Teaching the InterPlay Core Elements Online

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This document includes ideas about how to teach all 26 Core Elements of the InterPlay system on the online platform Zoom. Other InterPlay leaders are also accumulating wisdom about teaching online. An online Google document that gathers some of those ideas is also available and be can be added to by other leaders: https://tinyurl.com/interplayonzoom

This document also includes Zoom tips that can be helpful in getting your class oriented online and ways to manage your group as a whole and in breakout rooms.

Technical Orientation

In the same way that we are incremental about the steps in the forms over and over again, we may also need to review some of the technical parts of being on Zoom as well. As people become more fluent using Zoom, you may do this part more fluidly, but covering the functions that you will want to use in the class up front can make your class go more smoothly. Here are some of the things I cover at the beginning:

1. Mute your sound.

2. Turn your video on and off.

3. Show them that you can mute everyone.

4. Switch between gallery view and speaker view.

5. Find the chat box. Have them write their name and location in the box. (This is a good way to keep track of who has attended.)

6. Note the difference between sending a chat message to one person or to everyone.

7. Find the little box with the "..." in the upper right hand corner of each participants window and have them type in their first name if it's not there already.

8. Find that same little box in the window of someone else and "pin video" to have that person's window be larger, which is helpful when witnessing a partner while still in the whole group.

9. How breakout rooms work—that they will need to click on the invitation to enter the room, that they will get a one-minute warning before the room closes, that they can come back to the main room on their own even without a prompt.

The place where the various buttons appear is different on a tablet, so you might have to help those folks find where things are.

Structuring the Group Online

You have two primary options for organizing participants in your online sessions—whole group and breakout rooms—with some variations in each. In regular classes, we're often moving between the whole group, small groups, and pairs. Working in pairs, which is so common in InterPlay teaching, is still possible on Zoom, but less flexible than in a regular class. Small groups are possible in break out rooms, even

though it is a bit harder to monitor as a leader. Some whole group forms work fine online. Others, especially anything requiring singing in unison, are hard to create online because of time lags.

Whole Group

Many InterPlay forms can be done with the whole group at the same time—the Warm-Up, One-Hand Dances, Solo Dances, etc. There are some other ways, though, to structure forms while you are in that whole group mode, especially with movement forms. For example, you can put people in pairs and have half of the group dance at a time and have the witness just pay attention to their partner. Have the witness turn off their video so that there is less movement on the screen. Then switch. To further facilitate this, use "pin video." The witness would go to the video box of their partner, find the box with the three dots (...) in the upper right hand corner, and in that menu choose "pin video." That will make their partner's screen the largest one. On a tablet, I think they would just tap on the window of your partner.

I have also set up people in pairs and had one person begin moving while the other is still and then having the second person take over the movement while the first is still. The movement can shift back and forth between the two partners on their own time over the course of a piece of music. This could be One-Hand Dances or Solo Movement.

If I am having people warm up made-up languages, I can have them do that all at the same time, even with their microphones on. It's fun to hear everyone. On Zoom, I think it is a bit harder to hear the ending (whether that is the leader ringing a bell or saying "aaaaaaand stop.") If they don't stop, then just mute everyone. You can warn people that they might do that so that it doesn't feel rude! (See #3 in the Technical Orientation section above.)

Breakout Rooms

The host of a Zoom meeting can put people in breakout rooms using a button at the bottom of the screen. This means that for a period of time, two or more people would be in a "room" containing just the two screens. You can set up rooms of any size. This can happen by having Zoom assign them randomly, or you can put people in rooms. Personally, I have found the random function most convenient, but if your group is small and you want to control who is with whom, you can do that. When you send participants to rooms, they will get a message on their screen that they have to click to go to the room.

Sometimes you will have two people joining the online session from the same screen. This means that when you assign folks to breakout rooms, there may be three people in a group. Once they are in their room, they can sort out how to rotate between the three of them. If you have Zoom assign people randomly, you still have the option of shifting people around a bit. So if you end up with a breakout room with two couples, for example, you could shift one of those to another room manually before you send them off.

If you, as host, need/want to be in a pair because of the way the numbers work, there are a couple of ways to do that. If you have people set up in breakout rooms and there is one group of three, have one of those people choose not to join the group when then prompt comes up on the screen and they will just stay with you in the main room to partner. If you have a breakout room with just one person, then you, as host can join that room using the "join" button in the breakout room control box.

