Uncovering the Essence of What Animates Us
Beneath The Dance: Investigating the Lived Experiences of Bodily Perceptions Generated While Dancing

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Abstract

This dissertation is a phenomenological study in which I endeavour to uncover the essence of what animates us beneath the dance by investigating the lived experiences of bodily perceptions generated while dancing. I present four perspectives to illuminate this essence. In my first perspective, I offer literature from a variety of phenomenologists, dancers and choreographers which substantiate vital and spiritual perceptions generated while dancing. In my second perspective, I conduct an autobiographical inquiry and recollect my childhood experiences of dance. In my third perspective, I present an historic narrative about the lives of my dance mentors Gertrud and Magda Hanova which is of significant historical importance for dance history to Vancouver. In my fourth perspective, looking through the lens of phenomenology and drawing on performative inquiry, I present textual reflections written by grade four students, which explore the children’s dancing experiences. In conclusion, I stress the need to return again and again to the dancing body in order to experience revitalization and renewal. I explore the significance of dance for teaching and learning and expand on how this study may inform education. This work is an invitation to celebrate returning to the dancing body and to honour the divinity of the dance in each person.

Keywords: dance; dance education; dance history; spirituality; vitality; performative inquiry; phenomenology
I dedicate this dissertation to the dancing body and to everyone who honours our divinity with dancing. Much love to my dancing family, especially my Mum, Pauline and my loving husband Irwan.
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My deepest thanks and gratitude go to Dr. Celeste Snowber, my supervisor, who has constantly inspired me with her words of wisdom, perspectives on the dance and the body, and her insightful guidance for this work. Celeste, you are an exceptional person who demonstrates so gracefully how the teacher may successfully marry her love of dance, spirituality, and her passion for teaching to inspire and evoke students to successfully tell their own stories. You are a wonderful teacher and dancer. Thank you so much.

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Introduction
Returning to the Dancing Body
Honouring Our Divinity

*Figure 1.*

*Returning to the Dancing Body*
The little girl stood motionless, hugging the doorway of the dark, back porch. She gazed to her right at the steep stairway that slanted deeply into the night shadows of the yard. Then she slowly and carefully felt her way towards the railing of the porch by sliding her bare feet across the rough, old boards. Balancing on an unsteady stool used for hanging the wash, she carefully climbed up onto the lip of the wooden guard rail. She stood there for moments drinking in the stillness. Time seemed to have slowed. She looked down. The peach tree was a dark silhouette and she could see the black outline of the garage. She knew tonight was the night. She would fly. She spread her arms, feet close together, knees bent, not unlike a high diver getting ready to gracefully spring off a diving board. Ready, she took in a deep breath and raising herself up on her tiptoes, pushed off. It was as though the air became semi-solid. She was uplifted and held in the warm night breeze, suspended and wrapped in a holy and loving embrace. Time froze. And then still supported by invisible wings of air, feeling light as a seedpod, she was released and slowly drifted down to the grass. As she landed, her feet gently touched the wet, dew covered lawn and she shivered with elation.

As a small child, I wanted to fly. More than flying, I wanted to leave the earthly constraints of my body and weightlessly revel in the air, dance in the coolness of moonlight and feel joy at the release of the pull of gravity. Is this memory of myself jumping off the back porch a dream or was this moment real? I remember the details so clearly. Being caught up, suspended, floating, cradled and swathed so lovingly in an ethereal presence. And then drifting slowly down to the ground. I recall the feel of the wet lawn as I landed. I can still vividly recollect my feelings of elation, peace, and wonder.

It seems I have spent my life recapturing the feelings of this special moment from my early childhood by dancing. While dancing I similarly feel released from gravity and experience a profound elation. I connect to and am embraced by a sacred presence. Throughout my life, dance has remained a constant conduit to these deeply moving perceptions and provided a means to access my vitality and experience spiritual renewal. These exceptional qualities of dance have inspired this dissertation and called me to illuminate the beauty of a return to the dancing body and in so doing honour our innate divinity.

I come to this work as a means of understanding, unravelling, and honouring all that I have received from dance. The hope of this dissertation will be to investigate one
particular aspect of dance, which is the lived experiences of bodily perceptions generated while dancing.

This dissertation is informed by materials and stories I have gathered together from my childhood dance experiences, from the lives of my dance mentors, Gertrud and Magda Hanova, and from the experiences of the children who danced in my grade four classroom this past year in order to uncover the essence of what animates us beneath the dance. This work explores the importance of this ‘animation’, in that my materials and experiences suggest that dance provides a connection to our life-force, and is a conduit to our vitality, which is fundamentally inspirational.

I draw on the work of Snowber (1989, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009), a dancer, writer, educator, and Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, who has written extensively about the necessity of honouring the body as spiritual and knowing. Snowber (2007) informs us that, “…little attention has been made to the place of dance or to the body as places of spiritual growth within educative practice. There has also been little theorizing and practice around spirituality within dance education, although dancers for centuries have honoured these connections” (p. 1450). For the clarity and purposes of this dissertation, Snowber (2007) aptly defines spirituality “as the place one can make connections to the inner life, the other, the natural world, to the numinous, but most of all to ourselves” (p. 1450).

This work investigates how dance experiences provide a unique kinaesthetic entrance to the emotional, physical, intellectual, and especially the spiritual parts of our selves. I draw on this work as an action site of liminality, a threshold, for in dancing we experience a ritual of passage as we transition from one flowing moment to another. As we dance in this ‘inbetweenness’, we ‘become’ ourselves anew. We reintegrate ourselves and emerge vital and alive in our motions. We are ‘reborn’.

This dissertation is a dance in which I invite the reader to partner with me as we skip, waltz, turn, and sway through the pages together to discover why dancing matters and is of significance for everyone. In dancing, we are not just moving our bodies. We are also discovering our connections to the pulses and rhythms of our humanity. In dancing, we are focusing on moments which illuminate perceptions not always touched on or experienced as we pause, awaken, are still… and then embrace being closer to a
remembrance of our purity, birth, vitality, and the heartbeat of the world. We are interconnected in dancing to all that is and so we unite with the sacred selves we are.

The stage on which I reveal this dance is not limited to a small square holding us in or limiting our movement. This stage is an action site of curiosity and of being in moments in which possibilities are revealed and celebrated. The dance I invite you to dance with me is a dance of offering and is unlimited in its steps and spaces.
Ways of Being in Inquiry: An Interpretative Dance

Figure 2.

Rebirth

My body calls to me... Come dance with me, refresh yourself... I know her familiar voice and listen. I slowly unfold my confined self. I loosen, shake, release, and unwind. I shed layers of imposed restraint, caution, reserve, and tiredness. I find my ‘true’ self buried beneath these restrictive wrappings. I awaken. And stretch my being... I embrace this exposed and now more vulnerable self. I am uncloaking inhibitions and barriers and discovering my proprioceptive senses sharper and alive beneath. I swing out with a rhythm of heartbeat and breath, emanating in pulses that speak of my inner measures, beats and accents. I rise and fall, dip and turn, expand and contract. I open and lengthen, extend and increase, my body shouts and is exhilarated by this freedom. I am stronger, lusty, robust, energetic, tough, powerful, potent, and intoxicated with my movement. I am reborn. Through this dancing I have been returned to the body of my birth.
The research methodology which we choose shapes our understanding of our landscape(s), our questions, our ways of being. Our methodology betrays our communion with the world; it opens us (and the world) to inspection and introspection, expectation and interspection. Choosing a research methodology is to take off our clothes and expose our passions, our imperfections, our hopes, and yes, our quest. (Fels, 2010, pp. 2-3)

I call together materials and experiences related to the essence of what animates us beneath the dance in order to create a multidimensional view of this phenomenon. I invite the reader to enter this literary liminal space in the hope that he or she will embrace and celebrate the perspectives I present and emerge on the other side, transformed.

In my first perspective, I will discuss the sources of my inspiration, which provide the theoretical underpinnings for this dissertation, and which lie in a body of literature written by phenomenological philosophers, dance historians, modern dancers, modern dance choreographers, dance educators, and somatic movement dance educators. Through the literature, I will examine the written work of these authors in order to ascertain if the phenomena of ‘lived experiences of bodily perceptions while dancing’ have been documented and I will especially take note of references that highlight a dancer’s body data or a restorative, embodied, or spiritual aspect of the experiences.

According to Van Manen (1990), “…in its most basic form lived experience involves our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself” (p. 36). “Lived experiences gather hermeneutic significance as we (reflectively) gather them by giving memory to them” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 37). Bodily perceptions can be understood as “the felt sense of our bodies and a felt sense of our individual aliveness” (Sheets-Johnstone 1992, p. 3). We link the psychic to the physiological and arrive at our perceptions. Perception is more than the sensations one takes in but is always overshadowed by our personal way of seeing the world. How we make ‘sense’ of the world is undoubtedly by using our senses but how these senses are interpreted is always viewed through our own particular lens of experience. “The tactile-kinaesthetic body is the foundation of perception and the brain is an organ of and for movement” (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009, p. 196). Body data, may be defined according to Snowber (2002) as “the information, which occurs in the present moment, the immediate present-time, the ways we experience information
through our bodies” (p. 3). Embodiment can be defined as the “integration of the physical or biological body and the phenomenal or experiential body,” suggesting “a seamless though often-elusive matrix of body/mind worlds” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, in Hocking, Haskell, & Linds, 2001, p. xviii).

Given the scope of this research study, it was not possible to investigate or discover mention of ‘lived experiences of bodily perceptions while dancing’ across the many and broad artistic dance styles and cultural groups that have existed over time. I situate this research in my world of experience, which is a western perspective and so if I am remiss in including other experts or significant writers from outside of my limited cultural perspective, I apologize in advance. My selections were based on the recognized expertise of phenomenological philosophers, dance historians, dance educators, modern dancers, modern dance choreographers, and somatic movement dance educators, and their having expressed notions of ‘lived experiences of bodily perceptions generated while dancing’ or reference to a metaphor with similar meaning as ‘a return to the body where I was born’ which denotes the potential restorative or connective powers generated while dancing.

In my second perspective, I will conduct an autobiographical inquiry by delving into my personal lived experiences centering on my embodied perceptions of dance using a methodology called autoethnography. Autoethnography is a form of autobiographical personal narrative that explores the writer’s experience of life and utilizes the autobiographical material of the researcher as the primary data to link to an aspect of culture. An autoethnographical inquiry is a form of self-reflection and writing that seeks to share the researcher’s personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural and social meanings. The researcher hopes that in the telling of his or her personal story, the reader will find resonance with the universal aspects of the writing and find new meaning about a topic. (Ellis, 2004), (Chang, 2008), (Lapadat, 2009)

As a research methodology the benefits are the ways in which research of such a personal nature might give insight into the lived experiences of others. The researcher hopes to create a poetic resonance in which the reader is led to understand another’s life experience in a compelling, evocative, and authentic manner. Pinar & Grumet (1976); Spry (2001); Irwin & de Cosson (2009); Meyer (2008); Bresler, (2004, 2007);
In my third perspective, I will document and pay homage to the lives of my mentors, Vancouver Modern Dance teachers Magda and Gertrud Hanova. Their story is part of my story in that I spent almost thirty-five years as their pupil and so was greatly influenced by their philosophy of dance, which centers on each of their students finding their own personal access to their creativity, inner self and expression as dancers. For this section of my inquiry I will document and explore the Hanova sisters’ life experiences by drawing on historical writings, their own writings, recorded recollections of their lives by Gertrud Hanova which I recorded with well known Canadian dance critic, Kaija Pepper in 1993, and a collection of photographs given to me by Magda and Gertrud Hanova in the hopes that I would some day document their story. These photographs beautifully capture moments of the sisters’ lives and invite the reader to view and ponder glimpses of a particular and never before seen dance history.

It is important to note that this chapter of my dissertation is an historic narrative of significant historical importance for dance history to Vancouver. The Hanova sisters grew up, taught dance, and took dance classes in Europe from many influential and famous dance teachers between 1903 and 1932. This era, known as the time of Weimar body culture, was a golden period for the arts and sciences in Europe and particularly for a new and emerging modern dance.

The Hanova sisters also lived and danced in Bombay, India from 1932 to 1949, where the sisters were part of the revival and reemergence of classical Indian dance. Further, the Hanova sisters studied directly in London with Rudolph Laban in the 1950’s before moving to Canada and opening Vancouver’s first modern dance school in 1957. The Hanova School of Dance existed in Vancouver until 1997 and hundreds of Vancouver dancers’ lives were enriched by their dance experiences with Magda and Gertrud Hanova. This research is the first time the work of the Hanova sisters has been thoroughly documented. Previously, the Hanova sisters’ lives have only been briefly outlined in articles in newspapers and magazines, some of which I have written.

1 The photographs in this dissertation are under copyright and may not be duplicated or reproduced without the author’s permission
The Hanova sisters’ life experiences were unique and have much to contribute to an understanding of how dance has evolved in the last century but also maybe more importantly their life experiences uniquely illuminate an understanding of the essence of what animates us beneath the dance.

In my fourth perspective, while maintaining my focus on an inquiry into the lived experiences of bodily perceptions generated by dancing, I will connect my personal story to my practice as an elementary school teacher. Through the lens of phenomenology and drawing on performative inquiry, I will document my grade four students’ dance experiences through a personal dance journal and students’ dance journals in which the students explore and reflect on questions about their feelings, attitudes and beliefs about dance and their dance experiences. As a researcher, I will engage in and lead dance activities with my participants each time before they explore these questions in writing so that there will be a close connection between the experiences and the recording of the experiences. These phenomenological experiences, which will highlight moments that called the students to attention, will provide the textual material I will examine and interpret for insights into the essence of the students’ dance experiences. These moments or “stops” as Appelbaum (1995) has labelled them, are further clarified by Fels (2010). She explains that “a stop is a moment that tugs on our sleeve, a moment that arrests our habits of engagement, a moment within which horizons shift, and we experience our situation anew” (p. 6). My hope is to reveal the voices of the lived body and their perceptual experiences while dancing from these recorded moments to impart a philosophy of the essence of the dancing body.

In visiting these various action sites of research I hope to illuminate the essence of what animates us beneath the dance. This writing will be an act of eros in which I fulfill the need to explore and reflect on intimate questions about what I love the most, the nature and experiences of the dance.

From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings…In doing research we question the world’s very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us. The research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. We desire to truly know our loved one’s very nature. And if our love is
strong enough we not only will learn much about life, we also will come face to face with its mystery. (van Manen, 1990, pp. 5-6)
Chapter 1. Delving Into the Dancing Body
Inspiration and Longing

Figure 3.

Magda in Flight
Yes, yes, that’s what I wanted.
I always wanted.
I always wanted to return to the body where I was born.

Song
Allen Ginsberg (1954)

When I first read Ginsberg’s poem ‘Song’, his words prompted an immediate ‘recognition’ as I associated his words ‘to return to the body where I was born’, to what I experience while I am dancing. This metaphorical ‘return’ is a reconnection to my body, a rebirth, in which in the act of dancing I am able to perceive and experience ‘the lived body’, which is “a non-dualistic understanding of the conscious, intentional, and unified body, soul and mind in action in the world” (Barbour, 2005, p.35).

I experience this ‘return to the body’, in that while I am dancing, I rediscover my connections to what I call a ‘divine immanence’. By ‘divine immanence’ I mean the life force, the spark of vitality that pervades and flows in all that is alive. Among scholars of philosophy, (Spinoza (1677); Deleuze (1968), the term ‘immanence’ has been acknowledged to mean the divine force that is within all that exists and inferences that divinity is inseparable in all things. I believe this spark of immanence is the source of our animation, growth, and consciousness and remains a mystery as to its source or creator. This spark of immanence has a ‘sacred’ origin and I refer this to mean an experience of restorative unity with ‘the creator of all things’, which I acknowledge may have a universal but different meaning for every individual.

Ginsberg’s (1954) words beautifully capture the essence of my longing to return to a divine connection. It is a longing to revel in the presence of my original self, which has not been muddied by the everyday erosion and sometimes exhaustion of daily living. The self that understands that we are part of a deeper circle of life that is continuous and everlasting. It is an essential longing ‘to return to the body where I was born’ in which my origins, the place of my beginnings, my wellspring is easily accessed to gain vitality or a sacred sustenance. A sustenance which is spiritual food for my depleted soul and emerges while I am dancing. How I am sustained through dancing is a mystical experience. I am metaphorically retracing my steps to my original source. In the dance I am reborn and for moments, oneness is achieved with the divine.
When I dance, I realize I stimulate my 'lived' body, I increase my heartbeat and my intake of breath. The dancing fosters a flood of positive sensations that speak to me of restoration. These sensations are not reliant on how fast or slow I execute my dance movements, or what parts of my body I choose to move. My dance is about the rhythm and intention, the artfulness of the moving. In his essay, *What Is Going on in Dance*, Beardsley (1984) discusses how one may define dance as separate from everyday movement. He questions “how it happens that—or what are the generating conditions that make—motions and pauses become the movings and poses of dance?” (p. 41). He suggests that dance differs from everyday movement in that it has expressiveness and ‘virtual powers’. Beardsley (1984), in his discussion of how to define dance, aptly includes the thoughts of influential and eminent modern dancer Merce Cunningham, who when describing dance said, “I think it has to do with amplification, with enlargement. Dancing provides something—an amplification of energy—that is not provided any other way...” (p. 41). Cunningham’s description parallels mine in that he references the dancing body as increasing our energy and enlarging the self through dance.

**Defining Dance as a Spiritual Communion**

The term dance may be described as "an embodied sensory experience expressive of personal, historical, and cultural meanings (Press and Warburton, 2007, p.1273). Dance as defined by dance educator H'Doubler (1940) is “the rhythmic motor expression of feeling states, aesthetically valued, whose movement symbols are consciously designed for the pleasure and satisfaction of re-experiencing, of expressing, of communicating, of executing, and of creating form” (p. 128). But the term ‘dance’ may bring up all sorts of imagery and definitions depending on who is interpreting it. According to dance educator Lewitzky, (1975), “It is difficult to define dance in words because it is not a verbal language” (p. 4). Lewitsky’s statement identifies the dance to be a language in itself and one in which it is the body that speaks and expresses or communicates our meanings. Sheets-Johnstone, (1999a) concurs that, “Movement is indeed our mother tongue.”

Dance critic and writer Martin (1963) defines dance as “the common impulse to resort to movement to externalize states which we cannot externalize by rational means” (p. 8). Martin’s (1963) definition clarifies that dance is prompted by a motivation to
physically express our inner states which cannot be manifested by our reason or mind. Dance educator Stinson (2004) brings to our attention that our inner states or selves may be viewed as our somatic awareness. She informs us that, “The term ‘somatics’ is attributed to Thomas Hanna, who described it as a way of perceiving oneself from the “inside out”, where one is aware of feelings, movements, and intentions, rather than looking objectively from the outside “ in” (Stinson, 1988, p. 20).

Dance historian Sachs (1937) shares that the dance has been utilized in many roles in the history of humanity and went beyond being only a means of physical and emotional expression. His definition expands our understanding of the dance to include the dance as a form of spiritual communion. He illuminates the importance and integral place dance has held in humanities existence since time immemorial as a conduit to that which is greater than our selves.

The dance, inherited from savage (sic) ancestors as an ordered expression in motion of the exhilaration of the soul, develops and broadens into the search for God, into a conscious effort to become a part of those powers beyond the might of man (sic) which control our destinies. The dance becomes a sacrificial rite, a charm, a prayer, and a prophetic vision. (p. 4)

Dancer and phenomenologist Fraleigh (1987) adds to Sachs’ (1937) view that the dance has always held a significant and spiritual role in human history:

At the ritual foundations of Western dance and in the religions of the East, dance was viewed in its power to embody cosmological theory and to link human essence to origins. What could not be explained by other means could be either demonstrated in dance or imagined as a dance that could spin the world into being. (p. 70)

In our present time, the function of dance as a spiritual communion appears to be much less visible, particularly in the post-modern and industrialized west. The dance which was once our means of establishing a connection to that which was greater than ourselves, our inner selves and the Earth seems to have been forfeited to a technological world which has us act mainly as spectators and not participants in the stories of our own lives. This loss or disengagement of the dancing body from acts of worship, gratitude, prayer or simply dances of joy at being alive gives me impetus to pursue an investigation and validation of perceptual experiences generated while dancing.
Snowber (1995) puts our loss of dance as a spiritual communion into further perspective when she states, “I continue to marvel when I see my own life and others tangibly changed when given room for the body in the place of emotional and spiritual healing. The body is given a place of respect, becoming a sacred space where God can enter into the work of forming and transforming us” (p. 137). Snowber (1995) adds, “…the language of movement-- can be a sacred place of dialogue with our Creator. The body can become a place where we can listen to our own voice, the voice that is sometimes muffled by the constant demands of our lives” (p. 2).

Fraleigh (1987) in her writing about the body and dance, further clarifies the mystery of the dancing body enabling spiritual connections and highlights that the dance has the power to center and manifest a ‘vibrant presentness’:

Dancing is a spiritual endeavor in the sense that it is a quest for self-unification… She seeks to unite body-subject and body-object, uniting the body she is with the body imaged in the dance… Eventually she wants to be concentrated in it. Her concentration becomes the process of its own erasure, allowing her the possibility of becoming perfectly centered in her dance, or of being unified in a vibrant presentness. As she attains her purposes in dance, the vibrant life of her dance appears. In mystical thought and art, present centeredness is valued as participation in the essence of God. (pp. 41-42)

Besides dance, there appear to be many other activities that have the ability to increase our vitality and sense of wellbeing. The work of Csikszentmihalyi (1997) is of relevance to this study as he submits in his book Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life that achieving ‘flow’ frequently in creative activities is an indicator of life’s success and enjoyment. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) states that, “The metaphor of “flow” is one that many people have used to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. Athletes, refer to it as “being in the zone,” religious mystics as being in “ecstasy,” artist and musicians as “aesthetic rapture” (p. 29).

In my experience, dance is an activity that produces “flow” and may lead to feelings of ‘aesthetic rapture’ and vitality. In the public school curriculum, dance education may fall under the umbrella of either arts education or physical education, which seems to denote that it is thought of as either/or both an artistic practice and a physically engaging practice. The athlete and the dance artist appear to have much in
common, both seeking something more through moving their physical body. Modern dance icon, Graham (1991), when describing dance said, "In each it is the performance of a dedicated precise set of acts, physical or intellectual, from which comes shape of achievement, a sense of one’s being, a satisfaction of spirit. One becomes in some area an athlete of God" (p. 3).

Graham’s (1991) statement falls very much in line with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1997) conception of ‘flow’. Graham (1991) is expressing her recognition of the holistic nature of the human being and is implying that through a dedication and combination of all of one’s faculties that the sacred or spiritual, which was defined by Snowber (2007) “as making connections to the inner life…to the numinous, but most of all to ourselves” (p. 1450), can emerge and be experienced in any practice. According to Fels (1995), “…the aesthetic experience of dance, writing, painting, theatre, spills across boundaries, defeats boundaries, does not permit boundaries to exist” (p. 3).

Reimagining Physical Education
A Call to Awaken Movement and Breath


Smith and Lloyd’s (2006) journal article, *Promoting Vitality in Health and Physical Education*, focuses on encouraging a deeper look at what they feel should be most important in physical education programs. They emphasize that vitality is a key element of healthy living and clarify their meaning of the term vitality:

Even more than a concept, vitality is first of all an event, a situation, a circumstance that is experienced bodily. It is feeling alive, innervated,
animated, and invigorated in specific postures, positions, gestures, motions, and expressions of the body. Vitality refers, in other words, to the corporeal constitution of active and healthy living. (Smith & Lloyd, 2006, p. 250)

In my investigation of bodily perceptions generated while dancing I am also endeavouring to highlight the relevance of accessing feelings of vitality, vigour, and feeling alive. Smith & Lloyd (2006) further note that, “Emphasis should be placed on the enacted postures, positions, gestures, and expressions that comprise animate, kinaesthetic consciousness rather than simply on measures of movement capacity” (p. 262). Smith & Lloyd (2006) are critically stressing that vitality itself is a worthy outcome for physical education programs and adopting vitality as a key result may change how we assess physical health. Smith & Lloyd (2006) direct our attention to a “focus on the vitality affects and internal sensations, feelings, and actions of being composed bodily, having inspirational capacity, exhibiting more than brute strength, sustaining physical activity with enduring grace, and having the flexibility to reposition, repattern, and so be responsive (i.e., supple, agile, and impressionable) in movement expression” (p. 263). Most significantly they emphasize that, “Comprehensive health and physical education programs should connect with mental, emotional, spiritual, and environmental health as essentially derivative of the affects, motions, and movement patterns of vital engagement with others” (pp. 263-264). Smith & Lloyd’s (2006) suggestions that physical education programs include elements of an emotional, spiritual and environmental nature made me ponder and reframe my conceptions for physical education programs. Their inclusion of a holistic approach for physical education programs shifts my conventional understanding about physical education programs, which have been that physical education programs are about games, sports, and competition. My reframed understanding is a realization that physical education programs could move away from competitive outcomes and focus more on accessing vitality, communing with nature, and enabling spiritual connections. Smith & Lloyd’s article (2006) brought a realization that the intent and manner in which we engage in any physical practice is of most importance and will determine the depth of the experiences we perceive. The physical body engaged holistically in any activity, with a phenomenological focused awareness, appears to have a similar potential as dancing for making connections with our spiritual selves.
Lloyd (2011) in her article, *Awakening Movement Consciousness in the Physical Landscapes of Literacy: Leaving, Reading and Being Moved by One’s Trace*, weaves phenomenological insights, generated while experiencing nature, with an intention of expanding our understanding of physical literacy to include an awakening of movement consciousness and “the possibility of recalling an animate connection with the world” (p. 71). Lloyd (2011) when speaking of popular physical fitness regimes notes that, “Technological inventions such as the treadmill are not the root cause for the mechanization of movement and the numbness present within and beyond gym walls” (p. 72). Lloyd (2011) makes clear that, “Embodied ways of knowing and being, therefore, stand in stark contrast to the dominant approaches to physical education pedagogy and program development that for the most part are influenced by the scientization of movement (Corbin & McKenzie, 2008)” (p. 72). In Lloyd’s (2011) article, she describes a “motion-sensitive phenomenological approach” (p. 76) and recounts the invigorating pleasure she feels while walking in the woods or through the snow and how in these moments she is experiencing “a reciprocal embrace” (p. 72) with the Earth. Her article brings to our attention that curriculum transformation in physical education has many possibilities. Lloyd (2011) asks, “Could students be encouraged to find special, even sacred spaces and places that could awaken them on their pathways to becoming more fit and physically active within and beyond the milieu of physical education?” (p. 86) Linking eco-pedagogy with physical education pedagogy could open up physical education curriculum to new and sacred dimensions, where students are simultaneously combining physical fitness experiences with explorations in nature. Similarly, linking eco-pedagogy to dance pedagogy could enable diverse and sacred explorations of the environment through dancing, as “the human body dances the world” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1984, p. 134). As Abrams (2010) importantly informs us, “For too long we’ve closed ourselves to the participatory life of our senses, inured ourselves to the felt intelligence of our muscled flesh and its manifold solidarities. We’ve taken our primary truths from technologies that hold the world at a distance” (p. 7).
As I dance on the Earth’s bare skin, I merge with rock, tree, grass, air, and dust. I feel the rock as solid, substantial and sentient. The trees and grass speak my name in melodious undertones as the wind carries their voices and caresses my flesh. The Earth reaches up to me and I feel Her energy flow through my bones. I sink rapturously into Her embrace with a knowing that I have come home.
I endeavour to incorporate all parts of my self holistically each time I dance. My outcome or goal is not about how high I can kick my leg or how long I can balance in an arabesque. The dance I dance is complex, a reaching into my soul. Through the dance I caress my hurts, dispel my fears, and accept my flaws. I may only move my fingers or toes, tense or stretch my thighs or shoulders, shake my head or take a deep breath and expand my torso. The movement can be small or large. But as I give rise to and connect to the essence of my dancing body, I am expressing and proclaiming my aliveness. The pathways of my being have united.

Snowber (1995) articulates that, “Our feelings, emotions, and bodies, linked together proclaim that we are alive” (p. 132). Joining all that we are to announce our aliveness is a vital act. It is an act that suggests renewal and rebirth as I experience a “moment of natality” (Fels, 2010 p. 3). This notion of natality, originating with Arendt (1958) is “a rebirthing of the possibilities that is humankind, an opportunity to reclaim what has been lost, to celebrate what might become” (Fels, 2010, p. 3). Each time I dance I am able to cultivate this ‘becoming’ and refresh my soul. This renewal of my vitality is a creative and spiritual experience and is a focus on awakening bodily perceptions of an artistic nature. These perceptions are the path to a return, to a state of being in which I am invigorated, and reminded that my body is a place of knowing. My body is a reverent place and as Martha Graham often said, “Wherever a dancer stands ready, that spot is holy ground” (De Mille, 1991, p. x).

Similar to Graham's metaphor, Ginsberg's metaphor of 'returning to the body where I was born' speaks to me of the recognition that in dancing we discover a holy place of rebirth and renewal. I also interpret Ginsberg's words metaphorically to suggest that through dancing we may experience a return to a child like state, where we are free to move without embarrassment or self-consciousness, reveling in the purity of our bodily perceptions. Snowber (1995) expands on the notion of dance liberating our 'inner' child, when she states, “At the heart of movement is a playfulness that gives our child room to breathe, to come alive, and, ultimately, to be nurtured…When we are invited to do the simple yet exhilarating actions of the child, we give place for that child to be present again in our lives” (p. 142).

Ginsberg’s (1954) poem triggered a realization of my longing to 'return to the body where I was born' and inspired me to examine the significance of this ‘return’. With the inspiration of Ginsberg’s words I am drawn to investigate ‘a return to the body’ by
examing the ‘lived’ experiences (Merleau-Ponty (1945); van Manen (1990, 2007) of bodily perceptions generated by dancing in order to interpret and discover the essence of these experiences. As Fraleigh (1998) states, “One of the major purposes of phenomenological description is to build towards meaning. Then others may be able to see what you see, or at least understand what you see” (p. 139). Revealing an understanding of ‘the essence of what animates us beneath the dance’ will provide insights into the uplifting experiences found while dancing. Investigating and clarifying these understandings may deepen our knowledge of dance and illuminate the nature of the essence of what animates us beneath the dance. Revealing a deeper understanding of ‘the essence of what animates us beneath the dance’ may shed light on the importance of this ‘animation’, in that the dance may provide a connection to our vitality, which may be fundamentally inspirational in nature.

**Unfolding Phenomenology to Deepen our Understanding of Dance**

Phenomenology is a broad philosophical movement emphasizing the study of ‘conscious’ experience as experienced from the first-person point of view. Phenomenology can be seen as a personal study of our own existence and how we perceive it. Phenomenology has been practiced in different manners for centuries but it became more prominent in the early 20th century. In *Dance and the Lived Body*, Fraleigh (1987) examines and describes the early movement of phenomenology as deriving from the work of first, the philosophers Nietzsche, Husserl, and Bergson and then how their ideas were developed further by Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. Sheets-Johnstone (1966) further outlines phenomenology as “…descriptions of man (sic) and the world as man (sic) lives in-the-midst-of-the-world, as he experiences himself and the world, keenly and acutely, before any kind of reflection whatsoever takes place” (p. 10). Sheets-Johnstone (1966) adds, “Instead of reflecting upon experience as the objective relationship of man (sic) to the world, the phenomenologist seeks the heart of the experience itself: the immediate and direct consciousness of man (sic) in the face of the world” (pp. 10-11).
Phenomenology is not concerned with *re-making* experience according to a standard of impartiality. Phenomenology is concerned with the experience itself *as it is lived* and with bringing to light the essential nature of that experience through particular reflective acts that uncover what is actually there in the experience and that at the same time expose preconceptions and prejudgments which have, unknown to us, become encrusted onto the experience. (Sheets-Johnstone, 1984, p. 138)

We learn from Van Manen (1990) that hermeneutic phenomenology “is a human science that studies persons” (p. 6) and most importantly, hermeneutic phenomenology “appeals to our immediate common experience in order to conduct a structural analysis of what is most common, most familiar, most self-evident to us. The aim is to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviours, intentions, and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld” (p. 19).

To do a phenomenological-hermeneutical study, one must be in touch with actual lived experiences of the phenomenon one is investigating and with the beliefs, attitudes, and values surrounding those experiences; it is through an analysis of first-hand accounts of beliefs, attitudes, values, and experiences that foundational changes in thinking and praxis are revealed. (Sheets-Johnstone, 1984, p. 143)

The written work of phenomenologists has a concern with and holds reference to the unique and profound experiences of our bodies, which illuminate our essential nature as ‘lived bodies’. The writings of phenomenological philosophers such as (Merleau-Ponty (1945); Heidegger (1962); Husserl (1970); van Manen (1990, 2007); Sheets-Johnstone (1966, 1984, 1992, 1999, 2009); and (Fraleigh (1987, 1998, 2004, 2010) have furthered my understanding of the importance of the body and sparked my interest to investigate the lived experiences of bodily perceptions generated while dancing by their reflections on the body, and in the case of Sheets-Johnstone and Fraleigh, by their reflections on the dancing body.

The selected quotes I present from phenomenological philosophers provide philosophical and theoretical underpinnings for this dissertation and also acknowledge the notion of the body as our first place of knowing and perceiving the world and that our bodies are our means of interacting and expressing to the world.

In particular, the work of existential phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1945) has imparted many insights for my dissertation inquiry. He proposes that we are perceivers in a body first, before a consciousness or ‘cognito’ and the information we receive
through our body is to be listened to as a first source for making choices, doing, moving, experiencing and interacting with others and the world.

Merleau-Ponty (1945) stresses that “the whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous accounting and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second order” (p. vii). Merleau-Ponty (1945) believed that it is in listening to this first source that we may be enabled to ‘transcend’ the mundane and ironically see the mundane anew and be transformed to ‘something more’.

Bodily perceptions generated while dancing may provide, as Merleau-Ponty (1945) describes, a ‘transformation from the mundane to the ‘something more’. Sheets-Johnstone (1966) further illustrates this notion when she shares, “It becomes evident then that through the suspension of judgment or belief, one approaches the phenomena fresh or anew, so that what is usually familiar becomes strange, not in the sense of being foreign and unintelligible, but in the sense of being original and untainted” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1966, p. 133).

Merleau-Ponty (1945) defines phenomenology as “the study of essences; and according to it all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man (sic) and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity’” (p. vii).

In the act of dancing one may find a means to examine and listen to our personal facticity or the phenomena of our bodies, which may provide a conduit to feelings of ‘a return’ or put us in touch with our essence. This reconnecting to our essence provides renewal in that we may experience a metaphorical rebirth as we return to our inner source of vitality. For this research and in my focus and reflection on the existence of bodily perceptions generated while dancing I am attempting to capture or identify the essence of these experiences.

