The Accidental Curricularist:
The Building of a Dance Curriculum
Through Artistic and Improvisational Practice

by

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ABSTRACT

This narrative study traces the development of a dance curriculum as it unfolded in an inner city public school. It examines the curriculum emergence through intersecting worlds of artistic practice, improvisation, lived experience and context. These worlds were organized and explored through themes of gender, emotion, longing and intersections and examined through lenses of critical theory, aesthetics and currere. It examines the interior dialogue within one individual educator who is both a dance artist and a teacher and reflects the differing and at times conflicting perspectives within those two positions. The curriculum acquired the name “curriculum by accident” because several highly unexpected events contributed to its development. The students were initially suspicious and hostile and presented significant resistance to classical dance as an artistic form. This resistance was circumvented through creative process and improvisation. The act of improvisation became both a way to approach teaching and curriculum development and as an artistic process. Improvisation courts chance, the unplanned and the accidental through a structure in which the unknown is as valued as the known. The school setting is one full of known subjects; curriculum, settings, procedures, people and expectations. Curriculum by accident was a circumstance in which a known (school) and an unknown (the evolving curriculum) melded. The development of curriculum by accident was a response to an array of intuitive and serendipitous cues. The curriculum seeped through the cracks of school experience and transmuted into a curriculum that was very successful.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Like you practice and rehearse and rehearse and then finally the day comes and you’re going to show them, like, look what I can do and you’ve worked so hard and when you’re out there like your hearts beating all fast and you can’t wait. You’re out there and you don’t want it to end.

(Martiza, former Castillo student, 2009)

This writing is the story of curriculum change. It traces the development of a dance curriculum in an inner city kindergarten through eighth grade public school. The basic story line is as follows. I was hired as a dance teacher at Castillo School and brought to the job a concept of what dance was, what teaching dance meant and what it would look like. It was based on my own dance experience and training. However, what I found when I started teaching was dramatically different. I encountered resistance in many forms. Students responded to me with either open hostility or silent resistance. The school culture did not support dance as an art form, the academic value structure of the school placed dance below academics and the physical needs of dance (dressing rooms, performance spaces) were not met.

I had to choose either to impose my known understanding of dance education on the school and students, or find a different approach. The challenge was ultimately addressed through the act of creative process. I improvised. The act of improvisation became both a teaching method and an artistic process. All
the elements of creative encounter were present in that challenge; the making of something, an unknown, playing with ideas, discovery and risk taking.

None of this, however, happened on a conscious level. It unfolded unknowingly to become a curriculum and pedagogical method that I’ve dubbed *curriculum by accident*. I worked improvisationally both in the performing arts sense of the word and as a way of approaching teaching and curriculum development. I used it as a choreographic tool and as an approach to what was happening in class. Improvisation courts chance, the unplanned and the accidental, through a structure in which the unknown is as valued as the known. School is a setting full of known subjects, curriculum, settings, procedures, people, expectations etc. Curriculum by accident was a circumstance in which a known (school) and an unknown (curriculum) melded.

The dance curriculum at Castillo was happened upon through this improvisational, accidental way. It was a response to an array of intuitive and serendipitous cues. The curriculum seeped through the cracks of school experience and transmuted into a curriculum that was very successful.
Chapter 2

THE SCHOOL, THE TEACHERS, STUDENTS,
COMMUNITY AND STAFF

The School

Castillo School is a kindergarten through eighth grade magnet arts school. It is the only school of its kind in the state offering instrumental music, drama, dance, chorus, and visual art to all its students. It is a Title 1 school.

The magnet arts program at Castillo was put in place in the mid 1980s by its principal; Dr. Miller who was a strong supporter of arts, had a degree in gifted and talented education and advocated creativity as a learning mode.

Castillo School is located in Phoenix, Arizona. It is about three quarters of a mile west of the Sky Harbor International Airport. The building construction includes features that muffle the deafening sounds of air traffic. The school is partially underground. You walk down a flight of stairs to the front door which is in fact, the case for all the entrances. The roof is a vast expanse of concrete where there are basketball courts and unmarked open flat surfaces that offer a bird’s eye view of the school below. It reminds me of a huge landing pad for helicopters. Kids would stand at the fence on the roof and yell to others coming and going below them as they unloaded from busses, walked onto campus or stepped out of cars. The building was flanked by athletic fields.

Castillo is right at the end of one of the runways. Kids on the playground would sometimes jump and wave at the planes hoping the passengers might see
them. When I was outside as a plane was coming in, I covered my ears.

Frequently the smell of jet fuel clung in the air. About a half mile on the other
side of the school is a major freeway.

When I drove into work I often saw stray dogs roaming around the
neighborhood near school and they frequently made their way onto campus.
Sometimes it was a students’ dog but usually they were strays—a little too lean
and a little wild: canine scofflaws. There were regular calls to Animal Control to
come get them. There was a dog directly across the street from the front of the
school that was famously scary—the stuff of nightmares. It was a big muscular pit
bull that lived on a chain in a dirt yard with some junked cars. It barked and
lunged at passersby.

Castillo had long, long hallways. Four major ones had all the classrooms
on them. They were spokes that radiated from the library at the center of the
school. My classroom was at the end of the junior high, fine arts wing. Having a
pathetic sense of direction, it took me about a year to find my way around the
school. I got lost looking for classrooms.

Each class was different. Each had a different feeling and sense about it.
As I’d walk down the hall, I’d look in one after the other. Some were arranged
very traditionally with rows of desks facing front and others were more
imaginative. Some seemed aesthetically blank. Others seemed aesthetically
vibrant, filled with color and displays and creatively arranged furniture. Some
were comfortable and homey. Some lacked any awareness of it. They were tiny universes.

Each class had its own type of busyness. I went into classrooms for various reasons. Some would have the children all on the floor hearing a story or listening to a lesson, their energy concentrated and piqued. They wouldn’t notice me until I walked in. I’d walk by other classes and kids would be gazing into space, ready for something to catch their eye. They’d see me instantly and wave.

The hallways always seemed neglected and lonely. They were packed with life for short bursts of the day, but were otherwise ghostly—as if an inhalation sucked the life from the hallways and an exhalation released it. They were so long, they felt like tunnels. Each ended with a glass door to the outside. Sometimes they felt cool and refreshing, keeping the intense Arizona heat at a distance. Other times the bright outdoors was like a dog staring in, waiting to play.

Students were brought to my dance class. I didn’t go and get them. So I rarely saw them in their own classroom environment. When I had reason to walk down the halls and see students in their classes, there was a little jolt on both of our parts at seeing each other out of context. It felt a little like seeing someone’s home for the first time. It’s a new part of them.

Some teachers displayed their students work in the hallway outside their room—rotating it regularly. Some classrooms had student murals painted by the junior high art students on their hallway walls. There was a professional mural of
the Amazon jungle in honor of the book *The Great Kapok Tree*, painted by a past artist in residence.

**The Neighborhood**

The neighborhood had long time established families. There were also a good many rental properties in states of disrepair that saw a frequent turnover of tenants. There were houses with lovely gardens. The neighborhood had an abundance of magnificent mature hollyhocks that I envied. I sought horticultural advice from a few mothers as I had tried to grow them for years and mine were never as pretty. Many people in the neighborhood used their chain link fences for clothes lines. One could see at a glance how laundry was sorted and who had small children - an entire length of fence draped with whites or colors.

There were seriously neglected, sad looking properties that looked to offer little more than shelter. Here and there were empty lots, some surrounded with chain link fences and some without. When we took field trips on city busses, the kids would take us on shortcuts through the neighborhoods and alleys pointing out local highlights on our way to the bus stop. The houses were small and old. In the hot months, the neighborhood looked bleached and dusty. Only a few houses had lawns. None had swimming pools. Some had rambling ad hoc expansions built on. There was a home with a travel trailer that was turned into an extra bedroom. Family and friends did the work constructing a breezeway to connect it. I don’t think building codes or inspections were a major concern. It became a grandmothers’ room. About five blocks west of the school was a house with a
truck on its roof. I never heard the story that went with that. The neighborhood felt like the city’s basement—a place rarely visited, with interesting, quirky things - basically dusty and old and full of forgotten artifacts—separated from their meaning.

The Staff

The office was a busy place. It was small and mornings found it abuzz with students, parents and teachers and a cacophony of needs and languages. The bi-lingual people were at a definite advantage among the mix of Spanish and English spoken. The main administrative assistant was permitted to occasionally close her door with a Do Not Disturb sign on it when she was under a deadline. The office staff dealt with constant interruptions.

There was a full time SRO (School Resource Officer), meaning a policeman or woman. When I first started, I remember thinking it was very strange to have a permanent policeman at an elementary school. I’d never heard of such a thing. The officers had their own office and phone. They were generally very nice people. I’d never been in a situation where I could engage in casual friendly conversations with police and was glad for the opportunity. There was one in particular with whom I had some interesting conversations. We struck up a bit of a friendship. I remember asking him about the effect of seeing so much of the dark side of human behavior and its effect on him. He said it got to him. He couldn’t be out and about anymore without an awareness of it. He talked about going to baseball games and his thoughts as he looked at the stands.
The SROs would call students out of class to speak to them. There were parental custodial issues, abuse issues, gang related issues and they were also part of the team that helped families in crisis situations. An SRO came to my classroom once and told me I was needed in the office. He stayed with the kids until I got back. When I did, he said, “I don’t know how you guys do it. I could never do this.” To which I said, “I could never do what you do.”

Many children arrived at school in the morning and went straight to the cafeteria where they ate a free breakfast. This time before school was friendly and casual - a sort of magical period between home and school. Teachers and students took their time sliding into their school personas. There were often a handful of parents sitting with their children while they ate and there were almost always some who had babies with them. It was not unusual to see teachers and staff holding babies and rocking and talking to them.

Loud Mexican music poured from the kitchen. Murrieta, the cafeteria manager always had a pot of coffee on. Staff wandered in and helped themselves. She also cooked fantastic Mexican food and put it out for us sometimes. Informal gatherings of staff, teachers, parents and students assembled in the cafeteria.

Murrieta was highly moody and voluble and I wouldn’t help myself to coffee without checking out the situation first. I’d bring her a fancy Starbucks coffee or pastry now and then. She could bite your head off one minute and be sweet the next. I even saw her cry a few times. There was much speculation about Murrieta’s mood swings among the staff with a range of imaginative
explanations. She had nieces and nephews at the school and a teacup Chihuahua for a pet. She had an incredibly loud voice and a girth to match it. When she was yelling or laughing in the kitchen, everybody heard it. She was also a singer and sang publicly sometimes. There was a TV in the cafeteria with cartoons playing for the kids- but only in the morning. I hated it.

Family was big at Castillo. Carolina who worked in the front office had two children who were students at Castillo and they had several cousins at the school. Carolinas father was a crossing guard and her sister was a teacher’s aide. Variations on this story, like root systems on a tree, filled the school. I don’t know how many times I’d find out that students I’d known for the longest time were cousins or that someone who worked in the cafeteria was a student’s mother or aunt. Custodians were parents and aunts and uncles of students. If I was having problems with a student whose parent worked at the school, I could easily go to that parent, provided they spoke English. But, finding somebody to act as interpreter wasn’t difficult. There were parents who brought their children to the school who had been students at the school themselves. A few teachers had taught there long enough to remember. Principals came and went every four or five years, but the familial roots of the school were unaffected.

**The Teachers**

There was a group of veteran teachers, mostly bi-lingual, who had taught at the school for years. They seemed to be the vital organs of the teaching staff, meaning they were central and had a lot of influence. They were senior figures in
the school microcosm and some were quite progressive and willing to be experimental in their curriculum, pedagogy and attention to classroom climate. I remember being awed by some of them, thinking they were so remarkable. There was one teacher in particular.

She had an eight year old Native American student in her class who came from very difficult home circumstances. He was often dirty and often smelled bad. This teacher brought her third grade class to me one day letting me know that she was keeping this particular student with her. She came alone to pick up her class and spent a few minutes talking to them about this student.

She did so in a tremendously calm and human way. She talked about what was happening with this child. He was having a particularly bad day. She spoke about how he felt—not about his circumstances. He was mostly embarrassed and ashamed. She spoke to the class with a warmth and familiarity as if they were all family. There was an unspoken understanding, a value shared by them all, that no-one should feel that way. She took them into her trust—brought them into her confidence. And none of it was a big deal. There was no fanfare. It was a simple conversational tone. She spoke as if there was no question that these children were kind compassionate people. They listened seriously and seemed comfortable to be included. It was as if she spoke not only on behalf of the child but on behalf of the class as well.

She had taken the child to the nurse’s office to shower and find clean clothes. I never forgot how that was handled. I’ve never again seen a teacher deal
with a situation like that. I’ve seen many teachers treat students with tender kindness but I’d never seen a class of students included as she did. It was not just something experienced by this child, but by the entire class. The teacher provided an opportunity for the class to be very decent, human and involved.