Tell you group about how long they will be in the breakout rooms. As the leader/host, you can call them back when the time is about up. Participants will get a message saying that the room is going to close in one minute. They can choose to come back at any time within that minute, but when the minute is up, they will automatically be returned to the whole group.

You may also choose to give people an assignment and have them return to the main room when they are finished. Once half or two-thirds of the group is back you can give those who are still in the breakout rooms the one-minute ending to get everyone back.

Because it is a bit harder to move back and forth between the whole group and breakout rooms, you may plan to have them in the rooms a bit longer. So you might give them a couple of tasks, like "do a bit of I Could Talk About back and forth and then each person do a DT1."

Let's say you have sent folks to breakout rooms and then they have returned to the main room. The next time you send them to breakout rooms, they can go to the same room with the same partner. This means that you can pair people for a series of interactions that go back and forth between the pairs and the whole group.

I have used the breakout room function to get people paired up for a form that they would then do in the whole group. A sequence might go like this:

1. Send folks to breakout rooms, have them figure out who is person #1 and #2 and then do a couple of minutes of "I Could Talk About." (Note: if you have more than two people in a room, each should choose to be #1 or #2 (not #3), to facilitate the next step.)

2. Call them back to the main room to do a movement form that involves pairs, like Dance With a Witness in two turns, with #1 dancing and #2 witnessing (have the witnesses turn off their videos and "pin video" their partners). Then switch. (Note: if you have three people in a group, two people will dance at the same time with one witness.)

3. Send them back to the same breakout rooms to notice for a few minutes.

4. Call them back to the main room.

You could also send people to breakout rooms in pairs, have them figure out quickly who is #1 and who is #2, and the come right back to the main room, without waiting for a prompt.

Although it's a bit harder to do multiple turns back and forth like you might normally do in Babbling, I have experimented with setting up a series Babbling-like turns to be done in breakout rooms, then used the ability to send a message to the groups to signal changes. It might look like this:

In the main room, describe a series of turns that folks will take in partners in breakout rooms. For example, recently in a storytelling excercise about using details, I told them they would each be describing an object, a person, and a location, alternating back and forth between partners. I sent them to breakout rooms, then typed the message: "Partner #1 Object." I waited about a minute (I use the time on my phone), then typed in "Partner #2 Object" to signal the switch. I did that with each of the remaining tasks, then typed in "Aaaaand stop. Take a minute to notice." I gave them about 3 minutes to notice then called them back to the main room. The messages will show up at the top of the breakout screen, but it

doesn't stay there for a long time, so it might be helpful for the witness to be watching for it so that the switch and the task are clear.

Chat Box

You can use the chat box for having people sign in for the class and share where they are from. You can do brief noticings there as well or affirmations for their partners. If you give people a chat box assignment it also pulls their attention back to the class.

Personally, I find it hard to keep tracking the chat box while I'm leading and also attending to the individual participant windows. I don't set up high expectations that I will respond to comments in the chat box unless I ask for them specifically. If you have a number of people in the meeting, you might want to recruit someone to pay attention to the chat box in case there is something there that should be addressed in the moment, especially technical issues.

Technical issues may come up in your class. I've been finding that even if I don't know how to solve them, someone else in the group may. Folks seem pretty comfortable with adding their advice!

And for the fun of it...

While we're waiting for the host to figure out a technical thing, like getting people to break out rooms, sharing their screen or whatever, everyone else can do a "Waiting for the Host" dance—just a little "in your seat boogie."

And you know how the return from breakout rooms can seem a bit abrupt if you wait until the end of the 60 seconds? This is actually an opportunity to do the "Breakout Room Blastoff." As you see the time ticking down, you all chant "five, four, three, two, one" and then make blast off sounds to return to the main room with style and energy.

The Core Elements

Warm-Up

The warm-up is easy to do either full-on or seated. You might invite participants to set up their computers in a location where they can both sit at times and also have a bit of floor-space to move in. As noted above, you can play music and give directions verbally, but you might want to do a sound level check before you begin to see if participants can both hear the music and your voice.

