a platform deems the study even more valid, as there is interest amongst the Performing Arts fraternity at large around online teaching. What is unique is to this study is that it focuses on the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy and a discussion of the relevance of our existing practices in this day and age is absolutely necessary.

Fundamentally, making the transition into the second year of the pandemic, although less daunting, not only required refinement but an equal attitude to learn, unlearn and relearn. The data will show that LMSs have also made the necessary adaptations and adjustments where user friendliness, functionality and diversification of multimodal learning is concerned. However, I challenged whether these adaptations were capable

[9] A South African Nguni language phrase meaning “I am because you are”.

for certain aspects of our pedagogy. Moreover, the thesis shares the discoveries on whether or not going fully online is feasible and equitable at all not only for this pedagogy but within a particular South African context.

The research discovered what methods are best suited to embrace the changes brought forth by the pandemic and ensures that students (individually and as a collective), in their professionalisation, are exposed to the characteristically boundaryless pedagogy. Recommendations from the findings will further contribute to the well of knowledge in the development of systems suitable for Applied Drama and Theatre departments and the curriculum. Finally, the research is crucial in reflecting on this indelible moment in history and I believe in the potential of this study for future expansion and development of education as a whole.

1.6. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework serves to unpack core concepts and theories that guide the research. This section encapsulates the foundational principles of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, with a particular focus on the study's three curricular intentions and the theories that underpin them. The framework maps out the delineations of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy and how praxis, collaboration and immersive contexts are entrenched in it, especially when embodied and experiential in form.

Before I engage with these, I enter the noticeable distinctions of the terms 'pedagogy' and 'curriculum' into the discussion. These two terms are referred to throughout the thesis – albeit interchangeably. The term pedagogy is no stranger to Applied Drama and Theatre and Paolo Freire, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* confronts the boundaries of care and education, and the relationship of learner and educator (Freire, 1972). These principles inform the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy to this day. My understanding of pedagogy is that educators do not just deliver curricular content. There is a greater commitment to their approach, how the learning is instrumental in other areas of the students' lives and that the experience is not one sided. This can only be explored when students and educators interact through dialogical exchange and reflection on their learning.

Smith (2012) summarises pedagogy as the process of bringing life to learning and this includes the following three aspects: 1) animation which brings life into situations; 2) reflection which involves creating moments and spaces to explore lived experiences; and 3) action, which enables people to take informed critical action. In reference to the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, I view it as achieving a holistic purpose in, for and through the learning and this cannot merely happen by sitting in a classroom setting. Therefore, participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion in social contexts are viable pedagogical intentions that are explored through the curricular design and course structure. Oh and Rozycki (2017: para. 4) explain that the curriculum,

> …is not a textbook, nor the materials, videos and worksheets that help us instruct students. It is the knowledge and skills that students are expected to learn as they progress through the schooling system.

I would add that the curriculum includes assessment of the acquired knowledge as a prerequisite for the progression. Thus, curricula are designed to introduce and explore the concepts that inform a pedagogy. The approach to delivering the curriculum is also informed by the pedagogical attributes and concerns. What knowledge and skills (curriculum) have students learnt about the pedagogy, online? Were these knowledges and skills that were acquired remotely and online sufficient for them to go out and practise the pedagogy? The study looks at the movement to and the experience of the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum in online learning platforms and the impact of this move to this critical pedagogy. I will also discuss how the pedagogy influences the way in which educators offer the curriculum and how the loss of certain aspects in the curriculum bears direct burden or becomes ironic to the demands of the pedagogy.

Throughout this thesis I use the mixed term Applied Drama and Theatre, as offered by Drama for Life. For instances where specific streams are discussed, I will make clear distinctions. To begin with, I would like to give short definitions of the words ‘drama’ and ‘theatre’ on their own, outside of their applied context. The word ‘drama’ comes from the Greek meaning “to act, to do”, and it is in the several subtle and diverse meanings of “to perform” that drama can be said to have begun. The term ‘drama” can be termed as a subject that covers a mode of fictional representation through dialogue and performance

(Drama, n.d). Having derived its roots from ritual and mimetic instinct, drama is a literary work genre that imitates action and results in performative embodied experience with or without dialogue (Gilbert and Tompkins, 1996: 10). The pandemic's restrictions on physical contact affect the concept of 'doing' greatly, especially if it would involve the presence of and participation with other bodies. It is arguable that the ability *to do* as a collective is a significant part of the pedagogy's make-up.

On the other hand, the word 'theatre' is translated by the Greek term *theatron*, which means "seeing place" or "instrument of viewing". This "seeing place" denotes the site of performance or the stage area – in this case, the classroom and the space where play and learning takes place. Prendergast and Saxton (2009) argue that whereas traditional mainstream theatre is most often predicated in the interpretation of a pre-written script. Applied Theatre, in contrast, involves both the generation and the interpretation of a theatre piece that in performance, may or may not be scripted in the traditional manner. Phillip Taylor (2003: 38) crystallises the difference between the traditional *theatron* versus its entrance in Applied Theatre, as "a pedagogy which asserts that viewing is not enough… we need to act upon our viewing as a means of transforming the kind of world we live in."

As a result of the pandemic, the seeing place is now represented by a cell phone, tablet or computer/laptop screen and faces an obstacle if connectivity and access is compromised. This places limitations on the experience if connectivity and access is unequal or non-existent. More so when the sense of witness and community is also fragmented.

The placement of the word 'applied' to both drama and theatre, proves that they have a practical purpose when used for various interventional and experiential modes of exploration. Applied Community Theatre Uniting People (2020) explains that Applied Drama and Theatre, collectively is what happens when a group of people working together in a community, use the techniques of drama and theatre to address issues of social concern. Moreover, they add that Applied Drama and Theatre focuses on questioning, discussing and addressing the issue, as opposed to merely directing attention at creating a public performance (Applied Community Theatre Uniting People,

2020). Standing firm in their approach to the pedagogy, Drama for Life rejects functional interpretations of Applied Drama and Theatre "that reduce the field to a limited technical approach". They further highlight that it is about the creation of critical reflective pedagogies, spaces and aesthetic forms that give rise to alternative ways of being in the world (Drama for Life, 2021).

When defining Applied Drama and Theatre, the following factors are essential and interdependent: 1) the role of the trained Applied Drama and Theatre educator; 2) the encounter which involves participants/students and educators/facilitators (who are accustomed to engaging physically with one another); and 3), the common setting and non-traditional space in which the encounter occurs, that may or may not be affected by online learning platform. Combined, all these factors are inclusive of Drama for Life's intentions where the educators seek to forge collaboration, praxis and immersion, in embodied engagements. The following is a definition of the Applied Drama and Theatre educator, whose role during the pandemic is a cardinal focus of the study.

> An Applied Drama and Theatre facilitator (practitioner) is the name given to a theatre/drama artist who most often comes from outside the locations into which he or she enters to work, often in partnership with non-governmental organisations, businesses, social agencies and institutions (Prendergast and Saxton, 2013: xii).

Within the context of Drama for Life, the Applied Drama and Theatre educator is a qualified individual whose priorities are to expose students to the full might of the curriculum and its pedagogical offerings. A fundamental responsibility of an Applied Drama and Theatre educator is to offer students the relevant pedagogical tools and strategies, both theoretically and practically, so that they too can leave the institution as practitioners, theatre makers and specialists for social transformation as stated on page 22.

Amongst many course offerings in Drama for Life, the Applied Drama and Theatre educators facilitate courses such as Drama in Education, Reflective Practice and Theatre in Education which includes Theatre of the Oppressed and Theatre for Human Rights, Theatre for Development to name but a few. These are further broken down into concepts

such as process drama, role play, improvisation, storytelling, devising, image work etc. which include the theoretical foundations which are supported and pioneered by theorists and practitioners. All of which are dynamically explored through praxis, collaboration and participation and immersion in social contexts.

Prendergast and Saxton (2013) stress that an Applied Drama and Theatre facilitator (in this case an educator) knows and is capable of using theatre and drama strategies and techniques to serve the needs of their communities. For Drama for Life educators, these communities are their students, stakeholders, partners and marginalised communities who play an active role in the interventions. Adding to Drama for Life's endeavours in fulfilling the transformative agenda of Applied Drama and Theatre, Bashiru Lasisi (2020: 6-7) explains,

> It is a tool in the hands of professional drama and theatre practitioners and non-professional particularly those in the education and social science disciplines to interrogate, analyse and empower people in different parts of the world.

In Nicholson (2005), Phillip Taylor writes that Applied Drama and Theatre practices are similar in the sense that they are both dependant on strategies that teach about issues, events and relationships. These specific strategies (which will be addressed shortly) aid in the empowerment and upliftment of communities. Therefore, appropriate techniques and strategies are employed by the trained educators as they manoeuvre these issues with students, further training them how best to employ it in their individual practice. Consequently, when manipulated or exerted for various purposes, Applied Drama and Theatre interventions produce beneficially transformative results for participants and facilitators. The role of the educator, as stated above is to not only introduce pedagogical concepts to students, but also to design and carry out curricular opportunities for students to practically explore and engage through immersion. This already formidable pedagogical expectation is incredibly altered by the pandemic.

I will now discuss the central curricular intentions of the study such as participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion in contexts. This includes definitions of their form, points of connection and the change in dynamics when experienced online.

The nature of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy feeds on the presence of a community and this connects to Drama for Life's intention of participation and collaboration. Participation is understood by Megan Alrutz (2015) as having a pivotal function in Applied Drama and Theatre education, guiding students through collaborative and interactive processes of examining questions, themes or concerns within and through embodied self-expression. As part of the curriculum, Drama for Life educators introduce the principles of community-based work and ensure that students are cognisant of the role that Applied Drama and Theatre plays in acknowledging the self and the other. Interventional and participatory approaches are essential in the work as it is for the benefit of all parties involved. However, the notion of community engagement in a contact environment faces difficulty when moved online. Although it can be negotiated online, the battle lies in the uniform digital connectivity.

Gabriella Kovács (2014) also describes Applied Drama and Theatre as participatory. Participants play specialised roles; they interact with each other and by doing this they become more deeply involved in the subject matter. Congruently, John O'Toole explains that any process in Applied Drama is "very dependent on the specific group of people and external conditions that they cannot control, so they must continually negotiate the way in which they manage and manifest the elements of dramatic form" (1992: 4). The efficacy of participation is driven by the presence of these participants (whether spectator, actor, facilitator, spec-actor) as they collectively navigate their lived experiences through various forms of engagement, in a shared space. Even so, the dynamic of participation is reliant on synchronous and immediate feedback, consistent presence (virtually or physically) which requires constant negotiation in the online space. Due to the digital divide participation happens from a distanced and disjointed perspective because of the difficulties to be synchronous online and together in person.

Freebody et al. (2018) assert that participation is by all accounts a central tenet of practice in Applied Drama and Theatre. It interacts with our embodied histories, whilst simultaneously creating new potential ways of being. The need for communities to participate and forge collaborations occupies a definitive position for Applied Drama and Theatre encounters. Similarly, the capacity for educators and students to explore the

theory that grounds participation as a concept in the pedagogy could not be actively and physically engaged with due to the pandemic. As a result, the COVID-19 lockdown brought a sense of disconnection; specifically in isolating students and communities that could not connect and interact with one another in one setting.

Referring back to O'Toole's (1992) statement above, there seems to be direct relationship between participation and the role of shared communities in the pedagogy. Participation and collaboration are crucial because participants and facilitators create the work together. Prendergast and Saxton (2009:11) write that "any work that is created makes them aware and capable of change, they address issues of importance and the solutions they come up with may or may not be transferable to other communities." Therefore, all participants are active in the creation of understanding and of the action.

There are commonalities that assist the partnership in communities. Prentki and Preston (2013) state that Applied Drama and Theatre practitioners are constantly on the lookout for suitable groups that constitute communities in order to work with a group of people who share certain common denominators – be these geographical, racial, experiential or circumstantial. It is evident that the pedagogy rests on work done by, for and with these communities as they collaborate and share ideas and solutions with one another.

Participation and collaboration, although achievable online has the potential to be disrupted by the digital divide; predominantly, in cases where the pedagogy cannot access participants from marginalised communities who may not have consistent and compatible digital access. Perhaps participation and collaboration – if ranked against praxis and immersion in contexts – would be placed at the peak. The above definitions of its form suggest that without participation and collaboration, one cannot gain access into a community or their way of thinking through immersion and they cannot share in the communal ritual of reflection in praxis. Additionally, not being a part of the collective removes you from the sense-making process of the encounter, intervention or action. This brings me to the second intention: immersion.

Applied Drama and Theatre possesses a fundamental commitment to participation and collaboration that infers social function by reaching communities in various contexts. In the latter part of Lasisi's (2020) statement on page 29, it is clear that the Applied Drama

and Theatre pedagogy encourages a connection between people in “different parts of the world” who address and engage with common social, political and economic issues. Congruently, Kovács (2014) prizes Applied Drama and Theatre’s core principles for not simply facing or witnessing socio-economic or political events but allowing immediate and conscious feedback. This does hint at the possibilities of online learning achieving immersion to a certain extent, but I arrive at two questions, 1) how does the digital divide in South Africa hinder the process of immediate feedback, and 2) what aspects of community are potentially jeopardised and possibly lost as we immerse in the online space because some members cannot be present?

Drama for Life (2021) explicitly states that their mandate is to expose students to a critical reflexive pedagogy which encompasses various spaces and aesthetic forms. Hence my conclusion above that participation and collaboration allows for an organic immersion to take place. Therefore, all three intentions are related and exist co-dependently and the data will validate this. So, in order for any Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum to achieve its goal participation is required and it should happen in a particular context where its participants desire transformation and want to address social issues collaboratively. When immersed in a particular context, participants contribute to the transformative process and directed change takes place.

Due to the pandemic, Drama for Life’s Applied Drama and Theatre educators and students met barriers to immersing in the physical classroom and the social contexts (where placements and interventions usually take place) and as a consequence, students also struggled to immerse themselves in their academic programme.

> Our Applied Drama and Theatre in villages, on urban streets, prisons, schools, hostels for the homeless, homes for the elderly, universities and colleges, is recorded, reflected upon, and theorised (Drama for Life, 2020b: npn).

Drama for Life’s location of their curricular contexts clearly states that the critical pedagogy is taken to and experienced in various communities. Lasisi (2020) confirms that Applied Drama is drama conducted in community, facility or school setting among others; far away from the traditional performance space for drama and theatre. Adding to this

dynamic of non-traditional spaces, blogger, Elinor May (2020) emphasises that the "pedagogy's strength lies in its ability to be facilitated in not the most glamourous of spaces. Accessibility is of utmost importance and these performance spaces include prisons, parks and even local post offices". From the above discussion, it is clear that any Applied Drama and Theatre intervention or experience is heavily reliant on the presence of communities (participants), the spaces in which they engage and the issues they address. The success of a digital platform should be measured by its ability to connect all participants from their various home contexts and the manner in which they can partake in the intervention or encounter, from a connectivity level and overall functional experience.

The immersion in contexts is both literal and fictional. "Situated learning or situated cognition involves a broader awareness of the contexts in which these experiences happen both physically and in the fictional context" (Prendergast & Saxton 2013:6). Schonmann (2011) affirms that during collaborative moments, participants creatively construct new and embodied experiences as a collective. It is important to consider that these constructive experiences mostly occur in the presence of other human beings in a social and cultural or political context. Applied Drama and Theatre processes enter contexts with the purpose of creating transformative thinking, impacting social change, and fostering educational solutions. The pandemic has affected the way in which we engage with each other and the marginalised communities that we, as Applied Drama and Theatre practitioners, serve. Although various ICT systems could facilitate a virtual collaboration, their immersive capabilities (both in social and fictional contexts) have been seen to be limited.

> Role play, involves the process of both the facilitator and the participant, imagining that they are someone else in another world and exploring a situation through that person's eyes, in order to understand the world in which they live (Bowell and Heap, 2001: 29).

Role play is a tool that allows participants to step into the shoes of a particular person and experience their world. This world is known as the fictional context. The strategy encourages the educator to not merely present a problem to the student and ask them to

present a solution but rather, to create a world the student can invest their belief in, know who they are, what they are doing and why they are there, discover the problem and work with their peers to solve it. This happens by tackling the issue in another person's shoes. Prior to entering the fictional context, the facilitator would have taken steps such as building belief through story, props, play. These activities contribute to the participant's investment of the world and finally being enrolled into it (Wagner, 1995). In the research journal I reflected and imagined how a student could experience enrolment techniques whilst abruptly losing their internet connection or if they were accessing the lesson in an environment that is not conducive for their learning. *Can the educator effectively introduce immersion into the fictional world at a distance? What is the capacity of imagination when the students' environments are not equalised?*

Thompson in Barnes and Coetzee (2014) adds that the particularity of engaging in different contexts with diverse participants ensures that we keep the field open to varying possibilities of how performance enables people to learn and live through their experiences — both good and bad. There is a fluid negotiation between participants that in turn creates a micro community and fosters active citizenship. These processes sited in the material practices of theatre-making (or dramatic encounter), are situated in the complexity of its political, social and cultural context (Hughes and Nicholson, 2016). The critical pedagogy is premised on our ability to transcend the academic space with its connotations and move into modes of expression through human interaction. Once this is taken away, our pedagogy may become superficial.

It is clear that participation, collaboration and immersion in contexts are inter-related and somewhat dependant in an Applied Drama and Theatre encounter. Praxis, on the other hand, is the pedagogy's goal for encouraging connection and reflection. I deem it to be the agent that makes participation (action) and immersion (reflection) work coherent. Its role in reflecting on all collective action is paramount in an Applied Drama and Theatre encounter. Throughout the pandemic theoretical aspects of the curriculum have been easily migrated and experienced online; whereas the practical remained under constant relegation and postponement.

The application of the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum in various communities and contexts dedicates itself to a praxis-led approach to learning. The word “praxis” is a combination of two aspects, namely: theory and practice, and these hold equal magnitude. Similar to the word “drama” on page 26, the word “praxis” is also a Greek term meaning *to do* and Dawson and Kelin (2014) refer to the concept as “an ongoing reiterative cycle of reflection and action that moves the individual toward a new critical awareness”. This definition expands on Paolo Freire’s argument that theory and practice on their own are not enough and therefore it can be summed up as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (1973:52). In order for our communities to be transformed by any Applied Drama and Theatre intervention, there is emphasis on an active responsibility to go beyond studying and observing the community. Draper-Clarke in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe outlines that “this commitment to combine theory with experience, in order to motivate action that allows for the transformation of the self and society, is a central ambition of the Drama for Life curricula” (2022: 135).

Phillip Taylor (2003) echoes this sentiment by writing that Applied Drama and Theatre achieves a praxis of practice and theory, set in the connection to the people, passion and platform involved in the drama making.

> Praxis, a word developed by the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire claims that at the heart of sound education is an ability to help teachers and their students reflect and act upon their world and through that process, transform it…Praxis is powered by an agenda, a desire to push us to reflect upon our own practices (Taylor, 2003: 6).

This definition is paramount to understanding how praxis may be compromised when participants are unable to reflect together as a community in one setting. Again, at the end of an encounter a sense of completion and closure is created by the facilitator or educator when collective reflection takes place. Ultimately, this stimulates an impulse for concrete action. When students focus their attention on their new learning situation which is crowded by the realities of the pandemic, the limitations of the digital divide to their access and their distracting home dynamics – the concept of reflection may be drastically altered and have a negative impact on their process of learning. It is also possible that

students may successfully virtually grasp theoretical concepts but it becomes extremely difficult for them to explore them in practice, on the field or as a collective.

Therefore, without a present body in an embodied learning-friendly space of human interaction it could be even more difficult to explore the practical concepts of praxis, both individually and in unison. Freire (1973) substantiates Gavin Bolton's definition of Applied Drama by lending some perspective on the features of a praxis-based curriculum,

> …it allows the learner to be 'within the subject matter rather than outside it; they are involved in 'knowing this' rather than 'knowing that'; their understanding remains implicit rather than proportionality explicit… (1986:158).

A praxis-led curriculum ensures that all the learning possesses a global view of the purpose and participants it serves. Nicholson (2005) provides a deepened perspective of praxis, as being informed by the creative and contingent mapping of different narratives-cultural, personal, social, political, and artistic, and that learning is negotiated as encounters between artistic practices and the vernacular know-hows of the participants. This goes to show that the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy affords the students the opportunity to navigate their own lived experiences through reflection, then negotiate new meaning and understanding when collective action is based on that constant state of being, knowing and reflecting (Dawson and Kelin, 2014).

Confirming this, Phillip Taylor (2013) believes that any good Applied Drama and Theatre educator knows that the curriculum is a lived experience; it is negotiated with students and colleagues. This negotiation of the curriculum and its offerings happen through engagements where students continually think about what they are doing in relation to their realities and imagining beneficial outcomes. This muscle can be flexed throughout the learning, in interventions and developed more intentionally in a course called Critical Reflective Praxis which is offered in Honours and Masters level at Drama for Life.

These definitions of praxis and collaboration show how Applied Drama and Theatre interventions are suited to an experiential learning theory. According to Kolb, "Experiential learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984:38). All participants that enter Applied Drama and Theatre

interventions have concrete experience, they make observations and reflect on the collective encounter. The results of an experiential learning approach allow them to test all implications of new concepts in new situations (Kolb, 1984), which I find to be a similar characteristic of navigating praxis. Therefore, the learning in Applied Drama and Theatre happens through observation, interaction and reflection as participants undergo a guided process of goal-oriented learning.

As I deliberated the notion of praxis in Applied Drama and Theatre, the above descriptions emphasised that the practical aspect of its function is associated with the ability to undergo dramatic processes in the physical and present body. Applied Drama and Theatre practices are driven by the embodied experience when the self is in the presence of others, as they interact in a shared space. Validating this, Prendergast and Saxton (2013) state that all dramatic process is a form of embodied experience. In essence, the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum allows the educator and students to collectively experience elements of praxis in and through their bodies, for the purposes of, and in collaboration with groups, in particular contexts.

Comparing an Applied Drama and Theatre's experience to the sensation of computer games, Luchian and Luchian (2020) explain in their web article,

> Now imagine a similar design, but in a real space, with people you can see and interact closely. Imagine how human interaction can intensify the experience and boost the proliferation of skills and knowledge while participants are enjoying a highly entertaining activity.

This infers that human interaction is extremely important in an Applied Drama and Theatre intervention. More than just 'intensifying' the experience, human interaction allows for this melting pot of expression and a deeply guided focused involvement in the process. In addition to that, the participation and collaboration inspired in an Applied Drama and Theatre intervention allows for all diverse perspectives to be shared, negotiated and created harmoniously. However, the absence of direct human interaction and the interruptions posed by the pandemic turn a highly enjoyable activity into a laborious one.

Like praxis being two-pronged, Duffy (2014) defines embodiment as also relating two typical features namely: 1) how our central nervous system translates human interactions with physical environments into the perceptions of them; and 2) how humans physically make meaning and interact with their environment. That interaction prepares them for action.

Additionally, Prendergast and Saxton (2013) highlight that Applied Drama and Theatre involves the physical/biological body working in harmony with the phenomenal/experiential body. In my experience as educator and Applied Drama facilitator and performer, drama's foundational medium of transmission is through the body in a central space, in the presence of other bodies that delve into issues of human experience and life. It is through the body that stories are shared and roles are 'stepped into'; the body is affected by and reacts to all environments, it is placed in. This is also possible in the online space because – although in isolation – one can still engage with embodied activities and enrolment techniques through the guidance of a facilitator from their respective spaces.

Vettriano, Linds and Jindal-Snape (2017) describe embodiment as a concept that shapes how we understand the world around us through our physical being and that it is a process or activity that puts our thoughts into action. This description makes a pertinent connection between embodiment, experiential learning and immersion. Our bodies operate within social and cultural contexts that influence the ways in which we respond, reflect and share ideas in an Applied Drama and Theatre encounter. There is also a particular sense of knowing how to take collective action in and through the ensemble of bodies during immersive Applied Drama and Theatre's encounters. Furthermore, the pedagogical strategies incorporate lived experiences and transform one's thinking. Vettriano, Linds and Jindal-Snape (2017) further describe Applied Theatre in particular as enabling spaces for embodied reflection in such a way that participants make necessary changes through feeling and not just thinking.

Judging by the above, praxis is multidimensional in its definition and is found in every aspect of the pedagogy. Praxis drives the curriculum by pulling all other intentions

together. Paying close attention to “metaxis”, a Boalian[10] concept where participants are simultaneously experiencing the real and fictional contexts in an Applied Drama and Theatre process – participants make ongoing reflections as they engage with the physical world and stimuli around them. Decisions they make and the solutions that they forge through the process are retrieved from impulses of lived experiences which remain dormant in their physical body: a physical body with senses all working together to create a dynamic learning experience. Professor Coetzee (2018) confirms this by stating that dramatic and performative acts are of, and grounded in, body. Therefore, we cannot ignore what the changes in embodiment or absence of collective bodily expressions do to the student’s knowledges and experiences of the pedagogy. Vettriano, Linds and Jindal-Snape (2017: 5) insist that Applied Drama and Theatre practice is largely based on reflection through embodiment. They further state that

> In the co-creation and sharing, participants explore felt or embodied ways of knowing, as they physically enact and live their own and each other’s experiences. Applied Theatre also offers a safe space in which participants can embody and reflect on their experiences within the construct of aesthetic distancing (Vettriano, Linds and Jindal-Snape, 2017: 13).

The study explores what effect this would have on the achievement of the curriculum when this body is isolated from peers, unable to play together, participate and collaborate in real-time in a conducive environment. Furthermore, the research interrogates how Drama for Life educators and students negotiated the inherent co-creation aspects of the pedagogy (that are meant to be embodied) from a distance. It is through the acts of embodiment and discussion throughout the learning process that participants develop the skill to use self-experience to solve problems and regulate new ways of thinking about the world around them, their attitudes and belief systems. One cannot separate concepts of participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion without imagining the existence of the body in achieving them as well. Therefore, a threat to one aspect of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy in the move to online learning platforms has a ripple effect to the rest.

[10] A Brazilian playwright and political activist named Augusto Boal.

Underlining their pedagogical priorities for 2021 that explicitly address the intentions of this study, combined with their 2020 intentions detailed on page 14, Drama for Life (2021) makes the following statement,

> We believe in learning in, through and with the body- because within the body, we find tacit knowledge that we want to connect to all the other knowledge in the space. We want to do this collaboratively – in groups, ensemble work, communities and relationships. We also want to learn by immersing ourselves in context, in the places where we work and learn. Importantly, we want to immerse ourselves in the making and performing of our creative work in order to achieve social transformation and healing in the world.

Having concluded the Applied Drama and Theatre section of this framework with this poignant summary of Drama for Life's intentions, I can therefore deduce that whilst they endeavour to achieve them during a global pandemic the task is not simple. Having provided an in-depth discussion and definitions of the three intentions of focus in the study, potential threats to their endeavours are already identified – especially if we view them based on their historical definitions. Besides, the definitions leave room for modifications within the pandemic's context as well. It is important to take into account the various complexities of a South African context that may hinder or empower online learning platforms, in honouring the integrity of our curriculum.

This conceptual framework served to position the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum, where its intentions of participation and collaboration, immersion in context and praxis have been designated as indispensable to its pedagogical form. I have also discussed their function in the practice thereof and how they connect and operate in a conventional setting. Bearing this in mind, the success or failure in honouring the curriculum's virtue during the pandemic is solely dependent on the rigour of the online platform, the educators' efforts, and the management of digital divide.

1.7. Limitations of the research

This section addresses the features that limit the scope of the study and define its demarcations. These limitations have been established so that the research can be conducted under achievable parameters.

Following careful deliberation and consideration of all possibilities, this study focuses on only one Applied Drama and Theatre department, in Gauteng and South Africa as a whole. Drama for Life was chosen in particular because of its remarkable footprint in Applied Drama and Theatre in Africa, its fourteen years of existence and the caliber of practitioners and offerings under its belt. From a demographic standpoint, the University of the Witwatersrand, and Drama for Life in particular (as compared to neighboring institutions offering similar pedagogies), showed greater strides in the movement toward online learning, which allowed the research to progress. My role as teaching assistant provided me an insider perspective from which to observe the unfolding of all data and strategies relevant to the study.

Although the department offers both Applied Drama and Theatre and Drama Therapy, I only chose to focus on the former. This choice was largely due to my area of expertise and preferred focus. Although both streams are offered at Drama for Life and were taught during the pandemic, my role and skillset is stronger in Applied Drama and Theatre. Whilst trying to highlight the most significant features of an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum, it is difficult to cover it in its entirety. Therefore, I have chosen to address the three aspects of praxis, participation and collaboration, and the immersion in social and fictional contexts. Only in the data section (Chapters 4 and 5), will there be explicit discussion around the pedagogical strategies that could be hindered or empowered by online learning platforms.

Another limitation is the study's focus on the educator, with no reliance on student feedback or data. Additionally, the number of educators could be argued to be small but I have followed them extensively throughout the two-year period and they were selected based on their appropriateness of the research questions and the findings of the study.

I do acknowledge that this study may be limited by a data collection period of two years (2020 and 2021). However, this period was critical because it was marked by the entrance of the pandemic and the shift to Emergency Remote Learning, in Drama for Life and many other institutions alike. As such, changes and strategies to teaching in 2021, were a result of 2020's experience and developments. The findings show that nothing much had changed in the second year. Besides, the study addresses some of those key discoveries

made and further rectified in the 2021 academic year, which continued online. It introduces a plan for the envisaged 2022 academic programme and provides commentary on post-pandemic path.

Finally, when offering various recommendations in Chapter 6, I am limited by the complexities of a particular South African context. This context is plagued by challenges wrought by the digital divide, specifically taking into consideration the demographics of a majority of Drama for Life students and the effects of the divide on their progression and access to resources, remotely. Subsequently those recommendations will factor these student-educator digital divide dynamics and the limitations of the online learning platforms and approaches. Thus, I acknowledge that all recommendations may or may not suit the propensities of the current socio-political and economic climate in South Africa.

1.8. Overview of chapters

This thesis is divided into six chapters:

Chapter 1 sets the scene and introduces the impulse and inspiration for the research. This introduction is followed by the delineations of two crucial agents of the study, the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum and its move to online learning platforms and the impact of the digital divide. The main problem the study finds in relation to the pedagogy as a whole is identified and addressed. This chapter further discusses the aims and research questions, followed by the rationale or the significance of the research and then the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework frames and connects the pedagogical intentions to the role of the Applied Drama and Theatre educator in honouring its integrity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, I discuss the parameters and bounds by which the research is contained in the limitations section.

Chapter 2 covers relevant literature that speaks to the reactions and processes by South African Higher Education Institutions towards Emergency Remote Teaching, as the pandemic progressed. These are supported by the efforts to bridge the digital divide in South Africa. I further introduce various Applied Drama and Theatre and similar

Performing Arts based research projects that attempted to migrate their curricula online. In closing, the literature imagines a post pandemic approach to education, where an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum can be maintained both online and in contact. All literature and material acknowledge criticisms of, and determines relationships between, the core intentions and attempted strategies related to the research.

Chapter 3 covers the research method of the study. I discuss the decision to use ethnography as an appropriate method, outline the data collection process over the two-year period, the limitations thereof and the tools of data analysis. I also provide a reflection on the mitigation of bias. I conclude this chapter by describing the ethics procedure involved and approved.

Chapter 4 encompasses the presentation, analysis and theorisation of the data collected in the 2020 academic year. These include the ethnographic participant observation and field notes, as well as documentation from conference and festivals, and semi-structured interviews that reflect the Applied Drama and Theatre educators' experiences of the 2020 academic year. Relevant research questions pertaining to this period are addressed and connections to literature are made.

Chapter 5 maps out and analyses the data collected in 2021 and provides an outline of the intentions for 2022. These include semi-structured interviews and documentation from relevant departmental meetings, institutional plans and relevant conversations throughout this period. This section is thematically analysed, and relevant literature presented and theorised.

Chapter 6 consists of the conclusion and recommendations. It includes a personal reflection of the research journey and responds to the research questions. The recommendations address Drama for Life, its Applied Drama and Theatre educators and fraternity at large, makes provisions for an ongoing strategy and anticipates possibilities for a progressive post-pandemic pedagogical approach. Finally, I present possibilities for future research and make closing remarks.

1.9. Conclusion

This chapter addressed the background that steered the conception of the research, and further detailed the aims and fundamental questions of enquiry. The research questions shed light on the significance of the study in the world of Applied Drama and Theatre, as well as its relevance in the fraternity and related departments. Additionally, it introduced concepts of praxis, participation and collaboration as fundamental concepts to an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy that prides itself in transformative approaches for marginalised communities through its educative practice. These intentions have arguably been challenged by the entrance of COVID-19 and its insistence on non-contact, online teaching and learning. It has been emphasized that some of the key aspects that a student would focus on in their journey of becoming Applied Drama and Theatre practitioners, could be gravely disadvantaged by learning in this way. Finally, the limitations of the study have been addressed, with assurances that the specific choices will yield constructive results for a focused study.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter establishes a discussion of literature from various areas of research. Key literature will be reviewed in response to the research questions and addressing the conversations and interests around the study. The chapter addresses literature from a South African perspective, whilst engaging with global reactions to the pandemic, as the educational fraternity migrated to online learning platforms.

Although academic articles on Applied Drama and Theatre and online learning are important, this study will also draw strongly on literature from social media posts and various online sources as institutions went online due to COVID-19. I note that literature from theorists, researchers and academics over the past two years is still emerging and accordingly, I will also rely on online newspaper articles and video/audio responses made by people as the pandemic unfolded. The literature includes inputs from academics across other countries who were quicker in their shifts from Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning to fully-fledged online learning – though I concede that their solutions may not cater for our particular context.

The study positions itself on the intersection between overlapping areas of research: namely COVID-19's resulting necessity for online learning and the implications on the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. The conversations herein include the attitudes and reactions toward the entrance of the pandemic by educators and the Higher Education fraternity at large, and outlines the possibilities and negotiations for offering the curriculum online.

The first part of this chapter looks specifically at South African tertiary institutions' reactions to the pandemic and more importantly their deliberations on the most suitable path to take. This section is designed to set the scene of the immediate responses as lockdown was announced and provides an overview of the journey toward Emergency Remote Teaching, how it differs from online learning. Finally, I review the proposals by

institutions to move into blended learning in future as it may be most feasible for diverse pedagogies.

The second part of the chapter will focus on the digital divide and its impact on the rollout of Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning. It addresses the digital divide's threat to the pedagogy and discusses attempts made by institutions to mitigate it. The third aspect of the chapter summarises the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy (although earlier detailed in the conceptual framework) and how the movement to online learning platforms has impacted certain aspects of the curricular intentions. This section then introduces examples of local and global Applied Drama and Theatre based projects that have successfully migrated some aspects of their curricula online.

Finally, the literature review considers potential technological or suitable learning approaches that could have the capacity to carry the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum online as an effective and dynamic ongoing practice.

2.2. South Africa's response to the pandemic and its impact on Higher Education

> If online learning were to be declared tomorrow, we wouldn't have sufficient time to be able to address the different socio-economic challenges that characterise each institution and their ability to implement this change (Sishange in Mbolekwa, 2020: para. 9).

The above words were said by SA Union of Students' Spokesperson, Thabo Sishange as he expressed concerns over the readiness of institutions, educators and students in undertaking an online learning approach with haste. His response is a direct reflection of the numerous issues that have delayed online learning progression pre-COVID-19, evidently the result of our post-apartheid condition of historic inequalities and the effects of the digital divide. At most, the effective implementation demands that students, educators and communities (stakeholders and partners) are on the same digital level that allows them to experience the work simultaneously. As both researcher and educator I cannot be oblivious to these factors, especially when any educational strategy stresses inclusivity which leaves no student behind. Particularly related to an Applied Drama and

Theatre context, including its educational mandate, social justice and dialogical teaching are significant ethical features of its pedagogy. Additionally, the ability for institutions to implement any necessary changes are delayed by lack of training and the inconsistent use of and proficiency with existing Learning Management Systems across the educator- and student-board.

Reactions to the pandemic and the transition to immediate remote teaching and learning was met with two distinct reactions. Some institutions excitedly welcomed the transition with open arms and looked forward to exploring a new way of learning. This eagerness could be a result of the institutions' foresight and already steady preparation to migration to online platforms pre-COVID. Others panicked with fear and anxiety as numerous questions around access, proficiency and lack of training loomed. Ramnund-Mansingh, Souls and Reddy (2020) state that these feelings were valid because South African learning institutions were predominantly face-to-face in their teaching and learning practice.

Similarly, Black Academic Caucus (2020) recalls the University of Cape Town's (UCT) dedication to a one-week orientation for online teaching and learning which expected academics to be fully online by 27 April 2020. The challenge with the organisation of this orientation perpetuated assumptions that educators and students were sufficiently prepared and resourced (beyond access to laptops and data) to do meaningful academic work during a "historically unparalleled crisis of humanity" (Black Academic Caucus, 2020: para. 2). In a tweet, Professor Antonova (2020) resonates with the discomforts in assumptions that shifting to online learning would be easy to navigate and argues that,

> …this whole "switch everybody to online learning" thing is predicated on the most absurd, fantastical thinking that is so embedded in our culture we're not even seeing it: there is no way, no way at all, for things to continue almost as usual during a pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, educators and students were not trained to make the complete switch to online. The idea of data usage (let alone having a device) fired apprehension for many students affected by poverty. Add this dynamic to COVID-19's threat on lives,

livelihoods and overall well-being, and there is an even more unsettling upheaval of emotion. Dwolatzky and Harris (2020) state that at the end of 2019 (around the time when COVID-19 broke in Wuhan, China), only 51% of South Africa experienced internet penetration; meaning half of the population was without internet access. Even though Departments of Basic and Higher Education proposed strategies (2015-2020) to facilitate online learning platforms in South Africa, the implementation of these policies were poorly implemented and incompletely rolled out (Malinga, 2020).

The reactions toward online learning (whether good or bad) were a reflection of existing debates and opinions about the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and what we could lose or gain as it progresses: more pertinently the changing face of education. A prevalent debate was on the benefits and challenges of online learning, coupled with the urgency at which it had to commence. All these tensions underwent negotiation, whilst institutions were encouraged to remain calm and measured. Professor Andrew Crouch in Booth (2020) champions online learning for its ability to facilitate teaching and learning outside of the classroom and he adds that people should embrace this new development as it provides the country with the opportunity for a digital revolution. Even so, Crouch does acknowledge that the biggest challenge is "connectivity, especially if students do not have access to the gadgets that are needed for the lesson" (Crouch in Booth, 2020).

In relation to this study, the 'outside of the classroom' advantage is welcomed because our pedagogy is indeed targeted for communities that are on the 'outside' or marginalised and our agenda is to bring them in. An online-based Applied Drama and Theatre interaction that connects people from all over the world is imaginable and could be achieved. In contrast, online learning and the unequal connectivity dynamic in South Africa isolates those students and communities, rendering them outsiders again. There are pushes and pulls in the entire debate.

Positioning what could be lost when going online, Mpungose (2020) promotes face-to-face learning for providing real-time contact with resources and others, taking place within a specified contact time, and giving prompt feedback to students. However, he warns that these qualities "can never be realised in a South African university context unless the

digital divide is addressed" (Mpungose, 2020:2). Taking stock of the above reactions and the dynamics around them, it is my view that institutions were mainly concerned about three things: 1) training or lack thereof; 2) the format and structure (migrating existing resources or designing them for the online platform and forging new structural approaches to learning and teaching) and; 3) connectivity (ensuring that students and staff have access to online resources; including devices and data). From March 2020, institutions rigorously grappled with resolving these major aspects.

A key strategy that pressed institutions into online learning began with forging an Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) path. Hodges et al. (2020) clearly stipulate avoidance of equating ERT with complete online learning, arguing that they are different. Before outlining various examples of universities' approaches to ERT, it is imperative to make distinctions between it and online learning.

> Online learning is a modern educational approach where students and teachers follow a structured curriculum programme using advanced information technology that is mediated via the Internet. Modes of instruction include platforms like virtual study portals, apps and social media (Ramnund-Mansingh, Souls and Reddy, 2020: para. 3).

Closely studying the above, there is a definitive suggestion that for online learning to work there should be an online adapted curriculum, internet connection for educators and students in their respective remote areas, and a device from which they can access the curriculum and the lesson. It further suggests that students are able to participate from a distance provided they have appropriate hardware and software to facilitate the mode of instruction, and are not compelled to attend classes on campus. This implies that online learning provides students the opportunity to learn and fulfil qualification requirements without being physically present at an academic institution.

Now, Hodges et al. (2020: para. 13) define ERT as,

> A temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode as a response to crisis situations. ERT involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as

> blended or hybrid courses and that will return to that format once the crisis or emergency is abated.

Comparing the two, it is clear that ERT is an immediate response to crisis and is aimed at facilitating movement toward salvaging an academic programme. Online learning, though, is a long term and more permanent solution. The actions and steps taken in an ERT response accumulates in the development of an online learning strategy as a result of crisis – in the hopes that institutions do not merely regress to pre-crisis modes. Online learning then is a result and product of crisis attempts that are eventually formalised and configured well enough for institutions to continue with.

University of the Witwatersrand (2020) also agrees that ERT is not "true online teaching" and that as a pedagogy in itself, online learning requires substantial preparation and a course being designed in its entirety prior to offering it. Following developments post-ERT trial and error, institutions may consider going fully online or diverting to a blended learning approach. Regarding the latter approach, Olivier (2020) defines blended learning as a system that uses a combination of both online and offline interactions where students experience the curriculum face-to-face and through online learning platforms. This will be explored later in this chapter.

South Africa's transition into online modes of teaching and learning was slow paced over the past ten years. COVID-19 "fast-tracked this lag in the space of 10 weeks, as structures and curricula of higher education were flipped on their head" (Ramnund-Mansingh, Souls and Reddy, 2020: para. 1). Not only were institutions and government "flipped on their head" by the thought of implementing ERT but dealing with the realities of a South African context was a great cause for panic. In his first address following the president's school suspension announcement, Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande outlined four areas that needed attention, as institutions progressed towards ERT. He then asserted that government had invested in driving the following objectives:

> 1)Development and implementation of effective multimodal remote learning systems (digital, analogue and physical delivery of learning materials), 2) securing a universal access deal with major network operators around data and connectivity, 3) where physical delivery of learning

> materials are required and where no immediate digital means are ready, students should be provided with instructional materials and 4) finalising the procurement and distribution of devices (laptops) and its connectivity into digital remote learning platforms (*Times LIVE*, 2020).

Accomplishing these areas was anticipated to strengthen remote pedagogic teaching and learning models, and open up possibilities of continued post-pandemic blended learning, following a successful ERT stage. Council of Higher Education (2020:7) applauded Zhejiang Higher Education Institution in China for their three-pronged approach to ERT – with its first prong focusing extensively on hosting training sessions for students and educators. The training sessions catered for close to 3600 academics and demonstrated how to adapt contact pedagogy to ERT (Council of Higher Education, 2020: 7). However, they insisted that it might not be feasible to train academics in South Africa, especially where time and resources are concerned (Council of Higher Education, 2020). From April 2020, institutions all over South Africa forged ahead on the journey to ERT with determination.

This fast-paced shift to ERT, where educators found themselves grappling with and testing the systems, achieved an indirect training, “killing two birds with one stone”. Kupe and Wangenge-Ouma (2020) assured that the idea of ERT is not to pursue online learning as an alternative to contact teaching and learning. Rather, the shift should be used as an opportunity to leverage technology and optimise multiple delivery modes, whilst embracing creativity and innovation in teaching and learning. It was also hoped that all actions taken by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) will not be discarded once COVID-19 is eradicated, as this goes against a 4IR favoured direction.