Another of these teachers was interested in working with me. She was drawn to integrating dance into her curriculum and pedagogy. We created a lesson in which her second grade class attempted to connect with their birth experience. They were, after all, only seven years away from it. I turned on ambient, music and my rheostat lights to a very dim setting. We talked the children through what we had prepared, what we imagined the experience might be. We walked through the room of children all curled up in their little fetal shapes in their imagined wombs with their eyes closed. I would speak first and she would follow, repeating what I said in Spanish. We watched several slowly, tentatively arch their heads up. We looked at each other wide eyed, as if to say, “Is it happening?” Immediately after class and out of earshot of the children she said to me, “Shit, some of them looked just like they were coming through a birth canal!” She took them back to class and had them write about it. Two students mentioned lighthouses in their writing. The teacher attributed some significance to this, but I don’t recall what it was.

There was some pride among the staff about the quality of the school. It was progressive and teachers did things their own way. When a scripted reading program was being implemented in several district schools, the Castillo staff...
opted to not use it. The principal at the time left the decision up to the staff who wanted to approach reading and writing instruction their own way. They eschewed the high pitched tone that accompanied testing and instructional methods.

When there was a crisis in either the school or community, teachers and staff came together. There were a number of deaths during the time I was at Castillo: deaths of parents, siblings, staff, children, spouses and community members. Because it was a very low income area, there were regular calls to contribute money for funeral expenses or just expenses in general. Cards were circulated through the classes and checks were collected by a teacher or staff member. There were carwashes and services to attend. One recently widowed mother made rounds through the school every Friday taking orders for her homemade tamales that she delivered the next week. I bought them every time I had out-of-town company. It became an issue when she kept her twelve year old daughter home from school to help.

The arts staff were something of an island to themselves. All of our classrooms were on one wing of the school which was shared with the junior high. Kindergarten through sixth grade had to be escorted to our classes. Transition times saw the halls filled with lines of students led by their teacher.

Although there was quite a bit of turnover among the arts staff, we generally got along quite well with some groupings of staff that gelled more than
others. The arts staff generally saw themselves as separate from the school. We were definitely different from the rest of the teaching staff.

For the most part, there was congeniality among classroom teachers and the arts staff. Some teachers were very interested in the arts and others were less so or not at all. The interested ones were glad to have their students in arts classes. They wanted to see what their students were doing and occasionally came to pick up their class a few minutes early so they could watch them. They supported my expectation of student respect for the discipline. Meaning, they respected the structure of my classroom, the rules and protocol, and involved themselves in conflict if needed, addressing whatever the infraction.

The apathetic teachers were just that. They were not obstructionists, just disinterested. With the exception of one teacher who repeatedly warned me that I was going to lose my job, that I was taking great risks taking the kids off campus the way I did.

The Principals

The principal (at any given time) played a strong role in setting a tone for school community. The diversity of personalities within a school staff, which are many, is greatly influenced by the character of leadership. Over the course of my time at Castillo, principals revealed vastly different leadership styles and the arts programs expanded and contracted with them. Some principals made a point of recognizing arts events in staff meetings acknowledging our efforts and accomplishments as noteworthy. Others did so marginally and some not at all.
There was one principal who was particularly supportive of the arts and remained at Castillo for five years. During that time, the arts programs flourished and grew. Several of the arts staff pursued arts careers outside the school context. The professional arts staff were encouraged to keep their arts lives going. One of our theater teachers was permitted to take a four week leave so he could be in an out of state show. This principal felt it was important that personally meaningful opportunities be honored as much as was possible within the school context. I had professional courtesies extended to me so that I could attend several dance and somatic arts workshops.

He poked fun at stereotypical “arts” behaviors (meaning flakey and odd) among the arts staff. For instance, one of the instrumental music teachers, a professional musician outside of school played late gigs and famously fell asleep at staff meetings. He was chronically out of touch with what was going on at the school and an exaggerated point was made so Enrique knew when he was expected at particular events and where they were. He was from the Dominican Republic and had repeated problems that held up his visa upon re-entry to the US. Therefore, year after year he was late for the start of school. But he was a very good musician, a gentle person and an excellent teacher.

The theater teacher we had for several years also performed locally and was a very talented actor. He had a strong projecting voice and often spoke at staff meetings like he was on stage. He loved the spotlight and the microphone though our meetings were held in a windowless, generic school library with
fluorescent lights. He and I ended up collaborating on a number of projects and worked very well together though we had some major clashes. Our fractious and voluble relationship became something that was poked fun at.

There was a jocular attention paid the idiosyncrasies within the staff and it encouraged a friendly, familial atmosphere among us. This principal came to performances. He looked in on rehearsals and actually spent some time there listening and observing and seemed to find the work genuinely interesting. He brought the entire staff, certified and classified, together when there was a school celebration citing that all roles are needed to make a school operate and that school success is achieved by all.

This principal created a 30-second study of how my posture changed over the course of a staff meeting. He started by sitting up straight, then shifted and shifted, rolled his neck, looked all around the room, stretched to one side and the other, and then fidgeted and shifted much more rapidly and heaved over bent at the waist in the chair with huge sighs. He was very pleased with his study and showed a few other people. I told him he was a budding choreographer.

At the complete opposite end of that spectrum was the principal singularly focused on raising test scores who had little to no interest in the arts and did not value them at all. They existed on the periphery of the school. She was cordial and friendly to the arts staff but they were not part of the important work of the school. Another arts teacher referred to the arts classes under her leadership, as babysitting classes. She made it understood that the arts were of a lesser
significance than academic subjects. Some principals made an effort to shrink the separation between arts and academics and others widened it.

**The Students**

The student body was mostly Hispanic, about 95%. Many spoke only Spanish and many were bi-lingual. Non-Spanish speakers were in the minority. I was the clueless butt of many a joke told in Spanish. A subtext, beyond my reach, went on in several of my classes among the Spanish speakers.

I remember on a number of occasions, especially early on, having a little girl or boy standing and crying in my class because they were newly arrived from Mexico and spoke no English. Everything was strange. Everything was new. It was amazing to me how quickly many of them learned English. It was not unusual that within seven or eight months time a child who came to the school speaking no English at all, would be fairly conversant.

The students represented the same cross section of humanity that any public school does. The only difference was that they were economically disadvantaged, lived in the inner city and almost all had dark skin and hair. In terms of personalities and aptitudes, there was no difference.

**The Community**

Weekends often found the school athletic field packed with soccer players and onlookers of all ages. On Monday mornings the custodians were annoyed if the field wasn’t picked up well after games. The school was a central feature in the neighborhood as was the community center that was right next door. We
actually shared it to a degree. The properties abutted. We used their gymnasium because we didn’t have one. We also used a strip of their property for a vegetable garden that younger students tended. When Castillo absorbed students from a neighboring school that closed, the visual art classroom was permanently moved over to the community center to make room for more classes on the Castillo campus. Both the community center and Castillo sponsored health, dental and vision screening clinics and were bi-lingual Spanish and English. When my dance studio was flooded causing the wood floor to buckle and look like a topographical relief map, I was sent over to the community center until repairs were made.

*Chicanos Por la Causa* (CPLC), an Hispanic advocacy group, was a stone’s throw from the school. The organization was originally developed to address the problems of the barrios of South Central Phoenix, Arizona, particularly employment and community deterioration. It is a solid, established organization and has expanded a great deal over the years. They sponsored free legal clinics and support and advice on immigration issues among other things. They participated with Castillo School in a number of ways. I sought their advice on several fronts from scholarships for students to publicity for our dance group. We invited them to performance events. They used the school premises for a yearly large Christmas event.

The school was the gathering place for the annual neighborhood Christmas *Posada*, a Mexican tradition celebrated nine days before Christmas Eve. Any where from 30-50 community members, teachers, staff and students turned up at
about 7 at night, in the school parking lot to participate. Participants reenact the pilgrimage of the holy family returning to Bethlehem. Statues of the Virgin Mary “heavy with child” and Joseph leading a mule are carried by some participants. All carry candles. These statues are carried to three prearranged houses where the group of participants will ask the household to offer shelter for the family. These participants will be refused at the first two houses to simulate the refusal that the Holy Family experienced according to the bible. These were set up ahead of time and so when the throng of people arrived and knocked on the door it was no surprise. When the door was closed on the crowd, there was fake outrage and they went on to the second house where there was a similar scene. It was December and cold. Even in Phoenix everyone bundled up. Babies were dwarfed in their thick clothing wheeled along in strollers. Kids were excited and some ran through the group or ran ahead of the group and waited for them. Others walked with their families. It is not a somber affair. People talk with each other the whole time. A few dogs trot along.

At the third and final house, they are admitted and the celebrants traditionally would enter and hold a Novena which is the praying of the rosary, which is a traditional Catholic prayer. Songs were sung by the group. I didn’t know them but everyone who did, sang. Hot chocolate and hot soups were served. Several of my students were there.

Because of the proximity to the airport and the deafening sounds of air traffic, the city of Phoenix and Sky Harbor Airport offered free soundproofing for
homes of residents in neighborhoods within a certain distance of the airport.
Later, as the airport expanded, adding a new runway, the city of Phoenix and Sky Harbor Airport offered to buy residents homes and pay to relocate them.
Neighborhood meetings about the airport expansion were often held at Castillo School. Over the years, more and more houses are boarded up and fenced off as they are bought up by the airport.

**Getting Hired**

I was hired as a dance teacher at Castillo School after the school year had already started. My principal walked me into a teacher’s meeting and announced, “I found a dance teacher!” They applauded. The excitement in finding a dance teacher didn’t seem to be in finding that special person who was just the right fit, but in finding someone at all. I knew nothing about elementary education. I student taught at a high school.

I was hired at a job fair. I’d never been to one before. School districts are set up like vendors. Principals and human resources people sit behind rows of long tables with banners and promotional materials selling their district, hoping to appeal to teachers. They sport positive, hopeful slogans about teaching and often have blown up color photographs of teachers working directly with students in very warm, engaged ways. Who wouldn’t want to work in such a place? As I mentioned, the school year had already started at Castillo. They were having trouble finding a dance teacher, so when I came along they grabbed me. I had just finished my teaching certification coursework, which I completed as fast as
humanly possible. It was a blur. I was a single parent and desperate to find a full time job. It was more a collision of needs than a product of mutual thoughtful consideration.

My Relationship to Administration

I had never been part of a school staff before. Much of my previous work had been freelance so people and surroundings always changed. Working freelance, I didn’t have an opportunity to develop relationships with co-workers or students. I was unaccustomed to having “a boss”. There were three principals during my time at Castillo. They channeled the wishes of the district powers to the school. The principal who hired me was very orderly and ran a tight ship, or attempted to. A number of factors (mostly human) got in the way of a smooth running machine. She became easily frustrated with inefficiency and annoyed with lagging compliance.

After I had been teaching for three or four months I received a note in my box instructing me to decorate the front office bulletin board by a certain date. I wasn’t sure what that meant. I had never put up a bulletin board before. I went and looked at it and saw that it was decorated with a construction paper tree silhouette and fall leaves and cut out words about Castillo School and autumn. It looked just like what you’d see in a classroom. There was a single color background and a scalloped border. It was all behind a glass case. I didn’t have any thing like that in my classroom. Because I started after school was underway, I hadn’t decorated my studio at all.
The date was a ways off and I forgot about it. One morning I found a handwritten note in my box from the principal that said, “You were told weeks ago to take care of the bulletin board! See me!” I went to her office right away and she wanted to know why I hadn’t done it and told me to take care of it before I left work. And, in fact, the instrumental music teacher and I were supposed to do it together.

During my lunch I cut some pictures out of an old dance calendar and stapled them up there on bare cork. It was nothing elegant. I left space for the music teacher. I asked him if he realized he was supposed to do this, too. He said, “Yes, I already took care of it.” I was amazed that he had done it so quickly.

The next morning he invited me over to his room for coffee before school started. Jack had played with the Phoenix Symphony for years and was currently in a band that played in several local clubs. He too had gotten the same basic note in his box with the, “See me!” ending. I asked him what he’d put up on the bulletin board. He said, “Go take a look.”

“Just tell me what it is.”

“No, you have to see it.”

So I went up to the front of the school to see that Jack had crumpled and then un-crumpled his “See me!” note and thumb tacked it in the middle of the bulletin board locked behind the glass.

“She’s gonna kill you!” I said
“Let her get herself in a tizzy. Does she have nothing better to do? Are we supposed to jump when she snaps?” he said.

It took a while till she noticed but around the middle of the day I saw the principal (actually first I heard her) walk briskly past my room on her way to his. She always wore high heels with a distinct click.

**Overall Curriculum**

The arts program was put in place by a previous visionary principal who was there before me. When the next principal came on board she made efforts to integrate the arts with the academic curriculum but more pressing concerns arose and the idea was abandoned.