Walking, Stopping & Running

I haven't tried this, but Anita Bondi reports using this form online with the stopping part in front of the computer so that one can take in the energy and movement of the other bodies. She reports that participants were surprised with what they could do even in their limited space.

Babbling

This form will be harder to do on Zoom. I Could Talk Abouts or 3-Sentence Stories can work well in smaller and medium-sized groups. You may want to call on people rather than waiting on people to jump in. Or choose a person to go and then have them choose the next person. Also, we have been using DT1s (just one movement bit and then one story bit) more in in-person classes and they can work well online.

Hand-to-Hand Contact

Obviously, you can't be in direct contact online, but you can set up pairs to do One-Hand Dances together. It may be a bit more like Following & Leading (more on that later) but it can still be quite effective online. Depending on the size of the group, you may decide to have half of the pairs move while the other half turns off their videos and witnesses in order to decrease the amount of screen activity going on, then switch to the other group. This method of having half of the group go at a time can be used in other forms as well. Given the way that the video camera works, there are some interesting variations that you can play with: moving closer to the screen and then further away, letting your hand go out of the frame and then reenter from another place, etc.

One-Hand-Dances

This is a highly useful form online. Most of the variations we play with in regular classes can be done online, including Dance with a Witness, Dancing on Behalf Of, Exformation, blessings for a partner, discernment (find a question, throw it "in the air", and then dance in its presence.) One-Hand Dances don't take much space and fit well in the video frame.

I often use a back-and-forth structure in pairs. Partner #1 begins moving while Partner 2 is still, then at some point Partner #2 takes over the movement and Partner #1 becomes still. The movement passes back and forth over the course of a period of time or piece of music. This creates a connection between partners and also allows for some opportunities to create together as we loosen up the turn-taking and include more overlapping.

Noticing

Although a bit harder to do online, it is good to give participants an opportunity to notice. You might have folks do that in the chat box or to have pen and paper. It can be brief—a word or two or three. If you have people in pairs, you can send them to breakout rooms to notice.

Affirmation

Like noticing, it is good to include this in Zoom sessions. It could also happen in the chat box. So, for example, if you have pairs doing Dances With a Witness, the witnesses could add a few words of affirmation in the chat box when the dance is finished. The prompt could be something like "write in a word or two or three describing what you saw in the dance."

Easy Focus

This tool can be particularly helpful when working on Zoom as participants figure out where their focus should go on the screen. In larger groups it can be a challenge to have all those individuals in their separate windows to focus on. We can give our participants authority to take in as much or as little as they choose. So, for example, they can learn that they don't need to attend to all the people in the group. They can focus just on the leader or let their focus turn inward. If they are doing a solo dance, they can choose to not look at what others are doing or they can draw inspiration or ideas from others. Sometimes it can be fascinating to see the group choreography of all those folks moving in their separate boxes and sometimes it can be overwhelming. We can follow our body wisdom to make good choices about where we are putting our attention. You can also make those same choices about how much attention you pay to the chat room. (More on this in a section about the Chat Box above.)

As a leader, you can help your participants move into Easy Focus through your leadership. For example, with movement forms, you can establish clear time boundaries. Let your participants know how long a piece of music will go on, or how long a silence may be and invite them to be in their own space for that time. Use an auditory cue to signal the end—either the end of a piece of music, a fade-out, or by using a bell. This way participants don't need to watch the screen to know when to stop. They don't necessarily need to be on screen as they are moving (unless, of course, you are doing Dances On Behalf Of. They can stop their video or shift their computer or move out of camera range if they choose to.

Physicality of Grace

Having this tool at our fingertips can be extremely helpful in stressful times. To remind participants of this tool, or to teach it even in a brief way (if you are working with folks who may not have encountered it before) can be a good addition to an online class. For us to imagine that there may be many points in our day when we can choose between the "stress path" and the "grace path" can greatly affect our experiences of our everyday lives. It can also be helpful as we discern how to engage online. What are the small choices we can make so that the experience works for us. It could be as simple as choosing a comfortable chair and a laptop rather than sitting at our desks with a computer (if we have those sorts of choices!). Or how we choose to focus on the multiple windows (see Easy Focus). And, of course, we can encourage our participants to take the tool into the rest of our lives to make our experiences as easy as possible.

Exformation

This tool can (and should be) woven throughout online sessions both implicitly and explicitly. We can't do enough exforming during times like these! Feel free to share wisdom about Exformation—why we do it, how it can be valuable to our health, etc.

