

LeineRoebana Didactic and Creative Research Project

Michael Jahoda | in collaboration with LeineRoebana

Concept:

A collaborative didactic and creative research and development project conducted by Michael Jahoda in collaboration with LeineRoebana which is aimed at enhancing the development of modern dance training in the Netherlands, and enhancing the physical, technical and creative capabilities of today's modern dancers and dance students.

This multi-faceted didactic research and development project consists of a comprehensive evaluation of the modern dance training offered in the Netherlands (and abroad), an in-depth study of the choreographic work and working method(s) of the Amsterdam based dance company LeineRoebana, the development of a new formal dance training inspired by the work and working process(s) of LeineRoebana, and a collaborative choreographic project.

Plan:

- I. Dance education & professional dance training:
 - Observation
 - Analysis
 - Survey
 - Assessment

- II. The work and working method of LeineRoebana:
 - Survey / Interviews
 - Documentary
 - Observation : Repertory Study
 - Observation : Rehearsal & the Creative process
 - Catalogue

- III. New modern dance training method:
 - Lexicon
 - Movement material and exercises
 - Class and workshop structures

- IV. 50 Mini Solos - a choreography research:
 - Collaboration on a new solo choreography.

I. Dance education & professional dance training.

What is the level and quality of today's modern dance education and professional dance training, and how can the dancer's transition from study practice to professional working practice be facilitated more effectively?

Goal: To gain a comprehensive overview of the modern dance education and professional dance training currently offered in the Netherlands (and abroad). To identify the gaps between the study period and the professional working practice, and search for new strategies to fill those gaps.

Dancers today play a large and active role in the creation of new choreography. The broader their physical, technical and creative capacities are, the more physical, technical and creative input they can bring to enrich the creative process. Dance education and daily dance training play a crucial role in cultivating these skills.

In my capacity as a dance teacher I have seen the affects of many teaching approaches and the results of various educational structures on the development of dancers first-hand. In my more current capacity as a Rehearsal Director and Mentor my first encounter with young dancers is most often at an audition; at the time when they have already completed, or are nearing the completion of their formal dance education. This first encounter offers a brief snapshot of who they are dancers, creative beings, artists and potential colleagues. It also offers an insightful view of their dance education, and how their dance education has affected their development as dancers and creative artists.

As a Rehearsal Director and Mentor I have been working with the young dancers on a daily basis; from the audition process to the mentoring process to the creative process through the performing and touring process. One of my key responsibilities has been to assess the strengths and weaknesses of new dancers, and guide their development throughout the season (or project). During each creation process many hours are spent initiating new dancers to the physical, mental and creative needs of the work, which is to be expected, but many hours are also spent teaching (or rather re-teaching) a wide variety of dance fundamentals. Large gaps remain between the study practice and the professional working practice.

In order to gain a better understanding of this gap I began making a rudimentary analysis of our mentoring project at Conny Janssen Danst. I catalogued the priorities, aims, goals, strategies, exercises and working methods of our mentoring program, and cross referenced various components of the program to see where there might be recurring gaps in understanding or skill.

Intrigued by both the questions and the answers I discovered during my preliminary analysis, I am inspired to make a more comprehensive assessment of the missing links in Modern Dance education and professional training. This didactic research and development project begins where my prior assessment left off. I will continue by assessing the level, quality and consistency of the Modern Dance training offered to students and professional dancers.

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Observation :

What is being offered?

What is being taught?

How is it being taught?

How is it being absorbed?

Observation of dance academies - NL:

I will visit three of the main modern dance academies in NL - Amsterdam Hoogeschool voor de Kunsten Moderne Dans Theater Department, Amsterdam Hoogeschool voor de Kunsten Jazz Musical Department, Codarts-Rotterdam, and Artez-Arnhem - to observe the range and assess the quality of the daily classes, workshops and rehearsals.

I am planning 6 full days at each department; 3 days at the beginning of the season (September>October 2015) and 3 days at the end of the season (May>June2016) for my observation. I will also attend the end of the year school performances of each academy.

28 visit days in total.

Observation of dance academies - International:

I will visit the Boston Conservatory and ZZT Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln to observe the range and quality of their daily classes, workshops and rehearsals to compare my findings to those in NL.

I am planning 3 full days at each school for my observation.

06 visit days in total.

Observation of open professional dance training - NL:

I will visit the Henny Jurriëns Stichting, center for professional modern dance training in Amsterdam, to observe the range and quality of the daily training and workshops that are offered to professional dancers in Amsterdam.