Shortly after I started teaching at Castillo, the *No Child Left Behind* act was introduced and the high stakes testing climate that it ushered in was strongly felt. Castillo was an inner city school so test scores were, predictably low. Math, reading and writing scores were dismal and destiny hinged on those kids pulling them up.

In Tom Horne’s 2009 State of Education Speech, Horne set forth continued rationale in support of academic rigor through standards based, high stakes testing (*No Child Left Behind*), also setting forth a plan to address the schools that failed to meet those expectations. He cited the business community as the first to recognize “the important economic consequence of a declining quality of education. The business community began a movement, known as the Standards Movement, that has been a guiding principle of my administration”
He goes on to explain that education has been a hit or miss enterprise but that,

Now, everyone in the system—schools, teachers, and students—is held accountable for how much students learn, as measured by test scores. Not everything that is valuable in education can be measured in tests. But when students cannot demonstrate in tests the knowledge and skills expected of them, that is now a warning sign that triggers intense corrective action. (p. 6)

The way in which the standards were taught was left up to the districts and schools. The bottom line was that the teaching ended in tangible results measured on the tests. Horne (2009) added,

But if test scores show that students are not learning the standards, then that becomes a state responsibility. We are determined that never again in the state of Arizona will parents get their children up in the morning, washed, dressed, fed, eager to learn, and then send them to schools where they do not learn. (p. 7)

In other words, if the school had three consecutive years of below benchmark test scores, the state could take over the school.

Castillo struggled under these mandates. The academics were triaged at the school and there was simply no oxygen left for the arts. They were pushed farther to the periphery. Arts teachers were left on their own. Some of them liked
this and others were resentful and felt neglected and unvalued. I was a completely free wheeling agent. I loved it!

There weren’t ill feelings toward the arts but there was no understanding of them either, particularly how they work with thinking and learning. There were no arts people in the immediate school administration or at district level administration. There were no arts people in curriculum design positions. In terms of oversight of the fine arts magnet school, it was a little like running a restaurant without knowing how to cook.

A long bureaucratic shadow was cast over the school. At a staff meeting, one of my principals said when our school was at risk of serious reprimand due to poor test scores, “you can philosophize about this all you want. You just can’t do it now. You’re going to need to take it somewhere else. Discuss it over beer or something. This is going to bite us. There’s work to do now. This is what we need to focus on.”

**Effect of Overall Curriculum on My Work**

The effect of the curriculum on my work was two fold. On the one hand it allowed me freedom. The arts didn’t have the weight and serious consequences that were attached to academic performance and were therefore ignored. On the other hand, it became an obstacle to work around because academic performance acquired such an extreme importance that all other activities were insignificant by comparison.
The most negative effect on my work was that students weren’t allowed to participate in after school arts programs if their grades were below a “C” in any subject for any reason. A teacher could come to the studio, grab a student and announce that he or she couldn’t participate. The subject hierarchy was clear and the arts position shared that of sports. This was a situation we were constantly trying to balance out into some kind of agreeable state between performing arts staff and academic staff. This system referred to as the Ineligibility List (IL) was put in place to emphasize academic importance. I describe this in detail in a later section.

Students were also kept from arts classes if teachers wanted them to stay in their classroom to finish work. The arts staff repeatedly brought this to teachers and the principal’s attention as a bad precedent. We didn’t want the arts classes regarded as expendable or as rewards. It also meant students would come to class late and not know what we were doing. I often told a child who came half way through class to just sit on the side and watch. I couldn’t stop instruction to fill them in on what we were doing.

A significant amount of attention at staff meetings went to issues around testing. Staff meetings devoted lot of time studying overheads with graphs of how the kids scored on what subject in what grade. From this; strategies were discussed. If a certain target sector of the school pulled scores up than it would possibly impact overall scores more favorably than others. Sometimes it made more sense to pull kids up who were already high in a subject because of the
overall effect on scores. Rather than pulling really low kids up a little, if they pulled high kids up higher the effect on scores was more significant. It became a numbers game.

There were practice tests. One teacher took on the role of test coach. He set up practice sessions and handled all the materials. It was absolutely like a sports event. He regarded it that way and was very jocular about it. Incentives were put in place. He cracked jokes about it.

When real testing happened, the whole school became involved. The testing days were called game days. Students were provided snacks in class. Several teachers allowed students to chew gum during the tests. Gum was strictly forbidden in school otherwise. The intercom was not used. A number of teachers asked me to take their students through a yoga relaxation class before they took the test. Teachers felt it helped the kids focus. This was a piece of curriculum I developed in my dance classes. Some teachers said their student’s demeanors were noticeably calmer afterward. I describe this curriculum in detail in Chapter 3’s “Curriculum by Accident: A Teaching Practice” section. One of our principals coined the term “game day” for testing days. Meaning, this is the real thing - no more practice games (or learning).

I increased my attention to arts integration, physicalizing several academic concepts. I developed curriculum that blended dance and language—that looked at the similarities between written narrative and movement narrative, and between choreographic and written composition. I based movement studies on literature.
We analyzed poetry and mapped them into dynamic paths that were used for aspects of choreography. We wrote pieces that originated in movement. Students experienced math concepts physically and spatially. Any degree to which I could support an academic concept in my class was lauded.

Additionally, the partnership we had with ASU Dance (discussed in the “Intersections” section in Chapter 5) was altered to include a brief tutoring element. We scheduled a portion of our time so that the college students could help the Castillo kids with academic work.

**Effect of Overall Curriculum on the School**

I really cannot comment on what went on in classrooms, but I can say that the teachers who were inclined to be adventurous and experimental were far less so. They continued to be very good teachers but did not openly venture into areas far beyond standards centered curriculum. They colored within the lines. I feel certain that if a teacher had been observed doing the lesson we did—with children trying to discover their birth experience—they would have been reprimanded, had it happened during the high pressure climate that enveloped the school. Those teachers toned everything down. Children’s time in dance class (and all the arts) was a break from academics rather than an opportunity to create any kind of a bridge.

In the old “whodunit” movies the classic detective line is, “just the facts ma’am, just the facts.” The woman recoils at the limitation bare facts present. There is more, there are always mitigating factors and details that flesh out
information. What she is saying is that bare facts alone present an incomplete picture. The detective, who is in a power position, tells her that it is all that’s needed for him to draw his conclusion, to make an evaluation. Instruction narrowed at Castillo under the testing climate.

Where classroom ideas and experiments were once adventurous, the effect of high stakes testing rendered those efforts frivolous. Teaching to standards became central. Teaching outside of standards was viewed as irresponsible and a waste of time. Teaching that was not standards based was “poor teaching”. Some teachers were very unhappy with this, their sentiments murmured through the underground channels of the school, meaning lots of hallway discussions. Others regarded the circumstances as part of a cycle that would cycle out.

**Lesson Plans and Principals**

Following a lesson plan seemed like a good idea to me. It made a lot of sense. Everything is planned ahead and set and a teacher can just tick through the parts of it and maintain a steady course even with minor deviations. I thought my difficulty in following a plan was because I was an inexperienced teacher. But once I became more familiar and adept at the teaching format, as laid out, I realized I was at odds with it. I resisted it. I really didn’t like teaching that way whether I was good at it or not. It just felt so much livelier when an unexpected moment could be seized and followed or when the energy between the class and I could be volleyed. As I look back, I see that something else was going on.
There is a staggering abundance of lesson plan information available on the web and in print with varieties of templates, fully written lessons, guides for tailoring specific activity lessons and templates for units, semester and full year curriculum planning. The basic components of a lesson plan include: measurable learning objectives, theme, reference to specific “standards”, description of specific activities, modeling, guided practice, independent practice, closure, assessment. There is creative latitude within each of these components which could be argued as accommodating individual teaching style and autonomy. The lesson plan is, however, a format that dominates how learning and knowledge is considered and influences the way we think about it. Webster’s Dictionary defines learning as: “1: the act or experience of one that learns. 2: knowledge or skill acquired by instruction or study” (Merriam-Webster, 1998). The format of the lesson plan confines the idea of learning and teaching to a narrow interpretation.

The lesson plan asserts a learning outcome through the statement of an objective. It describes a learning experience that is predictable, fairly fixed and to some degree immutable. The lesson plan contains a linear logic which stands well on its own. But it is difficult to apply such a structure to a fluid subject and class dynamic.

Certain subjects will lend themselves more favorably to lesson plans with outcomes that can be predicted with more accuracy. For example, it is possible to specify with some precision a particular skill a student is to perform after instruction in math or spelling. In the arts, such specification is frequently
impossible and when it is possible it may not be desirable. Art does not seek
uniformity. In arts and subjects where creative or original responses are desired,
the student behaviors reflecting it may not be easily identified. They fall into a
grey zone.

The dynamic, unpredictable nature of the students upon whom the lesson
plan is enacted is complex. Instructional outcomes are far more numerous and
complex for educational objectives to encompass. The dynamic ebbs and flows
found in classrooms can fracture an original objective and take it in unexpected
directions. Elliot Eisner (2005) describes this:

   The teacher uses the moment in a situation that is better described as
   kaleidoscopic than stable. In the very process of teaching and discussing,
   unexpected opportunities emerge for making a valuable point, for
   demonstrating an interesting idea, and for teaching a significant concept.”
   (p. 19)

With a more porous, open attitude toward the lesson plan, room is made
for the unexpected. In this way the lesson plan is a part of learning rather than the
exclusive driver. This is not intended to suggest that lesson plans should be done
away with. It is rather to see them as less absolute and rigid.

Dwayne Huebner (1975) takes this further, looking closely at the
unexamined “language of learning” (p. 221) at the very core of our attitudes and
thought processes as they are contained in the language used freely in education.
The language he refers to, which we use in lesson plans, is a reductive one. The
mysterious and wonder filled nature of the human being at the center of learning is nowhere in the picture. In Huebner’s (1975) words,

A talisman need not be rubbed if one acknowledges that learning is merely a postulated concept, not a reality; and that goals and objectives are not always needed for education planning. Indeed, curricular language seems rather ludicrous when the complexity and the mystery of a fellow human being is encompassed in that technical term of control—the ‘learner.’ (p. 219)

Considering the notion of certainty can be thought of in terms of looking at art. One can look at the lines and strokes in a painting or one can look at the space surrounding the lines and strokes. Both are important. In fact both are essential. Negative and positive space are the right and left hand of a piece of art. You cannot look only at the positive because the negative is part of it. The negative has contributed to the positive being what it is. The something of the line relies on the nothing of the space. You can think similarly about subjects.

Studying language means there is also not language. Somewhere in consciousness or our lives is experience absent of language. Somewhere in mathematics is experience lacking that order—one that preceded it.

The lesson plan asserts a fixed logical assumption about a subject and about students. Looking at one thing means not looking at another. Looking at knowledge as static and students as something upon which to hang knowledge
like an article of clothing, means not looking at a host of other elements (in the picture) and other ways of thinking.

Although there is an abundance of evolving vibrant scholarship about learning and pedagogy that diverges from methods employed in public schools, we stick closely to the system we know as evidenced in the “back to basics” movement and No Child Left Behind. We stick to a sclerotic educational system although there is an ample supply of fresh vibrant research that points in innovative directions. W. F. Pinar (2004) made the following comments:

“Educational experience” seems precisely what politicians do not want, as they insist we focus on test scores, the “bottom line.” By linking the curriculum to student performance on standardized examinations, politicians have, in effect, taken control of what is to be taught: the curriculum. Examination-driven curricula demote teachers from scholars and intellectuals to technicians in service to the state. The cultivation of self-reflexive, interdisciplinary erudition and intellectuality disappears. Rationalized as “accountability,” political socialization replaces education. (p. 3)

While I did not seek to cultivate self-reflexive, interdisciplinary erudition and intellectuality in my students I did hope to create a classroom where creative experience happened and creative ideas could be explored - that wasn’t dictated by protocol and format. I was told that a good teacher carefully constructs lesson
plans and follows them to the letter. My first principal told me a teacher is only as good as her lesson plans.

The lesson plan structure tethers the scope and range of curricular experience and imagination. The wildly imaginative lesson must fit into the lesson plan categories to be considered viable. No matter how incompatible or ill fitting the idea and the lesson plan, the marriage will happen. A friend of mine, a Kennedy Center trained teaching artist, and I were asked to present arts lessons at a state arts conference. We were sent a required lesson plan format for our lessons. We met to look it over together and she said, “God, I hate this. It feels like I’m cramming this into these categories whether it fits or not. It makes me irritable. My lesson is good. This is stupid!”

