Dancing into Voice:
Articulating and Engaging Embodied Knowledge

by
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B.A., York University, 1986

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Abstract

As a phenomenological investigation, this thesis takes the reader on a journey of wandering in search of voice. My research is informed by my struggles transferring embodied knowledge to the written page. Through performative inquiry and recognizing embodied ways of knowing, I explore avenues that entice knowledge from my body, cultivate knowledge with my body, and express knowledge through my body. My wanderings unearth ways of being that are present, receptive, perceptive, and relational, revealing and creating pathways leading towards a figurative form of voice that nourishes self-understanding, while accessing a literal form of voice that can be represented in written and spoken articulation. Through a pedagogy of noticing and of reciprocal engagement, attention is paid to my own journey into literal and figurative voice with the intent of facilitating similar enabling circumstances for others.

Keywords: embodied knowledge and writing; performative inquiry; arts education; finding voice; phenomenology; dance education
To my husband and best friend, Ted.
My words could never have filled the pages without your love and support.
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Through the Blur

Note. Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.

I know it’s there, bubbling under the surface of my skin, living in my core. Unattainable without deep focus and attention, it moves through my limbs, surfaces briefly then returns to the depths of my body. As I reach through the blur, I search for glimpses of sunlight that will illuminate this undeniable presence that is substantial and wise. I can almost touch these fibres and am driven to find ways to entice the intangible to clarity. And as body, mind and soul merge, so does that elusive essence; an essence that presents itself in the form of interconnected understandings, intuitive presence and a distinctive, enlightened voice. This is my journey - and I invite you along as my companion as we sway, dip, and curve on pathways of dancing into voice...
Chapter 1.

My Pathways

The blank page awaits. It almost makes me laugh to look at the white surface. I have been waiting so long to write something for my thesis and here is this blank slate staring at me, the curser pulsing as if alive and breathing, waiting patiently for my fingers to hit the keys. The screen is so full of potential and in attending to the possibilities, I recognize the blank page as a metaphor for life itself. Life/thesis waiting to unfold - What stories will be told? What will be left behind? Will my life/thesis leave any lasting effect on anyone? And with these considerations, I have come to realize that this union of life and thesis goes even beyond metaphorical meaning. My life and my thesis are inseparable. One informs the other, an intertwining of knowledge and experience, of personal and professional insights, of tangible and intangible wisdom. Through my thesis journey I have uncovered an exceptional relationship with the ‘stops’ of performative inquiry and the living and writing relationships of phenomenology. These are not only research relationships – they relate to the way I live, and are ways of being in the world - and these ways of being invite inquiries that demand my daily presence and attention. By being open and sensitive, I am able to meet ‘stops’ that led to reflections, and in turn, inform who I am. And as I dance into voice, noticing and reflecting become my partners, my facilitators. When I spin and reach and drop, they are there to catch me, to help me find my balance, and send me on my way again. They mirror and shadow my understandings and questions, and provide a scaffolding for the elusive to emerge. By living and dancing and stopping and reflecting, I have found pathways into writing. My body holds intangible wisdoms, and through an artistic sensibility of noticing and living deeply into my inquiries, I am able to claim these wisdoms, call them to presence, and dance them into voice.

Finding My Way

Right hand swoops open and inwards toward my heart as I slightly contract...
palm of left hand slides up from belly to sternum as I release the contraction and shift forward
left hand opens in offering...
Knowledge lives in my body. This knowledge resides internally, intrinsically, within, and can be elusive to verbal and written language. My internal knowings are a layering of academic and artistic studies, performance history, decades of teaching involvement, and daily lived experiences.

My intent is to bring this swirling body of knowledge to the surface of a page so my understandings, connections, intuitions, can be more clearly understood by myself and others. Through this process I invite the reader along with me on my journey of finding voice, both literally and figuratively. My journey of surfacing is one that acknowledges non-linguistic wisdoms residing in my body, wisdoms that can be non-linear and intuitive, and grounded in over 25 years of practical experience teaching dance to children. As I sit at the computer, I allow my body to dance, knowing that I must listen to my moving body with all my senses in order to come to a place where my knowledge can take the form of written articulation. I propose that dancing informs my writing by bringing concrete form to my thoughts, and for me, the more concrete the form, the stronger my voice. As I search for words, my body moves, and as my body moves I take note of it. It is this ‘doing’ and ‘noticing’ that opens my awareness, which in turn provides me with a different mode of accessing verbal language to express my thoughts.

I believe, as Michael Polanyi (1967) describes, “we can know more than we can tell” (p. 4). I have deep embodied knowledge that is growing and meshing into a pedagogy of sensing, searching, and inviting reciprocity. I am discovering a relational way of being that includes leading, following and meeting - yet as I know this, I struggle to tell it. I feel, the compelling sense of responsibility to bring this knowledge to the surface (Polanyi, 1967), and in doing so...

*swirling, twirling, floating, landing
firmly planting, standing tall*
...this written form of representation will stabilize my ideas and experiences in a form that makes dialogue possible (Eisner E. W., 2002). I resonate with Celeste Snowber (2012), artist, writer, and educator who works in the field of embodiment, when she says, “Dance opens up to our breath, the tongue of language that is rooted in our bodies. When we write from our sweat, our words uncover knowing that we did not know” (p. 58). It is through moving that our bodily knowing can be transformed into words, and I know this relationship from first hand experience. When mindful attention is given to my moving body, words reveal themselves. And through the interplay of writing and moving, and moving and writing, I am able to gain a clearer understanding of myself.

Life experience and teaching experience filter through and unite with my educated knowledge of dance education. And what I thought was an intrinsic way of teaching is being revealed to me as a grounding in a way of being that is present and sensitive to the moment. Relational aspects are being revealed through patient persistence with my writing process- a process that also requires me to be present and sensitive. A rhythm of writing, researching, teaching and living evolves with my body in time and space. And with attention to energy and relationships within myself, with others, and with my environment I am able to recognize moments of opportunity to both articulate, deepen, and question my understandings.

There was a time when I thought that my words would spill effortlessly to the page when I was ‘ready’. And with my thesis timeline ticking I was patient but confident that my writing would happen. With various starts and stops as well as numerous deviations, slowly themes revealed themselves. First and foremost, the recurring theme of wandering became apparent. Initially I thought maybe I was just scattered in my interests and my writing, and that I needed to find one direction...

left hand, fingers straight, no air between fingers
slices in a direct line across the body to the right

...and stick to it. But wandering has become part of my method and is a part of how I live. My wanderings have allowed me to look phenomenologically at moments where joinings have occurred, moments where my presence was connected to others and to the surrounds, where my moving body became instrumental to my thinking, feeling, and
writing. The acts of enticing knowledge from the knowing body, expressing knowledge through the knowing body and cultivating knowledge within a dancing body became prominent landings. I write from an autobiographical narrative stance with phenomenological attentiveness and an artistic sensibility that connects the metaphor of wandering to deeper understandings. By allowing multiple pathways to emerge I am uncovering a pedagogy that welcomes the unknown as well as the known, the non-linear with the linear, and the intuitive, along with the concrete.

*arms come from behind then move up and over as if trying on a coat. torso floats while eyes follow an indirect gaze*

Although I circled a number of Arts-Based methods of inquiry and came to understand that one informs the other, my alignment with Max van Manen’s lifeworld phenomenology revealed my attraction to lived experiences along with my desire to unite my embodied wisdoms with the written word. Van Manen (1990) explains the methodology of phenomenology as follows:

The methodology of phenomenology is such that it posits an approach toward research that aims at being presuppositionless; in other words, this is a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project...Significantly, Heidegger talked about phenomenological reflection as following certain paths, “woodpaths,” towards a “clearing” where something could be shown, revealed, or clarified in its essential nature. However, the paths (methods) cannot be determined by fixed signposts. They need to be discovered or invented as a response to the question at hand... Indeed it has been said that the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method! (Gadamer, 1975; Rorty, 1979). (pp. 29-30)

In addition, van Manen recognizes an artistic sensibility within phenomenological inquiry. He goes on to state that, “the phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive” (p. 39). Through wandering and dancing, my attention is drawn to metaphor and meaning. And through this attentiveness, I am able to explore what it is I know and question, and thus come to a better understanding of my contribution to pedagogy and dance education. I share my insights with others through
text that is written with a sense of dance in mind. With attention to the rhythm and flow of words, the reader is invited to dance along side of me as my movements and thoughts and reflections intertwine and clarify into words. As if shifting locations on a stage, I shift font style as I my perspectives on my lived experiences reveal themselves.

In addition to the work of van Manen, my inquiries are also informed by the work of Celeste Snowber in the field of embodiment and writing from the body. By honouring the body as a site of knowledge and knowledge making, she fosters the connection of the body with the inner and outerworld, and rejoices in the relationships of dancing and speaking, and dancing and writing. The work of Lynn Fels and performative inquiry has influenced this thesis in the area of noticing stops that invite me to breathe into moments that speak back to me. “The “aha!” moments- what Lynn calls “moments of recognition” – that occur during or upon reflection following a performative inquiry, are pregnant moments of learning within a curricular context. This learning invites new questions, new perspectives, and new understandings” (Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p. 12).

I live, I teach, I dance,
I follow, I lead, I meet
I stop, I notice, I reflect
I move, I write, I breathe...

I am on a journey of finding voice, and in doing so feel the need to delve deeper into what exactly I am finding, and how the word ‘voice’ describes what I am reaching for. I understand the figurative notion of ‘voice’ to be the relationship of one’s thoughts, experiences and beliefs, alongside one’s philosophies, convictions, and understandings. The stronger the unity of such relationships, the fuller the state of self-understanding, or voice. And with this understanding comes the capacity to communicate with others and enter into dialogue in a literal form of voice that is either spoken or written. With deep listening, attention, and permission, I have found the union of my figurative form of voice and my literal form of voice through moving. My dancing body has the capacity to tap into and unite my voices, allowing for a deeper and wider understanding of myself and what I do through dance education.

Running parallel to this journey is my experience in creating environments within dance classes where students are supported in their own similar journeys of finding and
clarifying voice. I support early childhood dance educator, Adrienne Sansom (2009), when she says that dance can be “an embodied understanding of ourselves” (p.161) My question is how do we nurture these embodied understandings of ourselves, connect them with understandings of others and the world around us, and get this embodied knowledge to surface to a place where it can be more readily recognized? Further, how can we encourage embodied ways of knowing and why is this important?

In his book *Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardner (1983) suggests that “students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways” (p.11). He categorizes these “different ways” into nine intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, visual-spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, existential, and bodily-kinesthetic. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is further described as “having the ability to use one’s body in highly differentiated and skilled ways, for expressive as well as goal-directed purposes” (Gardner, 1983, p. 218). I would go further to say that not only is the body capable of being expressive, it is expressive.

As a trained dancer, I am extremely comfortable moving. Whether it be grand hand gestures while in conversation, or spins and stretches while dancing, I know my body possesses the capacity to communicate. I can speak through dance, but in addition, I have come to understand that my dancing can in turn speak back to me. In a school system that recognizes verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical skills as being essential, little recognition is given of other ways of knowing and communicating. Understandably, movement and dance in education do not have the strength of history as does reading, writing, math, and science. However, I propose that the language of the body is one that deserves greater recognition within the school system. This thesis shall address the issues of dance in education by questioning ‘What is dance?’ ‘What can we learn through dance?’, and ‘What should we really be teaching?’ I propose a pedagogy of dance education that while encompassing the whole child, also encourages alternative ways of understanding where embodied language is recognized, where knowledge can be both received and perceived somatically, and where pathways to voice can be found in the very movements and moments of leading, following and meeting.
Chapter 2.

Bringing Form to My Inquiry

In using phenomenological inquiry (van Manen), performative inquiry (Fels), and exploring dance as a form of inquiry (Snowber), I hope to take the reader along my pathways of bringing embodied voice to a language that is more universally understood. The primary purpose is to unveil possible pathways to voice so that others who embody knowledge and have deeply felt understandings may also find ways to develop voices that are too often silenced by both themselves and by others. My voice already lives in my body – it is non-linear, elusive, alive and somewhat hidden. My journey is one of bringing this voice to clarity by dancing it and, in turn coaxing it to the page.

I concur with Gretchen Wegner (2009) when she suggests that “we can literally think more effectively and imaginatively when we move our bodies” (p. 6). I have noticed that when I get stuck in a thought or while looking for words to describe something, although my vocal voice is silent, my body moves, speaking in a language that is expressive but often discounted. Having recognized my body speaking, I have become attentive and sensitive to its presence.

Rinehart (1998) stipulates that “the text should be able to convey the researcher’s bodily experience to the reader” (p. 562). And since my moving body has become a participant in my writing process, I have intentionally incorporated my body in my thesis writing, and in doing so have included descriptive details of my body’s speech in the text. As I listen and take note of my body, I also actively and purposefully engage my body in my writing. Natalie Goldberg (1986) states in her book *Writing Down the Bones*, “there is no separation between the mind and body; therefore, you can break through the mind barriers to writing through the physical act of writing” (p.50). I support her statement, however find the physical act can be encouraged to be much larger than fingers moving on a keyboard or page. Jana Milloy (2004) recognizes an embodied
sense of writing that includes the bones and the skin, the heart and the lungs, the cheek, the breast... My knowledge often presents itself in kinesthetic form where my movement is large and expressive – I dance in order for words to come out. As a trained dancer, I have a comfortable access to a wide movement vocabulary. Through inviting my kinesthetic sensibility to the writing process I am able to find avenues for a written formation to emerge, and this written formation...

*hands float, palms facing outward, moving close together and apart, each hand following its own pathway and level with continuous flowing movement...*

...allows me to organize, recognize, and reflect on my experiential knowings while connecting them to the wider academic community and adding to the dance in education knowledge base.

In order to write clearly and concisely, there are times when I need to move. During these times, only my body knows how to express my thoughts. My words come to a standstill, but my body moves. I have recognized “the visceral act of dancing the words (as) an ongoing invitation for the words to become flesh” (Snowber, 2004. p. 131). Sitting, bottom grounded to the chair, legs free to swing, cross, lift, stretch beneath me. Upper torso completely free to bend, stretch, twist and curve – arms, hands, torso, neck and head, available to help my words spill to the page. I move in order to bring verbal expression to my thoughts so I can more fully understand what I unveil. With patient attentiveness and a deep listening, I am able to notice my body hinting at words that are asking to be revealed. And as my dancing language becomes written language, I invite the reader to live into their own bodies as they enter my world of thoughts, knowledge and experiences. In this effort, as my movements become transferred into a more common form of language, I try not to leave my engaged body behind. I incorporate as much movement into my writing as possible by using words that evoke movement, and descriptions of the movements that brought forth words. My writing finds a rhythm both in terms of accessing words as well as a rhythmic flow throughout the text. In my attempt to bring my living, breathing, moving body to the page, I hope to inspire the reader to feel the rhythm, to mirror and shadow my journey, and to awaken their own moving inclinations while reading this thesis. With a backdrop of life experiences, the
writer and thesis engage in a duet, and once the pages are released it is with hope that a trio may be danced – that of writer, thesis, and reader.

As I explore my lifeworld, I have chosen to use different fonts to allow the reader to see the different experiences and perspectives I tap into. A normal font is used primarily throughout the thesis, as well as fonts to reflect an experiential voice, a personal reflection voice, as well as a moving body voice.

In questioning myself on how to bring the moving body to a flat page, I began to think of the reader as the audience. In doing that, I began to take note of what it is I do when I am in the audience watching (reading) dance. It is clearly apparent that we don’t watch dance from the left of the stage to the right, then immediately back to the left again, as we do in reading English language. Watching dance, the movement of the eyes is purely a subjective activity. The choreographer(s) and dancer(s) may have intentions on guiding the eyes to a particular area of the stage, but in the end, the viewers visually map the stage according to what is subjectively attentive to them. In bringing explanations of my movements to this thesis, I would encourage the reader to try to replicate my body language descriptions. This is the language that eventually brought words forth.

*Left hand scoops inward towards my mouth,*  
*then outwards towards my computer*

In addition, I place words on the page that encourage the eyes to move in a less typical fashion when reading. While writing in a mostly linear manner, at times the word patterns may be intentionally indirect, inviting the reader’s eyes to dance. By combining movement descriptions and patterning my words on the page, I encourage the reader to step out of the typeface and into their own bodies.
Read the following from an audience stance, watching the dance go by. Allow your eyes to wander. Move beyond the linear...