Solo Movement

This form translates well to Zoom. Most folks will probably have at least a bit of room to move in and can set up their devices to show the movement. If space is restricted, participants can use the One-Hand Dance form. As with One-Hand Dances, they can be Dances with a Witness, Exformations, or Dances On Behalf Of. Remember that if there is time, you can invite participants to play with various movement

qualities to continue to widen their range. More on that in the Solo Movement section of the Core Elements Self-Study beginning on p. 20.

Group Toning/Singing

Singing in unison can be a bit of challenge on Zoom because there is often a time-delay between the various devices that people are on. However, you should be able to replicate group toning online. The sound quality will be different, but you can at least get the effect of breathing deeply and consistently and also the internal vibration that is so good for our bodies.

One-Breath Songs

This form can also work online. Although we describe the longer sequence in the Self-Study for this form that begins on the floor, I have been using an abbreviated version standing in a circle that uses some of the same steps:

Take a deep breath and let it out with a sigh

...with a tone (any tone)

...let the tone wander

...let the tone wander quickly and slowly

Play with consonant sounds

Combine tones and consonant sounds to create a One-Breath Song (do this a couple of times)

You could then put participants in pairs in breakout rooms to do one-breath songs back and forth for a bit. Have the second person pick right up after the first, perhaps even borrowing sounds from their partner.

Other variations:

Have pairs play with "impolite" turns, so they can notice that the turns can be shorter or longer. Interrupting can be a choice, as well as letting a partner go on longer.

Have pairs turn it into more of a "conversation" with the sound going back and forth freely, perhaps even with overlap. This can develop into more of a vocal duet.

Witnessing

It will be important to include witnessing in online sessions. For participants to experience that another person is helping hold the space is powerful at all times, but particularly in times of trial.

Putting pairs in breakout rooms creates excellent opportunities for one-on-one witnessing, whether they are doing story, movement, or sound forms. In the whole group, you can set up a form like Dancing on Behalf Of or Dance with a Witness and pair people up. Then have half of the group move and the other half turn off their cameras. Witnesses put their attention on their partners, rather than trying to watch the whole group. At the end, you can invite a few words of noticing in the chat box. Those words can be sent to the whole group, or could be sent directly to the person they were witnessing.

Following & Leading

This form can be done using movement (one-hand or whole body) or sound. (To do following and leading with sound, folks would need to be in breakout rooms. See One-Breath Songs above.) In the full group, assign pairs and then have them follow and lead with just that person. It's helpful to have folks "pin video" their partners to be able to see their movement more clearly. You can use all of the incremental steps we normally use as part of Following and Leading, including letting go of the clear following and leading roles. I often move to more of a back and forth pattern with one person moving and the other still, then switching on their own time. If you are in the whole group, you can't really use sound along with the movement, but you could if you were in breakout rooms.

Having participants just following one person in the whole group can be good practice in choosing what to focus on given the number of screens that might be visible. Dealing with the wider range of visual information on the screen can be a challenge for some.

On Behalf Of Forms

See One-Hand Dances and Solo Movement. You could also use One-Breath Songs as a blessing for a partner (in a breakout room.)

Contact

Hard to do online! We can connect through eye contact, holding one hand to the screen and one to our hearts, bringing our faces close to the screen, laughing together (funny faces on screen?) Following and Leading can provide some of the connecting energy that is part of Contact as can Witnessing and On Behalf of Forms. This may also be a good time for us to be making contact with our own bodies!

Side-by-Side Stories

This form could be challenging in the Zoom landscape but possible. If you had a small group, you could do some turns with pairs with the rest of the group witnessing. You could also use breakout rooms of four and have them take turns working in pairs. It's a bit harder to manage since you aren't present to start and end turns, but you might be able to give the fours a task or two and set them loose.

Recently, when teaching side-by-side stories, I have been having people use made-up language. This relieves some of the pressure of playing with the form and coming up with content and also makes it easier for witnesses to take in. First have pairs talk at the same time (made-up language), then have them introduce occasional breaks in their speech to have some silence, then have them play more directly with their partners, both creating space for the other to speak and also overlapping. I sometimes ask them to try out a particular emotional tone to their made-up language—anxious, mysterious, seductive, etc. You can then add in English (or another first language) if you choose, providing some subject prompts.