Principals

Each principal dictated how they wanted lessons formatted. The three different principals I worked under at Castillo had very different leadership styles and requirements for lesson plans. The stylistic pendulum of their leadership swung from extremely controlling to extremely casual. The first principal, who hired me, was very specific in her requirements. She provided a lesson plan template that was as follows:

1. Anticipatory Set—setting the stage, attention getter and focuser
2. Statement of Objectives—tell students what they’ll be able to do as a result of the lesson
3. Instructional Input - lecture, demo, explanation, instructions
4. Modeling - demonstrate, show what you tell

5. Checking for Understanding—watch faces, ask questions

6. Guided Practice—turn them loose to work on their own, homework assignment

7. Assessment.

Later on we had to refer to the state standards that were covered in our lessons. If we were late with lesson plans or had been perceived as negligent or lacking in some way, she would place a handwritten note in our box informing us and demanding us to “see me!” The staff speculated that she must stay long into the night to personally tend to all the perceived issues.

After our lessons were looked over, she returned them to our mailboxes. Mine always had, “Looks good!” written across the top with occasional comments of “interesting” scattered here and there. The “looks good!” comment felt a little like a pat on the head. I was a good girl. I turned in my lesson plans on time and correctly. My lesson plans were full of references to space, time, energy, shape and had many French terms since a good bit of dance language is in French. I don’t think she knew what I was describing in my lessons.

We were required to turn in weekly lesson plans. I wrote them carefully and had every intention of following them. But, more often than not, the lessons would careen off into a completely different direction. Classes seemed to have their own weather patterns and if the wind was blowing in one direction, we often went with it. This could be perceived (and was) as my having no classroom
management skills. Had I been in charge, taken the reins and set the course I could have neatly moved through a lesson as written. The issue was never with the content of my plans. No one knew dance. There was protocol to observe and expectations to meet.

It was difficult to stick to lesson plans and I stopped trying. Writing lesson plans and teaching became entirely separate activities, literally. My lessons had theme and structure but their emergence was greatly influenced (and at times entirely influenced) by what was happening in the class—the context, the mood, the energy rather than being fully imagined before hand. Themes and ideas constantly morphed, evolved and emerged. The moment into which a subject was placed became as important as the subject.

I tried lots of things. I responded to ideas that occurred to me in the middle of lessons - that sometimes took me off in entirely new directions. At times those directions were dead ends. At other times they opened up avenues that were new to me - that I was unaware were there and couldn’t have anticipated and certainly couldn’t have planned for. I responded to ideas that occurred to me when I was going about my day, cooking, visiting with friends, walking my dog.

Any given moment contains a constellation of elements that reflect unseen influences. I liken it to our atmosphere which appears clear and empty but is actually filled with information. There are radio waves, myriad communication signals, bouncing from satellites to transmitters to what are called information clouds and pads. What seems empty and dormant is alive with invisible
information. So too, metaphorically speaking, is the atmosphere within a classroom.

Because the school administration was preoccupied with the pressure of raising test scores the dance program was allowed to follow an unmonitored direction. I received no guidelines and no wishes for program direction were articulated. The administration had no knowledge of dance as a content area. There were no discussions of pedagogy or curriculum.

When I was evaluated, it was based on lesson plans and classroom management. I never received comments on content. Effective teaching meant students were attentive, engaged and followed directions and as a teacher I managed that well. Teachers understood and advised me to never experiment during an evaluation. “Do something you’ve done before.” They would say, “You have to know how it works ahead of time.” These types of lessons were referred to by the staff as Dog and Pony Shows. A strict evaluation format was followed. The evaluating principal wrote on a pad through the whole lesson.

I learned this the hard way by submitting a lesson for evaluation that was very imaginative but was not tested. I used the lesson because I was proud of its creative content. But the class was not smooth and the students were not quiet and well behaved and I was put on an “improvement plan”. As part of that plan I was instructed to watch other classroom teachers so that I could learn their classroom management methods and I was also formally evaluated more often. In subsequent evaluations I did safe and tested lessons and was told that my teaching
had improved. Predictability in teaching was valued. It was a product rather than process oriented evaluation. Behind closed doors I worked on the rough edges but when evaluated I performed a polished rehearsed lesson.

The next principal was the polar opposite of the first one I described. He was very casual and had little interest in seeing my lesson plans. He told me he knew absolutely nothing about dance and couldn’t comment on my lessons. He was happy to see kids active and involved. As long as the program was vibrant and engaged, he was satisfied. He looked in on rehearsals, sometimes spending a significant amount of time and seemed interested in what we were doing. He even attended performances off campus.

The third principal swung the pendulum back. She took the school in a different direction and was much like the first principal described but more iron fisted. She ran a tight ship and was very authoritative. Her singular focus was to raise test scores and to do anything and everything she could to make that happen. Her interest in the arts revolved around the degree to which they served that end. The visual art teacher who had taught at the school for about fifteen years referred to the new position of the arts as “babysitting classes.”

I had a group of students selected for a performance group and a date that had been set months prior at The Herberger Theater Center, the city’s nicest theater venue. This opportunity, which I describe in more detail in Chapter 5, was a source of pride for Castillo. This particular performance revolved around Hispanic poetry. We had arrangements made to work with Alberto Rios, a very
well known, widely published Hispanic poet who taught at the university. All these arrangements preceded this principal’s arrival. When I began rehearsals, which were during my class, half of my cast was not there on the first day. I asked where they were and was told that they had been put into a special class to pull up their math test scores. When I protested, it was made very clear that this was the way things were and would not change.

When Rios came to our school to work with the students, I had to plead my case and get others help so that the students could be excused from their math class to work with him. She didn’t know this poet or his significance. She was not Hispanic, nor was she an arts person.

She kept the curtains to her office (that looked out on a hallway) closed. Previous principals left them open. Staff members were frequently called in to speak with her behind closed doors and curtains, myself included. She required lesson plans to refer to specific state standards. All lessons were to revolve around standards.

In my work as an arts teacher, or specials teacher, I taught K-8th grades. Realistically preparing thoughtful weekly lesson plans for eight grades felt overwhelming and preposterous. The term “specials” was the category into which all PE and arts classes were placed. Classes traveled down the halls on the way to their specials. It is an interesting word choice. It refers to areas of study that fall outside the main body of subject matter in school. Special subjects. The subtle
condescension in this term does not go undetected. Why did they not call them the arts?

Students who are in special education, and those who are not, know what it is. For whatever reason, students who can’t perform well or on a par with their peers are often referred to special education. Once tested they are then offered whatever additional help is suggested. The word choice struck me as one intended to mask the notion of a lacking academic or cognitive ability, to ameliorate the potential (and inevitable) insult and injury of inferior performance. Special means inferior. The term “specials” applied to arts struck me as a term intended to situate the arts and PE in relation to academics—to distance them from academic centrality. They were in a distant orbit - same solar system but far from the sun. The specialness is that they are not special. They are not part of the inner sanctum of valued knowledge.

**Castillo Beginnings**

When I started teaching at Castillo, in the first several weeks, the junior high students, almost exclusively girls of all shapes and sizes, stood leaning on the walls and mirrors around the periphery of the studio in their street clothes; jeans, skirts, jackets, sandals, athletic shoes, flip flops. It was difficult to pry them away from the edges. I told them they needed to take off their shoes. They looked at me like I was out of my mind. Mutterings of, “I’m not taken’ off my shoes” rippled through the group along with an exchange of incredulous looks that
unified their resistance. I didn’t see how in the world they could dance in their street clothes. I thought asking them to take off their shoes was a minor request.

I stood before them in my dance clothes doing what I’d done for years. They laughed at demonstrations of plies. Suggestions of rolling through the spine or locating one’s center were met with blank expressions, giggles or brazen remarks (in both Spanish and English) about how stupid and weird it was. “I’m not doin’ that!” Commenting on a second position grande plie, “That’s nasty!” On rolling through the spine from a standing position to hands on the floor, “What’s she doing?!”

They were very uncomfortable in the center of the room, once coaxed there. Standing on their feet and being in their bodies was unnerving. It was like they were saying, “What do we do with these?” Holding hands with their hostility was vulnerability. They dressed their bodies up, trying to make them look adult and desirable, according to the current notions of “cool and hip”. Some had bodies that lingered on the childhood side of development. They carried their own brand of awkward discomfort. But experiencing their bodies as sensate, dynamic, expressive entities was out of the question. It was foreign and weird. There was no way they would be caught dead in dance clothes. There weren’t locker rooms anyway. They did like the mirrors though. There was a serious preoccupation with looks and an undying love of make-up among them. They all had brushes and ample supplies of make-up, though they’re utterly lovely without it. Physical inadequacy and self criticism seem a cruel and inescapable twist of nature that
only a rare and wise young girl can elude. Over time I found that girls with rare wisdom weren’t really rare at all.

Initially, I attempted to teach from the knowledge base I knew—a classical modern dance background, meaning - ballet, modern dance, somatic studies, choreography, dance history and theory, improvisation and performance.

Classical dance training knows a clear, tradition laden structure. The teacher is the authority figure in the room - period. The students observe different protocols for different styles but all observe unquestioned respect for the teacher. Ballet is strictly regimented and includes a good bit of ritual. Modern dance has less, but is studied no less seriously. Ballet students wear leotards and tights, ballet slippers and pull their hair away from the face usually in some kind of bun. Modern dance is done barefoot. Hair is pulled back but can be pony tailed or clipped. Jewelry is not worn. Dancers never eat or wear street shoes in a studio. Dance class is broken up into fairly standard parts; warm up, center work and traveling phrases across the floor. If a break is needed, it’s taken after the warm up. It is tremendously rigid and demanding and it is not uncommon for “good girls” who went to ballet class through their childhoods to rebel and quit in early adolescence.

Dancers go to rehearsals no matter what kinds of competing circumstances may be going on. They go to rehearsals sick, injured, heartbroken, in crisis, in terrible weather, in pain. An element of suffering accompanies the discipline. But dancers want to dance and perform and that’s the way to do it. If a dancer
indulges the sentiment, “Oh screw it. I don’t feel like rehearsing,” very often, they lose that opportunity. Dancers often perform (and rehearse) for free unless they are in the tiny fraction who get paid jobs in companies. This was what I knew of dance training. Clearly, it wasn’t going to work that way at Castillo.

I had students from kindergarten to eighth grade reacting to it. The very young ones (kindergarten through third grades) loved to move. The middle grades (fourth through sixth) were a mix of cooperative and belligerent.

The junior high students, the age group I saw the most frequently, hated it. I didn’t understand why. What was so deplorable, so reprehensible to them? They didn’t have to sit at desks. They didn’t have to read books. I didn’t take it too personally because none of them knew me. It was the material. They couldn’t relate to the material. And I was a stranger - White, female and not yet known and certainly not yet trusted. There were the daily stand-offs. “I’m not doin’ that!” Or the silent stone-walling and the overt hostility, “This isn’t dance! This is stupid!” They seemed to say, don’t assume you can impose your knowledge on us without resistance. Don’t assume your ways or who you are, are what we need. Don’t assume we will passively accept you and what you’re doing. My options were to either strong arm them, meaning become autocratic which is not unusual for a dance teacher, or figure out something else. Dance was hip hop to them and I didn’t do hip hop. Even if I’d wanted to teach it I couldn’t.

It was clear that trying to take the bull by the horns, meaning to become authoritative and controlling, was a bad idea. There was just too strong a wall of
oppositional energy to grab hold of and break although it was suggested to me in so many words by a number of teachers and the principal who I asked for help. I was told that I had to be tough and eventually they (the students) would come around. “If you start off too easy, they’ll walk all over you. You have to be kind of a jerk and really tough at first and then you can relax it later. They have to know who is in charge. They appreciate it. They’ll respect you if you’re tough. This is the way junior high students are.”

I was on the heels of a major event in my personal life, was in its aftermath and did not have the energy needed to be authoritative and controlling even if I’d wanted to. I was starting off emotionally depleted. When standing in the water at the beach and a big wave comes, if you stay standing there’s a good chance you’ll get knocked over. But you can avoid the force of a crashing wave by going underneath it. Once the brunt of the crash is over with, you can stand up unaffected as the breakers water pulls back from the beach. I opted to go under the wave of my students’ resistance. It was survival. I could stay in the water but not get knocked over.

I needed the sensation of something clicking in order to proceed. I waited for it not realizing that was what I was doing. The car needed to go in gear. The transmission needed to engage. Nothing felt right about teaching dance the way I knew. There was no traction, no forward motion. And there certainly was no joy.

I watched junior high kids playing basketball. Their bodies were alive in that context - supple, agile, quick with fabulous elevation. And they loved it. It
caught my eye and I wanted to snip it out and take it to the studio. It seemed a
matter of making the motion they did so naturally and easily be experienced in a
different context. I had to convince them that the outdoor exuberance they
experienced could happen in the studio. They could feel that freedom they felt in
motion. I called my class Athletic Movement. Dance, as I elaborate in detail later
in Chapter 5, was not something boys did. It was the farthest thing from
athleticism they knew. Much of the early work revolved around athletic ideas.