How being I to flat embodied do page? convey confined while a knowledge

(How do I convey embodied knowledge while being confined to a flat page?)

Roaming

Roads Already Travelled

Elbows bent, palms together, fingers pointing outward hands peel open, like opening a book.

In accordance, with the long-standing emphasis on subjectivity and personal lived experiences in phenomenological research, Elliot Eisner (2006) played a fundamental role in embracing the subjectivity of the researcher while recognizing and substantiating other modes of research, by initiating the first Arts-Based Research Institute in 1993. The aim of this Arts-Based Research Institute was “to develop an approach to the conduct of educational research that was rooted in the arts and that used aesthetically crafted forms to reveal aspects of practice that mattered educationally” (p.3). One of Eisner’s goals was to explore “alternative ways of knowing” and “methodological pluralism” (p.3). Instead of looking for data outside of one’s self, arts-based inquiry recognizes the researcher as a rich resource of information. Valerie J. Janesick (2011) emphasizes the fact that, in qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument and in being so must be fully situated in the work. This approach to inquiry posits experience as the grounding source of knowledge, and understandings can be garnered and established through examination of these experiences (Sheets-
Johnstone, 2009, p. 2). Driven by a quest for knowledge, the researcher not only studies his or her own experiences, but also situates these experiences and knowledge gleaned from them within the context of others doing similar research in the chosen field. By noticing and reflecting on one’s own lived experiences, the intent is to find connections between the personal and the universal.

*right palm facing inward, left palm pressed to the back of my right hand*

The researcher puts himself or herself in a relationship with others and it is through this relationship that a grounding takes place. Without this connection to the wider academic community, arts-based research becomes a personal exercise in reflection. As Nancy Fichtman Dana and Diane Yendol-Hoppey (2009) explain, inquiry is different from daily reflection in that “inquiry invites intentional, planned reflection, heightening your focus on problem posing” and “as teachers engage in the process of inquiry, their thinking and reflection are made public for discussion, sharing, debate, and purposeful educative conversation” (p. 12). Andra L. Cole and Gary Knowles (2008), add, “the central purposes of arts-informed research are to enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible” (p.59). Patricia Leavy (2009) adds, “the aim of these approaches is resonance, understanding, multiple meanings, dimensionality, and collaboration” (p.16).

I am grateful for the scholarship that comes before me where the personal voice and multiple ways of knowing are acknowledged, and alternative means of representation are embraced. As my wandering becomes part of my method and the rhythm of my writing follows trails that separate and weave together, I invite the reader to attend to daily inquiries that present themselves in the form of invitational pathways. As I take the reader on my journey I hope to inspire the reader to live more deeply in self-awareness - both in the world around us and in recognition of the body as a site to receive and perceive knowledge. I hope to inspire curiosity in noticing and attending to the...

*palms down, right hand over left, fingers relaxed and slightly apart. Hands slowly veer off in different directions.*
...paths that merge and emerge, and in turn, come to understand dance as a form of voice, dance as a form of expression and communication, and dance as a place where knowledge can be both understood and conveyed.

The Courage to Follow

Setting Afoot

My thesis plan started with the idea of writing 5 or 6 chapters based on the Elements of Dance and to illustrate that they can be both the act of doing and the act of being. I still support this idea, but somehow this predetermined structure has paralyzed my writing.

*palms facing each other, fingers slightly separated but not touching, palms slowly open apart*

With starts and stops, I have come to...

*hands float over keyboard*

...hover at a place where I understand that my thesis may have its own pathways and I have to let go of a predetermined route in order to write. As succinctly stated by Snowber (2009), “the artist must learn to serve the work, to hear where it is going and respect that it has a life of its own” (p. 4). And so with this in mind, I have allowed myself the time and space for my thoughts to meld and bubble under and up to the surface, for my thesis roots to be nurtured into bloom. I embark on my thesis writing not knowing exactly where it will take me or what I might find. I don’t know the shape it will take, but I trust that the process of writing will unearth intrinsic understandings that connect both my professional life and personal life, and bring my bodily knowledge to the page.

Where Others Have Gone

I have been sifting through literature on arts-informed inquiry, trying to find my methodology.

*hands together, rubbing knuckles*
The numerous methodologies overlap and can be confusing when trying to ascertain which ones will be most appropriate for my needs. And so this leads me to question why I feel so inclined to...

*palms press into edge of keyboard, then hands clasp together, palm pressing to palm, followed by a full arm and upper body stretch*

...position myself within a particular methodology? Why do I feel the need to label what I am doing?

I feel the need to situate myself within methodologies because I am looking to be understood. I need to know that what I am doing has value, and by connecting with a methodology, I become associated with researchers who understand my processes. In wanting to be understood I must first understand myself and search for methodologies that resonate with me and my work and provide opportunities to tap into and clarify my thoughts, approaches, and philosophies on life and dance. I need to really understand what I do and why I do it. I need to be able to connect what I know experientially with theoretical standpoints and, in doing so, bring what I know in my body, to the written page. It’s all in there – years of practical teaching and living history – and yet I have found it so difficult to articulate.

*Layers live in my body, sensitivities, intuitiveness, moments of presence advance and recede. Theory and practice dance in the depths of my body and I am enticing them to move through and with my torso and limbs, so the invisible becomes more visible, and the unsaid becomes revealed.*

It would appear two things are occurring here. First of all, there is a need to clarify thoughts and beliefs (understanding myself). Secondly, there is the need to situate myself (being understood by others). These two points are touchstones to my thesis. By arousing verbal-linguistic articulation, through the acts of searching, sensing and noticing while in movement, I am able to understand and question my thoughts from a perspective that is more linear in fashion and that allows me to look at my thoughts from a more critical standpoint – meaning, once the words have made themselves to the page, I am able to reflect and examine my understandings. The underpinning desire
being: to seek clarity of thought in order to share knowledge. This verbal-linguistic foundation entices a more explicit sensibility to weave connections together and become aware of the space that either has yet to be filled or gracefully will remain empty. The process of connecting body language with verbal language, both figuratively and literally, is an entry point to finding voice.

Stop.

Entry point:
What intersects at this passageway?
Who/what leads?
Who/what follows?
Is there a space to merge and enter in unison?

Secondly, the need to situate oneself is also connected with voice. Potgieter and Smit (2009) have this to say:

We believe that unless we manage to locate our academic space (including the research traditions and the theories that have granted us the space), we will not be able to express our scholarly identity, which takes many years of reading and understanding and practising the craft. We agree that voice comes from knowledge, from self-confidence, and from a compassion for our fields of inquiry and the participants who inhabit them. Thus to find voice, we postulate, is to find knowledge and understanding that is blended into our identity (Ivanic, 1997) and setting up new understandings that have the goodness of fit. (p. 216)

As literal and figurative voices mesh, I find the words ‘connected’ and ‘blended’ have textures I am gravitating towards. We live in this world in relation to others and our surroundings, as well as internal relations within ourselves. Questions: With an openness to invitation, and a willingness to engage in relationships, are we not connecting and creating blended experiences, distinct unto its participants? Are we not co-creating pathways that would not otherwise exist?

Passage Routes

As described by Max van Manen (1990), “Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience” (p. 9). And further, “the notion underlying this approach is that
interpretive phenomenological research and theorizing cannot be separated from the textual practice of writing” (p. ix). It is precisely this relationship between researching lived experience and writing that allows meaningful connections to emerge. My research invites my body to move with attention to the intention of articulating thoughts into words. Through writing, I am able coax perception into conception and draw insights that otherwise would remain as embodied knowing. It is through the process of phenomenological inquiry and narrative writing that sense-making is cultivated. Leavy (2009) extends this in saying, “narrative can be viewed as a frame through which people make sense of their lives” (p.27). And when considering autobiographical narrative, Freeman (2007) suggests “that autobiographical understanding is at the very heart of the narrative enterprise” (p. 141). In writing phenomenological narratives from an autobiographical standpoint, personal lived experiences provide openings for philosophical, theoretical and experiential connections.

In needing a form to unite my threads of practice while looking for openings to understandings and questions, performative inquiry presented an invitation.

Performative inquiry uses the frameworks, activities, and strategies of drama to research issues or to explore the relationships and interactions between individuals, communities, and their related environments. An inquiry can be a question, and event, a theme, a feeling, a fragment of poetry, or a phenomenon, explored through questions: What if? What matters? So what? Who cares? These questions are embodied in the action of inquiry and reconsidered upon reflection.

(Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p. 32)

I approach my lived and living experiences with curiosity and a sensitivity to moments that present themselves as ‘stops’. Influenced by the work of David Applebaum, Lynn Fels describes a stop as “a moment of listening” (Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p. 36). A stop is a moment that calls us to attention, invites new perspectives and reveals questions, understandings, and offers moments of learning. The stop moment happens for me when I am open to possibilities of intersecting pathways, where energies merge and metaphor speaks volumes. My living pathway is with me at all times and

Although this quote recognizes performative inquiry as being within the frameworks of drama, this study uses dance while attending to the openings, relationships, and stop moments that guide a performative inquiry through drama.
intersects with other pathways on a continual basis. These pathways can be internal, and they can present themselves in the form of experiences or relationships. A potential stop moment may present itself, but is only of significance if I am available to meet it. By engaging in a presence with my whole being, and breathing deeply into moments, I become open to meeting another pathway. With curiosity and courage these pathways have potential to merge and reveal moments of substance.

A moment of stop for a dancer means a moment when movement of the body parts find stillness. When I teach children, I remind them that when we are dancing and we stop our bodies, our internal energy continues to flow and be alive. It is this alive internal energy that makes movement in stillness ‘dance’. The dancing does not stop when the body parts stop. If this internal energy, or ‘magic’ (Stinson, 1988) is not a part of the stop, the body is no longer dancing - the body’s external parts are just motionless. A performative inquiry stop is also about a dynamic energy; the combined energy of two pathways merging in a dance of noticing, resulting in a co-creation of energy of insight, engaging in a reciprocal relationship of receptivity. The same can be said of my thesis journey into voice. The dynamic energy of my moving body meeting and unveiling words created a reciprocal relationship resulting in the emergence of a situated voice.
Stop...

feel the energy...

notice...
Searching for Openings

I have found metaphor to be the key to opening my understandings and reflection to be my...

*head turns to the right, as body slowly shifts to the left.*

...springboard for reflective understanding. My findings and associations return to what Fels and Beliveau (2008), along with Clandinin and Huber (in press), question, “So what?” “Who cares?” In keeping these questions...

*torso floats from side to side as arms open wide as if receiving and protecting*

...hovering alongside my inquiries I become more fully grounded in the questions, “What am I researching? Why am I researching? And to what will my research benefit?”

Through my experiences in the Arts Education program at Simon Fraser University, I became aware of “openings” and rediscovered a “wide-awareness” that invited me to more fully engage in my living and teaching (Greene, 1995). Being wide awake is to be conscious and aware, curious and alive in the world. Being awake in the world allows one to stand on the edge of being and...

*wait for,*

*look for,*

*recognize,*

*perceive,*  *create*

...openings. These openings allow for fresh perspectives, and new thought pathways, and are an invitation to step forward in curiosity, inquisition and reflection. These openings present themselves in everyday life. These openings can reflect back hidden or deeper understandings or can reach forward in offering an avenue for insight.

My experiences in living, teaching and performing inform my research and, provide the openings I need to access my thoughts on dance and its place in education. And in stepping
into,
out of,
over,
under, beside,
behind,
around, towards,
between,

these openings, I am guided towards meaning making and nurturing a space where my underlying voice can surface, connect, celebrate, and inform.

Dancer and arts-based research pioneer, Mary Beth Cancienne (2002) talks about “dancing the data”, where data is collected, then interpreted through dance so as to “...bring the text to life in ways that the reading of it could not” (p.7). She asks, “If thoughts and feelings were imagined through movement, what would they look like” (p.9)? Her approach to using dance as a representational form of data interpretation has its challenges in terms of communicating research clearly to the audience, but distinctly recognizes dance as opening additional perspectives and interpretations. Cancienne and Snowber (2009) suggest that “writing is essentially attention” (p. 210). So fundamentally, part of my method is paying attention to my body by listening to the data my body holds, and listening to the data my body receives. Rather than taking data that has been clearly laid out then interpreting it bodily, I am noticing movement, and in paying attention to this kinesthetic form of language, I am able to find my way into more interpretive data and into writing.

These challenges include responsibilities and obligations to the art form, performer, and audience, while at the same time respecting the responsibilities and obligations to the researcher and the research data.
As my body dances, so do my words on the page. Movement has a dimensionality, a rhythm and energy qualities. My challenge is to capture this essence and transform it into words. With attention and presence, I am able to weave metaphor, movement, theory, imagination, philosophy, words, images, experience, observations into significant meanings that hold potential to influence how the body in education is perceived while unveiling a pedagogy of noticing and of reciprocal engagement. As multiple harmonious relationships meld and surface...

*shifting from side to side,\nright hand over left, then left hand over right as if rolling a ball from one hand to the next*

...the interconnections of linear and nonlinear expression through movement becomes evident. I can access verbal articulation through noticing my body’s dancing expression, cultivate knowledge with my body through embodied inquiry, noticing, and being invitational to the reflections of stop moments, in addition to expressing knowledge through my body as an intentional form of communication. One speaks back to the other, informs the other, and transforms the other.
Hand-in-Hand with Performative Inquiry

What will I find?
What will find me?
What will I meet?

The Warm-up

Writing and merging my thoughts and experiences has not come easily for me. I had been given advice to 'just sit down and write', but, for me, I knew this was a path with too many barriers. I had tried to just ‘logically get it done’, but there was no flow, everything seemed too rigid, forced and inauthentic. I knew I had to look to other ways of enticing my thesis to life.

*left hand spins as if stirring a pot
then right hand starts from breastbone,
and reaches outwards as if smoothing a table cloth...*

In dance, the purpose of a warm-up is to get the muscles, bones and joints moving and the blood flowing, giving the body opportunities for gaining strength, flexibility and balance, and preparing to move without injury.

*Standing with feet hip width apart, feel your feet on the ground. Slowly roll down through each vertebra and allow your knees to relax as you curl towards the floor. Slowly roll up to standing again. Arms reach to the sides, feeling wide across the chest and back, as they continue to lift towards the ceiling, eventually clasping together. Turn palms to the ceiling and stretch entire body towards ceiling, allowing your heels to lift slightly. Gently lower your heels as you lower your arms. Lunge any direction with right leg as arms stretch any direction. Repeat multiple times, changing legs and changing directions. Add reaches while balancing, changing legs and directions. Return to standing and roll down once more as in the beginning. Reach arms wide to the side and upwards, clasping hands above head once more. Turn palms to the ceiling and stretch whole body one last time. Release stretch and allow arms to float down beside your body. Stand tall, breathe...*
I also understand that the dance warm up is not only about warming up the body but also about warming up comfort zones. It’s about bringing the mind and body into a state of presence, and with that being established, moving on to stretching comfort zones with an intention of growth.

I came to realize that in order to write, I must engage in a similar warm-up that parallels that of dance. I needed to cultivate a mind and body presence. I needed to get my thoughts, experiences, and questions moving in a way that strengthened my conviction in either taking a stance or pursuing the questions. I needed to open my mind to flexible thinking in terms of how to capture words to express my thoughts. I also needed to be flexible enough to allow myself to wander without preconceived ideas of where I was going. In addition, I needed to find a balance between linear and nonlinear ways of expressing my movements of thinking.

My warm-ups started with sensing my comfort zones and stretching them as I lived into solitary walks around Whistler, BC. I quickly came to realize that in order to warm up, I needed to get lost. And in getting lost, I was surely finding my footing.

Not all those who wander are lost.
(J.R.R. Tolkien)

My Metaphorical Journey while Searching for Lost Lake

I didn’t find Lost Lake in Whistler, British Columbia, but I certainly found plenty of metaphors along the way. For starters, the lake is called ‘Lost’, and remained lost to me and indeed I kind of got lost looking for it! Not lost in the sense of not knowing where I was, but lost in the fact that I didn’t find Lost Lake. Yes, I did have two maps, and I have prided myself on being able to successfully navigate on many, many driving trips I have had with my family. In fact, my husband and I even entered a car rally competition, (him as the driver, and I as the co-driver), and I managed to navigate us into the winning position! But with all that behind me, for some reason, these Lost Lake maps got the best of me. The funny thing is, even when I was walking along and checking my surroundings against the diagrams, I would swear I was on the correct path and was going in the right direction.
So why would I tell the reader about my blunders in the forest? I bring this story to the reader in order to unveil my writing process. Karen Myer (2010) emphasizes that “the horizons of inquiry are our everydayness and our immediate participation in daily life” (p.86). And in attending to our everydayness, we are invited to notice what may typically remain unnoticed. This methodology compliments arts education advocate and honoured philosopher, Maxine Greene’s (1995) introduction of “wide-awakeness” (p. 35), where the individual is encouraged to notice. In my forest travels, my full intent was to notice; to look for metaphorical gifts that when presented, were seen,

where I allowed time to suspend,

(breathe)

and where my imagination was opened up to follow...