According to Sheets-Johnstone (1966) our essences in dancing are individual and unique in experience and can only be found in the 'act' of dancing. "If we wanted to
capture the essence of the lived body in the experience of dance, then we would go back to the lived experience of dance itself, for it is there and only there that we might discover, for example, that there are indeed many ways of being a body in dance…” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1966, p. 133).

Merleau-Ponty (1945) did not specifically discuss ‘dance and the lived body’ and mentions dance only briefly in his book The Phenomenology of Perception. He states:

The body is our general medium for having a world. Sometimes it is restricted to the actions necessary for the conservation of life, and accordingly it posits around us a biological world; at other times, elaborating upon these primary actions and moving from their literal to a figurative meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significance: this is true of motor habits such as dancing. (p. 146)

Extrapolating his meaning we may surmise that by this ‘core of new significance’ Merleau-Ponty (1945) meant that dance differs from our primary actions of moving and being in the world because in the motions of dancing we are taken out of our everyday experience and our dancing body serves no ‘logical’ purpose of survival or locomotion. But nevertheless through the dance we may experience a myriad of emotions, which assist us in cathartic motions to voice our felt bodies for multi purposes, which may be of a social, sacred or celebratory nature. Phenomenologist and dancer Fraleigh (1987) informs us that:

The universal impulse to dance is one of celebration; in its most fundamental state… in dance we celebrate our living, concrete reality our embodiment – and within the complexity that embodiment proffers. It is thus that dance may be called a sign for life. As dance is experienced through our vital body – the source of both dance and celebration – it signifies vital human embodiment, or life, as we typically use this word to describe both a vital force and the history of our experience – an indivisible physical and spiritual whole. (p. xvii)

Uniting perspectives on phenomenology and dance Sheets-Johnstone (1984) in her essay Phenomenology as a Way of Illuminating Dance explains that, “The task for the phenomenologist is to clarify and to deepen our understanding of how it is the human body dances the world, a task that is as broad and open-ended as dance itself” (p. 134). Phenomenological insights into the connections between the body, dance and our being in the world assist us in examining the nature of our dance experiences and
even though each dance experience is unique, we come to appreciate the transformational character of each experience. According to Fraleigh (1987), “We might call these peak experiences (as existential psychologist Abraham Maslow does), mystic if we mean an experienced unification with nature, sacred if we mean the experience of a transcendent ground of being; or we might simply understand them as expansions of freedom experienced through conscious exercise of creative agency” (p. 5). Fraleigh (1987) significantly adds, “…I believe that all our vital thoughts and movements pass through that alert and vibrant spot where dance (and also our experience of freedom) arises” (p. xiii).

In her book, *Dance and the Lived Body*, Fraleigh (1987) provides an aesthetic perspective of dance through existential phenomenology, which reveals the holistic nature of dance. She emphasizes:

…in reality the whole self is shaped in the experience of dance, since the body is besouled, bespirited, and beminded. Simply stated, the body is lived through all of these aspects in dance. Soul, spirit, and mind (or varying aspects of the psyche, if you will) are not separate from what we call the physical; rather they are intrinsically tied up with it. (p. 11)

Using existential phenomenological description to record her experience of dancing, Fraleigh (1998) illuminates the nature of one such experience:

When I dance, I am subtly attuned to my body and my motion in a totally different way than I ordinarily am in my everyday actions… And in this, I experience what I would call 'pure presence,' a radiant power of feeling completely present to myself and connected to the world… These are those moments when our intentions toward the dance are realized. (pp. 140-141)

Fraleigh’s (1998) description highlights an experience in which I feel a close affinity. Fraleigh (1998) identifies her experience as ‘pure presence’ while I have used the term ‘divine immanence’. Both of our terms name exceptional feelings experienced while dancing. They are similar in that we both describe feelings of connection and ‘a radiant power of feeling’ or vitality. Fraleigh (1998) further identifies feeling ‘completely present to myself and connected to the world’, which suggests a spiritual experience.

Van Manen (1990) proposes that recording our lived experiences will render the essence of such experiences and that phenomenology can be a textual activity and "a
good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience–is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience” (p. 27). Using phenomenological description to record our lived experience assists us to clarify ‘moments’ of our existence and so appreciate them anew. In validating our lived experience we may re-embrace the essences of our existence and look at the ordinary with fresh focus. As educator Meyer (2008), who writes extensively about ‘living inquiry’ informs us:

Living Inquiry is a practice of inquiry into being-in-the-world. It concerns care of oneself in the world. Living Inquiry encompasses how we experience our everyday worldliness in everyday living and what awareness as a clearing brings before prejudiced eyes – those ready-made interpretations that otherwise would happen behind our backs. As well it seeks awareness that sees newness, truth, and beauty in daily life. (p. 1)

Fraleigh (1998) agrees that phenomenological description is seeking the essence of an experience and further may be poetic in nature:

The subsequent descriptive process may also be similar to the poetic: both are grounded in experience and require reflection, or a looking back on the experience to bring it into language. It is further significant that both poetry and phenomenological reduction seek the essence of experience, a re-creation in words of the living experience, as the most salient feature arise in consciousness and others drop away. (p. 138)

As I transition into the next section, the voices of the dancing body will be heard in many such phenomenological descriptions. These descriptions will further an uncovering of what animates us beneath the dance and illustrate the lived bodily perceptions generated while dancing.

Dance Historians, Modern Dancers, Modern Dance Choreographers, Experiences of Bodily Perceptions and Renewal

...Our dances can and should connect us to something larger than ourselves, even as we also dance for ourselves. (Fraleigh, 2004, p. 60)
Lived experiences of bodily perceptions generated while dancing have been documented in the writings of some of the most influential and well known modern dancers, modern dance choreographers, dance educators, dance historians, and somatic movement dance educators of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Their experiences are individual and unique but also contain a universality that speaks of the commonalities of the deep perceptions felt while dancing.

In World History of the Dance, dance historian Sachs (1937), articulately extols the joyousness and mysteries of the dancing body:

The dance breaks down the distinctions of body and soul… The body, which in ecstasy is conquered and forgotten and which becomes merely a receptacle for the superhuman power of the soul, and the soul, which achieves happiness and bliss in the accelerated movements of a body freed of its own weight; the need to dance, because an effervescent zest for life forces the limbs from sloth, and the desire to dance, because the dancer gains magic powers, which bring him victory, health, life, a mystic tie binding the tribe when it joins hands in the choral dance, and the unconstrained dance. (pp. 3–4)

The writings by and about, some of the most prominent modern dancers and choreographers, such as Duncan (1878–1927), St. Denis (1879–1968), Wigman (1886–1973), Graham (1894–1991), Humphrey (1895–1958), Holm (1893–1992), and Halprin (1920–), contain descriptions that detail the deep perceptions manifested in the dance. These particular icons of the western dance world were chosen because of the enormous influence their work has had in revolutionizing dance and in highlighting dance’s underlying power. These artists solidify and illuminate an understanding of dance as having a strong spiritual element.

Isadora Duncan (1878–1927), an American dancer, described by many as the mother of modern dance, is credited with being the first dancer to ‘rediscover’ the body and return to natural expressive gestures. Up until the early nineteen hundreds, the ballet had dominated western concert dance for nearly four hundred years and employed formalized steps and story lines, which did not stray from an established formula. However, just prior to and at the turn of the 20th century, with the advent of many changes in the world, new ideas started to influence the arts. New styles of dance, currently known as modern or expressionist dance, began emerging. Dance, now became much more a form for artistic expression “not interested in spectacle but in the
communication of emotional experiences – intuitive perceptions, elusive truths – which cannot be communicated in reasoned terms or reduced to mere statement of fact” (Martin, 1963, p. 138).

Dance critic and writer Martin (1963) aptly describes the dance art of Duncan:

It was her deepest desire to discard all artifices, all invention, all traditional methods and established vocabularies such as the ballet employed, and to get to the source of man’s (sic) expressiveness, using only the natural movements of the body without exaggeration or surface ornamentation, and allowing them to produce themselves only under inner compulsion. (p. 138)

In Duncan’s (1928) autobiography, Duncan describes her early endeavours to uncover the source or wellspring from which her movement arose. Her account speaks of the meditative quality of her search:

I spent long days and nights in the studio seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body’s movement. For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus. My mother often became alarmed to see me remain for such long intervals quite motionless as if in a trance—but I was seeking and finally discovered the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversities of movements are born, the mirror of vision for the creation of the dance—it was from this discovery that was born the theory on which I founded my school. (p. 84)

Duncan’s (1928) profound account of her listening to her body to discover ‘the central spring of all movement’ resounds as a sacred discovery. Duncan sought to dance a purity of expression and she experienced perceptions as arising or manifesting from the solar plexus or center. This ‘crater of motor power’ as Duncan (1928) labels her ‘source’ seems to echo my metaphorical description of a ‘to return to the body’ in that both descriptions highlight a source of vitality or a well spring of creativity within us. In her book Gestures of Genius, Vigier (1994) describes how Duncan studied ancient Greek vases to rediscover what she considered a pure and natural form of movement. The vases intrigued Duncan because they depicted gestures of the entire body swept up in the ecstasy of dancing. Vigier (1994) states that:

In the Duncan lexicon, this gesture represents a perfect dance movement, where the natural movement of the body emanates from the spirit,
marking a moment in which the body can no longer contain the exuberance of the spirit and finally lets itself be carried by an impulse it can no longer resist. It is not the gesture itself, but the power and truth of the spirit behind the gesture which so inspired Duncan in her work, as she pursued her belief in dance as the art of finding the “motor of the soul” which stirs the whole body to knowledge of its natural movements. (p. 41)

Vigier (1994) also credits Duncan with returning dance to a place of personal expression and fulfillment. Vigier (1991) informs us that Duncan “…removed the external eye from the dancer’s consciousness—her students never practiced before mirrors—and returned the impulse of movement to the centre of the body where the dancer assumed responsibility for the evolution of its form” (p. 46). “…Duncan’s theories of harmonizing the spiritual and the physical through dance” (Partsch-Bergsohn, 1994, p. 6) has sustained its power and continues to inspire dancers who recognize the truth of her message.

At the same time period, another American dancer, Ruth St. Denis (1879–1968) was also becoming famous for her own unique dance art. St. Denis “became known for her re-creations of mystical Oriental rituals to Western music” (De Mille, 1991, p. 26). She successfully combined theatrical and concert dance traditions. She founded the Denis-Shawn school with Ted Shawn in 1915 in San Francisco and stressed the spiritual elements or religious manifestations of the dance as communication. St. Denis (1951, 1992) emphasized that “…in order to attain the fullest self-realization through the dance, we must understand that the arts—not just dancing but all of them—are never a religion in themselves, never objects of worship, but are the symbol and language for communicating spiritual truths” (p. 4).

According to De Mille (1991), St. Denis “evoked great emotion in her audience, and she projected an aura of mysticism and importance” (p. 34). St. Denis understood that an audience desired a connection to the divine and through her personal evocation was able to bring this unworldly quality to her performances. She believed in the spiritual power of the dance to heal many of the world’s dilemmas. St. Denis (1951, 1992) shares some of her philosophy:

…dance, and dance drama, persistently robust after thousands of years of snubbing by asceticism, scholasticism, and puritanism, can make profound revelations of that which is significant in the relations of human beings, can restore the dignity of the body which prurience and hypocrisy
have damaged, can recall the lost joys of people moving together rhythmically for high purposes, can immeasurably improve the education of the young, can, to a much larger extent than it does, restore vitality to the theatre, can contribute a moral stimulus to the furtherance of more courageous, coordinated, and cultures behaviour. (p. 17)

Mary Wigman (1886–1973) was a German dancer, choreographer, and dance instructor. A pioneer of expressionist modern dance, her work was hailed for bringing the deepest of existential experiences to the stage. She became one of the most iconic figures of Weimar German culture and is considered one of the most important figures in the history of European modern expressionist dance. According to dance writer Martin (1963), “Except for Isadora herself, no figure in the history of the modern dance occupies a higher position than Mary Wigman, in part, for her specific artistic creations, but mainly for her widening of the range of the art and the advancement of its underlying theory” (p. 144).

Wigman studied with Dalcroze and with Rudolph Laban in her early years. “…she held on to Laban’s use of improvisation and to his basic theory of the three elements—force, space and time—which became clearly recognizable components of her dance compositions and fundamental to her teaching. Wigman also adopted Laban’s metaphysical idealism, using space as a metaphor for cosmic order” (Partsch-Bergsohn, 1994, p. 18). Interestingly, Wigman’s dance debut with her solos Lento and Witch Dance I had no musical accompaniment. Wigman believed that dance was an art that could stand entirely on its own and her audience would appreciate her dance with the music of spiritual silence.

According to Partsch-Bergsohn (1994), Wigman and Laban also shared an interest in dances of ‘so-called religious cults’. Partsch-Bergsohn (1994), describes her classes with Wigman and how Wigman taught her students ‘dervish turns’ in order to reach a trance like state. “Wigman believed that the student had to reach this level of trance in order to connect to his (sic) unconscious roots, similar in thought to Carl Jung’s collective unconscious” Partsch-Bergsohn, 1994, p. 19).

Wigman’s dance contained an intensity of expression, emotion, and held many underlying spiritual themes. “Her dance, like Isadora’s grew out of “ecstasy”, but where
Isadora allowed her ecstasy to flow along the course of the music that inspired it, Wigman demanded that her ecstasy create its own forms” (Martin, 1963, p. 145).

Sondra Fraleigh (1987) studied with Wigman in Berlin in 1965-1966. She shares part of her experience. “What I gained from Wigman was an understanding of the philosophical foundations of modern dance, which have their source in her choreography and teaching. She often placed the central existential question, Who am I? at the heart of dance” (Fraleigh, 1987, p. xxii). This question and the question, who am I in relation to the world at large?, is very much tied to the artist’s search for meaning and the artist’s revelation that this meaning is found deep within oneself as the artist expresses her inner person.

“The dance growing out of the German school was marked from the beginning by what might be called the existential spirit of individuality” (Fraleigh, 1987, p. xxii). Fraleigh (1987), further describes the nature of Wigman’s themes:

- Her themes were not personal; they were universal. Many of her titles evoke the mysteries of nature, life, and death: Storm Song, Dance for the Earth, Death Call, and The Witches Dance. Individuality, however, was important to her work, which grew out of introspection and a belief in communicating “the personal experience of the creator.” Wigman spoke of the personal in art, but within a larger view of the creative and the human. (p. 29)

Dance historian Sorell (1969) also examined Wigman’s themes and highlights the spiritual qualities of her work. He comments:

- The entire orientation of Mary Wigman’s dance is toward the establishment of a relationship between man (sic) and his universe. It is this philosophical tendency that influences the emotional, spatial, and functional aspects of her dancing and her pedagogical principles… within its medium, this approach lends depth, radiance, and emotional conviction to the dancer’s efforts. (pp. 41-42)

Dance historian Randall (2005) describes Wigman’s vision for dance as functioning as a medium for social regeneration. Wigman believed, as did Laban (1976), that dance on some level was for every person and held a deep spiritual significance. For Wigman, dance represented life.
Mary Wigman’s conception of the new dance community included professional artists and interested amateurs. Specialist artists spent years pursuing the knowledge of “absolute dance,” a kind of mystical knowledge akin to that of priests or priestesses who must be initiated into secret knowledge through experience. Those she referred to as “laymen,” on the other hand, participated in dance as a leisure activity, enjoying physical rejuvenation, stimulation, relaxation, and joy from participating in dance, but their participation was on a different level than the true artists, who translated life into dance for the masses. In Wigman’s religion of dance, only a very few ever learn the deepest secrets, though all can participate on some level. (Randall, 2005, p. 231)

Wigman’s dance has been labelled mystical and undoubtedly she imbued her dance with spiritual elements. She honoured the body and the essences of the body. She called her dance ‘Absolute Dance’ meaning dancing the essence or dancing the spirit.

Hanya Holm (1951, 1992), Wigman’s most famous student relates her understanding of Wigman’s dance philosophy:

To Mary Wigman, the dance is a language with which man (sic) is born, the ecstatic manifestation of his existence. It is the entity of expression and function, pellucid corporeality, a form made alive through the pulsebeat of experience. To know is not enough; where knowledge can no longer reach, where only the inner emotional experience becomes sole and supreme law, there the dance begins, the dance in which body and soul become an indivisible entity, or “the body, visible manifestation of its being, turns into the truthful mirror of its humanity. (pp. 18-19)

The founders of modern and expressionist dance I have examined profoundly recognized the spiritual elements of the dance. They saw this spiritual element as a conduit to authentic expression in that it enabled a deep sharing of their inner selves but also as a fulfillment of their own desires for self-realization. As dance artists and performers they understood the necessity of tapping into the ‘essence’ of the dance in order to make connections to ‘something more’, which allowed a true sharing and connection of this powerful dynamic with an audience.

A second generation of innovative modern dancers emerged in the 1920’s. Some of the most prominent were Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm. Graham, Humphrey and Weidman all were students of Denis-Shawn. Of particular note for this dissertation is Martha Graham because she was able to articulate the mysteries of human life in her dance. She pioneered her own unique technique and
choreography and her influence on modern dance has been compared with the influence Picasso had on modern visual art. In describing the choreography of Graham, dance historian Martin (1963) relates:

The forms and surfaces of the works thus variously inspired are necessarily vastly different, but there remains beneath them a constant element, which is the personal style of the artist herself – a passionate intensity that is so controlled as to achieve an incandescent quietness, with an immersion in the emotional elements of the situation that brings movement of curious character and eloquence virtually out of the subconscious. (p. 155)

Martin’s account highlights the remarkable qualities Graham brought to the stage. She had the ability to delve deep within herself and draw out and project a dynamic that kept her audiences spellbound. She understood the power that is within our bodies and how the intensity of this power can be channelled and emanate forth to an audience. DeMille (1991) in her biography of Graham remembers her saying, “There is a vitality, a life-force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost” (p. 264).

In her autobiography Blood Memory, Graham (1991) makes many references to the spiritual nature of dance. She saw the body as holy and referred to the body as a sacred garment. While creating choreography Graham would retreat into her studio seeking solitude and privacy as one would in prayer. She referred to this space as “the holy of holies” (p. 136). Graham (1991) saw the dancer’s work as divinely inspired. She believed that we learn by practice, in life and in the dance and this can be a form of devotion.

Graham (1991) also had a deep reverence and understanding of the human body and the major role the body plays in our lives. She understood where the dance arises, in the breath, the center, and “the divinity of memory” (p. 15). Graham’s dance held an intense animation and presence. She honoured the body. Graham (1991) shares, “Many times I hear the phrase “the dance of life.” It is an expression that touches me deeply, for the instrument through which the dance speaks is also the instrument through which life is lived —the human body” (p. 4). Graham (1991) also describes the essence of dance:
I feel that the essence of dance is the expression of man (sic)—the landscape of his soul. I hope that every dance I do reveals something of myself or some wonderful thing a human being can be. It is the unknown—whether it is the myths or the legends or the rituals that give us our memories. It is the eternal pulse of life, the utter desire. (p. 6)

Graham's choreography did indeed deal with myths, legends, and rituals. Many of her themes were inspired by stories that had mythical or biblical origins and reflected the complexities of human life. Her work held a passionate and reverential energy as she danced the lore and sagas of human history. For example, to name just a few of her major works: Figure of a Saint (1929), Resurrection (1929), Heretic (1929), Lamentation (1930), Primitive Mysteries (1931), Appalachian Spring (1944), The Triumph of St. Joan (1951), Seraphic Dialogue (1955), Clytemnestra (1958), Acrobats of God (1960), Plain of Prayer (1968), The Scarlet Letter (1975) and Phaedra's Dream (1983). Harvard professor and dancer, LaMothe (2008) confirms that Graham's choreography was permeated with spiritual references and religion:

The body of work—danced and written—that Martha Graham left behind is saturated with religion. Of her over 180 dances, most feature religious themes, stories, symbols, characters, or ritual forms. In written and spoken accounts, she regularly uses religious language to describe her work. She describes dance as “movement made divinely significant”; she characterizes her work as a “practice” that generates “faith”… (p. 42)

LaMothe (2008) makes it clear that using the term ‘religion’ is not implying that Graham was a devout Christian or followed any particular faith but that Graham saw the sacred and spiritual essence of the body and mirrored this in her work. LaMothe (2008) relates that, “Graham is implying that there is something about religion, its values, beliefs, and practices, that can and must be danced. Her work suggests that the act of dancing enables some perspective on religion, some knowledge of it, that is otherwise not available through verbal means” (p. 42).

Graham (1991) in her genius saw that in the act of dancing we are making connections to the divine, the universal, something we all have inside of us. She encouraged her students to use spiritual imagery in her technique classes in order to make their movement meaningful. Graham (1991) shares in her autobiography Blood Memory some of these phrases, “Let the soles of your feet come together like a prayer… for the contraction I see the heavens”(p. 250). “You are a diviner and you cast your
sticks and get no answer. You cast them again, but still no answer. You try again until finally you lift your body up, open your arms and, yes, you finally have it” (pp. 250-251).

LaMothe (2008) clarifies Graham’s religious references by explaining how she viewed the dance as an alternate form of communication:

…in dancing religion, Graham was making the case that dance can serve alongside verbal forms as a source and measure of religious values, beliefs, and practices. Further, Graham implies that dance is qualified for this role because of the way in which the practice and performance of dancing challenge the mind-over-body logic that pervades western religion and its values— the mind-over-body logic that continues to marginalize dance as art, scholarship, and cultural event. By dancing religion, then, Graham sought to realize the capacity of dance to generate an alternative philosophy of human kind—what I call a philosophy of bodily becoming. (p. 42)

Graham (1991) interestingly references the word ‘reborn’ when she relates that one must be ‘reborn to the instant’. In her account she is also stressing the importance of being in touch with one’s body and that being fully alive is only achieved if one knows how to animate and access one’s essence. She affirms:

In order to work, in order to be excited, in order to simply be, you have to be reborn to the instant. You have to permit yourself to feel, you have to permit yourself to be vulnerable. You may not like what you see, that is not important. You don’t always have to judge. But you must be attacked by it, excited by it, and your body must be alive. And you must know how to animate that body; for each it is individual. (p. 16)

Graham’s contemporary and fellow Denis-Shawn student, Doris Humphrey (1959) also noted the importance of animating the body and refers to the ‘center’ as the place where emotion arises. Humphrey (1959) shares that, “Deep felt emotion always begins in the middle body, where the heart, the lungs and the viscera respond immediately and first” (p. 112). Charles Weidman (1992), another famous Denis-Shawn student also mentions the importance of the center when he states, “The artist must not run away from himself, from his “center of being.” He is the bearer of a message, and it is his responsibility to tell it—in whatever medium it may be—intelligibly, forcefully and with his utmost artistic ability” (p. 28).
Hanya Holm also in this second generation of modern dancers was a student of Mary Wigman and left Germany with Wigman’s blessing to establish a Wigman school in New York in the early 1930’s. Holm’s influence on American modern dance was significant and she helped spread Wigman’s European vision for modern dance in North America. According to dance historian Randall (2005), “In a prospectus published prior to the opening of the school, Wigman proclaimed, “The New York Wigman School of the Dance is dedicated to the development of Dancers, Teachers, and Amateurs, and to those thousands, untutored in the rich speech of the body, who might gain in life through physical and emotional exercise…” (p. 231). “This connection to the fundamental sources of life—and to everyday life experience itself—was one of the key attributes of the new community of dance envisioned by Wigman and Holm, and particularly distinguished modern dance from ballet” (Randall, 2005, p. 232).

Like Wigman, Holm, characterized this interlocked community of artists and laymen like a religion; she wrote, “Like religion, the dance must have its forms, its messiahs, and its high priests, and like religion, its scope must embrace the many who come, for whatever reason, to its portals. “In this religious community, the individual dancer explores the mysteries of the universe” in the hidden corners of his (sic) own being.” (Randall, 2005, p. 233)

In illuminating her philosophy of dance, Holm, quoted by Sorell (1969) shares, “Even the simplest movement will be marvellous if it is fulfilled by you, by your real self. When you dance you are naked” (p. 180). Further, Holm informs us that, “The inner man (sic) is a fine little point where your being comes together” (Sorell, 1969, p. 189). Holm had a long and outstanding career in America as a dancer and teacher. She is additionally famous for her choreography of many musicals for the Broadway stage, such as: ‘My Fair Lady’, ‘Kiss Me Kate’, and ‘Camelot’.

Out of the companies of this second wave of modern dance artists emerged many outstanding dance artists and choreographers. In the 1960’s, modern dance started to take new directions and companies led by Alwin Nikolai, Paul Taylor, Alvin Ailey, Twyla Tharp, and Anna Halprin presented work that broke away from the ‘traditional’ modern dance styles developed earlier in the century. This work reflected the changes in the world in general and again, as modern dance does, pushed the boundaries of theatre, style and expression in innovative ways. Since the 1960’s modern dance styles have evolved even further and modern dance is still an art form, which is
continuously reinventing itself and providing a rich place for dance artists to explore the movement arts in their own individual ways.

From this group of accomplished choreographers and dancers, Anna Halprin is of particular note for this work. Halprin is an American modern dancer, choreographer, performance theorist, community leader and activist, cancer survivor, and healer. She has been an innovative dance artist and was on the vanguard of what became known as ‘postmodern’ dance.

Halprin is of great significance for this dissertation as she has refocused a reflection and implementation on the spiritual power of dance. “Her approach to kinaesthetic awareness is based on natural recharging through movement initiation and ritual embodiment” (Hustic aka body pixel, 2012).

Halprin grew up in Illinois and studied with Josephine Schwarz, a former dancer with Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman. At the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Halprin was a protégée of Margaret H'Doubler, the pioneering dance educator who was one of the first to advocate for dance becoming part of a university curriculum. After marrying landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, they moved to the west coast and Halprin started a dance collective. She also was involved in teaching children in her community.

In the exceptional documentary about Halprin’s life, Breath Made Visible, Gerber (2009), Halprin leads us through her life’s journey as a dancer and choreographer. From the film we learn that Halprin was a leader in many areas, she revolutionized aspects of theatre, music, and performance and brought issues such as environmentalism and AIDS/HIV to the public eye.

As most relevant to this dissertation, is Halprin’s narrative about her personal battle with cancer and how she unearthed the wisdom of her own body through dance and drawing to facilitate her own healing. She describes the story of her survival with great insight and explains how her health crisis changed her life direction and led her to become involved in healing dance rituals.

Halprin (2009) relates that in the early 1970's, she was investigating drawing imagery as a way to comprehend how the mind works in relation to the body. She developed this process as a means to ‘dance’ the images that sprang up from the
unconscious. Halprin relates how she was engaging in what she terms the Psychokinetic Visualization Process and while drawing a picture of her own body found herself drawing a round ball in her pelvic area. She initially couldn’t begin to understand what this might signify but decided to go to her doctor and was diagnosed with cancer in precisely the area she had drawn.

Halprin (2009) explains how using the imagery she had drawn she was able to investigate and create associations to make a personal ritual that helped her healing process. By listening to her body, and rechanneling the negativity that she believed had caused her cancer, she miraculously danced away the cancer. Halprin has taken her discovery and helped the ill or elderly by conducting healing dance workshops all over the world. Her system of movement is a unified approach, which includes addressing the physical, emotional, spiritual and mental. Halprin also developed the Five Stages of Healing (1981) in which she uses dance in ritual to promote health and wellbeing. She has shaped her dance to become an accessible and life-enhancing art form. Halprin (1995) shares, “I began to generate forms in which the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual bodies functioned in greater relationship to one another. My search was for the whole person, and my criterion was the meaning in each individual’s life” (p. xi).

Banes (1995) in the introduction to Halprin’s book, Moving Towards Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance, comments on how Halprin’s illness led her in new directions. “Halprin’s interest in community and the rituals that create and sustain it eventually led her away from dance as a theatrical art and toward dance (or simply movement) as a healing art—whether in social terms. As in the healing of racial divisions, or in physical/psychic terms, as in her work with persons confronting cancer and HIV/AIDS (p. 3).

In her book, Halprin (1995) speaks discerningly of the need to ‘return to dance’ for a recovery and rediscovery of our human connection to the earth and spiritual identity:

As many of us struggle to find our spiritual identity, we can, I believe, return to dance to recover an ancient tradition that will serve us in today’s culture. The wisdom of dance and the body contains resources that can provide us with tools for the survival of life on this planet. Our connection to the earth and to one another as forms of the earth is our crucial next step. I believe that this is the wonderful possibility for dance today. Through dance we can rediscover a spiritual identity and community we
have lost, and the work of making this dance current, immediate, and necessary continues to be of the greatest importance. (p. xii)

Halprin’s (1995) editor, Kaplan, emphasizes the importance of Halprin’s contributions to the world. He states, “Halprin’s continual quest has been for a dance of meaning, one that comes from the authentic center of the person dancing” (p. xvii). Halprin’s work has been on the forefront of investigating dance and healing, dance and wellness and dance as a spiritual conduit. Her work provides much support and fresh perspectives in my uncovering what animates us beneath the dance and my investigation of the lived experiences and bodily perceptions generated while dancing. As Halprin (1995), so wisely reminds us, “Just as the ancients danced to call upon the spirits in nature, we too can dance to find the spirits within ourselves that have been long buried and forgotten.”

Dance Education and the Presence of ‘Something More’

Much scholarly writing and research by dance educators, both philosophical and practical have substantiated the great benefits of dance and movement for the growing child in the school setting and for people in general. See H'Doubler (1940); Sheets-Johnstone (1966, 1984, 1992 2009); Fraleigh (1987); Stinson (1990); Blumenfeld-Jones (1997); Gilbert (1992, 2006); and Bresler (2004). As well as the many obvious benefits such as increased physical flexibility and strength, dance brings an increased bodily awareness and a knowing about one’s own body. Dance also increases our mental, emotional, and social capacities as we solve problems, express our feelings, and socially interact with others in movement. Dance above all, dissolves the perceptions of disunity between the body, mind and spirit and stimulates our connections to our spiritual selves.

Many dance educators have documented spiritual connections which arise in the body while dancing. This reconnecting to the life force, or the vitality at our core, is intangible but nevertheless a real presence. As Snowber (1995) illustrates:

We cannot see the wind, this invisible agent that causes havoc and beauty in the earth’s landscape. But we name it. Its fundamental principle is movement—and this I can relate to, for my language is movement—the language of a dancer... We cannot see the Spirit, but she moves without
and within our lives. She enlivens us to the nearness of God, making the branches of our hearts and souls awaken to the living Creator. (p. 33)

And likewise we cannot see or measure the depths of emotion, the perceptions of spiritual communion, or the vitality that surges through us when we dance but these feelings are real and make significant differences to our wellbeing. Perhaps this intangibility is one of the reasons this aspect of the dance is not highlighted more in educational settings.

As Snowber (2007) shares, “An act of spiritual practice for an educator and researcher, first and foremost could be calling back the body to a place of honour. Honouring the body’s integration into the whole spectrum of growth is the place to begin” (p.1451). In the next section I transition into an exploration of the influential and profound work that was generated by dance educators, who honoured and understood the sacred connections inherent in the dance.

Honouring Dance as a Spiritual Practice in Education

The first task of the dancer is to awaken and activate his (sic) dance sense, the centre of his awareness. His whole effort is directed towards conquering this basis of complete human awareness for himself as for others; to pass it on and to preserve it. (Rudolph Laban in Sachsenmaier and McCaw, 2011, p. 48)

Prominent dance educators such as Laban (1976); H’Doubler (1940); Hawkins (1964); Snowber (1995, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2009), and Stinson (1988, 1990, 1995, 2000-2001, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2007), all speak eloquently of the spiritual connections that dance elicits. Their work calls us back to consider the immense potential the dance holds as a conduit to our vigour, vitality, and sacred life-force. Their work also importantly calls us back to consider dance as critical to being in the world and critical to an education that honours our spiritual selves. Exploring the history and early influences which shaped dance education illuminates the presence of a spiritual awareness that dance education was founded on.

Early European movement innovators such as Francois Delsarte (1811-1871), Emile Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950), and Rudolph Laban (1879-1953) have provided
the foundations for most systems of movement education and modern concert dance. Delsarte inspired modern dancers such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. Dalcroze, Laban and F. Matthias Alexander studied Delsarte's teachings before developing their own theories. Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) was a Swiss composer and musician known best for developing Eurhythmics. His movement work concentrated on the body as the original instrument and involved natural movement such as walking and skipping to learn to beat time to music. His fundamental philosophy was that “rhythm both embodies the spiritual and spiritualizes the body” (Partsch-Bergsohn, 1994, p. 6). “Dalcroze’s methodical Eurhythmic Art attracted many young females who, following the spirit of the times, craved exposure to the arts and inner harmony through self-expression” (Partsch-Bergsohn, 1994, p. 6).

One of the most influential teachers of this era, whose theories have had a lasting and formative effect on modern dance and movement education, was Rudolph von Laban. Born in Austro-Hungary, Laban was a dancer, choreographer, and movement experimenter. “Laban was one of the pioneers of modern dance in Germany in the 1910’s and 1920’s and of movement education in England in the 1940’s and 1950’s” (McCaw, 2011, p. 1).

Laban’s ideas and movement theories are now used as the basis of most dance and movement programs at universities and public schools in North America and Europe. Dance educator Winearls (1958) explains how Laban came to create and conceive of his theories:

Beginning with studies of ballet, of the work of Delsarte, of many kinds of folk dance, of the laws of mathematics and geometry, Laban evolved a means of “dissecting out” the basic elements, which create and control every kind of movement of which human anatomy is capable. (p. 8)

In Modern Dance in Germany and the United States: Crosscurrents and Influences, Partsch-Bergsohn (1994) describes Laban’s early life and we learn that Laban’s father served for a time as the military governor of Bosnia, a Muslim territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This childhood cultural landscape is where Laban had his first mystical experience with dance. In Laban’s (1975) autobiography, he describes how he encountered the magic of dance while watching the ceremonies and exercises of the Muslim Sufi sect of whirling dervishes in Bosnia. “This experience constituted one of the
most decisive memories of his younger years, and strongly influenced his concept of
dance” (Partsch-Bergsohn, 1994, p. 6).

In Laban’s charged rhetoric dance was not only elevated into a mystical
form of art through which a new form of humanity could be produced, a
production that was only to be surpassed by the "Creation" of God, but
this "humanity" was engaged in a new form of activity - dancing together
in a "Reigen"… It was this 'spirit' of dance that mattered. (Partsch-
Bergsohn, 1994, p. 6)

Laban first studied sculpture at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and moved to
Munich at age 30 where he began to focus on Ausdruckstanz, or the movement arts.
One of his great gifts to dance was his 1928 publication of Kinetographie Laban, a dance
notation system that came to be called Labanotation. Laban also developed the art of
the movement choir, wherein large numbers of people move together in set
choreography. This aspect of his work was closely related to his personal spiritual
beliefs, based on a mixture of Victorian Theosophy, Sufism, and popular fin de siecle
Hermeticism.