Hodges et al. (2020) stress that the primary objective of ERT in these circumstances is to not re-create a robust educational ecosystem, but to rather provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and reliably available during an emergency or crisis. Agreeing, Shakya et al. (2020) admit that although ERT forced HEIs to navigate new methods of teaching, educators were faced with the task of keeping students engaged, while simultaneously confronting the challenges that come with technology and the LMS. Still, Meyer (2020) warned that

despite the fact that ERT is perceived to be an innovative way of learning and teaching, it can be considered 'impractical and elitist' – especially where access and connectivity is concerned for certain students. To offer broader context, I will now outline how various esteemed South African tertiary institutions implemented their respective ERT strategies.

University of Cape Town's (UCT) approach to ERT has been described as a "multipronged, cross-disciplinary process that required agility and collective buy-in from role players across the university (Davids, 2020). Their strategy focused on providing a low-tech remote teaching, which promotes asynchronous[11] learning and low data bandwidth, including the use of Zoom and smartphone applications (Davids, 2020). Through their LMS, *Vula,* course material and content were restructured and redeveloped, and live check-ins were created for academic review and feedback (Davids, 2020). Consistent feedback and review by students and staff around the LMS was essential in these introductory phases so that changes could be made as the year progressed.

> Technology can enable lecturers and students to access specialised materials well beyond textbooks, in multiple formats and in ways that can bridge time and space. The systems can then adapt the learning experience to suit students' personal learning styles with great granularity and precision. Technology does not just change methods of teaching and learning, it can also elevate the role of teaching (Schleicher, 2020:16).

The key for effective ERT lies in technology and the platforms at one's disposal acting as allies and not villains in the process. As institutions across South Africa made the necessary changes caused by the pandemic, many encountered moments of elevation and the gradual precision that Schleicher (2020) mentions above. Similar to UCT, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) reconfigured their LMS, *Sakai,* and focused on curricular design, management of resources and consistent student engagement (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020a). Through the introduction of an inclusive pedagogical framework, they broke down steps for transitioning to online learning such

[11] A general term used to describe forms of education, instruction and learning that do not occur in the same place or at the same time; students view instructional material at a time they choose (Davids, 2020).

as “creating a social presence online, using appropriate assessment and feedback tools and monitoring accessibility” (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020: 3). As with UCT, they also relied on platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp to reach students in the early stages of lockdown learning.

According to Andreas Schleicher (2020) the response to the COVID-19 crisis encouraged a creative adaptation process for university institutions. He added that for universities to remain relevant and embrace their evolution, they will need to reinvent their learning environments so that digitalisation expands and complements student-teacher and other relationships (Schleicher, 2020). Wits claims that they had completed their planning phase of offering short courses fully online for part-time students in late 2019 and, surprisingly, COVID-19 struck a few months later (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020a). Sharing Schleicher’s (2020) sentiments on the benefits of online learning, this move to digital enhanced learning would offer exciting perspective on what students learn, how they do it, as well as where and when. Therefore, although the feelings of doubt and nervousness about ERT were valid, the fact that they had already prepared for the possibilities of this path was in their favour.

> A number of universities are struggling with this transition. This is mainly due to inadequate information technology infrastructure, limited expertise for online teaching and learning methods and the inability of institutions to provide computers and data to students (Kupe and Wangenge-Ouma, 2020: para. 10).

Exposing the darker side of the picture and experiencing a slower progression to ERT, Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) struggled with the transition. By the end of May and halfway into June 2020, they still had not commenced with the 2020 academic program (Tshwane University of Technology, 2020). The results of their student access survey indicated that out of 44 695 students who responded, 97% required a laptop loan and only 22% had their own laptops (Tshwane University of Technology, 2020). In another survey, results concluded that 72% of students would require physical delivery of course material (Tshwane University of Technology, 2020). Addressing this immediately would fulfil Minister Nzimande’s third objective on page 50 as TUT would not be able to afford all loan costs.

In addition to the collation and printing of a month's content course packs, educators were tasked with compiling digitised versions of the content (PowerPoint and Pre-recorded audio etc.) and these were packaged into DVDs and sent to students (Tshwane University of Technology, 2020). Unlike other institutions, TUT's demographic of students and overall access to necessary resources played a role in the successful roll-out of their ERT strategy. Eventually, by July 2020 with less restriction on travel, decisions were made to push the return of students to campus for the access of computer labs etc. to allow the academic program to commence. As a result of student protest, administrative staff had to re-adjust systems and timetables were disrupted (Czerniewicz, 2020). Proving that the playing field was not levelled across institutions, TUT saw their 2020 academic calendar concluding in April 2021. For a university of technology, it is ironic.

Reflecting this, Council of Higher Education (2020) cautioned that a strategy adopted under pressure, within a short timeframe, threatened to exclude or disadvantage institutions that are not economically or functionally able to participate in such practices. Moreover, dynamics and logistics around formal sit-down examinations, physical lab sessions and graduations were re-imagined.

> To give parents the impression that critical learning can happen online is misleading, especially when the academics have only had a few weeks to prepare for such a transition and are being encouraged to only focus on what is important (Black Academic Caucus, 2020: para. 11).

The 2020 academic year across all institutions proved to be a mammoth task characterised by immense trial and error. The above statement by Black Academic Caucus (2020) exposed the dangers of government and institutions hopping too quickly onto the train at the expense of excluding those students who could not get to the station in time or those who cannot afford a ticket. Highlighting the potential dangers of ERT, Hodges et al. (2020) foregrounded the rapid approach necessary may have diminished the quality of courses delivered. They add that a full course development project can take months when done properly and the need to "just get it online" is in direct contradiction to the time and effort normally dedicated to developing a quality course (Hodges et al. 2020).

An important discussion to include that affected TUT's ability to launch (and other institutions to settle in) their ERT phase with ease is the issue of accommodating complete curricula. World Bank Group Education (2020a) boils it down to the limitations of online and remote learning to translate practical courses. They state that some pedagogical approaches can be more easily translated to online learning and distance education environments than instructional practices that rely heavily on lectures or assignment of self-study materials including the more sophisticated pedagogical approaches requiring learner-centered or project-based approaches by students. (World Bank Group Education, 2020a).

As will be presented in the data and further delineated in section 2.4 of this chapter, the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum can to a certain extent negotiate remote collaboration and the theoretical aspect of praxis. However, participation, the practical aspect of praxis and immersion in social contexts are not as easily translated online. The eventual loss of the central intentions in the online space are increasingly evident.

> We need to pause, so we can engage with what the current moment means for our students, ourselves, for critical and de-colonial pedagogies, the university, the Higher Education sector at large and the society in which we are embedded (Black Academic Caucus, 2020: para. 10).

Declaring ERT as "a recipe for disaster", Tanga, Ndhlovu and Tanga's (2020: 23) findings showed fatigued and frustrated educators and students as they experienced the ERT approach. These feelings have been identified to be associated with student difficulty to transition, limited training time frames and the precarious conditions and circumstances surrounding the new change (Tanga, Ndhlovu and Tanga, 2020). Council of Higher Education (2020) highlight that in addition to training and support for ERT and learning, academics needed certainty in terms of expectations and how best to manage their time and schedules. For example, online activities take longer to develop and complete, as opposed to face-to-face preparation. Congruently, Wits stressed that "as a pedagogy, online teaching requires substantial preparation time and that is because an online course needs to be designed in its entirety prior to offering it" (University of the Witwatersrand,

2020a: 2). Moreover, Hodges et al. (2020) position that although the situation was stressful in this period, institutions emerged with an opportunity to evaluate how well they were able to implement ERT to maintain continuity of instruction. This provided them an opportunity to adopt policies and accelerate teaching and learning practices.

University of the People (2020) encourage institutions to evaluate their ERT strategies and prepare a contingency plan in the event that crisis strikes again. This evaluation should include the following aspects: 1) technical considerations and capabilities of staff and students, 2) monitoring the use and need of time in development and teaching of content and 3) highlighting key efforts in making the approach work, which include communication, flexibility, establishing routines and collaboration etc. Alternatively, it can be argued that ERT approaches should lead to blended or fully online learning methods and not a cyclical repetition following each new crisis.

When asked what long lasting changes to South African HEIs, the pandemic brought and how these will affect the way in which universities will deliver teaching and research, Vice Chancellors of UCT, University of Pretoria (UP) and Wits, respectively responded as follows,

> 1) We will draw on various methods that range between fully face-to-face and fully online. The new way puts the needs of students with barriers to learning at the forefront. It helps us design good learning experiences and reconsider methods of assessment.
> 2) A return to purely contact learning is not going to be possible. People have experienced something that seems more relevant to a future marked by increasing digitization. Universities will now need more resources allowing them to move with greater speed in changing to hybrid or blended teaching and learning.
> 3) I believe we are going to see a stronger shift to a blended learning model. Anecdotal evidence is showing that our students are performing better in the online environment than face-to-face. This suggests we need to re-imagine how we test and assess our students' capabilities (*The South African*, 2020).

This brings me to emerging discussions by institutions about the prospects of blended learning. Almost identical, these three views envisage a future post-COVID-19 learning

that 1) encompasses a blended-to-fully online learning method; 2) takes most student and resource related needs into consideration; and 3) is committed to redefining assessment methods. Notwithstanding, I argue that where point 3) in the above quote is concerned, it remains untrue for Drama for Life because the practical and embodied skills were not achieved. In fact, the findings will show how students' overall academic endeavour was fragmented. Although, it may be settled that preceding an ERT strategy, the most beneficial route to take would be blended or fully online; certain pedagogies may thrive better when complete contact learning resumes. This is also not an easy decision to make as blended or fully online learning would require institutional regulations, policies, increased funds and extensive stakeholder buy-in to take off. Moreover, any blended education strategy needs to be aligned with the country's socio-economic reality (Kupe and Wangenge-Ouma, 2020). The findings in this study will demonstrate recommendations toward considering blended approaches for the balance of human interaction and continued virtual engagements that benefit the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy.

The terms "blended" and "hybrid" are loosely translated as the same thing, however, Learning Technologies (2020) clarifies that the difference lies in the proportion of face-to-face and online sessions and/or instructional material given in a course. They state that "whereas hybrid refers to teaching that is roughly balanced between online and face-to-face (think 50/50), blended refers to a mostly traditional face-to-face course that also incorporates a few class sessions' worth of online instruction (think 25/75)" (Learning Technologies, 2020:3). These definitions denote that activities completed online should complement those that happen in class. In 2017, UP declared that they adopted a refined hybrid learning approach (University of Pretoria, 2017). This approach involved the ability of students to be present both in class and online and access the same teaching-with added technological tools for synchronicity. In line with global practices, "students of the University of Pretoria can expect contact with their lecturers in traditional classroom settings but will also find that some classroom interactions will have technology elements added and some assessments will be done online, with modules bearing a technology-based component to them" (University of Pretoria, 2017). This gave the impression that

they did not have to undergo ERT, seeing that they were already prepared. The pandemic and its rate of implementation proved otherwise.

Offering his thoughts towards a new definition of blended learning, Johannes Cronje argues that definitions of blended learning seemingly focus on the classic combination of face-to-face and the mediating technology, neglecting the learning and pedagogical implications (2020: 115). Using a concrete example, Cronje cites that certain affordances of technology may well enable forms of learning that others do not – "in other words, you cannot drive a grocery truck to the moon" (Cronje, 2020: 115). Another learning approach introduced by Wits University at the end of 2020 was the 'hyflex' learning approach which combines the terms hybrid and flexible.

Lynie Wong (2020) singles out hyflex's ability to enable students to choose how they want to engage in learning on a day-by-day basis, blended or online, synchronous or asynchronous. The benefits of this approach are that it caters for students who need to be on campus and those who can learn remotely (Wong, 2020). However, like other learning approaches, it has drawbacks that are related to educator and student's technical competencies, access to infrastructure and rapid IT support. As such, due to the resource intensiveness, Wits University decided against the approach (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020a).

The shift to semblances of blended learning in 2020 (post settling into ERT) can be identified in moments when Drama for Life opened their doors to students to partake in practical examinations, lab work and contact-based projects from August 2020. At this time, it was important for the department to tackle aspects of their curriculum that could not be effectively achieved remotely. This process was facilitated by COVID-19 screening apps and permits that granted access, with strict social distancing and mask wearing. The beginning of 2021 though saw a negotiation between remaining online or resuming with face-to-face teaching and learning. Due to the omicron wave, the 2021 academic year continued in an ERT mode all over again with some new advancements here and there. In a Wits conference titled *Lockdown Learning* educators reflected what the whole 2020-

2021 teaching experience symbolised: one said “rolling a boulder up the hill, only to have it roll back down again” and another said “it was like learning how to ski and I am glad I finally can.”

Institutions transitioning from contact to online should not only focus on the complex and costly nature of the migration but rather embrace the opportunity to implement and discover new systems (Makhanya, 2020). Additionally, in efforts to provide an optimal learning environment, the approaches should cater for diverse curricula, acknowledge the context and maintain digital accessibility. One institution that rose to the occasion during the emergent stages of the pandemic was the University of South Africa (UNISA). Makhanya (2020) is convinced that since UNISA is the largest open distance e-learning institution in Africa, it had no choice “but to flourish” in the face of the pandemic. Dismally, it was found that even though UNISA has invested millions in infrastructural upgrades, digitising systems and processes over the years, the pandemic revealed numerous inadequacies and their 2030 vision sees the doubling up on technology and building systems that can perform under pressure (Makhanya, 2020). No matter the institution, the literature shows that we were all limited and hindered by one thing or another.

This first part of the chapter drew from the reactions of educators and the educational fraternity in South African HEIs as they experienced COVID-19 and how this pandemic shifted their approach to education. I paid specific focus to the move toward ERT, how it differs from online learning and discussed its impact on the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum. Focusing on some institutions’ navigation of ERT, I also considered the benefits and shortcomings of the ERT approach. In closing, I introduced and compared concepts of blended or hybrid learning as potential directions that institutions would take post-pandemic, albeit flawed. The next section will introduce the digital divide, describe its impact on online learning in South Africa and the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy and discuss the attempts to bridge it.

2.3. The digital divide and attempts to address it

As deduced on page 49 connectivity is one of three make or break conditions for a successful ERT strategy. Also, even if educators are well trained and course content is appropriately designed for the LMS, the destructive elephant in the room and a fundamental mediator between institutions and students is the digital divide. The pandemic has since highlighted how crucial it is to confront the inequalities that exist in South Africa and its education system. A large part of this is addressing the digital disparities.

Mpungose (2020) asserts that the digital divide is a real phenomenon that is here to stay in developed countries, but is worse in developing ones—not only in terms of the first digital divide (access to Internet), but also in terms of the second digital divide (attitude, skills, type of use) and third digital divide (internet outcomes/benefits). Muller and de Vasconcelos Aguair (2022) confirm that the digital divide is multifaceted and the factors that lead to disparity in internet access are availability, accessibility, quality of service and relevance and, in addition to those are aspects of security, interconnectivity, access to equipment and digital literacy. Yuguchi (2008) reports that the digital divide problem also has demographic, geographic and socio-economic factors to consider and van Dijk (2020) emphasises that it should not only be focused as a technical issue when, in fact it is more of a social inequality. All of these factors deem it dangerous to only focus on surface definitions of the digital divide that limit it to ICT access only. The unequal access to ICT not only affects the above aspects but reciprocally these factors have impacted this disparaging access to ICTs.

Whilst Mpungose (2020) further admits that the digital divide is a natural phenomenon, suggestions for possible intervention to bridge the digital divide are inconclusive. As stated by Lei et al. (2008), there are two key contrasting thoughts regarding effectively dealing with the digital divide. These thoughts include either: 1) doing nothing and waiting for self-correcting developments of ICT or 2) adopting global intervention strategies (Lei et al. 2008). On the other hand, online blogger Premnath (2020) strongly points out that “the solution for effective online learning in South Africa is not as simple as providing computers to access online learning material”.

Echoing this debate on developing an effective strategy, Mpungose (2020) articulates that even if universities were to provide free access to Wi-Fi within their perimeters and students' residences (including free laptops), there will be students (residing in rental rooms or at home) who might not have access to the internet. Similarly, Muller and de Vasconcelos (2022) highlight that at first glance, the digital divide seems as the gap between those who have and do not have computers and internet access, when in actuality, there is no one digital divide and no single solution to bridging it. Consequently, these solutions may be far more difficult to achieve than managing the divide itself.

I will now address some attempts by HEIs in bridging the digital divide in South Africa, as ERT commenced. Dwolatzky and Harris (2020) applaud universities for their courageous moves of curricula to online platforms such as Zoom, Blackboard, MS Teams and their respective LMSs. Nevertheless, they too concede that the digital divide was an inescapable difficulty to grapple with. An immediate strategy to kick-start an ERT strategy was to ascertain the digital situation of staff and students.

Black Academic Caucus (2020) explains that the move to ERT relied on a university-wide student access survey, which mostly focused on the kinds of devices students had and their access to the internet. Premnath (2020) writes that Rhodes University conducted an extensive survey on students' capability to engage remote and online teaching and learning. Following the results, they subsidised students with laptops on a financed arrangement (Premnath, 2020). Similar to TUT on page 54, they also delivered printed study packs to students who could not access online facilities and declared their "moral obligation to ensure that no student will be disadvantaged" (Premnath, 2020: npn).

At the same time, UCT provided laptops to all students on financial aid (Premnath, 2020). Black Academic Caucus (2020) cautions that although this rollout is presented as a 'sweet deal', it comes with onerous and contemptible hidden terms and conditions because their fee accounts are immediately debited with a reversible R4150,00 upon returning the laptop. Wits University established a Mobile Computing Bank, which enabled qualifying students to loan laptops (Premnath, 2020). Over and above the distribution of laptops, telecommunications service providers were tasked with data provision and zero-rating their LMSs, libraries and study-based online resources (MTN Business, 2020).

Nonetheless, for this approach to have any longevity, it likely needs to be implemented with the help of government subsidies (Massey, 2021).

Once the data and connectivity strategies progressed, amongst other recommendations as part of the plan on page 50, Minister Nzimande motivated institutions to consider multi-modal approaches to reaching their students at all costs. These approaches included WhatsApp, emails, video conferencing and phone calls, as a way to meet the needs of digitally diverse students. The digital divide shook the efforts made by educators in embracing the medium because not all community members can be collectively reached virtually at a present moment with our socio-economic landscape.

Then Vice Chancellor of UCT, Mamokgethi Phakeng (2020) shares how educators could engage with students in diverse ways but are affected by challenges in data access and electricity provision for students. On that note, students were encouraged to remain vocal about their obstacles with learning done through continuous surveys and monitoring of their experiences for future review (Phakeng, Habib and Kupe, 2020). Even though all these efforts are commendable, the methods and rate of delivery have been disputed by many. Bridging the digital divide is a major nightmare and goes beyond the provision of data and devices (Steele, 2020).

Regarding students who were loaned laptops, Black Academic Caucus contested that the students may now incur costs that were not of their original academic plan – as the loss (including theft), damage or inability to return or replace laptops, would ultimately result in their exclusion and denial of re-registration or access to results. Black Academic Caucus (2020) argues that strategies to narrow the digital divide failed to interrogate deeper issues surrounding students' circumstances such as quiet learning space, infrastructure and other essential resources necessary for online learning.

In an online article *New research shows how COVID-19 impacted university students in 2020*, lack of access to resources as a result of being away from campus, increased stress and anxiety. Together with unconducive home environments these were the biggest challenges faced by university students in 2020 due to COVID-19 (Partner, 2021). Responding to the dynamics of home environments, Premnath (2020) reveals that many students struggled with remote learning because they lived in small, cramped and

unhygienic spaces with little to no water or electricity – as compared to on campus where it is a favourable safe haven with access to libraries, computer labs and food.

CNBC Africa (2020) state that as a result of the pandemic, learning discontinuity among students in underdeveloped nations and low-income communities was another visible threat we faced. Proving this, Hanekom (2020) summarises Statistics South Africa's results that when the hard lockdown began in March there were 1.8 million tertiary students and of them, only 37% of their households had consistent access to the internet through cell phones or computers. Clearly institutions were faced with a near impossible task of completing the academic year with students learning from rural areas and villages.

On the 17th of April 2020, a revolt against online learning by the students of the University of Johannesburg (UJ), ensued. #BoycottOnlineLearningUJ was a social media protest against its leadership bodies to consider their diverse range of students when speeding up the online learning process. Masai Buthani, a UJ Law student expressed his concerns over the digital inequalities, the data related expenses and overall aspect of prizing the rich student over the poor one (Molosankwe, 2020). This protest, while appreciative of lockdown efforts to slow down the spread of COVID-19, sought to vocalise that like safety and public health priorities, affordable and accessible internet was central to student survival and academic progression.

Gumede (2021) expresses a strong opinion that the 2015 #FeesMustFall movement and now emerging similar initiatives confirm that universities are not fully responsive to the needs and realities of students and this illuminates that we still have a long way to go in resolving challenges we face as a society. Moreover, the UJ revolt aimed to combat major outcomes that result in less access to digital technologies between students. Steele (2020) narrows the impact of the digital divide to four points: 1) low performance, 2) competitive edge, 3) learning convenience and 4) difference in learning experiences. Expanding on these points respectively, Steele (2020) explains that low-income families have less access to information, students with access to the internet perform better, privileged students who have access to better devices face fewer hurdles and students from lower socio-economic areas are more disadvantaged and require more time to meet the learning objectives.

In another survey conducted by Feenix (a student crowd funding platform) showed that 22% of the interviewed students responded that COVID-19 negatively affected their academic performance, getting a B instead of an A rating (Partner, 2021). 15% of students said that the pandemic had negatively affected their academic progression, while 25% said their earning potential was negatively impacted. This report provided an insightful snapshot into the very real challenges that many students faced in South Africa during the outbreak. Moreover, these challenges were found to extend beyond the access of finances and were heightened by COVID-19 and its imposed restrictions. It was also found that the least accessible resources (including digital devices, data and textbooks) were 30% food, 33% mental health services and only 6% had access to all resources required (Partner, 2021).

These results are a glaring depiction of the pressures placed on educators to not only deliver curricular content but negotiate each individual student's challenges beyond internet connection. These results show that the digital divide had a serious impact on any efforts to continue with remote and online teaching and learning. Again, with a pedagogy as rich as ours, Applied Drama and Theatre educators are agents of social justice by virtue of the pedagogy and in their commitments to providing an equal learning experience. Where is the social justice in an unequal connectivity situation? Additionally, they are also responsible for implementing teaching methods that allow multi-sensory experiences through embodiment, immersion and praxis. Overcoming the digital divide remedies some of the disparities in access to equal learning but, sadly, not all of them.

Massey (2021) implores that despite the fact that there are multiple barriers to online education in South Africa, there is much that can be done to improve the situation and these solutions need to not only be swift, but multipronged and adaptable. Gumede (2020) emphasises that the COVID-19 crisis should not go to waste and can be turned into an opportunity. In the same breath, Manchidi (2021) calls for urgency in exploring new and innovative ways to not only bridge, but leapfrog the divide. It is evident that although the digital divide posed challenges to the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, Drama for Life educators innovated and leveraged creative efforts to serve their students and the curriculum. Adotey (2021) considers that addressing these collective challenges

that hamper access should prioritise inclusive ways of exchanging knowledge and digital skills to young Africans in rural, underserved and marginalised areas and enhance their prospects of becoming active participants and contributors in the digital and knowledge economies.

Countering the boycott and attempting to forge productivity and a solution-driven attitude, the #NeverStopLearning movement introduced strategies that governmental bodies could consider in narrowing the digital divide,

> 1)The expansion of internet access such as leveraging existing technologies for public access, 2) Affordable internet prices, 3) Fast-tracking universal access i.e. subsidisation of devices, Wi-Fi hotspots in rural villages etc. (Makwakwa, 2020: para. 6).

Amongst many other strategies across institutions, this movement directs attention to the connectivity and network issues as well. Chinyamurundi (2021) acknowledges that although connecting African universities to high-speed internet can help drive the development of digital skills and capabilities of students to maximize their access, it is a lofty ideal. Nwaila (2020) recommends that online learning would be far cheaper for rural students than building physical learning institutions and, that narrowing the digital divide will yield more cost-effective results. However, Vice-Chancellor of UP, Tawana Kupe reacts that most universities do not have the human and financial capacity to respond to these changes, given that they have not been adequately funded for years (Phakeng, Habib and Kupe, 2020). Also, closing the divide cannot be achieved by cheaper technology alone (Cheeseman and Garbe, 2020).

In terms of maximising existing university facilities, Singh (2004) recommends that the prospects of on-campus access should be evaluated, more laboratories built and equipped to provide computing skills to students from all faculties and disciplines. The facilities should also be made available for 24 hours, on weekends and vacations, whilst ensuring their security (Singh, 2004). Speaking to the development of digital literacies Singh (2004) further advises that all students must be proficient in using operating systems, word processors, spreadsheets, presentation software, database software and use the internet more effectively. We are now 18 years post Singh's (2004) publication

and one can admit that even though universities have addressed some of these factors, they were still not prepared for the pandemic. Undeniably, this is not the sole responsibility of educational institutions but requires the commitment of national government in upholding their policies on education and access.

On COVID-19 and its impact on education, Rasool (2020) advises that the labour market is not looking for school curricula that are based on sending students to universities and we should therefore discern what our problems are and address them in our own context (Rasool in World Bank Group Education, 2020a). Chinyamurundi (2020) specifies that we cannot deny that Higher Education requires a step toward digital inclusion and that technology is an important vehicle in enabling it. Nevertheless, Cheeseman and Garbe (2020) conclude that bridging the digital divide and having access to digital technologies are only possible when a set of political, legal and economic conditions are in place, especially in such a delicate context as South Africa.

The literature highlights that efforts to navigate the digital divide are not as cut and dried as it seems. Research from the various scholars and academics has also shown that we are living in unprecedented circumstances and we should feel compelled to find immediate solutions. Adotey (2021) calls on African governments to boldly continue in their collaborative approaches in transforming education and enforcing digital inclusion by investing in both basic and digital infrastructure, such as digital public service delivery, internet coverage, and data storage capacity among others. Nevertheless, these solutions to bridge the digital divide should consider the holistic circumstance of the student, especially decreasing their feelings of physical, technological and mental isolation.

This second section of this chapter considered definitions of the digital divide and addressed aspects surrounding its form. The literature then engaged with the attempts by HEIs to bridge the digital divide considering their unique institutional bodies and socio-economic demographics, offering discussion around their efficacy based on surveyed results. Finally, these efforts were debated and discussions around implementation and longevity post-COVID were put to the table.

2.4. Migrating an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum online

The study focuses on the attempts by Applied Drama and Theatre educators to honour the integrity of a curriculum that 1) enriches a learning experience through theoretical study and practice (praxis); 2) integrates curriculum horizontally and vertically through collaboration; and 3) shares, documents and takes the work to various contexts through immersion. Additionally, one cannot separate the embodied nature of the pedagogy and its reliance on physical contact and participation.

This section of the chapter explores the potential threats that online learning poses to the core principles of the pedagogy (including the digital divide), exposes the complexities of a complete migration and finally, introduces examples of relatively successful attempts in engaging with online-based work.

> The fundamental digital divide is not measured by the number of connections to the Internet, but by the consequences of both connection and lack of connection (Castells in Graham, 2020: para. 14).

Gathering from various conversations by scholars and academics thus far, online learning poses the following threats to an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum, especially in a South African context (narrowed to three): 1) impacts physical connection; 2) limits accessibility to the complete educational experience; and 3) compromises the pedagogy. These will be further expanded on in Chapter 4 and 5. Castells's quote in Graham (2020) focuses on a second layer of the impact of the digital divide on education and the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum: "the consequences of connection and lack of connection." An Applied Drama and Theatre practice thrives on connection. Firstly, literally, where bodies are connected in one space and secondly, digitally in order for the successful remote or blended or online learning to continue. Literally, the connections typically happen when the body is in the presence of other bodies as we learn in and through the body (Drama for Life, 2021). Digitally, students and educators should have access to devices and connectivity. Crucially, their embodied and sensory connections which are explored over screens – with an added virtual distance – can only be explored if the digital challenges are solved. This includes the possibilities of synchronous connections.

Therefore, online learning poses a threat to connections and these play a significant role in praxis, collaboration and immersion in contexts.

> Through Applied Drama and Theatre, new connections and interdisciplinary projects emerge involving and connecting different domains, according to social needs and demands. Consequently new possibilities are created for life-long learning (Kovács, 2014:10).

Connected to Alrutz's (2015) definition of the participatory nature of Applied Drama and Theatre, Kovács (2014) emphasises that the success of the pedagogy lies into the flexible and open arrangement of theatrical and educational elements. More specifically, varied communication, feedback and discussions between all participants (students), spectators and facilitators (educators) are important because they have the opportunity to share their feelings, impressions and opinions (Kovács, 2014). Considering the nature of the pandemic, the concept of physical contact and engagement has been changed and therefore we had to come to some resolution – at the cost of the curriculum. Ex-Wits Vice Chancellor, Adam Habib also agrees that obviously certain degrees still require face-to-face learning but this has to be re-imagined (*The South African*, 2020). How do we maintain that students access the most out of the education experience online?

Engaging with various tools and tips to teaching online, Leah Henry (2020) advises that the standard practices that most educators use to build the desired classroom culture, can be built similarly in the online space. However, World Bank Group Education (2020b) cautions that we should all be aware that much of what happens in classes cannot be easily transferred online and all instructional approaches, content, pacing, interaction models and assessment may to be adapted when making the transition. Aladren (2020) compiled an online repository for academics to access and contribute to as they embark on the teaching of drama and theatre online. In the plethora of resources and submissions, educators from far and wide shared tips on how to use Zoom to build communities and facilitate group work through breakout rooms, mind mapping on virtual whiteboards and maximizing Learning Management Systems; even resorting to WhatsApp, phone calls and emails if students could not connect to the internet.

Connection in the digital sense has been one of the barriers for experiencing the curriculum. Manchidi (2021) encourages educators to embrace technology by taking full advantage of the opportunity and stressed that once they are both proficient and comfortable with teaching via various technological devices, they may enhance their and their student's experiences. Yet, Habib as quoted in an online newspaper, *The South African* (2020) says that even if educators and students are well-trained, the digital divide in our country will grow sharper if government does not adjust its thinking on the financial implications and the curriculum changes.

Drama for Life undertakes numerous immersion and fieldwork projects for student engagements and practical experience and these include working with learners in schools and exploring community interventions. Even though students may be digitally connected, how do they reach learners and community members in villages with low internet access? As much as the curriculum may need to be reimagined and redefined to fit the specific LMS – the reality is that some of its aspects will be neglected if we cannot connect every single stakeholder to the experience, specifically when synchronicity is vital to that experience.

> With the coronavirus spreading across the globe, many universities across the world have moved their courses online. While this may seem to be easier for business, math or science majors, we are all on the same boat. This rush to move online has left us scrambling for ideas, especially for performance courses. Going online can seem difficult and challenging for theatre or/and dance practitioners but it can be done (Sicre, 2020: para. 1).

Prendergast and Saxton (2009) posit that Applied Drama and Theatre predominantly takes place in non-traditional settings and therefore we should be able to embrace any physical change in performance, intervention or immersive site. These non-traditional settings are also easily accessible to marginalised communities engaged in the practice. Citing Sz Deme, Kovács (2014) highlights that even though events in Applied Drama and Theatre are organised in various contexts, they guarantee a life-like environment where theatre and everyday life meets and approaches one another.

Unquestionably, the role of Applied Drama and Theatre is to reach a wide range of communities and the intervention work is physically taken to the participants, further pointing to the immersive agenda. This leaves room for suggestions that the online space could be classified as non-traditional as well. This is supported by Sicre (2020) who suggests that any attempts to manipulate the online learning mediums to the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum are possible. Undeniably there are limitations. A crucial one being the digital divide.

Tracy Davis (2020) explicitly expresses the plight of educators migrating Performing Arts curriculums online. She asks a pertinent question that is investigated in this study:

> How does one teach quintessentially embodied forms dependant on human-to-human observation and whole body involvement, when no one is in the room together? (Davis, 2020: para. 1)

Teaching online (even in the most advanced countries) includes time lags, broadband fuzz and sometimes tinny sound that require mediating technologies utilised intelligently. South African universities have similar problems to other institutions in the world, however the big distinction is that we are undergoing these changes in the midst of deep inequalities. Amplifying Davis' (2020) inquiry, Aladren (2020) questions whether online learning can equal the experience of a staged performance or a processual intervention in classrooms, community halls or lectures. These are key questions to consider especially because scholars underline physical and social interactions as key components in the field of Applied Drama and Theatre. Yes, writers motivate that the online space could equally be viewed as another 'room' to enter and not feared, but the online space needs to be equalised. We cannot paint all pedagogies with the same brush and therefore institutions should cater to the specific needs of each curriculum in form and format. Only then can they truly address the specific needs and capabilities of their systems.

Commenting on the role of praxis in Applied Drama and Theatre, McKenna (2020) adds that when one embarks on any formal education, although it is important to acquire factual knowledge that is grounded in theory, "it is about becoming a specialist kind of knower

who can contribute to their field". This specialist kind of knowing can only happen when the curriculum is dissected and experienced in its entirety through theory and practice in embodied collaboration. Czerniewicz (2020) states that in the COVID-19 context where social distancing is encouraged, it will be essential to pay attention to human connection virtually and find ways to ensure that human support is continued.

Viral and highly contested academic article *Do a bad job of moving your courses online,* had Barrett-Fox (2020) persuading educators to do a poor job of migrating their Performing Arts curriculum online and emphasised that they are not to settle with an online class. This article was written to revolt against the expectation that drama curricula are easy to teach online and implied that we rather wait to go back to campus. Initially McKenna (2020) shared similar sentiments: the sooner students are back safely in class the better and that going entirely online is only going to be a stop-gap response.

The notion of safety in relation to Applied Drama and Theatre is crucial to consider. Hunter (2008) defines the safe space in four ways: 1) a literal place that provides safety from danger; 2) a metaphoric space boarded by temporal dimensions in which inequity is barred; 3) an abstract concept connected with familiarity and comfort; and 4) the ability to experiment and innovate within a creative environment where all processes and outcomes are invited, even with the aesthetic risk at hand. Connected to this, Davis and Phillips (2021) validate that drama classes are known for their capacity to build relationality and safe spaces.

The most relevant use of the term 'safe', in relation to McKenna's (2020) sentiments on students returning back to class is clearly stated as Hunter's (2008) fourth definition. The physical classroom encounter where the educator and students interact, or even in intervention and community engagement, takes place in a common space. Within that environment and throughout the processes of teaching, learning or intervention, experimentation, innovation, play and engagement happen organically as all present bodies interact and collaborate. The rules of that environment are set and we all receive real-time, uninterrupted encounters.

Once that experience is removed from a common or controlled physical environment students and educators are forced to bargain with the device screen, the digital divide

and their remote home environments. The luxury of that space for free-flowing creative expression and innovation becomes stunted. At best, the only negotiation of semblances of a safe space is if students at least connect from institutional residences away from the distractions of their home environments. Nevertheless, in conclusion McKenna (2020) accepts that instead of focusing on the failures we should rather reflect on our successes and sustain them because the nature of the pandemic is unpredictable.

Opposing Barrett-Fox with a *Post-Mortem* edition, D'Mello (2020) believes that while we have been temporarily removed from classrooms educators can produce and design exceptional experiences for students, using digital technology. There is hope. He anticipates that whatever happens, we are not going back to what was before and hybrid education is likely here to stay (D'Mello, 2020).

> In order for online spaces to be accessible we should consider using closed captions, offering simultaneous interpretation, include multiple ways for people to engage in conversation (for example written or embodied ways), and take more breaks, which especially serves empathetic and neuro-diverse folks (PeoplesHub, 2020: npn).

The pandemic and emergence of online learning has shown that even though migrating courses and particular curricula online is possible, some aspects suffer a devastating loss. Kupe and Wangenge-Ouma (2020) reflect on the pandemic challenging suitability, viability and sustainability of university operating models, practices and systems; reassessing their strategies for survival. This is true for the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum and other similar pedagogies. Habib (2020) clarifies that for certain pedagogies, a blended learning approach might be better suited; however, we have much to teach the world on how to engage in blended learning in unequal contexts and more importantly, how to assist poor people (Habib in *The South African*, 2020). The following are some examples of research projects pre and during pandemic that attempted to onboard an embodied curriculum to an online space.

Gowri (2020) introduces *CreaShakti* which is a group that focuses mostly on theatre and education. Since COVID-19 lockdown, the programme has been devising ways to keep their young audiences entertained through storytelling via audio-visual streaming. In

addition to this, they have also conducted online writing and role play classes to which 300 children and adults engage from their respective home environments (Gowri, 2020). She admits though, that due to access and connectivity issues amongst participants, they are no longer able to train or conduct workshops online and she remains “sceptical” about attempts to do so (Gowri, 2020). Because drama and theatre is concerned with the making of things perceptible by and through the senses (primarily seeing, hearing and feeling) as developed through the actions of dramatic play (Prendergast and Saxton 2013:2), it can be assumed that Gowri’s (2020) scepticism is based on questions around how educators achieved these sensory, perceivable embodied aspects across their screens.

Agreeing with the capacity of online educational storytelling through YouTube, D’Mello (2020) explains that it has the potential to immerse students in an asymmetric, illogical, unfair, wondrous world that more closely resembles their reality than any lecture, textbook or PowerPoint. He adds that despite low production quality, bandwidth issues and Zoom glitches, students can undertake an aspect of the curriculum through a storytelling mechanism (D’Mello, 2020). In parallel, Megan Alrutz (2015) validates how digital media has the potential to extend and deepen Applied Theatre practice and uses the term ‘digital storytelling’ as a shift to online modes of exploration.

> An Applied Theatre praxis responds to criticisms that are against digital media and its inability to be weaved with Applied Drama and Theatre. The combination of these two practices offer young people an interdisciplinary, critically engaged and multimodal approach to performance (Alrutz, 2015:7).

Advocating for the acceptance of interdisciplinary and multimodal approaches, she describes digital storytelling as shared stories that are presented on screen and participants reflecting on them after the completion of the performance (Alrutz, 2015). On a more technical side, educators and facilitators need to use editing software to combine layers of visual text, recorded narrative and sound or music into the digital story. There is a fear that this may drastically increase workload and increased efforts in developing their digital literacy and technical skills (Alrutz, 2015). These technicalities and the measure of

educators' digital literacy that result in additional software awareness, causes further discomfort albeit possible to navigate.

PeoplesHub (2020) recognises the complexities of working online but offers ideas on creating a space for students to engage in the content, share from their experiences and take time to engage in the various functions and tools at their disposal. Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben (2020) add that while most practitioners are versed in ensuring the application of these principles in face-to-face rooms, it takes careful planning and adaptation to make them work in online spaces. When done right these diverse modalities facilitate an engaging and connected learning online experience.

El-Nasr, Vasilakos and Robinson (2008) attempt to merge process drama (an Applied Drama in Education method) to the virtual world. They stated that in the virtual world students do not have access to physical, non-technological means such as props and the physical space, and they experience drawbacks such as interface, social communication, cultural and technical issues (El-Nasr, Vasilakos and Robinson, 2008). Twelve years later and as a result of COVID-19, university lecturers Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) experimented with process drama on Zoom. Regarding interface issues, they confirm that (in the creation of a fictional context) changing the virtual background did not work because objects and props they wanted to show to their students would 'become invisible' and mistakenly be identified as part of the background – disrupting participation, action and engagement (Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy, 2020: 5).

When embarking on a similar drama process, Henry (2020) shares that educators should request students to create a space in their home where they can learn and play without distraction. Again, this seems elitist because majority of South African households have cramped living spaces with little to no dividing room. Moreover, Henry (2020) agrees that students who cannot meet, live or access the materials from live sessions could watch a recording of the class or catch a later session. Again, this is problematic because Applied Drama and Theatre relies on community and inclusion. Students not accessing the class at the same time as others, excludes them from the communal ritual. Yet, the goal of learning in this new way should be creative and imaginative thinking, and another

advantage is the ability to engage with students from all over the world, through virtual technology.

Demonstrating the capacity to practice virtual collaboration and presence from various parts of the world, the research project *How to catch a flying pig: Facilitating embodiment work in online rooms* by Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben (2020) demonstrates the collaborative effort by PhD students across the world as they delve into Applied Improvisation and interact through the lenses of their cameras. Referring to Bucksberg and Carter (2012) and Crossley (2019), Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben (2020) explain that "using improvisation methods in online settings can be reflected on as a form of intermediality as sound, movement, audio and video are seamlessly connected across virtual space. The question 'can pigs fly' is explained as a metaphoric thread to question the possibilities of migrating Applied Drama and Theatre interventions, techniques and complete experiences, online (Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben, 2020).

Applied Theatre specialist, Kay Hepplewhite (2022) documents her collaboration with Curious Monkey Theatre Company as they adapted Applied Theatre for digital learning. While she agrees that human connections of quality are possible through digital collaboration; she posits that "within virtual, online, digital relationships, a connection is possible, but the *connection* in bodily from is not possible and the irony of being together – but not – is a tantalising idea of a frustrating reality for theatre practices that are embedded within communities" (Hepplewhite, 2022: 256).

As much as we would hope for a synchronous learning experience across South Africa, we are limited. While this learning can be incredibly meaningful for real-time connections, it seems an asynchronous mode works better across South African institutions. At Drama for Life, resources were incorporated on the LMS and students were required to use their time to explore, consume and process the material individually. This promoted a reflexive and autonomous praxis for the student that does not solely rely on the presence of the educator and is able to reconnect with the peers in discussions in the next lesson. However, it has the potential to breed a passive and one-sided learning if everyone else does not commit to the exact process. Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben (2020) explain that by adjusting to the limitations of the online environment, yet ensuring safety through

preparation and containment while enabling human connection in as many ways as possible, meaningful and transformative embodied experiences were discovered.

Another project, *Teaching Theatre Online* by Amanda Broadfoot (2020) introduces the concept of 'virtual camps'. These camps are designed to stray from the mundane nature of Zoom and facilitates a movement based, interactive programme for learners to engage with, talk to and perform for some of their peers online (Broadfoot, 2020). These virtual camps have been seen to enable a personalised experience between educators, students and their peers as they explore virtual performance. For reflective or performative moments, students and educators go into Zoom Breakout rooms in the presence of a smaller audience. Other options include pre-recording, taking pictures of their processes and sharing across the working platform. A note reads: *Your. Students. Cannot. Sing. Together. Over Zoom* (Broadfoot, 2020). This caution indicates the restrictions of this programme and sheds light on underdeveloped software technologies that cannot meet all learning requirements; especially synchronously timed instructions. While this project may be progressive, Hepplewhite (2022) questions how holistic relationships and communication are further mediated when co-presence is reduced to a digitised voice, head and shoulders on a computer screen.

Supporting the move to online learning, Cara Lavallee (2020) introduces four strategies for taking a Performing Arts course online and these are Creating, Performing/Presenting/Producing, Responding and Connecting. She reflects that many Performing Arts programmes pre-pandemic were heavy (and rightfully so) in the Perform/Present/Produce category. The challenge now lies in connecting and managing responses from home environments and diversified internet connectivities. In the same manner, educators in Aladren's (2020) online repository were concerned about maintaining the dynamics of immersion in online learning because Presenting/Performing/Producing was easier to achieve.