It is a sunny afternoon on my first outing. As I walk along the trail, I pass the skateboard park and dipped into the woods, I am sure I am on the right path. Not far into the woods, I see a small dirt path veer off to the right. According to my map, the trail to Lost Lake starts as a paved pathway, then turns to dirt. I momentarily consider taking this little dirt path, but decide to continue on since there were no sign indicators. When I end up at Blackcomb Village I realize I have definitely not found Lost Lake.

I decide to return to the little path.

After walking a bit, I begin to notice that no one else is on this dirt path, and although the path travels fairly close to some townhouses, it is still in the woods and I am alone.

Stop.

We travel this thesis path alone, on a path that many have gone before and many will follow, but for now I am alone. There is comfort in knowing that there are others around me, but they are distant. I feel somewhat safe here, but also have some insecurities. Am I taking the right path? Is there a correct path? I may not find what I am looking for, but, what will I find?
The path starts to get a bit rocky and the condos are now far behind me. I am following a rocky path climbing upwards into the forest. I want to turn back but don’t want to miss out on the opportunity to find the lake if it is nearby. As I turn to look upwards, I see someone coming down the path. I feel comfort in this and ask if the lake is close. “It’s too far”, he responds. “You should go back.” So here I am, in the woods, but on the wrong track. I turn back.

Stop.

Don’t be afraid to change your plan. You may be in the right general place, but need to revise your choices. Deviations can lead to wonderful moments of learning, however sometimes we just need to veer back and try anew.

Second attempt at finding Lost Lake. After reviewing my maps and noticing where I went wrong last time, I head out in what I think is the right direction. I walk all alone, with my map in my pocket. As the paved trail heads into the woods I start to feel uncomfortable. I don’t normally walk in the woods alone. I am afraid of the bears! This path is veering deep into the lush forest, and there are no condos in sight. Just as I start to feel insecure, the pathway opens to the roadside and past a school. I can’t find the school on my map, but the map indicates that the path travels alongside a road. Yes, I am going in the right direction.

The path has not split yet as indicated on the map, so I keep going. At last I come to the split. The path is now taking me away from the road and into the woods.
Alone.

I have not seen anyone on any of the paths thus far, so entering the forest by myself has definitely left me feeling uneasy. If I was walking with someone else I would feel much safer – safety in numbers. Or if there was a fair bit of walking/cycling traffic on the pathways, I would feel more secure. But here I am, stepping into the forest alone,

alone and nervous.

About 30 feet into the forest I come upon some bear scat right on the path. Yes, this was bear country. “Be brave – to find Lost Lake you must be courageous”, I tell myself. But another 10 feet into the woods I find more bear scat...

and more...

and more...

I have come across four areas of bear scat and I am only about 50 feet into the forest. I can’t continue. I am too afraid. This is not safe. I question if it is my inner wisdom telling me to turn back or my active imagination? Am I being silly? At this moment in time, it is not worth conquering my fears. I am not prepared. This is bear country after all and I am not about to walk into something foolishly. As I turn and head back, I notice a pathway to the left leading over a small bridge. I see a beautiful river flowing under it. It’s funny I didn’t notice it five minutes earlier.

Stop.

Change your focus.

Remember to look... really look with all your senses...endeavor to be 'wide-awake'.
Then I notice the map board with a little red arrow marking “You Are Here”.

What? Where the heck am I? I am nowhere near Lost Lake! How could I have read the map so incorrectly? As I walk back to my rented condo, I feel kind of silly and pathetic for once again getting lost, however, I realize that although this path did not lead me to Lost Lake, it did lead me to other clearer understandings. The first most obvious understanding is that Lost Lake was not in this direction! I also understand that I am brave, but only within the stretchings of my comfort zone. I am comfortable with the search but have to listen and respect my edges. I need to question my discomforts. Am I uncomfortable because I feel I am going in the wrong direction or am I uncomfortable because I have reached my limits?

Stop.

Courage, fear, inner wisdom, preparedness. Find the courage to follow your inner wisdom. You carry knowledge that begs to be articulated. It is only through this discovery that you can be prepared to advocate for what you believe in. Don’t fear the places that have not surfaced to consciousness. Trust that this will all come to you when you are ready. Listen to where the path is leading you and trust it will take you to where you need to be.

Wanderings on Galiano Island

My moments of solitude are few and far between. With a husband and two children, running a household and two businesses, my time is stretched in every direction. I have little time solely for me. I took advantage of one of these rare moments on Galiano Island in the Summer. My husband and kids were going golfing so I had the morning all to myself. Part of my thesis journey is exploring comfort zones, so instead of staying at our little rented cabin and reading in the sun, I decided to go for a walk alone. It’s important to note that this cabin was very much in the woods, along a narrow dirt road that resembled more of a wide path than a place for vehicles to pass. Being by myself, walking in a relatively secluded area I had never been in before, was my attempt at stretching my comfort zone.

There are no bears or cougars on Galiano Island, I am told. So with that in mind, I feel more secure about going for a walk by myself. The air is beautiful and the
coolness of the forest surrounds me. I have no agenda, no real plan of where I am going – I am just going to see where the path takes me...

After wandering down the tree covered dirt road, I eventually come across a small path that veers into the woods. It seems like a deer path to me, barely there. This must be the path I was told about that leads to a small pond in the forest. I wonder momentarily if I should take it. The path looks so small and winding. It definitely isn’t a clear path, and I was alone. There are no bears or cougars I remind myself, but I could get lost... Should I stay to the safety of the road or expand my comfort zone and enter the forest? I take a deep breath,

look all around

me and choose to take the path into the woods...

It is so beautiful – the dappled sunlight filters through the trees, the air is cool, and the forest is calm.

My journey so far has been like a series of deer paths. Nothing well trodden as of yet, but all leading somewhere. I am hoping that by patiently listening and following my paths, my pond will become visible.

As I walk along the path, the forest seems friendly – wide open spaces between the trees, mossy ground, forest sounds... I pick up a walking stick as my companion. Within ten minutes the pond becomes visible. As I step into the opening, the beauty, warmth, smells and stillness mesmerize me. What a beautiful place to be.

Stop.

Look for the open spaces – these are spaces of opportunity and beauty.
My senses are alert as I pick my way back through the forest, my right hand still holding my walking stick. As I walk, I start to notice the sensations in this hand – the texture of the bark, the circumference of the wood. I begin to notice how I am walking and how I am using this stick to support me, both physically and mentally. And so because I am on this walk to stretch my comfort zones, I decide to change my walking stick to my left hand.

It feels entirely different, yet it is the same. I already know the stick. This change to the other hand is not a big stretch to my comfort level, but it is out of the ordinary for me. I have taken what I know and what is familiar and switched it up – and although not ensuring success, if this switch fails, the return to my comfort zone (my right hand) is not that far away.

This walking stick still supports me, but I find my rhythm awkward. It is somewhat comfortable but also uncomfortable and clumsy. I try to find a co-ordinated rhythm, but it seems to come and go. As I continue my walking, I stop noticing how different it feels. It is becoming my new ‘normal’.

Stop.

Stretch and feel the energy move beyond the limits of your limbs.

Stretching comfort zones can be uncomfortable, but if you choose your situations with care, ensuring that the stretch is not too far, the boundaries can be willing to grow. In order for a comfort zone stretch to be successful, the stretch shouldn’t be too far from what is already comfortable and known. Look to approach a familiar situation from a different perspective. When embracing growth, actively look for different perspectives.

As I make my way back through the forest, I realize I am on the wrong path. Within moments, however, I am out of the forest and back on the little road to my cabin. I did not exit the forest the same way I entered, but I am where I am supposed to be. As I reach the cabin, I rest my walking stick beside the doorway, step inside, make myself a rewarding glass of cold iced tea, and grab my journal...
What I Found and What Found Me

I feel like I have been wandering the landscapes of thesis writing much the same as I have been wandering the trails of Galiano Island and looking for Lost Lake. I have the capabilities, but I just have to find the right path(s). And even in saying that, I realize that taking the wrong trails is part of my process, and that these trails provide learning opportunities if I am open to them (so in fact they are not ‘wrong’). Getting lost is not a bad thing, wanderings can bring wisdom. Tangents can lead to opportune findings. I am finding that I can become in tune with my surroundings in a relational way by being open and sensitive. Being courageous enough to embrace uncertainty and trusting that I will land on my feet is leading me down a path to understanding myself and others, and through this understanding I am discovering strengths and confidence, and a voice that is clear and wise. This takes time and patience – and a willingness to live deeply and fully into my inquiry.

When considering pathways, I realize that the invitation to wander is all around me, with potential directions inviting me at all times. But in order to wander, I must first be able to notice and accept an invitation, and have an inviting disposition. It is the relationship between the willingness to engage and recognizing an invitation where new pathways are created.

if what to do
miss to notice
meeting fail
we we

(What do we miss meeting if we fail to notice?)

29
Chapter 3.

Dancing into Presence

_Breathe..._

_Stretch your arms, wrists, and fingers..._

_Look up..._
The Path behind Me

Although I danced a little recreationally as a child, my serious dance training began as a young adult. I had a lot of catching up to do in terms of dance technique, but in some ways this catch-up prepared me for teaching in a way that allowed me to understand the demands of dance from a more mature standpoint. My college days were centered around auditing as many dance classes as possible, and it was here that I realized dance was my calling. To my joy, in 1982 I became a student in the York University dance department. With a strong focus on classical ballet and modern dance technique (I danced between 3 – 6 hours a day), as well as taking courses in dance history, music, dance notation, choreography, performance, and teaching, my dance background became well-rounded. I completed all the courses in the dance teaching stream, which focused on teaching dance to children, and got my teaching feet wet on practicums at the children’s dance program at the university. My specialty quickly became creative dance for little ones. I found out I loved children – the way they think, how free they are with their imaginations and opinions, and how open they are to trying something new. The more I taught them, the more delightful I found them.

My dance teacher training was based on the work of European dance artist and scholar Rudolph Laban3 (b.1879 – d.1958) and his ground breaking principles of movement analysis, in conjunction with the dance education philosophies and practices of American educator, Virginia Tanner (b.1915 – d.1979). Both dance education pioneers recognized dance as more than exercises in codified movement replication. As Laban (1948/1980) explained, “In schools where art education is fostered, it is not artistic perfection or the creation and performance of sensational dances which is aimed at, but the beneficial effect of the creative activity of dancing upon the personality of the pupil” (pp.11-12). Laban further suggested that the aims of dance in education were to foster the natural urge children have to dance, “preserve the spontaneity of movement” (p. 12),

3 For the purposes of this thesis I am not going into details around Laban’s work. In summary, Laban divided movement into categories of Body, Effort, Shape and Space. These categories set the foundation for movement analysis, and have become commonly known as The Elements of Dance. Although the categorizations have often been juggled slightly by dance educators since Laban’s time, he set the framework for the analysis and categorization of movement that is still influential to this day.
and foster artistic expression. He emphasized that “it should be mentioned finally that
the new dance technique endeavours to integrate intellectual knowledge with creative
ability, an aim which is of paramount importance in any form of education” (p. 13).

Virginia Tanner, a dance education pioneer in the United States, created her
approach to dance education using the dance elements while emphasizing the student
as collaborator. Rosalind Pierson (2000 – 2001) remembers taking classes from her:

The magic of engagement, coupled with the responsibility we felt toward
our dancing, made us young artists, rather than cute mimics reproducing
the steps of learned routines. We were true collaborators in the
dancemaking, and the works we performed were crafted from our own
movement inventions, carefully directed, and ultimately formalized, but
always true to the original material that emerged from our improvisations.
Always, our creative voices were encouraged and respected and, as we
grew older, we were required to make our own dances – I made my first
two when I was nine. (p. 15)

The teaching stream in the York University dance department had a strong
affiliation with the Virginia Tanner Creative Dance Program at the University of Utah. As
a result, my grounding is very much in Virginia Tanner’s approach to dance education.
In 1993 I furthered my connection to The Virginia Tanner Creative Dance Program by
attending a summer session at the University of Utah. There, under the direction of
Mary Ann Lee, I studied and explored the integration of dance with pre-school and
elementary school curricula. Currently with over 25 years teaching experience and
taking the time to reflect upon that, I realize the impact Virginia Tanner has had on my
life. Although I never knew her, I have had the opportunity to deeply feel, understand,
and experience her philosophy of dance in education. Subsequently, I have also found
the work of Anne Green Gilbert (1992) influential in the way that she “combines the
mastery of movement with the artistry of expression” (p.3) when teaching creative
dance, and has clearly mapped ways of addressing the dance concepts through
numerous detailed examples of dance activities that are geared towards the practice and
mastery of the language of dance. As Laban (1948/1980) explained, “Dance as a
composition of movement can be compared with spoken language. As words are built
up of letters, so are movements built up of elements; as sentences are built up of words,
so are dance phrases built up of movements” (p. 26). Green Gilbert has created and
compiled dance explorations aimed at the acquisition of such language. Her detailed attention to understanding and exploring the dance elements is substantial.

Why is this important to me? Why, once again, do I feel the need to situate myself? Although I lived this journey, I have not really reflected on my path already travelled. Up until now, I have never really noticed what was behind me. In attending to this history, I am finding a sense of self - a closer understanding to what I do and why I do it. In recognizing the people who have come before me and who I have been influenced by leaves me with a feeling of connectedness. Through association, I am more able to understand my stance. This history behind me holds me up, a far-reaching support that allows me to securely and confidently balance in the present, leaving me poised to soar into the future.

support  balance  security
freedom  fearless  confident
embracing  willing  brave
stepping forward
connectedness  courageous  similarities
base  comfort  relate  align
past  present  future.......
include a professional development aspect in each of my residencies, in an attempt at encouraging the teachers to continue including dance in their curriculum coverage. I do this by guiding them through my teaching process of lesson development as well as leaving the teachers with the resulting lesson maps. I also encourage them to observe how much I move and don’t move, and how much of the class is guided through questions and student examples rather than replication.

**Stepping Forward**

As my thesis revolves around dance in education, a definition of dance is required as a way of situating both the reader and a way of rooting myself in what I teach. And so as dance education scholar Judith Lynne Hanna (1999) elucidates:

> Dance is human behavior composed (from the dancer’s perspective, which is usually shared by the audience members of the dancer’s culture) of purposeful (individual choice and social learning play a role), intentionally rhythmical, and culturally influenced sequences of nonverbal body movements mostly other than those performed in ordinary motor activities. The motion (in time, space and with effort) has an inherent and aesthetic value (the notion of appropriateness and competency as viewed by the dancer’s culture) and symbolic potential. (p. 11)

Hanna’s definition satisfies ‘dance’ in a broad manner, that encompasses cultural and historical considerations, but for the purpose of this thesis and in stepping forward into voice, I feel the need to define dance as I teach it. The type of dance I teach has been called ‘creative dance’, ‘creative movement’, ‘modern educational dance’, ‘educational dance’, ‘creative modern dance’, and the like. This type of dance is student centered where explorations in thought and movement are guided through a lesson structure directed by the teacher. Ideally, there is an improvisational quality in both the students’ participation and the teacher’s participation. Having recognized the educational value of dance I feel the term ‘creative dance’, although widely used, does not do justice to elevating the perception of dance in education and its value. Dance is often thought of as ‘fun’, or as a skill acquisition. And while skill acquisition and joy have a place in education (Sansom, 2009; Joyce, 1980) when advocating for dance, which is still an underdog, I feel it important to focus on the educational component it facilitates. “Dance
has the capacity to be the muscle of the imagination, a magical invitation through the creative process to reimagine new worlds” (Snowber, 2012) Dance provides opportunities for

co-operation, communicating, organizing,

communication, learning about respect for others,

instills confidence to share and express ideas, promotes enhanced creativity,

problem solving, planning,

sequencing, visualizing, construction,

opportunities for self-expression, action oriented learning,

awareness of self and others, exploring perspective,

opportunities to learn in an embodied fashion,

to understand and be understood.