From 1930 to 1934 Laban directed the Allied State Theatres in Berlin, Germany.
In 1934, he was promoted to director of the Deutsche Tanzbühne, in Nazi Germany. He
led major festivals of dance under the auspices of Goebbels' propaganda ministry from
1934-1936. His work under the Nazi regime ended in 1936 with Goebbels's banning
Laban’s Vom Tauwind und der Neuen Freude (Of the Spring Wind and the New Joy) for
not advancing the Nazi agenda. Laban left Germany and traveled to Paris in 1937 and
from there he went to England. The Jooss-Leeder Dance School at Dartington Hall in
Devon, where other refugees from Nazi Germany had taken asylum, took him in.

With encouragement from other artist refugees, Laban set up schools in England
to spread his dance philosophy, which eventually entered the public school system and
became part of the English physical education curriculum. Laban's dance philosophy:

…'identifies the 'physical-spiritual-mental educational power’, of dance
and states that ‘dance experience has its roots in the whole rather than a
partial sensation of a person’. His concept has hence a philosophical-
spiritual emphasis, but it is directly rooted in the practice of dancing itself.
(McCaw, 2011, p. 45)
Laban (1951, 1992) had this to say about the beneficial results of his dance curriculum:

The rediscovery of the dance as a means of education and therapeutic treatment in our time originated from the aesthetic pleasure that some teachers, doctors, and industrial welfare workers took in watching modern stage dancing. They came to the dancers with the question: “Can you do this with our children, our patients, our workmen?” The dancers did it and with quite unexpected results. Not only did the children, patients, and workmen enjoy themselves, but some of them seemed to be changed in an inexplicable manner by dancing. (p. 46)

Laban incorporated the simplicity and natural play of children into his movement theories. He saw that human beings have an innate capacity and need to move and use their bodies to achieve health and wellbeing.

Everybody has seen children jumping around happily. This might be considered as one of the natural forms of dancing. Children may even instinctively feel that their rhythmic jumping or dancing contributes to their bodily and mental well-being and to the development of some of their inner capacities and powers. This hidden self-education and self-remedy have both been studied and the knowledge acquired hereby forms an essential part of the modern educational dance. (Laban, 1951, 1992, p. 53)

Laban recognized that all parts of a person benefited from dancing and that dancing provides a unique path to self actualization and unity. “Laban wrote: ‘dance… has something in its essence that fulfills the whole of the physical, emotional, and spiritual being’ and this was really the basis of his own life’s work (McCaw, 2011, p. xvii).

McCaw (2011) captures the essence of Laban’s philosophy when he states, “At the heart of Laban’s work was a drive to generate a new movement consciousness, to secure a wider recognition of the central role of movement as an activating force in the life of the individual and consequently for the life of society” (p. 240). Laban said, “We are all dancers: We all carry a dancer in ourselves. Even if we do not know anything about this dancer within us, we have the urge to awaken him (sic) within us. In this sense the budding joy of movement in our time is to be understood…” (McCaw, 2011, p. 15).

Margaret H’Doubler, an American dance educator, and one of the first dance educators to advocate for the necessity of dance being part of every school and
university curriculum, believed that dance should be an essential component of a complete education. H'Doubler (1940) declares, “If dance is to function again as a vital experience in the lives of our people, it must be the responsibility of our educators” (p. 59).

In 1926, in collaboration with Dean Sellery and the faculty of the School of Education at the University Of Wisconsin, H'Doubler developed the first curriculum to establish dance as a major in a university education. In her groundbreaking book, Dance: A Creative Art Experience, H'Doubler (1940) discusses the enduring qualities of dance, which she believed, as did Laban, are within the reach of everyone. She stressed that, “One of the ways dance can reach everyone is through the schools. Expression through spontaneous bodily activity is as natural to the child as breathing. This inborn tendency to expressive movement provides reliable equipment with which to build a vocabulary for artistic dance expression” (p. x).

H'Doubler's (1940) beliefs about dance included an acknowledgment that dance has always been part of the religious rituals of human beings. In her book, H'Doubler (1940), discusses the role that dancing has played from time immemorial and how she believes dancing fell into disregard:

Primitive dancing has always possessed a central place in the religious life of all primitive and ancient races. The records of sacred meeting show that until the medieval period dancing has always been essential in vital religions; nor did the early Christians frown upon dancing. It was only when the early and simple teachings of Christ were distorted into a fanatical asceticism that dance, along with all the natural, healthy pleasures of man (sic), fell into disfavor. (pp. 13-14)

H'Doubler (1940) recognized that dance when compared to the other arts was not adequately represented in the education system. H'Doubler (1940) states, “Unfortunately, because of the lack of movement education, the average person is kinaesthetically unaware of movement as a source of self-awareness and well-being; therefore movement cannot play its important role in the life of the individual” (pp. xxiii-xxiv). H'Doubler (1940) significantly adds, “To help our people mature and raise our cultural level, we must give them the same opportunity for artistic and spiritual growth that has been afforded them in other branches of education. The creative and artistic
potentialities must be unleashed and cultivated if many songs are not left unsung” (p. 29).

H’Doubler (1940) acknowledged dance as being a source of vitality and believed that movement could relieve physical suffering and had a therapeutic value. H’Doubler (1940) informs us that, “Every normal person enjoys the exhilaration of vigorous rhythmical movement, whether he (sic) is working with a group or by himself, and the sense of power that comes from the exercise of all his faculties in well co-ordinated movements” (p. 163).

Besides receiving feelings of well-being and vigour from dancing, H’Doubler (1940) believed dancing to be an activity, which promoted spiritual renewal and that this would be of great benefit in educational settings. H’Doubler (1940) believed that, “…when the movements of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual natures are co-ordinated with the activities of the body, there will result an expression that is vital and dynamic” (p. 59). “…the body should be given as careful a study and as high a perfection of technique as the associated processes of thought and feeling” (p. 63).

H’Doubler (1940) presents compelling arguments for the inclusion of movement education in the curriculum. She points to the fact that all children are given crayons, paint, and paper in the early grades to experience drawing, coloring, and painting, when most likely they are not going to go on to become professional artists. H’Doubler (1940) argues that dance should have the same privilege.

… whether or not there is any chance of his (sic) becoming a professional artist, so every child has the right to know how to achieve control over his body in order that he may use it to the limit of his ability for the expression of his own reactions to life. Even if he can never carry his efforts far enough to realize dance in its highest forms, he may experience the sheer joy of the rhythm sense of free, controlled, and expressive movement, and through this know an addition to life to which every human being is entitled. (p. 66)

H’Doubler’s argument is persuasive in creating a recognition of the need for dance education to become part of every child’s school experience. She was a visionary in that she understood that we must not marginalize dance education for the few but somehow broaden dance experiences so that everyone may enjoy the benefits of dance.
H'Doubler (1940) had a strong conviction that people could come to ‘know’ their bodies in artistic and creative ways if dance was allowed to play a larger role in education.

Professor Alma M. Hawkins (1904-1998) was another pioneer of dance education and the founder of the university dance department, at UCLA. In 'Creating Through Dance', Hawkins (1964) stresses that dance is a powerful art because human movement is the essence of life. “As a work of art, dance has an inherent communicative power. This is so because human movement, the material of dance, is the essence of life. It grows out of life, reflects life, and is life” (Hawkins, 1964, p. 4).

Hawkins (1964) discusses how many dancers speak of movement as emanating from their center and she identifies the middle of the torso as the center. She states that a dancer “is not thinking of this spot as a center of gravity but rather as a center or source of energy and feeling. Isadora Duncan referred to this center as the soul” (p. 79).

Hawkins (1964) continues discussing this idea by stating:

Perhaps the explanation of the center as the source of movement aliveness is that the life sustaining organs—the lung, heart, viscera—reside in the torso area. The middle of the body seems to be the spot where one feels the first reaction of emotional experiences, such as anguish, fear, or pleasure. (p. 80)

Hawkins (1964) also describes the dancer’s feelings of aliveness or their state of embodiment as something impossible to articulate. Something the dancer knows in their body but that there are no words to describe:

This so-called total body awareness or “aliveness” is a curious thing. Although every true dancer knows exactly what the term means and talks freely about the total organism’s being related actively to dance and about the inner tension that is maintained throughout the dance, still it is nearly impossible to define this state. Perhaps the condition of total awareness can be described best as a feeling state produced by associated tension in which the total organism is actively absorbed. (p. 79)

As Graham (1991), Hawkins (1964) connects our animation, our aliveness to the breath. Hawkins (1964) relates how, “the cycle of inhalation and exhalation is the very essence of life. The dancer, very much aware of moving in relation to breathing, knows that each movement must be filled with breath if it is to be “alive” (p. 80).
Dancer and writer, Celeste Snowber, a dance educator who brought dance education to Simon Fraser University, and who recognizes the body as a site of spiritual celebration, expression of spirituality, and sensuality through embodiment, focuses her work on ‘the body as sacred’. In her first and second books, *In the Womb of God: Creative Nurturing for the Soul* (1989), and *Embodied Prayer: Towards Wholeness of Body, Mind, Soul* (1995, 2004), Snowber poetically illuminates the body as a holy place and calls us to acknowledge the wisdom of our bodies. Snowber (1989, 1995) examines many of the metaphors of biblical scripture concerning the Holy Spirit and calls us to include and recognize the body as part of our spiritual seeking of God. Snowber (1995) particularly emphasizes that, “Our body sensations awaken us not only to physical needs, but to emotional and spiritual needs as well” (p. 128). Snowber (1995) states, “The Holy Spirit lives and breathes within us, an ongoing flame of God. Sometimes that flame seems more visible in different seasons in our lives, yet the Spirit is always within us, waiting and yearning to be kindled through our “paying attention” (p. 120).

Snowber’s (1989, 1995) description of the Holy Spirit as a ‘flame of God’ is an apt metaphor for the renewal of perception that may be generated by the dancing body. Both have an emphasis on “reverent perception” (Snowber, 1989, p. 76) and bring our attention to a sensing of the presence of the creator. The image of a flame burning within us is symbolic of our life spark and when our spark is burning bright we are most alive.

Snowber’s (2007) definition of spirituality, “as the place one can make connections to the inner life, the other, the natural world, to the numinous, but most of all to ourselves” (p. 1450) points to spirituality as occurring with or without the support of a traditional religious framework. Dancing can be seen as one kind of spiritual practice in that it is a physical remembrance and expression of thankfulness at being alive. Snowber’s writings (1989, 1995, 1998) above all, remind us that life is about finding our joy, living our passions and going beneath the surface of the everyday to see the greater harmony and wonder of our relationships and our world. The dance is one way of generating this joy and finding a spiritual revitalization. I see the dance as available to all persons as we all possess bodies. Snowber (1998) inspiringly describes leaving spaces in our lives for joy to enter and I see the dance as such an opportunity. The dance can be, “The place of an opening. An opening for beauty to rush in” (Snowber, 1998, p. 105).
In Snowber’s extensive writing about a philosophy of the body, she encourages us to honour the body as a sacred space. In her essay *The Mentor as Artist*, Snowber (2009) states, “Our bodies are filled with paradox. They are sacred spaces where we experience both the depths of ecstasy and the depths of pain” (p. 32).

We live, breathe, and dwell in and through our bodies, but more often then not they unfortunately have been relegated to the status of instrument or tool, rather than being places of discovery… How do we foster a connection to our own knowing, our own eros, our own bodies, our own internal landscapes? How do we continue to honour the body in all its paradox and joy as a place for discovery and wonder, a place for living into our own knowing? (Snowber, 2009, p. 152)

I see the dancing body as a unique place in which we may discover and honour our bodies. The dancing body has the capacity to forge new connections to ourselves and through the dancing body we may experience renewal, vitality, and an intimate ‘knowing’ of parts of ourselves hence unrealized.

In her essay *The Eros of Listening: Dancing into Presence*, Snowber (2009) shares, “We live in a world that thrives on an accelerated pace of life, consumerism, and production more than the art of being, an environment not conducive to listening to the organic rhythm of our bodies’ pulses” (p. 32). Snowber (2009) additionally outlines that:

Much of our relating in the world is experienced through our body, yet seldom do we take this as a serious place of study. But we understand viscerally the language of gesture, posture, and nuances of bodily expression. It is second nature, as natural as brushing our teeth… Attention to the body gives us the space to open new rooms, for others and for the passion living inside us. (pp. 93-94)

There has been a breadth of scholarship written about honouring dance as a spiritual practice. I have mentioned just a few of the many authors who have written about dance and spirituality. 2

2 The purposes of this dissertation cannot go into all the extensive writings on dance and spirituality but see: (Halprin 1997, 2000); (Abbey, 2004); (Barbour, 2011); (Csordas,2002); (Fraleigh, 1987); (Winton-Henry, 2009); (Wosien, 1974); and (Williamson 2009).
Laban (1976); H'Doubler (1940); Hawkins (1964); and Snowber (1995, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2009) were chosen as exemplary examples to illustrate the immense potential the dance holds for educational settings and as a conduit to our vitality and sacred life-force.

Educational Research in Dance Education

Recent research in dance education reveals a growing interest in movement and dance for learning. Dance educator and researcher Susan Stinson, a professor at the University of Carolina, has focused her research on both theoretical issues in dance education and how children and adolescents make meaning from their experiences in dance education. Stinson has written much about dance education in early childhood (1988, 1990, 1999, 2002, 2004) and collaborated in research projects with other dance researchers such as Blumenfeld-Jones and Van Dyke (1988) and Bond (2000-2001, 2007). Stinson’s (1988, 1990, 1995) scholarly writing corroborates the significance of exploring the body with dance in educational settings, especially in early childhood. Stinson (1995) stresses the importance of developing our kinaesthetic senses and highlights that to understand dance as more than viewing a body in a series of poses one must use the internal kinaesthetic sense. Stinson (1995) affirms:

This internal sensing has great significance not only for how one performs dance but for how we perceive the art. If we think about dance as an artistic object only to be looked at, it becomes little more than a moving picture. Certainly an audience does look at dance (and, if there is music, listen to it), but the visual and auditory senses return only a surface view. In order to understand dance, one must also use the kinaesthetic sense. The kinaesthetic sense allows us to go inside the dance, to feel ourselves as participants in it, not just as onlookers. (p. 43)

Stinson (1988) also unites the philosophy of phenomenology with her beliefs about dance and shares, “The body is the first self that we know; awareness of our bodies is an important step in becoming aware of ourselves. Body awareness is also an essential step in becoming aware of our feelings. Feelings do not exist just in our minds, but in our bodies as well. When we feel angry, sad, or excited, we feel it in the whole self” (p. 4).
Stinson’s (1988) work emphasizes the necessary inclusion of the spiritual dimension in dance to ensure embodied dance experiences. She states, “Dance … refers not just to body movement, but to an inside awareness of the movement. However, dance as an art has to do not only with the body but also with the spirit, another dimension of the self. This does not mean that dance is always “expressing your feelings,” but that it is more than just exercise with physical awareness” (p. 3). Stinson (1988) further discusses that ‘aesthetic’ and transcendent experiences may be found in movement experiences but also in the other arts:

Probably we have all experienced transcendent moments in our lives, times of total involvement when we feel deep connection, whether it is with movement, music, or even a sunset… Philosophers who study the arts refer to such experiences as “aesthetic”. While an aesthetic experience has other characteristics as well, the sense of total involvement, connection, and transformation is essential. (p. 3)

Stinson’s dance research is of particular note for my study. In Stinson’s collaboration with Bond (2000-2001) “I Feel Like I’m Going to Take Off !”: Young People’s Experiences of the Superordinary in Dance, Stinson and Bond (2000-2001) relate, “We have felt a compelling need to understand how young people experience dance and what it means to them” (p. 52). I have felt the same need and have many similar questions and so I have found Stinson’s work and examples most useful in fleshing out my own ideas. Similarly, I share with Stinson (2000-2001), a “phenomenological interest in essences of the dance experience” (p. 52) and my study also goes beyond description to my interpretation of the essence of dance experiences.

Stinson and Bond’s (2000-2001) study was a collaborative effort and they collected data with the help of other researchers from approximately 600 young people between the ages of three and eighteen from all over the world. (p. 53) Stinson and Bond (2000-2001) categorized their data under different headings. The heading of most relevance to my study was labelled ‘superordinary’. In describing this category, Stinson (2000-2001) states, “We recognized that we were both finding accounts of superordinary experiences in dance in our research material as well as anecdotal experiences with our students, and we had both experienced such moments ourselves. Indeed, there is a striking plenitude of human description relating to the superordinary in life and dance” (p. 53).
What further struck me as pertinent for this dissertation, in Stinson’s (2000-2001) study, was Stinson’s comprehensive collection of labels which writers, educators, and researchers have created to acknowledge similar feelings of the ‘superordinary’ generated by various moments in life. Stinson (2000-2001) shares:

A variety of writers have given their own names to this phenomenon: John Dewey, "imaginative unification" (1934); Abraham Maslow, "peak experience" (1968); Charles Tart, "altered states of consciousness" (1972); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "flow" (1975, 1996, 1997); … Similarly, dance scholars have used language such as "transcendental dance" (Hanna 1979); "endotellicity" (Sparshott 1988); "aesthetic community" (Bond 1991, 1994a); "wild disorientation" (Novack 1990); "altered states of consciousness with and without content" (Linton 1991); and the word used so often by children and adolescents, "fun" (Stinson 1997). (p. 69)

Additionally relevant to this dissertation is a study done by Lloyd (2004) for her Doctoral dissertation entitled Interactive Flow in Exercise Pedagogy. In this phenomenological exploration, Lloyd’s (2004) intention is to discover what makes an exercise pedagogical encounter deep, meaningful, and lasting. Many of Lloyd’s observations about teaching exercise could be applied to teaching dance to ensure the experiences are embodied and thoughtfully rendered. Lloyd (2004) states, “The benefit in exploring relational and interactive understanding of flow within the lived experience of teaching exercise is that it will give a real life understanding of what the interactive experience of flow will feel like in movement, postures and positions of active, bodies” (p. 38).

Stinson and Bond (2000-2001) conclude their study by remarking that, “In this study…a large and diverse sample of children and adolescents has articulated dance as an experience of high self; a place of enchantment, possibility, integration, and creative flight” (p. 87). Stinson and Bond’s (2000-2001) findings very much concur with my experiences and the data I have collected which I will be sharing later in this dissertation.

Stinson (1990), in her article Dance Education in Early Childhood, shares young children’s poignant definitions of dance, which resonate with my description of ‘divine immanence’:

Young children helped me find a way to talk about the consciousness one enters while dancing when they told me that the difference between dance and just moving around is that dance is magic. This description has
been so meaningful to young children that I use it often—not in the sense of magic tricks, but as a magical state of being. Our magic comes from a quiet place deep inside us, and each of us possesses it. (p. 39)

**Somatic Movement Dance Education**

When we are talking of Somatic Movement Dance Education, we are not dealing with one specific practice or a singular praxis… We are referencing a world-wide body of individual practitioners (real people) who tend to develop unique praxis arrived at through extremely high levels of creative synthesis, as well as spiritual, emotional, aesthetic and political individuality. (Williamson, 2009, p. 30)

Somatic Movement Dance Education is of importance to this study in that Somatic Movement Dance Education approaches are being practiced around the world to focus on health, vitality, the body, and spirituality. The roots of Somatic Movement Dance Education can be “attributed to the radical groundbreaking work of Anna Halprin, Daniel Levin, Emilie Conrad, and Mary Abrams” (Williamson, 2009, p. 30). Somatic Movement Dance Education may be a community practice or housed within university dance curricula. Somatic Movement Dance Education fosters a depth-connection within ourselves and with others. “…this discipline seeks to develop a dialectically lived relationship to the existential mystery and vitality of life energy acquiescing within body” (Williamson, 2009, p. 42).

In her article, *Reflections and Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Spiritualities within the Field of Somatic Movement Dance Education*, Williamson (2010), shares the deep spiritual component inherent in somatic movement dance practices and that dance may be viewed as a practice which promotes “self-actualization and healing” (p. 44).

Williamson (2010) explains that some of the most important defining features of Somatic Movement Dance Education are:

…the ‘sacralization’ of biology as an ‘extra special’ site of inspired intelligence – this force has in turn created SMDE pedagogies defined by deep immanence, i.e., a deep connection to the prima material that constitutes body-self… Pedagogies based on living inspired anatomy, elemental resonance, biomorphic patterning and earth-body interconnectivity are a common theme across the field… We could refer
to these as pedagogies of ‘deep immanence’ and ‘inspired anatomy’…
(p. 45)

I feel a deep resonance with the work of Somatic Movement Dance Education as I also believe that the body is our first place of ‘knowing’ and through dance and somatic practices we may promote health, vitality, healing, and increased spiritual connections. Williamson’s (2010) description of pedagogies of ‘deep immanence’ and ‘inspired anatomy’, echo my description of ‘divine immanence’. The work of Somatic Movement Dance Education is important because Somatic Movement Dance Education helps people focus on sensing and perceiving their bodies. Somatic Movement Dance Education practices encourage people to become more self-aware and sensually alive. Somatic Movement Dance Education is a call to listen to our bodies so we may reconnect with ourselves on all levels and reclaim our kinaesthetic awareness.

To conclude this chapter, phenomenologists have written about the body as our first place of knowing and being in the world. Phenomenologists encourage us to pay attention to our bodily senses and the ordinary moments in our lives which in turn may awaken us to these moments as extra ordinary so we may savour our existence.

Dance historians, modern dancers, modern dance choreographers, dance educators and researchers, and somatic movement dance educators document dance experiences as enabling the dancer to find a holy presence within herself. These writings also acknowledge that dance reinforces a ‘knowing’ of the essential spiritual essence of our beings. Our physical beings contain a vitality that is especially ignited when we move rhythmically or intentionally in artistic ways. “Artists, dancers, and performers know what it means to integrate the body as a place of unfolding learning” (Cancienne, Snowber, 2009, p. 212). Reflecting on these special qualities of dance I ponder, how does an understanding, a knowing that dance enables a holy presence, play out in the life of a child?

3 The purposes of this dissertation cannot go into the extensive research on Somatic Movement Dance Education but see: (Abrams 2009); (Conrad 2007); (Eddy 2009); (Hackney 2002); (Halprin 1997, 2000); (Hartley 1995); (Johnson 2000); (Levin 2010); (Olsen 1998, 2002); and (Williamson 2009).
Chapter 2.  
Reflections on my Dancing Body  
My Love Affair with Dance  

Figure 5.  
Karen Stanley Park seaside 1968
My small self twirls and whirls around the living room to the music being played on my miniature children’s record player. In my little girl voice, I sing off key along with the tune under my breath. “I'm Tina, the ballerina, the belle of gai Paris” (Peter Pan 78 recording, 1952). To the casual observer, I appear to be a child caught up in her world of play, as children can be, enjoying the music and trying to mimic the movements of a ballet dancer, and I obviously have no formal dance training. But this observer cannot observe my inner life. They cannot feel what I feel. They do not know the depths of my emotion or where I have been transported to through my dancing. In my imaginary but very real to me world, I am experiencing great joy. I am feeling beautiful within and without and love permeates my little body. I am imagining I am a wonderful dancer and that I have long flowing hair and a gorgeous full-skirted dress that seems to help me defy gravity as I dip and swing, turn and float on my tiptoes around the room. In the magic of this dancing I become something more than a plain little girl with no friends to play with. I am reunited with the divine, which whispers to me how special I am.

As long as I can remember I've loved to dance but I was a shy and self-conscious young child and recall quivering in anguish on the edge of dance floors, unable to work up my courage to spring forward and dance. I remember the war of feelings that would go on inside myself. My body craved the release of dancing but emotionally I felt insecure and too unsure of myself to step out and dance in front of strangers. It was when I was alone that my true dancing self would emerge and I was free to imagine and improvise without anyone judging or watching me.

I have been strongly drawn to the ecstatic perceptions and revelations, which are manifested in my body while dancing, all of my life. Not surprisingly so has my Scottish mother. I grew up in a home filled with music, singing, dancing, books, and healthy outdoor play experiences. When we walked to the library we sang songs that kept the tempo and swung our arms to the rhythm. Every night as I lay in bed waiting for sleep, I heard music. This was before a television was in every household and once my mother had her children in bed she would read and play records of the music she loved. Scottish folk songs of love and laughter, heart breaking Puccini, or the deep rich sounds of Paul Robeson. My mother believed in the social justice movement of the 1950’s and folk singers such as Pete Seeger and the Weavers were some of her favourites. As I fell asleep every night, I listened and soaked up the music into my soul.
I am lying in the dark and comforting depths of my bed, burrowed beneath the covers. Then I hear the music start. Tonight it is the melodious, lilting voice of Jean Redpath that eventually lulls me to sleep. Accompanied only by her guitar, she sings haunting traditional ballads in broad Scots dialect. I absorb the Scottish culture through these songs of longing and love. In my mind and body, I feel I am with her ‘skipping barefoot through the heather’ and ‘laughing with a laddie’. The rhyme and rhythm resonate deep within me and Redpath’s renditions of Burns’ poetry in song are forever etched into my heart.

As my mother could see I loved to dance, she briefly enrolled me in ballet classes at four, but soon pulled me out as she saw all we did was pretend we were teapots or wind up dolls. She said I actually never got to dance in these classes.

A few years later at seven, I started to attend a Ukrainian Hall through friends of my mother where I took dance lessons, mandolin lessons and learned to sew Ukrainian embroidery. My family did not have a Ukrainian background but I enjoyed belonging to this community. The Ukrainian culture is rich with soul touching music, poetry and dance. I particularly enjoy the Ukrainian music because it includes a beautiful mix of melismatic singing with chordal harmony, which is quite different from Western music. The dancing for young children consisted of simple folk steps and patterns for girls plus more athletic floor work for boys. I felt a belonging and accomplishment in the classes and performances.

Figure 6.

Karen with her brother Gordon in Ukrainian costume (1962)
When I was eight, I was one of many dancers who were privileged to dance at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre to celebrate the life of the famous Ukrainian poet and painter Shevchenko. The gorgeous many coloured costumes, the pageantry and high energy of the many dancing groups at this event made a huge impression on me. I remember the unified finale, which consisted of hundreds of dancers of all ages on stage, a full orchestra and a multi-tiered choir.

As I stand backstage waiting with the other children, listening to the choir, I hear the refrain of a hundred voices wooing the audience to experience a soul stirring moment. Then there is silence. A beautiful tenor voice rises up and fills the void. He is singing in a language I don't understand but that doesn't matter. I feel his longing, his love for his heritage and that his singing is of another time and place. I stand in the semi darkness and soak up this moment. There is nothing but his heart wrenching singing. I feel pulled heavenward.

In conversation with my mother, as we reflect on my early childhood experiences laden with music, dancing, singing and literature, I gain a clearer picture of my relationship with dance. I was encouraged from an early age to move and dance. There was no censorship, except perhaps my own. My mother was supportive of my dancing. She was an adept ballroom and folk dancer herself for most of her life. She lived her belief that dancing is a natural extension and expression of life. I first learned the joy of movement by example. My mother communicated physically, that it is gratifying and desirable to respond to the world with movement and dance. I picture her listening to music, tapping her feet, moving her shoulders, breaking into song, dancing with joy, a look of transported ecstasy on her face. At eighty, my mother still easily breaks into song or recites poetry, when telling a story or embellishing a memory. She believes that everyone should dance and enjoy music as part of life.

My mother and I also discuss my mother's work as a preschool teacher for thirty-five years. In addition to this, she taught early music education at Langara College in Vancouver. In her passion for music, dance, art, and literature she channelled these loves into a livelihood where she could revel in and transmit the importance of the arts. She excelled at assisting young children to experience the wonder of their existence and the world and received much recognition for her work. I am honoured to have followed in her footsteps as a teacher.
What is it that draws a person to the arts? What is it that draws a person to the dance? It seems to be an innate love but also it appears to be fostered by positive exposure to the arts in our early childhood experiences. The fine arts have inspired me all of my life but more importantly have imparted an awareness of something higher than myself. The arts call our focus to the revelation that there is something more to our existence. This ‘something more’ that is revealed in dancing and dance performances, powerfully touches me. The flow and unity of synchronized movement, the lines of the dancing bodies, the dynamic force exuded by dance artists, these things lift my soul and dumbfound me with their power.

In including autobiographical experiences of dance in this dissertation I am providing my personal story to impart an understanding of one person’s experience that may resonate with others. In turn, examining my own dance experiences has inspired me to ‘listen’ more attentively to others as they relate the nuggets and gems of their dance experiences. As Snowber (2009) so insightfully shares, “There is an art to listening to our lives. Research is not only an outward endeavour, but it travels in the realm of re-searching our own lives, knowledge, passions, and practice” (p. 3).

The Hanova School of Modern Dance

My life changed dramatically when I was ten. First of all we had moved from one area of the city to another, quite far away from where we had lived. The Ukrainian Hall now was too far away to attend on my own. This void was filled when I began dance lessons at The Hanova School of Modern Studies in Body Sculpture and the Classical Dance. My drama teacher, Lillian Harper, had suggested to my mother that I might enjoy this quite ‘different’ dance school. And so my thirty-five year relationship began with Magda and Gertrud Hahn.

I vividly remember my first dance lesson at the Hanova School. After climbing up what seemed like a long flight of stairs to the studio at the top of the building, the first thing I was impressed with was a wall of beautiful pictures of dancers, captured in graceful motion and unusual positions. These pictures immediately intrigued me and spoke to me of a foreign and fascinating world of dance I knew nothing about.

From then on, every time I waited for my dance lesson to begin at the Hanova School, I would sit on the small couch beneath the photographs
and gaze at these pictures and try to decipher their meaning. Who were these dancers and where had these pictures been taken? The pictures, covered the whole wall and unfailingly revealed new details each time I pondered them.

In time the secrets of the photographs were revealed to me. Many pictures were students from the Hanova sisters’ dance school in Karlsbad, Czechoslovakia from the 1920’s. In these sepia toned photographs, students demonstrated their flexibility and suppleness in exercises. Other pictures were photographs of the Hanova sisters as young women. In these pictures the Hanova sisters’ faces shone with a joy I recognized and seemed to have experienced also.

On this initial lesson, standing self-consciously on the landing, drinking in the pictures, I was greeted warmly by the Hanova sisters and told I could observe or participate in the lesson. I decided to participate and joined several girls in the main room. They were bent over, bouncing forward and undulating their spines. As I copied the girls, in what I thought then to be very strange movements, I also felt I was starting on a wonderful adventure. These ‘strange’ movements soon became familiar as did yoga, the ballet, modern creative dance and the ‘worship of the Terpsichorean Arts’. The Hanova School of Modern Studies in Body Sculpture and the Classical dance would change my life forever.

Figure 7.

Hanova wall photo. Magda and Gertrud in Czechoslovakian costume. India 1936.
Figure 8.

Hanova wall photo. Magda in the foreground on right. Mid 1920’s.

Figure 9.

Hanova wall photo. From Hahn Karlsbad School Mid 1920’s.
Figure 10.

Hanova wall photo. Students from the Hanova Bombay School India 1935.

Figure 11.

Hanova wall photo. Hanova School Bombay 1935.
Figure 12.

Hanova wall photo. Magda on the beach in Bombay, India 1930’s.

Figure 13.

Hanova wall photo. Magda Karlsbad Studio early 1930’s.
Figure 14.

Hanova wall photo. Gertrud far right 1920’s

Figure 15.

Hanova wall photo. Gertrud far right 1920’s
The first Hanova studio in Vancouver, British Columbia, before I started dancing at the Hanova School, was in the Academy of the Arts on Broadway near McDonald. Their second studio, now torn down, which I attended, was on the corner of Seymour and Drake in downtown Vancouver from 1960 to 1973. They later moved to the Scottish Auditorium on 11th and Fir and later still to The Creative Space on Dunbar and 35th.

I began classes with the Hanova sisters by taking one class a week on Saturday mornings. I usually came a little early and had to wait outside for their arrival. They would zip up in their red Austin-Mini, Magda at the wheel, as Gertrud never learned to drive. We would respectfully greet them and help them carry their bags or equipment up to the studio.

Each class started with a curtsy, "Good morning, Miss Magda." And then another curtsy to Gertrud, "Good morning, Miss Gertrud." The Hanova sisters grew up in Bohemia near the German border in Czechoslovakia at the turn of the century. German was their first language and so they both spoke with a cultured German accent. They had strong opinions about the dance and could lecture about their beliefs with authority and conviction. Growing up in an era long gone, the sisters taught their classes with an old world discipline and demanded our very best behaviour. They had a serious presence and I always had a bit of fear mixed in with my awe and reverence for them.

Gertrud and Magda always participated in the classes by demonstrating most movements or exercises. As a child I never guessed or wondered too much about the sisters’ ages. To me they were adults. They seemed timeless. They did not exhibit any signs of old age. They were vibrant and energetic. They coloured their hair and dressed with a chic European flare. I realize now that they were both around sixty years old when I started with them in the mid 1960’s.

All of the Hanova classes started with loosening up the body, hence the undulating spine work, and yoga exercises led by Gertrud. Supple and flexible, Gertrud would with delight always bend farther and lie flatter than any of her students. She would sit on a raised dais when demonstrating yoga positions in her signature black leotard and black dance skirt. She was inspirational, with strong dynamics, and I always felt it a privilege to watch her and tried to duplicate that special something she exuded before executing any asana or yoga position.
The yoga portion of the classes consisted of mastering many poses to encourage flexibility, balance, good posture, and improved strength in the body. The Hanova sisters especially stressed ‘center control’ which was a method of flexing the back out and then tucking under the pelvis to attain good posture and line. The Hanova sisters’ dance school was the first to teach modern creative dance in Vancouver, starting in 1957, and was additionally exotic because they also taught Indian dance and yoga.