Offering solutions, D'Mello (2020) found that using digital technology can be effective because as he explored placing his students in complex curriculum connected scenarios, this maximised their ability to be immersed. This, however, was in relation to his entrepreneurial course which is largely theoretical and can be individualised. In parallel,

Fullerton (2020) also uses collaborative art which involves students working in small groups and using a shared whiteboard to draw pictures together, respond to prompts or illustrate concepts that fuel their thinking around the process, their work, research or course related deliverables. The examples compel one to taste for the proof in the pudding.

Lavallee (2020) insists that educators working online have to shift their thinking to certain things that can be done online: timely feedback, relationship-building, amplifying student voices and more. It is clear that whilst some aspects of the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum can be migrated online, others are not as easy to include. For example, physical contact cannot be achieved online and therefore Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben (2020) assure that while people might not be able to read each other's body language as readily, touch each other physically, or experience one another spatially in three dimensions, they can access other aspects of one another that are available in online rooms. Interestingly, Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) discovered that even though Zoom breakout rooms did not allow them to have an 'overview of what was happening in the four corners of the room', it developed trust amongst students and assurance that they would stay in role when working in fiction and, curiously, students conveyed a lot of energy for a school activity taking place on screen. This made them realise that the online space also offered a few work forms that are not accessible offline.

Sajnani (2020), a qualified Drama Therapist, writes about the psychological shifts that students make as they experience a new way of learning. She recommends that educators return to the very theatre games they established in classrooms as they first formed a sense of community. Similarly, where exposing students to practical Applied Drama and Theatre techniques for their future practice in communities is concerned, educators can use games and creative routines to solidify a sense of ritual and foster appropriate skills. Flexibility is key. Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben (2020) address an important aspect of fairness when undertaking an online learning session across various student connectivity dynamics. They describe a 'props' game which invites participants to choose a prop from their personal environment and bring it to the conversation (Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben, 2020). Not only do games include the students in the virtual

classroom but they demonstrate to them that they too can explore processes online as future practitioners.

Part of immersing into context and praxis in Applied Drama and Theatre can be experienced in enrolment and derolment techniques. These techniques are central to building belief or taking up the role that participants draw empathy and understanding from, in relation to the topic at hand. There is no better way of introducing students to concepts in the curriculum than to practically engage with them and this can be done online. Sajnani (2020) illustrates that just as costumes help us get into role, educators could consider asking students to dress for class (and avoid joining from bed where possible) and conversely de-role after the class too. Research has demonstrated that enrolling in character produces traceable physiological and affective changes that linger beyond the life of the play (Sajnani, 2020).

This suggestion is another cause for debate because it caters for an environment where the online class is attended via Zoom or MS Teams with cameras that are switched on. An example of this is Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020)'s success with role-play activities. They explain showing objects of a character to the camera to trigger discussions and students enacting in front of their cameras simultaneously and, highlight that a few conventions offered even more possibilities in the online space. Arguably, these feats could be achieved because they participated from data abundant countries like Norway, China and Belgium.

Based on the research regarding the dynamics of the digital divide, and the discussion and analysis of data in Chapters 4 and 5, educators and students have had to work with their cameras off in order to save the bandwidth and yet again, synchronicity has not always been a frequent and viable option. Specifically in 2020, most classes were conducted via chats in WhatsApp groups: educators could not necessarily monitor their student's approach to enrolment and derolment unless visual evidence was provided. Clearly, geographic factors play a huge role in the experience of a digital divide (Yuguchi, 2008). More explicit approaches to strategy will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, however from the above research projects, it is clear that an entire curriculum's mandate could be endangered.

An Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy has remarkable educational, community-building and personality-changing effects when accessible and tangible to students and educators. Notwithstanding, Cited in Davis and Phillips (2021), Gallagher et al. (2020) challenges that “the traditional understandings of embodiment, participation and ensemble no longer apply in the virtual only drama classroom during COVID-19 pandemic, requiring drama educators to think of drama practices that could enable young people to find one another again” (2021: 74). Therefore, Katz (2020) states that as we take stock of the effects of the pandemic, South Africa’s Higher Education sector has an opportunity to adopt strategies that empower students with enhanced resources, the best pedagogical practices and relevant skills to prepare them to adapt to an unknown future as professionals.

This section of the chapter touched on the dynamics of migrating an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum to online learning platforms. Although there is still a shortage of literature on this topic (especially related to our pedagogy), research is beginning to surface. This also gives hope of the potential research that is still to come post-pandemic on the attempts to honour the integrity of drama and theatre based curricula in blended formats as well. I further introduced the threats on connections that online learning or the migration would have on core aspects of the curriculum: collaboration, immersion and praxis. I then argued that even though some practical aspects can be navigated online, others were difficult to negotiate. The digital divide also plays a role in the effective implementation of certain aspects of our pedagogy.

Finally, I introduced various projects by educators and researchers as they demonstrated the possibilities of conducting drama and Applied Arts based curricula online and these were matched against their limitations. The final section of this chapter proposes a utopia for honouring a multi-faceted curriculum through virtual or augmented realities. This is obviously a utopia because with the current digital divide and economic landscape it might be near impossible to achieve. Alternatively, we settle for a blended learning approach going forward, dream on and hopefully one day, as Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben (2020) would have it, pigs will fly.

2.5. Imagining a pedagogical utopia

The emergence of COVID-19 has not only caused disruption and forced adjustments, but it has challenged our perspective on life. Where education is concerned the landscape has shifted. We can look forward to innovative and progressive models of teaching and learning in the virtual space. In section 2.1, I mapped out some discussions and foresights considered by institutions, pertaining post-pandemic teaching and learning possibilities. Additionally, a vast majority of Vice-Chancellors and Higher Education bodies concluded that online learning could only be possible and effective if various socio-economic and digital accessibility factors are mitigated.

It has also been noted in the literature that for an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum to be completely honoured and engaged with, a blended learning approach might be suitable as the embodied, practical and immersive aspects would happen on the field. It is possible to integrate these with the theoretical components which can be explored online. Griffiths (2020) states that without COVID-19, the majority of South African institutions would not have engaged with the importance of developing robust e-learning offerings. We have therefore been forced to re-evaluate our models of practice. Scholars, reporters and researchers far and wide imagine a utopia where students from all over country or globe, participate in an experience at the same time, seeing the same things and engaging in a collective experience. Could this be possible for an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum? Judging from some examples in section 2.3, it is possible.

Bart Pursel (2020) writes that we have been deprived of interacting with the world in person and Virtual Reality (VR) may bring back some normalcy to everyone's lives. Joe Bardi (2020) explains VR as the use of computer technology to create a simulated environment which places the user inside an experience. Instead of viewing a screen in front of them he describes that users are immersed and able to interact with the world in 3D with simulated senses such as vision, hearing, touch and smell (Bardi, 2020). Richard McAdam (2018) believes that VR and education are a natural fit and it has the potential to improve education in Africa. Moreover, he motivates that VR technologies make

learning accessible and offers a range of learning and experiences that students would not be able to get in any other way.

Painting a more animated picture, Siphumelele Zondi (2017: 2) describes,

> With virtual reality, imagine if a child in class in South Africa puts on VR goggles and is transported to the pyramids of Giza in Egypt; he/she would be in a setting where he/she would be learning more than he/she would in class. If she turned around, she would be completely surrounded by pyramids, and would even be able to enter inside the pyramid and walk through the narrow tunnels inside.

I am obliged to applaud the capabilities of this offering especially regarding its approach to giving its participants a life-like encounter with reality. One can imagine that this child has a visually defined knowledge of Egypt, more than he/she would have with a simple video or pictures in a lesson or a mere episode on National Geographic. Seemingly, this child felt like they saw things and people, and was without a doubt, in Egypt. However, I am compelled to question the concept of imagination. What happens to our ability to imagine and creatively devise in our minds if the technology does that for us? The above by Zondi (2017) presents the idea that VR experiences transport the child to that particular world - bearing in mind that the world is already constructed and curated with precision. All the child has to do is put on the goggles and the helmet to immerse themselves. What about their imaginative ability?

This immediately poses a problem for an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy because participants are guided through a process of building a fictional context (with props and costumes). The sustenance of this context is predominantly driven by collaboratively explored imagination. Additionally, unlike a child who puts on the goggles to go to Egypt, an Applied Drama and Theatre participant creates their version of Egypt and faces a particular problem head on within the story of that fictional context. The latter explicitly reflects McKenna's (2020) notion on page 70 of the 'specialist kind of knowing'. Although we can appreciate the efforts of VR systems, at the heart of Applied Drama and Theatre is imagination and immersion into fictional contexts for problem solving (Wagner, 1999a).

Therefore, what of the pedagogy could be potentially lost if participants can no longer create and imagine by themselves?

Congruently, Houlihan and Morris (2022: 160) indicate that “categories of digital theatre and performance now include augmented reality, virtual reality and gamification and immersive theatre, to name a few models and modes of digital liveliness”. However, they pose a pertinent question related to this study, “if theatre is an exploration of humanity and human experience, how then will it function when it is no longer entirely human? Can we as theatre audiences [reflect and] be reflected in within this digital maelstrom?” (2022: 160).

Although limiting and arguably flawed, in the hopes to propose alternative and progressive developments in the digitisation of drama and performance, El-Nasr, Vasilakos and Robinson (2008) believe that a VR strategy could enable corporeal experience and everyone is connected all at once. They further offer that there are some elements of process drama that can be related to examples of simulation or interactive narrative experiences. The aspect of simulation can be experienced in the process of enrolment into fictional role and context as explained above (O’Toole 1992, Wagner, 1999a). Imagination and guiding tools (costume, artefacts/props, and building belief) which facilitate the investment into this fictional world takes all participants into that context’s reality. There is a viable opportunity for the participation and collaboration, praxis and remote immersion in social contexts.

Supporting the prospects of tertiary institutions engaging with specialised digital technologies, Vice Chancellor of UP, Tawana Kupe highlights the following:

> Futuristic trends are already emerging, having been accelerated by the pandemic. They include online teaching and learning and the need for up-skilling. Remote working, adoption of 3-D printing, artificial intelligence and robotics have also been accelerated by the pandemic (Kupe and Wangenge-Ouma, 2020: para. 6).

Commenting on the symbiotic relationship between drama and VR, Kerryn Wise affirms the game-changing power in performance that these two disciplines possess (University of Worchester, 2020). VR systems re-define the role of the audience and offer

participatory elements, though experienced in physical solitude. Showing this symbiotic relationship, in a virtual reality experiment due to COVID-19, drama students and lecturers reflected that technology was now seen as approachable and not a barrier to entry. It also proved to others that theatre can happen remotely and most importantly, they had reached "new levels of collaboration and artistic ingenuity that they had never experienced before" (Bauer in Dilella, 2020: para. 11). I hasten to mention that both of these sources come from parts of America and as above, noting our specific South African context and the digital divide, it will be a mammoth task to achieve.

Katz (2020) debates that education during the pandemic can no longer be about watching a video, doing some readings and participating in a discussion forum; new technologies need to be introduced that enable them to collaborate and engage while not being bound to the same time and space. Chen (2020) suggests that we should not fear Technology Enhanced Learning as it is not only about the innovative use of the digital tools and methodologies but it is more about how we interact. The beauty of this new dispensation is that as opposed to one-on-all traditional contact teaching, VR technologies offer a one-to-one mode (Chen, 2020).

> We are excited about virtual reality for South Africa specifically, as the technology enables the creation of stand-alone environments which distance learners can access. Could this be the solution to reaching the thousands of children whose education in our country is being challenged? (Inspire Africa, 2019: npn)

In 2018, South African provincial governments were in talks to pilot VR Technologies in some public schools, however, these talks were inconclusive (Staff Writer, 2018). How would they select the schools? What about the ones left behind? These are some of the questions that crossed my mind. Without proper planning and efforts to address the digital divide these talks are and have been deemed pointless. Furthermore, an entry level VR device with minimum functionality ranges from R800 depending on various factors (Virtual Reality Headsets, 2021). Multiply that by all students across institutions and you have a financial nightmare.

Otherwise, it can still be inferred that the introduction of immersive VR technologies in South Africa, specifically an Applied Drama and Theatre context, could assist in achieving some pedagogical principles on a more practical level. After all, these systems have been proven to be integrated into an entire educational curriculum. However, the feasibility and financial implications are enormous, so may be unrealistic in South Africa and other underdeveloped countries.

Acknowledging the pressure that the pandemic placed on education and learning, Mthethwa (2020) states that the answer to our questions surrounding a post-pandemic approach cannot be solely virtual. She adds that the move to a complete ICT direction leaves out a huge demographic of our country which disservices the idea of having education in a democratic society as this will further deepen the country's inequalities (Mthethwa, 2020). The United Nations highlights that low-tech and no-tech approaches should not be forgotten for students who have limited access to technology and that solely relying on technology on its own will not bring effective learning for all students, especially the most marginalised (2020:24).

Bardi (2020) shares that other limits to the VR experience include the accessibility and design of content, as well as the computing power. Moreover, the intensified training for such systems amongst students and educators are even more complex and time-consuming.

> Government, digital service providers and the education sector need to cooperate to identify solutions that work for individual contexts. Moreover, EdTech companies can collaborate on solutions such as increased access to mobile learning, sponsoring the provision of hardware, and providing open access to online educational resources and digital literacy training, among other potential learning programmes (Massey, 2021: para. 10).

Although these technologies are expensive to implement, Maseko (2019) reveals that the learning by doing nature of the technologies could be seen as experiential approaches to learning as mentioned in the conceptual framework. Connecting these outputs to Applied Drama and Theatre objectives, he adds that students switch from one environment to the next, they engage with real-life situations and this encompasses their affective sides

(Maseko, 2019). Explaining the difference between VR and Augmented Reality (AR), Bardi (2020) clarifies that AR simulates artificial objects in the real environment and VR creates an artificial environment to inhabit. Now, based on Maseko's (2019) offering the word *virtual* takes us back to the non-physical, non-real element and this contradicts the nature of the real, felt and embodied outputs in Applied Drama and Theatre practice. For a pedagogy that thrives on social learning for real experience these systems pose a threat of distortion of the pedagogy.

Until the digital divide is addressed these technologies remain but a dream. Considering the plight of the migration to online learning which included training, accessibility, disparity and launch of ERT, Griffiths (2020) advises that universities in South Africa need to begin to fully embrace hybrid models which explore what types of degrees can be facilitated through online processes. According to the United Nations (2020), hybrid learning offers flexible and quasi-individualised learning pathways for students, requiring a mix of pedagogies and approaches, and also the mobilization of alternative pedagogical resources.

Katz (2020) explains that blended learning with its real-time engagement aspect being a fast thinking element and its asynchronous components being the slow element; and combined, they create a flexible pedagogic design for optimal learning, while retaining a person-centric approach.

> Several countries are planning to implement a "hybrid" or blended model of education provision. Other countries are significantly reducing class sizes or providing lessons outside, and in many countries institutions require that almost all students and their teachers wear masks (United Nations, 2020:14).

Justifying the above by the United Nations, Olivier (2020) accounts that in many developing countries blended learning is a well-established practice. He adds that although it has enabled these countries to adapt to the demands of the pandemic, it needs to be backed up by dependable infrastructure and skilled, motivated educators (Olivier, 2020). Giving options of blended learning on a university campus, Ischebeck (2020) explains that students can either stream some of their lectures online from a location of

their choice or they can combine online and offline education by accessing online resources for research, submission of essays and assessments, but physically attending for contact necessary sessions.

Advocating for this mix of online and contact learning Chen (2020) states that with the help of digital systems educators can deliver classes both live with rich media content and students can also interact with them in real-time. The mix of modes allows for tracking and monitoring of the progress; and the curriculum can be explored on a horizontal and vertical level as Drama for Life requires. The United Nations (2020) reflects that as much as considerable attention has been given to the use of technology to ensure learning continuity, the digital solutions and continued approach to learning needs to put equity and inclusion at the centre. De Klerk (2020) agrees that blended learning is not a one size fits all approach: its strategies can only be effective when informed by the organic needs of a discipline's unique context, as they vary in each department.

Echoing De Klerk's (2020) notion, Ischebeck (2020) clarifies that the important thing is to ensure that the blend is specifically tailored to suit the needs of the students and their environments. For example, video streamed lectures might not be necessary in a university where all students live on campus and have access to infrastructure and facilities. Otherwise, educators who provide physical lectures that could be online, will demotivate the students and this results in lower attendance numbers (Ischebeck, 2020). In the efforts to teach Shakespeare through a blended learning model, Hawkes and Thomas (2018) confirm that student attendance drops as students realise that they can follow material in varying degrees and detail without being physically in class. For blended learning to yield positive and effective results, educators need to assess which aspects of their curriculum require an embodied classroom or field experience, and which ones do not. In the case of Applied Drama and Theatre, it may be beneficial to undertake placements, collaborative experiences, contextual immersions and group embodied work, in person. This does not mean that we cannot design embodied experiences online as well.

Concluding their study, Hawkes and Thomas (2018) concur that blended learning has to extend beyond merely taking up new technologies and incorporate a reconceptualisation

of the curriculum and learning environment. Bagarukayo and Kalema (2015) confirm that a mixed approach like blended learning, that is innovative to address problems of class and cultural diversity, learners' prior learning experience, increased education demand and changing learning needs, may be a suitable option in future. In order to achieve the benefits associated with the approach, there needs to be commitment and support from institutions, as well as readily apparent and accessible networks (De Klerk, 2020).

The section offered a dialogue of the possibilities of a post-pandemic utopia. In more advanced and financially resourced contexts, Virtual Reality Technologies may yield incredible learning experience and in contexts where the digital gap cannot be readily closed, a blended learning approach might be most equitable. Admittedly, returning to typical face-to-face contact teaching and learning may level the playing field. More of these options and discussions from a practical perspective by research participants will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

For this utopia to be realised in South Africa, government, network providers, educational institutions and all stakeholders at large need to come together to not only equalise the educational playing field but address the nature of post-apartheid disparity and inequality. The study recognises that in the early and unpredictable stages of the pandemic, nothing could be set in stone. Even as institutions imagine what a post-COVID teaching experience might be, a lot is left to hope for, and definitions of what was and what can never be, should be ongoing reflections.

2.6. Conclusion

The first part of the literature review introduced the reactions made by institutions and government to the entrance of the pandemic, which were met with uncertainty and anxiety. It then focused on the ERT strategy that had to be undertaken, with an overview of the paths that certain institutions embarked on. A comparison of definitions between online learning and ERT was provided: an important distinction to make in the preliminary stages of the pandemic. I also touched on what implications the move to ERT had on the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum. Following the first year of the pandemic and what seemed to be a successful ERT strategy, the literature foreshadows that most institutions would lean toward blended learning approaches either post pandemic or in their second

year of COVID-19. This was further substantiated by the voices of three prominent Vice Chancellors in South African based tertiary institutions.

The second part of the chapter discussed the role that the digital divide plays in the successful implementation of ERT to online learning strategies. The research delineated the digital divide and outlined its effect on connection, accessibility and a holistic Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. Moreover, I captured various protests against the move to ERT and the reactions by students as they experienced the unfair nature of the digital divide. This also included mapping out other important factors that influence the divide. In conclusion, it was imperative that strategies to bridge the digital divide were introduced, even though they may have not been rendered completely effective.

The third part of the literature review considered the possibilities of migrating an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum online. The research refocused the curriculum into the three focal study aspects of praxis, collaboration and contextual immersion. It argued that whilst theoretical components could be achieved online, the embodied and physical parts of the three aspects were in danger. In order to validate the existence of trialled attempts to take a drama curriculum online, examples were introduced and their shortcomings were discussed.

The final part of the chapter proposed a pedagogical utopia where an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy could potentially be experienced completely remotely via online learning platforms. However, as the digital divide and the South African socio-economic context's landscape would have it, it may be difficult to achieve and the feasibility study renders it impractical. Alas, we hold onto hope but keep redefining what education can be.

The next chapter encompasses a discussion of the research methods involved in the study. I further address the research instruments that gave light to the results of the study and present the challenges and limitations in the use of them – including a reflection of how I addressed potential issues of bias. Finally, I provide a discussion on the analysis of data and the ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 3

Research Method

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is an outline of the research methods that I employed in this study and the process I undertook from the stages of planning, designing, collection and analysis of the data. The research took the form of an ethnographic qualitative case study which included participant observation and field notes, and the use of semi-structured interviews and documentation. The choice to undertake the study from an ethnographic case study perspective allowed me to track the Applied Drama and Theatre educators' process both overtly and covertly as the pandemic unfolded.

The research, which is longitudinal in nature, covered a two-year period in which Applied Drama and Theatre educators at Drama for Life explored curriculum design and teaching of the pedagogy, online. Drama for Life, the department which serves as the case study from which the research stemmed, is named. However, the Applied Drama and Theatre educators that participated in the study are not named or gendered, although their anonymity cannot be guaranteed. These ethical considerations will be discussed later in this chapter. The focus of the study was placed on this department's characteristic approach to the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy and how its educators maintained the integrity thereof after being thrust into offering it online and remotely by COVID-19. As researcher and part of the team of academics, we developed and strategized an appropriate online version of the conventional pedagogy during the first two years of the COVID-19 crisis.

3.2. Research Design

The central questions of the research are summed up as follows: what core principles of a conventional Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy are seriously threatened by movement to online learning platforms, how did Applied Drama and Theatre educators set out to honour the integrity of the pedagogy throughout the 2020 and 2021 academic periods, and what discoveries were made that are helpful for a potential post-pandemic approach to learning? This section of the chapter will outline the research design chosen

to answer these questions. This includes the descriptions of these methods and instruments, as well as a discussion of their appropriateness.

The study is qualitative and largely ethnographic. Bhandari (2022a) states that qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions or experiences of people. Connected to the study, she emphasises that the qualitative research method can be conducted through text, video and audio - in addition to traditional face-to-face methods (Bhandari, 2022a). Tenny et al. (2021) add that qualitative research explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems. Additionally, the researcher commits to understanding and interpreting human behaviour, interactions and responses to phenomena. Unlike quantitative research that focuses on the how many and how much aspect, qualitative research is interested in the how and why, and is not as linear as the former (Tenny et al. 2021). Mack et al. affirm qualitative research's strength lying in

> …its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the "human" side of an issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals (2005:1).

Connecting with its provision of 'complex textual descriptions' above, Charmaz (2010) analogises qualitative research as, for one to know what living in the world means, one cannot merely describe it from the outside but rather learn from the inside. In the introduction of this chapter, I explained that through an ethnographic lens I was able to explore the data from both overt and covert perspectives. This involved the use of an insider-outsider approach that immersed me into the context of the participants, further fostering an authentic relationship and a deeply enriching experience; whilst having the luxury to discover what was not obviously stated. This outsider perspective contributes to a global view of the research and in turn leaves the covert facets for discovery and interrogation.

This brings me to the qualitative research methods in the study, namely case study and ethnography (of the classroom). Where the instruments are concerned, semi-structured interviews with the Applied Drama and Theatre educators were conducted, via virtual

meeting and/or typed responses. The data was generated through field notes, my preliminary observations were detailed in my research journal and then I extrapolated inputs from recordings of virtual meetings, the interview questions and finally, transcription took place. Lastly, I relied on various sets of documentation such as departmental policies and institutional ERT strategy policy documents, etc. I will now describe and discuss the qualitative research tools and instruments that I used for the study.

3.2.1. Case Study

The participants of this study were identified at the University of the Witwatersrand's Drama for Life department. Drama for Life is a leading Applied Drama and Theatre department in South Africa and probably Africa at large. It is internationally recognised as a unique multi-disciplinary, postgraduate academic, research and community engagement department (Drama for Life, 2022). The department's selection as case study was due to its already established and rich history of offering the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy and its pioneering of social transformation through arts-based education.

I viewed the case study from a two-pronged perspective. This study focused firstly, on the department (as part of the institution as a whole) and its provision of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy and secondly, its educators who deliver the curriculum to students. Regarding the former, the department's voice is captured and quoted from statements made by the Head of Department and management at large as they communicated updates and took action regarding the departmental strategy during 2020 and 2021. This data also included my observations of these collective actions as ethnographer. The second prong was gathered through interviewing the five educators.

> A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 1994: 13).

Yin (1994) emphasises that phenomenon and context are essential elements of distinction when considering an appropriate case study for research. McCombes (2019: npn) too outlines that case study research is premised on a detailed study of "a specific subject such as a person, group, place, event, organisation or phenomenon." This research focuses on Drama for Life as an organisation, the phenomena is their Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy and its core intentions as elected throughout the study and the context is a South Africa that is plagued by COVID-19 and the emergence of online learning throughout Higher Education Institutions. At the forefront of these combining elements of the study are the Applied Drama and Theatre educators, whose inputs, strategies and efforts are microscopically observed as they navigate the pedagogy during the pandemic.

Yin (1994) categorises case study research in three ways, namely exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Zaidah Zainal (2007) explains that descriptive case studies describe the natural phenomena that are captured in the data in question, look at various research strategies and explore how they are employed. In addition to that, she motivates researchers to describe the data as it occurs (Zainal, 2007). Congruently, this study exhibits qualities of a descriptive case study. In line with this definition, I have consistently described what the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy contains, shaped the components of its form as being taught (via contact) and outlined the shifts made for learning to take place virtually.

Using a timeline-based approach between the 2020 and 2021 periods, the data collection involved tracking and observing events of the academic programme and the progression of COVID-19 regulations and lockdown in narrative form. Su Jeong Wee (2011) confirms that the case study method is particularly suited for educational institutions because it attempts to understand the complex instructional processes and the interactions between teachers and students, in a natural classroom and the school context, in an open and flexible manner (2011: 491).

This research did not focus on the students and their learning experiences but rather the instructional approaches of the educators in an unfamiliar (and chaotic) setting and circumstance. The classroom setting is also challenged by the regulations of the

pandemic which would have staff and students attend lectures virtually, thus redefining Wee's (2011) notion of a 'natural classroom' that is flexible and open. Speaking of the changing dynamics of the classroom wrought by the pandemic and my observation therein, I will now discuss the second research method, ethnography.

3.2.2. Ethnography of the classroom

To begin with, the study draws on the similarities of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Classroom ethnography. I do acknowledge the similarities, nonetheless the research will show that the study falls more into ethnography.

Citing Gillis and Jackson (2002), Macdonald (2012: 35) defines PAR as a subset of action research, which is a "systematic collection and analysis of data for the purpose of taking action". Ideally, this action takes the form of the researcher effecting change with the action undertaken as an ultimate goal. Like ethnography, PAR is an educative process especially where the observation of participants is concerned. Margaret Eisenhart (2019) reveals that the traditions of ethnography and PAR are entangled. She agrees that they are compatible and both make their participants' perspectives central to the research but concedes that their end results are arguably distinguishable (Eisenhart, 2019).

Where PAR directly acts and applies results to the problems at hand, ethnography explores and responds through recommendation - providing participants the opportunity to contextualise and reflect upon their processes. Moreover, ethnography involves the researcher participating directly in the setting, collecting the data in a systematic manner and the meaning thereof is not imposed on the participants externally, through corrective action. This research uses both in combination and in one stage of the research one leads more than the other. Therefore, the PAR aspect of the study was used to gather the data as a participant observer in the process of re-working and addressing the Applied Drama and Theatre educators' intentions to change the pedagogy to suit the online space. However, because I am not taking any action post data collection, the study leans towards an ethnographic classification.

Brodkey (1987) defines ethnography as the study of lived experience. She stresses that in ethnography, the researcher cannot separate context from the participants and whether

explicitly or implicitly, context includes both participants and their settings/environment (Brodkey, 1987). Pre-COVID, the participants would normally occupy a classroom space; deeming this as a type of classroom ethnography. The displacement of the classroom (setting/environment) to an online space is a pertinent dynamic of the study. An advantage of conducting ethnographic research is that I had access to authentic information resulting from spontaneous observations of events that I could not have gathered through mere questioning. Considering this particular social group of participants, the study additionally falls under an 'ethnography of the classroom' description. Bloome explains that ethnography of the classroom or "Classroom ethnography",

> …can be viewed as a matter of foregrounding the classroom and back-grounding the broader contexts; but such do not and should not obviate the inherent relationship between a classroom and broader social and cultural contexts (2012:10).

This research draws on classroom ethnography in so far as the classic definition draws on participation and direct observation, and, crucially, careful observation of the activities of a definable group of people - which are the Applied Drama and Theatre educators. All the educator and departmental interventions and strategies undertaken by this group of professional qualified staff members as they navigated the pedagogy from a distance was central to observation and monitoring. This included the entries in my research journal as I observed them and reflected on my role as teaching assistant. Although the cycles and attempts were not formalised (trial and error), the study considered the efficacy of the various mechanisms and what they were and were not capable of achieving over the two-year period. Besides, the pandemic reshaped our view of the conventional classroom and as a result, certain descriptions of classroom ethnography do not fit entirely.

Williams (2018) states that the aim of ethnographic study within a project is to get under the skin of that problem, in order to better understand it. As soon as the pandemic hit, I immediately had a hunch to reflect on this revolutionary period through a journal titled *Moratoa's COVID-19 Research Journal.* These notes together with my reflections and observations became the starting point to undertaking research, before formally proposing the study for degree purposes. The notion of "getting under the skin" I achieved

in my role as teaching assistant in 2020 as I processed in the journal. My presence in the department afforded me access to both the classroom and the staffroom (as doer and observer), and allowed me to witness and document the plans of action to save the academic year and honour the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. Supporting my decision to undertake the research in this way, Williams (2018) concurs that ethnography is most useful in the early stages of the project as the researcher is able to identify and analyse unexpected issues. That way, by the 2021 academic year, I had an idea of which areas required even more scrutiny as the new academic year progressed and which factors would pose continued threat or hindrance.

Reeves, Kuper and Hodges (2008) emphasise that knowledge acquisition in ethnographic research is a cyclical process; beginning with a panoramic view of the community, closing in to a finer focus of the details then going back to the larger picture, but this time with even more detailed information. In addition to the cyclic process being vital, Reeves, Kuper and Hodges (2008) maintain that a sense of reflexivity is key. Throughout the data collection process, I constantly acknowledged that my presence would impact my interactions with the participants and even more, the vulnerability of the situation would deem my roles of researcher and teaching assistant/educator extremely ambiguous. It became a tug of war between Moratoa as researcher in one moment and Moratoa needing to step in and uphold the teaching assistant role in another urgent moment. These two roles became fluid and thus required that I maintain a reflexive stance at all times.

Another evident tug of war was how I chose to mitigate potential subjective[12] and observer biases. In this case, two factors come to the fore. Firstly, being a teaching assistant employed by the institution and working in the department could breed an unconscious desire for the results of the study to favour it gratifying our efforts as Applied Drama and Theatre teaching staff. Secondly, my supervisor also being the Head of Department (HOD) and having a potential subjective desire to uphold the reputation of the department and in turn, giving rise to a need of me to please her in my interpretations. This required

[12] The tendency of participants to consciously or subconsciously act in a way they think the researcher wants them to act; often occurring when subjects know the purpose of the study (González, 2021: para. 2).

me to clearly define the roles when she elicits objective and constructive feedback on the research itself as supervisor and not as an HOD – guarding her department and its reputation. As researcher, it is my duty to acknowledge and reflect on the possibly tricky implications of bias on the study and ensure that it does not affect the validity of the findings.

Caulfield (2020) writes that ethnographers who may be susceptible to observation bias[13] must ensure that interpretations are authoritative and representative of reality. The use of my research journal was a beneficial buffer to include in the research because I was able to refer back to the on-the-pulse thoughts I had and, leaving very little room for those thoughts to be re-directed or influenced by the relationships or by seeking validation. Another tool to mitigate the bias was through triangulation (which will be discussed later in the chapter) and the invitation of a peer reviewer. Having sought counsel from the HREC Non-Medical Ethics Committee on addressing issues of bias, I was advised that in addition to constant reflection and discussion about bias, a peer should be invited to give comment on the findings – see Appendix D. This peer review process provided an in-depth analysis of results of the study and how I managed potential biases in my interpretations of findings.

Bloome (2012) emphasises that classroom ethnography is not simply a set of methods and there are ethnographic tools at the researcher's disposal. These tools include, participant observation, taking field notes, open-ended interviewing etc. (Bloome, 2012). Before describing the tools, I will now discuss the stages of the research and when they were used.

3.2.3. Stages of data collection

The research took place throughout three stages across 2020 and 2021 academic years. The table below shows the data collection process throughout the period. I have included

[13] Observation bias occurs when a researcher's expectations, opinions or prejudices influence what they perceive or record in the study and it usually affects studies when observers are aware of the research aims or hypotheses (Bhandari, 2021: npn).

the research method undertaken in each year, the instruments used and the participants I used for each data set.

Stage one refers to the 2020 academic year and the entrance of the pandemic. Stage two is the second year and continuation of ERT strategies and the third stage, although focusing on educators' experiences of the 2021 academic year, will also touch on the documented planning for the 2022 academic year.

Stage	**Period**	**Research Method**	**Data Collection Instruments**	**Participants**
1	2020	Ethnography and Case Study	1. Virtual Participant Observation. 2. Field notes 3. Research Journal and other documentation.	1. Drama for Life department 2. University of the Witwatersrand 3. Five Applied Drama and Theatre educators (Participant A-E) 4. Reflections as Teaching Assistant
2	2021	Case Study	1. Semi-structured Interviews related to 2020 academic year. 2. Documentation.	1. Drama for Life 2. Five Applied Drama and Theatre Educators: A: Zoom Interview B: MS Teams interview C: Google Link Response D: MS Teams Interview E: Google Link Response

3	2022	Case Study	1. Semi-structured Interviews related to 2021 academic year. 2. Documentation.	1. Drama for Life 2. Five Applied Drama and Theatre Educators: A: Zoom Interview B: MS Teams interview C: Google Link Response D: MS Teams Interview E: Google Link Response

I will now provide an in-depth discussion of the data collection instruments employed in the study, explain their appropriateness and present the challenges and limitations, I faced.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

3.3.1. Participant Observation and field notes

Prevalent data collection tools in ethnographic research are fieldwork and participant observation. This continuous engagement with participants adds strength to the research findings. According to Hammersley and Atkinson in Morgan-Trimmer and Wood,

> The ethnographic researcher participates in people's daily lives watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues which he or she is concerned (2016: 2).

The 2020 academic year was pivotal in the inception and interest in the study. This was when I was employed as teaching assistant and the COVID-19 lockdown, thrust upon us in March, resulted in curiosity. As described in the introduction, I developed a keen interest in the joint efforts that the institution and Drama for Life undertook in attempts to save the academic year and, most importantly, to keep the pedagogy intact. As researcher and staff member, I assumed positions of observer and audience of my own acts, the acts of my Applied Drama and Theatre colleagues, and the department as a

whole. It must be stated that the observation happened virtually and at a physical distance.

The departmental observation took place online, through my presence in WhatsApp groups and witnessing the sharing of relevant information in academic and general staff meetings on Zoom and via email communications. Even so, I focused my predominant attention on the five Applied Drama and Theatre educators in their respective teaching groups. One teaches the third-year group, the other two interchange between fourth year/Advanced Diploma students. I and the other taught the Honours and the final one took the Masters cohort. I was an online witness to the expressions of concern about connectivity, to delighting in novel teaching discoveries and managing technological or systematic mechanisms.

Morgan-Trimmer and Wood (2016) describe ethnography as a long-term participant observation where the researcher spends an extended period of time in a social group in order to collect data.

> Ethnographers draw on a range of sources of data though they may sometimes rely primarily on one-very often participant observation. In the case of virtual ethnography, of course, the participation and observation take place online and accessing of documents and elicitation of accounts from participants, although offline sources are used as well (Hammersley and Atkinson in Morgan-Trimmer and Wood, 2016: 2).

I observed the workshopping, sharing of materials and aids that would make teaching easier and more accessible amongst this group of educators. This data was collected during virtual staff meetings and/or plenary sessions, the teaching staff WhatsApp group and the semi-structured interviews held virtually or engaged with via a Google link. This included my journal reflections as teaching assistant and researcher and the various mechanisms of exploration whilst facilitating my group of students. I further listened in on staff meetings as we reflected on ‘what worked, what did not work and what needs refinement including the challenge that the digital divide posed to the pedagogy reaching the students. I must re-state that I did not observe students or their reactions and responses to their experience of the pedagogy and/or teaching strategies online.

There can be a continuum in observation techniques between the overt and covert observer, especially in the case where the observer chooses to participate and/or merely be a 'fly on the wall'. In the staff meetings I only shared input if it was requested. This allowed me to listen attentively as observer and make the necessary connections between what is said and the implications thereof, what is not stated and requires 'figuring out', what is happening and how it affects the departmental staffing body and, most importantly, how the pedagogy is impacted. Emerald Group Publishing (2021) indicates that whilst the researcher ensures that the maximum amount of information is gained, they should retain a distanced researcher objectivity. Moreover, Hammarburg, Kirkman and Lacey (2016) argue that even though (like me) the researcher could be familiar with the environment, they should be unbiased and unprejudiced so that the study draws on valid and reliable conclusions. Assuming this dual role was imperative so that I do not influence the behaviour of those I was observing.

During the observation period in 2020, I made detailed field notes about the numerous occurrences, feelings and attitudes of the participant group pertaining to the focus of the research. The research journal further allowed me to share my impressions and insights and, track my own progress as teaching assistant whilst monitoring what my colleagues and participants were achieving as well. These were documented through journaling both electronically and via hard copy, as well as audio recordings of my thoughts during insightful discoveries.

Challenges and Limitations:

1. Online observations are difficult to conduct – especially when a researcher may rely on facial expressions and/or body language of the participants to adequately assess their behaviour. Due to bandwidth issues, we would turn off our screens during meetings and this would limit my perceptions of what the participants were saying in their bodies and their impulses to given information.
2. I did not observe the Applied Drama and Theatre educators in their respective online lessons and this poses as a limitation because I did not actively witness them and their strategies in action. From an ethical perspective with the students' not being the focus, the choice remains valid.

3. The observation period only lasted for one year (2020). Whilst some may debate that this period was too short, I would argue that this year provided me valuable material - specifically under the unprecedented nature of that period. The teaching strategies and efforts to honour the pedagogy forged in this year served as preparation for and aided the 2021 and 2022 academic programmes.
4. I am not included in the group of participants even though I was a part of the Applied Drama and Theatre cohort of educators. Hence, I did not even respond to the interview questions. I made this decision so that I could maintain distance and researcher objectivity. However, my voice does come through the ethnographic observations, personal reflections and the thoughts recorded in the journal.

3.3.2. Semi-structured Interviews

By the 2021 academic year, my teaching assistant contract had ended, thus recusing me of the role and place as academic staff member in the department. My role as researcher became increasingly focused. It was in this period that I conducted semi-structured interviews with the five participants on their experience of the 2020 academic year. (Interview questions are attached in Appendix A and B).

> A semi-structured interview is a data collection method that relies on asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework. However, the questions are not set in order or in phrasing (George, 2022: npn).

As tabled under stages two and three of the data collection process, I conducted a range of semi-structured interviews with the participants. Three of them elected to have a face-to-face virtual discussion and the other two preferred to respond to the interview questions via a Google link. They attached visual examples and audio recordings of their inputs to their written responses. Admittedly, the participants I interviewed virtually, provided further engagement and the semi-structured nature of the interviews yielded a wider set of results because I could probe more. This discussion was recorded and in addition, I made typed notes during the session. Adversely, those who responded via link, responded in a more structured fashion as the questions became fixed and there was no

room for immediate follow up when engaging in this way. Nevertheless, they did provide me with the substantial detail that I required.

I conducted the first set of interviews between February and June 2021, regarding their experience of the 2020 academic year. This set of questions was focused on their reactions to the pandemic, the challenges to their expert understanding of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy posed by the pandemic, their views on the digital divide and its impact on their efforts and the various strategies they set forth in honouring the pedagogy (refer to Appendix A). The second set of interviews were conducted in similar format between February and June 2022 in response to the 2021 academic year (refer to Appendix B). Herein, I focused attention toward key developments that aided a relatively easier teaching experience as compared to 2020, I also asked them to reflect on their retained and discarded strategies over the pandemic period and finally, had them share whether or not the pedagogy could be completely honoured online −amongst other key questions related to the study.

> Another drawback—unless you are just interviewing members of a small group is that, without an enormous outlay of time and personnel, semi-structured interviews are unlikely to encompass a large enough sample to yield precision (Adams, 2015: 493).

The reason for the lengthened periods of time from the end of the specific academic period to the eventual interview was due to availability of the participants – as they continued into the new year's academic programme. Although the participants were required to reflect on events from 6 months prior, they did so with much insight-supported by their already reflective state throughout the period. I found that participants recalled and could describe events, their contributions and feelings about the pandemic and their work, vividly. However, as Adams (2015) warns, the further the event from the interview date, increases opportunity for less precision in certain accounts of events-regardless of the small participant group. This I experienced with one of the participants whom I failed to interview throughout 2021 for various reasons and therefore they had to recall 2020 events in our eventual session in 2022.

Kakilla (2021) highlights that the process of conducting semi-structured interviews is highly time-inconvenient. I found that the preparation process for the interviews, setting up the appointments, conducting them and then analysing them was not as quick or easy as one would imagine. However, coupled with the observation, the small participant group and the focus of the research aims and questions, the transcription and alignment of the data was achievable. I also ensured that in either case of electronically written or virtual face-to-face interviews, I conducted the process with honesty and objectivity. The choice of questions left room for broadened perspectives and did not influence the outcomes of the study. However, the interview questions were relevant to their roles and expertise as Applied Drama and Theatre practitioners and they too provided interesting, eye-opening and valuable information for the research.

Challenges and Limitations:

1. The choice to accept either electronically submitted interview responses or virtual face-to- face interviews could be perceived as potentially limiting of the complete data set. As explained earlier, although I could not instantly probe the participants who completed an online submission (as opposed to the virtual ones), I did contact them directly when information was unclear. I can confirm that their responses were substantial because they had even more time to engage with the questions from the leisure and comfort of their respective spaces – without the immediacy and time constraints of a virtual interview.
2. I did not conduct an interview with Drama for Life's Head of Department regarding 2020 and 2021 academic years. While it may have been important to hear her insights, opinions and reflections of the pandemic from a management perspective and its influence on the department – her voice did come out strongly in the WhatsApp communications, departmental/management notices and staff meetings. Because she is also my supervisor, an appropriate distance was mandatory. Besides, I also relied on her literary contributions that were relevant to this study.
3. The length of time between the end of the academic year and the time of the interviews was challenging due to the availability and schedules of the researcher

and the participants. However, participants were able to refer back to their own repositories and examples to fuel significant information when their memory became limited. I requested that whenever they recalled beneficial information, they could contact me.

4. Participants who shared inventive and original strategies felt that these should not make it to the thesis – as they wanted to further develop these without greater exposure. This places a limitation on the results of the data because these strategies could not be presented and the study is unable to provide the entire scope of efforts. Fortunately, this affords me an opportunity to provide an in-depth recommendations chapter.

3.3.3. Documentation

> Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. They include advertisements; agendas, attendance registers, and minutes of meetings; manuals; background papers; books and brochures; diaries and journals; event programs (i.e., printed outlines) etc. (Bowen, 2009: 27).

As explained in the literature review, in combination with the ethnographic participant observation, field notes and interviews, the data was also collected from various other documented sources. Firstly, my personal research journal has been entered as documentation and therein, I collected my thoughts and reflected on the events of the 2020 ERT period. I also considered information stored in existing channels such as electronic records, online libraries and media sources. I engaged with newspapers (including online articles), television interviews and records of data made by public agencies, government, institutions etc. through digital media platforms as they all responded and reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ramifications thereof on education and life as we know it. I further regarded policy documents and

communiques/updates from Wits University and Drama for Life concerning the pedagogy and their intentions for 2020 and 2021, and the ERT strategy during 2020 and 2021, respectively. On top of that I relied on social media posts, over and above the discussions (specifically related to the study) that were had via WhatsApp in the relevant teaching staff group and the minutes or notes from relevant staff meetings.