The junior high students who didn’t play basketball were another story.
We talked a lot. A lot of the girls were interested in who I was. Where did I live?
What did I like to do? Did I have kids? Was I married? Where was I before
Castillo? How come I was a dancer but didn’t know how to dance? I asked them
questions back.

One of the early points of connection emerged when several girls with
strong personalities wanted tips to get in shape like Beyonce and Christina
Aguilera. I describe this in more detail in Chapter 5 in the “Gender” section,
subsection “The Girls.”

Suspicion seemed to decrease and a bit of trust slowly emerged. Once the
boys and girls were in class together they influenced each other in subtle and not
so subtle ways. Many of the boys were into large athletic movement and enjoyed
showing off. Many of the boys and girls were friends (and relatives) which played
a major role in establishing a class dynamic. The relationships between the kids in
class became a fabric upon which to build ideas.
A horse whisperer is someone who connects or is somehow able to communicate with the basic nature within the wild, unbroken (or undomesticated) animal. The horse whisperer doesn’t use force to break the animal but some intuitive skill they posses. They recognize and intuitively understand something about the animal that others don’t and relate to the animal through those means.

While I didn’t possess such skills or means, I use this analogy because creative energy lay within these students who had their own wild energy about them. Looking through a certain social lens, could describe inner city youth as uncivilized and wild. Some of my students lived in extreme poverty. Some had very difficult family circumstances fraught with criminal and immigration problems. Some of them were very angry, some insecure or troubled, others apathetic and others just suspicious and mistrustful. I know that some of my students had spent time homeless at some point. I remember one student who was not sent to class but to the nurse’s office where he was sleeping. His family was temporarily living in their car and the boy was exhausted.

I didn’t possess skills such as a horse whisperer, but do feel some intuitive radar was at play that enabled me to zero in on the creative energy within the Castillo students. I also speculate that my own intuitive self was perhaps more accessible to me being in the aftermath of a personal crisis. I think we tend to hunker down into ourselves when wrestling with difficult psychological experiences and it is deep in ourselves where intuition lies. I needed to find a middle ground—a place to meet the students halfway where we both felt personal
integrity and self respect. A landscape of endless rancor and hostility would have been intolerable to me and would offer nothing to students. I would not have lasted.

I understood that whatever success meant in terms of dance at Castillo lay in who these kids were as people rather than how they were able to respond to my ideas about dance. I was not heroic and made plenty of blunders and at times had a bad temper and no classroom management. But I did seem to have some awareness (though not conscious), of the creative energy within my students. I sought out creativity. It was grounding to me. It made way for forward motion. It made way for art making which is what I loved and longed for.

It felt good when we (students and I) recognized an idea and seized it. I think we both felt something truly gratifying. There was a little delight in a discovery. Honing in on their creative juices meant recognizing who the students were as people, as individuals. I also found that I liked them so much. They were interesting complicated people with bold and adventurous creative instincts. Having the students hone in on their own creativity made them recognize something that was uniquely theirs. They were junior high and therefore presented plenty of obstacles but at the core of the wild, drama drenched behavior was creative energy.

We went from the above description about the beginnings of dance at Castillo, through a twisting and turning journey that resulted in a program where boys and girls were tremendously imaginative and invested in modern dance as
both performers and creators. This dissertation explores that process. There are some central components that stand out as contributing to the character of this curriculum and program development at Castillo that will be laid out in the next chapter.
Chapter 3:

CURRICULUM BY ACCIDENT:
THE IMPROVISATIONAL EVOLUTION OF THE
CASTILLO DANCE PROGRAM

Description, Definition

We split ourselves into controller and controlled. We think that the musician learns to control the violin. We say “control yourself” to the addict or procrastinator. We attempt to control our environment. This delusion arises from the fact that we speak a language that uses nouns and verbs. Thus we are predisposed to believe that the world consists of things and forces that move the things. But like any living entity, the system of musicians-plus-instruments-plus-listeners-plus-environment is an indivisible, interactive totality; there is something false about splitting it up into parts. (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 143)

In the Accidental Tourist by Anne Tyler (1988), the protagonist stumbles upon a new life and world view as a result of a series of events entirely out of his hands. The effect of things unexpected, of accidents, led him down pathways and opened up worlds to him he would never have traveled otherwise. In very much the same way, curriculum by accident came into being.

An accident is something that is unexpected—not planned for. There are terrible accidents and benevolent ones. Some feel as if destiny played a hand in them and others feel utterly senseless. I use the word “accident” in this curriculum
because it arose from events unexpected and unplanned. I traveled new paths I
would never have taken had not a series of life events placed them before me.

Curriculum by accident refers, in part, to unknown opportunity in the
immediate learning environment, to elements that we are not consciously aware
are there. These elements may hold promising and meaningful directions that
could not have been planned for but are nonetheless valuable. Curriculum by
accident could seize something in the moment and that something could pull a
subject far a field, find a trajectory of its own and blossom into a fully realized
albeit unexpected event. The unique energy and intelligence present in a given
context reveals itself and is responded to.

It is not a random response but a response to something. The something is
not always clear or understood and may well emerge from the unconscious or a
realm of the unspoken. It is what improvisers work with. Curriculum by accident
is a curriculum that deals with learning and teaching in a way similar to the means
improvisational artists work with the elements of their craft. It may wander far
from a theme but always has tendrils that can be traced back to it. As that theme
wanders, perception is constantly shifting and adjusting.

A metaphoric way to think about this is as follows. For one who spends
most of their time in an urban setting, going into the wilderness causes a shift in
sensory perception. Points of reference, land contours, details and space are all
different. The wilderness is not an abstraction but something all the senses are
immersed in. The way one sees the land and experiences it shifts in undetectable

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ways as time is spent in it. One’s whole being subtly adjusts to the landscape in basically imperceptible ways.

But after an extended period of time in a wilderness setting, an opportunity to notice those changes arises briefly as one transitions back into urban surroundings. There are shades (moments) within that transition where everything feels a little strange. Not new or unfamiliar, just a little strange, a bit misaligned. That strangeness evaporates as those same adjustments reassert themselves in the new environment.

There are parallels to curriculum here. A teacher may know a subject abstractly, (as the urban dweller may know the wilderness) but until immersed in the living dynamic context of a classroom where subject, student and self converge, creating its own landscape, its own unique dynamic terrain, he or she will not know what it is like or what they are like in it. There are unanticipated qualities and properties which elicit responses.

The students at Castillo were tremendously imaginative as I believe all children are. Their imaginative inclinations often piqued mine and took us off in unexpected directions. These directional shifts were key to the curriculum evolution. In large part, it was imagination that softened the tough membrane of resistance on the part of my students and allowed some breathing on my part. It also influenced me as I sought a direction and a meeting ground for dance and the school. This intersection of content (dance) and context (school) became a place
of creative practice. Two unlike entities found coherence. Rather than transferring a body of codified dance knowledge, *we danced!*

I believe *curriculum by accident* occupies a lacuna between art making and teaching. I am an artist - a dancer and a choreographer. My aesthetic nature gravitates toward movement, form, space, relationship and energy. I am also a teacher living and working among buildings, classrooms, teachers, students, curriculum, power and political/social structures. As an improviser I am drawn to unexpected events, relationships and artistic possibilities hidden in everyday activities. It is the blending of these sensibilities that comprises curriculum by accident.

But several additional elements also stand out as contributing significantly to the character of this curriculum and program development at Castillo.

**Contributing Factors to Curriculum by Accident**

The following section describes influential factors that were significant to the development of the curriculum:

1. There was no knowledge of dance education at the school or district administration level. There was not an existing dance program to maintain or develop, and there was no overarching philosophy, curricular goal, oversight or vision for the dance program. When new dance teachers were hired, *they* were the dance program. I had the freedom to shape my program the way I chose.

   The program found its direction much the way natural water does.
On topographical maps, streams and rivers are represented by erratic squiggles and curvy lines. The wild lines indicate the course the water has cut through the landscape, over time as it responded to conditions such as slope angles, weather, terrain, barriers, etc. The water interacts with the land, and the land with the water. Each defines the other. The school, the students, the culture and I were the landscape and dance carved a direction through it. The merging influences shaped the program.

2. I entered the classroom as a dance artist, not a dance educator. I knew about making dances and I knew about dancing. There were no dance education courses in the teacher certification program I was in. My prior exposure to teaching was in the context of teaching adults or being a guest artist in schools. Adults want be taught and choose to take class. As a guest artist I would fly into a school briefly, be treated like a guest, offer a fast taste of dance and leave. Dance residencies lasted between one and five weeks on average. Classroom teachers would stay with me as I taught and handled discipline or management problems. There was little opportunity to build relationships with either students or staff.

3. The element of play is a basic part of creativity. I think it would be difficult to find a book about creativity that didn’t regard the act of play as crucial. The students and I played with ideas the way artists do.
Children don’t need to be taught how to play. They do it naturally. Pablo Picasso said, “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up” (n.d.). We were all contributors and participants in a creative phenomenon. The students were making curriculum as well as being subjected to it. I was giving cues as well as responding to them. We were involved in improvisation.

4. Choreographers work with bodies in space. I had approximately 120 bodies pass through my space daily. I felt like I soaked into their world and they into mine. I remember falling to sleep at night and seeing students faces as I drifted off. It was exciting to see children reaching into their creative selves. It often sparked either a deeper investigation or an unexpected diversion. I found myself being drawn to natural movement, pedestrian movement and what I perceived as total physical integration that many of my students embodied. I found my student’s movement aesthetically beautiful. My aesthetic was changing. We changed each other. Each of these factors played a role in the curriculum.

**Curriculum by Accident: A Creative Improvisational Practice**

One of the many catch–22’s in the business of creativity is that you can’t express inspiration without skill, but if you are too wrapped up in the professionalism of skill you obviate the surrender to accident that is essential to inspiration. (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 79)
Improvisation, in the arts, is a term referring to unscripted responding in the moment. It exists in every art form and of course in myriad other circumstances as well. (A purest would say we improvise all the time.) Improvisation has a structure, but that structure includes open spaces to be filled in. It is a joining of known and unknown.

As a dancer and choreographer I found improvisation tremendously appealing. There is mystery in improvisation with the possibility of delight and surprise. A heightened attentiveness and alertness exists in not knowing how something will unfold. The uncertainty of how the improvisational moment would reveal itself was greatly appealing to me. The present is an active, living place. It was a branch of dance I wanted to pursue in depth. My interest in traditional modern dance was waning as somatic and improvisational forms were awakening.

When working on set choreography, the body knows what is being strived for. The dancer knows the material visually, spatially, sequentially, dynamically and musically. The movement structure is already created and it is clear and constant. When we watch a ballet, the dancers have rehearsed the choreography for a long long time. For many, it is so imprinted in their muscle memory that they could, (figuratively speaking) do it in their sleep. The variables are time and the dancer’s body; meaning the time of day at which a piece of choreography is performed and the state of the dancers mind and body at the point of performance. The magic of live performance lies in how those variables play out. The rest of
the dance has no variability. Choreography and technical aspects are set as is a piece of writing on a page.

The improvisational structure is clear but unknowns are present in that structure. They are there by design, intentionally situated in the structure and waiting to be discovered as the improvisation is put into motion. Set, scripted performance, whether it is dance, music or theater tries to control and anticipate unknowns - to minimize potential deviations and unforeseeable events that could alter the artistic intention. Rehearsal and hard work minimize unforeseen surprises and crystallize an artistic idea. The actor will not add a line of her own to a script—will not change the original direction or intention of the play. The musician will not alter a melody, nor will the dancer add an extra phrase of movement. The aesthetic design is complete.

Improvisation, by contrast, is not complete and finished. It invites unforeseeable events into the action. They are the action. So it is not a matter of interpretation as is required in dancing a piece of choreography or acting a script, but a matter of openness and receptivity to the unknown or, as it is at times referred to, the muse. The improviser plays with and explores what is possible within the structure. The structure is always an anchoring devise—a frame of reference.

In the literature about creativity, there is significant reference to the unknown, deep self, true self, unconscious as reservoirs of information - aspects of living located under the surface or out of reach of everyday life. These
reservoirs and undercurrents were present and influential in the evolution of curriculum by accident.

The concept of accident or chance is significant here - differing from events that are random and haphazard. Many artists have been fascinated with the aesthetic possibility within the concept of “chance”. Dancer-choreographer, Merce Cunningham and musician John Cage are two prominent, well known pioneers who experimented with incorporating “chance” into their art work. It became an aesthetic component. The pioneering dancers from the Judson Church group, in their quest for truer, purer, authentic, non restrictive dance played with “chance” shifting authority and definition within dance. They all seemed interested in the form of no form. The riddle and paradox offered something of a fresh canvas—a new territory to be entered and at least spent time in and at best, understood to some degree.