And so with great consideration in honouring dance as a creative art form, but wanting to elevate its respectability and presence in education, from here on in, I will describe this approach to dance as ‘Creative Educational Dance’, (while when quoting others, still honour their labels). “The term educational dance describes dance taught as an art form in school-based programs to effect learning in and about dance” (McCutchen, 2006, p. 5) I like this definition because it emphasizes the learning that can happen in
around over under,

between, through... dance, and not just the learning about dance (Dimondstein 1985; Sansom, 2009). I would add to this that educational dance is not exclusively the domain of school-based programs. The dance classes I teach children after school and on weekends include a strong educational component even though they are taught within a recreational setting. When speaking of educational components, I mean providing an experience where dance can lead to better understandings of self, others, and the world around us – essentially situating oneself in the world and relating to it. “Consequently, it is through relationships with the world and other people that children learn about their bodies and selves, and, subsequently, their identities and emerging agency” (Sansom, 2011, p. 63) In addition, the word ‘creative’ needs to be included in this definition/title in that an approach of this style emphasizes and encourages creative thought and improvisation.
This type of approach to teaching dance differentiates itself from more codified, replication-styles of dance instruction in that,

There are no routines to learn. What is important in creative dance is that the dancer draw upon inner resources to make a direct and clear statement. An increase in skill increases ability to communicate, but in creative dance the statement comes before the technique.  

(Joyce, 1980, p. 1)

Artist educator, Jennifer Donohue Zakkai (1997) goes on to say that in this approach to teaching, students are encouraged to

make their own movement choices, and in turn, learn about dance. They are given the tools to communicate authentically and discover connections to other areas of their learning. They are not asked to imitate and perfect the movements of a particular dance form as performers. 

(p. 22)

Dance education movement specialist Sue Stinson (1988) continues, stating that creative dance

is based on natural movement rather than movement of a particular style such as one might see in tap dance or ballet. But, of course, not all natural movement is dance. (p. 2)

So if dance is movement, but not all movement is dance, what distinguishes one from the other? The words ‘movement’ and ‘dance’ are often interchanged, but they are also frequently combined as ‘movement and dance’, insinuating a difference between the two. Stinson (1988) states that the difference between movement and dance lies in the attention one gives to the movement. “This is what dance is about – making movement itself significant” (p. 2). Dance has been described as ‘expression’, however - the acts of jumping for joy or hugging someone to comfort them, although expressions, would not necessarily be considered dance. Dance has also been called a language and a form of communication, however waving hello, or gesturing someone to come closer would not necessarily be considered dance either. The difference between everyday movement and dance is the intent. Ruth Murray, a pioneer of elementary dance education, provides a further characterization of dance:
Perhaps the best interpretation [of dance] is one that emphasizes not only body mastery and discipline in movements but even more the use of such movement for expressive and imaginative purposes. Dancing may borrow from and lend to many other kinds of movement activities. It is when the ultimate concern is with the meaning of movement that the term dancing is accurately applied. (Cone & Cone, 2012, pp. 4-5).

In addition, Theresa Purcell Cone makes a distinction between functional movement and dance in that dance includes the expression of thoughts, feelings and ideas through movement (Sansom, 2011, p. 30).

Dance “is not just a particular physical language which is only seen on the outside as conveyed by the external body. Dance is something that also has its naissance from deep within, and is felt, as well as thought about, in and through the body” (Sansom, 2011, p. 30).

Ruth Foster (1976) differentiates:

There is nothing fancy about the walking or running of a dance during a dance. The difference lies in the focus of attention, the total absorption of the inner impulse in the outer action. This disappears when the dance is over and everyday movement takes over. (p. 31)

Dimondstein (1985) re-emphasizes dance as expressive when she compares it to sport when she says, “although dance and sports are intense personal experiences for participants, the end state of sport is to win, or at least to excel; the end state of dance is to give external shape to internal experience” (p. 81).

And so in gathering other dance scholars’ definitions and distinctions, I come to assemble my own thoughts on articulating dance, and more specifically Creative Educational Dance, and its place in the school system. Dance, with its many variations and forms, can be something one does: a corporeal way of expressing. This can include
technical training in preparation for performance, but more importantly in an education setting Creative Educational Dance can also be an opening for the embodied articulation of knowledge, understandings, and communication, as well as a place where the unknown can become known. Snowber speaks of embodied knowing and describes dance as a “visceral language that has the capacity to connect body, mind, heart, soul, and imaginative thinking” (2012). In school systems that typically devote a small percentage of time to the education of the body, primarily through physical education classes based on sports and acquisition of physical skill sets, I propose attention should be included beyond the education of the body, to include an education from the body, with the body and through the body, in relation to self, other, and the world. With classrooms filled with children with multiple intelligences, we have the ability to empower those students who may fall through the cracks in a traditional education system. And as educators it is up to us to realize that falling through the cracks can be an experience of beauty and potential if attended to (Snowber, 1997).

As the extraordinary Leonard Cohen poetically declares, “There is a crack, a crack in everything/ That’s how the light gets in” (Faith, 2002). But I am also interested in what is coming out of the cracks. Are children falling into cracks or falling out of them? Is the light getting in, or is it shining out? Is it possible that the directional qualities of falling and radiating can be multidirectional and dynamic? And when speaking of teachers and students, what happens when we fall and shine together? Who leads? Who follows? What happens when the falling, the light and the multiple directions and dynamics synthesize? The cracks hold potential for magic. Let’s not step around them, but embrace them and hover with expectant arms, ready to catch the fascinating moments of engagement.
Read the following from an audience stance. Allow your eyes to wander. Move beyond the linear...

(Rather than standing on solid ground, some students are falling into and out of the cracks. Imagine the potential if we free-fall with them...as the known and the unknown meld together, and unrealized possibilities become reality...)

**The Pedagogical Bridge**

Throughout my 25-plus years of teaching children’s dance and accumulating sources on Creative Educational Dance that include lesson plans, I have become concerned with how these written lessons are being presented. I know from experience that in order for a dance class to be dynamic and engaging, there must be some ‘magic’. Stinson(1988) describes this as a “magical state of being” (p.3), and goes on to say that “our magic comes from deep inside us, and each of us possesses it. We use our magic to transform movement into dance” (p. 3). When I teach children, I describe this as ‘sparkly energy,’ and often demonstrate the difference between dancing without a presence and intent, and with added ‘magic’. But beyond the magical sparkly energy in both movement and stillness, if magic becomes part of the presentation of the class, a dynamic energy and a focused attentiveness can ensue. This magic can be nurtured
through a creative, artistic engagement with a theme, story, image, experience etc. This magical focus can become the springboard for both creative exploration of movement and the development of creative thought. In turn, by guiding students towards magical focal points, students begin to learn to be wide awake to the world of possibilities of alternative thinking and expressing, and in turn become the guides themselves. This empowerment can lead them to a better understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them, as well as an appreciation for multiple perspectives.

Many published books on Creative Educational Dance offer lesson suggestions that seem to be purely physical in nature. Teachers are given suggestions on how to guide a class through the activities of exploring the body moving with energy in space, time, and in relationships. But when speaking of dance in education, too often I find that teaching the movements for their own sake, although thoroughly enjoyable and necessary for a certain amount of time, can also limit the progression of expression and discovery if dancing is not connected to anything other than the movement itself. Kieran Egan(1986) explains:

Learning to write is not a process wherein one can first master all the rules and conventions and then begin to be concerned about style. There is a constant tension to be played between mastery of rules and conventions and the development of individual style. (p. 93)

So while Egan is speaking in terms of learning to write, a parallel can be made with learning to dance. Both writing and dancing are about expression. They both have a language that, with increased mastery, provides wider choices for articulation. We work and play with language so we can represent ideas, feelings, and knowledge. Meanings become associated with words as they are constructed into sentences. From the writer’s perspective, the question becomes, “what am I trying to say”? While Egan speaks of developing the writer’s individual style, it can be said that the dancer should be encouraged to do the same. Rather than abstractly connecting one movement to the next, as in individual words placed next to each other without concern, students should be encouraged to take the platform of movement experiences with the dance elements and understand that this is where their movement language resides. The questions now becoming for the dancer, “What am I trying to express?” and “How am I going to convey it through dance?” Or on the flip-side, rather than the student creating a dance
to express something, the question could be, “I am dancing now – what is my dancing telling me?” Dance educator, Mary Joyce (1973) addresses the balance of technique and creativity when she says, “an increase in skill increases ability to communicate, but in creative dance the statement comes before the technique” (p. 1) Jacqueline Smith-Autard (1994) argues a “midway model” where both technique and expression are both emphasized, where process and product are equally considered important. So whether the dancer creates a dance to express, or the dance itself speaks, increase in technical ability opens wider opportunities for movement choices, thus creating a larger language base for the dancer to pull from. Skill alone is a hollow foundation to justify dance in the schools, but by linking dance with discovery and by recognizing that learning with and through dance offers alternative opportunities for personal and academic growth, dance may be more recognized as a valuable presence in education.