Data collected from Drama for Life WhatsApp communications and the quotes thereof have been specifically labelled with the name and date of the sender. The choice of including this communication was to present the department's ongoing communication around making pedagogically sound decisions throughout the ERT periods of 2020 and 2021. Their inclusion was also guided by their relevance to the specific research questions.

Kakilla (2021) promotes the use of technologically-based data collection because – given the pandemic and how it affects physical gatherings, travel and contact – researchers are susceptible to rely on it for critical qualitative research. Considering my earlier categorisation of descriptive case study on page 93 and the order of events; the use of documented sources was critical. During 2020, we relied immensely on media reports and governmental announcements as a guide for resumption of school calendars, progression of lockdown levels and strides by institutions and stakeholders to bridge the digital divide and save the academic year.

Social media platforms at large, too played a vital role in assessing the reactions and responses of educators and students far and wide, ascertaining how other institutions remedied the challenges. In particular, WhatsApp can be heralded for its facilitation of the communication between students and staff; and its offerings of multimodal tools in enabling teaching and learning via its group chat, voice note and audio-visual functionality. Lisa Boughton (2021) encourages the use of WhatsApp in qualitative research as it allows participants to share their responses almost instantly, and in varied ways, the researcher can manage and create groups which are research focused and, it is low data intensive.

For the learning we facilitated reflective and reading responsive moments as students engaged with the material that we uploaded on WhatsApp as well. Similarly, in the teaching staff WhatsApp group, we shared resources and highlights of how we taught certain aspects of the curriculum. Without the abilities of this platform, we would have been isolated and my online observation data set would be decreased. Furthermore, my attendance of Wits University and Drama for Life hosted festivals and conferences during 2020, 2021 and 2022, enabled me to connect with other groups of Performing Arts based practitioners, scholars and researchers allowing me to engage with their inputs, reflections, discoveries and experiences of online engagements. I made written notes and used audio recordings to capture these discussions. I also used of relevant inputs from their information portals and programmes of events, as Bowen (2009) classifies above. Overall, the use of documentation as part of the data set throughout these various sources enriched the research findings and helped me to respond the questions at hand.

Challenges and Limitations:

1. An incredible challenge I faced in my endeavours to use documentation for the study was the availability of relevant COVID-19 online education and Applied Drama and Theatre themed research and publications. I assume that many researchers, like me, are still developing papers on the effects of COVID-19 on similar pedagogies or even the educational fraternity as a whole. The inability to report on or find evidence of existing material, limited my scope of discussion, reference and debate. I am convinced, though that subsequent papers will contribute further.

I will now provide an overview of the data analysis process.

3.4. Data Analysis

My approaches to analysing the data in Chapters 4 and 5 were in the interests of best serving the research questions of this study.

Priya Pedamkar (n.d) outlines qualitative data analysis as the method of consistently looking at and composing the interview and observation notes and various non-textual material that the investigator accumulates, to increase the understanding of an event. As

such, my data analysis process included the arrangement and categorisation of the data and making sense of it in both in line with the research questions and thematically. Transcription of data included listening to and replaying Zoom and MS Teams participant recordings and relevant staff meetings and typing out the responses. I extrapolated and organised the WhatsApp group conversations in chronological order. Every entry in my research journal already had a corresponding date and this helped me to connect with the developments in the department and events of the pandemic. Then, these were factored into my observation and field notes as teaching assistant as well.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) highlight that researchers should interpret the data, the words spoken, descriptions and quotations into a believable narrative. Due to the mix of spoken and text-based data sets I will be presenting it in combinations of verbatim quotes and paraphrasing the responses. Where the latter is concerned, Facilitation First (2021) emphasises that the researcher should ensure that he or she has captured the true intention of what the participants intended to say and not alter their meaning to suit favourable results of the study. Particularly in the case of the participants that responded via Google with bullet points and short responses, I will thread them into more structured sentencing; but I will not alter the meaning of their contributions.

In terms of the participation observation and field notes (including my research journal entries), I employed elements of time-series analysis to capture and track the unfolding of events and developments as the lockdown period continued. Commonly related to quantitative research The QuantAcademy (2022) defines time-series analysis as measuring data that is captured sequentially over a period of time and further, inferring what has happened in the data points and attempting to predict what will happen in future. Because I am unable to predict what will happen in future and this analytic tool is mostly prescribed for quantitative data I am not entirely using this. Still, the periodic and time conscious nature of the data capturing is relevant to the study.

Key events, the progression of the lockdown period and its impact on the academic calendar were assembled chronologically. As the semesters unfolded in 2020, I narrated the significant strides, milestones and developments as we embarked on the ERT strategy as a department, in the journal. The blow-by-blow nature of decisions made in

Higher Education and Drama for Life or the institution at large, were also factored into the study. Therefore, the analysis of these insightful accounts can be aligned with narrative analysis. Dan Alimpescu (n.d. : 3) argues that narrative analysis "provides a portal into two realms, 1) the realm of experience, where participants lay out how they experienced certain events and confer their subjective meanings onto them and 2) the realm of narrative analysis devices are used to make sense of the data." This explanation suggests that I could employ narrative analysis in the respect of the reflections by participants about their experiences.

The data was also grouped thematically and then presented according to its correlation with the five main research questions. In Chapter 4, the data was arranged according to each research question and in Chapter 5 the data was arranged thematically. Caulfield (2022) writes that thematic analysis is a good approach to not only find your participants' views, experiences and knowledge, but the flexibility in interpreting the data allows you to sort it into your research questions as well. As the data was spread across two years, Chapter 4 will cover 2020 and recommendations for 2021 and Chapter 5 will cover 2021 with envisaged departmental plans for 2022. During the analysis of these data sets, I found that grouping them in this way allowed for an organic yet structured flow of discussion. During the transcription all the responses to similar questions that related to one of the five main research questions or corresponding themes, were grouped together. This helped me to observe the similarities and differences in the participants' responses, as well as what I already captured in my research journal.

I will now complete this chapter by addressing the ethical procedures, I followed in the undertaking of the research.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The first step I took towards preparing for my ethical grounding as researcher was the attendance of the University of the Witwatersrand's Ethics Training course. I attended a two-part course, hosted by Professor Jasper Knight on the 30th of September 2020 on Ethics in Research and Applying for Ethics Clearance for Non-Medical Participants. Part one of the workshopped course comprised of formal training on research ethics, with a particular emphasis on social science research. The second part involved the

description and steps of applying for ethical clearance to the university's ethics committee. The content-based nature of the workshop in part one, culminated in a formal written assignment. Following my attendance of the course, submission and successful completion of the formal task, I was awarded a Certificate of Competence on Research Ethics on 18 October 2020. This certificate is valid for three years and thus served as a pre-requisite for the eventual application to the Wits Ethics Committee.

Following the submission of my proposal to the Faculty of Humanities, I applied to the Wits Ethics Committee for Non-Medical Research in Human Participants for ethical clearance in November 2020. I was granted clearance to proceed with the research on 21 January 2021 and the protocol number is H20/11/43 – see Appendix C. Kerasidou explains that "the relationship between researchers, their institutions and research participants is often described as a consent-based relationship, which depends on reasonable expectations and proven capacity" (2017: 47). As researcher, the ethical clearance process pertaining to the use of case study was two-fold. Drama for Life exists within the University of the Witwatersrand, as institution and therefore, I was cleared to conduct the research under the following two requirements. Firstly, attached to the ethics application was a permission letter from the Head of Department of Drama for Life to conduct the research. Following the successful ethical clearance application process, I requested permission to conduct the research at the University of the Witwatersrand as a whole with the Registrar's office and this was approved.

The permissions granted by Drama for Life and institution as a whole covered the acceptance of my journal reflections as a preliminary data set, which I embarked on as the pandemic ensued, and the naming of Drama for Life and it being recognisable in the thesis and as a part of the university. The permissions also acknowledged and accepted my observation period of the department in 2020, the use of documentation and communiques related to lockdown, teaching and learning plans etc., recordings and use of relevant data in staff meetings and the interviewing of their six Applied Drama and Theatre educators as core participants of the research. I also requested the interview participants to complete informed consent forms, as well as thoroughly engaging with the Participant Information Sheets (which were also provided to the department as a whole).

> Two ethical obligations are required, namely: 1) Such individuals should be allowed the opportunity to choose whether to participate in a study or not and 2) Additional protective measures for vulnerable persons with limited autonomy (Wasunna et al. in Kruger, Ndebele and Horn, 2014:57).

The study was established as low risk with no vulnerable participants (where age of participants being over 18 years was concerned). Nonetheless, we negotiated the 'vulnerability' of novel and original strategies shared by the Applied Drama and Theatre educators − which they had the choice to accept or decline my disclosure in the thesis. Additionally, their confidentiality was upheld. Their anonymity could not be maintained because of the recognisable nature of naming Drama for Life and the already small group in which they exist making them potentially recognisable amongst the staffing body. Similarly, in a strategic planning session, other members of staff indicated whether or not their inputs would be recorded as part of the data.

Pieper and Thompson explain that beneficence goes beyond kindness in my interaction with the participants but also considering the overall aspect of Ubuntu when including people as subjects for the study, "it is an ethical obligation" (2016: 8). On beneficence and trustworthiness, I maintained the respect and honour of the participants' wishes and boundaries in the research. Again, as researcher, I constantly assessed the intended benefits of the data toward the research and any potential risks to participants or the department and institution as a whole.

As researcher, my participants need not only trust me on a human level, but they need to trust that I will honour their contributions and accept them for what they are, without altering or changing them to suit my research objectives. I found that triangulation was a good tool to use for the study. Not only in the case of having various data sets, sources and methods, but mostly in encouraging ethical validity and trustworthiness. Bhandari (2022b) endorses the use of triangulation in order for the researcher to enhance the credibility of findings. Especially on the quest to answering the research questions, one must utilise various sources and factor the ethical bounds of each source. My engagement with various sources and data collection instruments (as described earlier in

this chapter) mitigated potential subjective and observer biases − that could have existed if I only relied on one data collection tool.

Triangulation was especially essential where earlier discussions around bias was involved regarding the approach to my supervisor's intertwined role as HOD. From Chapter 4 and in instances requiring discussions on potential bias, I reflect and respond to this dynamic. I can confirm that the interpretations of findings do not favour the results of the study nor do they seek approval or validation in favour of Drama for Life or its reputation whatsoever. Additionally, the findings have been impartially and critically presented based on their relevance to the study. I have also ensured that the use of her inputs (statements as HOD and research literature) correlate with the relevant research questions and their pedagogical appropriateness. Therefore, data presented and interpretations thereof do not make commentary on Drama for Life's managerial stance or leadership capacity, but solely focus on how their communications and efforts connected with and mirrored the overarching constructs of the study's pedagogical intentions.

The decision to break the research up into the three stages ensured that I conformed to the relevant ethical procedures in a processual nature. Guion, Diehl and McDonald (2011) state that in qualitative research, validity has to do with whether the findings of a study authentically reflect the situation and can be supported by evidence. More explicitly, Bhandari (2022b) challenges researchers to consider how accurately their choices of methods and data collection tools "measure what they are supposed to measure". I can confirm that the choice to use case study from an ethnographic perspective with participant observation and field notes, semi-structured interviews and documentation as data instruments have yielded appropriate results for the study. Moreover, throughout the research, it can be trusted that I provided an authentic picture of the department and its educators as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and their upholding of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy − from the data collection, to the presentation of findings, analysis and this resulting thesis.

Bearing good ethical conduct in mind, data was collected and analysed with the utmost researcher integrity and responsibility from the various sources. The departmental and

participant-based data remained confidential and only accessible to myself and supervisor (in moments of discussion and guidance). All audio and visual recordings were downloaded and saved in a password-secured device. Interviews conducted via Google link were collated and further saved in a password secured device-although the online portal was sufficient protection − to which only I had access to. The results and evidence of the research have been reported accurately in relation to the collected data and the conclusions and recommendations are drawn only from the findings of the research. All data and matters deemed useful to the study have been factored into the research and all unrelated subject matter and/or information gathered throughout have not been included.

I am compelled to further emphasise that my role of researcher and teaching assistant during the 2020 observation period did not affect the way I chose to investigate. However, in some instances, the roles influenced the angle of my investigation in the department and with the participants. In fact, the positionalities of both roles speak back to the United States Belmont Report's (1978) call for researchers to pay attention to the balance of power between themselves and their subjects. At crucial points of the study, the role of researcher (as I conducted my duties of teaching assistant), assumed an aggressive position because it begged the study a deepened sense of inquiring what I was doing and why I was doing it.

Crucially, as a teaching assistant, employing various strategies to continue with academic work and honour the pedagogy, the balance of power tipped on this side of the scale because the research depended on these efforts. Naturally, I can admit that certain actions wrought by being human would subconsciously want the teaching assistant's role to favour the results of the study. Notwithstanding, I maintained trustworthiness and committed to providing credible experiences as teaching assistant and factual observations as researcher.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methods that were applied in the study. I classified the method as qualitative and argued for its strength in achieving the objectives of the study. I also described the ways in which I utilised case study from an ethnographic (of the classroom) perspective in a longitudinal format as part of the research design. The definition of ethnography (of the classroom) was juxtaposed with similar features of Participatory Action Research in the study, albeit the former was asserted. I then introduced the three stages that guided the trajectory of the data collection and discussed the research instruments, their appropriateness and the challenges and limitations I faced in using them. This chapter concluded with the examination of the ethical clearance procedure and commented on the aspects of trustworthiness and validity from data collection to analysis. The next chapter will present the research findings and discuss the tools of analysis for the 2020 academic year.

CHAPTER 4

Data Presentation and Analysis: 2020

4.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 will present, analyse and theorise the findings that emerged from the collected data. In this chapter I will address the findings that pertain to the 2020 academic year, with recommendations for 2021 and the future. According to David Fetterman (2010), the success or failure of an ethnographic study depends on the degree to which it rings true to the natives and colleagues in the field. He adds that even though readers may disagree with the researcher's interpretations and conclusions, the details of the description should be accurate (Fetterman, 2010).

The data findings that are accurately presented and then analysed in this chapter derive from the field notes made during the participant observation period in 2020. In addition, it presents significant reflections from my research journal, as well as departmental and institutional documentation from the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown period and throughout the year. Prior to addressing the specific research question, I have chosen to build up to it through interleading sub-questions. These sub-questions, as asked in the interviews (refer to Appendix A), assist in panning out connecting elements and exposing the undercurrents that relate to the main question.

As stated in Chapter 3 the observational data was gathered through WhatsApp group chats, Zoom staff meetings and my experience as teaching assistant. The relevant documentation was received by email or sent to the WhatsApp groups. The data from semi-structured interviews with the five Applied Drama and Theatre educators will be presented and analysed as they reflected on their experience of the 2020 academic year. Two participants responded via a Google form link and the other three via Zoom and MS Teams.

I will now introduce the five participants that were interviewed and shared their responses to the research questions in varied ways. All the participants chose to remain anonymous. I have chosen to name them 'Participant A-E' but anonymity cannot be guaranteed. To

add, I will avoid using ‘him, her, he, or she’ as this may also make them even more recognisable. The participant will be referred to as ‘they’, ‘them’ or ‘the participant’.

Each of the Drama for Life educators in question taught the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum to the following cohort of student groups: Third year, Postgraduate Diploma, Fourth year and Honours, Masters and short course programmes. Their combined qualifications (relevant to the study) range from three Masters to two Doctorates in the fields of Applied Drama and Theatre with expertise in Drama in Education, Theatre of the Oppressed, Playback Theatre, Theatre for Development and Applied Improvisation to name a few. Over and above their roles as educators at Drama for Life, they include Applied Drama and Theatre practitioner, facilitator and trainer in their designations. In the 2020 academic year they taught a range of courses such as Drama in Education, Theatre in Education, Research in Applied Drama and Theatre, Critical Reflexive Praxis and Applied Drama and Theatre based short course and other related programmes.

The key aim of the research is to explore the efforts and strategies that this participant group of educators undertook as they moved a deeply complex Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum to online learning platforms. Interconnected with this central aim are their reflections on the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges posed by the digital divide in South Africa. Therefore, research questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 on page 18-20 of Chapter 1 are pertinent to the 2020 academic year as Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators set out on the journey to honouring the integrity of the pedagogy, online.

Each section of the chapter will be organised according to the research questions of the study. As part of my ethnographic process and the narrative form of data collection and analysis, I will first present leading questions or thoughts which establish all the related factors connected to the research question. These sub-questions provided a view of the global picture. I then conclude the section with a consolidated response of the main research question.

4.2. What, in the opinion of Drama for Life's Applied Drama and Theatre educators tend to be the most essential aspects of the characteristic pedagogy?

The above research question serves as a vital introduction to the data because it paints a picture of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy from the perspectives of its Drama for Life educators. Prior to detailing how they attempted to honour the pedagogy's integrity online, it is necessary to first outline what the pedagogy means to these practitioners and educators. Freebody et al. (2018) explain that Applied Drama and Theatre practice is relational and as a result, different participants or students and their facilitators or educators "will have differing ideas of what the work is, why it is happening, whether it is good, how and why it and or should be measured and how it is or isn't helpful" (2018: 2).

Nevertheless, it has also been defined by the likes of Nicholson (2005) and Ackroyd (2000) as a 'set of practices' and these definitions were expanded in the conceptual framework. Prior to delving into their opinions of the essential aspects of an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum, I asked the participants what a normal contact teaching day of Applied Drama and Theatre looked like.

4.2.1. Describing a pre-COVID Applied Drama and Theatre class

The choice of question was for me to identify any common or prominent features of a pre-COVID contact class and these would also lead me to the connected research question. This question also begins to establish characteristics of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy in a live encounter. The journey of discovery began with Participant A. Without hesitation, over a Zoom video call with our screens on, the participant nods, releases a sighing smile and responds,

> So it looked like me stating at the beginning of the lesson, the intention of the lesson. Whatever the topic for the lesson is. I would ask them to make images or tell stories of what they understand about the topic. But first, what I do first is one or two warm up exercises, name games and then I go into what is the topic, yes. But I make sure that they get present in the

> room and create images…[14]that sort of thing… And I could spend the whole day spending time on the topic. The lesson would probably look like… ja, it depends. I also demonstrate a technique for them to explore. I will demonstrate the improvisation of an exercise… then I ask them to play it out and then they can also facilitate it (Participant A).

Participant B, whose camera screen is off throughout the duration of the interview, pauses and then reflects,

> It looked like, uh a full day [pauses]. I would not mind going to work in the morning then knocking off at 4pm. I would have three hour or two hour contact classes. Everything was flowing and the students were engaging so well. We did a lot of practical work (Participant B).

Upon instant inclination to analyse these responses I can deduce that a pre-COVID contact class constitutes of physically grounded and embodied activities. It is also clear that students and educators engage in practical tasks by virtue of being present, they partake in physical warmups, improvisation techniques, games and they explore the topic at hand through play. These activities are achieved "in, through and within the body" as Drama for Life (2021) points out in their pedagogical functions. Participant A's choice to state the intention of the lesson from the onset connects with Lasisi's (2020) representations of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy's impulse being driven by the purposes of the context and the topic at hand. This purpose motivates students to engage with the curricular content from a personal and accessible perspective-as the pedagogy requires, with a student-practitioner lens. I must add to this that the intention is set in the presence of the entire class group, the preceding actions are agreed upon and interrogated, and this fosters active participation and collaborative effort.

I found it interesting that in the Google link response, Participant E began their response with the length of 6-8 teaching hours when describing a normal contact teaching day. In similar fashion over an MS Teams video conversation, Participant D also starts off by saying that it would have been 7 and a half hours a week of direct contact with two-hour

[14] [….] Parentheses in between participants' inputs are an indication of their thought processes and pauses in speech.

sessions per lesson. This participant then goes on to say that half an hour would be dedicated to WhatsApp communication and updates for the content to come. Still, regarding time and almost identically as Participants E and D, Participant A also mentions a 'whole day' exploration of a topic but alludes to having a sense of fulfilment throughout the entire duration of the lesson. This gives an impression that time is of the essence in an Applied Drama and Theatre classroom experience and that these educators require a full teaching day to meet the needs of the curriculum. It also implies that the curriculum and course content, like any other, is time-conscious and when granted that time there is a sense of unadulterated enjoyment while working in contact – regardless of the working hours.

Nebe in Barnes and Coetzee (2014) indicates that an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy is rich in dialogue and prides itself on deepened exchanges that require adequate timing. Bringing up time in relation to a contact lesson also reveals that such engagements, whether in class or community interventions, did not constitute superficially glancing over the content, but honouring the intention and the time it takes to activate the message or technique. More specifically, a pedagogy that holds and shares stories, transforms and ignites minds and is embedded in solution finding should not be rushed.

Contrarily, I reflected in my journal that the migration to ERT (including designing content for the different multimodal formats) has been so time-consuming that when the eventual teaching of the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum began, we were depleted. I also noticed how the move to ERT had drastically increased our working hours. I found myself and my fellow course co-ordinator using Saturdays to plan the following week's content; from lesson planning to strategizing appropriate lesson output formats, up to recording and uploading relevant resources onto Sakai[15]. Unlike the pre-COVID structured manner of time and the luxury of enjoying the immersion as a group, time was spent more on the administrative matters than the actual pedagogical experience. This will be expanded on later in this chapter.

[15] University of the Witwatersrand's Learning Management System during 2020.

Another contributing factor to the extensive hours was the timing of the cellular networks releasing a second batch of data to students just after midnight. This resulted in them responding to class group messages and making commentary on class work (from earlier in the day) in the late-night hours. Consequently, educators felt compelled to check in or acknowledge the messages, because any response from a student (especially in these early stages of the pandemic and their inconsistent connectivity) was extremely vital to ascertaining their presence. This specific example of educators taking the time to engage with students throughout the day and night, not only demonstrates an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy's dedication to promoting social justice, equality and creating access (Conroy, Ong and Rodicks, 2020), but it also proves that this concept of time came with sacrifice.

Moving on, Participant B comments on the existence of a flow in a pre-COVID contact lesson. This specific comment about "everything flowing" implies that a characteristic Applied Drama and Theatre experience, in contact, is one without barrier and uninterrupted connection from intention to implementation. Besides the pandemic, the digital divide and the experience of the curriculum from a distance caused a blockage and disruption to the accustomed flow. The lack of flow is now caused by the absence of all students in one place, the limited ability to collaborate with one another or to even synchronously engage virtually.

Dorothy Heathcote insists that Applied Drama and Theatre is characterised by this carefully planned process and every event unfolds in a structured (though flexible) manner that is not rigid (Wagner, 1999a). Therefore, from these above data sets, an Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum on a normal contact teaching day is practical and embodied, it is time-sensitive to the needs of the participants and equally time-demanding. Additionally, the topic at hand and its structure, (though varied) leaves room for flow and engagement. I will now reflect on some of the activities performed in a normal contact class.

As I recall my years as undergraduate scholar at Drama for Life and now as teaching assistant, once we entered the learning space we would gather in a circle and begin with

some form of embodied introductory activity that sets the tone of all action to come. These activities ranged from walking around the room, making eye contact, sharing gestures, moving our bodies, call and response games and having discussions on the floor through mind-mapping with crayons, pens and paper charts. If the topic of the day required that we embody role, we would utilise costumes, props and play in the space. Validating this, Tamara Guhrs substantiates,

> Some of the practices or exercises that enable this are mindfulness meditation; listening exercises, breathing and centering techniques such as those used in voice training classes, and the use of journaling or "checking in" with the class, so that students can begin to develop the ability to reflect on their own unconscious processes with agility (Guhrs in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe, 2022: 110).

On another day of the week, a Reading and Writing slot was allocated (and much shorter than the core lesson period) and here we would respond to readings and unpack our understanding of what relevant theorists were offering in relation to the course. We would usually sit in circular formation on our chairs and desks for this lesson. Here, the theoretical, contextual and historical knowledges were introduced and discussed-with reference to the work we had done in our bodies and on the floor throughout the week. This proves that because we engage in praxis, the need for a 'traditional' looking class with books on tables and pens in our hands was not more important than the need to embody those concepts in order to know them. This is what a normal contact teaching day looked like for me as a scholar.

As contextualised in Chapter 1, in line with Drama for Life's (2020a) pedagogical objectives, I propositioned that a characteristic Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy is one that opens up opportunities for students to 1) explore participatory and collaborative elements, 2) uphold theory and practice through reflection and 3) immerse themselves within particular social contexts as a tool for social learning and engaging with marginalised communities. I further emphasised that these intentions are expressed through the present body for the purposes of reflection and transformation. I then asked the participants if they agreed with my description of the three intentions and all responded affirmatively.

Knowing the above and having established the pre-COVID classroom experience, one has an idea of certain mechanisms put in place for students to explore the curriculum effectively. The role of the educator is to translate essential features of the pedagogy into an accessible curricular experience in class. What more when the physical classroom is no more? I will now tackle research question one.

4.2.2. Descriptions of essential aspects of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy

Below is a discussion of the various opinions by the participants of what constitutes the essential aspects of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. For starters, I noticed that each educator related the core aspects of the pedagogy to their individual practice first and then connected it to each function of the curriculum and how it plays out in the greater scheme of the pedagogy. From a historical and organisational viewpoint, founder of Drama for Life, Warren Nebe (2022) writes that Drama for Life's vision located itself in the principles of Ubuntu and attempted to bring together the vast imaginative and creative expertise of African scholars.

Establishing the development of the department, the key contributors and the approaches to the shared learning processes, he then highlights that it was an academic feat that held enormous promise (Nebe in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe, 2022). Characterising Applied Drama and Theatre, Drama Therapy and Applied Arts in Drama for Life and more specifically their interventional functions, he also explains that,

> It became a "living pedagogy". Learning was determined by those who were present in the education space. It was mutual, collaborative, and shared and negotiated by all participants. We worked actively to deconstruct decades of colonial education by shattering the notion of the teacher as the authority, deconstructing patriarchy, redefining the relationship between teacher and student, re-imagining women and men, paying heed to oral histories, subjugated knowledge, common lived experience, cultural and unique signatures of expression and the divergent, sometimes uncomfortable spaces between us (Nebe in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe, 2022: 6).

Nebe's (2022) explanation above resembles Drama for Life's 2020 mandate and this shows that the department's vision has been maintained since then. These are narrowed down to physical presence in a shared space, a mutually collaborative effort to learning in that space and redefining the educator-student relationship. This confirmed that the three intentions of focus and the impulses for this study were legitimate. Participant D extensively constructs their opinion of the core aspects of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy and delivers three directed features. After I posed the question, the participant pauses, turns their face to the wall, thinks and then jumps straight into it,

> One, critical theory in relationship to the content for the course is imperative. So for example, if it is a more education focused methodology then it's critical pedagogy content. If it's Reflexive Praxis then we are looking at the likes of Feminist theory and and and (Participant D).

Interestingly, PhD scholar Amanda Wager (2014), like Participant D also perceives Applied Drama and Theatre as a hybrid of three important elements, those being theoretical foundations, community engagement, and practical applications. On the first point she explains,

> The theoretical foundations of Applied Drama and Theatre examine those underpinnings created and contributed by contemporary and historical scholars and practitioners of the field, such as Augusto Boal, Dorothy Heathcote, James Thompson, and Petra Kuppers (to name a few) (Wager, 2014:5).

Combining the two thoughts, Kovács (2014) adds that the intersecting fields of Applied Drama and Theatre range from theatre, psychology, sociology and politics and these work in combination with the scholars. Participant D emphasises that in the practice of the pedagogy, it is important to know its relations to particular intersecting fields and the contributors and the explorations thereof are not fixed. Hughes and Nicholson (2016) view Applied Drama and Theatre as an ecology of practice that is continually shifting and developing, with the consequence that it has not one identity but many practical identities, all differently nuanced according to context. Kovács (2014) then continues that Applied Drama and Theatre is interdisciplinary in nature but, has the common goal of improving the quality of life of different groups or individuals.

Participant E from the onset, maintains that instead of me naming the three intentions in the study as essential or "core aspects" of the pedagogy, this participant says,

> I would call these dispositions to the Applied Drama and Theatre educator rather than (the) curriculum as depending on what you are teaching. Each method may present to you their own principles that implicate the curriculum (Participant E).

Corresponding with Participant D, they are both of the view that the pedagogy is responsive to the needs of the content and each method serves a particular function. Referring to method, an educator cannot merely describe participation and collaboration, or map out how to integrate theory and practice or anticipate the dynamics of the actual immersion in contexts from a theoretical perspective. The pedagogy's essential function begs a marrying of all relational devices. This is why students are given the practical tools to actively explore the concepts they engage with as part of the curriculum instead of merely reading about them.

Congruent to Participant E's offering, Prendergast and Saxton (2016) explicate that drama, theatre and education strategies and techniques have a close kinship with good pedagogical praxis. Hence Participant E's conviction that they are rather dispositions to the educator. Prendergast and Saxton (2016) explain that in the practice of the pedagogy it is essential that educators need to be trained, knowing how to do something, why it is appropriate, when it needs to be done and how to do it in the most effective way.

Even the literature in the Chapter 2 has shown that there are several definitions and comprehensions of Applied Drama and Theatre and its main features cannot be simply classified as one thing or another. Ackroyd (2000) suggests that there is an intentionality which all the various groups have in common and this is the shared belief that drama and theatre have the power to address something beyond the form itself. However, it must be clearly stated what is inherent, what develops from a particular strategy, what can be taught theoretically and what must be practiced in order to understand and most importantly – how these are achieved and in what ways.

Participant C first sketches an understanding of Applied Drama and Theatre as "the use of drama as the core framework for facilitator/educator and participant/student

engagement". Then they define the essential role of an Applied Drama and Theatre educator as one who:

- Creates a 'safe space' or teacher-learner environment as defined by Jonathan Neelands (1984).
- Affords participants the opportunity to be agents of their own change and solutions.
- Provides effective questioning and reflection.

An identifiable recognition of safety, as earlier explained by Hunter (2008) and emphasised by Davis and Phillips (2021) on page 71 is what strikes me most. Participant C's decision to include safety as a primary point stresses that the pedagogy characteristically upholds safety in the physical environment – including the metaphoric and contextual senses of the word. Hughes and Nicholson (2016) argue that Applied Drama and Theatre practices require reciprocity, "a process that is often politically complex and emotionally challenging". Participant C's list above is also seemingly scaffolded, suggesting a hierarchical relationship between the three points given. If the student-educator environment is safely negotiated among the group then they freely become agents of their own change and solutions as stated in bullet point 2. This freedom is a not only guided by the educator but remains a cardinal agent for Applied Drama and Theatre practice. Reflection, in turn, becomes a reciprocal response to effective questioning and the consistent provision and assurance of the safe space. All of which cannot be separated when thinking about the pedagogy.

On Participant C's contribution, Sharon Grady (2003) also indicates three common theoretical underpinnings that provide a justification for Applied Theatre and Drama work: "a belief in the efficacy of artistic engagement, faith in the productivity of participation, and a solemn regard for reflection" (2003: 68). These foundations reflect how the pedagogy contributes to and is deeply connected to language, culture, and social practices of everyday life. Throughout the participants' insights, I am aware of a similar pattern where the participants do not separate the pedagogy from the pedagogue.

When describing the core elements of a contact-based Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, they provide all the necessary ingredients that the educator should contain in order to achieve it. I agree with this inseparable relationship because an Applied Drama

and Theatre educator or facilitator's responsibility is to expose their students or participants to the pedagogy and its faculties, from their lived and expert practice of methods. Thus, an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy's catalytic agent is the educator or facilitator who manipulates its methods to suit a need of that particular purpose (Prendergast and Saxton, 2013). The intentions and collective knowledges of the pedagogy cannot be explained without embracing the educator or facilitator and the student or participant as equal beneficiaries.

Wager (2014) motivates that in the practice of the pedagogy, educators rely on practical applications such as acting, role-playing, improvisational skills, script-writing, Theatre of the Oppressed practices (Forum/Image Theatre), process drama, participatory theatre, artistic design with few resources (costume/scenic/lighting), and research methods, such as interviewing and taking field notes. It is the educator's duty to equip students with the knowledges and skills to utilise all the relevant tools for each pedagogical technique, form and moment. Participant E foregrounds "the attitude or natural state of mind of the educator" as impacting the students' considerations of and advancements with the pedagogy. Again, focusing on the responsibilities of the educator, this participant defines the essential aspects of a characteristic Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy as,

> - Confronting class and difference in the classroom.
> - Applying an engaged pedagogy that promotes equity and equality.
> - Entering into a 'teaching' dialogue that allows for active engagement from all present.
> - Applying praxis through fieldwork engagement.
> - Place learners at the centre of their learning. (Participant E)

This participant's first two points bring out the earlier mentioned issues of social justice and equity through active dialogue, which will be addressed later in the chapter. In relation to the study's inclusion of praxis I beam at how this participant marries it to the immersion in social contexts during fieldwork engagements. The journey from Drama for Life scholar to fully fledged practitioner (as stated in the rationale on page 20), is an inward-outward trajectory. An Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy takes the student and places them at the centre and from that viewpoint they hone in on their skills through exploration of

techniques and methods – this can be described as the inward work in an inward setting (at the centre). As the student develops and progresses through the demands of the pedagogy, they become closer to their endeavours of an outward expression and into the literal outside communities they serve. In fact, the outward expressions also take place in their learning and this shows that praxis works interchangeably.

Participant D also adds “a praxis approach” as a second ingredient that is “absolutely required” to framing the pedagogy. The participant explains that the educator should be able to find a praxis mode of engagement with the critical content and specifies that critical theory should neither sit as a separate theory nor the methodology; as with the practice component. There has to be an integration of the two. The combination of theory and practice works hand in hand with the educator and student or participant and facilitator – one cannot be explored without the other. In our pedagogy, all agents that contribute to the pedagogical practice are essential. Where the shifts caused by the pandemic is concerned, Participant D specifies that “there is just something about that participant-facilitator relationship that you cannot really generate to the same depth online”.

On another note, the participants keep referring to verbs or actions that are to be undertaken when referring to the essential aspects of the pedagogy or the educator. Participant B does not neglect to keep emphasising that without the ability to physically “do stuff’ as a group and in our bodies then the pedagogy is robbed of its true essence. This buttresses the designation that an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy in all its facets should be practiced. As the conversation continues, Participant A also reminds me that the word applied means that we have to turn a concept into practice. These opinions indicate that the essential aspects of Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, although rooted in theoretical constructs require an active mode in their achievement. Even though these educators negotiated the barriers to exploring the physical and practical concerns of the pedagogy, the study begs the question: During this period, can we as educators undoubtedly declare that the cohort of students during 2020 were afforded the complete inward experience and are fully equipped for their outward endeavours?

Rounding up with their opinions of immersion in social contexts on the list, Participant D shares that an ethnographic awareness is paramount to the pedagogy. The participant explains that there is a real emphasis on context and understanding context in Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogical practice. A clear is example of this is the extensive preparation and research that students at Drama for Life must undertake prior to immersing themselves in the various contexts. Nebe in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe (2022) also mentions that the embodied presence should not only be limited to the educational trajectory but must be extended to community. Community engagement and transformation is crucial to the efficacy of the pedagogy. Wager's third prong of community engagement includes "important principles of community collaboration and leadership, such as adapting to new situations, organization and leadership skills, funding challenges, and directing and engaging individuals with no prior theatrical experience (2014:5).

From the perspective of a community driven pedagogy that benefits the marginalised, Participant D states that "how we perceive and analyse contexts is ethnographic (although we might not always name it) and that particularly in a South African context that is separated and segregated – we are to train Applied Drama and Theatre practitioners the principles of ethnography and social constructive theory". Back to Nebe's description of a "living pedagogy" (page 121), he accounts for the stories shared in interventions serving as a type of ethnographic documentation because it was a hybrid of the present, relational cultures (Nebe in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe, 2022).

Viewing the pedagogy in the eyes of an ethnographer helped me to see that it is indeed founded upon the principles of understanding a community through collaboration and, any efforts to integrate with them or engage with their perspectives and address their challenges can only be achieved by immersing into their social context. The idea of agency is heightened when we become a part of their activities for that time and actively participate with them. This, I agree is the crux of the pedagogy.

So far, the data and literature has shown that core aspects of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy cannot be narrowed to one thing. Yet, the data indicates that an

Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy is in fact alive. Within the constructs of being alive, it is practical and embodied in nature, it is rooted in theory and a historically embedded basis, it encourages reflexivity through effective questioning and engagement, it promotes access and inclusion to diverse groups of people and is solution or transformation-driven. Furthermore, it stands for dialogue that is shared in collaboration and the student or participant is placed at the centre of the learning and is an active agent in it. The pedagogy carries different meanings to each practitioner depending on the mode of engagement and the specific moment it requires; however, the purpose is unified in all aspects.

Earlier in this section the participants were tasked with describing a pre-COVID classroom and from this, I found that in a normal contact situation, one would require time, a flowing structure and physical presence to aid embodiment, participation and practical engagement – which have now been clearly identified as some of the essential aspects to the pedagogy. Moreover, the issue of safety which could be negotiated in the normal classroom encounter under controlled conditions could not be guaranteed remotely.

The research calls for a close observation of these essential pedagogical aspects and investigates what happens to them when they are placed in uncomfortable and unfamiliar settings. With the entrance of the pandemic and the restrictions on movement and access to the learning space, these core aspects became fundamentally threatened. The following part of the chapter will present, analyse and theorise the relevant data to research question 2 of the study.

4.3. What core principles of Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy did Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators identify as potentially seriously threatened by the movement to online learning platforms?

As highlighted in 4.2, the reactions to the arrival of the pandemic were two-fold. Naturally, we panicked and were concerned about our well-beings and wondered if we would survive this deadly virus. Within those critical moments in the beginning stages of the

pandemic government prioritised safety and the management of the spread. On the 24th of March, the Wits School of Arts (WSOA) released a statement via email acknowledging the President's address and Higher Education's directives on school closures etc. and in response, they afforded staff and students with a two-week time of reprieve to take care of ourselves and families in this uncertain time. The second part of the response to the pandemic was the anticipation of what online learning would entail for us. Although fearful of the transition, we looked to the opportunity and potential for discovery. At that moment, the biggest threat to exploring these possibilities was the digital divide.

Alas, on the 6th of April, it was announced by Drama for Life's Head of Department (HOD), Dr Petro Janse van Vuuren via WhatsApp message that the two-week reprieve would be called to an early end in favour of easing into the new online dispensation. This process included the circulation of surveys to ascertain student-staff device and connectivity access and educators were to load their curricula content onto their relevant Sakai course pages. However, these efforts fell short because the digital divide viciously reared its ugly head and an alarming number of students became unreachable. It was in this moment that as a department, management vehemently declared that "if we cannot teach all our students, we will not teach any".

This is the voice of an obstinate pedagogy that is clear of its purpose. We could not say that our pedagogy upholds certain principles and not stand by them. An Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy confronts barriers to inclusion and promotes humanity in its endeavours. In these preliminary stages, the move to online learning intimated a threat to the inclusive nature of the pedagogy. How were we going to ensure that all stakeholders, most importantly, the immediate stakeholders - the students were included in the online learning space?

4.3.1. Early reactions and responses to the entrance of the pandemic

Before I address the research question related to this section, I will firstly discuss the early reactions to the pandemic because these reactions uncover the looming threats to look out for. These reactions also pre-empt and build up to the key issues related to research question two; especially if these reactions take the pedagogy into account. I asked the participants to share their overall reactions to COVID-19 and what effects they thought it

would have on learning. Participant E states that the primary concern was for the student body,

> Would they be able to learn safely and adequately within the constraints of their homes? This followed with great anxiety around how I would be able to complete my course content, particularly the experiential learning moments on which the course is dependent on (Participant E).

Participant B admits to being "totally resistant" to online teaching from the onset. The participant then reflects, "I could not envisage how I would plan the lessons" but above all, the embodied aspects of the work caused the most concern. Lucy Bellingham (2021) concurs that "online" is not where drama educators want to be delivering lessons. She explains that collaboration and interaction lie at the heart of our pedagogy and throughout 2020, "we were in new territory, looking for ways to foster and retain the fundamental qualities" (Bellingham, 2021). Though hesitant at first, Participant C was convinced that theoretical grounding of the pedagogy could be negotiated online. The participant noted that COVID-19 had a great impact on both the methodology and the pedagogy. Where embodied experiential learning is concerned, Participant C strongly felt that the migration to online will compromise the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy.

Optimistically, Participant A expressed excitement and eagerness due to having had previous experience with developing and teaching an online course that dealt with immersive, collaborative and praxis related processes. This participant admits that although the undercurrents of the digital divide would make it difficult for us, the prospects were exciting. In similar sentiment, Participant D describes an initial mild excitement for the challenge and the possibilities of the new wave of learning until the demands of the digital divide came up and anxiety settled in. In a Zoom staff meeting in preparation for our eventual return to teaching, the words 'fear, confusion, anxious" were shared in a check in moment. In the same breath, words like 'fascination, anticipation, hopeful and courage' were also expressed. One thing was certain in this uncertainty, we were determined and were going to put our heads together to give students the most of the pedagogy regardless of the anxieties.

I remember thinking that although I was nervous for what was to come, I had always had a fascination with 4IR and imagined that this would be the opportune moment to digitise our work. The digital divide though countered some of those dreams instantly. I knew that some students would be able to instantly come to the party and others would be left out in the cold. In a notice to students shortly after this session the Drama for Life academic staffing team emphasised that even though educators were meeting in groups to redesign the curriculum for online learning, students should rest assured that Wits University and Drama for Life are not turning into an online university. This statement proved to me that there was no way we were settling for an online based Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy-in fact it was not at all feasible.

Henceforward, the reactions and responses to the entrance of COVID-19 and its anticipated effects on learning is marred by the realities of the digital divide. This elephant in the room must be confronted. The following captures observational notes I made and participants' responses regarding the digital divide and its implications on the pedagogy and our endeavours as a department.

4.3.2. Managing the digital divide and exposing its implications on the pedagogy

Amidst the hard lockdown period Wits University and Drama for Life circulated various online surveys, trying to establish student connectivity and preferred cellular network for data provisions. Amongst these efforts, included year heads[16] phoning students to ask them what their preferred communication platforms were. It recorded that most students relied on WhatsApp and email. Drama for Life also requested that students send messages detailing their connectivity, data or access related needs before the commencement of the remote programme on 20 April 2022. A WhatsApp notice from the HOD circulated on 08 April 2022 that demonstrated an awareness of the digital demands stated the following:

[16] Academic staff members that co-ordinate and oversee the well-being of the student cohort in each year of study regardless of course choices.

> Connectivity and access: …. WE have a significant number of students who struggle with data, connectivity and access- we will not leave you behind.
>
> Plans and Possibilities: WE know many of you relied on Wits hardware and Wi-Fi access and we are approaching funders and making plans. We will provide clarity as soon as we have it. We would love you to weigh in on this and suggest solutions that we might not be aware of.

During this time the institution and department as a whole worked tirelessly to ensure that students were connected with devices and data. Cellular networks also came to the rescue by providing students with 40GB of data per month and creating data free sites for students to access (Premnath, 2020). Through a mobile computing device bank, Wits University made a call for students to apply for devices. Staff members were encouraged to declare their data challenges and an allowance was also afforded to them. Most importantly, Wits University re-configured Sakai to be available and accessible on a data-free basis. This ensured that students could engage with their learning material course content without the pressures of data depletion.

Throughout the WhatsApp communications, management maintained that students should take agency in their learning and strongly suggested that they make use of all the solutions to opening their barriers to digital connectivity and access. However, they assured students that if they did not receive a device from the University, a back-up plan was being made and indeed it was. This demonstrated a pedagogy combatting the devices of the divide. Where the department could help it, as the pedagogy demands, they would by all means forge a path using any means possible. By the beginning of the start to the ERT period Drama for Life managed to secure access and some form of connectivity for every single student.