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung was fascinated with the subject of chance and studied it in detail. His work led to an understanding of chance as a concept with dynamic properties and significance, occupying a place outside causality yet of equal significance. Jung addresses the “chance” event through his theory of synchronicity. Jungian scholar Roderick Main (1997) describes this,

As such, it is “a hypothetical factor equal in rank to causality as a principle of explanation” (Jung, 1952, p. 435). It is “equal in rank” precisely in the sense of being complementary to the principle of causality: causality accounts for one kind of connection between events—“constant
connection through effect,” as Jung epitomized it (1952, p. 514)—and synchronicity accounts for the complementary kind of connection—“inconstant connection through contingency, equivalence, or meaning.” (p. 17)

Chance was more dynamically complex than could be explained through randomness, but outside the sentimental explanation leaning toward predetermined meaning. In Jung’s words,

We have not sufficiently taken into account as yet that we need the laboratory with its incisive restrictions in order to demonstrate the invariable validity of natural law. If we leave things to nature, we see a very different picture: every process is partially or totally interfered with by chance, so much so that under natural circumstances a course of events absolutely conforming to specific laws is almost an exception. (Jung, 1967, p. xxiii)

It could, perhaps be argued, that the attraction to certainty, truth and absolutes, is in part, a reaction to the anxiety that accompanies uncertainty. As this brief look at the concept of chance reveals, it is a complex subject that evades definition.

Chance events and thereby the unknown, wove aesthetically and pedagogically into curriculum by accident. The notion of certainty and truth know a strong presence in school, but the idea of wonder and mystery know a far more tenuous one. I improvised a curriculum. It became both a teaching method and an
artistic practice. All the elements of creative process were present in the challenge; the making of something, an unknown, playing with ideas and concepts, discovery, stimulation, risk taking, a quickening. Steven Nachmanovich (1990) articulates an aspect of improvisatory process:

As questions and answers unfold, we feel the excitement of being onto something, of following a lead, as in a detective story. Among all the diverse and confusing circumstances of a fictional murder, we seek the simplifying quotient, the whodunit. Among the welter of material that comes up in an improvisation, we seek to simplify all that doodling and noodling up and down the keyboard and find the answer to the question, “What is the deep structure of theme, pattern, or emotion from which all of this arises?” (p. 104)

The elements before me at Castillo were dance, children, culture, public school, administration, curriculum and myself. A desire to uncover the deep structure of theme, pattern or emotion within students, dance and myself, is a current running through the concept of curriculum by accident. The term “accident” doesn’t suggest no structure. Rather it suggests a different way of thinking about structure; of recognizing and responding to it. It includes attentiveness and serendipity.

Curriculum by Accident: A Teaching Practice

To educe 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.

Education must tap into the close relationship between play and exploration; there must be permission to explore and express. There must be validation of the exploratory spirit, which by definition takes us out of the tried, the tested, and the homogeneous. (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 119)

I didn’t respond well to the regimented aspect of school myself as a high school student. I was resistant to its structure and sought ways around it. The inclination, that emerged later as a teacher, to find the gaps, the places between or outside the education structure, and make staging grounds of them was something I did easily.

In other words, places like hallways and curriculum choices as happened when boys found dowels accidentally left on the floor (explained in detail in the “Gender” section of Chapter 5) were not stretches of the imagination. They did not feel out of the ordinary but like natural places to turn my attention.

Teaching opportunities arose in which I could refine or work on a subject in some depth, meaning the moment was conducive or particularly suited for a certain kind of work. For instance, several lessons revolved around the need for focus. Getting to the nuts and bolts of dance meant getting to a place where they could focus on the material in an undistracted way. Either I could just brush on ideas superficially or look for ways that the exploration could be more.

Students came to dance class from other classes, recess, lunch or home and as a result, brought competing energies into the studio from outside. It was
necessary to transition into dance from whatever went on immediately before. It often took a while. It was not a matter of me saying, “Ok, let’s get started” though at the beginning especially, I thought that was what you did. They needed some clear steps that steered them toward a concentrated state, which gathered their energies so they could focus. Because so much of what they did in their school day had to do with thinking and cognition, shifting their focus to their bodies took a little time. And for children, the experience of the body seems (in my opinion) to be in large part, a release and break from sitting and thinking. In dance, however it meant shifting the focus to a thinking body.

Once I started designing activities to hone their focus there was a greater sense of concentration for many of them. More concentration enabled the students to go further into whatever we were doing. It meant a more integrated encounter with the movement. It became evident that they were capable of subtle, very articulate movement. But, that capability revealed itself inconsistently. It would come and go. Having seen what quality of work was there, inside them made me insist on maintaining that level and building on it. I wanted to move from that point forward. It became exciting. It became a creative experience of its own. What could these kids do? What qualities and sensitivities in me were needed to draw out that caliber of work? What would light them up in this work? I did breathing exercises with them, centering ones and relaxation. In the interviews that I did with them, many recalled relaxation. I didn’t ask about it but they
brought it up as an important memory. Below is a small sampling of some of these focusing activities.

**Centering**

Students stand with feet at hip width and feel the full surface of their feet. I ask them to shift forward on their feet just to the edge before they fall off balance. They do the same thing shifting back to their heels. I ask them to rock back and forth between those two edges. Feel the difference in the muscle groups working. Don’t grip the toes. Fill the full span of motion. I ask them to picture a long flexible willow branch or plexi-glass rod and see the degree of play and bow it has as it bends. The willow branch is rooted in the ground beneath them, passes through their center and extends beyond their head. I ask the students to move their bodies as a flexible rod that goes to the extreme of its range of play and then slowly, slowly hones to a point of still dynamic center over their feet. This centering exercise became the opening of a dance because it had such a compelling quality to it.

**Breathing**

I began all classes sitting in a circle. I asked students to set their eyes on a point on the floor about a foot in front of them. I’d set a meter and have them breathe in for four counts and out for four counts on my meter. They had to fill the counts with their breath rather than draw in a large breath and hold it. I would continue until most of the group was together on the breath before letting it go.
Shaping Off Balance

This activity developed from the difficulty in finding physical balance. I’d watch students struggle and lurch. Rather than regarding balance as a singular point, I asked them to think about it as a point among other points along a continuum. Rather than fighting the body’s inclination to jerk and topple off balance, I asked them to ride the line of energy in the direction the off balance took them and to control and shape it, so that there was no jerking or lurching, but smooth continuous movement. Balance was lighted upon and passed through. It is a tensile, small place with a dynamic of its own. The point of balance and off balance becomes one movement idea with many parts rather than one correct point of balance and the rest wrong. Balance is a point along a dynamic of energy.

We started looking at it as full arcs and lines of energy in space. It became a breathing exercise as well. They would pitch themselves toward suspended balance on an inhale, hold their breath at the teetering point of balance and let the exhale cast them where it would in a shaped form. Rather than timidly trying to climb onto that little pinpoint of perfect balance, I asked them to generously send themselves toward a balanced shape and pass through in the natural direction the off balance took them, ending in a new shape. The movement dynamic was sustained and continuous filled with scooping, spiraling, carving, diving, pitching. They would repeat these balanced shapes one right after the other with their breath. This too became part of a choreographed work. Many of the students were very athletic and they ate up the physicality of this.
**Relaxation—Clearing**

This activity is geared for two age groups and designed in different versions for that reason. I ask students to lie on their backs on mats on the floor. It takes a while to get them settled. They giggle and I move them around so they’re not by someone who they can’t resist being silly with. I ask them to put their hands at their sides. Back of the neck lengthened. Chin reaching for the chest slightly. Feel the weight of the body distributed and balanced between skull, scapula, pelvis, heels, elbows and hands. Look with your inner eye—the eye that sees and imagines with your eyes closed. See a line that extends beyond your head and past your heels. Lengthen yourselves along that line - not with your muscles but by picturing it. Now imagine a line of energy that goes across your back making you wide. You want to imagine being long and wide at the same time but without using muscles, but rather picturing it. Each breath gets you a little longer and a little wider. Hold those two ideas at the same time, spine lengthening and back widening. What does it feel like where length and width cross each other?

Begin to notice your breathing. Notice the inhale and exhale. Now picture your breath filling and emptying a tall skinny drinking glass. As you breathe in, see the glass fill from the bottom to the top with your breath. When you exhale, see it empty. Slow it down and see every small detail. Continue to breathe while I talk to you. Continue to lengthen and widen. If thoughts come into your head, see if you can just notice them and let them pass on through rather than latching onto
it. It’s a little like what happens when you’re drifting off to sleep. Thoughts and events of the day just move about as you start to relax. All your concerns and preoccupations will be there when we’re done. Continue breathing. Continue sensing width and length in your body. Your job, your only job at this moment is to become as fully relaxed as you can while also being fully alert.

I have rheostats in my room. I move the lights to a very dim setting. Once the students are settling into the work, I turn on ambient music along the lines of Brian Eno’s *Music for Airports* and speak over the music. I walk through the room as I speak. There is a certain point where the entire group’s demeanor softens. The tension that is usually there drains from their faces and their bodies. The junior high students look like children. The first time I led them through this I was struck by the amount of tension they carry - by the degree of contrast between their daily selves and who I saw a ways into the exercise. I was also moved by what I perceived to be trust they had in me. I walked through the room speaking to them and watching them sink into the work. They became soft and open and beautiful. As a parent I often looked in on my daughter as she slept and was moved by her beauty and softness and the profound beauty and delicacy of children in general.

It’s not uncommon for some to fall asleep. It’s also not uncommon for a shrill voice to rip through from the front office: “Mr. Lopez, please report to room 102. Mr. Lopez, please report to room 102” followed by the crashing of the mouthpiece being set back in the plastic cradle of the PA system. It was also not
unusual for a teacher, speech pathologist or social worker to come in to the studio. They would open the door allowing a wedge of fluorescent light from the hallway to shove into the darkness as in a theater. They would come into the studio to take a student out.

Sometimes I ask them to picture a place that they think is utterly beautiful and thoroughly safe. I ask them to picture it in detail—temperature, time of day, season and all the details they can supply. The place can be imaginary or not. I ask them to bring one person into the place. It is someone who understands and knows you completely—better than anyone else. This person can be imaginary or real. This person loves you unconditionally and cares about you. They don’t speak or touch you in any way. This person is just there with you. Again, your job is to become as completely relaxed as you possibly can and be alert. Sometimes I would let this exercise transition into yoga poses. Several classroom teachers asked me to take their class through this lesson before their students took stressful tests.

For younger students I ask them to focus in on the bones in their body. “See your entire skeleton. Skull, bones of the arms, hands, fingers, legs, ribcage, pelvis, legs, feet. I have a powerful machine that can suck all your bones out of your body. It attaches to the bottom of your feet. Ok, I’ve attached it. I’m going to turn it on and count to ten. It takes ten counts to suck every last bone out of your body. Once all the bones have been sucked out you’ll be left with just muscles, guts and blood with a bunch of skin around them. Are you ready? Here we go
1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10. Ok, you have no bones. Now, get up and move. Even though you couldn’t really move without the support structure of your bones, pretend you can.” The class looks like a bunch of drunks. They crash into each other and fall down. Try to get up and fall down. They slop and slosh around until I ask them to lie back down.

“Ok, let’s put your bones back. No I changed my mind. I’m going to suck out all the blood and guts now. I have a vacuum cleaner (a wet vac) that I’ll attach to the top of your heads and it’s going to suck everything out and leave you empty and full of space. Ok, here we go. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10. You are completely empty. All you are is skin around space.”

“You are empty. Fill your bodies with color or colors. It can be rich and saturated or pastel or it can change as it is in your body. Then fill your body with a light texture. It can be clouds or fog or clear air. As you breathe, the texture and color swirl through your inside body. You are in there with the color and texture. Be aware that your skin is porous. It has millions of tiny little holes. If you want to, send yourself out through the pores of your body, into the room to mix with other peoples. If you don’t want to that’s fine. Start to move your outside bodies like the textures inside your body. You can keep your eyes closed or open them.”

Impulses

This is an activity I did with junior high students. It is done in partners and requires sensitivity on the part of the giver and receiver. The giver applies some pressure and force (impulse) with index, middle and ring fingers of one hand.
They apply it by touching their partner on a particular chosen body part with a particular energy in a particular direction. The receiver must react physically to the pressure and movement information provided. So, if I was a giver and applied an impulse with my three fingers just above my partner’s elbow - pushing the arm slightly away from the body, my partner may respond with a small turn. The reaction must match the energy of the impulse. If the pressure is very slight, the movement will be very slight. Both partners must tune in to each other. Both must become sensitized to the other’s touch and reaction. When well matched and well attuned to one another, it looks like a dance. Both are working with each other’s energy and read each other’s physical cues. The giver moves around and with the receiver allowing their movement to be absorbed and yielding into the reacting movement. This exercise became the basis for a dance.