**Conditions and Opportunities**

As Parker J. Palmer states, “Teachers possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal - or keep them from learning much at all. Teaching is the intentional act of creating those conditions, and good teaching requires that we understand the inner sources of both the intent and the act” (p.7). What if the conditions required for a student to learn and have their understandings realized were conditions that not only encouraged movement, but fully embraced the language of dance? What if knowledge for these students was not fully understood or revealed unless there was engagement through the body? What if the teacher does not have the opportunity to really see what the student has to say when the student does not have the opportunity to dance? What if the students are not given the opportunity to situate themselves in a language that resonates with their inner-most way of being and knowing? And how would these students’ self-esteem and confidence blossom if not given the opportunity

```plaintext
to understand and be understood...

and ultimately,

isn’t that what we all want?
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Blumenfeld-Jones (2009) writes of teaching towards bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as more than a replication-based approach. He says, “it requires an educator who will seek the potential in each person in the ways of paying attention and refining attention giving. It requires a labor bent toward each person engaged in finding him or herself inside motional activity” (p. 74). Creative Educational Dance is not about training the elite; it is about encompassing all bodies and all abilities. It does not need to be taught by someone who can do triple pirouettes or grand jetes, but it does require a teacher with a sensitivity to comfort zones, an awareness of individual and group energy, and an unending desire to tap into the potential of all students. With a strong understanding of the dance elements, and an ability to marry these into imaginative experiences, the teacher can guide the students on a journey of knowledge making and associations, and invite the students on the road to self-discovery.

Creative Educational Dance concerns itself with releasing the body as an expressive and imaginative voice, where all students are nurtured to greater understandings of themselves and how they fit into the world. It provides an environment where students come to understand that their thoughts, opinions and contributions are valued by others and, in turn, they learn to value them themselves. While increased understandings of self-prosper, so does respect for others and their contributions and opinions. Creative Educational Dance also fosters the idea of multiplicity, where similarities and differences are celebrated and multiple answers are not only accepted but encouraged, where children are given “opportunities to develop tolerance for ambiguity, a respect for divergent answers, and the mental freedom to find problems” (Giguere, 2011, p. 10). It opens a world of discovery, where the student is invited on a journey to expand understandings and uncover meanings. Creative Educational Dance is so much more than following steps and patterns. It opens pathways into ‘voice’.

Writing this thesis and my resulting journey into voice, follows very much the same conceptual pathways as does Creative Educational Dance. Through writing, and moving, my thoughts are becoming clearer. As I improvise with movements and words, my words and movements are speaking back to me and I am coming to an understanding that my contribution to the field of dance education is substantial. Through the on-going acts of writing, moving, and
reflection, I am finding (or creating) a safe place for myself where I am becoming courageous. Putting one's thoughts on paper leaves one vulnerable just as in stepping forward to dance. In many ways it is much easier if someone teaches you the dance routine and you have to copy it, but in Creative Educational Dance, just as in writing a thesis, the idea is not to replicate. Through reflection, and movement, I am accessing my tools to communicate what I innately do and what has become innate to the way I teach. I am exploring the elements of expression, both written and through the body and in doing so am invited to tap into authentic understandings. Through situating myself with others, and living my inquiry with my entire body, I am exploring ways of expressing what I know and what I question. With my understandings before me by connecting theory and practice through my bodily process of writing, I am attaining a grounding that is inviting my voice to become clear and strong.

Spin, arms wrap in a hug, rest, lunge forward, arms reach far and wide, sternum opens

**Situating to Proceed**

And so having come to a place where I have situated myself with others who have walked before me and associated with those who walk beside me, I have found a stability that informs who I am. In addition to this, by articulating my teaching philosophy and practice, I have situated myself further within the world of educational dance. My voice is becoming stronger through these associations and I am finding confidence in recognizing my presence in this field. What is illuminated here are the words 'confidence', 'voice', 'association' 'situation', and 'presence'. These words/concepts connect my personal inquiry to more universal meanings in that I realize these are the same words/concepts that are intertwined when creating a safe, nurturing space for students to learn. Through situating the students and encouraging associations, students are led down a path to growing confidence and ultimately on a journey to finding voice. This approach to teaching requires attention to the group dynamics as well as...
...a sensitivity to the individuals within the group. In working with horses, Stephen Smith (2011) recognizes an energy exchange between horse and trainer when he says, “the clarity and control of one’s body language are evidently the defining features of the trainer’s effectiveness” (p.13). He goes on to discuss engagement through the power of presence where a dynamic sense of reciprocity plays within the boundaries of being leader and being led. The same can be true of the dynamics within a dance class. The fact that it is ‘dance’ situates the class within a movement domain where the teacher’s body language and movements can become exaggerated and central to creating an environment of trust, respect, and encouragement. Through a sensitivity to the students movements and energies, the teacher can have the capacity to understand what the students need to do and where they need to go. The question being: How do I lead them to where I feel they are leading me?

Feeling the Path

By being fully present, receptive and perceptive, I am able to recognize the energies and body presences in the room and adjust our dance experiences according to what I feel the students need at that time. Adjusting class plans on the spot is a pedagogical approach that involves risk and a sensitivity to the energy of the students in the class, as well as the energy the teacher brings to the class. This sensitivity is enabled through becoming mindful, present, and open to moments of perception. Attentiveness to the noise level, the level of fast movements, and of eye contact help me to assess how to proceed with a class. The lesson plan is a structure in which to guide the class, but this structure can become fluid if the class energy is not aligned with the energy requirements of the plan. This becomes an intuitive way of teaching where the teacher can become aware of times when the students need to be led, and/or where the students are inviting the teacher to follow. The pedagogical relationship is one of sharing and co-creating, while engaging in curiosity and the courage to wander.

Findings

Ultimately, my goal is to foster confidence in the students and guide them to a place where they become aware of each others’ ‘voices’, appreciate their similarities and
differences, and find the courage and joy to step forward in recognizing and sharing their own voices. The irony is that although I am capable of being the guide in this process, my own journey into voice up until now has been suspended. My focus was on what others needed, and I did not provide the energy, space, or time to attend to my own growth. Because I hadn’t associated myself with others who teach dance as an opening to understandings, I have felt somewhat alone. Other dance teachers have not understood me and what or how I teach. And because I hadn’t situated myself with other dance scholars, I too didn’t fully understand what I was doing. I knew that what and how I was teaching was important and valuable from the feedback I would get from school teachers with whom I did residencies, but found it difficult to articulate what it was I was doing with and for the kids, or why is was important. I have realized that in order for me to find my voice I have to become completely ‘present’ in mind, body, and spirit on my own behalf, and need to put myself in relation to others in the dance education field. In essence, I have to create for myself the same safe environment I create for others. The experiences I facilitate for my students of gaining confidence and acceptance are the same experiences I need to explore myself. Embodied ways of knowing and understandings are what I need to listen for in myself. What I am sensitively able to give to others must find its way back home, and it is only through this journey that I will be able to unveil a confident voice that is situated, associated, and present.

So, who cares? Big deal... I am finding my voice... Why should this be important to anyone other than myself?

The process of finding voice has brought me to reflect on what it is I do with my students, and how I teach them. In order for my voice to become clear, I need to become even more present while teaching – leaving me to understand that the way I teach is very much the way I write and the way I live. I like to wander. I am comfortable with (reasonable) risk. The pedagogical importance here is in that if I am unable to discern the intricacies of my craft, how am I able to engage in personal and professional growth, and how can I possibly share my knowledge and experience with others? In deconstructing the idea of wandering within reasonable risk, I am able to recognize that the risk is deviating from a planned lesson. The wandering is moving into uncharted
terrain. This risk is 'reasonable' in the sense that in having situated myself alongside others, and recognizing my solid grounding in understanding how to guide students through movement explorations, I realize I have the capacity and propensity to let go, to free-fall, to wander and get lost with the students, knowing all the while how to lead the group back to solid ground should the detour prove less than engaging. But why risk? Why not stay on the beaten path? With teacher presence, you can encourage the presence of others, and when these two energies intermingle, a collaborative interaction can lead to places of engaged, motivated learning that is driven by curiosity and ownership.

I like to think of my knowledge base as an island – safe, secure and known. There are times when I just want to stay on that island, or feel the students need the structure of the island to hold on to. Other times, I feel the need to swim, or feel the students need to swim. Together we dive, and float, we sink and spin, we splash and play – and unforeseen magic happens.
Chapter 4.

Interconnecting Roots: Performing with Giants

Stand up

t w i s t

left       right

s t r e t c h
As a dance educator and artist, in the Spring of 2012 I was privileged to have the opportunity to work with a grade 7 class on a site specific dance project through an organization called Vancouver Biennale.\textsuperscript{4} The objective of the Vancouver Biennale is to bring art and community together inviting dialogue. This not-for-profit organization has brought international art exhibits to outdoor public spaces in the city of Vancouver, and the 2012 celebration included a BIG IDEAS aspect that focused on bringing performance to the artwork. An education outreach division paired artists with students to collaborate and use the public art as inspiration for dance, drama, music and/or poetry. The aim was to have the exhibits inspire thought, discussion of ideas and the imagination of possibilities, and for this to be translated into performance. The resulting performances were shared at the outdoor sculpture exhibits during one week in April, 2012.

With careful consideration of the age group I was working with and doing my best to ensure their success, I chose to use the sculpture called \textit{Walking Figures}, by Magdalena Abakanowicz, as our inspirational starting point. My sculpture choice was based on the criteria of both place and subject. Since we were to be dancing outside, I wanted to choose a location that would not be muddy if the ground was wet. The Walking Figures are placed in a large paved area where mud wouldn’t be an issue. I also liked that the sculptures were situated in an area where there automatically would be an audience. With busy vehicle and pedestrian traffic on Cambie Street to the West, Vancouver City Hall to the South, parking and Canada Line access to the East and the entrance to the Canada Line Sky Train Station to the North, our performance was sure to have an audience.

\textit{Stop.}

\textit{Why do I feel it is important to be noticed? Can’t the dancers just notice themselves and each other? Can the dance simply be for the enjoyment of the participants? What role does the outside audience play in performance? These questions can be answered by realizing the intent of the dance. If people dance solely for the intrinsic joy of moving, then an audience is not required. In fact, an audience can

\textsuperscript{4} Entire case study details, including video can be found on the VB Learn website, vblearn.ca/uploads/general/Captain_Cook_FINAL_BIG_IDEAS_Case_Study.pdf
be detrimental to this kind of enjoyment. There is that old saying “Dance like no one is watching”. Sometimes there is a release of energy and a freedom of movement if there is no one there to observe. On the other hand, an audience can give energy and motivation to the dancer as well - depending on the situation. When people are working towards a performance, and in the end there is no audience, the message is: no one cares. In the case of this residency, I needed the students to feel like what they did mattered, that they were important, and that their commitment and effort was not left unnoticed. Their ‘voices’ needed to be heard. I had to ensure success in this regard, and needed to be assured of an audience. As a dance educator, my responsibility is to the mind, body and souls of the students who so graciously place their trust and vulnerabilities in my hand. The role of the audience, known or unknown to them, is one of support, of being ‘see-ers’ and ‘listeners’ so the students know they have been ‘seen’ and ‘heard’. Through this exchange, the message becomes, “I see you. You are important.” With extremely sensitive attention to the performance situation, educators can facilitate an experience that celebrates commitment, community, and collaboration, where confidence and self-esteem is nurtured, and voices, both tentative and certain, emerge and unite.

The sculptures themselves seemed to be the perfect...

*hands, palms upward, fingers interlaced*

...match for this residency. Huge bodies as inspiration for dance - I could see the potential immediately. The more I thought about these sculptures the clearer it became: these were the sculptures with which we were meant to be matched. And then I realized – these were the sculptures with which I was meant to be matched.

**Stop.**

Sometimes a gift of openings presents itself when least expected. I was looking for inspiration for a residency, looking for something I could potentially give to others. In addition to this I also found an opening that was waiting for me. Although I wasn’t purposefully looking for this, in being perceptive and open to possibility, the gift became mine.
Unravelling the Method

Performance dances absence into presence, an unexpected gust of wind that sets clothes dancing on a line. (Fels, 1999/2012, p. 69)

I have previously experienced performative inquiry in project-based inquiries. This approach to inquiry resonates with me because of the multiple entry points it provides for learning through being wide awake to stop moments and reflecting on how these moments speak to us. Through inviting and reflecting on stop moments, I have cultivated an awareness of “letting go of the script, of trusting the moment” (Fels, 2008b), welcoming the unexpected and allowing the time to listen and follow pathways that emerge. Central to performative inquiry is the act of embodied learning, and as a result, through my inquiry, embodied understandings have revealed themselves. As a dancer who does not always easily have access to words, the invitation to move and encourage my spine to curve, my arms to float, and my fingers to entwine, was essential to my writing. For my words to flow, I had to allow myself to wander, to let go of control and be trusting and courageous to follow. In return, a path led me to the Walking Figures.

My inquiry into the process leading up to the performance, along with the act of performing itself, provided me with the clearings I needed to grasp the elusive and bring to vibration the fibres dancing in my body. Autobiographical narratives that run throughout the reflections identify stop moments, providing openings for verbal articulation where insights find a platform to flourish and voice finds opportunities for clarity.

When I teach creative educational dance I am aware of the problem of ‘too many choices’, ‘too many possibilities’... And so, enabling constraints are offered, which in turn provide a structure for freedom. Simply asking students to dance when the music is
on often is paralyzing. Students find the confidence to explore movements if they are both warmed up as well as have a focal point upon which to build their dance. The act of warming up is both physical as well as emotional and psychological. We are not only warming up our bodies, we are warming up our comfort zones, we are becoming comfortable in our own bodies, and comfortable with the space in which we are dancing. My wanderings in the forest and the resulting writing was my warm up, providing opportunities to practice being receptive and notice openings. Subsequently, the Walking Figures became my focal point for capturing and extending embodied knowledge and further thought.
Walking Figures

*Note.* Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.
Looking Up

Note. Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz. Nine figures, made of cast iron, each between 7.5 – 9 feet tall and weighing approximately 1,433 lbs. All have left foot forward, no arms, no head, little impression of knees, hollow chests and interiors, no sex, all the same yet different, all travelling more or less the same direction, each has different surface treatments so although they look the same they are all unique, the iron is weathered and a deep rusty brown in colour...

On this sunny windy day, I introduce myself to the Walking Figures. Although I have visited this spot before, I have mostly looked from afar. Today my purpose for being at Cambie and Broadway in Vancouver, was to specifically to see and be with the Walking Figures. As I walk towards them I am impressed with their size, literally looming over me at times. Their hard rough surfaces invite touch and leave a rusty residue on my hands. I listen, I try to feel the space, feel what the sculptures have to tell me. And the more time I spend there the more I realize that the space is speaking to me. Through metaphor I am able to connect with the sculpture. I can see that these huge, nine-foot statues are my giants – the teachers, mentors, and philosophers that have influenced me. They are the people and events that have and will influence the way I
perceive and conceive myself. These are also my internal giants – the ones that support and believe in me, and the ones that...

right hand in front of left, palms facing towards heart, backs of fingers on right hand pushing away against fingers of left hand, elbows out

...are also resistant and impose limitations. All these giants are helping me understand myself. The Walking figures are whispering and with an open mind and willingness to listen I am starting to see the possibilities.

Openings

Once again I am reminded of Maxine Greene’s (1995) thoughts on ‘wide-awakeness’ and ‘openings’. As I live through this inquiry, I am becoming more and more ‘wide-awake’ and I am noticing ‘openings’ that are presenting themselves to me. By following these openings I am being led to places I would not have perceived let alone conceived. As a result, I am becoming aware of the connections and similarities that exist between the way I live, the way I teach, the way I perform, and the way I write. There is an improvisational quality to what I do both personally and professionally.

I am not a rigid planner – I am flexible with my decisions for the most part. I typically have a plan, whether it be what to have for dinner, what to teach in a residency, or what to write for a paper (or this thesis). However, I also am usually quite comfortable deviating from the plan, improvising so-to-speak. In fact, the deviations often led to places that I...

fingers curled inwards in a loose fist-like position slowly they open up as if the opening of a flower

...couldn’t have imagined. “The word improvisation stems from the Latin improvises, which means “unforseen.” The element of surprise, wonder, mystery, and discovery is at the heart of improvisation as the dancer, writer, or artist forms the uninformed until that which is invisible become visible” (Snowber, 2002). Danielle Goldman (2010) goes on to
explain, "Improvisation is generally described as a spontaneous mode of creation that takes place without the aid of a manuscript or score" (p. 5). It takes a certain amount of trust and courage to follow an uncharted path, and the consequences can be anywhere from extraordinary to disastrous. And, of course, the decision to deviate primarily depends on these possible consequences and their effects. A willingness to follow an improvisational path is a way of living/teaching/performing/writing creatively. According to Twayla Tharp (2003), “Your creative endeavors can never be thoroughly mapped out ahead of time. You have to allow for the suddenly altered landscape, the change in plan, the accidental spark – and you have to see it as a stroke of luck rather than a disturbance of your perfect scheme” (p. 120). My ‘accidental spark’ came when I realized the Walking Figures were speaking to me and this ‘stroke of luck’ presented itself as an opening for inquiry. My visit to the Walking Figures was no longer solely about a residency for grade seven students. This encounter became an opportunity for personal introspection, a possibility to interrelate what I know with what I do, an opening to entice experiential embodied wisdoms and bring elusive questions to light. I had been living my thesis research and inquiry for years, unable to engage connections because there were too many of them. I was overwhelmed by the interconnectedness of it all, and so much so that I was unable to see where the map of my pathways was leading me. Through allowing myself to listen and engage with the Walking Figures I realized these sculptures were the touchstone of my inquiry – the anchor to my journey, and they were inviting me to see what was there all along.

Big deal. Who cares? So I noticed some statues. What does this have to do with anything that anyone else should care about? Tharp (2003) says, "You can't just dance or paint or write or sculpt. Those are just verbs. You need a tangible idea to get you going. The idea, however minuscule, is what turns the verb into a noun - paint into a painting, sculpt into sculpture, write into writing, dance into a dance' (p. 94). The reason my noticing of the statues is important is because it provided me with that tangible idea I needed to hang my thoughts on. On the flip side, I may not completely agree with Tharp's 'need for a tangible idea to get you going,' given that in many other cases the opposite is true for me. Rather than starting with a tangible idea, there are times when I move and it is in noticing the movement itself that knowledge, understandings and ideas then become tangible. So rather than needing a tangible idea to get me going, it is the act of