For students who were still inadequately resourced staff would make phone calls to them and did their utmost best to reach them in one way or another. One student could only be reached on their mother's phone after work and another would have to go to their neighbour's house for a network signal. Even though these efforts assisted in ensuring that students were connected and had some access to the learning, the divide still existed

and showed itself in our inability to have identical synchronicity and quality of access. Alas, we were grateful for any connection and progress we could achieve at that time.

When I questioned the participants about their pressing feelings towards moving the curricular content to online learning platforms and the implications thereof, all of them first began with their concerns about the digital divide then followed by the more curricular specific concerns in their responses. Participant E replies,

> The digital divide firstly. Then the reality that no one across the globe practices Drama in Education online-therefore there are no examples of the practice to assist me in translating the existing course online (Participant E).

The second part of this participant's answer excites me because although the participant had not heard of such online based projects, the research has shown that in fact, significant strides were taken globally in migrating aspects of similar pedagogies online. There is hope. However, where a Drama in Education process is concerned, I shared the participant's same concerns. Back to the question, Participant C writes,

"Firstly, the fact that not all students had access to resources such as laptops/smartphones and data. Secondly not all students live in homes where it is easy to focus on academic work. A lot of home responsibilities make it nearly impossible for them to concentrate on school/academic work." Clearly, these Applied Drama and Theatre educators are on the same wavelength because Participant C also shares the same thought as Participant E above,

> A lot of Applied Drama and Theatre methods such as process drama and forum theatre had not been explored online before. I would essentially be charting a new pathway. This was also concerning for me due to the fact that both these forms are still being adapted to the African context, let alone an online African context. The social-economic and political implications of such transitions render the entire practice as problematic (Participant C).

This comment on the pedagogy's responsibility to the African and their context is resounding. The restrictions posed by the pandemic and the digital divide perpetuated elitism and highlighted the binaries of privilege. As mentioned earlier even though all students were furnished with data and devices, their experiences of the learning were

unequal. A student learning from a rural and impoverished home environment did not have the same learning experience as their peer in the suburbs, with a vast number of amenities and luxuries at their disposal. Our pedagogy fosters equality in the learning space and now that we are removed from that common setting, our differences became more apparent. Later in the chapter, I will discuss more explicitly, how the digital divide impacted these educator's strategies and present its more prevalent realities. Nevertheless, Drama for Life and Wits University did offer solution to the manageable demands of the digital challenges.

> Are we able to participate as citizens across technological inequalities? Can we perform our social and communal connectivity in the digital space as well as in the physical? It is therefore key for us to reflect on the issues of the 'digital divide'… (Houlihan and Morris, 2022: 159).

Participant D resolves that the department and teaching staff had to consider the pedagogical implications of the move to online and equally factor in the urgent administrative responsibilities. Participant A also stands by this and says that most of the material just needed adaptation and moving the curricular content to online platforms "wouldn't be a big deal" and "all we needed to do is reframe". Certainly, the more apparent aspects of the pedagogy that were threatened by the move to remote learning were easily identified and were urgently reframed or postponed for later in the year when we thought lockdown would be over. However, as time went by one realised that the digital divide would have a ripple effect on other interconnected aspects.

> There is no longer room for difference to enter into the learning space as there is an assumption that we are all equal. If what bell hooks speaks of (students having to leave their realities at the gates of the university to take on middle class values) was cause for concern prior to digital learning, then it currently waves big red flags to me as a lecturer (Participant E).

At the heart of the above core principles, the pedagogy cannot do without connection and access-in all the senses of the words. According to Conroy, Ong and Rodicks (2020), accessibility is normative, carrying within it an assumption of norms that should be extended to all. It involves the recognition of privilege and lack of privilege, working frequently across the binary of inside/outside (Conroy, Ong and Rodicks, 2020). Our

pedagogy invites those who are left out and are barred from freely expressing themselves and gives them a seat at the table. As Participant E shares above, the move to online learning platforms caused us to interrogate how we navigate access and, most importantly, how we confront the inequalities that presented themselves. An online pedagogy in a digitally divided South Africa threatens the pedagogy's commitment to access and connection, not only highlighting inequality in the classroom but re-marginalising our communities even more.

Nebe in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe impresses that the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy

> …is cognizant of its material conditions, the embodied presence of its participants as active agents in their educational trajectory, the role of the lecturer as the facilitator in compassionate self- and community-care, health and well-being… (2022: 16).

Nebe's (2022) summary above calls for us to consider three important factors: 1) the undercurrents of the pandemic and the conditions under which we will now function 2) our inability to be physically present as a collective and the barriers to that connection remotely and, 3) extending compassion and care for ourselves and one another during these unprecedented times. As we prepared the Sakai-based curriculum and weighed in on the data and connectivity arrangements, an immediate call for food parcels and food contributions is made for struggling students. What does the pedagogy deem more important in that moment? Prioritising the on-boarding of the curriculum and saving the academic year or ensuring that students do not go hungry? Certainly, in this situation, the latter.

Participant D recalls physically driving to students' homes to give some spare devices and others food parcels. The pandemic and its imposition of remote learning bars students of the physical access to res food and amenities, as well as the readily available internet connection and computers on campus. During this critical period, internet cafes were also deemed non-essential and thus shut down, so students without their own equipment and devices had no other means.

Conroy, Ong and Rodicks (2020) clarify that access is constantly negotiated because no two individuals have an identical relationship to the similar access they share. Furthermore, access is not one single moment of just one thing. It shifts in conversation wider socioeconomic situations even as the individual's needs and preferences for different aesthetics, pedagogies, and practices change over time (Conroy, Ong and Rodicks, 2020). Another aspect to access and connection is the inability to meet physically and experience the learning as a collective in the learning spaces. To a certain extent, the pedagogy becomes inaccessible if it cannot be fully navigated. Students who did not have sufficiently modelled devices such as smartphones and laptops were also left out of the communication chain until they were loaned more efficient models. Still, a week into the new remote teaching period, six students did not have the appropriately compatible devices to access Sakai or WhatsApp. Participant E shares how some of them relied on a phone call to receive class related updates because their connectivity to the application was limited due to unstable network or device-related inadequacies. This undoubtedly excluded them from any attempts at the remote group learning.

> The coronavirus is so insidious because it attacks one of the central yearnings of human nature, which just so happens to be the bedrock drama and theatre are built on: our desire to assemble (Berger, 2020: npn).

Moreover, as discussed in the literature review on page 69, lack of connection was also due to insufficient data or connectivity, connecting into the world of the pedagogy and connecting with the communities for interventional and learning placement purposes. As Berger (2020) reflects above, our pedagogy is premised on assembly and the undercurrents of gathering a group of people to address a social issue and solve a common problem as a unit. Participant B outright resolves that our work is dying. Whilst agreeing with the necessary migration to technology-based learning and everything that comes with the "millennial age", the participant reiterates that our pedagogy involves human beings that connect and gather with other human beings physically.

The absence of this physical connection renders our work completely threatened. The data will later prove that even though we could assemble in the WhatsApp group, it was

not always at the same time and the distance at which we assembled did not yield the envisaged pedagogical results.

As Applied Drama and Theatre educators and the department, we had to remain cognizant of all the messages that we were communicating (explicitly and subliminally) in the way we handled the pandemic, the digital divide and provided equitable solutions to the problems. One such platform that Drama for Life used for assembly and dialogue across the whole department was Town Hall. Throughout 2020 we were unable to have this gathering online because it would exclude many students whose data was being spared for the most crucial activities. The choice to not continue with important departmental ritual was in commitment to conveying the message of our pedagogy – if one cannot connect, nobody will connect.

Regarding overall presence in class and reviewing collective moments such as Town Hall, Participant C questioned how we can adequately assess presence and participation when not all students have equal resources and favourable circumstances to take part in all crucial departmental activities. The move to ERT posed a threat to the inclusive and connecting nature of the pedagogy and further exacerbated the already apparent inequalities in a normal class situation.

4.3.3. Identifying the serious threats to the pedagogy

The research thus far has shown that an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy is not simple to define and therefore, the threats to its move to online learning platforms can be considered from various perspectives in relation to its many functions. Judging from the data there were many factors at play when considering how best to move the curriculum to digital platforms and honour the integrity of the pedagogy. Now, when asking the participants to identify the serious threats to the pedagogy, as I anticipated, their answers connected with their fears in question 4.3.2 – with some expansions here and there.

Participant C explains that since COVID-19 arrived there has been a total absence of embodied experiential practice. Debating this, Participant A states that embodiment is present but it is now individual because students partake in the learning, alone. Participant B stresses that our pedagogy is best learnt through contact learning and the

biggest concern is the lack of connection amongst the staff and student body. In their analysis of what the pandemic has cost the academic programme, Dorn et al. (2021) introduce the term 'unfinished learning' to capture the reality that COVID-19 threatened student's opportunity to complete all the learning that was anticipated in a typical year. Notwithstanding, the cohort of students during this pandemic are at risk of completing their qualifications without the complete set of skills, behaviours and mind-sets to succeed in their workspaces (Dorn et al. 2021).

Opposing Dorn et al. (2020), Cohen (2020) suggests that students need not master all the skills of a course in an emergency situation. Rather, she encourages that they should know what to hold onto and what to let go of and then after the pandemic, instead of wanting a degree, students can chart a course for and about hope and yearn for something else (Cohen, 2020). This is precisely what Participant D shares about making the choice to distil the curriculum to its fundamental elements. The participant explains,

> The real question, an urgent question became, "what is the thing about Applied that they (the students) have to know understand and experience. Like really distil it down to that. Uhm… so to really push myself and my co-teacher, to think if we only have one hour hypothetically, to be with them, what are explicitly these things and how can we flesh it out and achieve that (Participant D).

Deborah Cohan (2020) writes that a crisis such as the pandemic should not prompt us to add more content; it should encourage us to distil things to an essence and model for students how and what to prioritize. Participant E concedes that as a programme co-ordinator they found themselves sacrificing content and expectations from their specific course to accommodate expectations from other courses at Masters level. Additionally, the participant admits to "watering down the intensity of the course" and trying desperately to find a balance.

Noori (2021) reveals that many Higher Education Institutions had to make the necessary alterations to their courses and as a result, the quality of the learning experience was affected. At the end of the academic programme, "what competencies can we completely "tick" that the students achieved and qualified for"? asks Participant A. It is evident that the pandemic poses a threat to the complete demands of the curriculum and thus renders

the pedagogical intentions fragmented. Participant C worried that efforts to distil the content affected even the long-term endeavours of the practice,

> The principles and epistemology of the Applied Drama and Theatre discipline are being questioned and altered in a way that will affect the practice even after in-person teaching is restored. I asked myself questions such as “Who is this for?” and “What is this trying to achieve?” given the current circumstances (Participant C).

Our kind of work requires that we send out well-equipped practitioners into the field who are conscious of the needs of the communities in that environment and can use all the tools they learnt in their programme appropriately. The findings indicate that the dangers of distilling and sacrificing some elements in the curriculum resulted in this cohort of students having a minimized experience of the pedagogy. Participant A also reasoned that naturally “we had to minimise, cut down and simplify”, but throughout that process, kept wondering if we are not losing our standards and the academic endeavour as a whole. On a positive note, and factoring in the finesse of our pedagogy – it’s rejection of being boxed or fixed to one thing enables us to accept that the loss of some aspects gives rise to the refinement and redefinition of others. Perhaps the pandemic gave us the opportunity to relook at what our practice is and can be outside of the comfort of familiarity. However, if we put the opportunities and the threats on a scale the data finds that the threats weighed more than the opportunities in the 2020 academic year.

Another threat prevalent the nature of the dialogical learning exchange in an Applied Drama and Theatre encounter. Participant E adds that,

> Very little dialogue is taking place when students cannot access synchronous learning spaces. This lends the educator to become the monologue narrator and the learner to become a passive receiver. I can go on… but my brain already hurts (Participant E).

I can attest to this because the data has revealed that the learning experience was distorted and disjointed. Relating to my specific group of students, some of them could not attend WhatsApp based lectures during the day and would wait for midnight to access information due to data allowances. By the time they accessed the class recordings and

learning material the passive deposit was transacted. This dynamic brought a sense of a type of distance learning or learning by correspondence – which infers a traditional approach to education. Participant E laments that as a result of this distanced approach to learning, they could not even establish and achieve clear pattern or scaffold of the learning in each week.

The dialogical exchange and barriers to the move toward ERT and the now affecting the relationship between educator and student, goes against Nebe's (2022) statement on Drama for Life working "actively to deconstruct decades of colonial education by shattering the notion of the teacher as the authority…" Our pedagogy frowns upon the traditional banking model of education where the educator is the "all-knowing" imparter of knowledge to an empty vessel that is the student. As a result of the pandemic's shifts to learning and without this element of synchronicity in attendance and connectivity, students passively received content and recordings without being able to engage and contribute in real time.

Our pedagogy lends itself to phenomenal aesthetic processes as well and Participant D explains that this was also threatened by the move to online learning platforms,

> Uhm…the big missing piece that I experienced though, was the sort of lab, as I would describe it. So that idea of now really engaging with the aesthetic of the methods, uhm on the floor, you know. So in TIE for example, being able to say "Great, we've looked at this perspective of TIE theory, how then could it look on the floor in action? You know… Uhm that I really struggled with. It's very difficult to find…uhm full expressions like artistically and aesthetically in a technological space (Participant D).

The final notice to students before the expected return to lectures on the 20th of April 2022, assured students that Drama for Life was taking the whole degree programme into account and streamlining the learning for our return to contact teaching in semester two. Meeting after meeting, we strategized on interim solutions to on-board and continue with the theoretical aspects and rather wait for our return to campus for the more practical elements. Little did we know that the lockdown would continue for a long time yet. This solution of delaying the practical components was a clear indication that online learning

platforms would have a limited capacity to support our entire pedagogy, especially those that thrive on this aesthetic value and experience.

Participant E admits to knowing very little about online learning and in the early stages of the pandemic could not see its implications on the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, since this participant felt that they did not have the theoretical and psychological underpinnings of such a theory of learning. This participant also goes onto to say that in retrospect what we were doing was not at all 'online learning' per say and rather an emergency response or emergency remote learning. I see it this way: in an emergency situation, our response to a looming threat is defence. We usually defend and try to salvage the most important things and convince ourselves that what we have left behind can be replaced. The danger here is that, what we deem 'replaceable', we sometimes discover was indeed irreplaceable and must now strategize on how to best salvage the loss.

Not only did we find ourselves competing with the complexities of the digital environment but also of the contextual realities of students were a great threat to their learning experience. Participant A shares,

> Students became so lost and immersed into their problems and their home environments. There is very little distinction between home life and school life and they just couldn't… they couldn't keep a physical and objective distance. It really became a therapy session (Participant A).

This rings true because in my conversations with students many of them could not deal with the distractions of their home environments. For others, going back home meant assuming the role of parent, elder sibling or child first and this meant relegating or placing theirs of student in the back burner. Bassett and Arnhold (2020) indicate that when campuses closed, many students were forced to leave their dormitories and hostels and for many, especially those from lower economic groups or unsafe, unstable, or non-existent family environments, these residence halls are home.

Many students rely on their campus facilities as primary sources of meals, health care, and support services, including academic and mental health counselling (Bassett and

Arnhold, 2020). Therefore, Cleophas (2020) emphasises that how the lecturer and student communicate will ultimately determine how knowledge is transmitted and accepted. It must be useful for both to provide the context of their social environment and immediate physical surroundings (for example, I am looking after a sick family member or the children are noisy) (Cleophas, 2020: para. 9).

In terms of supporting student's mental health and providing them the space to process everything, Drama for Life Management decided that the Critical Reflective Practice courses rather be dedicated to decompress students' anxieties and tensions. In a WhatsApp message to staff, the team said that reflective practice should be focused on self-care, resilience and continued processing. Once we had reconciled the more evident threats to our pedagogy, we first put our focus on what we could achieve and simultaneously made room for play and exploration.

Life Boat was one such metaphor proposed by Dr Janse van Vuuren for the staff and students to engage with as they reflect and share where they are in the process of staying afloat during the difficult time. It was also used as a mechanism to design opportunities to catch up, pre-record lessons and plan boot camps and workshops when we could eventually return face-to-face. Conroy, Ong and Rodicks (2020) motivate that for Applied Drama and Theatre education, the act of creating, teaching and learning is intrinsically connected to choice, along with the agency and capacity to choose. The choices we made for the pedagogy and the students during this time were critical and would set the tone for the path going forward. One thing we appreciated in this period was that because we were experimenting and going through trial and error, the room for discovery was huge. Ultimately, Cohen (2020) makes a call for educators to re-evaluate our purpose for teaching during this time instead of dwelling on the entire curriculum.

This section of the chapter identified the core principles of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy that were threatened by the move to online learning platforms. Firstly, I considered the initial reactions of the department and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators as they considered a major move of the curriculum to the LMS and the remote experience. Secondly, I factored in their preliminary concerns about the digital divide and how Wits University and Drama for Life addressed it. Finally, I identified the potential

threats to the pedagogy based on the actions taken by Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators in progressing with the academic year. This structure of layout was done as to follow a narrative structure of observation as ethnographer.

The next section will address the strategies that these educators set out in honouring the integrity of the pedagogy, as well as the discoveries made and successes, they forged in 2020. Again, I will include their commentary on the direct barriers of the digital divide to these endeavours.

4.4. How did the Applied Drama and Theatre educators set about honouring the core mandate and intentions of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy (especially amidst the challenges of the digital divide) during the move to online learning platforms?

The research question of this section serves as the main enquiry of the study (corresponding to the title of the research). As described in Chapter 1, the entrance of COVID-19 had departments and practitioners far and wide exploring the various methods in packaging and presenting their previously contact-reliant curricula to online spaces. More specifically, as teaching assistant in 2020 and observing this drastic change to our department, I directed my attention to how we as Applied Drama and Theatre educators and Drama for Life as a whole attempted to honour the integrity of a rich pedagogy.

> What a ride we are on! We see the faces of those who enjoy the thrill of the adventure, those who buckle down determined not to puke, the ones screaming in naked fear and those trying to figure out how the mechanism works…. Many has asked about how we are holding to our motto: “if we can’t teach all, we can’t teach at all”. We stand by it. For us it means that if you are not able to engage with your learning, we are not doing our jobs. It does not mean that we do nothing until everyone has the same access, the same connectivity or the same devices. Rather it means that we adapt, innovate, make new plans, try different things until everyone is engaging in the learning through the device they have, the connectivity they can manage and the platforms they can access (Dr Petro Janse van Vuuren, 29 April 2020).

The above message comes a week into the start of our new learning dispensation. Firstly, what is clear from this message is that Drama for Life is welcoming its staff and students on this unpredictable ride and makes everyone aware that the road ahead will require willingness and patience. Secondly, the 'hows' in continuing the academic programme were extremely pertinent to take into account: 1) how we envisaged upholding the values of Drama for Life and their intended purposes for the pedagogy, 2) how to best serve the needs of the students and meet their learning objectives and 3) how to ensure that every student has access to their learning and the Drama for Life community.

Following the data collection and carefully studying the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy from various perspectives, I have come to realise that honouring the integrity of the pedagogy is not only about completing the curriculum and making sure that students progress. It is about taking care of the pedagogy in its entirety.

Earlier in the study I was convinced that absence of participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion in social contexts would pose dangers to the curriculum. The data, however, has since shown that over and above my convictions, Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators viewed the pedagogy from multiple perspectives and as such the curriculum was designed with its goal in mind. Therefore, honouring the integrity of the pedagogy was not only about ensuring that students engage with the three intentions of the study but, how they are exposed to the living principles of the pedagogy and, through mitigation of the digital divide, access it appropriately. All efforts to innovate and adapt had to take the entire pedagogy into full consideration and we all needed to prepare ourselves for what was to come.

4.4.1. Preparing to teach and learn remotely and considering the related factors.

> Online and distance learning has forced massive adaptation for tertiary education institutions regarding how information and coursework is delivered, strongly impacting how (and whether) students learn. There is, however, an implicit bias in this move, which assumes and requires a level of technical capacity (Bassett and Arnhold, 2020: para. 3).

Soon after the announcement of the hard lockdown and institutional closures, Drama for Life management required staff to attend a week-long training for Zoom, MS Teams and Sakai every afternoon from 16:00. If staff were not available, they had access to tutorials and additional support was furnished along the way. They also expressed that this training was to equip us to move online "if need be". The speed at which all of this was happening was extremely overwhelming. In the interview I asked the participants how confident they were with teaching online or remotely prior to lockdown. Participant B and C responded *not at all confident*, Participant D and E were *somewhat confident* and A was *extremely confident*. I was somewhat confident because I was facilitating a research course and assumed that a theoretically heavy course would be more manageable online- which I was proved wrong on because for the Arts Based and Ethnographic research streams, it was not. Otherwise, if I was teaching the more physically and practically reliant courses, I would also plead *not confident at all*. This definitely had to do with the technical know-how and the capacity of Sakai in relation to our complete curriculum.

Reflecting back, our first Zoom staff meeting on the 17th of March 2020 was flooded by "I'm struggling to connect", "Data might cut soon", "Sorry guys, I do not have a microphone on my PC" on our WhatsApp group. The following week, we explored MS Teams and, as a department, Drama for Life decided that it was more difficult to use – in terms of email account connection requirements and overall functionality as compared to Zoom. As time went by, we gradually acclimatised to the digital offerings and eventually, we started exploring the fusing of Zoom and Sakai together, even though the hiccups and challenges were still present. Into the two-week reprieve, we allowed ourselves to take a breath and slowly adjust by attending online tutorials.

Wits University also provided staff with additional training for Sakai and therein we learnt more about its latest functionalities and adaptations. Once the site became zero-rated, we also learnt to embed external links and tools for students to access upon their return with more ease on their data. Cloete (2020) points out that the only difficulty is the zero-rating provision by cellular networks and institutions did not allow for access to online journals such as Google Scholar, JSTOR or Sabinet for their research purposes and so even though students could access course related learning material, their research would

be difficult to navigate. The teaching staff was also tasked to consider which submissions and assessments could be adapted for the online platform and how best to re-design the content. Another cause for concern was how to maintain the integrity of assessments remotely. The less proficient aspects for Sakai's system were envisaged to be tackled upon our envisaged return to campus in the second semester of 2020.

It was quite alarming that there was an absurd expectation and assumption that all staff would have readily available Wi-Fi or stable internet connections at home. The institution was also quick to expect staff to attend training sessions and plan content online without first establishing how the digital divide affects us. Cloete (2020) states that universities acted without thinking and took an arrogant privileged middle-class position in their assumptions that an online approach was simple. One such example was an email sent from online specialist at the Wits School of Education. In this message she stated that staff should choose between three online learning structures as we embarked on the ERT strategy. Option one was named "Business as usual with a range of course assessments etc." This was unsettling because how could teaching and learning in a pandemic continue "business as usual".

If many of our staff struggled to connect and get accustomed to online learning in those first two weeks of lockdown; what more when the students are brought into the equation? On a preceding occasion, a survey to staff was released asking us to advise whether we foresee our data costs exceeding what we save on our monthly travel cost and if we would require a data package. In my opinion, the first point of the survey should not even be questioned because during this period, food costs increased. Also, even though we were not driving to work anymore, being at home the whole day with family was even more costly. Steven (2020) further acknowledges that staff had to contend with higher stress levels which included competing with the demands of the longer working hours as reflected on page 118, as well as a drain on personal resources and the pressures of home life. This time proved to be challenging from all angles and was bound to cause the uproar and protest as outlined in the literature review.

Cloete (2021) writes that there are four critical issues that universities have to consider to make their online venture a success: affordability, connectivity, assessment and student

support and the most important are affordability and connectivity. By the commencement of the academic programme, staff had familiarised themselves with the LMS and the next thing we needed to ascertain was the choice of a suitable learning (most accessible and user friendly) platform for students.

In order to assist with bandwidth limitations during Zoom staff meetings, we eventually discovered that it would be best to switch all our cameras off and back on only when speaking. Added to this, microphones needed to be switched off and we would only speak to respond or even use the chat function. This presented a faceless interaction and even highlighted the threat of disconnection to our pedagogy as our usual face-to-face interactions and behaviours became diminished. The data and network affordance also had us question the length of meetings and the necessity for Zoom at all for teaching. Then, once all students were accounted for and had some negotiable access, the first week from 20 April 2020 would be (based on the directive of the department) dedicated to the following:

- Sakai will be the main teaching platform where students can access resources and information.
- Ensuring that students are able to access content on Sakai.
- All students can access and complete the tasks/assignments online.
- Course lecturers and coordinators will be available for online consultations during usual class times as per the timetable.

This plan proved easier said (or typed) than done. Within days of the rollout, a large number of students could not access Sakai due to device compatibility issues and other technical issues that the ICT team[17] were unable to speedily address, so we had to use a mixture of all platforms to accommodate these diversities. For the Honours Research group, I would upload all content on Sakai as originally required and then send an email detailing the week's tasks and include attachments of all learning material. Then I would duplicate the message to the WhatsApp group and send material to individual students who could not access the email and Sakai. Drama for Life termed this a "double learning

[17] Wits University ICT service that deals with staff and student internet, software and configuration support and matters (University of the Witwatersrand, 2022: npn).

curve” because not only would 1) staff and students engage with the course work but, 2) they would also learn how to do it online. Consequently, into May, some students were unreachable and this was cause for great concern.

As part of the *Life Boat* strategy, Drama for Life made supplementary affordances for R250 for data until June and strategized a lobby plan for students who are unable to take part in the learning to be able to re-register without financial penalty. The irony of this consequence is that these students will be left behind. Shay (2020) says that the harsh reality of this suggestion is that universities will not be able to sustain themselves without a year of student fee income. Nevertheless, she laughs that we have left students behind for decades now, pre- and post-Apartheid and that government and Higher Education institutions should admit that even after observing the global crisis of the pandemic unfold they did not act quickly enough (Shay, 2020).

As expressed earlier, it is evident that honouring the virtue of our pedagogy is not just one thing but instead a combination of various forces at play. The digital divide is undoubtedly the most difficult force to contend with in our attempts. Prior to addressing specific teaching strategies, I asked the participants which online learning platforms they used to teach. In the preliminary stages of the rollout, they all shared that they explored all available platforms such as Sakai, YouTube, Zoom or MS Teams, WhatsApp and or phone call/email. As time went by it was discovered that the most effective platform was WhatsApp and then followed by Zoom when absolutely necessary. The least effective platform was in fact Sakai and YouTube. Participant D explains that the learning platforms from course to course varied and they had to ensure that each resource is equitable and that students are not excluded by any means.

Wilson et al. (2021) also point out that the type of online teaching methodology and viable platforms is dependent upon the course objectives. In their study, they share that using a blend of different platforms to deliver content served the needs of students and these included pre-recorded lectures, making textbook material accessible online and relying on social media applications such as WhatsApp (Wilson et al. 2021). Even though student engagement influences the type of methodologies a key propellant is their digital affordances.

> The new teaching and learning environment makes lecturers and students more knowledge workers than knowledge producers. They are monitored more on their ability to master the latest technological devices and programmes than on their capacity to produce knowledge (Cleophas, 2020: para. 10).

As Cleophas (2020) outlines, the dynamics of the digital divide and preparing for the move to Sakai, really took time from actually achieving the objectives of the learning. The digital divide had a great impact on the department from the administrative side, to the planning phases and even during the implementation of the ERT period. According to Participant E, the digital divide does not allow for online learning and without access to a reliable device or stable connection one cannot say they have attempted online learning. Furthermore, the participant criticises the University for its assumptions and directives of online learning, when in fact they were perpetuating a more distance or correspondence learning approach. Without the real-time aid of WhatsApp, the participant confesses that we would not have survived.

Participant C comments that the most frustrating issue with the digital divide is that people cannot be synchronous; then adds that the division between students and educators, and students and their peers is rendered even bigger-not to mention the already physically dividing aspect which the pedagogy relies on. Participant B also expresses that our pedagogy commits itself to addressing our already existing racial and class related conflicts in a post-Apartheid South African context and now the digital divide sharpens these disparities. Offering a perspective on the digital divide's direct impact on our pedagogy and hindrances to the advancements of the curriculum, Participant A replies,

> The translation of embodied and immersive works needs everyone to have data. And there needs to be a camera and we must be totally in sync. People just couldn't access and the learning became so data intensive. So, we tried to teach things on WhatsApp. We were at that point in emergency remote learning headspace and we had to go into a… a crisis management mode. E-learning requires proficiency in synchronicity and maximum data affordance. The students battled with this. The digital divide… Everything just completely backfired because of it (Participant A).

The findings and the research thus far have repeatedly shown that the entrance of the COVID-19 pandemic and the migration to online learning platforms was a complex process. Although the digital divide, lack of preparation and limitations of Sakai and other online learning platforms posed a threat to migrating the entire Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum online, this period was characterized by immense resilience and determination. Highlighting the results of their study, Du Plessis et al. (2020) reveal that during 2020, educators worked through a sense-making process and relied on reflective debriefing steps. From my observations of our collective efforts, Drama for Life was also on a sense-making course. The teaching of the curriculum was one dedicated to making sense of the pandemic, the challenges we faced and coming to terms with the new normal. During this time of crisis we shared tips, tools and resources as we forged the online journey and through every obstacle we steadily steered the boat.

Professor Garth Stevens, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities writes to us on the 24th of May 2020 about ERT and learning developments that "despite the ambivalences and debates about the pedagogic merits of this transition, as well as the political wisdom of the decision", he acknowledges the "herculean efforts by all staff to make their course content available in the modality, to critically alter their pedagogy, to support students and to contain students' anxieties". He adds that "only with hindsight, will we be able to grasp the true extent and scale of the work that has been done in this period (Stevens, 2020:1).

4.4.2. Online teaching and learning structure

Having earlier questioned in 4.2 what a pre-COVID or normal contact lesson looks like, I now ask the participants what particular structure they follow as they teach online. This will allow us to identify any distinguishable changes and adjustments to be made in attempts to maintain the agenda of the pedagogy.

Participant D starts off by saying,

> Regardless of the challenging situation, our role as educators was to go back to the very basic function of teaching. I won't actually say that teaching itself was the hardest thing or difficult thing. I quite enjoyed the challenge and the sort of intellectual and application challenge of uhm, distilling the content and

> delivering it. Because that is essentially the basic function of teaching (Participant D).

The data highlights that depending on the class group, topic for the day or nature of engagement, the lesson structure would vary. Uploading the course material onto Sakai included arranging it into weekly folders with the relevant readings and links to supporting audio-visual material. Participant A explains that the structure was already pre-designed to an e-learning format and students would read the article and do a quiz or reflect on a question about that particular reading or topic in the forum tool. The participant further shares that using a three-tiered stimulus, the student would respond as follows: “What do you think of yourself as facilitator, teacher or artist” and “What percentage would you divide those three roles into and why?” In this way, the student engages with the curriculum from the varied pedagogical roles and perspectives they should assume. Participant A confirms that students were extremely resistant to Sakai and this resulted in the push to using a multiple platform solution.

Wilson et al. (2021) outline that multiple strategies exist to promote students providing verbal and text-based responses to discussion questions or scenarios. Additionally, having students create a short video as a discussion response and upload the video to the platform is one of the most engaging methods of conducting discussions – in that students can see the faces of student colleagues, hear them speak, and thus feel more connected (Wilson et al. 2021). Responding to this, Participant A agrees that once they moved the learning to WhatsApp, students were able to make use of the voice note feature to respond and discuss. The participant found this to be more effective than the discussion forum tool on Sakai. For me, the forum tool worked well for checking in with students and encouraging them to use Sakai. I can admit that I was inconsistent with responding to students’ responses and this countered the aspect of community that we wanted to build with the tool. Sadly, we stopped using the forum tool because it excluded those who were not on Sakai.

Participant C recalls having to settle into the structure because this course had more embodied and practical demands. In the beginning, the participant relied on pre-recording lectures on Zoom and using PowerPoint for visual aids and illustrations. After

the students had engaged with the lecture they would assemble on WhatsApp and engage in a discussion. Students would also get into groups to examine the readings. The participant describes designing a WhatsApp-based reading seminar – which was similar to the contact reading and writing lessons but this time students would send voice notes of their inputs and take pictures of their concept maps. These reading seminars would include in-depth discussions of literature, case studies, revision and then as time went on, the participant began to strategize on the practice and application thereof and, stresses that the structure was followed in this order. As one can see, the data presents the practical and application part of the learning being left for last. This is different to in a contact class where it is usually first and in consistent combination.

> There are also important questions to be answered about the best way to teach online. We need to question the assumed value in simply going "live" on camera. Recorded lectures simply replicate the passive learning environment of classrooms and online seminars and tutorials fail to elicit meaningful student interaction (Atrey, 2020: para. 1).

As experienced, there is no best way to teach online or remotely. With that being said in this emergency and crisis mode we could not be 100% certain of the outcomes of each attempt. Taking us back to another journaled reflection: in a particular Reading and Writing lecture, a guest lecturer said that she would rather teach on Zoom instead of WhatsApp. My co-course coordinator and I obliged and assured our students who were unable to attend, that they would have access to the Zoom recording. Naturally, a war erupted and students were enraged at the unfairness of our decision. So much so that our colleagues caught wind of this and we were made to question what this meant for our pedagogy.

After all, unintentionally, we were excluding students with limited connectivity and access from their learning and prizing the privileged ones with that virtual class encounter. We gifted them the opportunity to engage and interact in real-time, whilst the others had to accept a passive alternative and with a delayed to no response of their questions from the guest. This moment made us revisit what "if we can't teach one, we can't teach all" really meant. It had to include, "if we can't teach one *live*, we shouldn't teach at all".

> Lecturers and students also have teaching and learning preferences. Some prefer writing, while others prefer talking. It is necessary to make allowance for both ways of communicating (Cleophas, 2020: para. 9).

Participant D resolves that educators should use the platforms in a “uni-directional manner” and ensure that each platform bears every student in mind. The participant used Zoom for specific live – dependent moments and moved back to WhatsApp for the deepened engagement and de-briefing. The participant heroes WhatsApp as an extremely effective tool for conducting full classes, as well as adapting and designing processes. However, for the larger groups such as Research or Reflective Practice, WhatsApp was not as effective because it would be difficult to track all the responses and engagements. In summary, the participant describes a sense of a flow disrupting structure throughout the process.

Participant B declares that kick starting the teaching was extremely difficult, especially because at the time the participant was still unsure how to continue without physical contact. Participant B says that the structure was asynchronous and goes on, “I would give them the theoretical underpinning and then ask them to prepare the reading before class. Then I would ask them to record their response of the reading or record themselves doing a particular activity and send the recording in the group”. Participant D calls this way of working a kind of staccato where they would have to analyse and respond between static moments. In analysis, the downside of all of this is the time-consuming nature, students not being able to download their peers’ contributions due to data constraints, the entire lesson not existing in a joint flow and therefore, the learning becomes fragmented.

Participant A also shares that before a reading response or the topic is discussed, students would be taken through a warmup or improvisation exercise from their respective learning environments. Similar to Participant B’s structure, students would be asked to take a selfie of their mood for the day or send a voice note of their soundscape or respond to Participant A’s guided embodied instructions. Participant A finds that the danger of this structure was that the learning became individual. Nikos-Rose (2020) fears that solo explorations are good but they rob the process of the collaboration and interaction that

the pedagogy thrives on. And, unlike a pre-COVID learning experience, one cannot prove that all students are actually participating and holistically present during the activities.

Accordingly, any attempts to replicate a pre-COVID class structure on Zoom was only possible if the cameras were turned off and this alienated the students from the entire learning experience. Professor Eric Landrum in Neiss (2020) informs us that when cameras are turned off and microphones are muted, it is difficult for educators to receive emotions or bodily feedback and the implications of camera use influences participation and engagement. Documenting the experiences of drama and performing arts teachers during COVID-19, an educator in Davis and Phillips (2021: 79) comments that "eye to eye teaching with body language communicates in a way that online teaching cannot and it is easier to see who is struggling and who is not at a glance". Another educator also realises that teaching in person has been dependent on making meaning in close proximity and meaning is difficult to construct online (Davis and Phillips, 2021:79).

> I tried recording podcasts. I tried making my own descriptive notes from the material. I tried weekly individual phone calls. I tried group WhatsApp calls. I tried Zoom embodied moments. Yet, I cannot say any of this was successful in the kind of learning environment that I am hoping to achieve. It silences. Greatly (Participant E).

This above description of efforts and attempts by Participant E shows that this trial-and-error period was unpredictable, sometimes discouraging and warranted continuous reflection. Earlier on in the chapter, Participant D motivated educators to go back to the basic function of teaching and even so I argue that it is not as simple as that. In fact, teaching as we know it would be changed forever, new skills would have to be learnt and it would not be as easy narrowing it down to its basic function. Particularly when we consider our pedagogical stance to education (in its basic form) as being an agent of dialogical exchange - what happens when students are not part of the dialogue? The basic function of teaching requires present students for it to take place and the pandemic resulted in students being absent physically, virtually and mentally. Had it been as simple as that then Participant E would boast of the successes of these multiple platform attempts.

The above data has underlined that today's strategy may not yield identical results the following day and one platform might work for one group of students and not the other. Additionally, one course might thrive on a certain online platform and the other may absolutely implode. The findings are indicating that it was difficult to replicate the structure of a pre-COVID lesson online. This could have been possible (even at a considerable rate) if everyone could at least connect to Zoom at the same time and share in a synchronous lesson. Ultimately, the journey had its successes and its failures.

4.4.3. Navigating participation and collaboration remotely

Going back to the core intentions of the study, I will now address how these Applied Drama and Theatre educators negotiated participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion in social contexts under these circumstances. Beginning with participation and collaboration, Participant B first laughs then responds,

> I would ask the students to work on their own in groups, in smaller groups during class times. They would have to do this outside of the main WhatsApp group and come back to give feedback. To get them to collaborate, I would specifically assign group tasks and peer teaching and learning…opportunities. For participation… we could not really participate and engage in the way we used to. It was difficult (Participant B).

Confirming this difficulty to collaborate, Participant E writes that even though they initiated a "chommie" (translated *friend* or *buddy*) system where in groups of three, students would account for one another and form relationships to get each other through the journey. Very often the students would disappear off the radar and their 'chommie' would not know where they were and why they disappeared. Wildman et al. (2021) report a variety of challenges that came about during the pandemic that made it difficult to engage in teamwork related activities. Including the disappearing of peers was geographical dynamics, changes in communication or platforms, task changes and role changes (Wildman et al. 2021). These were found to make it difficult for any collaboration to take place over and above the limitations of the digital divide.

In alignment with the geographical dynamics Participant E adds that collaboration would only be effective if students were in the same area. Nonetheless, looking back at the hard lockdown, we were not allowed to congregate and could only rely on WhatsApp, therefore collaboration could not happen as organically.

> Being in the isolation of quarantine adds another layer of complexity. There can be limited interactivity between the students. With the Zoom application there is the ability to have "breakout rooms", where students are put into smaller virtual groups to discuss and "practice" with a partner or partners, but the challenge of the virtual chasm remains the same. They are confined to their own spaces, both in reality and electronically (Nikos-Rose, 2020: para. 8).

Participant D explains that the participation aspect became a show-and-tell model because we were still experimenting and navigating this new way of communication and learning. The students would respond to the stimulus of the day by completing a particular task, then after taking some time to work on their contribution, return to present through videos, pictures or voice notes. Especially in the beginning of the new term, Participant D responds that "participation was limited to those who had access to the chat at that moment and could instantly engage and respond through dialogue". Doing the same thing, Participant A reveals that working in this way caused a delay in participation. The participant also recalls giving students instructions on WhatsApp, then using a week or so to reflect and respond in both the WhatsApp group and the discussion forum tool on Sakai.

The problem with this, the participant adds, is that the quality of participation and collaboration is not high and remains on a material level. Furthermore, due to the digital divide, the participant states that the inability to teach on Zoom and use break out rooms (which assist with participatory and collaboratively driven interactions) does not make it any easier. Also on participation, Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) express that facilitation was one of the greatest challenges because, as they were not sitting in a circle it was impossible to make and keep eye contact with participants. The lack of acknowledgement of each other's presence, immediate response and this sense of

confinement and isolation diminishes participation. However, the participant is certain that participation and collaboration can be achieved.

Research in the literature review has shown that online learning platforms certainly have the potential to foster the collaborative engagements that similar Applied Arts based and embodied pedagogies rely on. However, without fully addressing the digital divide we cannot completely explore these possibilities. I neglect not to forget that majority of those examples are from practitioners in more digitally accessible countries and they were at an advantage. In an online repository by the California Department of Education, *Lesson for the Fields: Remote Learning Guidance,* they acknowledge that while remote learning offers many positives (time-shifting, pace-shifting, personalization, etc.), student engagement can easily be compromised by the lack of face-to-face interaction (California Department of Education, 2021). They advise that when educators assign students to smaller groups, they participate more equitably. If students are required to review and comment on each other's work, the process of collaboration is enhanced.

The participants do reveal that in the second half of the year, attempts at forging participation and collaboration improved − albeit not with the exact rigour of contact teaching and learning. Some form of participation and collaboration was more negotiable because students had returned to Johannesburg and there was some access to campus facilities and spaces. Participant D explains that it got to a more conversational mode and represented what it used to be in lectures, which was dialogical and interactive. Similarly, Participant E found that because students were closer to campus, they could naturally collaborate and this included assisting one another with filming each other's projects or voluntarily participating in intervention themed projects. On Wilson et al.'s (2021) challenge of task change, it is also clear that now that students had some freedom to re-explore their work physically, they engaged more freely as a collective.

In hindsight, Participant D appreciates the key pedagogical gift that was the Drama for Life's conference and festival moments in fostering that collaboration and participation

we yearned for. One such monumental festival was *Masidlale: Exploring Connection* Conference and Festival which took place in August 2020. This collaboration between Drama for Life and ASSITEJ South Africa was "shaped in response to the global pandemic and questioned how we explore and co-create now, how the arts respond to disconnection and how we come together to create during this time etc." (Drama for Life and ASSITEJ, 2020: 2). Participant D applauds this moment for allowing students to see the online space come alive and they were also afforded the opportunity to host conversations in such meaningful ways. The participant adds, "it was an effective and liberating moment that made them go 'wow, I felt as though I was engaged in a different way-in a way that I have never done so' and this other layer, rocketed them".

> Accessibility through distanced and digital learning offers opportunity. The virtual classroom stops being a local, socially-distanced substitute and offers potentially global engagement (Hepplewhite, 2020: 267).

Below is an example of an experiment with a WhatsApp based process drama that one of the participants facilitated. The participant says that the exercise was aimed at getting students into the momentum of working in groups online, through use of story/drama. Prior to this exercise, the participant had shared stories as stimuli for students to choose from. Due to ethical considerations, I will not share the resulting images.

In your groups, select who is going to take up one of the following roles (please read instructions till the end before you select a role) 1. The Storyteller 2. The Artist 3. The Role-Actor 4. The Facilitator The Facilitator's first responsibility is to ensure that everyone sticks to the rules of the exercise. The Facilitator also has to keep track of time. Take a few minutes to revisit the story you selected on Tuesday. Once you have all agreed on a story, The Storyteller needs to record a voice note of him/herself telling the story.

The Storyteller needs to recite the story the way they would to a group of participants in a Process Drama. While The Storyteller is busy recording the story, the rest of the group members need to remain online and not exit the group chat. YOU MUST keep the story under 3 minutes. Upon completion, The Storyteller must send the voice note into the group and let the group members listen to the story. Everyone must listen to the story simultaneously.