*Figure 16.*

*Hanova wall photo. Hanova Karlsbad Dance School students mid 1920’s.*

After the yoga and warm up, Magda would lead ballet exercises at the bar. She was less stern than Gertrud and seemed to like children more but nevertheless in no uncertain terms demanded we do our very best. Magda always reflected a great inner joy and vitality when leading any movement activities and one could tell she adored ‘The Dance.’ As she demonstrated barre work, *developpe or ronde de jambe,* I remember she would pull up her dance skirt slightly to reveal her long, beautifully shaped legs so that we could see clearly how to execute the movement. She always spoke French during the barre exercises as she said this was the language of the ballet.
Figure 17.
Magda (age 70) demonstrating at the bar Scottish Auditorium studio 1974

Figure 18.
Gertrud around 1974 at a lecture demonstration
After our bar routine, we might do ballet technique au milieu. Each class would be a little different. But there was usually the basic warm up, yoga, ballet barre, kinetic explorations, based on Rudolph Laban’s work, some kind of choreographic study and time left for improvisation. The kinetic studies focused on specific Hanova inspired movements, which the sisters said were based on the figure of eight they had learned through Indian dance. These were rounded, flowing movements such as the front and side *impulse*, and the *tortille*. We would in addition spend time exploring Laban’s levels and the kinespheric space, effort qualities, rhythm, and a multitude of ways to travel and jump across the floor. Magda and Gertrud would always collaborate on the choreographic portion of the class. The classes always ended with my favourite part, improvisation, which was accompanied by a cymbal, a drum, verbal instructions or music. While improvising, we would freeze when a name was called out, which allowed one person the spot light. We were directed to move in various ways, for example, “only move your hands, your head, your eyes”. “Turn, whirl, tilt, side impulse, bound flow, lead only with your hands. Or, “use strength or softness, resist gravity or assist gravity, flow freely across the room, or make a twisted shape or a small shape.” This improvising allowed for individuality and expression. I particularly loved watching the older students, who I noted, had their own unique movement patterns and expression, which very much reflected their personalities.

I stand motionless, waiting for my turn to improvise. Others swirl around me, slowly, gracefully traversing the space, expressing their individuality so beautifully. We are dancers, together, creating a kaleidoscope of shapes, moods, impressions, and gestures. I hear my name and gratefully release myself from being stationary. I am swept up in my mobility. I inhale vigorously and simultaneously stretch my rib cage, and shoot my arms over my head. I toss my hair back and expand my diaphragm, opening myself to the energy of the dance. I listen to my inner voice, which connects to my limbs and torso and brings forth a rush of movement that has not been planned or formulated. It is just suddenly there. I feel the expanse of my body, the breadth, the width, the extent of my glorious reach. I launch into open spaces, gliding, twisting, turning between the other dancers, creating and weaving a unique pattern of arms and legs that lifts my spirit. I feel a deep sense of belonging, both to the dance and this group of dancers. It is here I allow my self to overflow, express my inner longing and transcend the mere physical to ascension. These are moments of ineffable but tangible interconnectivity and communion.
Knowing nothing of European dance history or movement theory I eagerly learned about the ballet, Mary Wigman, Rudolph Laban, modern creative dance, and various famous Indian dance masters and yoga instructors the Hanova sisters had studied with over their lifetime. The Hanova sisters had a rich and varied dance background, which I will go into in more depth in the next chapter on their lives.

I realize now that the Hanova sisters stressed yoga to foster flexibility and balance, ballet barre work to impart solid technique and the work of Rudolph Laban to give us a framework for choreography and an understanding of the components of dance. Laban’s, (see Preston (1963), elements or movement principles are contained in sixteen basic movement themes. They are the awareness of the body, weight and time, space, the flow of the weight of the body in space and time, adaptation to a partner, the awareness of basic effort actions, occupational rhythms, of shape in movement, transitions between the basic effort actions, orientation in space, the combination of shapes and efforts, elevation, the awakening of group feeling, group formations, and the expressive qualities of movement.

Imparted over many years, these movement principles became imbedded in my conceptions of the dance and it was only as an adult and after reading Laban material in more depth that I realized how much my notions of the dance had been informed by Laban’s movement theories, which were coloured and added to by other Hanova dance experiences. Further, the core philosophy at the heart of Laban’s teaching, that dance is for everyone in some capacity and that dance can revolutionize society, was echoed in the Hanova philosophy. The Hanova sisters were clearly influenced by Laban’s ideas, first through their study with Wigman, who was Laban’s student and later when they studied with Laban directly in London in the 1950’s. The Hanova sisters accepted a student into their school based on the student’s enthusiasm and desire to dance, not on the student’s ability or star quality. As historian McCaw (2011) informs us:

Laban’s specific focus on the human body in terms of its capabilities created a concept in which the individual being is central. … his conception of dance as a practice for all people meant a shift away from the dancer as a conservatorie-trained and technically skilled practitioner, and instead he sought to foster an engagement of an individual’s body, mind and spirit in the act of dancing. (p. 63)
After the warm up and barre exercises, for a change of pace, as dance students, we might get out our notebooks and write down information about a famous artist, poet, composer, or dancer. We had great discussions about many subjects. I remember Gertrud and Magda showing us many books about art and dance and we often listened to many pieces of music as the sisters identified the composers and names of the usually classical works. I felt terribly ignorant but I always gratefully and without complaint, listened carefully to what they had to say. I knew I had finally found what I'd been looking for, a place with kindred spirits who loved the dance as I did. This was very significant for me. I felt very vulnerable at this time in my life as I transitioned from middle childhood to teen and finding a place where I could mature, belong, and learn about something I loved so much as the dance strongly shaped who I was to become.

Validation. Important validation is provided while I move, turn, pose and transition into the body of a dancer. The sisters’ positive regard shines forth. I bask in their approval. The nods of their heads, their smiles, the looks of satisfaction that say, “yes, we see ‘it’ in her body, it is evident in her moving body, she is manifesting her bodylearning.” The sisters have transmitted their art, from their bodies into mine, communicated in silent dance conversations, which have disclosed the beauty of movement, to form a mutual declaration of our delight and adoration for the dance.

I feel reciprocal satisfaction. The mentored basking in the glow of the mentor’s validation. Shared pleasure in creativity, come to fruition. My body interprets and reflects back what I have absorbed. Unspoken, but voiced in my ‘presentness’.

What power the teacher holds. Perhaps not realizing the delicate, fragile ego that may rest in his or her hands. The short and tender impressionable years of youth when one is most open to learning. Only wishing for acceptance, inclusion, being part of something that imparts confirmation that one is progressing in this thing called life. For the student praise and encouragement are like rain on a parched landscape. The welcome moisture of validation can heal dry and thirsty souls and impart courage, confidence, and aid in the fulfillment of dreams.

As a young student during dance classes with the Hanova sisters, I remember being very impressed when they demonstrated or danced concepts or movements to illustrate what they wanted. It seemed magical as they transitioned instantaneously from verbal instructions as the teacher to showing the movement as the artist. An arm movement would become more than a gesture it would convey a dynamic that held power. Suddenly the arm would transform, it was no longer an arm, it became an embodied object d’art.
I especially remember Gertrud could instantaneously change a simple pose into a body filled with purpose and strength. As she called on her muse, her eyes would suddenly contain mystery and a veiled secret. Her head would tilt to the side and convey majesty. As a young girl, observing and learning these principles of dynamics I was absolutely engaged. Magda’s face would take on an inner glow and literally shine with joy whenever she demonstrated a jump or leg extension. As students, we observed what really cannot be put into words adequately, that the dance artist has only to call upon their inner divinity and this power will shine forth. Through the Hanova sisters I learned that the dancer holds vitality in her body. I learned that this vitality dwells within us, waiting to be accessed for our art. The unfolding of this vitality in the dance, which I now realize is divinely inspired and our life force, is probably the most important element an artist can utilize to make their work alive and embodied.

At the Hanova’s Vancouver dance studio, their students were not professional dancers nor were most of them ever going to be professional dancers, but the students returned every week seeking and finding inspiration. The Hanova sisters provided this inspiration and were our guides to unlock our creativity and passion. As students, we were always encouraged to create our own movements and choreography and through these movements find within ourselves a confirmation of being alive and a release of emotion and a mode of expression.

Choreography and kinetic studies were inspired by: Laban movement elements, poetry, music, and the personal interests of students. The Hanova sisters loved choreographing studies, which incorporated geometrical designs, yoga exercises or ballet technique. Looking back at old programs from the 1960’s through to the 1990’s, I note the gong and drum were used to accompany dances, poetry was voiced with dances and music was selected from a wide selection of composers such as Chopin, probably their favourite, Tschaikovsky, Debussy, Bach, Schubert, Grieg, Satie, Handel, and Shankar. 4

4 I was fortunate to be entrusted with a treasure of materials, which included photos, programs, newspaper clippings, and personal letters that Gertrud and Magda gave me for safekeeping in the hope that I would somehow preserve their life history.
The most endearing quality of the Hanova sisters, despite their strict manner, was the special way they had of making ‘you’ feel you were a real dance artist and that you were contributing to making the world more beautiful through movement. When you went home you were just a kid again but at the studio, for those brief hours, you were part of a creative and inspirational atmosphere. Despite their old fashioned discipline, Gertrud and Magda were generous with praise for everyone’s achievement and had a knack of drawing out of each student their movement strengths and talents.

The Hanova school was well attended by students of all ages and both sexes. Whole families attended, and were Hanova converts, the mother, father, and children. The Hanova sisters usually rented a theatre once a year or had a large studio performance to present an annual recital in which all their students participated in some capacity. From the inception of the Hanova school in Vancouver in 1958, the sisters consistently presented their work to the public in lecture demonstrations, performances, and television appearances.

From old programs I have documented Hanova presentations through the late 1950’s until the late 1990’s. They believed in spreading the knowledge and joy of the dance to a wide audience. In the sisters’ early years in Vancouver, I note a lecture demonstration of Indian dance for the Tibetan Yoga Institute of Vancouver in 1959, several dance performances at the Y.W.C.A. in 1960 (where Magda first taught dance in Vancouver), presented by the Vancouver Ballet Society, a full evening of the Hanova School of Dance at the Oakridge Auditorium in 1960, many dance evenings in collaboration with the German Cultural Society of Vancouver through out the 1960’s as well as their own performances at many theatres, now torn down, such as the Metro Theatre and the York Theatre.
Figure 19.

**Program advertisement from 1965 Metro Theatre performance**

HANOVA WILL PRESENT

Modern Creative Dance

METRO THEATRE CENTER, 1370 S.W. MARINE DRIVE, VANCOUVER 12, B.C.

SUNDAY, MAY 30, 1965, 8.30 p.m.

A DANCE PERFORMANCE CALLED

“Oh, Sailor”

Will be preceded by a short lecture demonstration

Tickets available now: HANOVA STUDIO — PHONES: 685-5016 - 681-8088

Prices: $2.25, $1.50, $1.25, $1.00

Figure 20.

**Recreating Oh Sailor on the Vancouver shore.**

*Berry MacDonnel Bunty Clements Sonja Christjansen*
In 1967, the Hanova sisters rented the York Theatre for a performance, which was on Commercial Drive before it was torn down. The program included exercises, kinetic studies, and two larger works called *Phantasmagoria* and *Rustic Bohemia*.

**Figure 21.**

*Program advertisement from York Theatre 1967*

*Rustic Bohemia* stands out in my memory as a beautiful dance work. This dance story centered around the River Vltava and was set to Smetana's *The Moldau*. Every student in the school was in it, from the youngest to the oldest.

At the beginning of the piece, two water nymphs enter, creating or laying down the river with long, shimmering blue and green fabric strips. Later, peasant girls dance by the river (I was one of them) and a nanny (Astrid Fisher-Credo) takes her charge for a stroll in a huge old-fashioned baby buggy. Workers harvest the fields beside the shore and women come to carry water away for washing and cooking. At the end of the piece, water dryads and enchanted trees protect the river and village as night falls.
As I moved into my teens, my commitment to dance grew. My mother and I took International Folk dancing for many years, I joined an historical dance society and I went from one class a week with the Hanovas to three. I continued with the large Saturday morning group class of students my age and joined the production group and also took private lessons. As part of the production group, I performed at many venues around the city, such as the Vancouver Art Gallery, The Vancouver Play House, the Unitarian Church, and for the University Women’s Club.

The sisters always made a point of trying to educate their audience about their style of modern dance and methods of teaching and would inevitably share a prepared statement before the start of each performance explaining their philosophy. Here is a short excerpt I found in an old program from 1977, which is a good example of what was generally shared before all Hanova performances.
Modern Dance is a creative Art form basically arising from the need to express through movements the emotion and ideas that are the experience of every human being.

Our students are non-professionals but have to undergo much the same training as professionals, only in a very much lesser degree.

It lies within our nature to approach everything with an inquiring attitude. To us, each class and each student contributes to the opening of new vistas. We believe true guidance can only be given by fully perceiving the personality of the student and the problems that emerge. Technique is essential, but it should never become greater than oneself. The unity of the physical and spiritual has been our guide throughout our teaching.

*Figure 23.*

_Mary Philippo, Judy Philippo, Karen Wenn (Kurnaedy) 1970 ‘Improvisation’ Bentall Center_
My heart stirs immediately as I stand ready and hear the lovely beginning strains of the violin concerto. I am focused, holding my pose, one of three dancers, positioned corner right, center, and corner left at the back of the stage. I can tangibly feel the other dancers in the space as we ready ourselves to move. First, the middle dancer glides forward, to center front stage. She forms a slow figure of eight with her hips and sweeps her right arm into a flowing side impulse and then with a flourish and precisely with the music, she circles her arms backwards and forwards and holds her hands in a gesture of invocation. The dancer in the left corner then glissades to the side and runs forward. She slowly extends her right leg into a side arabesque. She holds this pose and lifts her leg even higher, her arms held in a gesture of supplication to the heavens, and then she bends her leg and infinitely slowly, rotates on her foot until she has made a full turn. She ends with her hands in the same precise gesture of petition. The music tells me it is my turn. I glissade to the left and also run forward. I am in the spotlight. I bend slowly back and touch the floor, and raise one leg, pause, and then push off to propel myself into the opposite direction where I briefly balance holding my foot almost to my head. I circle my arms backwards and bring my hands forward to join in the same hand gesture of appeal. Then as one, we flow together into a line and sweep our right arms up, supplicating the gods, to grace our offering with ‘hope’ and blessing.
The Peasant Cantata was set to the music of J.S Bach. We performed many times at the Unitarian Church. Looking back at the programs, the dances expressed spiritual themes, which fit in with the church services, such as *Celestial Infinity* with music by Switched on Bach in June of 1971, *Vivacious Calm: Blessed Spirit*, music by Gluck in 1971, and *Hope* in April of 1972 with music by Tschaikovsky: Concerto in D major for violin. The Hanova sisters did not attend church or have any religious affiliations (except as they said worshipping Terpsichore, the Greek muse of the dance). But they were close friends with philanthropist and supporter of the arts, Jean Barber, who attended the Unitarian Church.
Sweet semblance, to your games behold me
Willingly surrendered; others have purposes,
Aims, for me it is enough to live!
All that ever moved my senses seems to me
A reflection of the Infinite and One that
I ever felt vitally.
To read such hieroglyphics will always
Recompense me for life, for the Eternal,
Essence I know to dwell within me.
(Hesse, 2008)
Reading this poem and remembering this dance of forty years ago, it seems prophetic as I am now writing about the Infinite, the Eternal essence I know to dwell within me, and about feelings of vitality generated by dancing. For ‘Confession’, I selected the poem and the subject matter and co-choreographed it with the Hanova sisters in my private classes. It was a powerful piece. I dramatically jumped forward and then bent far back for the opening strong piano chords. The music later becomes flowing and I traveled to this part of the music with running and turning, swept up in the ecstasy of the dance.

The Hanova sisters lived in the West End of Vancouver in a penthouse apartment that was a few blocks away from Stanley Park. The park provided beautiful spaces to dance and many wonderful photo opportunities on the beach, in the water, and forest. Magda and Gertrude also had many gatherings for their students on their roof garden in the summer months.

Figure 27.

Gertrud and Magda 1990 on the roof of their penthouse apartment
Figure 28.

Helga Straussman 1963 Yoga headstand Stanley Park

Figure 29.

Stanley Park Beach 1968

Note. Monica Ragetli, Tineke Ragetli, Judy Philippo, Beth Minsky, Karen Wenn (Kurnaedy) Mary Philippo Connecting to the Earth Mary Philippo, Beth Minsky, Karen Wenn (Kurnaedy) Monica Ragetli, Mary Philippo, Tineke Ragetli
Figure 30.

Stanley Park 1968 Connecting to the Earth

Note. Monica Ragetli, Tineke ragetli, Judy Philippo, Beth Minsky, Karen Wenn (Kurnaedy) Mary Philippo

Figure 31.

Stanley Park 1968

Note. From left to rt. Mary Philippo, Beth Minsky, Karen Wenn (Kurnaedy,) Tineke Ragetli, Judy Philippo, Monica Ragetli Stanley Park (Gertrud in the foreground) 1968
The Hanova sisters were invited to participate in the Okanagan Summer School of the Arts in Penticton several times during the 1960’s through to the 1980’s and also the Kelowna Summer School of Dance. I attended the Kelowna Dance intensive in 1970. Gweneth Lloyd, founding director and choreographer of the Winnipeg Ballet loaned the Hanova sisters her studio in Kelowna and dancers from Vancouver roomed at the home of Ann Briggs, a friend of the sisters and fellow lover of the dance arts.

Figure 32.

Okanagan Summer School of the Arts Penticton early 1960’s
The Hanova sisters encouraged participation in the choreographic process and so with their guidance and experience the finished product was always something satisfying. The sisters were very generous to me and knew I could not afford to take three lessons a week and so gave me a ‘scholarship’ every year. In my private lessons I remember we didn’t spend a lot of time on yoga or the bar. We got right down to the business of choreography and worked on the current piece. The hour always flew by. Working with them on choreography was very gratifying as they always tried to bring out my strengths and these sessions were always collaborative.

I will always be grateful that it was my destiny to meet and study with Magda and Gertrud Hahn. They were important life mentors and under their guidance I developed a life long appreciation for dance and choreography. I have been deeply inspired by their teaching and friendship. Through them I received a priceless gift, the life changing realization that I don’t need to jump off the porch in order to fly. I can simply dance.
Figure 34.

Scottish Auditorium Theatre 1974 ‘From Raw Materials to Aesthetic Forms’

Note. Helga Strassman, Sue Rowe-Evans, Susan Tsang, Karen Wenn (Kurnaedy), Raila Katona, Sonja Christjansen, Hilary Craigen

Figure 35.

Karen Wenn (Kurnaedy) Scottish Auditorium 1975 There is Music in my Heart
Music by Chopin Etude No. 10 in A Flat
Figure 36.

Karen dancing at Light House Park, West Vancouver 1975

Figure 37.

Scottish Auditorium performance 1975
Improvisation at the end of the performance

Note. Kathleen Pinch, Karen Wenn (Kurnaedy), Raila Katona, Heather Pinch
I continued to study and perform with the Hanova sisters until I was twenty-one. I took a few breaks. I traveled throughout Europe, the Middle East and to India and Nepal for a year and a half in 1973 and 1974. When I returned, I briefly danced at the University of British Columbia with Graham trained teacher Drelene Gibb, to try something different. I remember at this time I thought the Hanova style seemed old fashioned. This was the era of popular touring companies such as Alwin Nikolais, Twyla Tharp, and the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, all of which I saw when they came to Vancouver, who were all experimenting with new forms of dance. I eventually came back to the Hanova School. In dancing with them I felt I fulfilled something that was not fulfilled anywhere else. Thinking back, I realize this ‘something’ was how they fostered our individuality and encouraged students to connect to their vitality through the dance.

In 1976 I moved to Kelowna, British Columbia and got married. Over the next few years I had three sons and taught the Hanova dance system through the local community center. In 1986 I moved to Edmonton, Alberta and began studying at the University of Alberta and completed a Bachelor of Education degree in 1990. Along with education courses, I was most fortunate to study dance at the University of Alberta with Professor Dorothy Harris. Harris, wonderfully, had studied at the University of Wisconsin under Margaret H'Doubler. H'Doubler's (1940) famous book Dance: ‘A Creative Art Experience’, was one of our texts and I found H'Doubler's dance philosophy closely paralleled much of what I had learned at the Hanova School. In the four years it took to complete my degree, I enjoyed many courses with Harris, which included studying Limon, Graham, and Humphrey technique. I also performed with her dance group, Orchesis. When I graduated, I moved back to Vancouver, BC to be near my mother and immediately found employment as a teacher with District #43, in Coquitlam. I joyfully resumed dance lessons with the Hanova sisters and they soon had me performing in their productions again.

When I returned to British Columbia from Alberta, my relationship with the Hanova sisters changed, in that I was now an older adult and had more perspective on dance and my place in the world. We became much closer and besides dance lessons I spent more time with them as a friend at their apartment, having lunch or going to dance performances. They remained active and interested in the performing arts all their lives and enjoyed going to the theatre to see what other dance companies were producing. I especially remember we saw modern dance companies such as Paul Taylor and Martha
Graham, and the Indian dance company of Vancouver based Jai Govinda several times. I was now in my thirties, a teacher and mother but still a dancer, who still totally enjoyed the classes and choreographic collaboration with the sisters. In the period from 1990 until 1992 we had a very productive time together. The sisters still had many students and still held their annual studio performance and lecture demonstration.

*Figure 38.*

*Magda and Gertrud at their West End apartment 1991: Magda’s 86th birthday*
Figure 39.
Magda and Gertrud at the end of a studio performance 1991

Figure 40.
Magda 1991 Magda was also an artist and illustrated several books
Sadly, Magda suddenly passed away from a stroke in March 1992. I remember earlier in the year when Magda was still alive being asked to go to pick up a prescription for her with her identification which had her birth date on it. That was the first time I really knew how old the sisters were. I saw that Magda was born in 1905 and was 87. I knew Gertrud was two years older, which made her 89. I was surprised. They had always kept this information to themselves maintaining active and vigorous bodies so no one ever knew their exact ages.

_Figure 41._

*Gertrud at the Creative Space studio 1998 demonstrating a yoga pose*

Gertrud continued to teach after Magda died. She kept a loyal following. I would pick her up from her West End apartment and drive over to the Dunbar area to the Creative Space studio for a weekly lesson. We became closer friends. Despite her age, Gertrud kept her edge and strong opinions. I noticed she was becoming frailer but she was still quite capable of teaching. I enjoyed all of the classes over these years and we focused on Indian dance, revived old pieces that had been danced by the sisters many years earlier, such as Handel’s Largo, and created new studies based on exercises, ballet, and kinetics.
This piece was a blend of Indian dance styles, Manipuri, Bharatanatyam, and Kathakali which the Hanova sisters had studied in India. The music was from an Andre Previn/Ravi Shankar collaboration, entitled *East Meets West*. ‘The Garden’ was based on a poem by the famous Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1979, 2005).

Hidden deep in the heart of things,
Thou carest for growth and life:
The seed becomes shoot, the bud a blossom,
The flower becomes fruit.
Tired I slept on my idle bed
in the illusion that the work had an end.
In the morning I awoke to find
That my garden was full of flowers.

For this piece, I wore an Indian dance costume from the Hanova treasure chest of mementos brought back from India, which included traditional jingling ankle bells.
Gertrud told me the skirt had belonged to Menaka, a famous Indian dancer and a close friend of the sisters in Bombay. The skirt was made of many meters of silk fabric which billowed out in a wonderful swirl when I turned or spun. I also wore a colourful top or choli, and a long piece of fabric over my head, secured with many pins.

As the dance begins, I listen to the sound of a beautiful, languid, and stirring flute melody entice and draw each gesture from my body. I am transported into a garden. My hands form a seed, which transforms into a bud, then a blossom. I marvel as I create a glorious lotus flower with fingers and palms. I sink to the floor to convey an exhaustion that emanates from being tired of living and succumb to sleep. In my rest, the garden rejuvenates my spirit and I awaken, refreshed. I am paused in this moment. My garden has bloomed to reveal the sacred creations of the Infinite. I feel revitalized and must dance to express my aliveness.

I said each line of the poem accompanied by distinct hand gestures called mudras, which are from the Manipuri style. After the poem, the music transitioned into a faster rhythm. In this section of the dance, I start with intricate, synchronized and syncopated feet and hand movements. Then I simultaneously jump onto both feet, which prompts the bells to jingle loudly. I quickly turn, squat and rise and then travel across the space on toes that fly. The dance is a blur of motion, stamps, and deliberate poses and pauses. The piece ends with a continuous turning, which gradually gains momentum until I am spinning in a flurry of orange silk, my skirt blooming around me as a flower in the garden.

Many Indian dance teachers require a minimum of seven years of apprenticeship before they consider a student ready to represent the art form accurately. I learned the movements for this dance over many months and always knew I could improve my execution. I would never claim to be an Indian dancer but I was a dancer who had learned the rudiments of each style of Indian dance sufficiently to perform certain movements adequately.
Learn, too, how God’s own angels keep
Your ways by day,
Your dreams asleep.
Traditional
Gertrud taught dance to myself and to a group of devoted seniors until she was 97. In her last years she continued to live alone in her West End apartment surrounded by the paintings and photographs that spoke of the wonderful life she and Magda had led dancing around the world. Gertrud passed away in 2002 at the age of 99.

After Gertrud passed away, even though I felt there was no substitute for lessons with her, I knew I had to keep dancing to fulfill the need I had to move, create, and feel spiritual connections and vitality. I briefly taught the Hanova system of modern dance in my community through Continuing Education. I was additionally active in establishing a community arts village in my small town and performed my own choreography in the community space several times as part of various art shows.

Throughout my twenty-two year teaching career in the public school, I have also continuously taught dance and I have gradually expanded and increased the role of dance in my daily classroom experiences, knowing with deep conviction that children need to move and explore their bodies frequently. I connect the need to move and dance to my own experiences as a child and realize I am sharing a fundamental element of our
humanity. In my teaching practice, dance has been a way to foster the presence of joy and bring forth the vitally all children seem to possess.

Throughout the years, I have also frequently connected with friends and family who were artists or photographers and we created dance photographs together which captured memories of our trips to the local Gulf Islands and the surrounding beauty of the British Columbian coast line. Combining nature with dance and photography has been a wonderful way to express my passion for dance. Of course, the Hanova sisters were my first role models for these outdoor pictures. I will never forget the wall of photos at the top of the stairs at their studio on Seymour Street. I realize these photographs, so prominently displayed, were a way for the sisters to share and remember the beautiful essence of their past dance experiences.

The camera is sometimes able to capture an image, which represents a true reflection of the dancer’s feelings and perceptions while dancing. The dance is after all realized in fleeting moments, seconds of space and time, in which the connections we make to the divine are snatches of radiance and vitality. Photographs allow us to recollect and hold close these moments of divinity.
Dancing… I am improvising. Exploring the movement possibilities of my body. I travel, run forward, arms trailing, head tossed back, chest leading, I slow down and speed up, I pause, and throw my arms and body forward, then I flow into a turn and then undulate my hips and rib cage. Simultaneously I am entering into the space inside myself, I feel delight and rejoice in my buoyancy. I am aware of the air rushing past my arms and hair as I embrace this dance. I revel in the stretch of my torso as I reach up my arms, as I turn again I feel a delicious dizziness and I sway to an inner rhythm. I have come awake in my body.

The dancer raises her arm into the space for the sole purpose of creation. As her arm floats upward, it reveals a brief silhouette that is only present for a moment in time. The contours shift as her arm curves up and over, circling, taking the whole body sideways, her hips rotate, and join in making a figure of eight, carving small circular pathways in the space. Warmth flows over the skin, the body feels a glow, a smooth flow as it glides through the air, the movement registers as bodyunity, continuous, a symbol for infinity, the Creator.
Figure 46.

At Wayne Ngan’s Pottery studio Hornby Island 1998

Figure 47.

Karen Kurnaedy. Hornby Island 1998
Dance can be a meditation, allowing the center and heart to reverberate quietly with passion. In the dance, restoration tingles through my body connecting me to my ‘divine’ presence.

I fill the rooms of my body with the energy created through the dance. I am nourished. The energy radiates through my arteries, cells and molecules. In the dance I touch and unite with my source, a power that is linked to all of creation. Dancing outdoors, a special communion occurs with rock, tree, earth, sky, water, and air. We dance together, a dance of interconnectivity, intermingling our essences.

Figure 48.

Karen Kurnaedy. Hornby Island 1998
Figure 49.
Karen dancing on Long Beach, Vancouver Island 1999

Figure 50.
Karen Kurnaedy 2009: Earth Dances
In my graduate work at Simon Fraser University I have had the privilege of dancing many of the concepts I have studied to explore and celebrate my learning through the body. This outlet for creativity was an opportunity to continue choreographing and stretching myself in new endeavours. For my Masters thesis (Kurnaedy, 2009) I wrote about choreography and the parallels that are present in the writing process. I choreographed several pieces to illustrate my methodology using the themes of the Earth, ecology and saving our planet.

Ultimately, the Hanova sisters modelled that one is never too old to dance and dancing slows down the aging process and helps the body retain its integrity and range of motion. I learned from the Hanova sisters that our creativity and artistic ability can flourish even more abundantly in our later years as I witnessed them draw on their rich life experiences to create meaningful and inspirational dance works into their eighties and nineties. And so I am always eager and curious to discover fresh opportunities to dance and choreograph. I have found a conduit to the divine and dancing will ever enrich my soul and spirit.
My Love Affair Continues…

Figure 51.

*Argentine Tango
Irwan Kurnaedy, Karen Kurnaedy (foreground)*
In 1997, I started ballroom dance lessons with my husband, something I had always wanted to try as I had often reflected on how amazing my mother was at this dance form. Over the last fifteen years I have immersed myself in the fox trot, waltz, samba, rumba, cha-cha, salsa, jive, rockabilly, swing, two step, tango and Argentine tango. This social dancing also provides a deep dancing satisfaction where one’s vitality and joy can emerge.

Ballroom styles evolved from folk dances and social dancing and may also be performed for an audience. In ballroom dancing one is still expressing oneself and creating choreography, but in unity with another person. As the follow, the women must allow the male dancer to lead. This intricate leading and following directs the female to ‘listen’ closely with her body to every nuance of her male partner’s body.

I relax into his arms as he leads me across the floor. Our slow, quick, quick steps speak to me of comfort, trust and union. We are two bodies moving together in synchronicity. We know the dance steps well and I can be in the moment without thinking about what my feet are doing. My kinaesthetic memory has taken over. It is a heady feeling as I absorb the music, the feel of the floor as I slide my shoes across its surface and the light touch of my partner’s arms guiding me. I float.

He leads, I follow. I never know which steps he will improvise next. It is a delightful surprise. What intricate combo of links, meet and parts, swinging out, or stepping together will I unwrap next.

Our dance can be slow and languid, or fast, rock-a-billy murderous and crazy. We swing out, clasp hands, catch one another from being flung out into the space. Time seems frozen even though we are moving a mile a minute. I feel suspended and supported in the moment, the air has taken on the quality of something tangible and buoyant. I am elated, the movement is effortless, weightless, we are in balance, we have attained freedom from gravity together.

Our secret
Our dance has been created
With hours of practice
Classes taken
Risks of looking foolish
Stepping on someone’s toes
Getting up on the floor to expose the Real you.

When you first hear the music, your body goes, yeah, I’ve got to move to this beat or melody. There are no clear words to describe the feeling, this urgency. So you stand up, grab your partner and get on the floor as fast as you can. Sometimes, you are the only couple up there. The space is all yours. You can spread out, fly, move everywhere, unafraid of colliding
with others. The energy of the audience is up there with you, loving the music, the heat, the moment of freeing your body of all constraints, kinetically present, and feeling it’s so good to be alive.

Other times, the floor is really crowded. You have to dance everything small. Keeping your arms in close, slides and turns are controlled. This is a time of mass oneness. The good vibrations of the dancers reverberate off one another. We are a mass of people totally enjoying the jostling and brush of each other’s bodies. We share the experience of moving as one huge creature with many heads, arms and legs. Together we gyrate, pulse, throb and twist feeling extreme satisfaction. We acknowledge each other with small grins, shared glances of a deep feeling of, yeah, we are so in the groove! The intense pleasure we are experiencing in the dance is wordlessly communicated to anyone watching by our gleaming, sweating, beaming faces. Some of the dancers on the floor I have never met, others, I’ve only been introduced to briefly, but we all, now, know each other on a kinaesthetic level from our dancing experience, we have shared the dance floor, we are kin.

Sometimes, there will be a loner, someone who has come to hear the music without friends. Even though the dance floor is empty, there will come a moment when they can’t bear to sit there one more second. So up they get to twist and turn, shake and roll, jump and thump. They dance with abandon, alone on the floor. They don’t care if they look silly. They are following their inner muse, called and answering the voice of Terpsichore and they must express the music with their body.

The body instinctively knows how to dance. When the music starts, the feet begin tap, tap, tapping. The core starts to shake from side to side. The shoulders twitch in time to the music, the head bobs, the knees rise and fall. Finally, the need to move the whole organism bursts out. You grab your partner’s hand, lock eyes in agreement, and jauntily strut to the rhythm, into the dance space to share your motion with others.

We are matching, our timing, the back and forth movement and flow through the space. I listen with my body to the subtle signals his body sends me. I have learned to feel a hand placed so, means move here. A gentle push out means, turn. A clasping of my hand in a certain way means get ready for something fancy. The body develops a memory so as I feel him turn so we are shoulder to shoulder, I know it is time to kick out and slide back, to glide forward again.

The dance enables the dancer to be in the moment. This ‘being here now’, is precious. A high, higher than any drugs or alcohol can induce. A high where there seems to be no gravity or age in the body. The experience is one of dynamics, time, energy, flow, rhythm and relationships. You are engaged in body actions, which demand that you be present. There is no time for dwelling on the past or the future. This moment, in movement, takes up your consciousness. You are releasing the breath and taking in the next because you must in order to keep moving. This breathing creates a release in the body, a deep relaxation, a
new looseness. The joy of synchronizing your feet, arms and hips to a beat or melody, which whispers or sometimes screams, how fast or slow, to shake, how low to go, or how high to jump, is magic.

I conclude this chapter with the thought that I have represented one person’s dance experiences. I am not a professional dancer nor will I leave my name to be counted amongst famous choreographers. But I continue to dance and always will. I have taught dance to children for over twenty years in the public school system, which has been a rewarding experience. I have danced earnestly with many students and hope I have inspired my pupils to enjoy dancing and to keep dancing as a life long practice. My philosophy of dance parallels that of Rudolph Laban, Mary Wigman, Margaret H’Doubler and the Hanova sisters, dance is for everyone in some capacity. It is part of our humanity and a means to our vitality. Through the dance we may express the life we live through our bodies. How a child is led to a discovery of dance as a life changing activity is dependent on certain factors: one important factor being the mentors that come into his or her life. In the next chapter I invite the reader to read the story of two remarkable women who were my mentors and greatly influenced my conceptions of the dance and life.

*Figure 52.*

*Irwan Kurnaedy, Karen Kurnaedy
Confidance Studio performance 2010*
Chapter 3.
An Invitation to the Dancing Body
The Dance Story of Gertrud and Magda Hanova

Figure 53.

Hanovas in India in Czech costume 1930's
I am sitting on a low, pillow covered couch surrounded by a snug, comfortable living room, filled with mementos, paintings, photographs, and bookcases brimming with books on all subjects. East Indian carpets adorn the floor. The seating has been arranged around a circular coffee table in the center of the room, to facilitate easy reach for cups of tea and conversation. In this moment, I am captivated by the photo album lying on my lap, which is filled with pictures of dancing people. I am completely enchanted. I feel a vicarious pleasure as I imagine myself in some of the poses and costumes.