'going' that leads me to a tangible place. Regardless of the starting point, the emphasis here is that one idea would not lead to another without the act of noticing. As far as writing my thesis and assembling my thoughts cohesively, I couldn't see where I was going until I was open enough to notice, and that spark happened for me on that sunny day with the Walking Figures where a vision of past, present and future merged with my research and experiential wisdom. The statues became my centerpoint, my inspiration, and my scaffolding.

The idea of noticing multiple perspectives is one that educators should embrace if all the students voices are to be heard. The guiding questions being, “how can we empower our students if we can’t recognize their voices?” And “what can we do as educators to help facilitate the students recognition of their own voices?” One way of attending to these questions is addressed in this thesis by recognizing dance and embodied ways of knowing as valid means of expression, and allowing through movement for voices to be ‘heard’. Further, students and educators can come to understand that a dancing body has the potential to both receive and perceive knowledge if there is a guidance towards ‘noticing’. Our challenge as teachers is to recognize and tap into openings and guide our students toward noticing their own openings, inspirations and enablers. We need to find ways to help students step forward confidently to explore alternative possibilities of expressing and learning. For as Scurlock-Durana (2010) claims, “When we open to new possibilities or take in new experiences, our perceptual lens naturally expands” (p. 41) We need to honour multiple perspectives and multiple ways of understanding. Our commitment should be to make numerous ‘lenses’ available to both ourselves and our students so that the invisible and unsaid can be seen and heard, and voices of all kinds can be revealed.
Opening the Space

*Note.* Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz. The space is somewhat confined – the determining boundaries being concrete curbs or planters, also earth and plants define boundaries in a less solid means. The sidewalk on the West side of the sculpture is separated from this space by the planter barriers. Pavers ground the space defining squares within the location.

My association with Magdalena Abakanowicz’s Walking Figures was a result of an extended residency bringing performance to public art. I was facilitating a dance experience for grade seven students, giving them an opportunity to work, explore and create through dance, with the residency culminating in a public performance. What I wasn’t expecting is how the sculptures drew me in, and invited me to explore my own state. The connection I made between what I was being led into, and where I was leading the students, became obvious to me almost immediately.

Stop.

The wide open space seemed to embrace my presence. Was it possible these huge, headless, armless figures were inviting me to dance? I was going to ask the students to become trusting,
courageous, and vulnerable. I was going to ask them to be committed, engaged and present. I was going to ask them to work with integrity. The obvious questions then were, "How can I ask them to do all this unless I am willing to do the same?" And "If I am not brave enough to do what I am asking them to do, why should they trust me?"

I realized the sculptures were calling for me to perform for the students, and that this performance was pivotal on many levels. It became an opening for a performative inquiry on my part, and in turn, an event that would create openings for the students to step into performance with courage and confidence.

**Stretching Beyond Comfort**

I am acutely aware of the importance of creating an environment...

*...where students feel safe, respected, and valued. This is especially important when asking students to step outside of their comfort zones. I find that younger students tend to be more willing to move confidently and with freedom while typically, as the student ages, a self-consciousness comes into play that can inhibit the participation in dance. Regardless of the student’s age, my initial goal is to create a space that feels safe so the student is able to accept the invitation to dance.*

So what is this ‘space’? When I speak of space I mean the physical space around us, and the tangible and intangible spaces between us and within us. I am interested in how these spaces interconnect and affect each other. When working with young dancers I attempt to create a physical space that is clear of clutter, organized, and if at all possible, bright. According to the ancient practice of feng shui, clutter in an environment stagnates the flow of positive energy, and light has the power to uplift and affect peoples moods (Shurety, 1997). This in turn can have an effect on the intangible spaces within us. And without having a positive energy within, the probability of having positive interactions with others becomes more challenging. The cultivation of this sensitivity to energy is described by Gabrielle Roth (1989) as a continual play between
intuition and improvisation. She says, while reflecting on teaching dance to young and old, “And looking back, I realize that my real job was to keep their energy channeled in positive, creative directions” (p. 7)

Randee Lipson Lawrence (2012) speaks of intuition and embodied teaching in much the same way I consider having a sensitivity to energy. I question whether it is intangible energy that I am sensing in a room, or is it as Lipson Lawrence describes, about paying attention to non-verbal body language the students are conveying? Although non-verbal body language can display movements and gestures, the moving body can also reflect an internal energy of being. Whereas the moving body is visible, the energy itself is intangible, but noticeable. By entering into a willingness to notice movement and embodied energies you become sensitive to group energy and the energy of the space occupied.

I am also interested in how teachers use the physical space around them. I am acutely aware of the positioning of bodies within space, more specifically, how and where I place myself in relation to the students. It is common for a teacher to stand in one general place, whether it be in front of the class, or near the sound system. I prefer to move about the room, changing the perception of ‘front’, even changing my level when possible, by standing on benches or whatever to elevate myself, or to bend down low to the ground. My purpose here is to challenge students’ perspectives of what is conventional and open their minds to other possibilities. At the same time, as students become aware of how the teacher is unafraid to break from norm, they are invited to be more present and active in their own bodies. By modeling and embodying positive energy and cracking the expected with the unexpected, the doors to creative thought and the inclusion of the body in exploration and communication are opened.
Vulnerabilities

As a teacher, my goal is to bring my dancers to a place where they feel the joy of moving, and in the case of dancers who feel...

*arms hugging torso*

... inhibited, find exhilaration in the pushing of self-imposed boundaries and comfort zones. Through experience I have come to realize that the sharing of vulnerabilities builds a willingness to step beyond typical comfort zones. hooks (1994) agrees when she suggests that “it is often productive if professors take the first risk” (p.21). I distinctly remember teaching Creative Educational Dance to two high school drama classes, and although they were for the most part willing to participate, I still sensed a resistance. One day after my first class had just left and I was feeling a little less than pleased with the results, I thought I would try something different with the second class. Rather than verbally explaining what we were going to be doing for the day, I danced the explanation through demonstration. I turned the music on loud and full out danced an exploration of dynamics. The students sat quietly and were attentive. I think I may have temporarily shaken their expectation of what was ‘normal’. In addition to this, by sharing my dance, and showing my willingness to open up to them, as if by magical offering, they took up the invitation to do the same. The students were fully engaged and excited to share their work that day, and even for the rest of the residency. I realized the act of being open puts you in a state of vulnerability, and that state has the power to break down walls of fear and push the boundaries of comfort. I found this to be true of both encouraging others to step forward and equally as true when dealing with my own self-imposed limitations. Fels and Belliveau (2008) agree and write with similar conviction in the case of drama in education. They say:

> Our experience is that educators must fully engage in the role drama and the individual dramatic activities in order to model for and engage students. If we ask our students to extend their comfort zones, then we, as educators, must also be willing to participate, to take on the challenge to “let go”, to bring the experience fully to life. (p. 112)

Given this understanding of the power of sharing vulnerabilities, I decided to do a solo performance for my Vancouver Biennale residency students. I needed to show
them that if I could do it, then so could they. My dancing inquiry had evolved from experiences of vulnerability and its invitation to open comfort zones. I was sensitive to the fact that dancing publically may very well have been beyond their comfort zones for various reasons. Not everyone would be comfortable dancing, never mind dancing in public. And so I chose to place myself in their position and allow them to watch me do what I would be asking of them.

As I walk up to, around and past one Walking Figure to the next I notice the colours, shapes, and textures of the sculptures. I touch the warm roughness and notice at times I am standing in their shadows. I am searching for hints or subtle offerings that will guide me and create structure for my performance and bring opportunities for connections and new perspectives to emerge and where understandings and questions surface.

So I walk,

I listen,

and I write...

**Preparation**

Preparatory Free write at the Walking Figures:

Vulnerability individual finding voice

Diversity same different celebrate differences

Conformity loss of identity confidence

Who are you what makes you you? Doubt pressure follow

Connectivity relationships true to self insecurity identity

Embracing opening, not closing where have you been?

Where are you going?
When considering my performance, I had to acknowledge that the purpose was two-fold. Although providing structure for inquiry on my part, my performance was also an extension of a residency with grade 7 students. While being tuned into my own curiosities, I had to ensure that my performance would be seen as understandable to the students and relate to what they could potentially be doing in a couple of weeks’ time. When planning my performance, at first I thought I would dance without music, allowing the outdoor sounds to become my accompaniment. I also considered straight-forward improvisation, wanting to push my boundaries of comfort. Instead, given the context of this performance, and the importance of it being successful in encouraging the grade seven students, I decided to impose some pre-determined structure. I became acutely aware that my performance was not only an entry point for inquiry on my part. The purpose of my performance was to ease the comfort levels of the grade 7 students.

Stop.

Textual reflections (van Manen, 1990) have the capacity to reveal stop moments. While in the moment of writing and re-reading, a breath can arrest you. My focus literally shifts from the screen or page, and it is at this time that significant meanings can spawn. While re-reading the previous paragraph and realizing the duality of my performance, I was stopped. Not all experiences are singular in focus. One moment can hold multiple opportunities for learning through the lens of multiple perspectives.

The outdoor physical space around the entrance to the Canada Line Skytrain station is typically a space that pedestrians...

*hands start together then veer outwards away from each other*

...use as a passageway to or from the Skytrain entrance. Given that there is an open space and beautiful sculptures surrounded by planters, this area is also often used as a meeting place, or a spot to linger. As in most public spaces, there is an expected norm as to how this space is to be used. Performing in this space was definitely out of the norm. By dancing for them, I was not only showing them performance possibilities, I was also breaking open the public space. I was hoping to crack open the closed walls of ‘the norm’ and invite new possibilities for the use of the outdoor space. My intention was
that the students would no longer see this area as solely a Skytrain corridor, but now also as a performance stage. I wanted them to see the Walking Figures as more than sculptures – I wanted to introduce them as collaborators, literal touchstones for their performance. Little did I know that everything I was doing for them to make them comfortable dancing outside was, in fact, setting up similar enabling conditions for my own inquiry process.

So I am to perform at the Walking Figures site next week. I actually prefer to say I will be performing with the Walking Figures. As a site specific work, the site has become my partner - the sculptures, the pavement, the planter boxes, the sidewalk, the sky above... Mike Pearson has this to say about site specific performance, “Performance draws attention to the details of location, valorizing them, pulling them out of the everyday into relief, acknowledging them, staking claim to them in passing, as places to be, to do, to watch” (p. 48). Just as I am cracking open the space for the students, I am cracking open a space for myself to access embodied knowledge. This site specific space is providing me with the opportunity to be courageous and dance my own voice into presence.

The sculpture is the inspiration for my dance, but I am also choosing to dance with them - to honor them being there. They are my starting point and this opportunity to dance with them at this location is providing the opening I have been waiting for. This performance is becoming like a pair of magic glasses so-to-speak, allowing me to see into my thesis process. It is becoming the enabling constraint (Fels & Belliveau, 2008) to my inquiry, and through this constraint I am finding connections and insights that up until now have remained elusive and even unimaginable.

So why should this matter to anyone else? The word ‘elusive’ resonates with me when I reflect upon my journey thus far. It makes me think of the challenges teachers have when working with students who hold strengths in alternative ways of processing and expressing their understandings. In trying to capture the elusive in myself, I needed a springboard. Without something
I was lost. The Walking Figures became my springboard and by entering into a relationship with them I was able to find connections that both grounded me and allowed me to understand my need for a central focal point.

Stop.

Fibres of knowledge, experience, research, questions, clarifications and interconnections flow in and through my body. As much as I call them out to assemble, they are evanescent. It’s almost as if they are waiting for an anchor to give them a point of convergence. The Walking Figures are inviting me to listen to them, touch them, and dance with them... and their presence is both unifying and clarifying.

(Can you imagine if we could empower those students whose capabilities and understandings are not easily discernible? To allow them to understand that because they may not easily have access or strengths in the symbolic manner that is most widely recognized and primarily taught through in schools, that they are thinkers and understanders of an alternative manner?)
The Music that Moves Me

In my sensitivity to creating a positive, inviting atmosphere that wasn’t too far out of a grade seven student’s idea of ‘normal’, I chose to use music to dance to in my solo performance instead of using the natural sounds emanating from the performance location. The music is an electronic mix by Hol Baumann called Human (2008). I was drawn to this music because of its complicated rhythms, its underlying...

right hand, palm down, floats left to right as if smoothing over an invisible surface

...intensity, its playfulness and it’s technology sound. I didn’t want a piece of music that was too emotionally heavy, or too light. I was looking for a piece of music that had a similar feel to it as the feelings I am experiencing while writing this thesis. The music is driving, there is a sense of pressure, there is a circular quality to it, a layering of sounds, a sense of continuity. There are light moments and heavy moments. The energy changes but there always is a relentless drive that keeps the music pushing forward. There are sharp sounds, and smooth sounds, there is repetition, there are changes, the energy builds and subsides, there is calm, there is chaos, there is a continual underlying intensity... and it breathes. All of these qualities resonate with my thesis journey and my challenges in getting my thoughts and experiences cohesively to the page.

Part of my performance process was to really get to know the nuances of the music as well as the performance space. Although my performance was to be an improvisation, I still felt the need to create a structure, and that structure was in part guided by the music. The purpose of this structure was to provide a framework for my expressive intentions both in terms of movement as well as concepts. Because this performance was not solely for my inquiry benefit, I had to make sure the connections between dance and expression were clear for the students. Mary Beth Cancienne is sensitive to the performance/audience connection as well when she writes in Dancing the Data, “One of the many questions that I ask as the choreographer interpreting the data is: if thoughts and feelings were imagined through movement, what would they look like”? (p. 9)
Foundations of Wonder

Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.

The following is a free-write of sorts (Goldberg, 1986; Cameron, 1992) I did while at my second visit to the performance site. With my i-pod on and the music playing, I sat and sometimes walked around the sculptures, touching them, trying to become tuned to the space and any gift of potential openings. Thoughts, images and inspirations were noted as my body, mind, and spirit, united with the space and the music.

Calm – unaware – own world- connected but not in a big way – choosing to be alone – no connections. - connections hard to find - not fitting in - not a technique teacher - fit in education but not a lot of opportunity to teach here, small children = joy, breath – look outside of self - look inside of self -self-identity - what do I know and is it worthwhile? - I am distanced from the people who are similar to me - why do I do what I do? - Who or what can I connect it to? Does anyone really understand me? Do I understand myself? How can I understand myself? Connections - people who understand and I understand - a new world - I am accepted and understood even

The Structure

Improvisation is a place of discovery and freedom. It is a place where acceptance is at the heart of the endeavor and courage is fundamental. It is “about discovering possibilities; achieving surprise; finding the unpredictable”. (Harrison & Aty, 1991, p. 15). I work with structured improvisation both when I teach and when I perform. To embrace structured improvisation, it is best if one is fully aware of the structure at
hand to begin with (be it a lesson plan or loose choreography), and be open to recognize opportunties for alternative decision making in the process. With a structure in place, the individual can choose when, where and how far to deviate, and equally when to return to the plan. The structure can be seen as a safety net and/or a framework for propelling forward. Often times the term 'improvisation' is attached to thoughts of ‘doing what-ever’, ‘no skill involved’, ‘anyone can do it’ and although individuals should be encouraged to explore improvisation regardless of their position, there are issues that need to be addressed if structured improvisation is to be taken seriously as a mode of inquiry or educational method. For structured improvisation to be elevated to a respected place in an educational or artistic context, it is critical to take into account the layers of experience informing the improvisor as performer and/or as educator. As Goldman (2010) clearly states the issue:

A more serious problem with many discussions of improvisation is that their emphasis on spontaneity and intuition often implies a lack of preparation, thereby eliding the historical knowledge, the sense of tradition, and the enormous skill that the most eloquent improvisers are able to mobilize. (p. 5)

The process of choosing the music and framing a structured improvisation for a performance opens doors to questions and understandings that otherwise would remain not easily accessible and deep within me – known perhaps, but not articulated. The process of performance has become my scaffolding and it is only because of this scaffolding that I am able to springboard into improvisational ways of moving and thinking that in turn lead me to...

*hands opening as if in offer*

...perceptible insights.
Rehearsal at the Walking Figures

Note. Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.

Rehearsal at the Walking Figures

“Great...” (to be read with sarcasm) – there are 3 men sitting on the planters right in front of the statues. I stay in my car for a bit, feeling uncomfortable. There is a young couple off to the other side as well. It seems the area around Walking Figures is a comfortable place to linger. The weather is fantastic and balmy. I hope it is this way tomorrow for my performance. I brought my i-pod to practice a walk-through of my structured improv. A part of me has wanted to come to this place to move through and with the statues, and another part of me has been a bit nervous and afraid to do this. This kind of thing is not ‘normal’. ‘Normal’ people don’t go walking, dancing, touching, balancing. ‘Normal’ people don’t jump, twist, or lie down on public pavement. ‘Normal’ people do not move big... I guess I am not normal.

As I step out of my car with my ipod on, I need to find some comfort before diving into my work. I am not comfortable – there are too many people around and I don’t want to seem weird. I guess my i-pod gives me some comfort. I decide to listen to the music I will be using for my residency with the grade 7 class. The students and teacher will be
here tomorrow to watch, as well as to practice their own dance. Originally, I was going to have the students explore and rehearse before I performed because I did not want to influence their process, but after being here today I am thinking that I need to break the ice for them first. Instead of performing for them just before they leave to go back to school, maybe I should greet them with my performance. The music created a comfort zone for me to enter into my work – so my performance could be the invitation and create a comfort zone for them. My performance may break the ice of what is considered ‘normal’ behaviour.

The Performance Plan

As a result of spending time with the sculpture and the space around it, a framework for my performance emerged. The space and sculptures became metaphors for my journey into voice, and presenting itself in four sections.

The first section I would dance on my own on the upper level of the ‘stage’, where there were no ‘giants’. This section was to represent my world before I really became aware of the philosophers and theorists interested in dance in education.