Once everyone is done listening to the story, The Facilitator needs to come in and begin sending questions into the group as they would in a process drama workshop after the story has been read to the participants. The Facilitator wants the group members to paint the world of the story with their words. So you want to know “what did you hear?”, “what was this world like?” “How did it look?” “What colours were prominent in this place, was it brown mountains or blue oceans etc.” “Who lived there?” ETC. As The Facilitator is asking these questions, The Artist needs to have a blank paper and crayons out. The Artist will then draw “the world” as everyone else is giving their input. The Artist must try their best to stick to the input being given.

When you are done “painting” the world of the story. The Artist must take a picture and send the drawing into the group and perhaps you can have a few moments to chat about the drawing. The Facilitator can ask questions (do not want to give away any more questions so you can have fun and be creative with what you ask).

Then, select one role/character from the story world you would like to explore who you said is part of this world you created. The group members must now bring this role to life by describing features, clothes, etc. Be really creative and fun about it too. The Role-Actor must find items and props in their house to put on as the group members are describing. The Role-Actor must take a picture of the final product or video of themselves in action. Once you feel like you’re done describing the role you then send the picture/video into the group. You are welcome to have a brief discussion here as well although you don’t have to.

To finish off, The Facilitator must use effective questioning to take the group through a reflective discussion based on the entire experience. What stood out for you? What worked? Etc. This is mostly about your experience but if other things come up, go with them. Use your discretion as the facilitator.

Sharing the results of the process, the participant concludes that students were extremely receptive and worked well together. However, time and connectivity challenges were evident and some students did not get to experience the full capacity of the exercise.

Participant A describes a collaborative process of creating Redemptive Theatre[18]. The stories shared are lived experiences that are documented by performers and audience members. Firstly, the facilitator shares a script for everyone present to engage with. Audience members are introduced to the rules of engagement, characters/storytellers and most pertinently the character named "Silence". The collaborative aspect lies in the ability for audience members to swop places with the storyteller, take over with their own perspective and equally leave at any point. The performers continually weave and thread the story and the storytelling does not resume until a new person continues, allowing for the silence. Participant A adds that this theatrical form allowed for wonderful aspects of collaboration remotely. At the end, students would respond to the performance through reflection, discussion and sharing and the themes would be captured using the Zoom whiteboard.

For more intimate conversations, the reflections can also be done in Zoom breakout rooms or if students are in-person they can also collaborate and interact with one another in the space. However, as Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) problematises, educators cannot be in all the rooms at once and access a global view of the four corners of the room. In similar fashion, Participant E, inspired by the tools and tips of

[18] Redemptive Theatre currently exists as a collaborative workshop performance… that tells stories of people struggling with a mistake, a burden of guilt or an experience of being wronged. Experimental in nature, it aims to create a dialogical performance that redeems as story that is generally perceived as irredeemable (Khutsoane, Janse van Vuuren and Nkosi in Janse van Vuuren, Rasmussen and Khala 2021: 164-165).

collaboration and participation from the *Masidlale* Conference, found Facebook as another viable platform to host collaborative processes. Therein, students would host sessions and stakeholders could access the page to view the work.

My analysis of the above is that although the educators explored various avenues in their endeavours to achieve a collaborative and participatory learning experience remotely, they were restricted by the digital divide and lack of physical distance. Going back to the definitions and objectives of participation and collaboration in relation to an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, the active creation of work as a collective is rendered completely fragmented. Secondly, not only could students and educators not completely collaborate but the marginalised communities and intervention stakeholders could not be engaged with.

On the other hand, as Megan Alrutz (2015) suggests, the educators did to some degree guide collaborative and interactive processes of examining questions, themes or concerns within and through embodied self-expressions. Though a visible shift in this dynamic is that this guidance was 1) explored individually from their segregated home environments, 2) it was not experienced at the same time and same place and, 3) the embodiment was not explored on a level playing field. Still, the individualisation of the learning and inability to connect in real-time affected participation and collaboration, tremendously.

4.4.4.Negotiating the aspects of praxis remotely

In the conceptual framework on page 35, Phillip Taylor (2003) demystifies Paolo Freire's (1970) definition of praxis as students reflecting upon their practice through theory. "Students are encouraged to develop reflexivity in order to become fully functioning individuals, characterised by openness to experience, a flexible self-concept, unconditional regard for the self and ability to live in harmony with others" (Rogers in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe, 2022: 148). Participant A admits that one of the biggest sacrifices of this period was the ability to self-reflect. The participant reveals that "students were so stuck in their own heads and their home environments that they could not reflect

and at no point could they find themselves out of their own situations and find objective distance". This brings me to these educators' negotiations of praxis.

Participant E writes that locating praxis was fuelled by working purely off memory. Valuing the timing of a trip for Masters students to Mpumalanga, just before the COVID outbreak and lockdown, the participant mentions that the students drew from the experiential fieldwork approaches gained there. The five-day trip was designed for students to enter or immerse into the community, observe, practice and explore co-facilitation, while engaging with the core theory. The gift of this trip was that throughout the emergency remote learning period, students would draw on the conclusions of praxis from the trip in essay writing and using memory, refer back reflectively in WhatsApp discussions. What this indicates to me is that without the trip, approaches to praxis would be difficult to achieve. What is more, this affirms the arguments of the study: praxis thrives on the integration of theory and practice and without that physical engagement on site or in class it is incomplete. The data also affirms that educators found meaningful ways to incorporate the physical embodiment even from an individualised point of view.

Participant C is convinced that they did not effectively achieved praxis online, but admits to having attempted to apply some techniques to video interaction, photography and the use of art/drawing. In a blog titled, *Taking a Praxis Course During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Theory in (DIGITAL) Action,* Matteo (2020) shares initial feelings of disheartenment at the idea of the pandemic altering her intended course. She worried that while she enjoyed reading about content specific topics, her heart was also invested in the experiential possibilities and she could not imagine not experiencing fieldwork and interacting with communities physically (Matteo, 2020). Like the Applied Drama and Theatre educators, it was quite clear how we would be able to continue with the theoretical aspects of our courses but the practice was left much to investigation and innovation. Matteo (2020) writes that taking 'digital action' is certainly difficult but in the course, they learnt invaluable lessons on adaptability.

I now ask Participant A what praxis looks like online and the participant describes,

> What that looks like… so I have translated some of the embodied practices into…. So I would do voice notes that take the students through a process. If they put the voice note on and follow what I say then they could go through a warm up exercise from where they were… so like a whole embodied process… uhm… So they can do embodied and then they need to reflect on what that process did for them in the group chat. It is not ensemble work but it is still embodied (Participant A).

Participant B details a similar process to A.

> So what would happen…I would give them the theoretical underpinning then for the practical stuff, I would ask them to prepare something or respond to what I gave them and then give them some time to show it back-either in pairs, groups or individually (Participant B).

Like Participant C, Participant B also relied on students' submissions of their audio recordings, filming themselves and/or taking pictures of their embodied approaches connecting to the theory. Participant D insists that 2020 was about focusing on two things, distilling the content and trying to simulate it online,

> …the questions became… What is the effective practitioner skill set required from that method and then… uhm how can I simulate it online? The theory would be engaged in a similar way as before − whether its lecture notes or PowerPoint. It was consistent. Integrating the practice though was…uhm…we were limited and it became about what could the students design, write down, draw up and critique and review… off the page (Participant D).

Davis and Phillips (2021) explain that Performing Arts educators had to translate their classroom-based encounters to more text-based resources and 'theory-based' work, leading to more writing for teachers and much more reading for students (2021: 78). Callum Bates (2021: para. 5) notifies educators that "it's important to take time to identify exactly what we want our students to learn and why." Especially on the concept of praxis, he continues,

> Do we want our students to learn more *about* our subject and gain factual information? Do we want them to learn *how* to "do" our subject and learn technical skills? Or do we want our students to develop their knowledge of our subject and

> understand more about their personal relationships with its content? Teaching content-heavy lessons may feel like the easiest way to move practical subjects online but it would clearly be detrimental to students if their technical skills were diminished. Maintaining a balance between these different approaches is key (Bates, 2021: para. 6-7).

Participant A and D paint a picture of a push and pull when negotiating this balance. These two participants strike me as having somewhat 'figured' it out the most. On the one hand, innovation was taking place, students were exploring creatively by taking short clips or asking family members to film their outputs. The adaptable and innovative side of the rope was submitting to the collective effort and determined energies of these participants and their students to keep the boat afloat. Yet, on the other hand, a consistent and equally hindering opponent pulled on the other side: the digital divide. Participant D lets out a sigh and says "because we did not have greater access to Zoom, we could not necessarily achieve the practical aspects. We were not able to integrate aspects of role as effectively because of these difficult data demands". Participant A continues,

> If we have a good day and I can have as many people as possible online then we would do images with the square… an exhibition of images around a particular topic but it has to be a good day. By good day, I mean everyone or at least most of the class is online and they are connected and we have checked in on the group as all being present. I mean…we have done listening hour and storytelling. We have done a fabulous process where different people do different processes of uhm… poet making, collective poetry… the works. It's just that…there is wonderful innovations that are hampered by… and deeply influenced by connectivity (Participant A).

The data is showing me that an online approach to praxis treats theory and practice as separate entities and the Applied Drama and Theatre educators struggled to thread or intertwine them. This is because, in their responses, I noticed that the theoretical underpinning was established on a more focused previously established footing and the practical would happen after it, when students were given the time to devise and examine it from their respective environments. The practical and embodied outpouring of that theory was separated by the fact that students could only experience it in isolation and on an individual basis, they could not collaborate with their peers and it did not have the

immediacy of a contact class. Furthermore, there was limited freedom to marry the two and instead, students would have to break them apart to build them together from their own perspectives. These perspectives though, were marred by their surroundings and the circumstances of the pandemic.

Again, my understanding of praxis draws from Gavin Bolton's (1986) frame where praxis allows the student to be "within the subject matter rather than outside of it". Earlier, I had touched on Participant A's expression of students not being able to self-reflect and being so distracted by their home settings that they could not see beyond them. Even in my encounters with students, before we could get to the business of the day, we first had to address all their difficulties and challenges. After a while, one realised that the lesson could not continue because the issues spoke louder and as Draper-Clarke writes, the reflexive lens of the pedagogy turns on itself (Draper-Clarke in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe, 2022: 136).

On a more progressive note, Participant A found story as a somewhat remedy for the lessened embodiment.

> When we did our exam processes, it was more story based and I guess that's what happened. Yes, we became less embodied but we were far more verbal and story based. It's sadly, more in the head than the body. We used symbol, asked people to interact with objects… used hand gestures with their phone cameras. There's gives and takes but praxis still happened… although it is less embodied and more story based (Participant A).

This circumstantial relegation of embodiment in favour of story as a way for students to engage with praxis, though proving the limitations of online learning true, demonstrates the finesse of the Applied Drama and Theatre educators in utilising all pedagogical tools at their disposal. Draper-Clarke in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe (2022) explain that classes in Critical Reflexive Praxis are structured by storytelling and role-playing activities. Stories are not only a form of communication but they allow students to reconstruct their identities and there is a sense of collective creation. Even though students cannot embody the theory as a collective in a common shared space, they are able to draw from their own bodies, minds and hearts that are now influenced

by their environments and the pandemic, through story. Just like Participant E's students relying on memory. The loss is that, undoubtedly, the type of reflective-practitioner they would have been without the pandemic would not be as clouded, and now their interpretations of the theory have been negatively impacted on by this experience.

Regarding the second semester, Participant E mentions that because lockdown restrictions were eased and there was some access into placements nearest to the students' homes, as well as more consistent supervision and consultation, students were more able to locate praxis in their studies. Again, this highlights that if there is no way to meet in person or have the digital divide completely alleviated during the hard lockdown period, a characteristic Applied Drama and Theatre approach to praxis is difficult to achieve. Taking digital action in this specific South African context is unattainable and therefore the potency of praxis is increased on the side of theory. The data has displayed that praxis is possible but it cannot be fully expressed in the same way as in contact.

4.4.5.Immersing in social and fictional contexts remotely

The study's third intention of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy was the immersion aspect. In the conceptual framework, I looked at immersion from two perspectives: 1) accessing communities for placements and interventions and 2) entering the fictional context where social learning takes place. As stated in the conceptual framework, Prendergast and Saxton (2013) term this as "situated learning". From third year to Masters academic programmes, Drama for Life ensures that the curriculum incorporates fieldwork and intervention in various community sites. With the hard lockdown in place, we could not access those spaces. Below is a discussion of how we attempted to navigate immersion in contexts.

> Uhm so yeah… that was just a huge missed opportunity like absolutely. Because at that point we were in hard lockdown and by the second half of the year, we were introduced to the notion of waves… those plans… to go into schools and engage in fieldwork were completely shut down in 2020. The

> biggest loss was that there was absolutely no way to bridge that (Participant D).

Referring to the same dynamics, Participant E explicates that immersion was non-existent and further illustrates that for Applied Theatre, contextual immersion refers mainly to placements and fieldwork practice, and regrettably, fieldwork was stopped. Participant C also starts off by defining contextual immersion and then resolves that in terms of being able to practically apply the pedagogy in community contexts “no, we were unable to”. Participant B agrees with Participant A that they were unable to interact with schools and engage in fieldwork the way they used to. Outlining Drama for Life’s pedagogical impulses, Robbins in Kritsonis describes as follows,

> Based on principles of democracy, human rights and social justice; Drama for Life’s approach identifies the need to ensure the development of the individual in parallel with the broader social environment. Cognisant of “environmental influences, personal factors, and behavioural qualities” as interdependent social concepts driving change, the relevance and responsiveness of creative, embodied and reflective practice, lies in principles of volunteerism and inclusivity in approaches to engaging community contexts (2004: 4).

Community engagement is central to our pedagogy. Whether it’s in school placements, intervention-based encounters, fieldwork or curated festivals and conferences, Drama for Life has ensured that its curriculum exposes its students to these moments for the purposes of enriching a deepened approach to praxis. These community engagements are responsible for cultivating a self-reflective and socially-aware future practitioner. I have discovered that since the pandemic and the move to emergency remote learning, immersion has not only been about the communities that the work is intended for but also included the nuances of immersing into the academic programme as a student. The latter saw a disturbance and this has surfaced throughout the chapter. Furthermore, even though students could not immerse in the physical community contexts, they had to immerse themselves into an unfamiliar online space for the purposes of grasping the pedagogy.

Participant A agrees with my thoughts that immersion had to take on a different form and although we could not physically go into schools or access clients as the co-

participants mention, educators were tasked to come up with ways in which students could at least access the tools of immersion. Hepplewhite (2020) also accepts that immersion in this context connotes the promotion of an embodied experience in the online space.

> Uhm… what I could immerse them in, I could create a case study and the students would respond as the person in the case study. So enrol them as a person in the story, ja. I would ask: if you were enrolled as a facilitator how would you design an intervention using this kind of model? Then I would also use story…. There are limits to what it can convey. We used pictures rather than body image (Participant A).

This above demonstrates an educator discovering how best to build an experience of immersion into fictional contexts. I agree with the participant that even though story does not immerse in contexts, it does immerse the participant/student into a world where they can access the goal of social and transformative learning. Also, in the fictional context, they step into the shoes of that person and are able to analyse the solution-driven objectives of the pedagogy. On the other hand, Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020: 4) reflect that when doing process drama online "distantly", the fictional nature of roles felt more evident and instead of working against the alienated setting they decided to use it. However, because the students are so immersed in their home environments, the challenges of the pandemic, frustrations with connectivity and not being able to learn as they used to, I do not think their imaginations were as deeply engaged as compared to being in class.

Participant A goes on to verbalise the difficulties of trying to immerse into a story when the students' cameras switched off. Also, students who access the learning from outside their homes such as a public Wi-Fi hotspot or even in a taxi cannot suspend their belief or adequately enrol into the fictional world. The compromises are endless.

Whilst the limitations are present, the possibilities are limitless. In the literature review on page 70, I alluded to the online space as signifying a type of non-traditional setting that our pedagogy caters for and suggested that it could be negotiated as such (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009). Providing a clearer picture of the prospects of

harnessing the online space as a non-traditional Applied Drama and Theatre setting, participant A continues,

> The other thing was I would immerse them in experiences of techniques like a listening technique. Listening Hour [19]is a Playback[20] informed facilitator process which is designed for online space. We immersed them in processes that were adapted for online use. Redemptive Theatre is also an immersive space. We could run a fully immersive redemptive theatre process that they could take part in. But it is still not immersion in contexts… They also took part in the worldwide Listening Hour conference which was facilitated by people in India, Germany etc. So you could in some way immerse yourself in another context as you experience people from other countries. You get a taste of other spaces. So I would say that immersion looks like connecting them with other people from other places in the world now and this is being done online (Participant A).

On a prouder note, Participant E reports that the pre-COVID fieldwork principle of using the action-reflection cycle could still be maintained online. As stated above on the easing of restrictions, students could access communities in their area for their final intervention projects. The participant describes the process: a) students would submit their site plans and receive feedback on them before they entered the site, b) following the experience at the sites, students would then submit a reflection (using a describe, analyse, interpret method) for assessment, and c) the lecturer would call the student for supervision and to prepare for the next session.

The only problem with this way of working, Participant E identifies, is that as educator, there was very little ability to enter into the spaces physically due to distance. In addition, connectivity limitations did not even allow for video calling or online observation. The participant could only rely on trusting that the student was doing the

[19] The Listening Hour is a format created by Jonathon Fox in 2020, contextually to the COVID-19 outbreak where in one hour, six participants meet and share their personal stories as a way to build resilience in times of crisis. The first part of the session involves ice-breakers and warm up exercises to get comfortable with one another and by the end of the sharing, stories are weaved together artistically by a Guide who listens, mirrors and connects the themes and messaging (Spazio Rebelde, 2022a: para. 4-7).

[20] Also co-founded by Jonathon Fox, it is an Applied Theatre method in which a group of performers listen to audiences' personal stories and mirror them using enactment, movement, sound, songs and a few words- in a way that honours the stories and fosters connections. (Spazio Rebelde, 2022b: para. 1).

work and the assessment would be on the word of the students' journal entry and the supervisory phone calls. Another red-flag I immediately raise is how could the educator honour the integrity of the assessment and the practice if they are not all present? Participant B highlights the role that the Masidlale Conference and Festival played in bringing in an aspect of immersing into the broader community context online. The participant emphasises the importance of requiring the students to attend so that they can get back into the Drama for Life culture.

> Even though students could not go into school spaces and communities, the conference sort of gave them a window into collaborating with other voices in the Applied space and the DFL community. Just by interacting with others in the online space was a way to immerse in the thinking of other practitioners…What I found was that the ability to go back to being an audience member was also vital (Participant B).

What I have seen here is that the online space provided these Applied Drama and Theatre educators, opportunities to be re-define immersion. Some rose to the occasion and others could not see past the impositions of the pandemic on physical movement and contact. The loss of the physical social integration and community engagement devastated our pedagogy and navigating the curriculum was far more demanding than ever before. However, ours was to ask ourselves how to embrace this change and what ways we could reach our communities regardless of the restrictions. When I think back to conferences and festivals that were previously taken to villages like Machadodorp and Moutse East, how could we possibly reach those communities without digital connectivity and access? Being immersed into the worlds of our screens; whilst speaking of and teaching on a marginalised community driven pedagogy was ironic. Our pedagogy was unbelievably shaken by the pandemic.

4.5. A reflection on the findings

I will begin by declaring that the results of the data leave one conflicted. This has no bearing on the issue of bias but because as an objective researcher, there are two clearly visible sides to consider. Even though one side of the argument lands heavily, the other remained a worthy opponent nonetheless.

On the one hand, I am certain that as Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators we tried by all means to honour the integrity of the pedagogy where participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion in contexts are concerned in 2020. We also did this with the most extreme working hours and mentally stretching conditions –within a life changing pandemic. This rightfully deserves applause. However, the reality is that regardless of the efforts and great strides, the pedagogical losses were too obvious and too great. After all, this is the study's ultimate enquiry.

When I accumulate the results of the 2020 academic year which include the inability to fully express ourselves as an embodied collective, the individualising of the learning, the inability to integrate loaded theory with practice, the hindrances of the digital divide, the inadequacy of the Sakai in holding our pedagogy; the overall weight of the pandemic to learning and the sacrifices made at the expense of the pedagogy – our efforts alone, were not enough.

The findings suggest that the cohort of students in the 2020 academic year were immensely disadvantaged and their experience of our Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy was compromised by uncontrollable and unmanageable factors at play. Can we honour the integrity of our complete pedagogy in an entirely remote and online learning environment? The findings indicate (though not clearly showing) that only in moments where data and connectivity were equal for all with the opportunity to access our learning spaces, could we achieve optimum pedagogical results. We also cannot entirely measure the effectiveness of the strategies because the findings discovered that what worked for one course, did not work for the other.

> Ultimately, the crucial task was to complete the academic year and identify the most suitable and equitable strategies for the benefit of students under these unprecedented conditions – even if it meant simplifying and valuing certain aspects over others. This would obviously leave the pedagogy in a negatively altered state. The publishing of material/content for students to engage with cannot be seen as successful online learning. The lack of embodied practice with a dependency only on memory of being in a shared space cannot be seen as online learning. The messy, long winded

> and ambiguous conversations and voice notes on WhatsApp cannot be seen as successful online learning (Participant E).

This section of the chapter covered a discussion of the strategies that the Applied Drama and Theatre educators explored in attempts to maintain the elements of the pedagogy. Firstly, I considered the endeavours by Wits University and Drama for Life to prepare its educators and students for teaching and learning remotely. This included a description of the processes for training for Zoom, MS Teams and Sakai. Following this, the data found that a multiple platform approach was best suited for the teaching and learning as a result of the digital divide. I then asked the participants what structure they followed in conducting an online lesson, trying to establish the adaptations in comparison to a normal contact teaching lesson. The findings concluded that the typical teaching structure could not be achieved in the same way online due to the digital divide and the constructs of not being physically connected.

Finally, I presented the data and some examples of the active strategies that the educators employed in navigating participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion in social contexts online – as they faced the obstacle of the digital divide. I concluded that although I applaud these collective efforts and strategies, our pedagogy was not fully maintained in a remote and online academic year. The final section will offer a reflection by the Applied Drama and Theatre educators on the discoveries made about teaching our pedagogy online in 2020.

4.6. Following the first year of COVID-19 (2020), what discoveries were made as the Applied Drama and Theatre educators continued in their attempts to honour the pedagogy through the curriculum?

The 2020 academic year was characterised by this continued pursuit of innovation, adaptability and reflection on our practices. I asked the participants to share highlights of discoveries made and any successes that stood out for them in this tumultuous year. These inputs will be factored as key points of comparison in the 2021 academic year's

findings, if any similarities arise. Moreover, it would be interesting to discover how these successes were continued for the following academic year.

Starting with the more technical discoveries, Participant D discovered that “there is too much of a relationship to theatre and drama methodologies that one cannot translate online. Translating it online takes it to a different media form like film or short film or even the social media content production space. Even the function of storytelling is aesthetically different in the virtual space”. Remedying this, Participant E suggests that lecturers need to immerse themselves into their field of practice before even considering what the alternatives online may look like. In the same manner, the participant recognises that students themselves need to understand how the principles of the practice shifts when the practice moves onto a virtual platform.

Both of these inputs on the form of our pedagogy and the specificities of it once it enters an online space, show me that that our field of practice is so layered that one needs to be fully entrenched in it to see how to best serve it. I also noted that these comments render the earlier prepositions of virtual reality technologies as impractical to our specific form, albeit not impossible. Not only has the literature disproved the feasibility of VR technologies in South Africa, but the data has also shown that our socio-economic undercurrents are unsuitable for them. Besides, the participants do not even mention them as an option or a tool to consider.

> The Drama Therapist sees her work as distinctly different from that of the group who employ drama to enhance the skills of a company sales team. The prison theatre practitioner will not necessarily relate to those using drama to support the elderly. The practitioners in each group will see themselves working with specific skills appropriate to their work and therefore not the same as those in other fields. How then can we gather diverse practices into one bundle? (Ackroyd, 2000: 2)

Participant E further recognises that although our work is not as easily translatable onto online platforms, it allowed students to think up interventions that could affect change using digital platforms and while doing so, honouring the principles of their practice. Identically, Participant C admits that while the challenges exist, “a lot of students have

been forced to think out of the box and have made some ground-breaking discoveries" and there has been a wave of innovation of new techniques in our fraternity. Speaking to the successes of innovative strategies, Participant A highlights the use of Redemptive Theatre as it met some requirements of immersion, collaboration and praxis so fostering a new approach to accessing the pedagogy.

Referring back to Ackroyd's (2000) distinctions on page 174 of Applied Drama and Theatre, it has been made explicitly clear that our practices are diverse and if we cannot bundle them into one, how could we think we could bundle them into one learning platform or use one type of tool? For such an intricate pedagogy, the only way we could forge a new path was to relinquish our old ways of doing and knowing, and allow ourselves to redefine the transformation we always speak of in our practice.

In their discoveries, the participants valued social media as an instrumental agent in the trajectory of the emergency remote teaching and learning period. Participant D is fascinated by the role of social media and the modalities it offered during this time. Aligned to this, Participant E found that Facebook can be used effectively as a site for performance and activism. Perhaps, like the success of WhatsApp in teaching, the findings imply that we should have drawn more from what the students already knew and were already comfortable with from the onset. This is extremely pedagogical as it brings us back to relying on participants' tacit knowledges.

González-Padilla and Tortolero-Blanco (2020) motivate that social media have a great advantage of rapidly disseminating educational content and, in line with the study, facilitates collaboration and allows for interaction. When I consider the instant and accessible nature of social media applications during this time, I wonder how we would have gotten through the period without them. The findings have also shown that students favoured a social media platform over a Learning Management System and this speaks volumes. While Participant B has learnt to embrace "the Zooms and MS Teams", the participant is afraid that unless a plan is made about the data issues "we cannot really explore what online learning really has to offer us". Participant D concludes with the same reality that our socio-economic conditions could have a crippling effect on our efforts.

This very short section consolidated what has already been communicated throughout the chapter. In the next chapter, it will be examined whether these discoveries became solutions for the 2021 academic year or not. The findings also shed light on the importance of support in this difficult year. Without the support from government and HEI stakeholders to address the digital divide, Wits University, in mediating the administrative changes to education, and Drama for Life in placing the student at the centre of all developments and solutions, we would not have made the progress we managed to, in the time we had.

The critical interventions across the board, although not entirely effective or sustainable, provided a reasonable capacity for us to advance in our efforts and were appropriate as emergency responses. As we embark on the 2021 year and beyond, it will be of utmost necessity to seek sustainability and serve the holistic make-up of our pedagogy. The final section of the chapter will concisely prescribe an imagined way forward.

4.7. Based on the experience of implementing an online pedagogy, what lessons have Drama for Life's Applied Drama and Theatre educators learnt that might be useful to others aiming to honour the principles of the pedagogy in future?

I conclude the chapter with final inputs from the participants as they consolidate the lessons learnt and offer recommendations for better practice as they embark on the 2021 academic year and beyond. Similar to 4.6 above, this section set out to initiate further discussion of their strategies in maintaining the principles and intentions of the characteristic pedagogy. It will be interesting to see whether or not these were implemented in 2021.

> 2020 was a turbulent year…I think with what was made available to us made it impossible to honour the integrity of our pedagogy but we also did more than what was expected. The resilience that I saw, the attempts to innovate, the going above and beyond was incredible (Participant D).

I could not agree with Participant D more. Throughout the chapter, we have seen how Drama for Life and its educators fought to honour the integrity of our pedagogy against the odds. Moreover, the collective strategies not only proved their already vigorous

standard but showed that our 'living' pedagogy is robust and adaptable. We reached the end of the 2020 academic year and COVID-19 was still very much present. Throughout the thesis, I had expressed how we had anticipated that the pandemic would have dissipated within the first 21 days of lockdown and to our dismay, it stayed and indefinitely so.

On the 30th of November 2020, Wits University released a Plan for Learning and Teaching (PLT) for the 2021 academic year.

> While the trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic is unknown at this time, what is certain is that there needs to be an online component to all courses in 2021. A return to a contact-only mode of provision will be a step backwards in terms of offering flexible learning opportunities and promoting student learning (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020c: 3).

An online article titled, *How to Improve Remote Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic*, Sargrad (2020) advises institutional plans for continued remote learning should address at least four critical areas in future: "closing the digital divide, improving academic monitoring, strengthening the modes of instruction and the curriculum and centering equity and community needs". These four critical areas, are also mentioned by the participants and have been included, although not as satisfactorily in the PLT. On bridging the digital divide, Participant A emphasises that,

> We have to fight the fight to get students online and have access to data. We cannot get to the level that we need to if we have to deal with the digital divide (Participant A).

What I find peculiar in the plan is that there is no explicit strategy of bridging the digital divide where Wits University is concerned, but rather a plan to support students remotely. The first one being "a loan pool of laptop computers available to students who meet the criteria" (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020c: 6). The rest of the plan has everything to do with support for the new LMS, which is valid but with no assurance of continued or improved data or a connectivity strategy. It implies that the same data affordances will continue in 2021 and nothing more will be done. Participant E suggests that class engagement time could be shortened to ease data usage but again, because of not adequately combating the digital issues, the academic endeavour is threatened.

On the academic endeavour and strengthening the curriculum online, Participant C stands by distilling the teaching to its basic form and continuing in the multiple platform approaches. Likewise, Participate E emphasises that educators should not overburden the student (who is having to study under already difficult conditions) with a great deal of texts. Rather, the participant encourages fellow educators to select and work with core readings that the students can access. Participant B advises that once an educator finds their rhythm with the class and has observed what works and what does not work, “try to make things as simple as possible for the students. Do not bombard them and yourself with so many things. The online space can be very overwhelming.”

Wits University envisages that the planned move to an institutionally supported, more modern, more powerful LMS in 2021 (Canvas) will make it technologically easier and educationally more possible to do this effectively (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020c). I am still left questioning if distilling the curriculum will not water down the learning and weaken the pedagogical objectives. I also wonder if this “more powerful” Canvas is suitable enough for our entire curriculum and with the assurance of its effectiveness, does it take all pedagogies into consideration?

Participant D believes that there is still great opportunity to innovate and explore and that now that we are going into 2021, we have a lot more tools at our disposal than before the pandemic. In the spirit of experimentation, Participant E encourages educators to experiment within their fields of practice and perhaps they will discover some nuances in the online practice that could assist them in teaching it to others. The participant goes onto say “host master classes with volunteer participants or with other students on campus and these can be recorded for material to be used in teaching”. On the note of collaboration and integration, Participant A welcomes the invitation of guest lecturers to promote cross border and intergenerational engagements online by using Zoom. In terms of our pedagogy and Sargrad’s (2020) consideration of community needs, prioritising this cohesive approach will be key. Participant C ends that students should be given the opportunity to be creative and be exposed to all available tools and sources.

Coupled with these strategies, World Bank Group (2020c) adds that an ongoing response to supporting tertiary institutions for continuity, innovation and adaptation is, among many others, 1) tailoring the training for each academic staff member to define their own plan for content; 2) adapting existing online/remote platforms; 3) assess students capacity to engage in remote learning-equipment, family, responsibilities, home environment etc.; and 4) to understand how realistic it is for students to adapt to pedagogical shifts and equally ensure that educators adapt according to student capacity. Already, in line with point 1), Wits University urges staff to make use of The Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development (CLTD) to access all available developmental resources, which include workshops, webinars and one-on-one instructional design consultations (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020c).

Referring to World Bank Group's (2020c) point 3 above, Participant C concludes that due to the lack of privacy and home responsibilities, students were not fully present in their learning and that most students learn best when they are removed from their home/family settings. Therefore, the participant recommends that under strict conditions, students be allowed to go back into campus residences, where they can learn and engage more productively. The findings will explore in Chapter 5 if the latter was indeed achieved.

Substantiating this point but more on the students' disrupted engagement, Participant A emphasises that "we need to do everything to retract students out of their own stuff." Perhaps the return of students to a conducive learning space is a solution here too. Furthermore, Participant C emphasises that because of the demands and the strenuous nature of teaching and learning online, we should not neglect our mental health and this includes holding firm boundaries with students. For the 2021 academic year to yield better results in student performance, overall mental wellbeing of staff and students, the findings seem to cry out for support.

Finally, Participant A makes a call for Applied Drama and Theatre educators and practitioners alike to "Get out of the emergency remote mind-set and find innovative ways to offer our courses online. This is in line with the PLT plan that states that we will move

from an ERT approach to ‘true’ online teaching (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020c). However, on page 49, I provided a definition of online learning and judging by the results that indicated a lack in resources, tools and skills, I was not convinced by this declaration. Especially because Wits University had not adequately fulfilled the requirements of an online teaching pedagogy that is equitable, the 2021 academic programme leaves much to be desired.

The data in Chapter 5 will further confirm that we in fact did not and could not go into ‘true’ online teaching and learning in 2021 or even 2022. Rather, Participant E resolves that the institution could seriously consider taking a blended learning approach instead of shifting the full curriculum online in the near future. The reality is that, while Participant A has throughout the study shown tremendous hope and embraced the new way of learning, the participant does agree with the others that the absence of physical interaction and contact does not do our complete Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy justice.

> We need to be able to bring them into the room…to be an ensemble and let them connect with the wisdom of their bodies. If it means we do boot camps or …ja…We just can’t do without face-to-face. We will fall apart from disconnection and loneliness (Participant A).

The Wits PLT explicates that once the trajectory of the pandemic and the national lockdown regulations allow for contact teaching, they intend to offer all courses in a blended mode in 2021 and the future (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020c). Online learning alone is not a viable option for a majority of tertiary institutions in South Africa, let alone an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. Even the blended learning option requires suitability for every aspect of a curriculum and it should cater to every student’s need and capacity to engage. In the literature review, I indicated that a blended approach would be a feasible option if we could not go back to face-to-face teaching and learning. The findings also validated my claims to this point.

This section of the chapter presented the lessons learnt by the Applied Drama and Theatre educator in their experience of presenting an online curriculum but more importantly, they shared their opinions of recommendations for continuing with the learning in the near future. These collective recommendations and strategies were

birthed from a place of trial and attempts to honour the integrity of our pedagogy in 2020, with the hopes for an autonomous improvement as well.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter presented, analysed and theorised the sets of findings from the 2020 academic year. These included the findings that emerged from the five Applied Drama and Theatre educators' semi-structured interview material. I also used field notes from my observations as teaching assistant, documentation from Wits University and Drama for Life, as well as Zoom meeting encounters and a collection of relevant messages from the teaching staff WhatsApp group.

Section 4.2. of the chapter focused on research question one and these educators' delineations of a characteristic Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. Herein, I discovered, alongside the research in the conceptual framework, their view of the essential aspects of our pedagogy. Section 4.3. of the chapter identified, in the opinion of the educators, the core aspects of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy that are threatened by the move to online learning platforms. This was supported by also establishing the educators' pressing feelings toward the move online and a picture of the departmental and institutional processes in addressing and confronting the digital divide.

Section 4.4. of the chapter tackled the examples of practical and theoretically explained strategies that the Applied Drama and Theatre educators set out in honouring the integrity of the pedagogy. The section included an overview of the platforms engaged with to teach, as well as their effectiveness and their approaches to teaching along the hindering digital divide. Section 4.5. included a reflection on the findings of 2020. Section 4.6 consolidated the discoveries made about teaching and online learning during a pandemic and finally, 4.7 proposed recommendations for departments and educators alike for 2021 and the near future.

Throughout this chapter, the study analysed the findings and established what it suggests and indicates for the research and the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy and the practice thereof. Specifically focusing on the 2020 academic year, the findings highlighted the particular contextual issues of the digital divide and the socio-economic make up of

South Africa. I concluded, with theorising relevant literature that in 2020 the educators could not, in spite of valiant efforts, sufficiently honour the integrity of our pedagogy. Chapter 5 of this study will address the 2021 academic year and conclude with the department's plan of action in preparation of the 2022 academic year.

CHAPTER 5

Data Presentation and Analysis: 2021

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 of the thesis attempts to present, analyse and theorise the data findings from the 2021 academic year as the pandemic and lockdown continued. As stated in Chapter 3, I was no longer employed at Drama for Life in 2021 and therefore did not have an insider perspective of the academic programme. I also did not observe or journal during this time, however, I still had access to the WhatsApp teaching staff group to document other necessary information and developments.

Therefore, this chapter will thematically present data from the semi-structured interviews with the five Applied Drama and Theatre educators as they reflected on their experience of the 2021 academic year. In contrast to Chapter 4, the 2021 academic year chapter is structured thematically, it is more reflective and less emphasis is placed on the actual teaching strategies. The findings presented will also include documentation pertaining to this year and my attendance of conferences and festivals. Finally, I will briefly discuss Drama for Life's intentions and plans for the 2022 academic year.

The findings discussed in Chapter 4 attempted to respond to all five research questions. The chapter outlined that a characteristic Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy relies on (amongst many other factors) embodiment, in a safe space where participation and collaboration take place between all present members of that educational experience. Through praxis, the pedagogy relies on a consistent commitment to reflection about, through and in the practice, by means of effective questioning, engagement and facilitation. Furthermore, the pedagogy which is in the interest of marginalised communities and social transformation, thrives on the immersive and intervention-based encounters.

The findings also concluded that including the urgent need to physically connect and assemble, online learning posed a threat to the complete academic endeavour as the practical and embodied aspects of our pedagogy would remain individualised and could not be sufficiently replicated online. The findings also showed that online learning

platforms destabilised our already established deviations from the passive and banking model of education, in the way in which educators and students had to interact remotely. The findings described efforts by Applied Drama and Theatre educators to distil and simplify the curricular content online and trying by all means to serve the urgent and manageable needs of the students. Until a holistically feasible and equalising strategy to bridge the digital divide is found, the findings implied that the pedagogy as a whole would be greatly compromised and that perhaps for 2021, a blend or return to face-to-face would be essential.

Knowing all of this and based on the different investigation for the 2021 academic year (refer to Appendix B), the chapter will address the findings thematically. I have grouped it according to the following themes: 1) thoughts on the new LMS and narrowing the digital divide; 2) discoveries, lessons and improvements on practice; 3) honouring the pedagogy and imagining a post pandemic utopia; and 4) approaching 2022 and beyond. Congruent to Chapter 4, I will also include leading questions that pertain to the specific theme.

This chapter serves to investigate how the participants continued in their attempts to honour the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. It also provides an overview of the changes to the LMS in 2021 and, the continued efforts to address the digital divide as compared to 2020. I will examine the lessons learnt and discoveries made by the educators in 2021 as they continued to teach remotely. Finally, I ask the participants, based on their overall experience over the past two years to: 1) consider whether or not the curriculum can be fully taught online; and 2) what would the utopia be in honouring the integrity of our pedagogy going forward.

As mentioned above, the data concludes with the envisaged 2022 academic trajectory as planned by Drama for Life. This chapter also includes numerous contributions from Dr Petro Janse van Vuuren in her capacity as researcher who contributed collaboratively to works that taught aspects of Applied Drama and Theatre online. It is important to note that this literature was included on the basis of including relevant data to the study.

It is vital to mention that the participant group still had the same complement of courses as 2020, with some additions here and there but the changes do not affect the study or their continuation as participants in any way. They will still be named Participant A-E and

I will refer to them as they/them/theirs and not he/she. I conducted the semi-structured interviews with Participants A, B and D via Zoom and MS Teams respectively. Participant E elected to respond via Google Link and Participant C provided a mix of Google link and WhatsApp voice note responses, where clarity and substantiation was required.

5.2. Thoughts on the new LMS and narrowing the digital divide

> …Drama for Life will not be returning to campus and students will not be received in person. All teaching is moving online for the first semester in keeping with the university's plans communicated toward the end of last year. All teaching material will migrate to a new Learning Management system known as CANVAS and branded for Wits as *Ulwazi*. We will guide you through this carefully and there is much support from Wits itself for this transition (Dr Petro Janse van Vuuren, 02 February 2021).

On page 176-177, I introduced the Wits Plan for Learning and Teaching (PLT) for the 2021 academic year and in line with the directives therein, Drama for Life management stated their compliance of the institutional regulations in the WhatsApp message above. The statement indicates that there was no return to face-to-face teaching, no blend, no accomplishment of "true online learning" and thus, an ERT strategy continued. According to the PLT plan, CANVAS would be more "modern, easier to use, more reliable and more powerful than Sakai" (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020c: 3). Thus, Wits University's version of CANVAS was given a name.

In Wits Vuvuzela's online article *Sakai Out, Ulwazi In,* Leah Wilson (2021) documents the thorough process that Wits University CLTD carried out in developing the LMS. *Ulwazi,* translated as *knowledge* from the Nguni languages. Wilson (2021) is convinced that unlike its predecessor, Ulwazi will host a full scope of the university community using the platform all at once without strain, offers easy-to-use interface and the cloud service will now be available as a mobile application for cell phone access. Considering these developments, I questioned whether these functionalities would be better suited to our pedagogy, as opposed to Sakai. However, the consistent languaging by the institution around a preferred blended model, implied that our entire pedagogy could still not be catered for on Ulwazi.

Speaking to the more accessible faculties of CANVAS in a YouTube video, Professor Diane Grayson, Senior Director of Academic Affairs enlightens audiences that staff can develop sites and the features allow them to add and edit (Wits University Official, 2021). Moreover, it is emphasised that faculty online course designers should be utilised to support lecturer's endeavours (Wits University Official, 2021). On the 20th of January 2021, the Humanities Teaching and Learning Unit offered tailor made support for educators through a workshop for technical training and course design. The workshop would provide educators with a tour of CANVAS and an introduction to the design principles for developing storyboards. What has been illuminated, is that there would be an increased and more planned out priority to offer training and support in preparation for the 2021 academic year. On this, Participant A informs me of the process,

> …the only thing that the change from the LMS was that lecturers got step-by-step guides that were very helpful. There was a stronger sense of training for Ulwazi than Sakai. It also came with an announcement that this was going to be it for the foreseeable future… because they wanted us to move toward a more blended model for the foreseeable future (Participant A).

The findings outline that unlike 2020, staff and student training was factored into the transition more expeditiously. Literature and data in Chapter 4 has highlighted the importance of training educators and students to make their access to the LMS more viable. Students also had a dedicated site to assist with their training called *Helping you Learn Online* on CANVAS (Wits University Official, 2021). Perhaps now that educators and students were more confident with the LMS, it gives the impression that teaching and learning may be significantly easier to undertake. To further investigate their overall experiences of the new LMS, I asked the participants how the move to Ulwazi affected the teaching and learning and if it was indeed as effective as the PLT plan vowed (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020c). Participant D responded with a contrasting view of Sakai and Ulwazi,

> It's quite interesting. Ulwazi was more effective than Sakai. But two things, in terms of a very close hindsight view comes to mind: 1) I think the aesthetic of Sakai, uhm, just being a lot more contemporary for some reason, translated a lot quicker

> into my… current use of digital and social media-based platforms. So from a visual media and from a sort of front end perspective, as they say like in computing, it was visually a lot easier to use and navigate. Uhm…and in terms of functionality, it seemed to be a lot easier as well. Sakai, yes was effective and had a lot of the functions that Ulwazi does. But there was something about the way it sort of oriented itself and required you to navigate it… that just felt a little bit cumbersome, perhaps dated, I would describe it. I think with just the pressure of the time… didn't feel conducive… uhm and I do sit on a fence here. I don't think that *Sakai* was all that bad but for the time that we needed it and for the way it was… it just didn't fit. And maybe it became a sacrificial lamb in a way... like if we had to all point our finger of something that didn't work, that would be it (Participant D).