I am planning 2 days per month over the course of the year for my observation.

24 visit days in total.

Analysis :

*What is the level and quality of modern dance education in the Netherlands,
and how does it compare to other international institutions?*

Following my observations of the classes, workshops and rehearsals at the dance education institutions mentioned above I will make a detailed catalogue of my findings. I will note my findings in the following categories:

- The mission, focus and approach of each institution.
- How the mission, focus and approach manifest in the curriculum.
- The strengths and weaknesses of each institution.
- The level and quality of the teaching.
- The effect that the various missions, focuses and approaches have on the dancers technical and artistic development.

Student Survey :

*What are the expectations of today's dance students and professional dancers?
How do they view and evaluate their dance education and dance training?*

I will take a questionnaire survey of a group of students at each of the academies that I visit, as well as a group of professional dancers who take professional dance training at the Henry Jurriëns Stichting in Amsterdam to gain insight into their views about (their) dance education and (their) dance training.

* See attachment A-Survey Students +

Assessment :

I will collate all the findings of my observations and surveys into a catalogue to assess and compare the range and quality of dance education and dance training at each institute.

* This catalogue will serve as a reference point throughout the development of the new dance training.

II. The work (and working method) of LeineRoebana:

What are the key elements of the work, working method and working process of LeineRoebana that have facilitated the cultivation of some of the most skilled and most admirable dancers in the country and in the field at large?

Goal: To gain a deeper understanding of LeineRoebana's creative process and working method(s), to have a comprehensive overview of their creative output, and to document their artistic and choreographic development.

I have been admiring the dancers of LeineRoebana since 1996 when I first saw their piece "the Circle Effect" at Korzo Theater. Since that time LeineRoebana have been cultivating some of the most skilled and most admirable dancers in the country and in the field.

Andrea Leine and Harijono Roebana have a love of dance, of dancing, of dance making, and of the physical and mental possibilities of the dancing body which I highly respect and relate to on a visceral level. They create complex, multi-layered choreographic work and have a unique work process that develops an acute awareness, physical intelligence, technical prowess, intellectual analysis, and encourages a rowdy abandonment, primal courage, and steadfast commitment. I believe their work and work process would provide a rich source of inspiration for the research and development of a new modern-dance training.

I have experienced LeineRoebana's work from the outside as a spectator, from the inside as a dancer, and in between as a rehearsal director. I now seek to explore their work from "underneath" to learn how their dancers grow and develop within their work. I want to "unpeel the onion" of their work process, one layer at a time, and illuminate and analyze the broad range of components of their work process, pinpoint the key aspects that bring about the successful development of their dancers and crystalize that knowledge into a format that can be shared and transferred to a new generation of dancers.

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Survey / Interviews

How does the dancer view his/her role in the creative process of LeineRoebana, and what influence does he/she think they have on the work?

"The dancer" is the key ingredient of any choreography. Without the dancer there would be no dance, no work and no working process. I will therefore begin my research from the dancers' point of view to learn how they view and experience the work and the working process of LeineRoebana.

I will conduct a series of extensive oral surveys, conducted as filmed interviews, with Andrea Leine, Harijono Roebana (both of whom danced in their own work for more than 15 years) and five of their most prominent past and present dancers (Tim Persent, Heather Ware, Uri Eugenio, Ty Boomershine and Ederson Rodrigues Xavier) each of whom has greatly inspired and influenced the work and working process of LeineRoebana. The collaborative exchange - between the dancers and the choreographers - continues to define the course of the creative process and the final outcome of their work. Three of these dancers (Tim Persent, Heather Ware, Uri Eugenio) will play a crucial and active role in the development of the training approach.

Documentary : All of the interviews will consist of the same set of questions asked in the same order, and will be conducted and filmed in the same manner. They will be edited into a documentary about their views on formal dance education, daily training, the creative process and the work process of LeineRoebana. The final documentary will include video excerpts from the repertory study that underscore key aspects of their experiences in the work and working process.

* See attachment Survey

Observation : Repertory Study

How has the choreographic work of LeineRoebana changed and developed over the course of their collaborative choreographic career?

There are seminal moments in the work of all living artist, moments when they break new ground, absorb new influences and/or take new turns that influences the future of their work. These critical developments often go unnoticed during the lifetime of the artist, hidden from view in the daily grind of the working process, and only come to light years after the fact. I would like to illuminate the seminal moments in LeineRoebana's choreographic collaboration while they are active in their creative careers.