Another variation I have used which could work online is a sort of overlapping DT3. One person begins with the story part and the other beings with the movement part and then it switches. The transition can happen by the storyteller ending a section and beginning to move which is their partner's signal to begin a story, or the mover can begin speaking which can compel the partner to go back to moving. So basically, only one person is talking at a time.

Internal/External Authority

One of the powerful aspects of strengthening our inner authority is being able to return to our own body wisdom in times where information from the outside is insufficient, untrustworthy, or conflicting. In our current situation, things are changing rapidly and we're taking in information from a wide variety of sources. Being able to trust our inner authority can help us make good decisions when we aren't sure what else to rely on. What is best for us may be different from what is best for others. Our own body wisdom can also take in the needs of the larger group body. Paying attention to our inner authority may mean making choices that are challenging for us individually but good for others.

Practicing having our own internal authority online may mean asking participants to make simple choices in the context of an activity. For example, when doing a One-Hand Dance, you might invite folks to choose whether to sit, stand, or lie down. This simple request means that we will each discern what is best for us at a particular moment. It doesn't have to be a major decision and it doesn't even matter whether we know completely why we have made the decision.

I believe that we have multiple opportunities each day to choose between the "stress path" and the "grace path." Are we aware of those possibilities? If we can more consistently see and take the grace path, the positive effect of that on the body will be cumulative, even if they are small choices.

You could also set up an "I Could Talk About" and ask people to name things they are doing for their own good and/or the good of others (that circle can be of any size). How are we taking care of ourselves these days? Then they could tell Three-Sentence Stories or do a DT1 or DT3 on the subject.

You could also do a One-Hand Dance or a Solo Dance on behalf of claiming what we know—inviting the courage to pay close attention to our inner authority.

Body Data/Body Knowledge/Body Wisdom

This tool links well with Inner Authority and is particularly helpful when things are changing quickly or dramatically. In times of change, we must allow ourselves to collect current body data for a while before jumping to conclusions about body knowledge. Give yourself time to notice what you notice but don't move too quickly to drawing conclusions about what is true for the long term.

We can, however, rely on our stores of body wisdom. Although things may be changing around us, many of our ways of being will be similar to what they were two months ago.

We can adjust or fine tune our body knowledge or body wisdom based on new circumstances. Does our daily routine need to be different? Do we need to connect with others in new ways? Do we need to speed up or slow down? Change our expectations?

Body data, knowledge, and wisdom can be both individual and collective. We have more control over our own information, but since we are all connected as bodies, keeping that wider lens open to the group body is a good thing all around.

Use storytelling forms to invite folks to reflect on how they are adjusting to new realities, how they are taking care of themselves, how they are taking in external events. Use prompts that will invite participants to share details—"what is giving you energy/joy/relief these days," "how has your daily schedule changed (be specific)," "if you get anxious, what do you do to calm yourself."

Use One-Hand Dances to reflect in an easy focus way on some area of challenge, to see if any wisdom emerges. Have people notice with a partner in breakout rooms. Sometimes we need to use indirect ways to get to our body wisdom.

Incrementality

When isn't incrementality helpful! This tool is inherent in the way we teach, but it can be helpful to talk about it more explicitly. Although in times of trial we sometimes need to take bigger actions more quickly, the basic wisdom of incrementality can be helpfully applied in many ways. It can be a good framework for giving ourselves the time and space to make adjustments in our lives. Even when we are compelled to make a large change, we can recognize that it is a more gradual process for the new circumstance to be comfortable. It can be an antidote to the body's resistance to change.

We're often in the middle of the dialog between our more basic instincts and our more rational, reflective selves. We may think of it as the conversation between the front and back of our brains, between our "lower selves"and "higher selves," or the "stress system" (the sympathetic nervous system) and the "grace system" (the parasympathetic nervous system). Incrementality, by its nature, invites us to be deliberate and less reactive.

If we need to take on new habits, incrementality can help us cope with the successes and failures of doing anything in a new way. (Like, "don't touch your face!")

You can use movement or storytelling forms to have participants reflect on making small and large changes in their lives, about daily routines, about imagining something they want to accomplish given changing circumstances. Given that many will already understand the tool of Incrementality, you might just ask people to reflect on ways that they are currently using the tool.