Professor Diane Grayson explains the changeover to Ulwazi by also offering a hindsight view of Sakai not being as "trustee as we had hoped" and that "we all had to learn how to drive it but it was a bit like driving a *skedonk* (translated old car) that bumped along and creaked and conked out altogether" (Wits University Official, 2021). She adds that although the ICT mechanics tried to keep it going, it got "harder and harder" (Wits University Official, 2021). Participant C first recalls that they did not use Sakai at all in 2020 due to its incompatibility with their particular course and then continues,

> Ulwazi was more user friendlier than *Sakai*… But I think with both platforms or any platform, it is intimidating to learn a new thing, if it involves technology. Ulwazi is such a simple and effective platform. It does your calculations, your archiving, your plagiarism checks… It's such an effective tool… If I am to be objective… if I gave myself a chance in 2020 to study Sakai, I would have found it a lot easier than what I think it is now. With Ulwazi I needed to learn it and we got a tutorial and everything (Participant C).

Participant A also accounts for the user-friendly swap and that although they had to learn a new system again, "it was easier and not onerous". Having vowed a sense of improvement across the board, Grayson can he heard stating that "there will be lots of support available for everyone and there is a community of CANVAS users worldwide" (Wits University Official, 2021). The data from the three participants so far indicates that Ulwazi was indeed more effective and accessible than Sakai as the video announcement promised. I am particularly drawn to their praises of the functionality and this proposes

that they could have been given more time to train, plan and explore CANVAS, unlike with the rushed and unprepared on-boarding of Sakai. The data indicates that some of the PLT's envisaged objectives were indeed being met.

Without surprise, Participant B, although acknowledging the vast improvements to the overall LMS experience, also identified a functionality drawback,

> Eish… So Ulwazi is a bit hectic but it's a one-stop office where you can put your documents there. You can also do your online classes on the BigBlueButton… However, it is not friendly on the side of the students because they cannot easily share other stuff with you, except when only submitting their assignments. So it's a bit rough (Participant B).

BigBlueButton (BBB) is a virtual classroom software that can be embedded into LMSs for synchronous video conferencing. According to BigBlueButton (2021) it has features such as screen sharing, multiuser whiteboard, breakout rooms, document upload and polling etc. However, within the first week of the new term it was announced via email by the ICT department that BBB would charge students for the sound file component, it was not designed for large groups and it was data intensive. Therefore, staff were encouraged to rather create one conference per group and keep cameras turned off. Nevertheless, the overall experience of Ulwazi in retrospect has been observed to be positive, yet the above by Participant B and the shortcomings of BBB expose shortcomings that required attention. I imagine that if students could not submit "other stuff" on Ulwazi then it could mean that like in 2020, a multi-platform approach was still necessary.

> Oftentimes when we're thinking about going online, we look for the materials we already have, and we want to just upload those or transfer those into an online environment. But when it comes to creating learning materials, we have to have the learner and their particular activities in mind when we design things (Govender, 2019).

Participant E is convinced that the shift from Sakai to Ulwazi has altered the teaching of their course but has found that Ulwazi, through its tools that encourage discussion and dialogical exchange, most certainly encourages the blended learning model. Bagarukayo and Kalema (2021) advise that these challenges demand a mixed approach like blended learning that is innovative to address problems of class and cultural diversity, students'

prior learning experience, increased education demand and changing learning needs. However, Participant E communicates that since the digital divide has not been bridged effectively these challenges are difficult to overcome. Govender (2019) continues to admonish educators to consider the discipline, the students and the context when planning curricular content and designing the learning. Although the participants have offered holistically satisfactory feedback on Ulwazi, findings that emerged in the early stage of the year showed that the digital divide was still a looming threat. The email detailing the data challenges read as follows,

> Dear Colleagues. First the good news. Over 25 000 students logged onto Ulwazi on Monday. However there are challenges: 1) Zero-rating issues: Zero-rating a complex site like *Ulwazi* is not straightforward…it seems students may require some data to access Ulwazi… Lecturers should reserve synchronous conferencing for occasions that merit it and students should avoid downloading or do so after midnight (Wits ICT department, 10 March 2021)

The limitations present are problematic for our pedagogy, which could do with an improved experience of synchronicity or enabling students to engage with all kinds of material that will enrich their learning. I imagine that on top of distilling curricular content, there has to be a re-distillation of the types of media or formats because of the incapable LMS. Speaking to this, when asked if the digital divide was managed as compared to 2020, Participant A stated that from their experience, “things were exactly the same”. Initially, Participant B understood Ulwazi to be a response to the student data challenges however, when the limitations and issues came up, they were disappointed. The participant continues, “it has been the same struggle. In 2020 there was hype around giving the students data but in 2021, not as much.”

Almost identically, Participant E expresses that BBB came with incredible prospects but students had limited access to it due to data constraints and those with older laptop versions were unable to participate due to the “sound errors showing up”. Bagarukayo and Kalema (2021) recommend that efforts be made to improve connectivity because a shortage of resources causes negative attitudes from students and an overall negative

impact on engagement with online resources. Participant D highlights that the digital divide was not bridged but appreciated the opportunity for students to learn from campus,

> A lot of the breakthroughs on a macro scale… in terms of what the university was able to get through with the network providers … that helped quite a bit. It was not the best set up but it helped. Also opening up the campus made a big difference… so allowing students to come and use Wi-Fi here… something as significant as getting the generators stable was important for 2021 because of the load shedding[21] crisis. The reality of the digital divide was not addressed… that is the one big blind spot that we are all still moving forward with… We actually haven't done much to bridge that or address that… what has been in place that mitigated in the university it was made accessible again: students could come to campus, use the Wi-Fi and computers and their phones and plug in on campus (Participant D).

Another difficult yet necessary declaration made by Drama for Life management to staff and students, was that they would no longer be able to offer additional data as with last year's ERT strategy. "This year all students are aware that data is an essential part of being ready to study at Wits", the message reads. Educators were also reminded that they were no longer responsible for making sure that students have data neither should they make plans to accommodate absent students because of data. Consequently, as Participant D outlines, students were required to make use of the Wits data allowances or return closer to campus for Wi-Fi access.

I view this decision from two perspectives. On the one side of the coin, students' options are wider as the lockdown restrictions have eased and it is on them to make use of the tools at their disposal – which is fair. But, on the other side of the coin, if we want the options of exploring the embodied, interactive and synchronous reliant aspects of our pedagogy remotely, then our students are certainly in need of extra data. Perhaps this is a call for institutions and stakeholders to conduct an analysis of all pedagogies and cater for their specific digital demands.

[21] A South African lexicon describing the National electric power utility's inability to supply power to the entire country at the same time. From 2007, a two-hour (or more between periods) blackout schedule was implemented across the country in order to manage the power grid's capacity (Thompson, 2019).

The loadshedding crisis added insult to injury. Jacobs (2021) reports that these power outages do more than just frustrate us and keep us in the dark, but they make it impossible to handle daily operations. It is such a sad state of affairs because when load shedding happens, many fibre and Wi-Fi users become disconnected. For a student who relies on the Wi-Fi, their next best option is to switch over and use data. Depending on the configuration of the nearby cell phone towers, if the power becomes depleted due to the load shedding, then the network will black out entirely (Jacobs, 2021). A classic case of the domino effect; the student in attempts to use their data and continue with the lesson, cannot do so because the network coverage has now been taken away. Participant B sniggering, “students will be students and some of them would lie and say that they are experiencing load shedding when they are not and there is absolutely nothing we can do about that. Between the data and the load shedding, it was just a struggle.”

In the literature review, I covered an incident of protest action in response to the actions by institutions at the onset of the pandemic. Consequently, with the start of the new academic year and a plague of related overlooked issues carried over from 2020, a Wits University protest brewed and tragically, the life of an innocent man was lost. Quoted in Bangani (2021), Wits Student Representative Council deputy secretary general, Mandisa Nyilika underlines that the protest was against students’ financial exclusion and that some students had still not received their laptops and data for the beginning of the new academic year. Furthermore, Nyilika in Bangani (2021) expressed that the academic year at Wits could not commence until all students were registered and got their proof of funding to be able to secure accommodation and amenities.

Head of Drama for Life, Dr Petro Janse van Vuuren, penned a letter to the departmental learning community and pledged solidarity with the purpose of the protests. Learning was declared non-compulsory with staff and students engaging in dialogue and conversation to process the events that unfolded. This decision again draws on the constructs of the pedagogy that remains an advocate for equality and human rights. Even while standing up for access to education for all, Drama for Life reiterated that they would not condone violent acts.

At the same time, while negotiations between students and institutional stakeholders regarding the protest action continued, the ICT department worked tirelessly to revisit the data challenges of Ulwazi. In an update from the ICT department, it was later shared that BBB and Ulwazi were now zero-rated when using a VPN and embedded content could now be viewed zero-rated, unless hosted elsewhere. The audio issues across cellular networks were resolved and staff and students were encouraged to remain patient and continue exploring the system as they awaited further updates and feedback. However, until a resolution was reached regarding the protest action, classes remained non-compulsory and course work deliverables could be negotiated for later dates.

The digital divide is like Big Brother who is not only watching but also decides the course of action for everyone else. Narrowing the divide is clearly not an overnight process and findings show how the institution has resorted to working around it and not facing it head on. The danger with this is that it will continue to fester and impact other inter-related aspects making it an even bigger giant to deal with. It is great that students could now go back to school and have better access but the strike action showed that this was not enough. I also found it ironic that Professor Grayson called Ulwazi an “innovative, high quality, luxury car” because if one was not totally focused on the subliminal implications, then one would miss the fact that it would also require a luxurious affordance to access and functionality.

In so far as Wilson (2021) presents the development of Ulwazi as being thought out and thoroughly planned, how did this thorough planning miss the data intensity of BBB or the zero-rating glitches? CANVAS is an international platform and is used in countries that do not have the same data struggles as we do, why then are we not developing our own contextually aware Learning Management Systems? The findings explicate that while Ulwazi was better than Sakai in many respects, staff and students suffered under the inadequate solutions pertaining to the overall nature of the digital divide. I am of the view that if the platform is inaccessible, then so is the learning. Moreover, it remains unclear how the Ulwazi catered for the embodied aspects of our pedagogy and leaves one to assume that because we could still not learn via face-to-face engagement in 2021, we

would have to wait for the intended pathway to the blend. In the meantime, what more of our pedagogy is lost in the mix?

Following their request for students to take responsibility for their data situation, Drama for Life pledged to extend themselves as follows,

> What you can rely on DFL for: To offer teaching that strikes the balance between being data trim and still delivering courses that align with our embodied, collaborative and immersive pedagogy. To support students to navigate the university structures and access the university support that is available. To offer data support to students for our additional curricular engagements, specifically for the Conferences & Festival experience (Dr Janse van Vuuren, 17 March 2021).

While this is a legitimate statement to make and the student is being held accountable for their learning, there are potential dangers of exclusion. For as long as the learning experience across the entire student body is not equalised, some students will thrive and make the most of available resources and others will be swallowed by the domino effect of the other interlinking dynamics that we explored in Chapter 4.

The following section will pay attention to the discoveries and lessons learnt by Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators as they embarked on a second year of navigating collaboration and participation, praxis and immersion online and remotely.

5.3. Discoveries, Lessons and Improvements on pedagogical intentions

The 2020 academic year was incredibly demanding on the educational fraternity and those who saw the partial and, in some cases, complete loss of their pedagogical rigour. Nevertheless, they approached the 2021 academic year with foresight. Would it be a case of once bitten twice shy or an ongoing attitude of fortitude and bracing the unpredictable nature of the pandemic? The Applied Drama and Theatre educators, in their responses have seemingly chosen the latter. The following is an overall reflection by the participants of discoveries made and lessons learnt in overcoming the challenges of 2020 in the 2021 academic year. Firstly, I will tackle the participatory and collaborative aspects.

5.3.1. Negotiating participation and collaboration, remotely

> When the pandemic forced class structures to change, drama programs were forced to hold their classes online. With these types of programs, where physical closeness and collaboration are so crucial to their success, the online format took away the charm and benefits that drew students to the programs and the activities as a whole (McVety, 2021: para. 10).

The data in Chapter 4 foregrounded this crucial requirement of participation and collaboration as essential intentions of the pedagogy. Toward the end of the year, we all hoped that institutions would draw from experiences of 2020 to improve 2021, yet the findings in 5.2. Illustrate an image of a large number of things staying the same. Seemingly, the greater responsibility in ensuring a more dynamic learning experience, was handed over to the educators. Now, if these educators were working under the very same conditions, at what level could they be expected to design a different learning experience?

World Bank Group (2020b) sees it this way: despite the lack of official support from institutions and education systems, a subset of highly motivated, highly competent educators, especially those comfortable with using new technologies and have reliable access to the internet, will be able to support many of their students online in various ways. As Drama for Life and the pedagogy would have it, this has been the concerted culture of its educators during this time. In light of the first pedagogical intention of the study, the data in Chapter 4 showed that it had a lot to do with managing the data situation.

Addressing this, Participant E verifies that they did not make any new discoveries because although the LMS was changed, the realities were still the same. Referring to their specific course, the participant does recall having to tailor in more deliberate interactions and collaborative moments with other departments, practitioners and external partners. However, most of these were facilitated by Conference and Festival moments. Sharing a breakthrough, Participant C states that collaboration was the biggest learning curve for them and because it was so challenging in 2020, the participant wanted to change the narrative. Judging from their reflections and contributions to collaboration in

2020, this suggests that the participant wanted to give this aspect a more refreshed and optimistic approach − exploring all available possibilities.

In 2020, Participant E shared that they looked forward to fostering cross-border collaborations and employing social media more effectively and as a result of these active attempts in 2021, the participant relatively succeeded. The highlight here, the participant added, was that under strict data management, they were able to collaborate across provinces, countries and continents through social media and Zoom. This saw students engage with themselves and others in a more determined manner.

Matthew Lynch (2020) recognises that remote collaboration is hard to achieve but overcoming the obstacle can only be through utilising online learning apps such as Pedagogue. He goes on to encourage educators to get past the barriers (which in our context is arguably impossible) and rather look to alternative solutions-especially in the face of this indefinite pandemic (Lynch, 2020). Opposing this, Carr, Jaffer and Smuts (2009) warn educators to be cautious when setting participatory tasks and activities, and not expect too much from students because in any case, they do not all contribute in a regular class setting and the online space is sometimes uncomfortable and unfamiliar. While I partially support this view, our pedagogy does encourage everyone present to interact and make contributions to the collective learning experience. Only when the digital gap is closed and we can possibly reframe our processes in line with the altered digital affordance, can we manage the rate and nature of student participation.

Participant D explains that changing their view on collaboration helped,

> …it became very much about promoting students' voices, hearing what they are engaging with and hearing them share quotes from texts and books they are reading…that sort of thing. There are a lot more options and experiments that we explored with now but we could not engage in the same way and depth online… (Participant D).

The findings from 2020 showed that because students were learning from their home environments, an individualised experience was bred. Participant D's approach above not only promotes student-driven learning but when students are required to immerse themselves into their prescribed theoretical content and return to share it with peers, a

more authentic learning takes place. Yes, they first engage in the reading “alone” but the process of presentation, debate and conversation propels participation. If they are to respond to readings in smaller pairs and groups, then collaboration can take place, albeit partially.

On page 107, I expressed that there was a lack of literature in this field of research, specifically related to drama education during the pandemic. However, the development of the following and the yet to be published research contributions (even though coming from my supervisor/HOD) was significant evidence of progress in the field and required I include it. Additionally, these contributions are paramount to demonstrating other efforts being made by practitioners in the field as they offered aspects of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy remotely, and within Drama for Life.

Describing their approaches to teaching the Honours Reflective Practice Course in Applied Drama and Theatre and Drama Therapy at Drama for Life online, Janse van Vuuren, Khutsoane and Gitelson (2022 awaiting publication, para. 53) introduce the idea of collaborative frame. They describe it as a mechanism that fosters an engagement between educators and students allowing different views to be heard and more voices contribute to understanding the matter or content at hand. Through the creation of a group contract pertaining to content and the teaching style students can expect, students were able to share their expectations and commitments. An effective model used this time was creating two WhatsApp groups: one as a noticeboard and the other for live engagement. Whenever, things were not working as a result of the data situation or overall content structure, the whole class would go back to the collaborative frame (Janse van Vuuren, Khutsoane and Gitelson, 2022 awaiting publication, para. 55)

What this research raises is that collaboration may not be in the way that we have experienced it through synchronous play, games and physical activities. Instead, in their endeavours to become Applied Drama and Theatre practitioners, students would be equipped with tools to navigate it in their future practice. The mark of collaboration online was the act of creating a group contract and deciding on the medium of communication collectively. This, in my opinion is a victory. Nevertheless, it is also worth emphasising that tools alone can’t build community, they can only facilitate its development, and

secondly, students interact with tools based on their own personal histories of using (or not using) specific tools or modes of interaction (Carr, Jaffer and Smuts, 2009).

On this reality, Participant A says that some students demonstrated the ability to collaborate and "really made lovely work" but only if they could meet and rehearse in physical spaces on campus. This was only made possible when the third wave died down and students were able to go back to residences and closer to campus. This sense of having to return physically to campus implies that if we are to focus solely on collaborating online, then we are still limited in our capacity.

> It's interesting… There were a couple of groups that just could not collaborate and they didn't have the capacity to work on their collaborative skills. There was just no cohesion, there was unhappiness and anger and they couldn't find a way to co-create. Uh… but it's not all of them. We had to work very hard for cohesion and connection and in the end I just asked them to not work together. The effort to overcome the collaborative issues was detrimental to meeting the requirements of the course (Participant A).

In their case, Participant E resonates with Participant A that student collaboration was non-existent because a lot of the students were still in different provinces and worked on their on-site placements individually. With respect to their course, the participant concludes if we are going to define collaboration by the way we could access it before COVID-19, then effective collaboration was not achieved as per course requirements. Participant B firmly believes that 2020 and 2021 were no different and in fact, 2021 got worse. Like 2020, the participant continued to share work with students and have them return to engage as a collective on WhatsApp. Again, not all students responded at the same time or worked together in a constructive manner.

The findings infer continued feelings of frustration and disheartenment yet equally revealing that the longer it takes to return to campus or blend, the greater the loss would become. Yet the prospects of a pedagogical revolution festers. After all, Rogers (1969) classifies drama educators as not simply modifying classroom methods but revolutionising them. In my advocations of the above, Drama for Life and its educators are tremendously innovative, adaptive and trailblazing − their history and achievements

over the years speak for itself. To undergo a similar two-year long journey not only proves the pedagogy to be complex and not as easily translatable, but it increasingly highlights the failure of the institution at large and Higher Education government's inadequacies in supporting our pedagogy. In Chapter 4, I had stressed that support is an essential need and the data is proving the lack thereof.

5.3.2. Achieving praxis remotely

Having delineated the conditions under which praxis conventionally takes place the findings in Chapter 4 concluded that in 2020, without the unifying agent of contact, theory and practice became detached. Participant E impresses that nothing new was achieved in 2021 but made a necessary discovery,

> The only improvement made was lessening the amount of theory due to the fact that learners themselves are having to be in difficult places while learning. Playing additional roles as parents, children, caregivers while engaging with course theory was difficult for them. By lessening the theory, I was able to condense core theorists and students could recall their contributions during moments of practice and this encouraged praxis (Participant E).

Comparing this participant's locations of praxis to last year, they resorted to relying on memory again but this time around the participant focused more on having a solid grounding of theory to inform the practice. Also connecting to the already established efforts of distillation and prioritising the core essentials from their colleagues in 2020, Participant C decided to prioritise principle over method,

> I found it more useful to go back to the basic principles of our practice and explore how they can be as effective online as opposed to sticking blindly to the method (Participant C).

This decision aligns with Participant E's recommendations in 2020 and it is rewarding to witness a congruency in approaches as a department. The participant continues by analogising a striking revelation in reference to Carl Rogers' (1969) articulations in *Freedom to Learn* and discovered that,

> …learning (presence, participation and engagement) is a choice. This is the kind of freedom that Carl Rogers advocates.

> He also mentions that even this same freedom, not everyone is ready for. Those who survived the year and did well under these circumstances, were ready for this freedom (Participant C).

On the one hand, I echo the participant's standpoint that exercising freedom in the learning process is a choice and I value the role of agency on the part of students and educators throughout these turbulent times. The research by Conroy, Ong and Rodicks (2020) supported the notion that Applied Drama and Theatre processes are intrinsically connected to choice. However, what I find difficult with Participant C's statement is that it overlooks the unequal learning circumstances of all students and perpetuates an "all students are equal but some are more equal than others" narrative.

Some students had the luxury and capacity to choose or even challenge their readiness of freedom based on their home settings, access to internet, food and the ability to completely assume the role of student at home. As for the others, no matter how hard they tried, they would never be ready enough for this freedom. Even literature has shown that because of Apartheid, they would always be significant steps behind their privileged counterparts (Shay 2020). Ultimately, Rogers' (1969) notion of freedom was under the guise that all students and their educator were learning in an identical setting.

Janse van Vuuren, Khutsoane and Gitelson (2022 awaiting publication, para. 69) explain that through their use of role exploration techniques, "enabling entry into and out of role as a means of reflection," although they were unsuccessful with a majority of students, the leveraging of stepping into the fictional roles themselves made the students happy. What was peculiar was that the minute these researchers asked students to reflect on the roles from their real-world experiences in order to learn, the students resisted (Janse van Vuuren, Khutsoane and Gitelson, 2022 awaiting publication). In fact, my use of word 'peculiar' is invalid because this is what choice is all about in an Applied Drama and Theatre encounter – students and participants have a responsibility to exercise their rights to choose their course of learning in class and their choice of being in the fictional context too. Not even the educators have a choice in the outcome or course of action in the process because the pedagogy emphasises an environment of agency, democracy and liberty to choose.

Participant D was delighted that as compared to 2020 – although still data sparse – students were more open to the setting of Zoom-based teaching and learning. This allowed them to explore dramatic contexts far better than in 2020. The participant further explained that they integrated role online and students would communicate and process in role, with the already established theoretical footing (as outlined in their approaches to participation above). What was incredible to hear was that the participant factored in their already existing expertise or vernacular knowledges (as the pedagogy would have it),

> Referencing my experience with radio and being able to use that platform… I took models from process drama such as a talk show or group debate and fused it with the radio hosting skill sets to make it more alive and more of an experience. Another thing…just the Conference and Festival moments again, were effective and liberating to our praxis (Participant D).

In March 2021 The Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative in partnership with various other stakeholders, including Drama for Life, curated a first ever virtual version of their Public Arts Festival, *My Body My Space*. The entire festival took place on a dedicated WhatsApp line with synchronous moments taking place on Zoom and Facebook live (Creative Feel, 2020). In attendance of one of the programmes, we started on Zoom checking-in with a one word and gesture responses of where we found ourselves in the space and what we looked forward to exploring. Then we were given a WhatsApp number to save and led through an exploration of performances by Drama for Life students on WhatsApp. We followed the prompts and once you had finished watching the first video you would press 1 to continue to the next until you witnessed all the video performances. When we returned to the Zoom room, we engaged in dialogue and reflected on what we saw.

This method was powerful because originally this festival would be taken to places such as Machadodorp in Mpumalanga and those communities would get a taste and feel for Applied Drama and Theatre based interventions and live performances. Drama for Life students also used the chance to engage in fieldwork and placements for assessment purposes. The choice to use WhatsApp was strategic because most people (even from

those communities) could have access to the much-loved festival via such an accessible social media platform. A barrier to their full experience would potentially be the insufficient data affordances for the deepened conversations and exchanges that happen on Zoom. Consequently, the conference was more accessible to participants in Gauteng, who had consistent internet access. As Participants D and E suggest, these moments at conferences and festivals could be used as concrete stimuli for students to refer back to in the development of their practice. The findings also demonstrate that because students were exposed to works and presentations by practitioners, they could witness their processes of integrating their praxis and this was vital for their learning.

The pedagogical gift of conference and festivals that Participant D named, can certainly be used to fill the gaps that the Applied Drama and Theatre educators are not entirely able to supplement in the classroom context alone. The choice to collaborate and partner across organisations and theatre companies fosters an active commitment to leveraging what has been lost as a result of the pandemic. Critically, it initiates the cohesive and transformative agenda of the pedagogy because we cannot expect students to learn about it solely within the institutional structure. Carr, Jaffer and Smuts (2009) state that it bears repeating that in efforts to provide a rich learning experience for students, good online pedagogical practices are built on good offline pedagogical practices, and the same applies to the development of materials.

As such, it warrants repeating that the arm of the digital divide needs to be chopped off in order to support a dynamic learning experience.

> One of the things educators miss the most about in-person classes is our ability to read the room—that is, to see how students react and to read their body language and nonverbal cues. These cues signal to us their level of understanding, their comfort level with what was said in the class, and even whether the joke we made landed with students. Replicating this online is very difficult because we're not able to see people in the same way we do in the physical classroom (Israeli, 2020: para. 4).

Going back to the use of Zoom in 2021, Participant A maintains that conference and festival moments, over and above the curricular content, catalysed the collective attempts

by educators to teach students how to understand experience, and their relationships with self and the other. Sharing the same challenge as Israeli above, the participant complained that “people were almost never with open cameras and they were on mute. You can’t see them snigger, roll their eyes or even teach them to (as future facilitators) read the body languages of participants”. In addition, McVety (2021) explains that especially for drama and theatre-based students not being able to feed off each other’s energy, emotions or body language in the same way was extremely restrictive to their endeavours. Based on the findings, the return to campus with embodied interactions may be a more satisfactory answer to this problem.

Participant B recalls that in 2020, they relied on uploading the theory on Sakai before they unpacked it on WhatsApp, followed by students responding in their body afterwards through videos, pictures or voice notes. Reidsema, Kavanagh and Smith (2017) term this type of pre-class engagement as ‘flipped or upside-down pedagogy’. This method is known to be effective when you want students to come to class prepared and engaged before joining the lesson. In this case, Participant B would require that students flip their characteristic relationship of theory and practice, and deepen their understanding in bodily isolation, later. Now, the participant says this strategy does not “do what it used to do” noticing that students began to resist what used to be reinforcements to their learning in 2020.

Conceivably the findings have highlighted that students did not have the capacity at home to learn prior to class with all their responsibilities and disruptions. Another thing is that because students had to learn from platform a, submit in platform b and then process a new format on platform c, a sense of oppression is bred. For a pedagogy that invites marginalised communities to access a boundaryless and borderless exchange – these endless steps to access it online are not only tedious but could leave some behind and make the learning unenjoyable.

Substantiating this, Participant B enlightens me on the theories of Resistance Pedagogies. Summarising the works of Henry Giroux (2022) and relating it to the COVID context, the participant states that online learning produced an “oppressive kind of narrative” because students were always reminded of what they did not have and how

the lack negatively impacted their learning experience. My understanding of this concept is that: 1) pre-COVID, students who were previously disadvantaged were welcomed into an educational institution; and 2) their acceptance and learning among counterparts from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, almost equalised them on an access and learning field basis. Now 3) the pandemic removes them from this almost equalised atmosphere and takes them back home where they are reminded of their limitations and then; 4) they have to learn online with no connectivity or devices or food or optimal learning conditions. The more they voice their discomfort and limitations, they are told that things will improve and sadly, they don't. For some, due to connectivity, their voice is muffled and their faces hidden. This is indeed oppressive to their learning because they can no longer give their learning the attention it deserves.

> For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire, 1970:72).

This notion of resistance to praxis is also documented by Janse van Vuuren, Khutsoane and Gitelson (2022 awaiting publication) as students being frustrated with 1) the adjustments to the new learning formats; 2) the multi-platform shifts between tasks i.e. having to switch from platform to platform depending on the learning of either theory or practice; and 3) the overall navigation of their learning away from the campus and their peers. Earlier, I had made a call for us to develop our own context-aware LMSs and now, another layer to that is developing LMSs that are able to integrate both diverse pedagogical theoretical and practice-based content. For example, there are opportunities to integrate the already existing interactive, embodied and immersive aspects of the pedagogy onto a dynamically designed LMS while maintaining data friendliness and device compatibility. Central to this innovation should be a consideration of a thinking, feeling, seeing and breathing human who wants to access their humanity on the platform as well.

Finally, Lavallee (2020) underlines this concept of praxis by reminding us that when we ask our students to reflect on their art, we are asking them to make connections between

the work we do and how it affects them. As educators we also need to ensure that they are provided with a global perspective, not only on where their lives intersect but that topics of "diversity, equity and inclusion" also come into question (Lavallee, 2020: npn). Praxis, as the data has exposed, is more than just a peripheral consideration of the work we do. In the same way Participant B challenges us to carefully ask ourselves as educators, at what time is the best practice the best practice?

> As an arts educator, what technicalities do we need in our bodies and how can we technicalise our bodies to fit in this new way of learning… (Participant B).

The above discussions warrant entering into discourses around the politics of achieving praxis. It is no longer just about combining theory and practice but also how do we best serve the results of the reflections about our world as well. What more is being lost except the obvious and how can we repair some of the damages that are re-dressed in light of these feelings of oppression? Moreover, the findings suggest that praxis is the process of a transference of change and the holistic attitudes of being and doing. In 2021 I am finding that the self-reflexive practitioner skill set was in a battle between accepting what is now the learning and hoping for a return to the norm. The norm has also become relative.

5.3.3. Immersion in social and fictional contexts, remotely

Participant A makes a poignant statement: "collaboration and reflection were the biggest sacrifices because of the lack of immersion". I will now conclude this section with the participants' approaches to immersion in social and fictional contexts in 2021.

I attended a Wits School of the Arts (WSOA) based conference titled *Lockdown Learning: Telling our Stories* from the 2nd to 4th August 2021. Contributing to a panel discussion, conference speaker Sarah Godsell indicated that 2021 was still pretty much in ERT mode because we were neither blended nor fully online as the PLT had anticipated. Godsell (2021) commented that social learning was a huge loss to our collective pedagogies at WSOA and ERT, while the pandemic did not allow for any physical and practical engagements. She concluded that educators should continually ask themselves what the

implications are for the pedagogy and in continued efforts to “figure out how to continue the year”, always place those thoughts at the forefront.

In a presentation titled, *Virtually Here and Physically There…*, Theatre and Performance educator, Neka da Costa and co-presenter Kamogelo Molobye (2021) deduced that the social and communal facets of our pedagogies were at risk and unless something was done to mitigate the divide, (even though we would eventually find a way but not with the desired strength we imagined), we would not be able to treat them with the dignity they deserve. WSOA based pedagogies like ours thrive on social interactions and learning by being immersed into the physical campus space and facilities, with peers and the larger institutional community. If Godsell (2021) was convinced that we were still in ERT then it gives an impression that even at Drama for Life, immersion might not have taken place, unless there were opportunities to meet on campus or allow students to identify immersive spaces in their remote areas.

On this theme of *Virtually Here, Physically There*, Participant A confirms that the only context that students could immerse into, both in 2020 and 2021, was the online context. An even disruptive dilemma in attempts to being fully immersed online, was the turned off cameras and microphones, overlapping with being mentally and physically immersed in their home dynamics. Sharing similar insights to 2020 the participant explains that students’ attention was divided between the noisy backgrounds, unstable connections and sometimes having audio and then losing it.

According to Participant B attendance rates in 2021 were drastically low. The participant, going back to the nature of resistance caused by the data issues, frustration with online learning and now load shedding, replied that immersion could not happen because students were not present in class, “we also had to beg them to attend conferences and festivals”. Congruently, Participant A expresses that sometimes a third of the class would “just not show up for class”. Presence is an indelible currency in our pedagogical exchange and now that students and their educators could not be physically present, it demanded that they attend virtually, mentally and within the requirements of learning, be academically present.

The findings support my convictions in the conceptual framework that immersion and presence are interdependent. On the same note, Participant C states that immersion was difficult to achieve because of the lack of student presence in the moments where the participant had designed online immersion aspects for the lesson. In this regard, Dixson (2010) suggests that educators need not only create opportunities for students to interact but make it a requirement to do so. Although I empathise with this need to be stern, the findings confirm that because students are frustrated with remote learning, it negatively affects their zeal and desire to learn and/or participate in class activities.

Literature, theory and data in the research about the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy promote this assurance that participants are problem-solvers and encounters foster a solution making process. Paying close attention to the events of the past two years and the observations by educators about the students' behaviour, it is hard to identify moments when students were problem-solvers. Participant A may have used case study and story in 2020 to explore problem solving concepts but the findings highlight that students struggled to embrace the changes in 2021 and this drained their resilience and fortitude.

Actually, the findings inform us that students were too immersed in their own personal problems and this resulted in their educators solving numerous problems on their behalf. Ironically the pandemic presented problems to Higher Education that were beyond staff, students and educational institutions in any case. How could I possibly expect students to overcome and solve problems that were seemingly placing them at a disadvantage? If government could not manage the pandemic, what more is asked of students?

> For me, Applied Drama and Theatre immersion applies mainly to placements and fieldwork practice. I discovered two things on immersion. 1) Students who could go into placements in their hometowns need a clear framework and weekly consultations to plan for each session and they need a weekly reflective space to debrief from each session and 2) there must be room for face-to-face intensive experiential learning where all students together with the educator are immersed in the fieldwork (Participant E).

What is shared here by Participant E resounds with the definitions set out in the conceptual framework and Drama for Life's curricular agenda that immersion happens in the presence of communities and is specifically tailored for their benefit. Once restrictions were eased, students had the option to go into surrounding communities where they could finally engage with interventional commitments of the pedagogy. However, the participant stresses a need for supervision and consultation. Hepplewhite (2022) describes a partial return to campus (Autumn 2020/2021) where socially distanced and masked applied theatre students eagerly anticipated the opportunity to run workshops with 'real' community participants. Though restrictions were eased, not all students were present due to either having COVID-19 symptoms or being in isolation. She writes that their usual 'get to know each other' activities were curtailed and

> …we could not move around the room, shaking hands, breathing closely while laughingly interacting. We could not relax and were required to sit individually far apart. Rather than the typical 'what I did in the summer' topic, the buzz of conversation focussed on the 'unprecedented' circumstances still marking the world. The chance to practise activities that developed their 'proximal skills'… was gone (Hepplewhite, 2022: 257-258).

The conundrum of safety is brought in to question here. The pandemic had not been completely cleared at that stage and their safety from the virus (regardless of masks and social distancing) was not guaranteed. As stated earlier by Davis and Phillips (2021), the role of the drama educator is to ensure safety. How then was returning to campus a safe choice? How does the educator navigate their responsibility for safety when the virus threatens their physical presence? Moreover, how do we ensure an equalised learning when some students were present and others were not? How can we ensure that students are safe when we are not in full control of the learning environment?

Ravitch (2020) introduces the concept of brave spaces in contrast to safe spaces and explains that the group of educators and students need to rather develop their critical competencies to be 'brave' enough to share even the most uncomfortable opinions and experiences. So-doing, students can offer authentic and unadulterated viewpoints pertaining to their learning experiences. Essentially, without the face-to-face encounter, immersion, according to the findings, was observed to be fragmented.

> The first half of the year was quite interesting because we had opened up a little bit more and there was physical access. There was a little bit more lab access and that made a difference. But by November 2021, schools that we had previous relationships with reopened their doors so we actually manage to get experiences for the students. Interestingly, it wasn't for the exam process… But they got into the school to get a taste of that and then that experience was used to inform their eventual exam process. It was almost like a simulated experience. It turned out to be an effective model and it was celebrated. So yeah… uh...Going into the school for a controlled engagement worked well (Participant D).

Similarly, Participant A remembers that one of their colleagues at Drama for Life really "blew things out of the water" when they "figured out immersion". The participant explains that the colleague deliberately used the students' home spaces, what they were doing in the communities and made theatre with that. What fascinated the participant the most was their colleague's strategy of using what students were already immersed in to enable a free and authentic approach to exploration. Regardless of the practice or principle, Participant C accentuated that our choices should not be in contradiction to the very education and pedagogy we strive for and that in efforts to honour the integrity of our pedagogy, we should not over immerse ourselves into the online format so much that we miss the very needs and capabilities of the students.

My attendance of Drama for Life's Conference and Festival in collaboration with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, *Performing Democracy* in August 2021, opened a window into the possibilities of treating online or virtual and remote environments as democratic spaces. The entire move toward online learning, although experimental, demanded that we factor in our democratic nuances. An Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy in itself is extremely democratic especially in its approaches to participation and dialogue amongst members of the shared community. However, the findings have incessantly alerted that the digital divide robs our pedagogy of its inherent democratic functions. Nonetheless, a democratically charged decision, which was also assisted by the eased lockdown restrictions was the ability for the conference to take place both online and in-person. The immersive aspect was unmatched because some of the participants were present and experienced the conversations and performances

physically. They were immersed in the social, and could engage with the fictional, contexts as well. The rest of us who opted to continue online did so out of the choice to make a democratic decision.

Much of what has been shared in this section is an extension of what was experienced in 2020 and to avoid repetitive information, I insisted that participants share only what was significant to their process and the journey in 2021. In some instances, the participants could make immediate associations of their inputs in 2020 and then make the comparative analysis. In other moments they shared completely new revelations. What was striking to me was that the more we forged a path to sustainable practices, something would happen and things would change again. To this, Participant A says that there was always something new and different in the learning and this bred frustration amongst students. The two visible and, I must say, monumental changes to the learning has been the changeover to Ulwazi and the ability to access campus again. Trying to change teaching strategies and perhaps streamlining the platforms, could only be affected by the digital divide and a change in students' collective attitudes toward it.

Where the intentions identified in the study are concerned for 2021, I deduce that they were impartially engaged with and honoured in the online space. This was largely because of: 1) the digital divide; 2) the confinements of the LMS and 3) the physically demanding nature of the pedagogy which could not be translated online. The findings have shown consistently that our pedagogy can only barely survive under a balance of physical and virtual or face-to-face encounters again. The following section will have the participants conclude whether or not the complete pedagogy can be honoured fully online and what they imagine a utopia would be. Following this, I will present Drama for Life's teaching and learning plan for the 2022 academic programme.

5.4. Honouring the pedagogy and imagining a post pandemic utopia

> Moving forwards into 2021, the million-dollar question of when we will return to "normal" is still unanswerable. No one would have chosen that path we have had to follow in the last year. However, the radical change in our teaching delivery has forced us to find creative solutions in how, why and what we teach – new perspectives that will surely help us to improve

> the student experience in any circumstances (Ross, 2021: para. 6).

In the rationale, I recognised that our role as Applied Drama and Theatre educators during 2020 would be three-pronged. However, the findings have shown that it would demand more than that. In fact, what has surfaced is that in efforts to safeguard our pedagogy, we had to: 1) become proficient in our use of the LMS and the various multimodal tools; 2) take an in-depth analysis of our pedagogy and decide how best to offer it; 3) maintain a consistent awareness of the digital divide and its devices; and 4) make sure that the student remains at the centre. As Ross (2021) puts it, finding creative solutions were a top priority and I could not agree more. Following these efforts and having extensively covered their perspectives over the past two years, I asked the participants whether they believed an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy could be fully taught online. All of them responded, *no* and *not fully*.

Participant C first takes us on a journey of redefining a conventional Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. In their response, I am taken back to Drama for Life's (2020a) priorities of determining a theory and practice that is framed by theories of critical pedagogy and is inherently embodied. On this particular requirement of embodiment, the participant convinces that the absence of in-person human connection just cannot be compromised in any way, shape or form. The participant justifies that yes, there have been incredible and beautiful breakthroughs and yes, there were amazing innovations but our pedagogy demands so much more that cannot fully be expressed online only. Participant A concedes that the loss was clear and continues,

> If people cannot move out of their space and into another space, the learning doesn't happen, they cannot communicate across boundaries, we cannot play, we cannot create a safe space. The transformative agenda of our pedagogy just cannot happen when people do not feel safe…We also need to be able to take risks to open up, to transform and to effect the change we speak of. Without safety, we can't do that (Participant A).

In 2020 Participant E dignified the creation of a safe space as a core element of our pedagogy− implying that our pedagogical responsibility is to make the learning environment safe and accessible in all the senses of the word. The findings illuminate the

inability of educators and students to control and manage the safety online, rendering that we have not met the objectives of the pedagogy. I stand by the notion that even the loss of one aspect is a significant loss and no one disposition of the pedagogy has more value than the other.

It was captivating that three of the participants, before answering the question, like defence lawyers stating their final arguments before the court, had to first recount their earlier descriptions of the pedagogy and then recall what was relatively achieved before offering their view on why it cannot be honoured online. The choice to respond in this way can be summed up by Adair in Lederman (2020) as follows: throughout the period they have been exhausted by the process and their efforts did fall short but equally, they experienced exhilaration because their joint expertise made the pivot possible. It is therefore only natural to respond with the pros and cons in mind before reaching the dreaded reality of the conclusion. But it also bears recognition of the extreme mental fortitude to persevere under these straining circumstances and that warrants defence.

Participant D in particular begins with a statement that as a department, we really achieved ground breaking and effective work. The participant then gives an example of the learning breakthrough,

> For one or two of our students, you can see the robustness that they carry and in some instances, they have a sharper understanding of theory and a greater appreciation of certain elements that sit in a praxis space (Participant D).

In page 119, I described a normal class encounter and stated that only one 45-minute lesson a week was dedicated to Reading and Writing. Although we would refer back to theory in the more practical sessions, I must admit that my robustness of theory would be more in preparation for exams or placements. Still, to say that we would regurgitate theory during the practice was not the case. So, for online learning to result in students now having a sharper understanding of theory than before (and yes at the expense of practice) makes for a fascinating swap. This aspect is worthy of more sustainable practice. Participant D also believes that because we could not be fully embodied online, we have not honoured the moral groundings of what we deem our critical pedagogy to be.

Participant E responds as follows,

> Students need to collaborate with one another in the field. Lecturers need to observe students in the field. No school access meant no practical exam. The fact that students lived in four different provinces meant no witnessing them in practice. Without experiential learning moments that become intensive reflective experiences, the practice will be flawed (Participant E).

Sharing a mutual sentiment, Loughran in Caollai (2020) also questioned how we can possibly assess things we are not seeing physically. Overtime, he realised that it simply meant adopting a new creative approach to each setback, to the best of his ability. While Participant E shares valid concerns they have also shown moments when they overcame challenges adaptively and creatively. The findings drive the idea that there is no fixed response and the nature of experimentation meant that strategies and viewpoints were ever evolving. Contrastingly Participant B accentuates that they "just want to do away with the whole online thing". Even though they also offer an appreciation of the skills development and learning about "what is synchronous and asynchronous teaching?" and the overall diversifications of student learning and educators' practice, they explain that it would probably be better to "at least be asynchronous or be half online and half on campus".

Lapitan et al. (2021) warn that although asynchronous learning promotes a positive learning environment, with this method alone, students cannot get instant feedback and message from the educator and vice-versa. This may also lead to students feeling disconnected from their instructors and be less motivated. In this regard the findings have warranted me to play devil's advocate. What it reveals is that even though the participant has been continually resistant to ERT, they have learnt to embrace the alternatives and look to a future that does not discard everything they have attained thus far.

Participant A also mentions that we have certainly achieved many feats and some of them can be retained, however the digital divide and its consequence on resources and the differences in learning amongst students have been too disruptive to our efforts.

Earlier on, I reflected that this season was marked by challenges to our democracy and Carr, Jaffer and Smuts (2009) point out that power is an integral component in education. Thus, one makes the connection that all the events of the pandemic, the protest action, the effects of the digital divide and the feelings of frustration between educators and students had a lot to do with power. I now question who really held the power over the past two years. Yes, we were incredibly empowered, but the oppression was equally felt from all sides. Even the privileged students with internet access and a comfortable home environment were, to a certain extent, oppressed because they had to sacrifice their learning capabilities to meet their peers' needs. Everyone was affected. So, what is the ideal? Seeing that we could not honour the integrity of our pedagogy fully online, what now?