I will make a comprehensive survey of their choreographic oeuvre by studying all of the existing documentation of their work - in chronological order. I will map the progression of their choreographic output and identify key moments in their choreographic and creative development.

Observation : Rehearsal & the Creative process

What is LeineRoebana's creative process and how does it manifest in the rehearsal process?

I have spent many hours in the studio during the creative process. Although I am familiar with many aspects of their process, I have always been inside of the process, focused on my specific tasks as a dancer or as a rehearsal director. For this research project I will observe the rehearsal process of a new work that I am not a part of and document how their creative concepts become material.

Catalogue : Lexicon

I will collate my findings into a catalogue which will be used as framework for the research in phase 3 - New modern dance training method.

III. New modern dance training method:

How can the unique work and work process of LeineRoebana contribute to the advancement of modern dance education and dance training?

Goal: To develop a new, formal modern dance training that inspires today's students and professional dancers, invites them to (re-)engage with in-depth modern dance training and helps them to enhance their physical, technical and creative capabilities.

Modern dancers in the Netherlands today have very limited options in consistent, in-depth modern dance training. Instead they rely on ballet as their most consistent and developed training option.

In-depth modern dance training has historically been rooted in the work of one choreographer; i.e. Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, José Limón, Trisha Brown, Lester Horton, Jennifer Muller, Ohad Naharin, o.a. Our rich modern dance history is built one rich layer upon another of these great dance makers, and their unique dance techniques are still taught at major dance academies around the world. William Forsythe was unique in the Ballet world for having formalized a contemporary movement system which has had a large impact on the modern dance scene.

Today there are very few dance makers in Holland who venture into a detailed investigation of a new training approach based on the fundamentals of their work. Anouk van Dijk's Counter Technique and Emio Greco's Double Skin/Double Mind are the two exceptions. These two training approaches are manifestations of contemporary, living choreographers who have inspired and educated a large number of dancers here and abroad with their unique classes and workshops.

I believe that the work of LeineRoebana, and the rich experience of their dancers, could inform and enrich today's modern dance education and training in a unique and valuable. I will therefore use the work and work process(es) of LeineRoebana as a framework for the development of a new training method which looks forward to a new potential in modern dance development, inspires today's dancers to (re-)engage with in-depth modern dance training, enhances their physical, technical and creative capabilities and fortifies their potential creative input.

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Lexicon :

The findings of research categories [1 - Dance education & professional dance training](#), and [2- The work and working method of](#) will be assembled into a catalogue and distilled down to a lexicon “of essentials” which can serve as a framework for the development of the new training approach and workshop formats. The preliminary working essentials are:

- the Core Concepts
- the Fundamental Movement Principles
- the Supplementary Applications
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Movement material and exercises :

Class and workshop exercises will be developed in five phases :

- Phase 1 - the distillation of movement excerpts and phrase material extracted from the Repertoire Study.
- Phase 2 - the creation of Elementary Exercises for each of the Fundamental Movement Principles as defined in the lexicon.
- Phase 3 - the creation of working methods for each of the Supplementary Applications as defined in the lexicon.
- Phase 4 - the creation of connective movement elements/themes designed to warm-up the body, wake-up the mind and weave the Core Exercises together.
- Phase 5 - the creation of improvisational tasks to facilitate the investigation of the Fundamental Movement Principles, Supplementary Applications and Core Concepts from a personal and individual perspective.

Class and workshop structures and formats :

The class and workshop structures will be framed by the preliminary lexicon, and informed by the findings of the research/investigations of the dance education, modern dance training, surveys and the interviews. They will frame the building blocks of the movement exercises.

Research Update: March 2018

In January/February of this year LeineRoebana created a new piece for the MTD3 at the AHK. In addition to making a new work, they were asked to give daily training/classes to the group. This provided us with the perfect opportunity to combine an analysis of a new creative process with a test-run of the preliminary class structure, exercises and movement material. A detailed assessment of that work period is currently being written.

IV. 50 Mini Solos - a choreographic research:

What happens when a working method of one choreographer is be applied to another choreographer? And when a creative concept of one choreographer is applied back to the other choreographer?

Goal: To experience the work and working process of LeineRoebana through my own choreographic process.

I would like to experience the working process of LeineRoebana from a creative perspective, and see how my creative and physical input both affects and responds to their work and working process.