The pictures I am viewing, visually unfold part of the history of the lives of my two dance teachers, Magda and Gertrud Hanova. I am visiting them in their West End, pent house apartment in Vancouver. It is 1969. They have many albums filled with photographs and old programs. Each one is labelled with a place name, identifying where they lived or studied dance in a period of their lives. Looking at all the photographs cannot be accomplished in one afternoon. There are far too many. I am satisfied to savour one album per visit. The sisters are impressed that I am so interested. But I think, who wouldn’t be? The photographs fascinate me and I am brimming with questions, which they graciously answer.

These photographs are puzzle pieces, which over the years, I piece together to explain the complexity of my dancing teachers. They are not like anyone else I have ever met and I am never bored in their company. I am a young teenage girl but I have started to look beyond people’s exteriors and realize some people have more depth than others. The Hanova sisters have extensive layers, which the photographs help to uncover. This afternoon is one of many visits in which I spend practically my whole time at their apartment looking at an album and asking questions. I am drawn to a discovery of their dancing lives. They enjoy sharing their past. Many years later when I am an adult, the sisters give me many of these treasured pictures or allow me to make copies. I retain a deep conviction that I need to tell the story of the Hanova sisters’ lives and preserve their photographs for dance history.

In telling the story of Magda and Gertrud Hanova I am presenting the experiences of two people who dedicated themselves to the art of the dance throughout their whole lives. They were gifted dance artists and teachers. From an historical perspective their story presents a unique view of ballet and modern dance in Europe during the 1920’s and early 1930’s. Their dance story then travels to India in the mid 1930’s and 1940’s where they lived and studied Indian dance and yoga and in turn shared European modern dance with many pupils. The sisters then traveled back to Europe in the 1950’s, and furthered their knowledge of the body and dance by studying directly with Rudolph Laban and teaching dance at their London school. Finally, in the
late 1950’s the sisters traveled to Vancouver, British Columbia, to establish the first modern dance school in the city, which over a period of forty years influenced hundreds of dance students. Their story is one of inspiration as they completely and wholeheartedly lived their art all of their lives but their story also bears academic relevance to this dissertation. The Hanova sisters understood that the dancing body was a vital and sacred place and they were able to convey an understanding and appreciation for this aspect of the dance to their students. Magda and Gertrud Hanova left a legacy in their teaching for those in search of the essence of what animates the dancer beneath the dance.

Bischof-Teinitz and Karlsbad 1903 - 1921

Magda and Gertrud Hahn were born in Bischof-Teinitz, Czechoslovakia, Gertrud in 1903 and Magda in 1905. From an early age, the sisters were encouraged by their family to appreciate the arts. Magda’s and Gertrud’s parents, both doctors, had a great interest in music; their mother played the violin, and their father the cello. It was not unusual in the Hahn household to have several musical evenings or chamber concerts a week and the sisters both took piano lessons. During the concerts, instead of going to bed, the sisters would listen to the music and were inspired to dance behind the closed doors. And so they developed their love for music and dance.

Bischof-Teinitz is a small town near the German border in what is now the Czech Republic. It was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until WWI. To get a picture of exactly where this is, in 1938 the town and region were annexed into Nazi Germany as part of the Sudetenland. Until 1945 the area was populated by native Germans, who spoke a Northern Bavarian dialect. The Hanova sisters’ first language was German. They spoke of a Jewish background but always included the fact that they were not ‘religious’ in any traditional sense, and here in the telling is where Gertrud gets a twinkle in her eye, as she adds, “except for worshiping Terpsichore, the muse of the dance”.

From my many conversations with Magda and Gertrud about their early life, they said that their mother was, “extremely avant-garde and very much interested in the dance”. Both parents greatly encouraged them to know about and try all the arts: music, sculpture, painting, and design. But the dance was what they loved the most. When they
were still quite small their mother hired a dance master to come to their village from a nearby larger town called Pilsen to give them private lessons and so their talent for dance was expanded. They first performed at four and six in local festivals, such dances as the minuet and the schottische, a polka like partnered dance, which originated in Bohemia. Their parents helped them to recognize the importance of physical training, with a sound knowledge of basic anatomy and the importance of nourishing the body.

Figure 54.

*Magda Hahn, their aunt, Gertrud Hahn, 1909*
Figure 55.

The Hahn Family around 1909
Figure 56.
Magda around 1913

Figure 57.
School girls Magda and Gertrud 1914
It was a turbulent time in Europe during the Hahn sister’s childhood. The First World War broke out on July 28, 1914. At the start of the war, the Hahn family moved to Karlsbad, a spa city situated in western Bohemia, now in the Czech Republic, on the confluence of the rivers Ohře and Teplá, approximately 130 km (81 mi) west of Prague. Both of the Hahn parents were involved with war work. The larger town afforded the sisters more opportunity for dance lessons and the study of music and art. The sisters attended a dance school that taught ballet and Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Gertrud and Magda, as young teens, also both taught at the school and helped choreograph dances. They also were in many local performances.

Figure 58.

WW I photo. Gertrud and Magda sit beside a fallen soldier

The war ended on November 11, 1918. This led to Germany and Russia losing territory and the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires ceased to exist. The large German-speaking population of Bohemia was incorporated into the new state of Czechoslovakia against their will in accordance with the Treaty of Saint Germain. The German-speaking majority of Karlsbad protested to no avail.
Of interest to the Hanova story is historian Toepfer’s (1997) account of Dalcroze’s influence on public education in Germany and Czechoslovakia, before and after the war. Toepfer (1997) provides a clear description of Dalcroze’s philosophy:

"The aim of rhythmic gymnastics was to create a heightened condition of individual freedom as well as a stronger sense of social unity ... The expression of individuality required the disclosure of a “unique rhythm”. ...it embraced all bodies, regardless of talent, aptitude, or intelligence. Dalcroze persistently attacked ballet training as a tyranny that intimidated people into thinking they had no business exploring their bodily expressivity if they lacked rare physical gifts. He proposed that people become conscious of their bodily rhythms by listening, especially to music." (p. 18)

Toepfer (1997) shares that after the war, Dalcroze disciples taught mostly in the public school system and struggled to maintain the popularity of Dalcroze rhythmic gymnastics. Toepfer (1997) relates that Dalcroze was a great teacher but not as good at publicizing his work. In Czechoslovakia, in 1913, according to Toepfer (1997), “…the powerful Sokol (Falcon) Organization of physical educators and bureaucrats …began to absorb Dalcrozian ideas into a large-scale plan to create a strong body culture in Czechoslovakia. … it treated body culture as an international network of ideas that produced an embodiment of power and identity" (p. 123). I remember Gertrud mentioning Sokol and his work but could never find any references to him. Toepfer (1997) does such a thorough job of detailing anything to do with dance in the Weimar period that I was gratified to find mention of Sokol. According to Toepfer (1997), in 1929, in partnership with the Czech government, Sokol produced a huge book, which set out a state sanctioned method for the rhythmic gymnastic education of females, as the female body was thought to need different exercises than the male body. Toepfer (1997) states, “the book presented a vast treatise on rhythmic gymnastic practice, replete with more than four hundred exercises, each one described in detail regarding musical rhythm, bodily movement, and function through the use of stick figures, drawings, musical notations, and more abstract diagrams, charts and tables” (p. 124).

The work of Sokol was of significance to the Hanova sisters as they would have been eight and ten in 1913 and most certainly were influenced by Dalcrozan ideals and methods in the dance schools and the public schools they attended. When discussing Dalcroze with the Hanova sisters, they mentioned that his system starts with an
awareness of bodily rhythms, and especially of the heart beat. This awareness is transferred to an awareness of a drum beat and then piano rhythms. Dalcroze was criticized for limiting movement to a synchronization of body and music. Looking back at the Hanova sisters’ choreography, the sisters employed much of his system in that they loved to create exercise and kinetic studies to set rhythms.

1919, A war-torn Europe. The conquered people sought to overcome their physical defeat by finding new intellectual values, new forms, new expressions. Out of destruction and uproar, out of the struggle for one’s existence, grew the awareness that man was inextricably entangled in political issues that reflected the economic and social revolution of modern man. (Holm, 1951, 1992, p. 24)

After the upheaval of the war, Germany and the newly formed Czechoslovakia reinvented and renewed their culture, society, and political ambitions. The Hahn sisters were privileged to grow up during the creativity of this period which is referred to as Weimar culture. Weimar culture was named after the newly formed Weimar German Republic. This golden age of modernity was a flourishing of the arts and sciences in Germany and Austria between 1918 to Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. In particular, Berlin and Vienna were sites of fertile artistic innovation in all of the arts and particularly the dance.

According to historian Toepfer (1997), who extensively details the dance and body culture of this period in his book Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture 1910-1935:

German culture between 1910 and 1930 cultivated an attitude toward the body unprecedented in its modernity, intensity, and complexity. This attitude motivated the formation of body culture... However, it is useful to observe that a genuinely modern attitude toward the body entails more than a modern attitude toward the representation of the body or toward identities imposed upon the body. Much of what most people consider modern, such as fashion or machines, is external to the body, the body itself remains a constant, even eternal mode of being… (p. 6)

The Hahn sisters embraced this new modernity and being from a middle class home with professional parents who loved the arts, they were supported in all of their endeavours to dance. Their parents encouraged them to travel and experience life and try different methods and schools. Toefer (1997) when discussing the emergence of the
Germanic body culture, makes mention that the rise of body culture was largely due to the achievement of women. Toepfer (1997) imparts that:

These women believed that unprecedented assertions of freedom and power for their sex depended on revised perceptions of the female body and its expressive capabilities. The desire for a modern identity in a modern body entailed a desire for unprecedented expressions of ecstatic experience resulting from a collapse of difference between inner and outer forms of being and metaphysics, even among the most rational advocates of the body culture. (p. 11)

Gertrud and Magda related to me in several conversations about their early life, that they were fortunate that their parents had a modern attitude and fully supported their decisions to focus on being dancers. The sisters said they were never pressured to marry or to have children. I remember the Hanova sisters mentioning many times, that marriage and children were not important to them. They both did eventually marry and divorce but never had any children, with apparently no regrets. The dance seemed to provide all that they needed.

**Karlsbad and Europe 1921 - 1932**

Gertrud, being slightly older than Magda, was the first to travel in Europe and studied ballet at the Vienna Opera with the prima ballerina, Cerry in 1921 when she was just seventeen. In our conversations about Gertrud’s youth, she told me that the young women dancers at the ballet were called ‘rats’ and when leaving the Opera House after classes had to navigate many male admirers hanging around outside the door. At the Vienna Opera, Gertrud danced in ballets, which incorporated the minuet, marche and waltz. Magda soon joined Gertrud in Vienna and also studied and performed at the Vienna Opera. In 1922 they returned to Karlsbad and opened their own dance school. They attracted many students and choreographed and danced in many performances they organized.
Figure 59.

Magda Karlsbad Studio 1920’s
Figure 60.

1922 Gerti’s First Solo Performance

Note. This newspaper clipping, in German, advertises Gertrud’s up coming performance ‘A Unique Dance Evening’. The Karlsbad area of Czechoslovakia at this time was mostly German speaking. Note music by Strauss, Mozart, and Chopin.
Figure 61.

Gertrud (1922) received many flowers from well wishers at her first solo performance in Karlsbad.
Figure 62.

An early Hanova production, around 1924, choreographed by the sisters in Karlsbad.

Note. Gertrud in white, arms open (center rt) Magda at her side with cane. This looks like a very lavish production, with a full orchestra and many participants.
**Figure 63.**

*An early program from the Hahn Karlsbad School.*

![Programme Image]

**Note.** Gerti Hahn and Magda Hahn in various roles
Figure 64.
Karlsbad Studio Gertrud 1923

Figure 65.
Karlsbad Studio Magda 1923
Figure 66.

*Magda and Gertrud early Karlsbad School performance 1925*

![Image of Magda and Gertrud performing](image1)

Figure 67.

*Magda and Gertrud, center, in An Arabian Nights Tale, around 1925.*

![Image of Magda and Gertrud in An Arabian Nights Tale](image2)
From conversations with the Hanova sisters about their dance experiences in the 1920’s, they kept their school going in Karlsbad but also took time to study in other parts of Europe. The sisters’ mother died unexpectedly in 1923, which brought them back to Karlsbad for a time to be with their father. Magda, who loved the ballet, later studied in Berlin with Max Terpis, who led the Berlin State Opera for six years. Terpis had studied briefly with Wigman and excelled at choreographing group movement. He was known for building, “individual movements out of classical concepts supplemented by a distinctly modern enthusiasm for swinging motions” (Toepfer, 1997, p. 297). Magda also studied with Ellen Tels, who according to Toepfer (1997), “had an influential modern dance school and company,”… and … “pursued a kind of pantomimic dance derived from Delsartian principles” (p. 179). In 1928, Gertrud spent time in Paris taking Acrobatic Dance at the Moulin Rouge. The Moulin Rouge best known as the spiritual birthplace of the modern can can dance was home to the elite and fashionable of Paris. The Moulin Rouge, originally staged performances of operettas but in the 1920’s gradually became a spectacular cabaret which saw the performances of grand revues and such stars as singer and actor Maurice Chevalier and singer Mistinguett.

**Figure 68.**

**Magda Karlsbad School**
Figure 69.

*Moulin Rouge*

Note. Gertrud at far right

Figure 70.

*Moulin Rouge*
After studying in Paris, Gertrud, joined by Magda went to Dresden to study modern dance with Mary Wigman. In our recorded conversations (1993) about Wigman’s classes, Gertrud said the warm up consisted of running and leading with various body parts and lots of bending and stretching. Gertrud also said the Wigman movements were very strong and masculine. Interestingly, I can see from pictures of Wigman, that she had a tall, angular, and muscular body. Gertrud however liked Wigman’s gong and drum accompaniment and the fact that the students had the possibility to create their own dances. In a taped conversation also from 1993, Gertrud shares that “Wigman wanted us to be individuals and her dance was different from other dance at the time in that we danced barefoot and we were encouraged to make our dance our own.” Gertrud remembered that, “Wigman liked to turn for half an hour every day as the Sufi dervishes and there was a performance every Sunday of student dances which I would never miss for anything.” Toepfer (1997) comments that:

Wigman was great because she brought to dance an unprecedented magnitude of tragic feeling. For her, modern dance had to go well beyond the naïve expressions of joy, innocence, and decorative idealism the public had come to expect since the heyday of Isadora Duncan: she tied conditions of ecstatic liberation to conditions of heroic sacrifice. (p. 110)

Gertrud concurs with Toefer’s assessment of Wigman in that she said in a taped conversation from 1993 that at this period in her life she felt the ballet was “too sweet” and she felt the modern dance, especially with Wigman, provided far more room to be expressive and experiment with different types of movement.

Historian Randall (2005) further outlines the greater agenda of modern dance in Europe during the 1920’s that definitely had a part in influencing the Hanova sisters’ dance philosophy:

Laban and Wigman, as well, as other European modern dancers, were fundamentally concerned with creating a new utopian community through dance. After the First World War, there was a sense that bourgeois European society had been destroyed, and that a new world would grow out of the ruins. Artists invoked the metaphor of the “zero hour,’ asserting that they could begin anew without the burden of the past. Like their fellow Expressionists in other art mediums, the German modern dancers—also called Ausdruckstanzers, or dancers of expression—condemned art for art’s sake. (p. 230)
After studying at the Wigman School, the sisters went to Hellerau-Laxenbourg, a small town near Vienna, which had a popular Dalcroze School. Much of the school was outdoors. Playing instruments and developing one’s rhythmic abilities were stressed. Toepfer (1997) discusses the Hellerau-Laxenbourg School:

Hellerau sought to free the female body without exhausting or depleting it. The school therefore condemned gymnastic acrobatics, dance virtuosity, and a focus on the perfection of movement: the female body possessed a different strength than did the male, and one measured it not by feats of acrobatic prowess but by an ability to move truthfully, confidently, and with adroit intelligence. (p. 119)
Toepfer (1997) additionally explains how the body culture in Germany and Austria in the Weimar period had a vast diversity of teaching styles and philosophies:

The tendency to reduce the Weimar dance culture to the activities of a few major figures—for example, Mary Wigman, Kurt Jooss, and Rudolph Laban—gives a very incomplete view of how dance and attitudes toward the body produced a modern culture within a particular European social context. (Toepfer, 1997, p. 3)

Toepfer (1997) mentions that there were hundreds of dance schools and solo and group performing artists in this period and documentation is very limited because of the ephemeral nature of the dance. For most dancers of this period, their dance only existed for brief moments on a stage. Toepfer (1997) relates that dancers did not want to film their work in the fear that someone would copy them. Photographs are all that is left to mark the passage and contributions of the many significant Weimar culture dance artists.

The Hanova sisters managed to study with many of the most famous schools of this period both in ballet and modern dance. In particular, Mary Wigman stands out
because of her immensely influential innovation and philosophy for modern dance. “Wigman is counted among the great radicals of early twentieth-century dance with Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. These women were artistic revolutionaries, moving away from the stringent conventions and prettiness of ballet to found new truths, re-discover organic principles and carve out a way for dance as an art of its time.” (Jarvis, 2005, p. 1)

Holm relates Wigman’s underlying belief about the dance which became part of the Hanova sisters dance philosophy:

Through her the existence and importance of the eternal source of dancing—sensed by many others at this time—is made articulate. Realizing the error and futility of teaching dance forms in themselves, her credo leaves open all question of personal or national systems and results, and is content to point out the underground springs that wait to be tapped by individual dance artists. (Sorell, 1969, pp. 43-44)

The sisters were two of the many thousands of young women searching for inspiration and self-realization through the dance at this time.

In the late twenties, the sisters returned to Karlsbad and continued to teach at their school. They incorporated what they had learned into a Hanova methodology, a blend of Dalcroze exercises, ballet technique, and modern dance. Their dance school prospered and they had many local performances.
**Figure 73.**

*Magda Karlsbad School*

**Figure 74.**

*Magda and Gertrud with their father Gustav Hahn (late 1920’s)*
Figure 75.

Gertrud – with her fiancé Yusuf Mitha – Magda Karlsbad 1930

Figure 76.

A Fun Cabaret Evening

Note. Translated this program reads ‘Society Club Harmony’ A Fun Cabaret Evening in Schutzenhause, Dancers Gerti and Magda Hahn, Artistic Director Karl Kohn, after the program, dancing for all. Karlsbad, March 23, 1929.
Figure 77.

*Gertrude at the Karlsbad School 1930*

![Gertrude at the Karlsbad School 1930](image)

Figure 78.

*Magda at the Karlsbad School around 1930*

![Magda at the Karlsbad School around 1930](image)
Figure 79.
Karlsbad Studio around 1930

![Image](image1)

Figure 80.
Magda—second from the left Karlsbad School

![Image](image2)
Bombay 1932 - 1949

In 1932 the sisters both married, Magda to Franz Weisskopf, a fellow Czech, and Gertrud to Yusuf Mitha, an Indian law student, who had attended Cambridge in England. Yusuf’s father was also a doctor and a friend of the family. In 1932, Gertrud and her husband plus her father moved to Bombay, India, the home of the Mitha family. A year later in 1933, Magda and her husband followed. There was again great unrest in Europe. The Hahn family had decided to avoid the Nazi regime.

Figure 81.

*Gerti with Yusuf (1932)*
In Bombay, Gertrud immediately set up a dance studio teaching a Modern Central European Style. And as Magda soon joined her, they continued their life of teaching and performing European dance in Bombay but also embraced the study of yoga and many diverse Indian dance styles such as Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Manipuri, and Kathak. Through their avid pursuit of mastering Indian dance they became close friends and pupils of classical revivalist Indian dance performers such as Ram Gopal, Menaka, and Uday Shankar.
To give some background to Indian classical dance, at the turn of the century in India, classical Indian dance had all but disappeared or been dismissed as the dancers were considered temple prostitutes. It would take foreigners such as the famous Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova, and American dancer La Meri to revive this dying art form.
La Meri (1899-1988) discovered and supported classical Indian dancer Ram Gopal. La Meri was known as the ‘queen’ of ethnic dance and traveled extensively all over the world learning dances from many cultures. She earned a reputation as one of the foremost experts in the ethnic-dance field. She was a noted performer and teacher and received many awards for her work.

Pavlova toured the world extensively in the 1920’s and 1930’s. While performing in India, she looked for authentic classical Indian dance but was told it was dead. While in London, Pavlova met a young Indian set designer called Uday Shankar and encouraged him to develop his interest in the Indian dance arts. “Working with Pavlova shaped Uday into a disciplined artist and familiarized him with the essential elements in successful stagecraft” (Joshi, 2012, p. 3). Shankar became one of the most famous touring Indian dance artists of this period and is called the Father of neo-classical or contemporary dance in India.

In 1927, Pavlova also met Leila Sokey, an anglo-Indian woman, who later became Madame Menaka. They exchanged dance styles and with Pavlova’s friendship and backing Menaka also became a world famous dancer, touring with Pavlova and reviving the classical dances of Kathakali, Manipuri, and Bharatanatyam. Menaka was honoured with the first prize for her dance production at the Berlin Dance Olympiad in 1936 and is remembered for creating a renaissance in the Indian dance arts. Pavlova also supported Rukmini Devi in touring the world with Bharatanatyam. Historian Joshi (2012) comments that, “With boundless creativity and a wealth of traditional resources, these three artists (Shankar, Menaka, and Devi) elegantly demonstrated to the world the timeless élan of India’s art and culture, helping to dispel the notion of India as a primitive and inferior country suitable for foreign colonial rule” (p. 5). Sadly Menaka, died in 1947, at the age of 48. In her obituary in the Bombay Chronicle Weekly, dated June 15, 1947, which the Hanova sisters kept in their collection of memorabilia, it was reported, “With the breath of her enthusiasm Menaka fanned to flames the dying art of Indian dance till its rosy glow suffused the entire world” (p. 15). On the front cover of the paper, June 15, 1947, there is a full page color photograph of Menaka standing next to Pavlova in support of the story, with the headline ‘The Passing of an Apsara.’ An Apsara is a female spirit of the clouds and waters in Hindu mythology.
Figure 84.

Menaka’s Dance Troupe 1930’s

Figure 85.

Menaka with Nilkanta 1920’s
Figure 86.

Menaka 1930's
From old programs and photographs there is much evidence that the Hanova sisters consistently studied, performed and taught dance throughout their time in India. They broadcast an exercise and body sculpture program from 1936 until the outbreak of war in 1939. Magda played the piano, while Gertrud instructed listeners as to how they should become physically fit. They both also taught physical fitness and dance at private girls schools. Magda taught at The Alexandra Girls’ English Institution from 1940 until 1949 and Gertrud taught at the Cathedral and John Connon Girls’ School during most of the forties. They were also very involved with war work.

Figure 87.

Magda and her husband Franz in Bombay during WWII
Figure 88.

Picture from Hanova radio broadcast 1936

Figure 89.

Magda and Gertrud at the radio station late 1930’s
Figure 90.

Gertrud and Magda in Indian costume 1940’s

Figure 91.

Gertrud and Magda Bombay 1940’s
In India the sisters enjoyed performing a mixture of traditional Czechoslovakian dances such as the waltz, mazurka, polka and schottische with modern dance elements.
Magda and Gertrud’s dance programs consisted of first showing exercises of what they called the Central European style which I assume was Dalcroze, then rhythmical movements, probably also Dalcroze, and then dances. In this program they danced ‘Slavonic Dances’, with music by Dvorak and the ‘Viennese Waltz’, with music by Strauss, two Classical Indian dances and ‘A Dance of Fun’ with their students. I note that in 1944 the war was still being fought in Europe and while in India, the sisters strongly identified themselves as Czechs. All through the war, I have evidence through old programs, that they gave many performances to aid the Czechoslovakian cause.
Figure 95.

Magda and Gertrud in Indian costume

*The Golden Gate* was a mixture of European and Indian dancing on one program, perhaps a first. It was an interwoven story about Terpsichore, one of the nine Greek muses, whose name means ‘delight in dancing’, and Shiva, the supreme Hindu God who was both the preserver and the destroyer of life. The program consisted of separate dances of Central European style and Indian dance. Gertrud told me that Magda and herself danced in the opening Indian dance portion of the show as well as performing European dance later. They had been studying Indian dance for many years at this time, although they said the European body was not capable of performing Indian dance as well as Indians. Menaka and Ramnarayan were the Indian star performers.
Figure 96.

Gertrud in India 1940’s
Handel’s Largo

Figure 97.

Magda 1940’s in India
Handel’s Largo
While in India the sisters enjoyed an exciting social life. They were part of the European Bombay elite and were invited to many social functions, such as garden parties, teas, and dance performances, which included meeting Her Highness The Begum Aga Khan. They said they enjoyed the Indian food, the climate and of course the dancing. They traveled extensively while in India and embraced the culture.

*Figure 98.*

*Magda at a Bombay Society Tea*
Gandhi was the pre-eminent political and ideological leader of India during the Indian independence movement, which finally led to India breaking away from British rule and becoming a united and independent nation in 1947. He is famous for employing non-violent civil disobedience and inspiring civil rights and freedom around the world. Gertrud said she snapped this picture of him walking by their Bombay beach house around 1944. Gandhi was assassinated in 1948.
Figure 100.

The poet Rabindranath Tagore with Menaka (far right) 1945

DANCE, MY HEART!

Dance, my heart, dance today with joy!
The streams of love fill the days and nights with music,
And the world is listening to its melodies.

Mad with joy, life and death dance to the rhythm of this
music. The hills and the sea and the earth dance.
The world of man dances in laughter and tears.

Why put on the robe of the monk, and live aloof from
the world in lonely pride?
Behold! My heart dances in the delight of a hundred
arts; and the Creator is well pleased.

Rabindranath Tagore
Figure 101.

Dancing on the beach in Bombay Magda and Gertrud far right

Figure 102.

Magda and Gertrude on the Bombay beach
The following photographs are some of my favourite pictures of the Hanova sisters in India as they illustrate the inner vitality and energy generated by the dancing body.

**Figure 103.**

*Magda on the Bombay beach. A favorite place to dance.*

![Magda on the Bombay beach](image)

**Figure 104.**

*Gertrud and Magda India 1940’s*

![Gertrud and Magda](image)
Figure 105.

Magda and Gertrud Bombay 1940’s
Figure 106.

Magda on the beach 1940's

In 1949, the Hanova sisters both ended their marriages and left India. They moved to London, England, where they set up another school of dance. Here they performed and taught until 1957. I found evidence in old brochures that while in London, Gertrud and Magda both taught Rhythmic Movement at the Finsbury Women’s Institute in the early 1950's. They also studied at The Laban Institute with Rudolph Laban. They never went into great depth about their leaving India but I suspect that with Indian Independence in 1947 and the partitioning of British India into India and Pakistan, the elite status of Europeans was waning. In a paper presented by Vij (2003) on partition he outlines the horror of this period.

Such was the magnitude of the devastation wreaked by the Partition of undivided India that it was, and is a mammoth task for writers to deal with it. Historians, for one, talked in aggregates: ten million refugees, two million of them dead, seventy-five thousand women raped and so on and so forth. These statistics fail to impart even a fraction of the enormity of the tragedy that was the Partition… Statistics fail to even hint at the trauma of husbands and wives, sons and mothers separated by the Radcliffe line. And the last thing that statistics or historical narratives can ever do is to reflect on identity crises of innocent individuals at a time when identity could be altered by loot and rioting. (p. 1)

Gertrud’s husband was an Ismaili Muslim and in the new India, Muslims in Bombay probably struggled to hold their position. Gertrud also mentioned that she divorced him quite amicably so that he could remarry and have children, as she did not want children. Gertrud laughingly said he did offer to keep her on as a first wife but this did not appeal to her. The sisters also said that at this time they no longer wanted to be married but needed to follow the muse of the dance.
Figure 107.

London Hanova brochure illustrating ‘central control’

Figure 108.

Magda with students in their London studio. 1952
Figure 109.

Gertrud at the bar at their London school with students 1954

Figure 110.

Rudolph Laban 1950’s
The Hanova sisters enjoyed living in London and had a studio in the Bayswater area. In a taped conversation with Gertrud from 1993, she related to me that London was a hub of dance in the fifties and they saw many wonderful modern dance and ballet performances. Attending the Laban Institute was a highlight of their time in England. By the 1950’s, Laban had become very well known and his methodology was firmly established in the British public school system. It seems that the Hanova sisters took this time to thoroughly absorb his philosophy and principles in greater depth. They incorporated much of Laban’s core beliefs, which McCaw (2011) outlines specifically:

‘Dance’ for Laban is largely a metaphor for an activation of those aspects that for him make up a human being. ‘Dance’, in his view, can and should occur anywhere, everywhere, and it is the experience of dancing itself rather than a performance of dance to a viewer that is key for Laban. (p. 63)

From this quote I reflect on the Hanova sisters’ dance philosophy and how in their classes it was the personal meaning and emotional content of the dancing for the individual that mattered the most to them, not the performance or the perfection of the performance. They understood that to be truly fulfilled through the dance, the dancer needs to first have all expectations and boundaries removed. The dancer needs freedom to explore his or her own body, before he or she is able to share set choreography with authenticity. Therefore, after exercises and bar technique, to end classes and to inspire new choreography, an exploration of the self through improvisation was always a component of the Hanova classes. The sisters lived and breathed the dance and I remember going to many outdoor sites with them, such as Stanley Park in Vancouver, to have dance classes. We embraced the outdoor environment into the movement.

Historian McCaw (2011) quotes Laban to illuminate Laban’s key concept that the body is our instrument for life, and inextricably linked to all other parts of our person. In the body Laban states, we will find the key to uncovering our source of vitality:

We have to look more closely at our body and its possibilities for movement. We must examine how this instrument of our mind and soul actually works. We must comprehend how our mind and our soul are connected with this instrument and where the focal point is from which we can develop our vitality. (Laban, 1926, in McCaw, p. 91)
McCaw (2011) further shares Laban’s understanding of the spiritual connections the dancer and his or her body make while dancing.

Everyone knows that the basis of all things and all perceptions is movement and humanity can only communicate through movement. And yet one disregards just this movement, which is the basis of all things. For instance, one calls the human body’s expressiveness primitive and unspiritual. This is so because a man who does not know his body is not able to grasp the enormous spiritual depth which becomes evident in the expression of movement.” (Laban, 1926, in McCaw, p. 91)

These two quotes, especially illustrate the Hanova sisters’ philosophy in which the dancer must know his or her body and connect to all that he or she is. Students at the Hanova school were encouraged to find a personal dynamic and vitality in the dance. The sisters did not directly label the dance with any spiritual references of a religious nature. In the Hanova classes an understanding of the dance as having deep spiritual elements was passed on through gesture and the modeling of joy, ecstasy and strong emotions that shone forth on Gertrud and Magda’s faces and through their bodies. This was how we came to understand a ‘spiritual’ element was present in the dance. We witnessed it and felt it through the sisters’ bodies and learned how to emulate this. It could not be put into words. As Fraleigh (1987) explains:

Throughout the German school, dance was a means toward self-knowledge – not a disclosure of personality but a construction of it, not self-expression as self-indulgence but a creation of self in expressive action that moves one beyond the confines of self. (p. xxii)

**Vancouver, Canada: 1957- 2002**

In early 1957, at a party in London, Magda told me that she met some travelers from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. She inquired if Vancouver had any modern dance studios and when they said, not that they knew of, she decided to move to Vancouver to set up a dance school. Gertrud followed her a year later.

After getting settled in an apartment in the West End of Vancouver, Magda initially started teaching dance classes at the downtown Vancouver Y.W.C.A. Magda kept all of her early press clippings and advertisements for her classes from the Province
newspaper and from the German Courier newspaper from 1957 and 1958, so there is evidence about her life in this period.

On June 27, 1958, in the Province newspaper, Magda is posed in a photograph with her cat, Tamu, which she had flown to Vancouver from London. The caption is ‘Happy Pussy Tamu joins her mistress, Magda Hanova’. Magda explains that she took a boat and a train to get to Vancouver but didn’t think her cat could travel that way. The article also mentions that her sister Gertrud is soon to follow. I note another article captioned ‘Y’ Ballet Lessons for Mother and Child’ from the Province newspaper, 1958, in which Magda advertises unique ballet classes for mothers and their daughters at the Y.W.C.A. Another article entitled ‘Gals Weight Not Important’, from the Province newspaper, 1958, introduces Miss Magda Hanova, a physical culture expert newly arrived from London, England. In this article she explains that diet is not enough to have a good figure. One must also exercise and dance in order to be toned. The article goes on to say that Magda and her sister are planning to open a school of gymnastics and dance.

After Gertrud’s arrival in late 1958, the Hanova sisters taught together at the Y.W.C.A. until 1961. There is evidence in old programs that the sisters held performances for their students at the Y.W.C.A. at this time. But they also opened their own studio, at a building called the Academy of the Arts at 2695 West Broadway in the fall of 1959. A press clipping from the Province newspaper advertising the opening of the school on November 1st, proclaims:

FROM LONDON, ENGLAND, Magda Hanova proudly announces the Opening of THE HANOVA SCHOOL OF MODERN PHYSICAL CULTURE and DANCING (acclaimed one of the leading studies in Great Britain and India) Our system is based on Central European and Indian Studies. A NEW WAY TO HEALTH, BEAUTY, ENERGY, SUCCESS & HAPPINESS.

Classes were offered to children and adults, and to beginners and advanced students, in modern creative dance, ballet technique and improvisations, yoga, and East Indian Dance from 9:30 to 12 noon and from 6 to 7:30 pm. The Hanova sisters expressed in conversations with me that they both felt excited to move to Vancouver and that moving to Vancouver was a new chapter and adventure in their lives. Gertrud and Magda also conveyed to me that they felt Canadians needed more dance culture.
Figure 111.

Magda on route to Vancouver 1957

Figure 112.

Magda leading fellow passengers in dance on the deck of the ship coming to Vancouver 1957
**Figure 113.**

*Magda in the Province newspaper 1957*

![Image of Magda in a dance pose with other dancers.

**Figure 114.**

*From the Province newspaper Gertrud promoting their school in 1958*

![Image of Gertrud in a dance pose, stretching wide with a newspaper clipping below.

\[159\]
Figure 115.

Magda with Hanova students Stanley Park 1958
The sisters quickly established a school through testimonials from their loyal Y.W.C.A. students and through advertising in the local papers and the German community. Their love of dance and gift for teaching attracted many students who appreciated their innovative and original style. After the establishment of their school the sisters had regular student performances, lecture demonstrations and television appearances. Their students performed at the first Annual Vancouver Summer Jazz festival in 1963 at Malkin Bowl in Stanley Park and over the years were part of many dance festivals around the city.
Figure 117.