Research in the literature review advocated for the potential of VR and AR technologies in achieving the collaborative and immersive intentions of the study. Judging by the realities of an untameable digital divide, the findings thus far have seemingly thrown VR and AR technologies out of the window. Loughran in Caollai (2020) states that there have been big debates about automation coming into the classroom and those conversations are largely technophobic. The findings convey that perhaps we are not technophobic but rather, extremely resource-conscious. He highlights that one of the biggest issues is that these technologies reduce all knowledge to information and it loses that other dimension, the professional transmission of knowledge that gives it meaning. The other side of it is that we often times expect technology to solve all of the problems of teaching and it never will (Caollai, 2020). Hence, 2021 saw Drama for Life and its educators reeling for a moment on campus with their students and when that moment presented itself, the answer seemed increasingly obvious. We cannot do without physical contact.

Participant E expressed that both in 2020 and now again in 2021, we urgently need to move toward a blended learning mode – especially because our physical interactions are irreplaceable. According to Lapitan et al. (2021) the blended online learning strategy is deemed to be the most practical method to adapt as this combines the advantages of synchronous and asynchronous strategies. The main motivation in choosing the blended strategy is to increase the student's participation in their own learning process rather than

quietly sitting during a synchronous discussion. In the Wits PLT they envisaged that the move to a blended provision would help educators and students retain many of the positive learnings during the ERT and this will include a variety of the following:

> Opportunities for students to access educational materials, including videos and recorded presentations, in their own time and multiple times, participation in online discussion forums and chats with other students and the lecturer, online assistance from tutors, frequent assessment tasks with the possibility of rapid feedback to students, and options for submitting assessment tasks in a variety of formats and using a variety of media and devices (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020c: 2).

Literature has shown that while a blended approach certainly allows for a more beneficial mix of modalities and takes the diverse students groups into consideration, it has to address the specificities of the pedagogy and represent its true intents. A way to control one aspect of students' environments to suit the blend would be to require that they at least be in Johannesburg during the academic programme. Furthermore, to encourage consistent attendance, educators are to carefully plan out the activities that require physical presence in class and those that require online presence (Ischebeck, 2020). Based on the findings, it would be an injustice to only leave theory for online and practical for laboratories, as it will regurgitate the oppressive COVID-19 narrative. This will result in a pattern of disengaged students and stunted learning. Consequently, an acknowledgement of a blend is the acceptance that we cannot abandon the technologically based work we have put in.

Participant B clarifies that even though they were resistant to online learning, they have learnt to adopt and embrace a resilience pedagogy. The participant continues,

> The human being and the humanness is what we should fight to keep for the future. I'm not saying we should do away with everything we have learnt so far but we need to be careful with how we choose to align our work with technology. Whatever we do, we cannot lose the plot and we need to be able to go back to our ways of being human (Participant B).

Participant E further explains that like their development of Playback Theatre for the online space, the possibilities are endless and supports that the blend or continued online trajectory should be dynamic,

> …unless our practice can be taught as an online methodology then there could be potential. However, we must be able to create a unique online curriculum and match it with online practice. We must be able to teach, learn and practice fully online. There has to be Equal Digital Access and this means Equal connectivity, Equal devices and Equal literacy (Participant E).

The words that scream out to me are humanity and equality. A utopia that should be realised is one that, like the pedagogy promotes, is embedded in the principles of humanity. This was also symbolically outlined in the rationale on page 24. The findings are a call for us to keep our commitments to a human-centred learning and teaching at the forefront. After all, our pedagogy rests on the human-centric experience and it is for the purpose of the human that we do our work (Nebe in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe, 2022). Another aspect of humanness is the well-being of students and staff. The findings are in favour of even a partial return, and this may assist with restoring the cognitive, emotional and social wellbeing of educators and students, that is directly related to engagement and achievement (Steelcase Learning, 2020).

We have seen how mental health issues were on the rise as a result of the pandemic and our pedagogy has been a meeting point to address some occurrences. A return to campus and each other makes for a return to our pedagogy. Therefore, the findings persuade that a utopia is one that honours the integrity of the people who our pedagogy was designed for and, if we cannot reach them due to data, we will have to push through until we can assemble again in person. Participant D suggests that an ideal situation is one where we can return fully. Especially considering the digital divide, the participant adds,

> We aren't ready yet for participants and our clients to be fully online. For the training of a professional, coming back is absolutely necessary. But also integrating an online component to our courses is equally necessary. If I had all that power, I would suggest that core methods are taught and we

> have boot camps with an online component. Internationally, it has become a requirement but in our particular South African context where the socio-economic realities that are still a shadow from apartheid are still a reality…uh…it would be an injustice to impose it (Participant D).

Participant A imagines that it will only be possible to do Applied Drama and Theatre in an online space, if the space on the other side of the screen can be made reliable, open and accessible. They are convinced that government and stakeholders should be strategizing how to make connectivity reliable and accessible and ensure that students can come onto campus so that "we can have some form of control… like the ability to have the camera open." The data is indicative of the acceptance of technology-based learning and there has been an embrace of the thoughts that our learning will have a technological aspect to it post pandemic. This is a good sign because it shows that there were numerous revolutionary additions to the pedagogy and the practice thereof. Dixson reminds us that the clear path to student engagement is not about the type of activity or assignment but the "multiple ways of creating meaningful communication and most importantly-making connections" (2010: 8).

An ideal for Participant C is one where there is freedom of choice and freedom to learn. In the words of the participant, students should be able to exercise "freedom to choose how I want to learn, where I access my learning and what I make of my learning" and we as educators should also have the freedom to choose how best to honour our practice. We should have the freedom to learn without barriers of the digital divide or barriers to the learning. The latter, I identify to be the pedagogy's driving force. I deeply resonate with this offering by the participant because, as touched on earlier, the pandemic has been a power struggle. From the lockdown restrictions challenging our freedom to the chains of the digital divide and the mental enslavement, our humanity was confined. As bell hooks (1994) writes, "education is the practice of freedom" and without practical and effective solutions to narrow the digital divide, we won't all be free, online.

> As David Livingstone (1987) points out, if critical pedagogy is to fulfil its mandate of creating truly liberating social change, it needs to not only engage more complex layers of ideological formations but also the dynamics of cultural power (Chinyowa in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe, 2022: 75).

Honouring a critical Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy that is living and commits itself to the practices of freedom, transformation and education, according to the research data, means being able to access it freely. It also means we relentlessly deconstruct the powers that bar our entry into its experience. Houlihan and Morris (2022) bring in Nicholson's (2015) linkages of applied theatre to citizenship and highlight that the pandemic has displaced our abilities to effectively contribute to the process of social change. I resonate deeply with this because of the exclusivity that was bred by the digital divide.

Therefore, the research data thus far has not only re-defined my understanding of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy but the participants and the department have demonstrated a heightened finesse and progressive stance at shaping the pedagogy and their practice. Even though the findings conclude that we could not honour the integrity of our complete pedagogy online, the measures of adaptability, creativity and innovation in the face of the chaos were undeniable.

5.5. Approaching 2022 and beyond

As I write this, it is November 2021 and as expected, the staff and students of Wits University anticipate the release of the Plan for Teaching and Learning for 2022. In the beginning of this chapter, I drew attention to Wits' PLT for 2021 that proposed a blended learning approach, However, due to the ongoing pandemic waves, 2021 saw ERT mode continue. Even though students could learn from residences and widely returned to the Wits surrounds, there was no physical and contact class interactions. Progressively, the findings then indicated that only later in 2021, could students access the university, and explore some interactions and placements, under very strict and controlled conditions.

> We now have an opportunity to reflect on what we have learnt since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020 and, in the context of our approved 2020-2024 learning and teaching plan, formulate our 2022 learning and teaching plan (University of the Witwatersrand, 2021: 3).

By December 2021, the Omicron variant's infections were less severe and although the national state of disaster was extended into January 2022 (Staff Writer, 2021), the restrictions were significantly eased and institutions were free to consider a varied return to campus. Thus, Wits University, in their PLT firmly declared that the 2022 academic

year would transition into a fully blended mode. The university cites Joosten et al. (2021) for inspiring this model of blended learning and they define it as “instruction that blends technological, temporal, spatial and pedagogical dimensions to create actualized learning” (University of the Witwatersrand, 2021: 3). The four-tiered approach is broken down as follows,

- “technological” ranges from no or lean technology to rich technology
- “temporal” ranges from real time or synchronous to over time or asynchronous
- “spatial” ranges from same or near space to remote or distant
- “pedagogical” ranges from passive or instructor-centred to active or student-centred (University of the Witwatersrand, 2021: 3).

According to Joosten et al. (2021), the strategic thinking needed in blending allows instructional designers and educators to carefully align the learning objectives with the modalities and technologies that are more effective for students, with the opportunity to still come to campus or meet in real time. They conclude that the strategic integration will allow for something greater and better than a random mix and match of activities and this enhances the quality of the learning offered by the institution. The findings have in fact projected that this approach will serve the learning needs of students and meet the embodied and interactive pedagogical intentions. Following their justifications of the blended learning mode, Wits University made some of following suggestions to staff and students,

1. All courses need to have a course site on Ulwazi.
2. As part of good online pedagogy, synchronous sessions should be utilised for interactive sessions with students.
3. Course design and pedagogy should help students feel a sense of belonging and be inclusive of students who are differently-able and who have diverse needs.
4. Course design should promote considerable student engagement, through a variety of activities and media (University of the Witwatersrand, 2021: 4-6)

The university further encourages that students be given the opportunity to participate in in-person experiential learning which may include practicals in laboratories, studio work

and field trips, as far as possible. This decision implies that the university has seen that under the circumstances, neither a full return to campus nor a full online teaching and learning model will be feasible and as such, the choices should remain student centred. Crucially, any insistence by Wits University to have some students present in class and others logging in online simultaneously, would not allow the educator to select the best learning medium and approach. The data intensity would also be a nightmare to deal with.

In an email to the entire institutional community in December 2021, Wits University announced their adoption of a Mandatory Vaccination Policy and urged all members of the institutional community to be vaccinated by March 2022 in order to enter the premises or access facilities. This decision resulted in dispute.

Wits SRC president Cebolenkosi Khumalo is reported in Bhengu (2022) to have been adamant that the mandatory vaccinations violated the rights of individuals who do not want to get vaccinated and instead, the university should have adopted a pro-choice approach. As a result of this, Khumalo was convinced that protest action would ensue because it would be the only way to get their grievances heard. Just going back to the conversations on page 212 around power, democracy and freedom – this mandatory policy is embedded in destructive and destabilising principles. Moreover, to say that unvaccinated members of the Wits community will not be given their right to learn or access accommodation, shows a lack of ethical and moral ground and brings up the pre-1994 injustices in a different form.

For further data collection purposes, I attended Drama for Life's Strategic Planning Session for the 2022 academic year as observer. Regarding the vaccination policy the HOD criticised the university on its actions and decisions as there were two sides of the spectrum to consider: pro-vaccine and anti-vaccine groups. She mentions that as a department, protest action will be necessary and in living out the essence of our pedagogy, it is only right to face and address these oppressive structures. On the 6th of July 2022, it was announced that the university had temporarily suspended the policy – based on scientific evidence and the changes to national legislation and regulations.

This gives the impression that not only were their "community members" not in mind when creating the policy in the first place, but even their grievances and viewpoints alone were

not enough to suspend it. For an institution that ceases to exist without community of staff and students, it is quite disappointing how insignificant their voices are. The powers that be in the institution could benefit from an Applied Drama and Theatre intervention.

On that note and in line with the blended learning strategy of Wits University, Drama for Life will be adopting a 5P rhythm plan for their academic programme for 2022. In conversation with Dr Janse van Vuuren, she explained the plan as follows,

> So we are going to have a range of online and offline activities this year and I am absolutely thrilled…We have come up with a 5P rhythm plan for the semester and P1 is Prepare and we would like to meet with students face-to-face and take them through orientation and what they can expect for the year, you know. Then P2 stands for Play. So we've broken the 5P into phases and weeks. So in the first 5 weeks of term, we follow the timetable in person…for about 2 to 3 sessions per course. The third P is for Praxis and for 6 weeks we will combine online teaching with some lab or field work… but educators must plan carefully, when they will be doing what… P4 stands for Perform… we come back to campus and we prepare for the practical exams but following the timetable still and lastly… P5 is Process and this is the 3 weeks dedicated to written exams and journal submissions.

Mostly related to the student's journey, Prepare includes the application and audition process as part of registering to become a student and then in our Practice we join the community and experience the work. In terms of Play, students absorb online material and apply it to their community practice and in Performing, they reflect and rehearse on what they learned and present and perform what they found. Finally, in Process, they write about their work and breathe out deeply. This 5P plan demonstrates a meeting of the characteristic classifications of blended learning because of the integrated online and offline structure. Literature in Chapter 2 has also motivated educators to adopt a more fluid approach to the blend instead of compartmentalising the two and this is visible in the plan.

Morant (2021) notes that educators now perceive that education in a post-pandemic world must amalgamate the advantages of online instruction with important pedagogical goals associated with in-person teaching. As such, Dr Janse van Vuuren expressed that there

are advantages to working from home and online but our work cannot thrive online only. Therefore 2022 would be about adjusting and finding new lines for teaching and working differently. The 5P rhythm is juxtaposed by an equally processual STORI frame. Janse van Vuuren explains the frame as follows,

- S-Strategic Intent: I/We Figure out what is the summons in the situation that I/We will respond to.
- T-Transition: I/We transition across the threshold.
- O-Open experimentation: I/We overcome obstacles as I/We test and apply teaching.
- R-Reflection: I/We return to reflect on the learning and remember/resurrect our strategic intentions.
- I-Integration: I integrate the learning into a new identity as artist/facilitator/therapist/researcher.

This frame, I believe will be vital to the revival of the self-reflexive student and educator throughout the learning and teaching. It will also be interesting to observe the implementation of this structure and the staff and students' experiences of the multimodal mix. The findings having further described that students were unable to reflect indicates that any method going forward should be in the interest of rebuilding the reflective lens which our pedagogy is deeply rooted in. So, at the Strategic Planning session, every educator was required to share a plan of action for their particular course in 2022. Their plan had to address the following prompts:

1. What are the main outcomes of your course?
2. Which kinds of activities work best face to face and which online?
3. How can you use the 5P rhythm we suggested to advance the course outcomes?
4. What ideas do you have for reducing how labour intensive this teaching could be without compromising quality and pedagogy?
5. What questions/concerns are you still grappling with? (Strategic Planning Notes, 25 January 2022)

Connected to the ongoing strategies throughout 2020 and 2021, these prompts appear to be requiring the staff to: 1) keep the specificities of the pedagogy in mind and ensure that the curriculum best represents it; 2) remain cognisant of the conditions of the pandemic and maintain a solution-driven and creative stance; and 3) make the teaching

and learning accessible, exercising care and prioritising the human-centric experience. Sharing their thoughts for the new year, Participant D implores that as a department, we need to question what it means to train professionals for the world we live in now and this will require a pedagogical revival. Another consenting participant in the meeting expands on Participant D's question, "there are wonderful gifts that we have received online, how do we still hold onto them this year?"

Accordingly, I foresee that the 2022 academic year will follow this path of pedagogical renewal and revival but this will mean that they hold onto the valuable lessons of the past two years and improve on their practice. With the change in dynamic of learning and the work-life balance of students and staff, I also imagine that a return to campus may present further questions on the feasibility and sustainability of full contact or blended learning going forward. Participant A suggests that it might seem easy to only engage with praxis and practice offline, and theory and material online, but this type of model would negatively impact the students' holistic development.

On "keeping the gifts we received online", the participant states that students should still be trained with the tools of facilitating both online and offline processes. Participant B is also excited for the prospects of returning to more experiential learning methods and realised that students had lost confidence in their capabilities because of the challenges they faced in learning remotely. The participant is of a strong belief that there is potential to further develop their own teaching methods in the online spaces so that "we become true 21st century teachers".

Participant C states that because interdisciplinary courses hold different nuances, an overlapping of offline and online approaches will not be as bad as they initially thought. However, they worry that the university's ongoing streamlining of Ulwazi across all faculties might not be feasible to Applied Drama and Theatre courses and that this may ultimately discourage their use of online teaching and learning models. Shifflet in Lederman (2020) explains that after all of this, we might reach a tipping point where technology truly becomes embedded into our educational approaches as the new normal. She adds that online learning has untapped potential to support student achievement and if used effectively, can produce a future of multifaceted professionals.

The findings pertaining to the 2022 academic year confirms that educators' attempts to implement a blended approach might be the answer to the questions of the study. It would be interesting to discover how their approaches to 2022 improved student performance, the overall academic endeavour and fostered a more dynamic, positive teaching and learning environment. However, like Participant C cautions, the findings promote the notion that if the digital narrative is not positively changed and the LMS still caters for certain types of pedagogies over others, a return to face-to-face could be the better alternative.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter attempted to present, analyse and theorise the findings of the study related to the 2021 academic year and offered a glimpse into Drama for Life's proposed 2022 academic year. Different to Chapter 4, I used thematic analysis to present and discuss the findings and it covered 5.2. the introduction new LMS, Ulwazi and the participants' experience of it. Herein, I addressed the mitigation of the digital divide which was no different to 2020. In section 5.3. I established the continued strategies of the five participants as they explored participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion, online, and in 5.4., I offered a summary of conclusions regarding the efficacy of online learning platforms in supporting our pedagogy and the participants shared their ideas of a pedagogical utopia. Section 5.5. provided an overview of Wits University and Drama for Life's plans for the 2022 academic year and concluded with the participants' closing statements on the future of our pedagogy and education.

Therefore, the findings of the study in 2021 concluded that a blended learning approach or full return to campus may allow educators and the department to stand a better chance of honouring the integrity of the pedagogy with all its facets. The findings have also emphasised that without the cohesive and practical implementation of strategies to bridge the digital divide, even blended learning might not be feasible to continue. The findings highlighted that while the pandemic compromised our pedagogy and disorganised the learning of students, there have been revolutionary and monumental improvements on pedagogical practice for the future – particularly toward a digitised future. The final

chapter of this thesis will make conclusions and recommendations, not only for ongoing multi-modal pedagogical practice but for contributions in future research and publications.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Introduction

This study aimed to investigate the collective efforts and strategies by Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators as they endeavoured to transfer the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum to online learning platforms due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic's Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning period. It also sought to discover what role the digital divide played in their efforts and how the inability to mitigate it threatened the essential aspects of the pedagogy.

The findings of the study do not only cater for a South African context but extend to other countries who practice a global Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. Even though their digital situations may be more advanced, the research exposes the pedagogical losses in online spaces, providing departments and practitioners with an opportunity to reflect and implement accordingly. Although the move to online learning platforms have opened up new possibilities for our practice, the findings have concluded that physical interaction cannot be replicated and replaced online. Thus, an equitable balance of online and offline approaches is deemed most necessary for the pedagogy and for reaching its characteristically marginalised communities.

As this thesis draws to a close, I will provide a brief personal reflection on the overall study and make conclusions on the findings in order of the research questions. I will also outline the limitations that presented themselves in the undertaking and offer solutions. Finally, I will propose recommendations, not only for future studies but that also contribute to the knowledge for Higher Education role players, Applied Drama and Theatre based departments and practitioners as they embark on a post-pandemic teaching and learning journey.

6.2. Personal Reflection

When I think back to how the inspiration for this study erupted, I am overwhelmed by this feeling of intense curiosity, a shadow of fear but mostly fascination with what would become of our Applied Drama and Theatre practice. I now realise that my Masters research was unknowingly prophetic to this journey and by some very welcome default, also connected. In my Master's research, I warned that because we are moving into the Fourth Industrial Revolution, a more digitised learning would result in the diminishment of soft or interpersonal skills. The findings concluded that in traditional teaching environments, Drama in Education strategies could be used to address the soft skill gap and recommended relevant educational role players to pay attention to the potentially serious losses in their plans to migrating teaching and learning to paperless or online formats (Mokoena, 2019).

Fast forward to three years later, we were thrust by the pandemic into a situation where we had to rapidly face this very technological revolution that I imagined and here again, I was fascinated by what threats this migration would pose to an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. In the former, the pedagogy was the solution to threats of digitisation and in the latter, the pedagogy needed saving from the threats of digitisation.

Over the past two years, I have observed how Drama for Life and its educators tried to salvage the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy as it was shaken and faced a dismantling – not only by the pandemic as a whole but also the digital divide. From the onset of the curious journaling and finally making the decision to formally undertake the research, I knew that the documentation of our process and the adjustment of a characteristically embodied and practical pedagogy to online spaces would serve as a valuable contribution to an evolving pedagogy. My view of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy was always shaped by Heathcote's[22] and Taylor's[23] theory and practice and

[22] Cited and captured in Wagner (1999a) and Bolton (1998), Dorothy Heathcote was a renowned educator who used drama as a tool for social learning and transformation, contributing to the Applied Drama and Theatre methodology.

[23] Phillip Taylor is known for his contributions to Applied Theatre and its transformational agenda. His work has been referred to in the Conceptual Framework of this thesis.

now it has been re-defined by African practitioners and even more significantly, in an online setting. What is more, in an African context where the digital divide has suppressed us, we valiantly showed up despite our inadequacies. Taking our pedagogy to non-traditional settings has a whole new meaning and this study challenged this notion, this classification.

I am extremely appreciative of my role as teaching assistant in 2020 and had a microscopic perspective when the pandemic broke out. Not only did it flex and strengthen my ethnographic muscle but it honed my researcher skill because of the challenges of having to decipher the ambiguity of my roles and to maintain neutrality. From the conceptual framework that deeply grounded my knowledge of the pedagogy, to the voices in literature teasing out the emergent possibilities and the participants who shared their journey with me, I have developed a deeper understanding of Applied Drama and Theatre, Drama for Life's process of building future practitioners and researchers, and the realities of the broader undercurrents of the digital divide.

Therefore, the recommendations that will be made later in the chapter come from this global and holistic perspective regarding our pedagogy, its capabilities and limitations online and offline. While the findings have shown that certain aspects of the pedagogy can be continued online, it cannot be ignored that equally important aspects are compromised. Admitting this was difficult because, although I had witnessed the possibilities and the resilience of the department, students and educators, it was only at a partial achievement. The reality is that the entire pedagogy cannot do without human contact and interaction. The findings indicated that the intentions of participation and collaboration, praxis and immersions could be negotiated to certain levels but their experiences in isolation did not serve the pedagogical needs well. The following section will draw conclusions of the research questions.

6.3. Responding to the research questions

The study sought to explore five key research questions by means of relevant literature and data that was gathered from semi-structured interviews, participant observation and field notes and documentation during the 2020 and 2021 academic years, when Drama for Life at the University of the Witwatersrand School of Arts grappled with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.3.1. Essential aspects of the characteristic Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy

Regarding the first research question, findings concluded that an epistemological Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy is a relational set of practices that is rich in dialogue and thrives on deepened exchanges through the use of drama and theatre techniques (Freebody et al. 2018; Nicholson 2005; Barnes and Coetzee, 2014). Relating its form and function to the work of Drama for Life, founder Warren Nebe in Barnes, Beck Carter and Nebe (2022) explained that an Applied Drama and Theatre learning was mutually shared and negotiated by those present in the educational space deconstructing colonial forms of education.

Based on the participants' definitions, the findings concluded that the pedagogy is primarily embodied and participants express themselves through interactive and contact-based activities. Additionally, any Applied Drama and Theatre process elicits safety through questioning and reflection. At the heart of its human-centred approaches, it promotes equality and transformation in the educational encounter. Another key conclusion made in the research deduced that the educational experience is to be accessed by all and that the work benefits marginalised communities. However, the digital divide posed a fundamental threat to this concept of access. This brings me to the findings of the second research question.

6.3.2. Core principles of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy that are identifiably seriously threatened by the move to online learning platforms

The digital divide completely implodes any attempts to be synchronous and even though the findings showed that students were given devices and data, Wits LMSs, Sakai and Ulwazi, were incapable of supporting the practical components of our pedagogy and it purported the passive banking model of education (Freire, 1970). A threat to the academic endeavour as a whole, the digital divide was characterised by disruptive home environments and this meant that students could not effectively engage in their learning, and educators had to cut down and simplify the pedagogy. The online learning experience was placed at a disadvantage as compared to pre-pandemic learning and in turn, the full expressions of the pedagogy became fragmented.

Most crucially, this study demonstrated that our inability to operate with, in and through our bodies was great loss to the pedagogical experience. Physical human connection was lost and embodiment became individualised, isolated while educators and students could not engage with the sensory and energy stimulating effects of multiple bodies in one space. Due to the digital divide and its limitations on collective synchronicity, educators could not even attempt to explore the virtual possibilities of existing collaborative embodied experiences. The inability to be in person has also resulted in the loss of organic participation and collaboration, the practical aspect of praxis and immersion in social and fictional contexts.

6.3.3. Honouring the pedagogical intentions of participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion in social contexts amidst the challenges of the digital divide

In attempts to negotiate the three intentions of focus in the study and answering research question three, the findings revealed that educators and students were not all confident in their online proficiencies prior to the ERT trajectory, hence my proposal that institutions

should prioritise ongoing training. In response to their discomfort and dissatisfaction with the situation, students became resistant to LMSs and a multi-platform approach was deemed best practice. Findings also concluded that because the period was marked by experimentation, all strategies had to keep student accessibility, connectivity and their comprehension of the curricular content in mind throughout. Participation and collaboration have been found to be a show-and-tell model and depending on student's access, responses and engagements became delayed. Even though the educators would place students in smaller groups and buddy systems, the findings concluded that unless students be allowed to gather in-person, the intention is difficult to achieve.

The findings illuminated that the inability for students to "reflect upon their own action" was a huge disservice to the characteristic notions of achieving praxis (Freire, 1979). Because learning happened remotely, the embodied aspects were observed to be individualised and the connection to their world and the theory, I deduced, became separated and not integrated. Due to the limitations of the LMSs and the inability to use Zoom simultaneously, the findings confirmed that collective practice and interaction suffered a sacrificial relegation. However, storytelling, memory and the use of other pedagogical gifts such as conference and festivals, were found to leverage the missing aspects.

Finally, the findings exposed that due to the inability to fully engage with schools and other stakeholder communities, immersion in social contexts was not achieved online. The educators also shared that because students were overly immersed in their home situations and the need to minimise their data usage, they could not be completely immersed in either the fictional or the online context. Because communities and stakeholders are also affected by these very data challenges, the findings confirmed that the pedagogy could not reach them and therefore, we could not honour the integrity of our pedagogy online.

6.3.4. Discoveries made and lessons learnt in 2020 and 2021 for a post-pandemic future

Validating the viability of a blended approach to teaching and learning, the data consistently stressed the need for a return to campus (even partially), in order to honour the core pedagogical intentions. The findings exposed the politics related to achieving the pedagogical intentions and revealed that the online learning process was democratically unjust, had oppressive tendencies and highlighted the power struggles across all role players during the pandemic. Moreover, it warrants a discussion on the overly stretched mental aptitude of the departmental staff and students and the overwhelming fatigue and burnout caused by the conditions of working under unprecedented conditions; not to mention institutional mechanisms that made it difficult to achieve the pedagogical objectives and the constant battle between meeting the pedagogical demands and progressing with the academic programme at all costs.

A pedagogical utopia is one that places the human endeavour at the core of practice but more importantly, ensures that students are not barred from their human right to learn in an equal and progressive environment – as do their educators.

The core intentions of the pedagogy were found to be partially achieved online and therefore, in commitments to produce well-versed professionals and future practitioners, the findings concluded that an appropriate balance would be feasible. We certainly cannot discard the discoveries and adjustments made in the online space and as such, a more sustainable and revolutionary decision would be to continually pursue a mix of modes.

Consequently, based on the findings, until the gap of the digital divide is closed and Ulwazi becomes more diverse and pedagogically-conscious we run a risk of completely returning to full face-to-face again.

6.4. Limitations of the research

Firstly, the research did not involve students or request their inputs. This may pose as a limitation because their opinions of their learning experience and academic endeavour during a pandemic, and their views on the effectiveness of educator and departmental strategies would have been valuable. However, due to the large student population across all year groups and the changeover in each year, the data set would have been unmanageable. Instead, a more appropriate focus of the study became the specific five Applied Drama and Theatre educators who are primary responders and have expert knowledge of the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy. This intimate group of participants provided an in-depth and microscopic focus, not only on the pedagogy but their evolving practice as African practitioners.

Secondly, as seen in Appendix A and B, I did not ask the participants the same set of questions in each year. Closer to the end of 2021, I discovered that there were no significant changes to the institution's management of the digital divide or their teaching and learning strategies; and that would have resulted in a repeat of data. Also, the questions in 2020 were relevant to the emergence of the pandemic and in 2021, participants were already accustomed to it. This warranted different questions. I found that taking on a more reflective stance in 2021 allowed for a more organic and global view of the pandemic and their own progress.

Thirdly, I struggled to find relevant literature especially within an Applied Drama and Theatre or broader Performing Arts perspective regarding how other educators and practitioners migrated their curricula online. Also scarce, was research from an African perspective regarding teaching and learning embodied pedagogies within the digital divide. The absence of this critical research limited my ability to engage, contrast and interrogate our own efforts as opposed to other fields of study. This does present exciting prospects for further research and this will be discussed in the following section.

6.5. Suggestions for further research

Toward the end of Chapter 5, I realised that there is so much more to the Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy as well as its teaching and learning practice that cannot merely be designated to one or even a mix of modalities. It is a rich pedagogy and the sacrifices due to lack of institutional support and functional incompatibility of the LMSs are destructive to its form and our efforts. Although we are headed toward a post-pandemic new normal, the findings implied that an ongoing attitude of adaptation and sustainability would be to retain the productive gifts from the pandemic. Unfortunately, the digital divide is one relentless obstacle to achieving our wildest pedagogical dreams.

Therefore, an extension of this study could take the following directions (to name a few):

- Based on the experience of the proposed 2022 academic year, in what ways did blended learning or the 5P rhythm (as opposed to full online) honour the integrity of our pedagogy?
- How differently did the Drama for Life and their Applied Drama and Theatre educators negotiate participation and collaboration, praxis and immersion within this mix of both online and contact modes?
- What are the students' learning experiences of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy that is engaged with from a blended approach?
- Following the end of the pandemic, what have become the markers and affordances of the progressive Applied Drama and Theatre teaching and learning strategy, and what of our pedagogy has been healed from the scars of the pandemic?

Additionally, this research is but a drop in the ocean of emergent conversations and future academic contributions around these important topics of interest and investigation. The pandemic has changed the course of education forever and more research about these changes are needed – especially as it relates to embodied, collaborative, praxis integrated and immersive teaching modes.

6.6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from and expand on the suggestions provided by the five Applied Drama and Theatre educators over the past two years and my researcher insights. These recommendations serve to address a future approach to the teaching and learning of the pedagogy, and invite the powers that be to consider our plea. As stated in the rationale, many like-minded and like-practising people from departments far and wide can refer to the findings of this study to better their approaches or make further contributions to the conversation. The key recommendations related to this study have been identified as follows:

6.6.1. Learning Management Systems

According to Bentley in Lederman (2020), it will be important for institutions to evaluate and improve their teaching strategies by using post-mortem feedback from all its community members. The findings concluded that Sakai and Ulwazi were counter-productive to the efforts of Applied Drama and Theatre educators and that the resistance by students was not only about functionality and access (which Wits thought they improved through Ulwazi). But it was largely towards the incapacity to experience the entire pedagogy therein.

Therefore, in order to promote an equalised learning experience across all faculties, institutions, instructional designers and relevant specialists in app development will be required to develop a more creative and innovative configuration of LMSs, that specifically cater for the translations of diverse methodologies onto these platforms.

In the literature review, Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) are introduced for their successful exploration with aspects of process drama in the virtual space. Other literature by Janse van Vuuren and Freisleben (2020), Dilella (2020) and Hepplewhite (2022) shows that Applied Drama and Theatre methods are interactive and can be manipulated for the online space. Seeing that LMSs are already immersive, there are opportunities for integrating existing Applied Drama and Theatre techniques onto a more interactive and creatively designed LMS. This may yield a more dynamic blended learning experience

for a pedagogy such as ours, without losing the value of embodied and in-person participation. After all, this would be that tipping point where technology is embedded into our practice and vice versa. Granted, we cannot do without human contact and interaction but in the interests of sustaining a multimodal curriculum, LMSs require rigorous adaptations for each pedagogy.

It is not enough to skirt around the digital divide with zero-rating solutions here and there, but in the commitments to provide a quality higher education, institutions' Learning Management Systems should be built and developed with the South African context in mind. This will include a prioritisation of educator training and skills development in technology-based teaching practices going forward. That way, following extensive research on suitable proficiencies and technology affordances, institutions should ensure that their decisions keep the student learning at the fore.

6.6.2. Bridging the digital divide

Research in Chapter 2 highlights that if the pandemic happened about 10 to 15 years ago, we would not have survived it at all in terms of our then digital strides. Even though the digital divide has shown a gradual decrease over the years, the pandemic exposed our under preparedness to go fully online. It has also been stated that the digital divide is not only about devices and connectivity, but permeates into issues of access to food, running water and the politics of running a country (Mpungose, 2020; Van Dijk, 2020).

Atrey (2020) explains that online or blended learning needs more than the basics and the findings have emphasised this as well. Therefore, ongoing commitments to provide reliable broadband access are necessary as a national strategy. Funding institutions should include a device and data solution for students to undertake their academic programme. It should be made a requirement that all students have a compatible device and/or laptop to engage their online based learning and those who cannot afford it, be subsidised and supported accordingly. The same should go for staff. Educators should be supported in their attempts to prepare and implement a progressive pedagogy and this will demand extensive training, support and, where possible, increased funding to provide

a dynamic and high-quality educational experience. Zero-rating, device loans and data provisions by the institution certainly remedied the harsh nature of the divide however, the findings demonstrated that they were not sustainable.

6.6.3. Redefining an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy

Audrey Watters (2020) blogs that regardless of the monumental turning points in education, institutions have the opportunity to lead with greater humanity. In line with this, the findings illustrate an Applied Drama and Theatre's pedagogical need for human connection in order to initiate processes of social transformation and justice. Ongoing post-pandemic practices should be in support of a humanistic teaching and learning environment and as such Drama for Life HOD's statement "if we cannot teach one online, we will not teach any online" should be an ingrained principle of future practice. Creativity and innovation were beautiful products of the crisis however, they should remain cognisant of the students' learning conditions and the digital divide.

In a Drama for Life teaching staff meeting held in September 2022, it was shared that while the 5P model had its challenges, it presented exciting prospects around the department moving forward with blended learning. These challenges included inconsistent student attendance, students' feelings of being passive instead of active learners in the mix of online and in-person classes and the pressures of working from deadline to deadline due to the online learning format. Similarly, the staff had to acclimatise to the transition and foster a manageable scaffold between rich content delivery and giving students the freedom to choose how they learn. The nature of learning has also changed because of the dynamics of students' financial capacity to study full-time and access the physical campus. Moreover, the wide range of opportunities that the pandemic has offered in terms of the options to learn, opens up new meanings on the freedom to learn (Rogers, 1969).

Our future definitions of a typical Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy have to include our ability to practice in online and virtual spaces, as focused as we are able to in person. The more we encourage technological embeddedness in our work, is the more we open

ourselves to reach global and cross-cultural collaboration and participation. Now that Drama for Life and its Applied Drama and Theatre educators have extended the boundaries of the past, there are expansive prospects to gradually design more embodied and immerse experiences for the online spaces. Emerging research is showing the possibilities. Placements and interventions can also be designed with virtual components in mind so that we are not subdued by old ways of doing and in turn, we will continue in our agendas to deconstruct what may have become a “traditional” approach to our pedagogy. As long as the educational practice is not oppressive, students and educators exchange knowledges in a free and safe learning space, our pedagogy can be even more expansive.

In order to foster a more digitally-conscious pedagogy, Drama for Life and other embodied, collaborative and immersive based departments should try by all means to secure funding and financial partnerships for more data for students. This will increase the use of, and learnings with, video conferencing for remote based work. These attempts may have to be supplementary to the recommended efforts to institutions at large. Now that we know what has been lost over the past two years, may we take this moment to rebuild and revive. However, may we never neglect to continually question possibilities, push boundaries and consider what can still be birthed for future practitioners and pedagogical partakers to come.

6.7. Conclusion

In closing, I trust that this study captured this moment in history with integrity and as an Applied Drama and Theatre scholar, I am even more excited to see what the future holds for teaching and learning our pedagogy. The work to be done is still great and the journey ahead is unpredictable but, ours is to remain reflexive and highly conscious of the role our pedagogy plays in the greater scheme of life and our society. Therefore, in maintaining the integrity of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, with our humanitarian agenda in mind – we have to fight and adapt in order to keep it alive.

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Appendix A: Research Interview Questions for 2020 academic year

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS-2020
APPLIED DRAMA AND THEATRE EDUCATORS

These semi-structured interview questions are part of qualitative research for the paper titled: *A pandemic shakes our pedagogy: Attempts to honour the integrity of a South African tertiary institution's Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum in online learning platforms as a result of COVID-19.* The professional opinion and engagement of Applied Drama and Theatre Educators with the following questions will help the research in many ways. The researcher will be able to establish 1) the overall feelings around the movement to online learning, 2) the migration of the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum to online learning platforms, 3) Strategies employed in teaching the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum online or through multi modal platforms and, 4) The effectiveness of the strategies employed and the reception from students and 5) Overall challenges with teaching Applied Drama and Theatre online, as opposed to via contact. These interview questions may be conducted face-to-face, via email, telephonically or over Zoom etc. based on participant's availability and preference. As stipulated in the consent form and participation information sheet, all answers will be treated with confidentiality and will only be released as part of qualitative data findings.

1. What is your background in your field of expertise?
2. What year group(s) did you teach Applied Drama and Theatre to in 2020?
3. On a normal day, what does your contact teaching Applied Drama and Theatre lesson look like?
4. What was your overall reaction to COVID-19 and its effect on learning?
5. How confident were you with teaching online or remotely?
6. What were your feelings towards moving your curriculum to online learning or multi-modal platforms of teaching?
7. How did you experience this move (Academically, Digitally, Otherwise?)
8. What preparations or training did you receive for teaching online?
9. Which online platforms did you use to teach your students? (YouTube, Sakai/Wits-e, Zoom/Skype, WhatsApp, Other?)
   9.1. Which one of them were most effective for your teaching?
   9.2. Which one was the least effective for your teaching?
10. How has the digital divide impacted the process of migration to online learning (for yourself and your students)?
11. Is there a particular structure you follow in teaching online? What does it comprise of?
12. In your opinion, what are the core principles of the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum?
13. What are the threats posed by online learning to learning in this way?
14. Would you agree that praxis, collaboration and immersion in contexts are part of these principles?
15. What strategies did you employ in migrating these core principles to online learning?
    a) Praxis
    b) Collaboration
    c) Contextual Immersion
16. Have these strategies been effective? If yes or no, How so?
17. Briefly describe some of the challenges you encountered with teaching the curriculum online?
18. What are some of the discoveries you made with teaching the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum, online?
19. What are some of the successes you achieved with your teaching and using various online mediums?
20. If COVID-19 lockdown continued beyond 2021 and remote learning was to continue, what recommendations would you make for other educators and practitioners such as yourself in honouring the integrity of the full Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum online?

`Appendix B: Research Interview Questions for 2021 academic year

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
RSEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS-2021
APPLIED DRAMA AND THEATRE EDUCATORS

Research Title: A pandemic shakes our pedagogy: Attempts to honour the integrity of a South African tertiary institution's Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum in online learning platforms as a result of COVID-19.These interview questions may be conducted face-to-face, via email, telephonically or over Zoom etc. based on participant's availability and preference.

As stipulated in the consent form and participation information sheet, all answers will be treated with confidentiality and will only be released as part of qualitative data findings. Dear Applied Drama and Theatre Educator, thank you again for agreeing to take part in the study as an expert. Now that you have completed the 2021 academic year during the pandemic, please respond to the following questions around your experience of teaching the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum via online learning platforms, as a result of COVID-19's lockdown. Thank you for agreeing to take part in the study as an expert.

1. What Applied Drama and Theatre course(s) did you teach in 2021?
2. What changes of the following aspects did you find most effective in facilitating the teaching of your course(s) in 2021?
   2a. Learning Management System
   2b. Bridging the digital divide
3. What interesting discoveries and/or improvements did you make in encompassing each pedagogical intention below through your teaching as compared to 2020?
   3a. Immersion in social and fictional contexts.
   3b. Praxis
   3c. Participation and Collaboration
4. What were some of the difficulties you encountered with teaching Applied Drama and Theatre in 2021?
   4a. How did you overcome them?
5. In your opinion, do you think the Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum can be fully taught remotely/online? Why/Why not?
6. What do you envisage an ideal utopia where we would be able to honour the integrity of an Applied Drama and Theatre pedagogy, online?

Appendix C: Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Mokoena

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H20/11/43**
PROJECT TITLE	A pandemic shakes the pedagogy: Attempts to honour the integrity of a South African tertiary institution's Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum in online learning platforms as a result of COVID-19
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mrs M Mokoena
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Arts/
DATE CONSIDERED	20 November 2020
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Low
EXPIRY DATE	21 January 2024

DATE 22 January 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** J. Knight
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr P Janse Van Vuuren

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

Signature

26 01 2021
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix D: Peer Review Letter

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

DRAMA and PERFORMANCE STUDIES
Private Bag X01**;** Scottsville, 3209; PIETERMARITZBURG;
SOUTH AFRICA.
Telephone: 27 33 2605551

21st December 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I have been asked by Moratoa Mokoena PhD student number 545383 at Drama for Life Wits University and her supervisor, Dr Petro Janse van Vuuren, to give a peer opinion on an issue of possible bias in her thesis: "A pandemic shakes our pedagogy: Attempts to honour the integrity of a South African tertiary institution's Applied Drama and Theatre curriculum in online learning platforms as a result of COVID-19."

The issue of bias to be considered was expressed to me as follows:

> "As you may be aware, Dr Janse van Vuuren is the current DFL Head of Department and my supervisor. Upon reviewing the work, she realised that there could be questions around confirmation/observer/subjective bias during the examination of my thesis-that I had not explicitly addressed."

Steps taken so far have been:

> "We then sought counsel from the Ethics Committee Chair and she advised that in addition to the acknowledgement and reflection of this aspect in my introduction, method and discussion chapters—a member or peer review may be necessary."

Ms Mokoena has made the necessary additions to her thesis as requested. These additions can be found as follows:

Chapter 1: Intro page 11

Chapter 3: Research Method (pages 96-97, 104, and 112)

Chapter 4: page 171-172

Chapter 5: page 182, 195

I have also read through Ms Mokoena's thesis in its entirety and I am satisfied that she has an excellent understanding of the issue of bias in her work and has responded appropriately to the Ethics Committee's suggestions. She is able to stand back from her association with Drama for Life and presents her findings in a balanced manner, pointing out successes and failures in DFL's response to the need to present the pedagogy online. Her data is well supported by direct quotation of participants' responses to her research questions and from other literary and online sources. Her Literature Review shows wide and thorough reading and understanding of the concepts she is dealing with. Her Methodology Section also indicates that she understands the methodology used and has taken into account the issues of validity and bias.

In my opinion she has dealt with the perceived issue of bias effectively, and I do not find it a concern in my reading of her thesis.

Yours sincerely

Hazel Barnes

Professor Hazel Barnes
Senior Research Associate
Drama and Performance Studies
University of KwaZulu-Natal