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Choreographic collaboration :

For the fourth phase of this didactic research and development project I have asked LeineRoebana to collaborate on a new solo choreography that we will create together, and I will perform.

In 2010 I was granted an artist residency scholarship in Malmö, Sweden. During that residency I gave myself the task of creating 50 mini-solos for myself from a set of text excerpts I had written. My aim was to create a series of 50 tiny choreographic ideas (samples) that I could draw on at a later date and develop into more complete choreographic material as needed. This process proved very inspiring and fruitful, and provided me with a wide range of fresh choreographic ideas that I later developed into a solo performance, and two full evening performance-installations for the Phillip Project.

During this research I will make a choreography of 50 mini solos - composed of 50 tasks chosen and ordered by Leine and Roebana. In addition to choosing the tasks and order for my choreography they will act as artistic advisors for the piece throughout the process.

This solo choreographic project will allow me the opportunity to explore various aspects of their working process from my own creative point of view and physical experience. It will also allow me to embody aspects of their work process in a performative context - something that I could not experience through observation alone.

*This 50 Mini-Solos concept may serve as a potential framework for new choreographic workshop structures.

INSPIRATIONS & INFLUENCES

- 1 Name an artist that you highly admire, who has greatly inspired you and/or influenced you most.
- 2 Why?
- 3 What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of this artist?
- 4 Give one word that sums up the essence of this artist.
- 5 Name a dancer that you highly admire, who has greatly inspired you and/or influenced you most.
- 6 Why?
- 7 What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of this dancer?
- 8 Give one word that sums up the essence of this dancer.
- 9 Name a performer that you highly admire, who has greatly inspired you and/or influenced you most.
- 10 Why?
- 11 What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of this performer?
- 12 Give one word that sums up the essence of this performer..
- 13 Who was your best teacher?
- 14 Why?
- 15 What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of this teacher?
- 16 Give one word that sums up the essence of this teacher.
- 17 Who was your most inspiring/influential teacher?
- 18 Why?
- 19 What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of this teacher?
- 20 Give one word that sums up the essence of this teacher.

DEFINITIONS

- 21 How would you define a dance class?
- 22 What are your expectations of a dance class?
- 23 What are the essential components of a good dance class?
- 24 How would you define dance training?
- 25 What are your expectations of a dance training?
- 26 What are the essential components of a good dance training?
- 27 How would you define a warm-up?
- 28 What are your expectations of a warm-up?
- 29 What are the essential components of a good warm-up?
- 30 How would you define a dance workshop?
- 31 What are your expectations of a dance workshop?
- 32 What are the essential components of a good dance workshop?
- 33 Is there a difference between a “company class” and a “professional class”?
- 34 If so, what is the difference?
- 35 How would you define and/or describe what dance technique is (to/for you)?
- 36 What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of dance technique?
- 37 Give one word that sums up the essence of “your own” definition of dance technique.

DANCE EDUCATION

- 38 Is there a difference between a professional class and a class within the framework of dance education?
- 39 If so, what is the difference?
- 40 How would you define a good dance education?
- 41 What are the essential components of a good dance education?
- 42 Give one word that sums up the essence of “your own” definition of a good dance education?
- 43 How would you define a good dance education?
- 44 What are the essential components of a good dance education?
- 45 Give one word that sums up the essence of “your own” definition of a good dance education?
- 46 How would you define and/or describe what dance technique is (to/for you)?
- 47 What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of dance technique?
- 48 Give one word that sums up the essence of “your own” definition of dance technique.

B - Survey LeineRoebana only

THEN > NOW

49 How has your approach to dance training changed or evolved over the course of your career?

51 How has dance education and/or dance training changed over the course of your dance career?

53 Give one word that sums up the essence of “your own” definition of current dance training.

54 Give one word that sums up the essence of your dance training.

55 Which technical skills do you see lacking or under developed in the current generation of younger dancers?

56 Which creative skills do you see lacking or under developed in the current generation of younger dancers?

57 Which performance skills do you see lacking or under developed in the current generation of younger dancers?

58 What is the most essential advice that you would/could give to a young dancer?

59 Give one word that sums up the essence of your advice.

60 Which technical skills do you see highly developed in the current generation of younger dancers?

61 Which creative skills do you see highly developed in the current generation of younger dancers?

62 Which performative skills do you see highly developed in the current generation of younger dancers?

63 What is the biggest difference that you see between young dancers and your generation of dancers?

64 Give one word that sums up this difference.