Backstage, 1961, Metro Theatre, Magda and Gertrud with Astrid Fischer-Credo, in makeup.

Figure 118.

English Bay 1962

Note. The sisters had a penthouse apartment in the west end, which bordered Stanley Park. The park and English Bay were popular locations for dancing and picture taking Hanova students, Helga Strassman and Barbara Wall 1962
Note. In this production, at the Vancouver Playhouse in 1963, The Hanova Studio Group, consisting of children, intermediates and seniors presented a program of exercise, technical studies and dances. The main dance story was entitled, ‘The Caliph Stork’.
Figure 120.

Evelyn Roth and Berry MacDonnel 1963
From Terpsichore and Siva
Evelyn is well known for her Moving Sculpture Company
Gertrud and Magda always started performances with a lecture demonstration to inform the public about exercises and the modern creative dance. Gertrud would present a short talk on the Hanova method and then students would illustrate exercises and kinetics and then there would be specific choreographed pieces and improvisation. Here is an excerpt from Gertrud’s prepared notes on exercises:

The students are commencing the programme with exercise to show how to gain body control by bringing muscles, ligaments, tendons, etc., into work, which may have been neglected as a result of the routine of our daily life, or to relax those which, for the same reason, may on the other hand have been overburdened through limited use of the others. Advanced exercises, based on the same principles, are the bricks with which every dancer must build her art and every athlete should build up his achievement.
Following the exercises there would be various demonstrations of kinetic studies. I note that from two programs in 1974 and 1975, the kinetics featured were arm movements: the eight arm movements and their adaptations, swings to demonstrate flow of movements, at the barre based on central control, various qualities of movement: dimensions to demonstrate an awareness of space, andante to demonstrate transference of body weight and the geometrical to demonstrate floor design.

After the kinetics, each group of students would present their latest choreography as well as solo performances by students who took private classes. From a 1975 program there were such diverse themes as Lady of the Court danced by Astrid Fisher-Credo, Tango danced by Louise Martin, The Peacock danced by Sonja Christjansen and La Ville Inconnue danced by Helene Fuldauer. The interests of the individual dance students always inspired solo dances.
The following paragraphs are taken from a lecture demonstration and performance program from the late 1960’s, and I note that Gertrud made very similar statements in programs throughout the 1970’s, 1980’s and 1990’s. Over the years, Gertrud did not change her basic philosophy about the necessity for freedom of expression and individuality to be included in the dance.

At the beginning of this lecture, Gertrud first outlines the history of ballet and differentiates the modern dance by mentioning Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis and how the modern dance has sprung from their fundamental ideas. She mentions that modern dance has not yet got a rigid thesis of movement, presentation, or technique, as does the ballet.
Modern Dance is still only in the making, although it is slowly gaining ground and Terpsichore’s temple will again have new bricks built upon its ancient ones. But this time the bricks will be brought from Shiva’s temple, and the Muses of all the creative arts will join hands, because the new conception of the Dance is no longer just a fairy-tale but a creation taken from life as we live it today. And that is really a very natural outcome.

Further in her talk, Gertrud discusses the Hanova style:

The style of the Hanova School allows great freedom of expression. Each dancer can build upon it his or her own individual style and yet keep to the original laws of its technique—rather in the way that musical composition is built on scales. It is essential to have an original style, but this style often has to pass through many stages—before it becomes a style in its own right.

Figure 124.

Seymour School 1970

Note. Taking their bows after a performance at the Seymour School 1970 (far right) Gertrud, (middle) Magda, (Karen back row smiling)

The Hanova sisters kept all of their many press clippings, reviews, and articles that were published about them from Europe, Bombay, and Vancouver. The fact that the sisters retained all of this memorabilia has helped me immensely to piece together events and put names to faces in pictures. There are many press clippings from
Vancouver in the period from 1958 to 1980 detailing performances and what their classes had to offer. Here is an especially lovely excerpt from a description of their school from the Province newspaper November 7, 1962: A photograph of a mother and her son dancing illustrate this caption.

Gertrud and Magda Hanova well-known through lecture-demonstrations on T.V., believe exercises have to be practiced correctly in order to achieve maximum benefit. Once body control is obtained, even amateurs will feel that with proper guidance, their “secret love for dancing” can find self-expression in Creative-Dance studies.

The Hanova sisters maintained a large following through out the 1960’s, 70’s and 80’s. They kept a keen vitality and creative spirit all of these years. In 1992, Magda died of a sudden stroke and left Gertrud to carry on teaching solo. Gertrud retained a group of loyal students to the very end when she passed away in 2002.

*Figure 125.*

*Susan Tsang, Birthe Kulich, Karen Wenn (Kurnaedy) 1974*
Figure 126.

Magda, Astrid Fischer-Credo, Gertrud 1980’s

Note. Astrid was one of their many loyal senior students. She danced well into her eighties. The Hanovas believed one was never too old to dance.

Little writing about the Hanova sisters and their work exists in the public record. However their presence was not unnoticed, as is evidenced by a short passage about the Hanova sisters from Max Wyman’s Notebook in the Vancouver Sun newspaper.

Wyman was a well-known arts critic in Vancouver for the Vancouver Sun for over twenty years. This article was written in the spring of 1992 shortly after Magda died. Wyman pays tribute to the Hanova sisters and first details their lives in Europe and India before discussing their impact on the Vancouver modern dance scene. He continues with:

In 1961 they competed against Norbert Vesak, the city’s only other practitioner of serious modern dance, for a spot on the Vancouver Ballet Society’s Showcase programme. They won with a work called Creation – described by adjudicator Arnold Spohr at the B.C. Dance festival that summer “as a very interesting work…depth in mood and expression…unique.”
Wyman (1992) ends his article by remarking that, “The newer trends in modern dance that developed in the 60’s and 70’s largely passed them by. But they always retained their integrity as creative artists.”

As I remember the Hanova School, Wyman was right, the Hanova sisters never changed their core dance values and what they believed and to which they remained committed. Trends came and went and still students danced at the Hanova studio discovering Dalcroze, Laban, Wigman, the ballet, Indian dance and yoga. Each student was encouraged in the expression of his or her personal vision of dance, with an underlay of inspiring Hanova principles, to discover the vitality and essence of his or her dancer within.

*Figure 127.*

*Magda at The Creative Space Studio 1992*
The Hanova sisters were rock steady in their belief that dance:

The goal of what is referred to as the “Wigman revolt” was clearly not to offer mere dance classes; the goal was to enact a cultural revolution through dance, by which all people could experience a more embodied, expressive, and free life-style.” (Sorell, 1969, p. 231)

Further, the work of the Hanova sisters reflected Wigman’s understanding that, “Only if the dance is kept, by the artist and by the spectator and lay participator, approachable and universal can it fulfill its promise as a delight and as a vital force in life today” (Sorell, 1969, p. 233). The Hanova sisters in their love for dance and in their quest to encourage all to be dancers will be remembered by many as pioneers in the Vancouver modern dance community.

I note that I was one of hundreds of students whom the Hanova sisters influenced and inspired to dance in Vancouver from 1957 until 1997. I marvel that when they first moved to Vancouver they were both in their fifties. But they were not hindered by their age or that they did not know anyone in Vancouver. Failure did not enter into their thinking. They confidently set up a school offering what was then very exotic and unusual dance lessons for the Vancouver of 1957. And students who were hungry for
that deeper ‘something’ in the dance recognized immediately that the Hanova sisters philosophy and teaching style offered dance that honoured the spirit and body.

The Hanova dance school was important because although Vancouver had many dance schools, none offered anything like the Hanova sisters’ blend of dance experiences which stemmed from the masters of dance they had studied with in Europe and India. The sisters focused on accessing and addressing their dance students’ yearning to discover themselves. Their school provided a community of fellow believers.

In Hanova classes, discussion of the roots and philosophy of modern dance was often visited and the spirit of Isadora Duncan was a tangible presence in the Hanova studio in that a palpable passion for expression was invariably in the air. Their classes were always stimulating and productive. When you left a Hanova class, especially after the improvisations at the end, you always felt vital and energized and sorry the class was over. And after the class in the changing area, cheeks flushed and glowing and feeling slightly out of breath, we would look into each others eyes and smile. A smile that conveyed wordlessly our mutual pleasure and how much we had enjoyed our dancing experience with the Hanova sisters that day.

Magda, joyfully taught dance students in Vancouver for thirty-five years and Gertrud, for forty years. Their example inspires me. The Hanova sisters’ lives stand as a testament that the possibilities for our existence are opened up and multiplied with the dance. How do we measure what the sisters gifted to their many students over the years? I don’t think you can measure inspiration or the sacred sense of being that dancers receive while dancing.
Figure 129.

Dancing on the Bombay Beach, India 1940's
Gertrud, an unknown friend, Magda

Figure 130.

Magda and Gertrud demonstrating their vitality and animation manifested by the dance.
Figure 131.

Gertrud Hahn 1903-2002

Figure 132.

Magda Hahn 1905-1992
Chapter 4.
Giving Voice to the Dancing Body

Figure 133.

Boy Dancing

In the work of writing and reading text we must always ask: how can we invent in the text a certain space, a perspective wherein the pedagogical voice which speaks for the child can let itself be heard? (van Manen, 1990, p. 153)
Once again the summer is ending and it’s the beginning of September. For school aged children and teachers this can be a time of excitement and uncertainty. “Who will be my new teacher?” children ask. “Who will be in my class?” teachers wonder. The crucial placement of students has been pondered and adjusted by student services, and then the day arrives. Students are ushered into their new and unfamiliar classroom and meet the teacher who will influence a whole year of their lives. The teacher is reciprocally meeting the students who will influence a whole year of his or her life.

As the children troop into my classroom for the first time, I sense their unease. I am a stranger to them and an unknown entity. I can almost hear their thoughts. “Will she be nice?” “Will she be mean?” Their feelings of uncertainty permeate the air. But as some of the new students spot the comfy looking couches on a big, carpeted space and see all the books in close proximity, some of them shout, “Wow!” and “Cool!” I say, “Come on in, you are welcome here.”

This year in creating classroom space I have consciously eliminated all the excess furniture I could in order to leave ‘spaces’ to move and dance and there is a clean and clear look to the room that several colleagues who have come into my room have remarked upon. The desks have been placed in pods or tables of six and positioned on the outer edges of the room, creating an open space of floor in the center. I have hung brilliant blue paper, bordered with autumn tones of orange, yellow and red leaves, on the empty, waiting bulletin boards. On the wall over the bookcases and couches I have juxtaposed a very large and gorgeous print by Claude Monet, which reflects the same complimentary colors. I chuckle as a child asks me if I painted the picture. “No,” I say, “It was painted by a very famous French artist who we will be learning about this year.”

I grin at all the new faces and am genuinely glad to meet my new class. I direct the students to find a chair and sit with a friend. I point out where they can hang their backpacks and jackets. I calm students who have forgotten to bring their school supplies and tell them it doesn’t matter for today. I wave and reassure any parents who are still hanging around by the door that they can leave, their child is in good hands with me.
Then, once everyone has arrived, I shut the doors and begin the job of forming this group of strangers into a unified, happy, connected and productive classroom of learners. Fostering this sense of unity is accomplished by creating community (see Palmer (1998); Bennett, Rolheiser, Stevahn, (1991); Bennett, Rolheiser, (2001) and evolves over the first few months of the new school year as we slowly get to know one another. I reflect that teachers create community in many individual ways depending on their grade level, personality, and passions. I usually start by playing cooperative games and utilizing interactive team building activities that encourage an atmosphere of trust, mutual regard and respect. This year as in other years, I also plan to do a lot of dancing to accomplish this goal. I reflect that even though I have prepared a hopefully welcoming and physically inviting learning space for these children, which is hospitable to their bodies, the realization hits me that the children’s flourishing will not rest entirely on how I’ve placed the furniture or decorated the walls. The children’s flourishing will depend on who I am. What I bring to the classroom everyday. “Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardsness, for better or for worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together” (Palmer, 1998, p. 2).

But this school year will be different in that as I employ dance activities to achieve the goal of creating community, as well as to fulfill many other goals that address the growth and development of the whole child, I will simultaneously be doing a research study for my doctoral dissertation and documenting our dance activities. I have invited the twenty-two students from my grade four class to participate. The students and parents were given the option of not participating in the study but I received full permission from all twenty-two parents and students.

I am excited to make this school year different in that while I have always highlighted dance as part of my physical education and music program, this year I plan on integrating dance into even more new spaces as these spaces arise in the daily workings of my classroom. Above all I want to bring the dancing body to the forefront of our learning experiences throughout the curriculum and at the same time reflect upon how the children explore and make meaning of their lives through the dance. I want to position the dance as a spiritual endeavour in which the children gain new perspectives on themselves and their relationships to others and the world.
Through our mutual phenomenological writing, which will form the basis for this research, (See consent form in Appendix) I hope to in some part uncover another perspective of the ‘essence’ of what animates us beneath the dance. As van Manen (1990) clarifies:

… the word “essence” should not be mystified. By essence we do not mean some kind of mysterious entity or discovery, nor some ultimate core or residue of meaning. Rather, the term “essence” may be understood as a linguistic construction, a description of a phenomenon. A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way. (p. 39)

One of my plans for this dancing endeavour is to have loose plans. By this I mean I recognize my need to shift away from conventional teaching practices and loosen up not only the physical spaces in my classroom but my need to control learning outcomes and let the questions and topics that we dance and write about arise spontaneously from the moments of engagement. I want the students to discover their own subjects and create dances that matter to them. One of the vehicles I hope to draw on is called performative inquiry. Performative inquiry is a research vehicle extensively written about in a large body of work by arts educator Lynn Fels, an Associate Professor in Education at Simon Fraser University (see Fels 1998, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2012). Performative inquiry recognizes performance in action and interaction as a place of learning and exploration. As Fels (1998) explains, performative inquiry enables researchers/as participants to guide students in highlighting key aspects of their inquiring and learning.

Utilizing performative inquiry in dance classes is an exceptional vehicle for the researcher/teacher to pause dancers in moments of discovery, beauty, or creativity to share with the other participants. Reflection is a key component of performative inquiry and engaging through performative inquiry is an opportunity to reflect on what matters, to ask questions, to inquire about why one is momentarily paused in action, and what learning is possible from such moments.

Performative inquiry as outlined by Fels (2010) employs philosopher David Appelbaum’s (1995) concept of the “stop”: 
...Appelbaum speaks of what he calls a “stop,” a moment of risk, a moment of opportunity. A stop, he tells us, occurs when a traveler (teacher, researcher, child) encounters an obstacle, and is momentarily paused in action. A stop is a moment of hesitation, a moment that calls our attention to what is hidden — a vulnerability, an intimacy, a longing. A stop invites us to question our habits of practice and to engage anew. A stop is an invitation to understand things, events, experiences and/or relationships from a new perspective. (Fels, 2010, p.

The ‘stop’ is instrumental to performative inquiry in that the ‘stop’ is something we behold which calls to us and grabs our attention and which leads to opening up the experience for reflection, to ask what matters, and to explore the meaning of what we witnessed. A ‘moment of recognition’ is that through the experience, we came to a stop, and wondered, reflected, and came to understand what mattered. Key to performative inquiry is that we collaboratively engage in performative encounters and explorations which give rise to individual and collective embodied “moments of realization” (Fels, 1998, 1999), through which upon reflection, new learning comes into being and is recognized, or what Fels calls “moments of recognition.” (Fels, 1998, 1999)

I plan to use performative inquiry as a research vehicle and teaching tool to enable the teaching and learning in my dance classes to be more reflective and inclusive for all the participants. In critical moments of dance, the students’ dance movements will be explored, highlighted, and celebrated as meaningful, and their ideas will be fed back into the lesson to enrich everyone. Critical moments of learning have the possibility of leading to transformation for the students and teacher through reciprocal exploration and inquiry: as the students are stimulated by the teacher’s direction and invitation into engagement, the teacher is, in turn stimulated by the students’ responses and creative actions. A valuable circular interaction is thus created for all concerned as the dance curriculum is mediated by what is seen and reflected and then further developed by the students’ responses. Insights and learning continually go back and forth.

Communal sharing and collective understanding matters because teaching and learning in the dance class then becomes a reciprocal engagement between the students and the teacher. The dance pedagogy and experience is truly informed by the students’ knowledge, interests, moments of recognition, and ideas and abilities. Teaching and learning then becomes an ever changing, growing, and unfolding practice with the students as partners. The richness of moments experienced is focused on and,
as I have so often experienced in my work with students, the inner person of both teacher and student is touched and expands in awareness. Through utilizing performative inquiry, the learning environment is opened, uplifted, and carved out of interchanges that reveal unexpected moments of the human condition. In these moments, student and teacher dance into being together as they collaborate and discover themselves. This interchange has implications for the curriculum in that lesson plans and goals may be created before hand, but as the teacher employs the teaching and research vehicle of performative inquiry in his or her classes these plans may be abandoned or altered as the students reveal in their work a curriculum that is far more relevant and meaningful for everyone.

I yearn for this year of research to reveal moments of “risk and opportunity” (Fels, 2010, p. 1), perhaps more for me than the students. In immersing myself in this dissertation I have come to discover a metaphorical longing to return to the body of my birth and to more fully embrace my dancing self in acceptance and love. I have as Rilke and Palmer (1998) describe it, had a “homecoming” (p. 58). Through this work, I have also become ready to listen and act upon, “the voice that invites me to honour the nature of my true self” (Palmer, 1998, p. 29) in my teaching practice, for this is the vocation I love and feel I was called to. When asking myself the important question, “Who is the self that teaches?” (Palmer, 1998, p. 7) I am discovering myself as a teacher anew and recognizing the complexities, unexplored territory, and unresolved conflicts, which reside within myself. I am aware, as Jagodzinski (2009) states when speaking of our inner person that,

The Self (atman) is not an entity, or a substance, or an essence, but a dynamic process characterized by a shifting web of relations among evanescent aspects of the person such as perceptions, ideas, and desires. The Self is only perceived a fixed entity because of the distortions of the human point of view (p. 148).

And as Palmer (1998) tells us, “Identity and integrity have as much to do with our shadows and limits, our wounds and fears, as with our strengths and potentials” (p. 13). The question is, can I more fully put into action what my identity and integrity are calling me to be in my teaching?
I have always had doubts, inklings, ‘stops’ if you will, and moments of clarity that I managed to dismiss, about children’s feelings and needs and what schools actually deliver. The longer I teach, my consciousness of the gap between what I perceive children to need and the realities of school life seem ever more pressing. Bai, Scott, and Donald, (2010) articulate this gap succinctly:

…the way we educate students, from kindergarten to university, tends not to encourage them to inhabit deeply and continuously in their body, sense, feeling, and for that matter, even in their thought. Their attention is continually drawn out of and away from their embodied and inhabited experience, and is attached to abstract and discursive knowledge (information, fact, theories, ideas. (p. 3)

In exploring this research I have been unexpectedly paused in the actions of my teaching and am facing this gap. I had envisioned this chapter to be about revealing the wonderful experiences of dancing in my classroom this year. It will. But if I am honest, this chapter also needs to be about how I have inadvertently stumbled onto, “a moment that made me hesitate, a moment that has called my attention to what was hidden – a vulnerability, an intimacy, a longing in which I am questioning my habits of practice” (Fels, 2010, p. 1). I have been called, “to engage anew” (Fels, 2010, p. 1). Through this work I have been invited, “to understand things from a new perspective” (Fels, 2010, p. 1).

I therefore intertwine my story of dancing all year with my class with my personal teaching journey as they are interconnected. I experienced a transformation, a break through. I gained the courage to face that I can’t remain complacent in my old ways of teaching. I need to move into new spaces that more truly reflect who I am and what I believe in. This was uncomfortable work. Change can be painful. I caught myself repeating old habits and behaviours I didn’t like.

To spur myself on, I had to return again and again to what I felt was solid knowledge. The solid body knowledge I had gained from years of dance and movement experiences that spoke to me of the wonders and vital perceptions that may be inherent in moving the body in dancing. And from the written work of phenomenologists and movement educators, the knowledge and confirmation of the validity of trusting and highlighting the perceptions of the body as our first place of learning. (Merleau-Ponty (1945); Sheets-Johnstone (1966, 1984, 1992, 1999, 2009); Fraleigh (1987, 1998, 2004);

Ideally, the process of discovery and exploration of our world to learn and acquire knowledge should encompass all of the senses. Educating students in understanding their own body, as a vehicle for expression and enjoyment, artful meaning making, and for physical health and fitness appears to be crucial in counteracting our technologically dominated world. Shifting my focus from dancing only when the gym was available to a more open and intuitive listening to the students needs to move and create proved to be liberating.

**Looking Through the Lens of Dance**

As Laban knew all too well, the problem lies in the very enterprise of writing about movement: the unfolding of language is unilinear, whereas the experience of movement is multilinear. On the one hand, one is trying to ‘pin it down’ intellectually, while, on the other, trying to retain its sense of it being a process of change. (McCaw, 2011, p. 349)

“My task is to record and make connections between the voices of the lived body and their experiences while dancing to reveal a philosophy of the body” (Margolis, 1984, p. 77). However, writing about any experience may distance us from the experience. In writing about our experiences, there is a transformation of those experiences. There is a drawing on one’s memory of what happened and what was felt, as well as always interpreting the events through one’s own lens of experience. As van Manen (1990) tells us, “The point of phenomenological research is to “borrow” other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience” (p. 62).

Through borrowing the students’ expressions of their experiences for this study, I seek to understand the deeper meaning or significance of the students’ dance experiences to stimulate change in my own and others teaching practices and pedagogy. I wish to discover what matters and as van Manen (1990) so importantly asks, “How may we come to an understanding of the ineffable nature of pedagogy while recognizing that pedagogy is something that animates our living with children? (p. 143)
What is it that children need? (van Manen, 1990, p. 158) As Fraleigh (1998) importantly reminds us, “Phenomenology strives to capture pre-reflective experience, the immediacy of being-in-the-world. I think of this initial impulse of phenomenology as poetic and subliminal, containing moments of insight into an experience when the details of ‘being there’ are vivid in feeling, but have not had time to focus in thought” (p. 138).

I hope to ‘enact new spaces of possibility for education’ (Haskell & Linds, 2004) within the dancing and writing activities and invite educators on my journey so as to change our ideas about pedagogy. Our teaching is based on a ‘framework of assumptions’ (Haskell & Linds, 2004). “Draw a different frame around the same set of circumstances and new pathways come into view” (Zander and Zander, 2000, p. 1).

The themes that emerged and recurred in the children’s expressions of their experiences initially spoke to me of the power of the dance to create community, build self-esteem, and harmony within a group and first manifested as the themes of risk and confidence and security and acceptance. As the year progressed other themes emerged such as creativity and engagement and learning. Throughout the year the theme of lived bodily perceptions generated through dancing with an emphasis on animation and vitality was continually expressed in the children’s writing.

As van Manen (1990) shares:

…phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes. Themes are the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes. (p. 90)

Van Manen (1990) further outlines that the purpose of research is to discover, “What is it that children need?” (p. 158). In conjunction with his question, I ask, what will my research reveal about the significance of dancing for teaching and learning? Will my research reveal dancing as fulfilling specific needs for children and will this dancing be for the good of children? As a researcher of human science and as any scientist does, I base my answers to these questions on what I will witness, feel, and experience.

“Phenomenological research consists of reflectively bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural
attitude of everyday life" (van Manen, 1990, p. 32). Dance is an experience or activity that I feel passionately merits such an in depth look as to its meaning and what it is that constitutes the nature of this lived experience? How have these written expressions of children’s lived dance experiences opened up “a deepened and more reflective understanding” (van Manen, 1990, p. 86) of the notion of dance and especially how may these written expressions inform education?

From the diverse descriptions presented, it may be seen that, “The meaning or essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one-dimensional” (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Each child felt or experienced the dance in his or her own personal way but there were certain commonalities present, which can be seen as the structures or themes of the experience. “In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1990, p. 107).

I will first discuss the themes that emerged and then reflect on my learning. To reiterate, the themes or aspects of the dance that emerged were risk and confidence, security and acceptance, creativity, expressions of lived bodily perceptions with an emphasis on animation and vitality generated through dancing, and engagement and learning.
Risk and Confidence

Figure 134.

Dancing in the middle

Real risk-taking occurs in the context of one’s receptivity, commitment, and responsivity to the actions of children. It strikes an ethical register, not only in the concern shown for the well-being of the child and the quality of the child’s relations with others, but also in the underlying concern for the manner in which the child comes to be at home in a world that is worth living in. (Smith, 1998, p. 14)
I have just put on some catchy modern tune that has a strong and measured beat. Standing in our circle, I make eye contact with everyone, and start by demonstrating with my body what I would like them to follow. When I say follow, I have to add that I always tell the students to, “make it their own.” They are invited to dance with their own unique body languages.

I consciously start my dance classes with a circle, especially at the beginning of the year. This way we can all see one another and I am not ‘at the front.’ The circle conveys the idea that we will be learning from one another and immediately generates a feeling of oneness for the group, as everyone is essential in creating the shape or formation.

In dancing with my class, I am taking risks. I am moving away from stationary classroom practices, such as Freire’s (1970, 2009) notion of the banking concept of education where “the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (p. 72). Freire’s (1970, 2009) notion of the banking concept of education has students sitting behind their desks, remaining silent and still, while the teacher directs the proceedings and fills them up with knowledge. In dancing with my class I am relinquishing my role as depositor. I am inviting each student to be the source of her own knowledge acquired through her body. I am endeavouring to unfetter our collective bodies to explore learning in new ways. I am acknowledging that education is a complexity of possibilities.

In discussing playground risk-taking, Smith (1998) speaks of risk as an important and positive aspect of development in children. Smith (1998) stresses that the adult observer is in a pedagogical relationship with the child and has an ethical responsibility to witness children’s actions with concern and commitment to foster “a world that is worth living in” (p. 14). Smith (1998) defines the concept of risk as being multilayered and having various definitions, but which may be interpreted to serve educators “in order to define that which is experientially significant” (Smith, 1998, p. 13) for children’s maturation and development. Smith (1998) defines risk taking to include activities, which may explore our physical, social, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual capacities. Smith (1998) further outlines risk as “a term which brings to mind our responsibility for the direction of children’s activity aimed at guiding young children towards a position of being responsible themselves for the consequences of their activity” (p. 9).
I see Smith’s (1998) notion of a pedagogy of risk as being meaningfully applied to a pedagogy of dance. Dancing in the classroom setting may also be a place thoughtfully designed for children to take risks and one in which, “the adult need not see risk as danger or hazard, but more positively as challenge and adventure to which children can actively respond. Here risk can serve to highlight something that is being accomplished by the child, some intended activity that expands the child’s world” (Smith, 1998, p. 18). Smith (1998) additionally expands on the value of risk-taking as helping children grow with confidence and a firm sense of physical competence. He encourages an atmosphere of challenge, encounter and practice, all of which may be present in dance activities. Smith’s (1998) notion of risk is additionally applicable to a pedagogy of dance in that in dancing as on the playground, children are exploring their physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual worlds to a discovery of who they are and what they might become.

To develop this important notion of risk-taking, my daily dance activities followed a considered outline, which somewhat mirrored a standard lesson plan. Each dance class had a warm up and I introduced a concept or skill. Then the students explored the concept and practiced or developed the skill. By skill I mean exploring and combining aspects of Laban’s movement framework. But the skill could even be learning some steps of a folk dance. The children were given time to develop the skill and then I included this skill in a movement problem which involved creating choreography in small groups, and which might also entail a short performance for their peers. Utilizing performative inquiry, lessons were often paused to highlight moments in which the teacher witnessed something of importance in the children’s work that was worth sharing and exploring with all of the students. Lessons usually ended with improvisation and a short cool down.

An exploration of a choreographic process that is developed for a repeatable performance was also highlighted in my teaching, which included discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design. These four interrelated processes of choreography are based on the writing process of Donald Murray (1968, 1990) and redefined by Mamchur (2004) and may be transferred to other artistic processes (Apps (2007); (Kurnaedy (2009).
Throughout the year the warm up varied, as did the types of movement problems I presented. I might begin with yoga, Anne Green Gilbert’s brain dance (1992), or use a drum to explore patterns and rhythms. The point of the warm up was to stir, stimulate, flex, and stretch the body in enjoyable movement before launching into any skill development. As one child commented, “I want to tell you why I like dancing, exercising and walking to the drums beat. I like to let my body move. Today what I did to move is a dance with my class. First it was hard then it was easy. I like to slide left and right. It was lots and lots of fun.”

Today, I am going to start with the Hanova warm up. I start at the top of my body, gently shaking and rolling my head and work down through the body parts until we have shaken and stretched our toes and feet. We next undulate our spines, make big circles with our arms, and bend in all directions. In our initial dance sessions, I am conscious that in my genuine expression with my body, I am showing the children who I really am. I feel quite vulnerable in my middle-aged body but my enjoyment in moving soon takes over and I forget to be self-conscious.

I invite the students into this dance by showing them with my body how the music, drum or poem makes me feel that day. Emotion and expression are a big part of what dancing with young children should reveal. (Stinson (1990, 1995, 1997) As September melts into October, the children absorb my physical cues and now I hardly need to say a word in our beginning circle. They are attentive and eager to follow my lead and let their bodies take over.

In the early dance sessions, there are sometimes a few students, who are uncomfortable and find it difficult to move. By the looks on their faces and their stiff body postures I see that the art of dancing is foreign to them. I reassure these students that it is okay to observe or pass if they aren’t ready to share or can’t respond. My husband is fond of telling me that just because I love dancing doesn’t mean everyone does. I take his words to heart and never coax or cajole students to dance. I allow the magic of dancing to reach out and touch these students and when they are ready, they come as willing and enthusiastic dancers. I realize risk and confidence are developed over time. As one girl shares:

When I was dancing in the group I was in, I kind of felt shy when it was my turn to stand because at the beginning of our dance we were on our
knees then we each got turns standing up and doing a move. I just felt shy when people were looking at me. My body knew that it didn’t really want to do anything because I was shy but I just did what I was supposed to do... But I had fun yesterday doing the dance up there. My favourite part was coming up with the dance moves, that was the most fun.

To encourage risk-taking in my dance classes, I always set ground rules before dancing with students. I ask them to only critique each other’s work with positive ‘put ups’, ‘I liked…’ statements or ‘I think you could improve this piece by…’ statements. The students gradually gain confidence in their abilities and take more risks as they weave original and innovative movement into their improvisations and choreography. As the year progresses, creating becomes easier and easier for the students as their self-esteem and skill grows. They are developing the ability to take risks with confidence.

As the Fall progresses I witness how quickly the children have come to regard dancing as part of our classroom routine. By late October, they are becoming willing risk takers in that I see an embracing of dance experiences in which they may as Smith (1998) relates, “encounter the unknown” (p. 13). Smith (1998) aptly discusses this notion when defining his pedagogy of risk:

To take a risk requires that the unknown be encountered, that we do indeed experience uncertainty. We are required to do more than that which feels comfortable, more than simply display those capabilities we possess. We must even at times dig deep within ourselves and test the limits of our resources. Taking a risk is the project of encountering the unknown wherein self-understanding occurs. (p. 13)

There are immediate ‘yeses’ if I say, “Okay, let’s put our Math away and dance.” Although the curricular lines are blurring as I recall how frequently the children have danced patterns and numeration in Math so far this year. The physical body has been an excellent instrument to experience and understand Math concepts. For example, for pattern making, we played a pattern making movement game. The students had to show some kind of pattern, working with a group, and the rest of the class had to guess the pattern. The students were extremely inventive and used step and arm patterns but also their height, kind of shoes, jean’s color, hair length, gender, and even skin color to create patterns.
We also are exploring Laban’s movement concepts (McCaw, 2011) so the students are becoming familiar with his elements of Space, Body Awareness, Time, and Flow. I marvel how quickly the children are able to learn and apply Laban’s movement concepts. In early choreographic explorations, I have a ‘stop’ moment as I witness a group of girls all fall in synchronicity with heaviness and then rise in lightness before skipping in a clear circular pattern. I call the class to attention so the girls can share this work. I ask the class what they saw, so as to elicit an awareness of the possibilities in utilizing Laban’s movement concepts. Repeating a performance, for insights and discussion are an important dynamic of performative inquiry for the dance class. Utilizing performative inquiry has enabled everyone to be part of the learning as a performer or witness.

I have another ‘stop’ moment as I behold a group of five boys perform a movement problem which consists of showing a clear beginning, a vibratory machine movement with synchronicity, traveling in some manner and then a clear frozen ending. They have marvellously and unconsciously incorporated all aspects of preposition. First, they stand in a line one behind the other facing the audience and create a tunnel with their legs, which they all must crawl through and under, one by one. Then they ride on each other like horses. Then they lift and carry each other while swinging one person over another lying on the ground. Next, they all crawl forward in unison. My ‘stop’ moment and subsequent understanding as a teacher and choreographer is a recognition that effective and significant creation is not limited to the age, gender, or experience of the exploring dancer. Rather, when and why magical moments of movement appear and arise out of the depths of the creative process stimulated by the interplay of individual ideas and involvement in group choreography is uncertain. Meaningful creation does not appear to be related to the age or experience of the dancers. My concept of the limits of what might be produced by elementary student dancers has been uncapped. The boys’ work stands as a worthy example in terms of the value of emergent performance through exploration and speaks to me of the mystery of the creative process.

Witnessing the boys’ work has impacted my understanding of the dancing child and I use the term witnessing to convey that I have physically seen the dancing but also been moved by it. I importantly note that witnessing is an important practice in many forms of dance teaching, authentic movement, interplay, movement therapies, forms of creative dance, improve, and contemporary dance (Foster, 2004); (Adler, 2002); (Eddy,
2009). Through witnessing the boys’ dancing, I realize their choreographic explorations are extremely important for them to represent the ineffable. My recognition has implications for the curriculum in that what I have witnessed confirms my belief that teachers need to provide as many kinaesthetic activities as possible in order for children to self-actualize in all parts of their being. Witnessing the value the dancing holds for the children also has implications for who I am as a teacher. The feelings of vitality and the learning generated through the dancing confirms to me that I am justified in my inclusion of dancing as part of the daily curriculum and I am encouraged as I recognize the body as a valid source for generating knowledge.

I am also deeply struck by the themes of war I see in the boys’ imagery. I have been mulling over what could be a relevant subject for our November Remembrance Day assembly dance. And beneath this effective creation lies the answer to my choreography problem. In the boys’ choreography I saw soldiers crawling through tunnels and crawling across battlefields. I saw soldiers carrying their wounded comrades and riding horses into battle.

We discuss the boys’ imagery with the whole group. I listen to the boys explain their choreography which was not about war and I share my interpretation. I ask them if we can use some of their imagery in our upcoming dance piece. I am excited to see the boys take so positively to creating dances and with such enthusiasm and creativity. The stereotype of dance being a feminine art is being challenged. Watching the children dance, I witness that dancing serves to expand their artfulness and importantly gives them confidence in themselves.