Body Wisdom Practices

Practice is a key element in the way that InterPlay understands both self-care and creating change. When we repeat actions (which can also include internal experiences—thinking, imagining, quieting) over time, they are more likely to become part of us. Practices can be good for us, good for our communities (however widely you want to draw that circle), good for the Earth, or good for all of creation.

We are in a time where we are being asked to take on a variety of practices—washing our hands, staying home, physical distancing, etc. Along with these collective practices, we may be adding practices of our own to help keep ourselves centered and sane. When we begin a practice, it often requires paying extra attention before it becomes more habitual. We may need to remind ourselves, to start over if we forget. Be easy on yourself as you take on a new practice. Adjust or change it if you need to.

In our InterPlay creating, Body Wisdom Practices can also be helpful to expand our range. As we experiment with new possibilities in our stories, movements, or sounds, we may need to repeat those possibilities to really get them in our bodies. As a leader, you can ask your participants to play with particular aspects—using large and small movements in Solo Movement, varying volume as they Babble, using loud and soft in One Breath Songs. Come up with your own list! These variations can bring new possibilities. When our range expands, we have access to a wider range of information, as well as sharing more of our possibilities with witnesses.

DT3s

A DT3 (Dance, Talk, Dance, Talk, Dance, Talk) is easy to do on Zoom, especially in breakout rooms. Of course, you will want to warm up the elements before you launch into them (I Could Talk About, One Hand Dances, perhaps 3-Sentence Stories to suggest brevity). You can give a choice between using full-body or one-hand movement. For two people to both do a DT3 and have a bit of noticing can take a bit of time, so you have to have time in your session (15 minutes?) to send them off to breakout rooms. I have also been using DT1s (move and tell just once) quite often in both in-person and online classes, so this could be an alternative to a full DT3. This way, when you send folks to breakout rooms, you can have them go back and forth a few times, guaranteeing that each person gets a turn or two.

Shape & Stillness

Although it is less possible to have clusters of bodies doing Shape & Stillness together, this form can still be used online. It is good to do that bit of it in the Warm-Up, as usual. You can also do solo shape and stillness, especially emphasizing the stillness part, to folks to have that experience of intentionally holding still.

One of the interesting characteristics of Shape & Stillness is that it can have as much, or more, or an effect on the witness as on the mover. It delivers an experience of stillness to the person watching. Even though participants are in their separate boxes on the screen, it can still be interesting to watch one or more bodies do Shape & Stillness. You could put people in pairs and have one person go at a time and the other person just witness their partner as opposed to trying to track all the separate screens. You can use "hide video" and "pin video" to facilitate this (see above). You could also have a group of four or five people do this form while the rest witness. If your group is relatively small, you could do two or more turns to give everyone a chance to move.

It is good to remind folks that being on video also adds a new wrinkle to making shapes—are we near or far from the video, do we fill up the entire screen or make a shape that only partly enters the screen, etc. These variations can create new sorts of visual interest for the witness.

Movers can still play with moving at the same time as someone else on the screen or matching shapes, if they want to pay attention to what others are doing.

Big Body Stories

Most of the practices around DT3s online would apply to Big Body Stories. This is a more advanced form and it could be the DT3s provide a slightly easier approach to combining movement and story (and also sound). But for those who know the more open-ended, flexible form of Big Body Stories, you could offer that as an option in situations where you might be, say, putting people in pairs in breakout rooms to do DT3s.

The challenge of both DT3s and Big Body Stories is that they can take more time. In an in-person class, you have probably noticed that some people finish much more quickly than others. It's a bit trickier to put people in breakout rooms and manage the time factor, especially in an online class that tends to be shorter. Still possible, though!

I could imagine setting up a class where the focus is just on telling DT3s and Big Body Stories for those who are familiar with the form and limiting the size of the group (4-6?). You could do a bit in pairs, but then spend most of the time letting each person do a story. You might keep the length of the class open to accommodate each person.

Circle Stories

Circle Stories could be done on the full screen with a few participants at a time or you could send small groups to breakout rooms to do this form. You would need to establish the order since you can't actually be in a circle and because the position of individuals in the "grid" can change. Have people remember the person they are to follow in order to keep the circling going.