I felt my curricular instincts were bearing fruit. That was exciting and delightful to me. I wanted to build on those instincts and develop them. I needed to feel my engagement with their engagement. It felt alive. When my curricular instincts were piqued, my artistic ones were as well. They mingled. I felt I was being pulled into a new way of seeing and working. I was not working with a dance vocabulary but with a language that invented itself as it went along.

The balance between discipline and openness was tricky. A structure needs to be limited enough so its parameters are crystal clear allowing it to be fully excavated. But it also needs to be open enough so the self can move through it. That limitation must be experienced in its full entirety. The beauty and paradox of
discipline is that the limitation it imposes actually offers expansion. Less is more. 
The limitation becomes the freedom. This koan like concept is found in all the 
arts and in many disciplines and contexts. The art of designing a curricular 
structures is found in the tension between limitation and freedom. Musician and 
composer Igor Stravinsky, spoke eloquently to this:

My freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more 
narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with 
obstacles. Whatever diminishes constraint diminishes strength. The more 
constraints one imposes, the more one frees…” Like a magnifying glass, 
the focused light has the capacity to ignite that which it is focused on. 
(Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 79)

When the students worked in a concentrated way, I think they felt some of 
what I felt. The experience of focused physical work was stimulating to both of 
us. Some of the distractions that interfered with concentration were very basic 
human ones such as self-consciousness, trust, and confidence. They were self 
conscious in front of each other. They weren’t sure if they trusted me, or 
themselves or each other. And many of them were lousy students with basic low 
self esteem. John Dewey (1934) addressed this: “The medium through which 
energy operates determines the resulting work. The resistance to be overcome in 
song, dance and dramatic presentation is partly within the organism itself, 
embarrassment, fear, awkwardness, self-consciousness, lack of vitality” (p. 164). 
The Internal Critic is one activity that addressed some of these interferences. I
used this exercise when students seemed particularly blocked or resistant to an activity and I only used it with sixth through eight graders—occasionally younger ones. It focuses on locating and interacting with one’s inner critic.

This is a writing exercise. Students were directed to give form to their inner critic. What does it look like? Where is it located in your body? Is it in your head, or on your shoulder or somewhere else? Is it difficult to locate? Is it diffuse and not in a clear form? Does it change forms? Does it move from place to place? What does it say? What does its voice sound like? When does it speak? What gender is it? What is its name? How do you react to it? How does it make you feel? Does it have special powers or properties?

Once these questions were responded to, I asked them to do battle with their inner critic. The goal of the battle was to either excise the critic all together or greatly diminish and impair its power and strength. I asked them to picture a battle—to choose their weapon. The weapon could be their body or words or thoughts and they had to imagine how they would use it. But it could not be a gun or weapon. It had to require physical or physic skill and maneuvering. The student and the critic had to engage.

**The Role of Imagination in Curriculum by Accident**

There is a Victorian satire entitled *Flatland, A Romance of Many Dimensions* by Edwin Abbott (1884/1952) that describes a world that lacks the third dimension. The narrator is two dimensional (a square) and interacts with the one-dimensional world, *lineland* and then with a three-dimensional sphere that he
can’t comprehend until he sees the third dimension for himself. At one point the line is all that is known in the world described in Flatland. It can’t conceive of the field beyond the line; the second dimension. But one of the main premises of Flatland, in addition to its satirical social commentary on Victorian society, is that the other dimensions can’t be known because of a perceptual limitation. It can’t know the other dimensions because it exists on only the one. In other words, we are limited by what we know. It is an issue of imagination. The ability to seriously ponder the existence of other dimensions requires imagining them. There are some in the scientific community, physicists especially, that say the same phenomenon goes on today, namely that dimensions exist that we can’t know because we are perceptually hindered by our inability to conceive and imagine them.

Around the turn of the century there was much stir in the scientific community around the notion of a fourth dimension. Many papers were written by mathematicians, philosophers and scientists. The excitement of the exploration spilled beyond the boundaries of science over into many disciplines—the arts included. In Lawrence Krauss’ book, Hiding in the Mirror, he comments on this:

His, [Picasso’s] famous statement, ‘I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them’, was more a reflection of his protest against the confines of standard perspective than a claim to be interpreting higher dimensions. Just as Van Gogh fought against the tyranny of color, one might say that Picasso and his contemporaries Braque, Gris, Metzinger, Weber and
Duchamp were struggling to free us from the tyranny of space. Yet, at the same time the ultimate goals of the mathematicians and the artists were similar: to compel us to use our minds to liberate ourselves from the confines of our own experience. (2005, p. 87)

The idea of imagination having a valuable role in education is reminiscent of this thinking. The efforts put forth to maintain a status quo seems to assure imaginative limitation. Imagination is often regarded as fanciful and charming but not among the company of serious learning. That is slowly changing as we transition out of the information age into one where invention and creative problem solving are projected to become essential in the competitive workplace (Pink, 2006). But as of yet, the role of imagination remains largely unexplored in terms of its value and practice in public education. Curriculum scholars such as William Pinar, Maxine Greene, and Elliot Eisner address the role of imagination in learning, where they make compelling arguments for it but it seems to remain more a subject for theorists then for education policy makers and administrators.

**Curriculum by Accident and Curriculum Theory**

A school of curriculum thought that has particular resonance with curriculum by accident is that of the reconceptualists. The theories from this school differ from each other but also overlap in many ways and seem that they could flow in and out of each other. Maxine Greene and William Pinar are two from the reconceptualist school that I discuss below.
There are four significant theoretical positions that educational philosopher-theorist Maxine Greene makes that align quite directly with the idea of curriculum by accident. They fall in the categories of imagination, risk taking, the unknown and awareness of the “givenness” of school systems. These positions exist harmonically along side each other so looking at them in separation takes some of the music out of them.

She purports the role of imagination in education as important and meaningful. But she does not refer to it as a charming or fanciful way in which children engage but one full of epistemological and existential significance, capable of shaping change and evoking joy. Without exercise of the imagination, the possibility for expanded meaning in school life is truncated. It is in no way a frivolous engagement but one capable of connecting people to inner meaning and experience. She says, “The role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected” (Greene, 1995, p. 28).

Curriculum by accident makes repeated references to that which exists in the present moment in a classroom that may not be immediately evident. And it makes reference to a need for developing an openness to it.

Risk taking, according to Greene is an action that is at times necessary and warranted for personal expansion and actualization. Risk taking, according to Greene (1995) often refers to stepping into the unknown or into the dark (p. 47). So much of school is predicated on that which is known and is certain, that
willingly going into the dark or inviting the unknown into school experience, is territory not treaded. Curriculum by accident has roots in creative exploration which means in the unknown, or in the not yet known. That which awaits, or that which is not yet known, has a significant place and plays an important role in curriculum by accident. The curriculum would not have happened were I not able or willing to stumble through ideas of which I had no prior knowledge.

Greene (1995) refers to Mary Warnock here: “It is imagination—with its capacity to both make order out of chaos and open experience to the mysterious and the strange—that moves us to go in quest, to journey where we have never been” (p. 23).

Greene (1995) frequently refers to hidden dangers within the givenness or unquestioned nature of being:

Only when the given or the taken for granted is subject to questioning, only when we take various, sometimes unfamiliar perspectives on it, does it show itself as what it is—contingent on many interpretations, many vantage points, unified (if at all) by conformity or by unexamined common sense. (p. 23)

Quoting Greene again on this subject:

To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or “common-sensible” and to carve out new orders in experience. (1995, p. 19)
While my pursuit of new curriculum territory was not an overt or particularly aware questioning of the givenness of school, it was a reaction to what I felt as a numbness and fear of being trapped in the regimen of school life and schedule. In reaction to that, I experimented, I sought new experiences and I looked and waited for something to “click.”

Greene (1995), a lover of literature, illustrates many of her points through literary reference—in this case, Walker Percy. “The quest that anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life … To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair” (p. 14).

Curriculum theorist William Pinar (2004) says, “Curriculum is an extraordinarily complicated conversation” (p. 186). One of the ways, among many, that he thinks about the concept of “conversation” is through the dialogical one developed by Freire. Meaning, an exchange in which people encounter each other in a more open-ended, often personally motivated and interest driven way. In curriculum, that “conversation,” according to Pinar has become not only distant but bland and processed as it moved through the machinations of institutionalization (p. 186). Paraphrasing Huebner, Pinar (2004) says, “Teachers are forced to ‘instruct’ students to mime others’ conversations, ensuring that countless classrooms are filled with forms of ventriloquism rather than intellectual exploration, wonder, and awe” (p. 186).
Pinar looks at the interior life of the human being and its importance in school life and curriculum. That interior life, he says, is a fantastically complex one that is significantly and sadly neglected in education, yet a potential catalyst for dynamic growth of the individual and society (Pinar, 2004). He looks at the deep fascia that connects self to experience questioning the self’s interaction with and relationship to place, teacher and subject.

One of Pinar’s important responses to the “educational condition” is a body of thought he refers to as currere (Pinar, 1975b). It is an autobiographical process. The distance between subject and student is reduced because the student, (or researcher) becomes the subject. The present is made clearer through investigation into past and future.

The curriculum development in my classroom had a conversational nature. I needed and wanted to be part of that conversation. Pinar talks about free association in terms of data generation. I used free association a lot in my classroom.

There are aspects of Pinar’s thoughts on currere that have corollaries with curriculum by accident - that actually move into areas of creativity. One of these happens through the act of interpretation. Pinar refers to the interpretation of personal imagery as ultimately being an artistic act. The experience of creative process occurs through the act of interpretation. In an early paper on currere Pinar (1975b) says,
I see that my thoughts are like bubbles from the bottom of a pond, and I am on the surface; and they express, to use a psychological analogue of Chomsky’s concept, the deep structure of my being. Thus the partial validity of psychoanalytical theory, the image of the iceberg, and the potential profit of interpreting, (at times it is only speculation) what is seen in terms of what is not. This epistemological view, very simply stated above, makes me an artist. (p. 4)

The “deep structure of being” (a foundational aspect of who we are) comprises part of what Pinar refers to in currere as the “biographic basis”. My curriculum, which emerged through my students and myself, steered the work toward and through biographic subject matter. The physical experiences of time, space, shape and energy were the means (the language) that gave form to “bubbles from the bottom of a pond”. Imagery arose from the students and myself that was interpreted.

We made choreographic personal narratives. Once they were constructed, the students worked in pairs helping each other clarify their work. I remember walking around the class watching the students and listening to their comments. They were watching and reading each other. They were really watching and reading each other’s movement language. “This isn’t coming through”, “This part needs to be stronger” “Show me that again. I need to see it again.” “Yea, that’s good. It works now.” “What was that? I don’t get it.” They saw, experienced and read each others movement imagery.
A deliberate investigation into the temporal nature of existence is an important part of “currere.” Pinar (1975a) refers to them as regressive, (past) progressive, (future) and analytical (biographic present). He uses this temporal schema for self reflective and illuminating purposes. Through a detailed examination of self in time, personal meaning and understanding are enhanced and the complex influences that shroud us and obscure our ability to see ourselves in authentic terms are diminished. Pinar repeatedly refers to the value of free association suggesting a suspension of the rational critical aspect of thought.

While this theoretical construct is far more developed than anything I did in my classroom, again there are pieces of it in the curriculum. I used biography, as I mentioned above. I used a great deal of free association in a number of contexts. I used relaxation techniques, which Pinar also refers to as a means to access thoughts and feelings. On many occasions and in many contexts, I suspended the rational, critical aspects of thought.

Additionally, Pinar (1975a) had thoughts on the role of the body that align with my curriculum:

Make it all of a whole. It, all of it—intellections, emotions, behavior—occurs in and through the physical body. As the body is a concrete whole, so what occurs within and through the body can become a discernible whole, integrated in its meaningfulness. The physical body is the concrete manifestation of all that occurs in and through it. The Self is available to
itself in physical form. The intellect, residing in the physical form, is part of the Self. (p. 13)

Francine Shaw, an artist and educator, authored a theory that revolves around the idea of congruence. The concept is described as a harmonic state between one’s authentic Self and one’s lifework. The Self, she says, wants to gravitate towards that which holds meaning and authenticity. “In touch with his center and sensitive to its relationship with his subject’s language and meanings, he becomes the subject, has an authentic relationship with it” (Shaw, 1975, p. 445). Therefore, within such thinking, neglect of work (or subject) will result in a diminished experience of self. Congruence, in this sense means that the work and the person are directly and meaningfully connected in an authentic, honest way.