For the Remembrance Day assembly we co-created a beautiful dance exploring war and peace based on some of the original ideas I saw in the boys’ group choreography. To create authentic choreography for this dance I conducted several sessions where the students were first given concrete concepts to show in tableaux. Then we moved onto abstract concepts, which were more difficult for them to convey such as freedom, slavery, beauty and goodness. Finally, we ended with the abstract concepts of war and peace. The imagery the groups produced was amazing. A group of boys illustrated peace, by showing themselves laying down their guns. Another group were angel headstones in a cemetery, with mourners kneeling beneath them. Another stood in a circle, hands covering their faces, weeping.
There were significant moments of shared recognition and understanding in our learning as we debriefed and discussed the meaning of the children’s imagery because their imagery had revealed the depth in which they understood and related grief and loss as being associated with war. The powerful images the children produced revealed that their child’s world was not impervious or protected from the reality of the world in turmoil. I was impressed and surprised with the quality of the work I was witnessing from these grade four students. I had thought, as the teacher, I might have to introduce or lead the students towards a discovery of the possible imagery contained in the abstract concepts of war and peace. Instead the children showed me how complex and real the concept of war was for them. I would not have discovered the children’s deep knowledge of war if we had not used our bodies as an exploratory tool.

The revealed maturity and insights from the grade four students has implications for the curriculum in that I recognized that teachers do not have to gloss over or eliminate certain subjects for beginning intermediate students in order to protect them from the horrors of the world. The students appeared to be very aware of war and violence and an inclusion and exploration of this sensitive subject matter might instead be beneficial to aid children in coping and understanding how to be peacemakers in our violence ridden world.

By the end of the school year, the children in my class were able to explore dance activities with more surety, courage and self-reliance. They appeared to gain confidence through the dance activities. Notably one child reported, “I … felt nervous when I was dancing but I also felt confident in my self because I’m a really shy person and being in this class has really helped me get out of my shyness.” Another said, “I felt shy at first because I have stage fright, sometimes, but when I dance I feel really, really good and it’s really fun to dance for me especially making them up.” And another revealed, “I learned that you should never be afraid to share or show your ideas because you should have confidence and never be afraid of having your ideas shown!”

Performances in front of the whole school, still remained, until the end of the year, an area where some children were understandably nervous. As one child shared, “Now I know how to express myself and move my body and make new moves and have fun. When it was the performance I was really nervous but then I got over it.” Another said, “My body knew that I just had to get out there and have fun and show the parents a
good time. It was the most awesome dance ever!! But my stomach kind of hurt.” And one girl said, “I feel good but yesterday I felt kind of scared. My favourite part is when the music comes on and then it just makes me feel hyped. My least favourite part is when it’s my turn for the Virginia Reel when we have to lead the others. I was afraid I would forget to go under the arch.”

Conversely, one boy related his love of dance and of performing, “I just loved the performance. I did not hate anything about it. I just wish we could do it again. But I just don’t hate anything about it. I didn’t even feel nervous. If I didn’t like it I would have been so scared.” And one girl, in sharing about one of the performances said, “I was happy I had no fear. My favourite parts were shuffling and the running man….I love to dance and wonder what dance we’re doing next. I like dancing dances especially when people are doing the same moves as everyone else!!” Another girl said, “I think my dancing has improved from the start of the year and I think I have more experience now, like different moves and how to do them. I have also noticed I am not as shy to dance as I was at the start of the year.”

As we dance together, there is an anticipation and expectation in this classroom that no one knows exactly what will emerge next. We are taking risks together and, “encountering the unknown” (Smith, 1998, p. 13). We are moving together in a creation of moments that delight, surprise and enchant the whole group. I see and feel this on their smiling faces, in their attentive, lively body postures, and in the tangible, positive mutual regard that manifests amongst the dancers. We have become the dance and the dance is us. As one enthusiastic boy expressed his confident feelings about dancing in our classroom:

Dance makes me feel excited, like at the start of the year I did not know how to dance. If I wasn’t in Mrs. K’s class I would have been the worst dancer in the world. I learned so many dance moves.
Security and Acceptance

*Figure 135.*

*Dancing with the environment*

Sometimes, the school is the safe haven, or, sadly, may be a source of trauma. The educator’s responsibility for creating an optimal learning environment, where dialogue within relationship is encouraged and facilitated, is both essential and highly demanding. Indwelling interpersonal relationship requires that educators engage in the Art of Awareness. We must find ways to reflect—on relational connection and disconnection within ourselves, and on our feelings, beliefs, and perceptions in relationship with others. (Bai, Scott, Donald, 2010, p. 8)
As part of an optimal learning environment, as Bai, Scott, & Donald (2008) relate, “dialogue within relationship is encouraged and facilitated” (p. 8) in order to foster positive relational connections. Opening channels for dialogue and connection may be fostered through dance activities. I witnessed the pedagogy of dance in my classroom foster a dialogue of acceptance between class members as they worked together and these positive connections appeared to contribute to feelings of emotional security. As one child said, “Dancing for me is about having a lot of fun. When I dance with more and more people it’s better. Dancing this year with my friends was really exciting.” In the dance experiences, through risk taking, enjoyable participation, and performing, the children received positive feedback and support, which led to feelings of acceptance and security in their place amongst their peers and in their relationship with the teacher.

The communal context is established through an intersubjective field of consciousness that discloses my body as lived in relation to others, the field of awareness wherein I experience myself as seen, touched, understood, misunderstood, loved or despised. The intersubjective field is the field of communal interaction – my consciousness of my own body-of-action, of others’ body-of-action, and my awareness of what passes between us. (Fraleigh, 1987, p. 58)

To illustrate the positive and encouraging social relationships that occurred in the dancing experiences for acceptance, I highlight some of the children’s quotes. Notably a child said, “I love to dance and like to do dance when everyone is moving together.” Another said, “I felt great because we all had fun.” And, “I felt awesome because we were learning new skills and we get to teach our moves to our friends.” Another expressed, “Dancing is awesome to me because sometimes I get to have my best friend as a partner.”

And, “I love dancing. I had so much fun dancing with my friends. I practice day after day.” Also, “I feel relieved because the performance was awesome but I got a little bit of stage fright. My favourite part is where everybody in the gym danced together.”

In their journals, the students regularly expressed their enjoyment of dancing with others and especially with their ‘reading’ buddies, a Kindergarten class we met with once a week all year long. We usually spent our time together reading books but occasionally we would do an art project or dance. The ‘little buddies’ loved dancing and the ‘big buddies’ enjoyed mentoring them. I would lead a simpler version of a warm up and the
big buddies taught them a few basic hip-hop steps and arm movements. Some notable comments were:

I noticed that they were trying to do the moves like us and I noticed that they were really in the dance. My favourite part today was coming up with a dance with our buddies because when she does her dance it’s so cute and they looked really, really, really interested in it. And very focused in the dance.

Also, “I noticed that my buddy needs a little more practice. Oh, who am I kidding they need a lot more practice. My favourite part of the day was teaching my buddy because I want them to experience dancing.” Finally, “Well… I noticed that my buddy got the hang of it! She was doing a great job on the running man and the side shuffle! My favourite part was when we were doing the running man. Why? It’s because I got to do it with my buddy and got to see her do it!”

I note that the students in my class didn’t always get along when creating dances and had to evolve as co operators and collaborators, especially at the beginning of the year. To encourage each person in the group choreography work to have an equal representation of their ideas, I gave the students some negotiating tools, such as encouraging everyone in the group to allow at least one of each individual’s ideas to be included in their dance and in debriefing discussions actively drew out from the students how the successful collaborators managed to get along. I noticed that it wasn’t just the girls or the boys who struggled with working out whose ideas were included in a piece. Both genders could experience conflict.

As a warm up, we often would start by playing an improvising game in a circle and the children especially loved this activity because it called on each individual to be in the spotlight for a minute. Taking turns, with the provision of passing, each person dances a move they feel the urge to share, which could be performed on the side of the circle or they could strut their stuff into the middle. Everyone else then tries to imitate the movement in their own way, usually with great hilarity. I am very aware that students are taking a risk when showing and trying their moves. As one boy commented:

Moving in the classroom is really AWESOME. It’s like one of the exciting things I like to do in school because you never know what we will be, we could be a light ghost, a 5000 pound man, even a zombie with one leg. The best thing she does is if she hits her drum hard then we have to step
hard if she hits the drum light then we have to step light. Today we weren’t a ghost or anything. We were just ourselves and we listened to Mrs. Kurnaedy’s patterns and tried to do them back.

As the dancing students transform from feeling unsure to secure, from awkwardness to acquiring more skill and agility, from timidity to becoming more adventurous, from having few original movement ideas to never having enough time to express all of their unique movement ideas, we experience a tightening, a cohesion, a unification of the class in spirit, friendship and most of all, acceptance of each other as class members.

... it is through indwelling our own being that we overcome and heal the wound of disconnect: the alienated states of being or consciousness. The healing occurs through the experiences of intersubjectivity or interbeing, for such experience is in and of itself wholesome, meaning that we become whole and not existentially alienated. Security, ease, contentment, and joy arise of their own accord through the experience of interbeing. (Bai, Scott, Donald, 2010, p. 4)

I try to foster a classroom environment that has a mutually encouraging feeling tone. I witnessed the dancing activities in my classroom promote interconnections and good feelings. The dancing activities provided a relaxed venue in which I found it natural and easy to supply authentic encouragement, support, acceptance, mediation, and positive talk. While dancing with my class I could be an appreciative beholder of their choreography and dancing bodies. In the dancing activities I witnessed these growing children ‘becoming’ in all aspects of their person. The dance encouraged each member of this class to be in a positive relationship with one another and in a special relation with me. In this closed environment, van Manen (1990) shares, “the teacher-child relation is experienced as a special lived relation to the other in the sense that this relation is highly personal and charged with interpersonal significance. In this lived relation the child experiences a fundamental sense of support and security that ultimately allows him or her to become a mature and independent person” (p. 106).

I can’t help but see myself in each child in my classroom. Their insecurities, worries, and fears remind me of myself. I was a worrier and had fears as a child. Arts educator and writer Mamchur (2009) importantly questions, “How can we learn to be open and accepting of the ways of others if we do not feel accepted ourselves? And how can we change our self-concept if we are not valued and respected at an early age” (p.
There is a deep truth to these words that I feel viscerally. And as part of coming to terms with my own identity as a teacher, I have learned to turn any of my lingering negative feelings into positives and I use my understanding of myself in my classroom to understand others. When I say to a child in certain circumstances, “I know how you feel”. I can really mean it. But I can also assure them that fears and worries will fade with support, love, and acceptance. In any classroom, “I like you,” may be a powerful phrase. But even more specific is the statement, “I like how you move. I like your dancing.” In my classroom this equated with, “I accept you.”

As one girl shared, “I say that I like dancing because we get to show our moves and learn new dance steps! Dancing is also fun because you can do it with your friends and enjoy a time to be active and enjoy dancing with your classmates!” The children stated over and over when asked to express their favourite part of dance class that dancing with friends was a highlight of their dance experience. As one child stated, “Dancing in class is very fun like when I dance with my friends.” Another added, “My favourite part of the dance class today was when I joined another friend’s group.” And additionally, “My favourite part of dance class was when me and my friends made up a dance. I felt active because I was moving every part. I felt like every muscle was moving with everyone.” Also a child shared, “My favourite part of dance class was everything. Especially when my friend was dancing. I felt excited. I felt it in my lungs beating hard. Our dance is going to be funny and fun for us.” Phenomenologist and dancer Fraleigh (1987) beautifully highlights the interconnected nature of dance when she states:

Dance passes directly between the dancer and the audience, actualizing a bodily lived aesthetic between them as it is expressed and experienced intersubjectively. Dance closes the distance between self and other. As the dancer dances for others, she instantiates others in her dance and dances the body-of-everyone.” (pp. 60-61)
Since the value of the creative experience resides in its very nature and process, the individual who sets out to study dance should experience it from beginning to end as a creative activity. (Hawkins, 1964, p. 8) ... The dancer who is interested in developing creatively must have many varied opportunities to use his imagination and to invent through the medium of movement. (Hawkins, 1964, p. 17)
The child as dancer is revelling in her whole being while dancing and in the moment. For the child, dance is a form of play. Snowber (1989) relates, “Play and dance are interconnected at a root or primal level because movement is at the heart of play and at the heart of dance” (p. 20). While dancing, children are simultaneously playing and stretching their imaginations and creativity. (See Gilbert (1992, 2006) Kelly and Leggo (2008) further inform us that, “Educators need to nurture an ongoing experience of creative engagement with diverse kinds of learning in students, as well as a desire and confidence in their creative experiences and encounters and endeavours” (p. 255).

In the creative dance work with my class, I am constantly returning to the wisdom of dance icons such as Duncan, Wigman, Laban, Graham, Halprin and my mentors the Hanova sisters, to touch base with how I may foster an atmosphere of creativity and imagination. I acknowledge their greatness and I have learned from these dance pioneers that creativity can be taught, nurtured and cultivated. From Duncan (1928) I retain her belief that the dance is above all a sacred art. Duncan also showed the world that dance could be the simple and natural movements of skipping, running, jumping and leaping, all accessible to children’s abilities. I also credit Duncan (1928) in stressing the solar plexus and torso as the dancer’s generating force for her animation and vitality and from which her movement can flow. Wigman showed me the dance as a deeply expressive medium. From her work I learn that this expression may be spiritual ecstasy and joy, or grief, misery, and sombre reflection. Wigman stressed two important things the dancer must do; play and dream. (Sorell, 1975) Laban’s movement analysis provides me with a framework with which I can teach children the elements of movement. Laban also stressed that movement education will help the child to retain his or her natural enjoyment of moving and reawaken and develop this sense of movement. (Newlove, Dalby, 2004) From Graham (1991) I gain a deep sense of the artist and how dance can inspire and move an audience. Graham (1991) also provides the idea of teaching dancers a movement vocabulary so they have the tools and concepts to build their own dances. Halprin (1995, 1997, 2000) teaches the important lesson that dance contains the ability to heal and nurture and that age should not be a factor in limiting the dancer from pursuing her art.

The Hanova sisters reinforced many of these same ideas, having studied with Wigman and Laban. Through studying at their school, I gained confidence and acceptance and discovered myself as a choreographer and dancer. As a teacher,
looking back at my years with the Hanova sisters, I realize that one of their greatest gifts to me was modeling the power of the mentor. By showing such a deep commitment and interest in me I was able to flourish and greatly enjoyed dancing and learning with them. Hence, mutual regard and respect have become the cornerstones of my teaching. I want every student to know I like and appreciate aspects of who they are and the work they produce. From this place children can stretch their wings and develop their creativity. As Kelly and Leggo (2008) share, “A belief in the creative potential of oneself and those around you is an essential starting point to develop an educational culture of creativity. It is a good thing to take risks and become vulnerable and have one’s own ideas validated on a journey of personal growth” (p. 255).

As the children continued dancing throughout the year, I came to witness their increased creativity and ability to transfer dance and movement concepts into creating their own dances. I observed the children's immense satisfaction and pleasure in their creations and how they expressed enthusiasm in sharing and viewing each other's work. As one child said:

I enjoy dancing because you get to show your moves, learn new skills, have fun and then you get to perform it. Dancing is fun because you can just do anything you feel like when the music starts, I mean like, you show your skills.

Dance educator Murray (1970) informs us:

For a child, movement is both an organic need and a constant delight. Dancing to him is good for its own sake, often without meaning or purpose… If education is to become an integrated and enriching development of the total person, those experiences, which involve the self in creative and constructive activities assume special significance. Dance can do this, and perhaps better than many projects with which children are involved in school… The compelling necessity is for education to use this natural love for rhythmic movement which children possess, employing it extensively to help them develop their bodies for creative uses, to supplement other learnings, and to find fun and satisfaction in worth-while day-to-day experience. (p. 98)

Throughout the year, I endeavoured to provide many different types of dance experiences so the students would gain a sense that dance is a multi dimensional art form. We learned and performed variations of folk dancing, social dancing, line dancing, hip-hop dancing and modern creative dance. This class loved hip-hop dance and this
popular style held many feel ‘good’ rhythmic possibilities as well as possibilities to explore space, time, and effort qualities. But it was in the creative dance experiences where I observed a change in the children’s understanding of what dance may convey. In the creation of the creative modern dances, many of the children were able to vocalize that this dance form was a vehicle to convey meaning and a message to the audience in different and more specific ways. One child said when relating about our April, Earth Day dance performance, “I liked our performance. I thought the best dance we did was the respect the earth dance because it looked like people got the meaning of the dance. I think my partner and mine was pretty clear what we meant and also the boy after us. I think it clearly showed that it meant we care about the Earth.” And another child said,

I really enjoyed the dance. We really showed the audience that we care for the Earth. The part that I mostly liked was when we walked in and passed the ball. When we were doing poems I really felt like people should not do this to the earth. I learned lots of things. I learned that hip-hop is way, way different than the dances we did for the Earth because hip-hop is having fun but the Earth dances were serious.”

The multiplicity of creativity and the creative process manifested as a theme and a pedagogical space in this research and was an essential element of the dancing experiences in the classroom. As one child wrote:

(To create a dance) You use your imagination and try new things with your arms and legs, head, shoulder, feet, fingers, then if you like it you can put it in your dance. You take the move you like and change it if you like. But we people all have a movement we don’t know about... You can put in steps you like and create dances with your imagination all by yourself with ideas from other people’s talent. You can make cool moves up that don’t exist for other people but do for you. But when you write a dance you have to use your imagination and practice.

Another said, “I think our ideas come from some of our old dances and sometimes we have new movements and I think that comes from how excited and how much energy we have that day to put in the dance. I guess we know when the movements are right when you have that perfect feeling about it...” Another girl related, “I put all the things I can do with all of my body and create a dance. My ideas come from art. I picture it in my head as art. I put the movements all together and get a dance. I like to do dances with lots of people.”
In a discussion with the children on dance history and the choreography of folk dance, hip-hop dance, modern dance, ballet and social dance and how people discovered this choreography, I was intrigued with what emerged in this discussion and so I asked the children to write in their journals their ideas about how they thought people created new dance steps. Notable comments were, “I think people use regular movements and they do it in a different way. For example walking. If you do it with a little jump and different motions it could be a dance move.” Another interesting comment was, “I think that sometimes people find what kind of dances were in the olden days and then they do the same dance but they change it a little.” Additionally a child said, “People create dance moves by listening to the beat of the music. And they find a rhythm that they like and their body finds interesting things to do to it.” And, “Well…that’s easy! They move their bodies and play around with their steps and when they are finished, they have created a new dance or new steps!” Also, “I think they put some music on and let their body do what their body wants to do.” Also, “First they do something random and add more to it. Or they just have a gift of making dances.” And most interestingly, “Well…I get those steps when I go to sleep. When I have nothing to dream of, I just dream of some moves for my dance!”

In January, the students had just come back from the Christmas break and were really excited to be dancing again. Hip-hop remained their favourite type of dance. Dancing seemed to take over the classroom as we were choreographing and practicing every day for an upcoming presentation, which was wonderful in that I could feel a palpable positive energy being generated in the classroom. We were working on several dances simultaneously to demonstrate and share for a school wide dance along. As I was driving to work one January morning I saw several boys from my class walking to school. Suddenly, on the sidewalk, they simultaneously broke into dance steps from one of our dances. I had to marvel. As one child related in her journal:

You create dances by listening to the music’s rhythm so you know if the rhythm is fast or slow. After that you could keep dancing till you think something is good. You could dance anywhere you want to, the street, your house, at school, etc.

The class has also learned to be appreciative of one another’s creativity as an audience, which I model constantly so the children will see a thoughtful and respectful audience response as part of the success for the performer. After class performances,
we share what we enjoyed. I model specifically in words and actions what I witnessed that was remarkable or special. Or what I saw that impressed me, for example, how the performers were able to fit in the criteria for the piece so beautifully or how they were so wonderfully synchronized or how delightfully and creatively they were able to work in individual solos.

As the children take more risks, which may lead to the unknown, falling or failing, they step off into spaces of uncertainty and find freedom in the creative process. Their bodies have relaxed as they authentically dance into ‘being’ in the moments for all to see. The children have opened up unknown vistas, both in realizing that they ‘are’ dancers and that dancing has no boundaries. No one has ever danced all the movements they are capable of or that they hold inside of themselves. They have discovered creativity with their bodies. As one child relates, “My ideas come out of my heart because when I move dance comes out of my heart.”
Dance as an art is both physical and emotional. These two aspects of dance are interwoven and never exist in isolation. Physical movement is transformed so that it creates an illusion of a feeling state. It possesses a magic that is quite different from the utilitarian activity of everyday life. (Hawkins, 1964, p. 64)
The children’s feelings and emotions were regularly expressed in the children’s journal entries and the expression of lived bodily experiences was recorded with extremely positive language. The children were very clear in their responses (and stated many times over) that dance was ‘fun’, ‘exciting,’ and made them ‘happy’. Dance, in the classroom experiences, manifested as positive feelings of vitality, animation, and aliveness. As one student said, “Dance makes me feel strong and free and happy.” And another states, “Dance makes me feel alive, like I just woke up from a dream.” And, “I felt good. I feel it in my hands. It has energy.” And, “When I was shuffling, I felt excited and happy. I felt happy because my afternoon will be filled with joy!”

The responses additionally revealed that new and deep feelings were stirred, as one student so poetically reveals:

(Today) I learned different movement and a new feeling too. I felt calm and settled and happy, like my life paused, in a good way so I can let go of extra feelings at the time. I did not expect joy it just sprung true in me like a flower bloomed. And I heard the time of the movement slow and peaceful and the shapes inspired me somehow. Some of the exercises made me feel like drawing or painting. I loved that inspiration and I hope it happens again. The slow movement with the soothing music. I liked it, thank you for making that activity, Ms. Kurnaedy.

The children’s writing also showed that they felt that dance was energizing and manifested in feelings of vitality. One child shared:

I felt awake when I was dancing, not the kind of awake like you got out of bed but a kind of awake like you got your body moving. I felt awake when we were doing the warm up, especially the breathing one and squeezing part because the breathing wakened up my brain and the squeezing part woke up my body.

Another student said, “In my legs I felt strong and I felt energy.” And another adds, “Dance makes me feel alive and a lot more energized.” Another lovely response was:

I love dance! It is so awesome. I do not know why but it was meant for me. When I dance I feel like I am proud of myself and brave. I feel like I am crazy, full of energy, crazy, brave, awesome, cool, and sweat drips down. And I feel my whole BODY!
Other evocative phrases emerged that exemplified the animation that may be hidden beneath the dance such as: “I walk excitement.” “I felt like dancing to heaven!”, “Dance feels like passion within the heart. It feels like riding a rainbow or flying with a dragon ….”, “Whenever I stretch I feel the dance move in me.” “Dancing is like the thing of my life. I enjoy it a lot. I do not know about anyone else but I really like it. But (dancing) today was like every other day! It is sooooooooo active, fun, awesome and enjoyable!” “I love dancing. It is my favourite activity. My body feels really, really smooth.” “Well… I love to dance! Because it’s the only subject that’s fun!” Expressions of bodily perceptions with an emphasis on animation and vitality manifested as an important theme and ‘essence’ of the classroom dance experiences.

In addition there were mixed expressions of emotion about the dancing that illustrated the students enjoyment but also their difficulties and dislikes. One boy said, “The winter dance I really thought I was skiing! It was AWESOME but when I stay in the same spot it is extremely hard.” Another said, “My favourite part of the dance activities was when we did the Mexican Hat Dance. My least favourite dance was January. I felt that it is not fun because it’s too serious.” Additionally, a girl shared, “When we did our performance I felt scared but because my class was with me I wasn’t scared after.” And one boy related, “Dancing was just ok today because it’s kind of nerve racking because lots of friends are watching.” And finally, one boy wrote:

Today when I was dancing I felt like everyone in the classroom was in the Party Rock Anthem music video because everyone was dancing so fast and the music was fast too. When me and my group were dancing I was nervous because everyone in the classroom was watching and if I made a mistake everybody will notice what you did wrong.

What did I learn from reading these expressions of mostly positive emotion? The expressions confirmed to me how powerful dancing is to change the human condition. Students who previously appeared restless, bored, or tired in class became animated, vital, happy, and excited as soon as we started dancing. Dancing could immediately change the mood and atmosphere in our room. Dancing enabled the students in my classroom to convey their emotions and express that which was deep within themselves. To an outsider some of the dancing that was choreographed by the children nearer the end of the year might have appeared silly or ridiculous in that some of the boys’ dances were goofy and exaggerated their walks and facial expressions so they
appeared grotesque but I saw this dancing as manifesting the children’s sense of community and the ease they felt to express themselves together. This was what and how they wanted to dance and they were really enjoying themselves. They made the dance their own. The changes in the students’ behaviour that occurred over time was also quite remarkable in that previously quiet and unsure students became leaders and competent choreographers, fearless and almost manic in their enjoyment. I felt the dancing experiences definitely opened up avenues for trust, respect, and mutual regard to flow, flourish and thrive in the relationships between the students and myself. As several students shared, “Dance, it’s what you believe in your heart comes right out. It’s passionate, it gets your heart going, especially when Ms. K. teaches me.” And, “Dance makes me feel alive… It matters. I like dancing because it makes me feel comfortable. I liked this dance thing in Ms. K.’s class. Thank you for the opportunity to dance.”

What do all of these recorded phenomenological expressions of vitality and animation imply for the curriculum? The implications are that dance is a valuable resource and can provide immediate and positive changes in the feeling tone and energy level of a classroom. The dance is an art form and medium in which the participants are able to generate positive feelings and perceptions and share in actions and motions which stimulate all parts of the person. The dance is a mode for vital social and emotional self-expression and learning.

The dance was also further embodied in the children’s writing and poetry. Here are a few samples of our dance Haikus that illustrate the children’s feelings about dance.

Dance makes me feel fresh
Dancing free on the dance floor
Having a great time

In my house I dance
Shuffling for ever and ever
While doing back flips

We dance on the stage
Moving freely together
Happiness arises

Arms and legs moving
Legs squiggling every day
Feet tapping the ground
In addition to the process of learning, there is the question—“What is she learning?” She is learning the science of body movement itself, rhythmic factors, elements of force and space, and the relationships of moving with other people, among other things. She is also learning how to discover dance ideas from what she feels, sees, and hears. She learns how to use the materials of dance to shape movement experiences into patterns and to recreate forms for her dance ideas. The result is that her knowledge is not limited to rigid technique but rather to fundamental materials of dance that draw upon the vast potential resources of the child herself and the principles of art. (Halprin, 1995, pp. 29-30)
Through the research with my students, I came to appreciate the many diverse learning opportunities dance activities offer. I witnessed dance activities address the physical body in terms of healthy exercise and fitness, improved flexibility, strength and coordination. I witnessed dance activities expand the kinaesthetic sense and encourage an awareness of each student’s movement capabilities, limitations, and abilities. Additionally, I saw creating choreography stimulate cognition in problem solving, using the imagination, and developing creative thinking strategies. The social and emotional aspects of the child were expanded in terms of increased skill in collaborating, cooperating, communicating, negotiating, and caring about others. And finally I beheld the stimulation and expansion of the children’s spirits as they explored their dreams, relationships and potential. As Halprin (1995) stresses, when discussing learning and creative dance, the child is freed from limitations in her creativity because she is learning how to “draw upon the vast potential resources of the child herself and the principles of art” (pp. 29-30).

The children were also very engaged and focused in their learning while dancing. As Csikszentmihalyi (1997), relates in his book, *Finding Flow*:

> When goals are clear, feedback relevant, and challenges and skills are in balance, attention becomes ordered and fully invested. Because of the total demand on psychic energy, a person in flow is completely focused. There is no space in consciousness for distracting thoughts, irrelevant feelings. Self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual. The sense of time is distorted: hours seem to pass by in minutes. When a person’s being is stretched in the full functioning of body and mind, whatever one does becomes worth doing for its own sake... (pp. 31-32)

When witnessing the dancing activities in my classroom I saw deep levels of engagement and absorption. The dancing activities held a high level of interest for the students and the immediate positive emotional and physical feelings that were generated kept and sustained their attention throughout our dance explorations. After I assigned my students tasks or movement problems, and any questions about these were clarified, the children were quickly able to immerse themselves in the activities. Over many classes, we explored many aspects of the dance, which included Laban’s movement concepts of time, space, effort, and relationships. The concept of choreography was introduced by first building a simple movement vocabulary and then
students were invited to divide into small groups to choreograph short sequences of movement. I saw the children successfully work with others. Occasionally I had to step in to assist children who might not readily find a partner or might have had a disagreement with another student. The children appeared to derive much satisfaction from the work and inhabited the moments of their dancing. As Fraleigh (1987) shares:

Good dancers know that the dancing self dies when it looks back either to visualize or to admire itself. The present tense is lost. Spontaneity is lost, and with it the dance. The dancer is at her best (she becomes her dance) when she is present centered. Good dancers become absorbed in the problems and pleasures of dancing itself. (p. 23)

When writing about their engagement and learning, children notably said, “Well… Dance is a way to show your moves and try out new things! So like if you are new to a dance move, you should just keep on trying and trying to get it right! So that way you have learned something new.” And, “I learned how to be alive when I dance, how to do cool actions, how to be more into it, how to do more moves and new kinds of dances.” Additionally,

I learned that dance isn’t just about moving your body, it’s also about your feelings. Some people express their feelings in dance. I bet a lot of people do. And I learned that you don’t always have to dance alone, you can dance with a partner or more than just two. You can make your own group if you wanted to. Dance is an adventure through life. Dance takes me to a new world when I dance. I hope I can still do dance next year because its really, really, really, fun and joyful!!!

Engagement and learning emerged as a theme and was a strong ‘essence’ and component in making the dance what it was in our classroom. On the occasions throughout the year that I watched the children perform in front of the whole school I couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride and accomplishment. The children worked so hard to perfect the pieces we choreographed for various assemblies and events. We received a lot of compliments and praise from the staff and the children in the audience for our performances.

But while rereading my journal entries to write about the theme of engagement and learning, I had a ‘stop’ moment and after pondering, I have come to an understanding. It has struck me, that yes, the moments of performance were wonderful but really the everyday processes of skill building, choreographing, negotiating and
collaborating while dancing and dance making have been what mattered the most. The learning acquired in these moments might have a more lasting impact on the children than the moments of performance because the children will hopefully take the skills they acquired and apply these skills beneficially to their future learning.

Ultimately, what I witnessed in the daily work, which consisted of a flurry of often loud and boisterous negotiations and communications between the small groups and partnerships, trying out what worked and what didn’t, moments of laughter and tears, improvising and deciding what they wanted to keep, messy, busy, and sometimes awkward, in all these moments of engagement and learning, this was where the precious nuggets of transformation and growth occurred.

As one boy commented at the end of the year.

I learned how to be alive when I dance, how to do cool actions, how to be more into it, how to do more moves and new kinds of dances. Mrs. Kurnaedy taught me how to dance different dances, like old music, peaceful music, instead of hip-hop all the time. I wish I could be in your class again but I’m now in a higher grade but I can watch what your class is doing next year.

And a girl related, “I learned so much this year. My feelings are now so different, first I was so scared, now I can dance wherever I want.” Another student said, “I enjoy making dances up. Learning more moves… It’s awesome. I like doing practice… And I get lots of exercise dancing. I like EVERYTHING about dancing.” And another student said, “I think the most important thing about dancing I learned this year is how you feel about dance. Every time I dance I feel excited.”

In the dance activities, friendships were forged and barriers removed as students learned to include everyone. The dance sessions were often a physical tumble of discovery but never seemed competitive. I saw a lot of admiration between the dancers for those who were especially gifted or talented and these dancers had a lot of humility. As a class the dance activities united us.

As Scott (2011) relates, “The voices of the learners (both students and teachers) and the curriculum itself emerge and are made present: the emergence of Logos” (p. 244). I beheld the dancing in my classroom occupy a logos or ground of knowledge as a means to enact ‘a dialogue of the dancing body’ and this dance was instrumental, as
Scott so succinctly puts it, to “affirm the significance of being seen” (p. 229). And further, “This creation of meaning in and through relationships reveals what is sacred in ourselves, others, the world, and our relationships” (Scott, 2011, p. 270). As one child shared:

I know that dancing is about creativity. What’s important is having fun dancing with your friends. When I dance with a whole bunch of people it’s fun. When I dance with D., S., and P. it makes the dance cool. When I dance with the class it’s even better. It was really fun dancing this year.

Another significant 'stop' moment that occurred for me in conjunction with the theme of engagement and learning was in letting the students choose their own subjects and how they would dance them. Relinquishing control of the creation of the choreography was difficult for me. I was entrenched in thinking I (the teacher, the holder of knowledge and expertise) knew best what they should be dancing about and of course how they should dance it. But fortunately through this year of dance I changed.

I was aware that the kind of work I needed to do was transformative, not manipulative. Manipulation is when you act to change others. Transformation occurs when you change as an act of empowerment. Because it is the nature of meaningful relationships, when you change, your students change. (Mamchur & Apps, 2009, p. 117)

In examining a creative dance called January, that the students and I choreographed together I will relate some of my 'stops' to illustrate how I managed to relinquish (some of) my control of the choreographic process and the selection of the final choreography. I reiterate that by choreographic process, I mean discovering a subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics and creating a design which is a writing process as defined by Murray (1968, 1990) and redefined by Mamchur (2004) and may be transferred to other artistic processes. Apps (2007); Kurnaedy (2009) While choreographing this dance with my students, I was frequently stopped in my actions and found myself consciously reflecting on my own involvement. I came to an understanding of the necessity of stepping aside so the students’ ideas and movements could emerge and make the dance an authentic expression of the children’s ideas. To illustrate how much I had been controlling choreographic outcomes, I will relate my thinking.

I had a great idea for a new dance for the January term. This dance would show winter activities from a child’s perspective. I had pretty much choreographed the whole
dance in my head over the Christmas break. I could picture who would dance what and
oh, I thought it was going to be very moving and really showcase the talent in my class.
Of course the children would have some input. I just wasn’t sure what it would be yet.

At the start of the new term, to discover a subject and define the details and
design for our dance, we started with a discussion. I suggested since it was winter, we
could look at winter activities. We drew webs in groups. A boy wrote January in the
middle of his web and this name stuck. The children came up with lots of great ideas
concerning what goes on in January. I will first relate the choreography of the dance and
in *italics* underneath our moments of ‘pause’, where I was ‘invited’ to understand things
“from a new perspective” (Fels, 2010, p. 1).

As some beautiful and delicate piano music begins, a girl walks slowly out
and lifts her hands up to catch the falling snow. She opens her mouth to
taste a snowflake. Then she turns, arms upraised, enjoying the quiet
snow filled air and gracefully sinks down to make a snow angel. She rises
and walks off.