The second section of my dance is where I would begin to recognize that there are others like me – others who believe there is a place for dance in education where the focus is not on the competitive nature of dance or replication, but on the development of the individual’s mind, body and soul.

The third section of my performance is where I recognize these huge sculptures as my mentors. These are the giants I have been reading. These are the giants that resonate with me and what I do. These are the giants whose footsteps have come before mine. I am both in awe and fearful of them.

By the end of the dance I will have touched all statues except one. This one will be intentionally left untouched in that it represents all that I have not yet encountered. This sculpture represents all the giants I have yet to know, who have yet to touch me in return. As the performance winds down, I struggled with how to end it.

I thought I would perhaps walk off, as if walking off in the distance, my journey carrying on...
I thought I might crumple to the ground, beaten by the thesis process...

I thought I just might stand there, just like the statues – immobile and proud, as if I had finally situated myself amongst them...

In deciding the ending, I asked myself what this dance was truly about – and in one word I would say ‘voice’. This dance and this thesis process for me is about finding my voice. Finding it both literally, enabling me to speak my knowledge and understandings as well as write them, but also to clarify my intrinsic knowledge and experience into a cohesive bundle, where meanings are intertwined and consciously understood. With this in mind, I decided to end my dance standing like the statues, but finally taking a deep breath, and with courage (and uncertainty), yell out loud at the top of my lungs. A yell that exclaims ‘I am here, hear me’. In the end, I have found my voice and am willing and capable to share it with the world.

**The Costume**

I wanted a costume for this performance and I had a clear idea in mind. Each of the nine Walking Figures was created individually out of cast iron. They are brown and rusty from being exposed to the elements and have layers of metal overlapping. They all look somewhat the same, but are all different. When considering a costume for my performance I wanted to appear as one of the Figures. I had a brown pair of yoga pants, all I needed was a brown dress type thing that I could alter to give the impression of layers similar to the ones on the sculptures. After a bit of shopping around, I came across the perfect dress. It was cheap ($8), it was brown, and it had no sleeves. (Note: the sculptures have no arms, so this was perfect) I stitched seams in somewhat of a zigzag across the front and back of the dress, and cut the hem on the diagonal for a further layered look against my pants. It was close to perfect, I had a brown layered torso and brown legs. I was becoming ready to dance alongside the Walking Figures.

**Stop.**

The act of creating a costume makes me curious about what one does to situate oneself alongside others. What is the power of situating? Through finding commonalities with others, understandings are mirrored back at us. We can question ‘how are we the same?’, ‘how are we different?’ and ‘does this matter?’ And although I had a costume
for theatrical reasons, I question ‘what costumes do we wear on a
daily basis?’ As we reach towards self-understanding, the costumes
we wear may not always fit us. Through exploring and celebrating our
similarities and differences we come to a better understanding of
ourselves. And as this self-understanding increases, the costume no
longer is fabric on our bodies, it becomes the fabric of our beings.

The Costume

Note. Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.

The Performance

Morning of the performance – my god, my stomach is doing flips. I can feel the
nervous pre-show energy surging through my body. I must remember to go slow – listen
to the music – listen to my journey – listen to my mentors – listen, listen, listen – and find
a voice.

Post-Performance Notes

Parts of the performance went as I imagined for the most part. However, the
music wasn’t loud enough. I used my sound system with batteries because electricity
was not available at the location at that time. Had it been, I would have rented a powerful speaker and hooked it up. Anyway- I worked with what I had. I had been listening to the music multiple times a day on my ipod, so I was used to it being loud and driving. When I practiced with my battery-operated sound system it didn't seem that bad – but with morning traffic and all, my sound got a little drowned out.

**Stop.**

Interesting... do I feel my voice is being drowned out by others? Am I finding it hard to find my own voice because I can't hear it? What do I need to listen for? How do I hear it?

I put on my costume in the morning and threw a black sweater over top to keep warm until the performance. Suddenly, in the middle of the performance, I realized I had not taken my sweater off. All that preparation and my costume was not even completely visible! I'm not sure what made me suddenly notice this, but when I did, I incorporated it into the dance. I sat on the ground, looked at the statues looming above me, and respectfully admired them. I proceeded to intentionally look at myself, then back at them, then took my sweater off revealing my brown layered dress. I stood up and looked at them, and looked at myself again, emphasizing how we now looked similar.

**Stop.**

Have the giants invited me to walk with them? These giants represent theorists, philosophers, and practitioners who have come before me and whose layers of knowledge have set the grounding for dance education. Are they inviting me to walk with them? How can we, as teachers, as holders and guiders of knowledge, invite our students to walk with us? How can we cultivate an environment of acceptance where students feel invited and encouraged to step forward?

acceptance  respect
encouragement
association  participation
confidence  courage
The Performance 1

Note. Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.
The Performance 2

Note. Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.

The Performance 3

Note. Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.
The Performance 4

*Note.* Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.

The Performance 5

*Note.* Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.
**Wandering in Search**

Structured improvisation as a soloist provides freedom to stray from the pre-planned. Typically when working towards a performance, I create a skeleton dance - meaning I have an idea of how to begin, how to end, and some sections in between. I do not work on a tightly choreographed performance. Hence, even though my performance plan may be the same, each performance is different. I have the freedom to improvise because I have no obligation to another dancer. I don’t have to be in unison with anyone other than myself and the integrity of my truth at that time. Looking back on this performance that happened only two hours prior to writing this, I only have scattered memories of what actually happened, but I am left with images, feelings, and even smells and rusty residue on my hands. I look forward to watching the video to see my performance from a spectator point of view. I care what the performance looked like to the students because this was my way of showing them performance possibilities, but that was not my sole reason for dancing today. I danced to open my thoughts, to provide...

*index and thumb connected on both hands, floating as if creating a silken spider web*

... connections, bridging thoughts with experiences and philosophies. I danced to reveal embodied knowledge that lived deeply and quietly inside. I danced to entice this knowledge up and out and through my body so that connections could be realized and perceived. I danced to open new perspectives and to allow new insights to present themselves. I may never have come to certain questions or realizations had it not been for the entire experience of preparing, performing and reflecting. My dancing became my inquiry, my data was my expressive body. And this is a place where I can both intentionally communicate what I know, but in turn the experience also reveals what lays hidden and informs what I have yet to discover.

**The Giants**

Up until this point I have been teaching very much in my own world. I never really fit in to what was considered a typical dance teacher. I don’t focus on dance technique, so I imagine I was thought of as a bad teacher from some outside
standpoints, the measurement being how well my little dancers can do a plie, tendu, or arabesque. Instead, my aim has always been to create a nurturing environment where the child feels important and where they understand that their contributions are valued. My focus has been on developing group dynamics that include respect for each other and fostering positive self-esteem. I welcome all body shapes and sizes, and encourage each child to find the confidence to share their ideas, and offer opportunities for them to step forward as leaders, as well as learn how to take on supportive roles.

Stop.

During my performance I ran back to the safety of my primary starting position - where I teach and live in my own bubble, where my voice is not heard because I am unable to find it, but it is safe because I have been there so long. This is a place of comfort because it is the known place, and there is discomfort in stepping into the unknown. I begin to understand that I have been trying to fit into a world that does not resonate with me. I can be misunderstood because my goals and philosophies are not the same as most dance teachers. And until I am able to fully understand my approach and personal philosophy of teaching dance, I find it frustrating in being unable to tell what I do - I feel I am being unheard, and this is because I have not been able to hear myself.

There was a sense of joy when I finally became aware of philosophers, theorists and teachers who have the same belief system as I do. Not only have I become aware of these giants, I have become aware that I have a lineage that connects me with giants that I have not recognized or fully honoured. I have become aware that I have one foot stepping forward, ready to walk amongst these giants. There is exhilaration in this, and also unease. It is more comfortable to just continue doing what I already do – in my own little world, with my own little voice. But I feel I have a responsibility to inform others. As much as it is pushing my boundaries of comfort, I feel the need to have my voice heard.

The Journey Continues

Now in hindsight, I see I have created a very neat and tidy dance that on the surface reflects my journey, but has an ending that I truly haven’t experienced yet. The four sections represent the past, the present, stepping towards the future, and finally the
future where I find my voice and am able to be heard. The journey is continual, so I realize that it is not only the finding of one’s voice that is important, but in addition, what is important is the forward nudging of that voice, continually exploring, reflecting, researching, what it is we have to say, what we know, what we question. Voice is a dynamic...

left and right arms swirl over head

...concept. Although sometimes elusive to capture, moments of clarity allow one to step forward into voice, enabling understandings and connections to converge into a foundation that is both secure and inviting to change. And with curiosity, voice constantly evolves. So although my dance had an envisioned ending, I now understand that the pathway to voice is continuous. “The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself” (hooks, 1994, p. 11).

The Journey Continues

Note. Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.
**Splinters**

In looking at the pictures and watching my performance video, I realize my dance was tied very much to the driving force of the music as well as my responsibility to present a performance that would relate to the students. The dance was not only for me, it was for a specific audience and I needed to take them into consideration. As I travelled from sculpture to sculpture, running, touching, and stepping through them, I now realize I was working with split attention. I was focusing on what I wanted to project to the students while at the same time hoping to find some personal insight that would speak back to me in the moments of improvisation and reflection. My performance was not completely honest in the purely artistic sense of the word in that I felt I had to filter my actions and reactions. I could not become too deeply self-involved because I was afraid the students wouldn’t get it, and possibly lose attention. I had to keep their attention and relate what I was doing to what they could grasp themselves doing in the near future. In the end, I am not in any way disappointed with the event. I have come to realizations and know I brought both clarity of intent and integrity to both my performance and my inquiry.

Palmer (1998) declares, “we speak to the teacher within our students only when we are on speaking terms with the teacher within ourselves” (p. 32). Liora Bresler (2008) adds a third dimension, and although she speaks of qualitative research, this third dimension is significant when considering the teacher as research practitioner. By tri-directional she means, “reaching toward the phenomenon under study to understand it accurately and fully, reaching within oneself, and reaching out to an audience” (p.228). So I realize I had multiple responsibilities during my performance. I had to listen to the teacher within myself (reaching within), in order to connect and call forth inner understandings (the phenomenon), while speaking to my students (reaching out to my audience).

**Stop.**

This speaks to the many fibres of teaching. A teacher has responsibility to the students as well as themselves and their growth as teachers. To be exclusively there to teach the students removes the teacher from the equation. To be in a class for the sole purpose
of teacher research removes the students from the focus. The fibres of students and teachers learning together should weave a reciprocal tapestry creating a healthy co-creation in the learning relationship.

After watching the video of my performance from a critical standpoint, it looked like I wasn't going slow enough. This process of getting my words to the page has been slow and at times steady, but the music I chose had a driving pace and a very specific time framework. And although I have a time framework for my thesis, there certainly is enough time to go slow. The music kept my dance moving forward at a quick pace, one that I felt I needed to keep the attention of the students. My mostly pedestrian style movements were chosen so as to not intimidate the students, but also because this is how I move as a dancer now.

Stop.

My inner critic is telling me my dancing was lame because it simply was too pedestrian. I have chosen to listen only partially to this voice. I struggle not to believe the voice that tells me I am too old and too fat to dance and that nobody wants to watch some old lady perform. I am trying to find a place where I believe I belong, regardless of how old I am or how much I weigh. This is the damage done by a society that places youth and a thin physique as the measure of beauty. It has further been reinforced by a dance community steeped in tradition, where the optimal size, shape, weight and proportions of the ideal dancer is only attainable through the luck of genetics, or sometimes less than healthy means. And although I do my best not to listen to the critic who is damaging, by watching my performance with a critical eye, I can see my movements provide potential for insights to deeper thought.

I struggle with calling myself a dancer. I remember the elitist attitude that was ingrained in my training and have often felt offended when others have so boldly declared themselves as dancers when they had not put in years and years of serious, dedicated training. And yet at the same time, when I teach I support and encourage everyone to be a dancer. I try to erase the preconceived perception of what dance is and who a dancer is, in an effort to embrace all movers. Regardless of ability,
appearance or training, I invite students to live and express fully through and with their bodies.

I call them ‘dancers’.

And yet, I struggle with calling myself a dancer.

Stop.

What conditions do I create for my students to enable them to see themselves as dancers? How can I apply that to myself? Why is this even important?
Chapter 5.

Forks in the Road

Am I a Dancer?

I remember myself so clearly, as a young dancer standing at the front of the class, lean and flexible, mind and body ready to take on the challenges and pace of professional dance classes. I remember seeing older dancers come into the studio and wonder who they were – noticing they were kind of ‘fat’ and certainly ‘old’. (And by fat and old, I mean maybe 40 years old and maybe 15 pounds over a slender dancer weight. In other words, they were perfectly healthy. And ‘old’? Well, everything is relative, and from a 25-year-old’s perspective, 40 was old) Then noticing they weren’t half bad at dancing, in fact some of them were quite good. I remember those ‘fat old ladies’ at the back of the class, and this memory makes it hard for me to return to the studio today. For the tables have turned, and now I am the fat old lady at the back of the class. I know what the younger dancers are thinking – I was one of them not that long ago.

And so, how do I break away from ingrained pressures to be a certain way and arrive at a place where I am confident and secure with the label ‘dancer’? I have given excuses for myself in the past –“I used to be a dancer,” with the measure again being body related. I have lived with the idea that in order to have the privilege of calling oneself a dancer, you had to be technically proficient, taking classes, choreographing and/or performing. I do none of these any more – and so lies my difficulty in calling myself a dancer. I dance, I teach, but am I a ‘dancer’?
educators encourage acceptance struggle 
we students we themselves they are our own 
how to model as if can accept our self 

(How can we encourage students to accept themselves as they are, if we as educators struggle to model our own self-acceptance?)

Lessons from a Hip Hop Class

I went to a dance class last night - hip hop (!) I am not a hip-hop dancer (nor have I ever really pretended to be). Anyway, the experience was revealing. I came to an understanding that I tend to describe myself as a dancer (or not) based on my ability to recreate someone else’s prescribed way(s) of moving. This is a very interesting perspective to me. I stood towards the front of the class so I could easily follow the teacher, and was for much of the class completely lost. The movement combinations were fast and sharp, and the flow of one movement to another did not make natural sense to me. I was one of the oldest students in the class, but I had little time to notice my ability compared to others since I had to be so focused on following the teacher. In my younger days I would have left the class feeling like an idiot and perhaps even a little mad at myself. Last night I left class with a little shrug thinking, what the heck, it was fun, but totally not me - and that's OK. No pressure, no disappointment. I didn't leave feeling like I wasn't a dancer any more, in fact I left feeling like I AM A DANCER - I DANCE IN MY WAY: AND THAT IS GOOD. Perhaps it is age and/or maturity that has brought me here - but I can honestly say I can now 'feel' and 'know' that I am a dancer. My way no longer includes high leg lifts or large jumps and that's OK, and I no longer care if I am able to follow someone else’s choreography. I bring something else to the movement now. When I dance now, I dance from an inside motivation. My ‘language’ is more subtle yet honest and true to who I am. I dance through my body, not only with my body. I dance for expression rather than for impression. I dance to vocalize rather than be applauded. I dance to have my voice heard. So it seems I have come to a place
where I have found acceptance and confidence. How did I get here (and will it last more than a day!!) and how can I help others down this path of finding their own voices?

“What should we be trying to teach?”

“As dance educators it is not our purpose to train dancers: rather we are educating students about life through dance” (Kay, 2004) Susan R. Koff (2000), addresses the difference between dance training and dance education in that:

Dance education does not seek to prepare children to become performers. Dance training, however, dictates movements and strategies for learning specific motor skills with the aim of mastery and future performance. Dance education can be described as the sequential development through the exploration of time, space, and energy in order to express oneself (Griss, 1998; Purcell, 1994; Stinson, 1988). In simpler term, however, dance education seeks the development of self-expression and interpretation through motion, with self-knowledge as its aim. (p. 27)

When speaking of dance, images of a body moving with energy in space, time and in relationship come to mind. But dance in education is so much more than what the body can do. We must also address the voices of our students and ask ourselves “why are we doing this?” Beyond the physicality of dance class, “what are we hoping to accomplish?” And until these questions are fully realized, dance in education will remain in a precarious position, misunderstood, and widely regulated as just an ‘activity’.

Veering Back

When watching the video recording of my performance I noticed my movements could have had more dynamics to them. I noticed I could use the space in a more three dimensional manner. I noticed I no longer lift my legs.

Stop.

Watching my video is telling me deeper things other than performance notes. It is telling me that in order to be more dynamic I have to believe in what I do and have to say with conviction – say it and know it to be truthful. I can be more three dimensional by embracing all that I know in connecting my worlds of dance, education
and life. I understand that lifting a leg requires strength and flexibility. This can apply to a state of mind as well as a courageous disposition. My dancing could be much more physical, which tells me first of all that I need to reconnect with and enliven my body, but also I need to open up my body so it can speak louder. My thesis journey is one of finding voice. And in order to do this I need to attend to the dynamics, physicality, depths, and interconnectedness of what elusively lives inside me, allow it to speak through, and with my body, revealing a three dimensional dancing voice.

Dance is an immediate art form, one that exists in the moment, and is fleeting. How ironic that after watching my performance on video twice, somehow a glitch managed to erase the whole file. The performance was captured for a day or two, just enough time for me to take an audience stance, but not long enough for me to re-visit it with an overly critical eye. The video existed for only a short time, then evaporated – mirroring the indefinable and impermanence of dance. What is left behind are thoughts and memories, feelings and sensory fragments.

Thoughts, memories, feelings and sensory fragments: such elusive knowledge. The smell of rust on my hands and the scrape on my elbow remind me of the moments where body, mind, and spirit combined with intent and offerings. Where the immediacy of the moment called forth a courage to reveal hidden wisdom and a willingness to welcome the unknown. The scrape hurts a bit and it reminds me of how stepping outside of one’s comfort zones can be uncomfortable. But in the desire to grow and seek understandings one must be willing to endure the scrapes as you push forward into new territory. The writing of this thesis has been a bit of a scrape. It surely would have been much easier for me not to engage in this kind of growth, where I have had to live my inquiry so deeply in order to bring my words forth. Time, patience, and trust have allowed my body, mind, and spirit to swirl to the surface, while my fingers searched for letters on the keyboard to elucidate fragments as they emerged. With energy, focus, intent, along with courage, willingness and slight discomfort, I am slowly strengthening my voice.