*I initially wanted this darling, tiny girl to come out and perform something
delicate and light. The sweet girl I asked to perform, tried but after a few
tries she just shook her head shyly and said “I can’t do this.” I said,
“That’s okay.” I had just learned about how shy she really was. Suddenly
from the sidelines a large and very tall (for fourth grade) girl and also by
the way another darling girl, said, “I can do it”. “I want to do it.” I said,
“Okay, give it a try.” She was so confident, and right away I could feel the
beauty in her movements. We had our opening, which she made her own.

Suddenly as the music speeds up four skiers ski down a slope, then two
hockey players skate out and one shoots at the goalie before they skate
away. Next two more hockey players skate forward and pass each other
the puck before spinning around.

*I initially pictured the students playing in the snow, having snowball fights
and building snowmen. In their webs, the children shared lots of their
ideas. Building snowmen and snowball fighting never came up. But in the
web making, the Winter Olympics and all its events were of interest and
were listed. The students were very keen to be ice skaters and hockey
players. So the choreography, which had been all in my head so far, took
another turn.

Next, four cross country skiers in synchronization glide across the stage
in a line and then four bobsledders sit down, one behind the other,
gripping each others shoulders, in the center. They bob to and fro down a
slope.
One boy, who loves skiing, said he really wanted to ski, and as he demonstrated skiing, his three friends joined in, following him and each other around the room in synchronicity. Wow! Talk of the Olympics turned to bobsledding and before I knew it there were four bobsledders. This was actually my favourite part of the dance. The way they evolved the movement, holding onto each other’s shoulders and moving jerkily side to side was so effective. They were in motion!

Next, four skaters glide out and hold their right legs up in a classic arabesque skater pose and then twirl around before skating off. Finally three snow boarders emerge individually and jump and bump over moguls.

*If the boys were hockey players, although one girl who loves hockey was a hockey player, some of the girls wanted to be figure skaters. I was so impressed with how they held up their legs and did turns. The snowboarders, well I never would have thought of that. They bumped and jumped and were all over the place.*

The music quiets again and the dance ends with the lone girl returning to the center of the stage. She takes a deep breath of January air and then once again reaches up to catch a snowflake on her palm.

This moment was precious and gave the dance a beautiful ending and I’m so glad this girl got to dance this part. She was so self-possessed and had a quiet authority. I never knew this side of her until I saw her dance with snowflakes. Well, all of my ideas probably would have worked out but definitely were not as interesting when compared to the children’s imaginations. This was a huge lesson for me and I really tried to let the students take charge with discovering their own subjects and choreography for the rest of the year.

In relating how this dance evolved I learned that the choreography is much more meaningful for the children when the choreography arises from the children’s imaginations and interests. In allowing the children to be the creators of the movement and have their ideas come to the forefront, the dance really became theirs as they developed their dancing voices. In reflecting back, I realize how important allowing children to be the authors of their own learning is. In letting go of controlling outcomes and even the subjects that children choose to dance about, write about or investigate in a science class, teachers will have to change their conceptions of curriculum and learning. If curriculum is no longer seen as a static, unchanging body of information to be transmitted en masse to a group of stationary students but instead a dynamic, individual, and personal choice, teachers will need to alter the design of their lessons and the
accessibility to learning materials. Classrooms will need to become action sites of learning for all subject areas, not just dance classes.

After all, good teachers know that our individuality is important, and good teachers strive to make students independent and original learners and thinkers who make connections and inferences of their own. In order to do this, teachers need to let go of controlling learning outcomes and trust their students to go in directions that fulfill the needs and desires of the students. As one student put it so well:

I think the most important thing about dancing is having fun because if you don't have fun you won't want to do it anymore. And another thing is for the dance to be original. Something I learned this year is that the more we performed the more comfortable we got. I think dance is a way of taking your feelings from the inside and showing them with movements on the outside.

**Reflections on the Dancing Body**

In presenting my research findings, and in telling the story of my research experiences, my goal was to give voice to the individual dancers in my classroom while also discovering the meaning and value the dancing held for the children. In piecing together how to most effectively present my findings I found my story would be incomplete without an examination of my own teaching practices and how this research work has changed me. I had to include my moments of learning and how this work has affirmed my belief in the power of the dance. I ponder that maybe in telling this research story I am seeking confirmation. A confirmation of what I most value in my teaching practice and what I feel was missing in my public school experiences as a child. I can’t help but note that in the children’s expressions about their dance experiences I have uncovered recurring themes that have a deep significance for me personally. Perhaps what I had hoped for in school. What I felt I needed but never got.

For a teacher to include a pedagogy of dance at the forefront of her classroom curriculum is to acknowledge a belief in the importance of the body for learning and meaning making. Giving voice to the body through the dance is one important way to share who we are. “When one honours the body, one honours the heart. It is a beckoning to the inner life. The weird abundance beckons us back to the body, to an embodied way of teaching” (Snowber and Wiebe, 2009, p. 11).
The dance is one important way to acknowledge the spiritual nature of our humanity and one important way too consciously make curriculum spiritual.

A spiritual curriculum moves beyond the rational and analytic ways of understanding the world and favours intuitive and emotional ways of knowing as we focus our perceptions on building connections, seeking unity and feeling centered: in other words, being mindful. (Irwin, 2007, p. 1401)

Dancing is one way to be mindful. Through the dance my body is awakened to its body knowledge and I am able to gain fresh perspectives and perceptions on being alive. In the act of dancing, I feel vital, unified and centered. The doors to my creativity, inner self and expression are opened and invite me to ‘enact spaces of possibility.’ (Haskell & Linds, 2004) In the dance I am constantly reborn while enacting these possibilities and so feel compelled to share these wonderful possibilities in my role as a teacher.

Parker Palmer (1998) wisely reminds educators that, “We teach who we are.” (p. 1) By this he means, that what we are at our core, our loves and hates, passions and principles, childhood experiences and family life, are all brought, consciously or unconsciously, into our classrooms everyday we teach. As a teacher, I have, albeit slowly, come to realize that partitioning parts of myself in my teaching, is denying children the best parts of myself. For the dance is a fundamental part of who I am. As Palmer (1998) relates, “We need to open a new frontier in our exploration of good teaching: the inner landscape of a teacher’s life. To chart the landscape fully, three important paths must be taken – intellectual, emotional, and spiritual – and none can be ignored” (p. 1).

Palmer (1998) speaks of the spiritual as “the diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life – a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching” (p. 1). In my classroom the spiritual path is partially enacted in the curriculum through my love of the arts and particularly the dance. However as Sameshima and Irwin (2008) share:

…the word curriculum is derived from the Latin word, currere, which means to run. Curriculum is static, while currere is dynamic. In order to support an energetic curriculum of currere, working in the liminal space where art and its tropes continue to resist distinction and containment in
focus fields or layers will hearten a generative place of creative knowledge construction. (p. 7)

While in the liminal spaces of lived experiences while dancing, teachers and students may also unfold a mindful, dynamic currere of movement, literally and metaphorically, constantly in motion, stretching, flexing, and exploring all that the body, mind, emotions and spirit may discover. In the fluid and malleable liminal spaces of dancing, we may discover the dissolution of order and create a new dynamic order in which we give ourselves permission to linger in thresholds that enable new modes of being and new customs to be established in our school institutions.

Figure 139.

Dancing with my friends
Chapter 5.
Returning Again and Again to the Dancing Body

Figure 140.
Restoring the body
In the early morning as I start my day, I consciously give thanks for all that I am. These moments of gratitude include physically reconnecting to myself through a series of Tibetan yogic rites and Hanova stretches that I perform every day without fail. Through dancing and moving in these moments I remind myself that I am a physical body, which needs movement, care, consideration and compassion. As La Mothe (2008) shares, “We are bodies. Our bodies are movement. The movement that we are making is us” (p. 44).

Ignoring the body and viewing the body as something that needs to be brought under our control as we perform our daily tasks may happen so easily. I am a person who is invigorated by movement and in love with the dance but I can also succumb to forgetting to nurture my body in the seemingly endless demands and responsibilities I face in my day. I must remind myself to return again and again to what I know to be restorative. I must rediscover daily my connections to what I call divine immanence. This life force, the spark of vitality that pervades and flows in all that is alive is especially present for me in my quiet morning moments. As I kneel and stretch backwards, with my arms over my head, and then allow my arms to slowly fall to my sides, I feel this divine immanence stir within my chest. By opening my arms wider as if in a submissive embrace, I feel the dance move in me. I am reigniting the spark of my animation and am reminding myself of the sacredness of my body.

In my investigation of the lived experiences of bodily perceptions generated while dancing, I have experienced a renewed appreciation for the restorative unity, which may be experienced through dancing. As long as I return again and again, as Ginsberg (1954) so beautifully expresses, to the body of my birth, seeking out this animation and conduit to my vitality, I know I may be continuously revitalized.

Each time I return to the body of my birth, I am celebrating being alive and being in the world. Creating these moments of reconnection every morning enable me to keep at the forefront of my awareness the knowledge that I live in an intersubjective world. (Bai & Cohen (2008); Bai, Scott & Donald (2010) An intersubjective world, where all things are interconnected in some way and therefore all my actions and experiences will potentially affect others and my environment. My daily morning ritual reinforces that as I go out into the world and particularly to teach, I must endeavour to be a positive force and act in ways that meet the needs of the children in my class. Through working on this
dissertation, the restorative possibilities inherent within the dance have been strongly reiterated and I have become recommitted to share this knowledge with the children in my class on a daily basis.

Conducting research into the child’s world of dance in the school setting, with an emphasis on the lived experiences of this dancing as revealing possible spiritual connections and perceptions has also led me to reflect deeply on how I am positioning spirituality in my educational practice. To teach holistically, meaning addressing and including all aspects of a person, spirituality must also hold a place and a presence in the classroom. Snowber’s (2007) definition of spirituality, “as the place one can make connections to the inner life, the other, the natural world, to the numinous, but most of all to ourselves” (p. 1450) anchors me to the possibilities and purpose of an inclusion of spirituality in the workings of my daily classroom interactions. I recognize that dancing in my classroom has opened up many opportunities for connections of the spirit to happen. Through these gratifying dance experiences I fostered closer connections to myself and to my students as we opened to one another and came to know each other through our dancing bodies.

What has previously held me back from ‘becoming’ a more open and embodied teacher? On reflection, fear and indoctrination. Old fears from my childhood that told me there was safety in conforming. Fear of the school board, what the principal might say, what other teachers think, fear of not getting to all of the curriculum if we spent too much time on dancing and artful playing. All of these things! I have been indoctrinated all of my life through institutions as to how a teacher should look, speak and behave.

This year, I have come to a realization that the school board and principal are far too busy to worry about students dancing too much, and probably wish they were the ones dancing instead of sitting in another meeting. Constructed evaluations, letter grades, and conforming to a curriculum and timeline for units, may all have their place in a teacher’s need for order, but I intuitively know that these things don’t actually have a lot to do with children’s learning about life or encouraging a sense of wonder about the world.

In discussing fear in educational institutions on the part of teachers and students, Palmer (1998) responds to the question, “How can we move beyond the fear that
destroys connectedness? (p. 58). He says, “By reclaiming the connectedness that takes fear away” (p. 58). Palmer (1998) adds, “I realize the circularity of my case—but that is precisely how the spiritual life moves, in circles that have no beginning or end... The only question is whether we choose to stand outside the circle or within it” (p. 58). Through this year of research I have finally come to face and address old fears and to throw off old anxieties. I am reclaiming my connectedness. I have tried to focus on what is really important in my classroom, which is fostering relationships, interactions, and activities that help children progress in their social, emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual capacities through doing, moving and dancing. I reciprocally have enjoyed every moment as a learner as I immersed myself in my teaching, taking the time to enjoy each and every child as an individual.

Fear is a complex emotion and not easily or permanently banished. Am I still that little girl who was afraid to dance in front of strangers? Am I still that little girl who was afraid to reveal her true self in the fear that she wouldn’t be liked by anyone? The little girl I once was, the one who would shrink back and retreat from embracing life to the fullest because of her shyness and feelings of uncertainty has finally danced herself into release and transformation.

As Snowber and Weibe, (2009) share so poignantly:

When we go into tender places within ourselves, we break open to the page, where blood is transformed to ink. Here the sinews, tendons, flesh of our flesh are formed in language, which is resonant with bone reality. It is not the text which is distant, or the body that is distant, but the embodied self which has the capacity to heave, breathe, sigh, contract and release into all the magnificent and painful ways of being human in this world. We break open our humanness into each other. And in the breaking we invite in the space for transformation. (p. 10)
My thoughts keep returning to the Hanova School and how the Hanova sisters enabled me to reframe my ideas about myself. They inspired me to leave behind fear and anxiety and see myself as a dancer. The Hanova School was my refuge and place of safety for most of my young life. It was at this dance school that I felt all the parts of myself unite for the first time and I awakened to my creative potential.

As I think about all of the encouragement I received in my dance classes with the Hanova sisters and the positive changes their support produced in me, I have a moment of recognition. The remarkable feelings of vitality and spiritual connection I experienced through dancing at the Hanova School enabled me to blossom in terms of greater self-esteem, self-acceptance, and security in relationship with others. This emergence of new feelings matters because being instilled with this confidence I was inspired to go forward and create my own positive vision of life. The dance I learned at the Hanova school showed me the presence of ‘something more’. I really shouldn’t be surprised then that the reason I value dancing so much as a teacher is that I have witnessed, experienced, and felt its power to foster inspirational feelings all of my life.
Encouragement, engagement, and positive mutual regard were all qualities modeled by the Hanova sisters. Qualities, I realize that are indispensable and intimately interconnected to healthy and effective teaching and learning. I enjoy this moment of synchronicity as I pause and remember, and trace my understanding of effective and powerful mentorship back to the modeling I witnessed by Gertrud and Magda Hanova.

The Hanova sisters were such strong and effective teachers and mentors because they cared so deeply about what they were teaching and were totally immersed and engaged with all that surrounded the dance. They transmitted this engagement and they were closely connected to their students through a mutual regard and love for the dance. The Hanova sisters inspired their students to work hard and their students relished the discipline as the outcomes were so rewarding. Palmer (1998) relates his deep understanding of mentorship when he shares that:

Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance and one of teaching’s great rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiralling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn. (p. 25)

I have been a teacher for almost twenty-three years and it seems as if I am only now allowing myself to be the embodied teacher I truly wish to be. A teacher, who is present, spontaneous, willing to be vulnerable and playful with her class each day. A teacher, who embraces teachable moments as they arrive and tries to be a mentor who has the “capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling their impact on our lives” (Palmer, 1998, p. 21). As I read the written expressions that were recorded by the children in their journals, that spoke of their feelings of vitality and engagement generated through our dancing, I marvelled that the themes of learning that recurred in my research, echoed those I had enjoyed at the Hanova School. The wonderful, magical feelings that the dance produces appear to remain a constant.

This year in my classroom I tried a different dance. For this research year, I gave myself permission to expand, reach out, take time, try new steps, tempos, rhythms, to shake up how I did things, and just ponder and reflect. Through dancing I invited my students to get to know me and me to know them through our moving bodies. As we
choreographed together I became more transparent, vulnerable, and not surprisingly I gained more courage to keep going and just let things unfold as they would. I learned to try not to control outcomes.

I note that the recurring themes that manifested from the dance activities all hold the potential for transformation or what we might consider as restoration to the child within us. I witnessed the children transition and transform as risk takers and develop more confidence, find security and acceptance, discover their creativity and perceptions of vitality and animation, and as learners become engaged and deeply immersed in the dance activities. I also experienced transformation as an educator as I allowed myself to let go of preconceived ideas of how teaching and learning should occur in a classroom. “And as educators, this is what we are after: the transformative possibilities of growth. It takes courage and daring, risk that calls one to jump off the page, jump out of our hearts and tell the authentic story of our lives” (Snowber and Wiebe, 2009, p. 10).

Being your authentic self while constantly transforming along with your class into a better you is important: the world is rapidly changing around us and becoming an ever increasing complexity of technology which enable increasing modes of self-absorption and disconnect. Educators must be beacons and models reflecting the important human qualities we want our students to retain. Human qualities that speak of our spirituality and the sacred selves that reside in our bodies.
Finding Our Own Movement Voices

Figure 142.
Magda on the Bombay beach with dance students 1940’s

Dance classes for children should be about making connections between the personal and the social, developing imagination, bodily perceptions and sensual ability, finding their own movement voices, becoming empowered as choreographers which in turn leads them to seeing themselves as artists and creators in the world. (paraphrased from Barbour, 2011, p. 119)
I attend thoughtfully to a room of dancing, vivacious, energetic, active, loud, and boisterous students. They are engaged in solving movement problems. Dancing moments unfold and when I am struck by a specific motion, a line of the body, or the way two or three people seem to breathtakingly flow together so magically to show a brilliant solution to the movement problem, I ask the class to pause and freeze. On cue the students have learned how stop to a voice cue, drumbeat, or a handclap. Then together we watch the student or students repeat the movement that has grabbed my attention. In this pause, insights and meaning are explored through teacher and student comments and questions. For example, I might say, “Please, let's stop a moment, I've just seen something remarkable.” I point to a girl. “Would you mind showing everyone that last movement again” Then I might ask the class, “What did you notice?” How did she explore the concept or idea that was different?” “What did you learn?” “What did you see that you might like to try?” “How could we fit this beautiful bit of choreography into our larger piece?” “How did her body movement show you in a way that words could not explain what she was feeling?” “What did her dancing body reveal to you?” Time is then required to listen carefully and reflect on the answers and further comments that are prompted through the individual perspectives the students share. Then the students take these insights and merge them with their dancing and learning. In this way they are finding their own movement voices.

The teaching vehicle of performative inquiry enabled fleeting moments of marvellous dance to be highlighted and explored, pedagogical moments which otherwise might have slipped away unnoticed. Through performative inquiry the students' movement voices were recognized and celebrated. Utilizing performative inquiry, I became an interpreter and reflector of the student's growth and specialness as dancers. The dance curriculum transformed and became enlivened and something shared.

Utilizing performative inquiry in my dance classroom had implications for how I was viewing other areas of the curriculum and who I was as a teacher. I began to see curriculum differently. Through my work with phenomenology and performative inquiry, I recognized that curriculum should be more a vehicle in which children can discover their own ideas, voices, and reflections about their lives. Curriculum should be a beginning source of stimulation about a subject area.

Through the two lenses of phenomenology and performative inquiry I was able to look afresh at the job of coordinating daily classroom interaction and learning. I came to a realization that individual moments needed more recognition. I learned to pause and
let important activities or discussions flow until insights were fully explored. I became more flexible with the time it might take to complete a dance project, art, or math exploration that mattered to the children. When I saw that the children were really engaged with their work, I let them continue and I didn’t worry if we didn’t get to everything on our timetable that day.

Overall, the significance of dance for teaching and learning, which was revealed in the children’s movement voices through their phenomenological written expressions and which drew on performative inquiry to focus on important moments of learning, showed that the dance was a vehicle which enabled the children to: learn to take healthy risks; develop more confidence; gain emotions of acceptance and security; experience feelings that were of a vital, deep, or moving nature; develop their creative abilities; and experience a deep engagement with their learning. The phenomenological written expressions of the children’s experiences also confirmed that dance is an inclusive activity and that dance may address the uniqueness and diversity of each student in the development of their personal strengths and talents in such a way as to foster their social skills, emotional and spiritual health, physical well being and enable an ability to make connections between all of these faculties. The dance activities in my classroom were also instrumental in creating a strong feeling of community. As one girl shared:

I create dancing movements by the beat of the music. It has to go with my attitude. It has to be fun. Every teammate has to like it and teamwork. The ideas come from everyone’s imagination. If someone gets an idea, I add my idea and someone else adds an idea and it goes on. If it doesn’t work out we just change it. My body tells me how to move. When I move, my body boosts my energy.

In my classroom research, the significance of dance for teaching and learning additionally revealed that the dance is an effective vehicle to inspire and animate students in artistic practices through caring mentorship. Snowber (2005) explores the role of the mentor, “as an act of deep listening in the way an artist must also listen in the creative process” (p. 1). Snowber (2005) illuminates the mentor as a guide attuned to the student’s needs and sharing in the student’s discovery of knowledge and passion. As mentor, I endeavoured to embody the dance for my students and model a discovery of the ‘voice of my body’. Vigier (1994) speaks of the power of the, "voice of the body"--a "voice inside the flesh" that is beyond interpretation, "that is simply the body speaking"
(p. 236). Further, Vigier (1994) underscores the importance of finding ways to give voice to this, "place of subtle and silent speech" (p. 236). So perhaps most importantly, my research has revealed the significance of dance for teaching and learning as something that should be practiced not only in the confines of music or physical education classes but throughout the curriculum and as part of the daily learning taking place in the classroom. The voices of children’s bodies have the potential to be released through the dance in the school in all areas of learning. This significance underscores the recognition of the dancing body as a powerful teaching vehicle. In this research, I confirmed that the dancing body is a key medium for the investigation of ways of knowing and learning through the senses and a way that teachers and learners may come to know one another in deeper and more embodied ways. (See Bresler (2004, 2007); O’Loughlin (2006); Latta (2003); Csordas (1999, 2002)

In full embodiment, one experiences lightness and radiance of being. For instance, walking is a joy, for one experiences the uplifting energy pulling oneself upright towards the sky, and downward pulling energy that securely holds one to the ground. Poised delicately between these two pulls, one experiences the miracle of standing upright, and of moving, balanced and resilient. (Bai, Scott Donald, 2010, p. 6)

Figure 143.
Karen Hanova Studio 1973
Informing Education Through a Pedagogy of Dance

Figure 14.

Hanova Summer School Okanagan 1970

“…Laban insists that we appreciate and respect the art of the dancer, because in his conception the dancer is someone who can understand and celebrate the world through the way they move within it. (McCaw, 2011, p. 1)
This study may inform education in that this work is a creative and interpretative
dance in which I invited my reader to be my partner as we danced through the pages
together to reveal new possibilities for pedagogy. Van Manen (1990) states, "Pedagogy
is not something that can be "had," "possessed," in the way that we can say that a
person "has" or "possesses" a set of specific skills or performative competencies.
Rather, pedagogy is something that a parent or teacher must redeem, retrieve, regain,
recapture in the sense of a recalling" (p. 149).

Hence, each teacher’s vision and practice of pedagogy is never static but is a
changing, growing entity as the educator learns to choreograph new ways of creating a
happy, balanced, and productive classroom community. The educator’s changing
passions, likes, and dislikes, and learning will be reflected in their pedagogy.

As a dancer, I include dance experiences in my classroom because dance is part
of who I am. Dancing is a way I can allow spirit to enter into my teaching. Moving the
body in dance will lead to healthier and happier children, refresh their souls, spirits and
emotions, and create connections to themselves, others, and the environment. The
dance will fulfill the natural need to move and be a general good for children. For those
educators who are not dancers, and who view teaching dance as a formidable task, a
role of this research, in some part, I hope has been to simply encourage dancing. I have
endeavoured to create openings and invitations to come and enjoy the dance through
the different perspectives and stories I shared which uncovered the dance as accessible
to all and inherently part of every person’s life.

Utilizing a pedagogy of dance in classrooms will have implications for the
curriculum. Curriculum will become more body centered, interactive, vital, and in motion.
A pedagogy of dance will encourage curriculum to be reflective of our bodily perceptions
and will hold opportunities for the formation of knowledge to be informed through
kinaesthetic and tactile modes. A pedagogy of dance highlights the importance of the
body for education and encourages curriculum to slow down to allow students to dwell in
moments of learning.

Importantly, employing a pedagogy of dance in classrooms highlights honouring
the body. The teacher who is moving her body every day with her students, being in
touch with her own body to foster personal self-expression and the joy of moving, and utilizing movement as vital for learning, creates a classroom environment which encourages honouring the body. Honouring the body through a pedagogy of dance recognizes the human being as a spiritual entity and brings the spirit into classroom teaching.

Arts and Music Educator Liora Bresler (2004) importantly expands on the role of dance education when she states, “In a submissive school choreography we note children holding themselves with head bowed, shoulders up, shuffling steps. A different choreography expands, lengthens, opens up. The physical, the cognitive, and the expressive are intertwined. Dance/drama afford fields for bodily action that exercise and expand cognitive and affective capacities” (p. 148). This year, I had the privilege to witness my students and myself make meaning together, connect to our spirits, and create a choreography of joy and aliveness through our dancing.

Finally, this research informs education by pointing to dance, as providing, “unique opportunities to experience and create knowledge unavailable in other forms” (Foster, 2009, p. 91). Dance teachers encourage an environment that values learning with the body.

There is much to learn from the body, and not just dance either. The physicality of our selves is basic to everything we do, yet it is one of the most neglected aspects of our upbringing and education, which often serve to trap the reflexes and cauterize the instincts. (Vigier, 1994, p. 10)

Drawing on performative inquiry as a research vehicle was a way to explore and recognize moments of learning through performance, action, and interplay between myself as the researcher and the participants. Performative inquiry provided insightful stops, action sites of learning, and most importantly, performative inquiry encouraged listening and reflection and inspired me to ponder what really matters in the midst of the busyness of classroom life. Informed by phenomenology, I conducted research in my classroom in which the children recorded their responses to their experiences of dancing. Interpreting the children’s textual material, I shared the essences of these responses, which manifested as the themes of risk and confidence, security and acceptance, creativity, expression of lived bodily perceptions with an emphasis on animation and vitality, and engagement and learning. Through contemplating these
themes we may see the rich learning possibilities inherent within dance activities and within our lives.

And we continue because our pedagogy is about connection and teaching with vitality, rather than obsessing over how we are meeting the accountability goals of the latest educational reform. More importantly, woven within this public professing are our inner confessings… (Snowber and Wiebe, 2009, p. 3)
Uncovering the Essence of What Animates Us Beneath The Dance: Investigating the Lived Experiences of Bodily Perceptions Generated While Dancing

Cherishing the fragments
Little stories go into
The bigger story
The one we all weave together
Of absolute complexity and paradox
(Snowber, 2009, p. 130)

Figure 14.5.

Judy Philippo Karen (Wenn) Kurnaedey 1968 Stanley Park Forest
This dissertation has been a means of understanding, unraveling, and honoring all that I have received from the art of dance. The initial hope of this dissertation was to uncover the essence of what animates us beneath the dance by investigating the lived experiences of bodily perceptions generated while dancing but so much more has been revealed to me. While presenting the diverse perspectives of lived dance experiences, I have discovered in the liminal spaces, the subtle thresholds where one is transitioning between one dance movement to another, the wisdom of learning to be awake in my body, to be present, to tend to experiences, so that I might learn and articulate what matters and why – this has been the journey of this teacher inquiry; a doctoral voyage.

These research offerings involved reflecting on myself as a child, a dance student, and dance teacher and with these reflections came memories, some painful, some poignant, but all important in understanding in deeper ways my dancing and teaching self. There has been circularity to my life, as I traced my journey from sensitive childhood, to mentored and confident dance student, and now to having become mentor and teacher reflecting the richness of dance experiences for children. These reflections have prompted important changes but also significant learning and transformation, and in my reflective stance, point continuously to a return to my body to rediscover what I have to offer myself, and others in the dance. I reflect that transformation is an ongoing endeavour and there will always be room for new discoveries and new learning. As I ponder the insights I gained which show the pedagogical value of dance for everyone, I must celebrate my learning and the value of embodied dance experiences of all kinds.

In each chapter of this dissertation, I endeavoured to uncover aspects of the essence of what animates us beneath the dance and to emphasize the importance of this animation. Presenting these perspectives has hopefully led to a clearer and broader view of this animation, which the dance appears to generate from a place of divine immanence. In the first pages of my dissertation, I introduced the significance of a ‘return to the dancing body’ and an honouring of the divinity of the dance in each person.

In chapter one, I metaphorically delved into the dancing body to share my inspiration and longing. The ideas written by phenomenological philosophers, modern dancers, modern dance choreographers, dance historians, dance educators, and somatic movement dance educators substantiated and explored the presence of a
spiritual animation which emanates from the dancing body in perceptions of vitality, vigour, and numinous engagement.

In my second chapter, I reflected on the dancing body and related my personal dance story in order to document my personal experiences. I linked chapter one, which provided the philosophical underpinnings or support for an understanding of the animation that is generated by the dance, to my personal experiences of dancing. In this chapter I unfolded how the dance, has held a precious place in my life and manifested as deep and powerful feelings, creative urges, and spiritual connections, which have inspired and allowed for a vital and lively animation of my person.

In my third chapter, I highlighted the lives of my dance mentors, Magda and Gertrud Hanova. In sharing this perspective, a unique look at ballet, Indian dance, and modern dance history was revealed. The Hanova sisters’ story needed to be told in order for the reader to understand how I was guided by their teaching to an awareness of ‘divine immanence’ and so that their philosophy of dance, which centered on each of their students finding their own personal access to their creativity, inner self and expression, would not be lost. The dance was their life and joy and their lives stand as a welcoming invitation to experience the dance in all its wonderful capacities.

It is also important to note that this chapter of my dissertation is of significant historical importance for dance history to Vancouver. Although Vancouver has had many dance schools, there was none like the Hanova School. The Hanova sisters’ taught hundreds of dance students in Vancouver between 1957 and 1997. The dance the Hanova sisters taught emanated from the recognition that human beings are sacred vessels. Sacred vessels which when dancing release perceptions of vitality, joy and a sense of renewal. The Hanova sisters focused on accessing and addressing their dance students’ yearning to discover themselves and so their school provided a place to celebrate being a community of dancers which recognized the dance as holy. The Hanova sisters’ life experiences were unique and have much to contribute to an understanding of how dance has evolved in the last century but also maybe more importantly their life experiences uniquely illuminate an understanding of the essence of what animates us beneath the dance.
In chapter four, I listened to the voices of the dancing body and drew on performative inquiry as a vehicle to highlight the children’s and my own learning from our dancing experiences and performances. Informed by phenomenology, I presented textual reflections, which illuminated the children’s dancing experiences. I interpreted these textual responses in an endeavour to uncover another perspective of the ‘essence’ of what animates us beneath the dance. As part of my research reflection, I looked at the aspects or themes that emerged from my research and I explored the significance of these themes. I examined what I learned from being immersed in this classroom research to reveal a personal ‘pedagogy of dance’.

In chapter five, I stressed the need to return again and again to the dancing body in order to experience revitalization and renewal. I shared how I experienced transformation and new learning as an educator through this dissertational work and how this research has expanded my potential for teaching dance in all areas of the curriculum. I explored how important finding our own movement voices is for teaching and learning and how this study may inform education.

My aim was to record and reveal the voices of the lived body and perceptual experiences while dancing to impart a philosophy of the essence of the dancing body and to reflect on the nature and significance of these experiences in, “a hitherto unseen way” (van Manen, 1990, p. 39). Through illuminating dance experiences, I endeavored to investigate and clarify the possibilities and accessibility of a ‘return to the authentic body of my birth’. But most of all, I wanted to leave a love letter to the dancing body, through dancing with the text, and within the text, so that those that read my work will gain some understanding of the deep importance of the dance for humanity. As Pina Bausch so passionately warns us, “Dance, dance, or we are lost.” (Wenders, 2011)

In relating my journey on this doctoral voyage, I want to reinforce the notions that artful dancing may broaden our concepts and connections to our selves and allow an understanding of our place amongst other human beings. We are interconnected in the dance and the purpose of dance is as Sheets-Johnstone (1984) so lyrically states, “...to clarify and deepen our understanding of how it is the human body dances the world.” (p. 134) In revealing the voices of the dancing body and the perceptual experiences generated while dancing I am introducing a possible pedagogy of dance in which the possibilities of coming to know one another as teacher and student may come into being.
in deeper and more meaningful ways. One aspect of this pedagogy is about illuminating aspects of the dance that may invite other educators to ponder how they may dance their world so that their pedagogy ‘meets the needs of children’. (van Manen, 1990, p. 158)

We need to remember, as dance educator and writer LaMothe (2008) importantly stresses in her personal philosophy of bodily becoming, “Knowledge is a sensory awareness of ourselves as bodies whose movement is making us. It is a sensory awareness that forms the basis for a vision of life …” (p. 44). We must therefore continue to strive to encourage our educational institutions to honour the body, movement, and the sacred vitality of the dance.

My body has called me to a return. In this return I rediscover the self of my flesh, tender and vulnerable, strong and resilient. As I return again and again to my dancing body, the heady feelings of new love emerge each time. I am swept up in connection and bliss. In falling in love over and over with the dance, I understand that I have been chosen, as all others are chosen, to honour our divinity with dancing.

Figure 146.
Returning to the Dancing Body
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Appendices
Appendix A.

Permission Forms

S.D. #43 Coquitlam

Parental Permission Form

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Karen Kurnaedy and I am a teacher at Eagle Ridge Elementary School in Coquitlam. I am a doctoral candidate at Simon Fraser University and am conducting a study on the beliefs; feelings and attitudes students have about dance for my doctoral thesis.

Participation in the study is voluntary and no names of individual students will be used. All of the information collected for the study will be kept strictly confidential and only used for the purposes of the study. No students will be penalized if they choose not to participate in the study and, or choose to drop out. The dancing and writing we will be doing is part of the everyday curriculum and I am asking all students to participate in it, whether or not they agree to be part of the study.

In order to use the data collected, which will be in the form of student’s journal writings or statements, parents must be informed about a study and give their permission in writing. I believe that the study will provide valuable information for educators and will help in an ongoing effort to improve the quality of education for your children. Therefore, I want to encourage you to allow your child to participate.

If you do give your consent, please sign below and return it to your child’s teacher. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to email me at kkurnaedy@sd43.bc.ca or kkurnaed@sfu.ca.
This research study is supervised by my supervisor, Dr. Celeste Snowber. If you have any questions about the research, you can contact Dr. Snowber at celeste@sfu.ca. This project has been approved by the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics. Ethics Officer, Barb Ralph can answer any questions about the rights of your child as a volunteer participant or any complaints about this project. She can be reached at:

Office of Research Ethics  
Simon Fraser University  
Phone 778 782 3447

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,  
Karen Kurnaedy  
PhD Candidate  
Simon Fraser University

*Please Sign and Return to Karen Kurnaedy*

I give permission for my child(ren),  

__________________________________________________________

to participate in the study administered by Karen Kurnaedy for her doctoral thesis.  
Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

Signature(s):___________________________________________________

Daytime Telephone: (______) _________________________________

Today’s Date:_________________________________________________
Dear Student,

In order for your thoughts and ideas to be included in this study on dance I need your assent or agreement to participate. Participation is strictly voluntary and if you do not wish to be included this is your right. Please indicate below if you agree that I may use your words in my study. Your name will not appear in this study.

I wish to participate. ________________________________

I do not wish to participate. ________________________________