The Known and the Unknown

My experience with performative inquiry has given structure to allow my embodied understandings the opportunity to weave together and become consciously known. What I never knew at the start is what else would bubble to the surface. Wandering through the forests awakened me to alternative pathways. The Walking Figures became my inspiration and my focal point for springboarding, and a place for metaphor to blossom. My structured improvisational dance had form, but I was open and willing to wander from it. The structure I set up was intentionally not solid, it was fluid, and had allowances for empty spaces and opportunities to deviate. These empty spaces were left available so potential could germinate, where the unseen and unnoticed could surface. The words that have spilled to the page are an end result of being receptive to possibilities, meeting them, and embarking on new pathways. Having a structure allowed me to call forth and assemble many of my understandings by giving them a point of focus, but this structure also provided openings to directions I may never have travelled. ‘Knowns’ were revealed, and ‘unknowns’ appeared. And with a phenomenological sensitivity, layers of experience and research merged, a stronger, more confident voice emerged.
Chapter 6.

The Path Continues

Upon reflection of my performative inquiry and my thesis process, I am left with some understandings as well as some questions. I primarily set out to write this thesis as a way to clarify my teaching philosophy and practice, and I came to acknowledge that I am an artist in the way I approach my personal, professional and academic endeavours. Improvisation is at the heart of what I do, where I am receptive to openings and opportunities, and I realize I have the courage to let go of the predetermined and explore uncharted possibilities. I understand the need to ‘warm up’. I have come to understand that I have embodied knowledge that requires patience and perseverance to entice out. I understand that my body speaks, but it also speaks back to me, unveiling perspectives that otherwise may have remained unnoticed. I understand that my wanderings provide openings for wonderings. I understand that in order for all this to happen, I need a focal point, or a structure where my research and practice can attach itself. I understand that it is equally important to allow for empty spaces within that structure where I can fall into imagination and metaphor and get to my feet with found wisdoms and connections.

Pathways and threads have presented themselves and provided invitations to follow. In the end, I found many commonalities that intertwined these paths and threads, and although seemingly separate at times, glimpses of convergence provided for moments of clarity. I found my embodied wisdom elusive at times, just as situating my voice was elusive at times as well. Because my writing rhythm was so slow, I question if I was resisting the process of bringing voice forward into words because in doing so the words on a page become concrete. Perhaps my unease is in the understanding that embodied knowledge and voice are not concrete entities, not fixed inactive positions. The journey of finding voice is one of constant movement.
Coaxing the Elusive

I question, why is my research important? What have I learned from my explorations of phenomenology, embodied expression and writing, and performative inquiry, that go beyond the personal? Through my struggles with writing, I have realized that my practice and research reside in my body. They live in my muscles and bones, in my flesh and blood. But as Smith-Autard explains, “there is a tendency not to notice that for which we have no language” (p.33). So while I struggled to get the words out, I realized that just because the words don’t flow to the page easily or through conversation, does not mean I am not knowledgeable. Because I had been unable to quickly and easily grasp verbal and written symbolism in this regard, or see the association of my pathways immediately, does not mean I am not wise. As a result of my struggles, I can empathise with the children who fall into similar cracks where knowledge and language do not necessarily entwine. These children may be considered faltering since their grasping of concepts or understanding of associations may not be clearly displayed in a typical verbal-linguistic manner. However, as Wendy Slater (1974) states, “those children who have difficulty in communicating with words, either spoken or written, may find that they are able to communicate the same ideas through movement” (p. 23). Hawkins (1991) speaks of the limits of written and spoken language:

The language of internal sensory communication is only in part verbal language. Images, sensations, obscurities, emotions, intuitions, and biological factors are all involved in the internal communication system, so that words alone, both written and spoken, are inadequate and present limitations. (p. vii)

So while communicating through movement and dance can be seen as an alternative expression to writing and speaking, ultimately writing and speaking still remain the primary modes of communicating in both our school system and our wider society because this is the symbolism that is most broadly understood. As a result, we must encourage the moving-knowers to attend to their body speech and help them find connections to words so they can be understood. As John Lee states, "writing, of course, is a powerful Dance, the dance of creation. To write from the body, we must let the body dance" (p. 64).
Most people don’t understand the language of dance, and that dance can be a form of knowledge presenting as well as knowledge making. If dance is to be recognized as a place where knowledge can be both received and perceived, somehow a bridge needs to be built to facilitate the interchange between the language of dance and more readily understood languages.

“Combining dance, a kinesthetic form, and writing, a cognitive form, can forge relationships between body and mind, cognitive and affective knowing, and the intellect with physical vigor” (Cancienne & Snowber, 2009). Boorman (1973) adds “that words and language belong to dance, that dance belongs to words and language, that both belong to the child, and that it is our responsibility to attend both to creative dance and to language. (p. xiv)

Students can use knowledge already conscious to create and develop dance which has the potential to mirror and deepen their understandings. In addition, the process of creation and the dance product itself can elicit and entice knowledge and understandings that may otherwise have remained unrecognized. Embodied knowledge and embodying knowledge can be a place of fertile ground for many students, where success lies waiting.

Read from an audience stance:

engage the question
bring to get
how and then
this do we becomes
embodied children
forth to understandable articulation
knowledge knowledge

(The question then becomes, how do we get children to engage their embodied knowledge and bring this knowledge forth to understandable articulation?)
**Holding on to Let Go**

From my own personal experiences with my inquiries, I have found the discovery of a focused inspiration to be the structure on which my conscious and intuitive knowledge could dance, relate, connect, and become articulated. Louise Steinman (1986), agrees by suggesting that structure can be freeing and that “setting boundaries and limiting options makes possibilities for creating” (p. 81). In an educational setting, I support curriculum connections as inspirational starting points because students find comfort in moving from the familiar into the unfamiliar (Hanna, 1999). There is comfort in working with tangible ideas and elements such as can be found in curricular connections. By...

*arms open as if embracing*

...starting with the known, comfort zones can gently stretch to a place where students find confidence to step into the unknown. With the scaffolding of the curriculum subject in place, dancers can be encouraged to explore these supports as well as the empty spaces in between the supports. It is within these in between places that learning about the self and others exists beyond the set school curriculum. These empty spaces provide openings for students to make connections to the world around them and make sense of who they are.

**Stop.**

I need to move and notice, and notice to write. In turn, my writing and dancing informs what I have yet to discover. By listening and trusting, pathways become visible and merge.

**What Lies Deep**

“In its deepest form...education is not the piling on of learning, information, data, facts, skills, or abilities – that’s training or instructing – but is rather a making visible what is hidden as a seed” (Moore, 1997, p. 3). Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990), writing about improvisation and creativity, also speaks of training and education:
We often make the mistake of confusing education with training, when in fact these are very different activities. Training is for the purpose of passing on specific information necessary to perform a specialized activity. Education is the building of the person. To educate means to draw out or evoke that which is latent; education then means drawing out the person’s latent capacities for understanding and living, not stuffing a (passive) person full of preconceived knowledge.

(p. 118)

Ronald J. Pelias invites the heart and poetic voice into academic scholarship and says so beautifully, “I seek a clearing, a place where I can begin to see” (p. 72). And when I begin to see, I can understand, and when I understand, I can find voice, and when I find voice, I can write, and when I write it speaks back to me, building and strengthening my understandings. “It is easy to lose sight of the fact that writers do not write to impart knowledge to others; rather, they write to inform themselves” (Goldberg, 1986, p. xii).

I speak of ‘voice’ and through connecting with embodied wisdoms, understandings and questions, two voices are brought forth. One voice is the voice of self-understanding. I have decades of lived experiences residing in my body. I have intuitive sensitivities when it comes to energies and teaching dance to children that reside deep in my body, and I have years of dedicated research...

left and right arms swirl and circle

...churning internally. In calling this history to conscious awareness, I am able to engage another voice. This is the voice that can be heard by others in a more universal manner. This is the voice that engages the vocal chords and allows words to spill to a page. Until this wealth of living experience is brought forth to my reflective consciousness I will be challenged to express what I know or consider to be my questions. And how can I possibly express to others what I don’t fully understand myself?

Through my thesis journey, I have been attempting to understand my practice and philosophy of teaching Creative Educational Dance. I have sat, I have moved my arms, twisted my torso, I have stood up and turned around, I have thought and thought and thought, trying to reach a truth. And in looking back, I realize my journey into voice was one of “learning to trust my own mind” (Goldberg, 1986, p. 2). But further to that, I
had to trust my own body and my own way of being. I am a wanderer and I have come
to understand that I am curious and courageous, and that sometimes I need to move in
order to find clarity. Palmer (1998) speaks of ‘authority’, and differentiates authority from
power in saying, “power works from the outside in, but authority works from the inside
out” (p. 34). In reading what he has to say in this regard, I realize I have been searching
for authority. “The clue is in the word itself, which has author at its core. Authority is
granted to people who are perceived as authoring their own words, their own actions,
their own lives…” (p. 34). In so doing, a confidence emerges. So as the blur subsides, I
am able to better understand myself, how I learn, how I live and communicate, and what
I have to offer to others. In returning to my guiding questions of ‘who cares’ and ‘why
does this matter’, Linda and Richard Eyre (1980) write:

Ponder, for a moment, the quality of a child’s life once he becomes
confident in his own ability to make decisions, to enjoy and be aware of
nature, to set a goal and accomplish it, to share with his friends, and to
see himself as a unique individual with a great deal to offer others.

(p.10)

In attending to my personal journey, and noticing blocks and openings, I have uncovered
my key to finding and cultivating voice. By warming up and situating a foundation (the
Walking Figures), a framework emerged. And by meeting and following pathways, and
allowing myself to diverge, I have realized something about ‘voice’. All along this
journey, I have been ‘looking for voice’, when in fact in the end I think what happened is
that I was actually ‘meeting voice’ and ‘cultivating voice’. My voice was there all along,
just not in an outwardly connected fashion. Through living into an invitational way of
being and working my way through writing, I was finding clarity. The act of writing has
given concrete form to my elusive thoughts, offering a structure that requires deep
considerations on my part. My process has been slow, but has allowed my figurative
and literal voice to surface and enrich. Max van Manen speaks of this connection when
he says, “Writing is a kind of self-making or forming. To write is to measure the depth of
things, as well to come to a sense of one’s own depth” (1990, pp. 126 - 127).
The Path that Leads Back Home

“Wandering is essential for writers” (Powell, 2006, p. 31), and wander I did. It is only in looking back that I can fully understand what I have written. As I played with structure and improvisation while I wrote, I allowed myself to follow a directional flow that unfolded naturally. With the freedom to adhere to structure when I felt the need, and a trust in following where my attention was guided, I have recognized a road to voice. I find parallels in my writing style and teaching style in that with a warm-up and a structure, I am open to wander. With sensitivities to the groups of students, I am able to deviate from my lesson plan when invitations present themselves, knowing that if the new road travelled does not present rich opportunities for learning, I am able to...

left palm flush against right palm, right palm slides forward to contact with fingers of left hand, while fingers of right hand are free to curve to the left

...steer the experience back towards my originally conceived direction.

Giving Back to Myself in Order to Go Forward

What I give to others is what I have needed to give myself in order to find my voice. The spaces I try to create for the students to explore embodied expression are places of acceptance and honest attention where a sense of security leads to confidence and self-knowledge. It took me a long time to realize that I needed to offer myself that same space so my own embodied expressions could dance into voice. I was forgetting to give back to myself what I innately and sincerely gave to others. With a sense of trust and courage I led myself towards self-acceptance – which, in turn, illuminated pathways into voice.

Clear pathways have been recognized and explored, but I know there are many more paths to traverse. And I know I will never be able to fully explore these passages without continued attention to the nurturing of self-acceptance.
By giving back to myself, I am learning how to tap into and use my body to both express what I know as well as what I don’t know. And this in turn is bringing me personal experiential insights into the process of articulating and engaging voice through dance. Patricia Leavy (2009) says “dance has a transcendent, consciousness-raising potential” (p. 180). Snowber (2012) agrees when she states that dance holds “generative possibilities for deeper understanding” (p. 54). I know this to be true and in looking back I realize the only way my voice was able to reveal itself is if I was patient and allowed myself to dance.

Nachmanovitch (1990) declares that “education must teach, reach, and vibrate the whole person” (p.177). The word ‘vibrate’ in this case can suggest the engagement of the entire body. Creative Educational Dance embraces this approach to teaching and learning. Many languages are recognized within the school system, however, dance remains mysterious and often absent. Students are falling into, out of, and through the cracks because they are being misunderstood. Through my experience in calling my voice to presence, I have come to deeply understand what it is to have knowledge, understanding, questions, uncertainties, and wisdoms as well as insecurities that inhabit my body. I have navigated pathways and found convergences where clarity of voice has emerged as verbal and written articulation: the articulation needed to enter into conversation, debate and collaboration with a larger community. Carl Leggo (2007) relates, when he says,

Ultimately, I have to remind myself (almost daily) that I write my autobiographical narratives, first, for myself, not in some kind of egocentric, narcissistic self-obsession, but out of a conviction that by writing about myself in process, with all the hopes and joys, as well as the struggles and disappointments, I can enter into a dialogic conversation with others, including students and colleagues. (p 131)

And in the end, I am meeting and developing a voice that has potential to enable so many students who are unheard and unable to funnel their way of communicating into
the school system. I know what it is like to struggle to tell what you know, however, I have uncovered a means of tapping into an evanescent language in connecting the invisible to the visible, and movements to words. I propose that we challenge our perceptions of what ‘telling what we know’ looks like and expand our vocabulary to include ‘showing what we know’ in the embodied sense and ‘finding out what we can come to know’ through an embodied way of exploring.

Clarity

My wanderings have taken me on pathways where the destinations were not always clear. At times I felt lost, but with a belief that I was being led towards something to be found, I persisted and allowed for possibilities to unfold. There were times when the path led me towards wonderful imaginings, but I came to realize that some experiences were to be left unfinished. Certain pathways held great promise but the time was not right to fully engage in the detour. I know where these paths are, and how to find them, and I know I will revisit them when the time is right. But through my wanderings what surprised me the most is how many of my pathways indirectly and unexpectedly converged at various points that were poignant to the understanding of who I am and what I do as a dance educator. By considering and embracing my history I am now able to stand tall and proud, confident that my contributions to dance education are both valid and relevant. My writing has invited and engaged my body to swoop and float, and in return my movements have brought forth words to the page that were formerly resistant. I find now when I stretch my fingers the elusive is more willing to present itself and I can now call myself a writer and a dancer. As I continue on my journeys I welcome the lure of getting lost and hope I can convince others to do the same. I understand that voice is a dynamic essence that is ever changing and while the fog will lift and settle and lift again in a rhythm that entices curiosity, there will be moments of clarity. I will continue to be wide awake to the possibilities and courageously step into the openings that present themselves. And as this journey comes to a close, I know the fog has shifted, the sunlight is pouring in, and I am able to dance, revealing a voice that is graceful and wise.
More Questions

Max van Manen (1990) emphasizes that the purpose of reflecting on lived experiences is to find the significance of the experiences in order to gain deeper understandings and universal connections. So I return to my questions: “Why does my research matter?” “Who cares?” And “how do we address the inclusion of dance as an alternative language and way of knowing into our school systems?” Firstly, a broader definition of dance needs to be embraced. Tim Hopper (2010) notes the problem where dance is seen as

a repetition of steps, modeled by a teacher who then corrects students’ errors until a synchronized movement to the model and then to music is created. Learning to dance then becomes a mechanical process with actions reduced to simplest components, the mind is separate from the body, but through rehearsal the mind is able to govern the bodily actions. It is this form of dance teaching that has discouraged all but the most musical and coordinated from learning to dance. (p. 5)

If dance is to be seen as valuable within the school system, it should be inclusive and embrace all movers regardless of their abilities. While including the cognitive and purely physical aspects of dance, this understanding would do well to move into the experiential realm where dance can provide openings and other pathways to learning. And through warming up comfort zones, and providing focal points from which to find inspiration and to springboard, the relationship between embodied ways of knowing and the world can open up. In a circular relationship, dance has a way of showing what we know, and it can, in turn, speak back to us. If I am able to pass these keys on to other educators and bring an awareness of embodied understandings to others, then perhaps dancing-knowers won’t remain lost, and can be led down a path to finding a confident, eloquent, and wide-awake voice that is recognized by both themselves and others.

While teachers can use “dance to teach, reinforce, review and assess skills and content” (Hanna, 2002, p. 50), it is important to understand that dance also has the capacity to empower and bring deeper understandings of self, and one’s relationship with others and the world at large. As students are guided to “embody abstract conceptes in dance-making, they can explore their transcendent, aesthetic, physical,
social, emotional, and intellectual selves” leading them closer to self-realization and a deeper understanding of what it means to be human (Hannah, Nov. 2008, pp. 501-502).

The practice of attention and reflection will guide students towards understandings of how the language of the body has potential to connect with verbal forms of representation, resulting in a deepened understanding of subject matter as well as self. While being guided towards an artistic improvisational attitude, students can become receptive to wandering and courageous to lead, follow, and meet experiences. And while engaging their embodied selves they can be led towards an articulation of understandings, questions, wisdoms, insights, connections that may have remained dormant. With a focal point on which to direct attention, students can be encouraged to notice the empty spaces that are inviting them to step forward. These are the spaces where the individual is recognized by both themselves and others, where honour, respect and celebration reside, where we learn what it really means to be human and are invited to explore who we are as individuals. This is a place where individual voice can arise and be encouraged to flourish. And as the dancing voice provides access to alternative ways of communicating, it also awakens a different kind of consciousness. With this, doors open for reflection and association, leading in the direction of self-understanding and ultimately of finding ‘voice’.

There are students out there who are being misunderstood and who are missing opportunities to see value in what they do and who they are. We need to provide sensitive and attentive learning opportunities for them that include their minds, bodies, and souls in a creative and inclusive manner. And as educators, if we have the insight to embrace and engage with dance as a way of knowing and expressing, and have the courage to wander with them, we may have the privilege to celebrate with students as we watch them bravely blossom and dance into voice.
The Path Continues

Note. Sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz.
References