There was a good bit of congruence between myself and the work I did at Castillo. The reasons for that however were rooted in influences I was unaware of at the time. There was no consciousness or intention about it. It was a response from a deep place in me that needed creative expression. Extreme circumstances catapulted me into the job. I had a need to be in creative experience and that need forced a degree of what Shaw refers to as congruence. “Congruence means that threads of the Self weave a conceptual bond with and continuity between our theories and experiences, work and creative practices, our relation to students and the atmosphere we provide for them” (Shaw, 1975, p. 446). Though the bureaucracy and the structure of school were rigid and difficult, the actual work
came to reflect my own center. I think I sought continuity between myself and work. Had they remained separate I couldn’t have tolerated it.

In Shaw’s (1975) words, “We must be in the process of growth we help our students to experience, be what we help others to become; we must be what we do, live what we do. Adhering to this highest good means allowing our own authentic relationship with our work to mature” (p. 447). This perspective emanates from ethics and philosophy. Her words are refined and well crafted. They describe ways of being I feel are well worth aspiring to, however, not without difficulty. They had resonance with my curriculum, but not because of their ethical origins. Rather, it had to do with survival.

My ability to find some level of success at Castillo was directly connected to my ability to operate authentically. Curriculum by accident was anything but refined and carefully crafted. Survival in a foreign environment (Castillo) under extreme personal circumstances, required finding authenticity and connection with what I was doing. I was out of my element. The only way to find a connection to what I was doing was to be what I wanted to have happen. Through a feeling of connection I found a sense of grounding which allowed a level of authenticity and ultimately a sense of forward motion. And to some degree, it served to ameliorate a slow burning sense of despair at being caught in a bureaucratic setting that might last a very long time. I felt I would have lost all sense of myself had I not been able to be authentic. The job at Castillo was definitely a saving grace and I don’t want to sound ungrateful about it. But I did
seriously struggle with aspects of it. That struggle had to do with feeling that I was loosing touch with who I was. The schedule, the regimen, the expectations all felt like they were wearing grooves in my psyche. This is a clarity revealed in retrospect. Elliot Eisner, who I discuss below, talks about the act of looking back as it pertains to curriculum. I speak about it in terms of curriculum and art making.

Elliot Eisner, a painter himself and curriculum scholar has written extensively about the role of art and aesthetics in education. He champions the unique modes of learning and experiencing within art and creativity. In the following passage, Eisner (2005) uses the term “expressive outcomes” as a modification of the term “expressive objectives”. The term “objective,” he says directs the learner to actualize content and form that are already known. In other words, there is not an authentic discovery process, rather one that steers toward a concrete known goal. But the term “outcomes” places attention on what actually happens, regardless of whether it hit the goal.

Students learn both more and less than what teachers hope for. So, expressive outcomes are determined after the fact by looking backward to identify the consequences of the activities and pedagogies that were employed. In looking back at side effects, one might discover that they are the main effect. Expressive outcomes seek not predictability, but visibility. (p. 2)
Looking at this passage in relation to curriculum by accident, there are several corollaries. The cultivation of awareness of that which is present but not predicted or readily seen, is one. He speaks of a kind of culling of the atmosphere—casting a virtual net to catch what can’t be seen. Additionally Eisner’s (2005) comment on “side effects” becoming “main effects” happened on many occasions in my curriculum. Following tangents or “side effects” sometimes resulted in fully realized and articulated ideas that then blossomed further opening up new worlds of curriculum ideas so the charting and direction of the curriculum had, to a degree, an energy and trajectory of its own. The lesson often became a frame or point of reference that could be veered from rather than an immutable or authoritarian presence. In the quote Eisner (2005) says to look backward and “identify the consequences of the activities and pedagogies” (p. 2). In a way, this dissertation is doing just that. I didn’t go into the school with any version of the curriculum that eventually developed in mind. It wasn’t brewing around in there. I had no prior notion about working with adolescent kids. All of it was a response to what was there. Who we (all of us) were and what we were doing influenced and charted the curriculum

My Historical Relationship to Dance Studios

I am a dancer and a choreographer. Therefore, I’ve spent hours and hours and hours of my life in dance studios—taking class, rehearsing and directing. They are spare places. Just open space, minimal decoration if any. My training
was classical. I studied ballet and modern techniques and later choreography and improvisation.

As an artist, I recall whenever I went into the studio to begin a new piece it would be accompanied by a very unsettled feeling. I may have gone in well prepared with a clear idea and started directing, teaching phrases, talking ideas, playing with space but I never had a sense of sureness about what would happen or what I was doing. Something disquieting hovered around the work. Often my ideas or what I had envisioned became something very different. I felt like I was waiting for traction, for something to take hold - a spark or recognition or discovery, a little thread that pulsed. I was waiting for form that was in my ideas and vaguely hanging around the work, to reveal itself.

That connection usually happened at some point in the process and then I would relax and really yield into what I was doing and become almost obsessive. When I’d go through bouts of terrible insecurity about a piece, my friends told me that I always went through this. It would pass. A close friend laughed at me saying she would worry about me if I didn’t freak out at the beginning of a piece. She said I was like clockwork. I somehow needed to be mired in anxiety and uncertainty. It was the way I worked. And they were right.

I often did not start at a beginning place but somewhere in the middle. I would look for a little thread that worked and it would serve as a root that delivered juice to the rest of the dance. It gave it a center. The work would often
start with broad strokes, be very rough and full of gaps and then find its’ filled in form and patina.

I know other choreographers who work very differently. They go in with a pre envisioned work that they proceed to mount on the dancers. Their vision and ideas are clear and fully formed prior to work in the studio. Phrases are taught, spacing is learned, intent is explained and so forth. Dances are not passive but the relationship between dancer and choreographer is one of transferring the movement material from the choreographer to the dancer who takes it in and speaks it through their own body - makes it their own. It is simply an issue of working style.

More than anything else, studios were places where I felt alive. They were social, aesthetic, creative, disciplined, sensate, spare, musical and a place where I could be myself in a deeply authentic way. Working with what I felt were gifted teachers had a transformative effect. They could not only craft a beautiful idea or personify a philosophical perspective but do so in such a way that I could take it into my whole being—embody it and move it. Something unique happens when intellectual, artistic and physical sensibilities merge. The physical dimension of information brought expansiveness to it - gave physical form to the conjured and ethereal nature of theory and ideas. It was like breathing, sweating and inhabiting them. Dance was my language and one I was very comfortable speaking.
Chapter 4:
PHYSICALITY IN EDUCATIONAL SPACE

Experimentation in the Classroom

As Foucault shows in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, the organization of classroom space “made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all …. It made the educational space function like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervision, hierarchizing, rewarding. (Ross, 2007, p. 13)

Students

Physicality and space - the way students physically interact with space is tightly controlled in public school. Running is never allowed in the halls, the classrooms or cafeteria. Running and playing is designated on the playground and athletic field only and at predetermined times. When classes of students travel through the school, they usually do so in lines. Students are to be in their classrooms or en route to an approved activity and be supervised by a teacher. They must have a hall pass to be in the halls unescorted. Students are directed to sit with their age groups at lunch at rows of tables in the cafeteria. Physical contact that approaches aggression or affection is strictly forbidden. There are dress codes that dictate “appropriate” clothing to be worn at school. The body is to be presented in an approved way. To more thoroughly manage that, many schools now require their students wear uniforms.
Many of these rules of physical conduct are in place to assure safety and order. It cannot be denied that without them, there could be chaos. But the tightly monitored design of school life itself, offers little to encourage students to develop self management. There is an emphasis, I think, on institutional management under the auspices of safety and order.

**Teachers**

Physical contact between teacher and student was discussed in staff meetings. Appropriate affection could be demonstrated by a hand on the student’s shoulder. The teacher can put an arm around a student while standing next to him or her. But a frontal hug was forbidden. Periodically there were junior high dances and supervising teachers were instructed to separate students who were too close.

Some principals imposed a dress code for teachers. There was an expectation of “professionalism” that would be represented in the clothing worn. We were not allowed to wear jeans, except on casual Fridays. Obviously, this didn’t affect me. When the presiding principal dictated that an era was one of professionalism, there was substantial griping from the teachers of younger students especially. When the era was a more casual one, teachers clothing appeared more practical. More teachers wore athletic shoes and jeans and t-shirts for instance. When I first started teaching, the principal called me into her office to tell me to cover up. My clothes were too form fitting. Students, specifically
junior high boys, were making comments. I then wore my dance clothes under a long t-shirt before I abandoned dance garb altogether.

**Teachers and Students**

Teachers organize the space of their classrooms and tell students where and how to place themselves in it. Teachers learn how best to organize space to optimize learning. Usually it is on chairs at tables or desks. Physical placement of the teacher in the learning space is also a conscious choice to optimize effectiveness or management. There are books on optimal arrangement and use of classroom space. In thinking of Foucault’s *panopticon*, the students are surveyed by the teacher and the teacher surveyed by the centrally located school administration and the administration by political interests. Students know they cannot come and go from a classroom without permission. These are non-negotiable.

Teachers all had what was called “duty.” This was a period of time at a specific time of the day when we had to watch children in a certain part of the school. For instance, one semester I had my duty at 7:45 in the morning. My location was the West playground. I would get relieved at 8:10 by another teacher. If this was neglected or if teachers were late, it became an issue. It was like military choreography.

**School**

The way that the body is regarded in institutional spaces (school being one) reflects culture and politics. The body is symbolic. To a degree, the body is
handed over to the institution. Upon entering school, the child stops responding to his or her own rhythms and impulses and adjusts to the physical requirements of school. Physicality becomes regulated by something other than home and family. Nature and the environment outside of school are excluded from the learning experience except by way of the rare field trip. Learning is confined to a specific spatial configuration. Homework connects the learning that originates in the school space to the home space but the source, the nexus of learning occurs at school. Through this delineation of the learning space, activities outside that space become, by default, non learning ones. The unregulated body is included in this non learning space. The mind and body are separated.

**Mind-Body in the Educational Setting**

Our first teachers in natural philosophy are our feet, hands, and eyes…Not only is it a mistake that true reason is developed apart from the body, but it is a good bodily constitution that makes the workings of the mind easy and correct. (Dewey, 1934)

There is a significant amount of educational theory that regards the body as an important and meaningful part of who we are and how we experience. But these perspectives remain on the periphery and are generally not exercised in public education settings. The following represent some of these perspectives from educational theory.

William Pinar (1975a) who was instrumental in the curriculum model of currere wrote:
Make it all a whole. It, all of it—inтеллект, emotion, behavior—occurs in and through the physical body. As the body is a concrete whole, so what occurs within and through the body can become a discernible whole, integrated in its meaningfulness … Mind in its place, I conceptualize the present situation. I am placed together. Synthesis. (p. 13)

Donald Blumenfeld-Jones (in press) wrote about teacher training:

we must begin to trust our senses as locations of knowledge, not merely conduits of data upon which the mind might work in order to have knowledge. We must see, for instance, that while we usually associate mind with brain and, thus, our mind is in that organ, our bodies are filled with the nervous system. It could be said that we can ‘think’ in our leg or arm or lower back because the mind is there as well. Our bodies are our ‘minds’, not merely our brain is our mind. To credit the value of aesthetic consciousness, the privileging of mind over body must be reversed and body must become a trusted partner in knowing. (p. 6)

John Dewey (1934) wrote:

We use the senses to arouse passion but not to fulfill the interest of insight, not because that interest is not potentially present in the exercise of sense but because we yield to conditions of living that force sense to remain an excitation on the surface. Prestige goes to those who use their minds without participation of the body and who act vicariously through control of the bodies and labor of others. (p. 21)
These three quotes suggest that the body is an essential part of learning—not an entity outside of it. The longevity of the attitude that neglects and marginalizes the body has roots that reach far back into history and religion. The scale and scope of such an analysis is far greater than this dissertation permits.

**Privileging of Mind over Body**

The paradigm that privileges mind over body is vast and can be found in the most unlikely of settings, even the dance culture itself - among university dance departments, presenters, arts panelists, and arts administrators. Where it might seem given that the body’s role in learning and experiencing, where the embodied practitioner/dancer would feel equality and a collegial acceptance among the modes of knowing, it is not necessarily the case. Let me explain.

Arts administrators, presenters and panelists are in positions of power and influence the content and direction of dance and art. They have little direct understanding about how dancers process knowledge.

The dance intellectual (scholar, administrator, panelist, presenter) probes embodied experience arriving at ideas and interpretations through whatever means of analysis he or she employs. Ideas are presented in books and papers, at meetings, conferences and in conversations. The movement practitioner may be celebrated and highly valued but it is the illumination of the practitioners practice through the linguistic representation of his or her work that elevates it to a revered, realm of intellectual value—albeit a disembodied one. The representation
rather than the experience becomes the epistemological focal point, the place where knowledge is understood and valued.

Jaana Parviainen (2002) put her finger on the crux of the issue:

The paradox in discussing bodily knowledge is that I am trying to articulate a phenomenon that happens only in bodily awareness. This articulation cannot translate bodily knowledge to a literal form; it can only indicate the existence of bodily knowledge. As a Zen philosopher would say, the finger that points at the moon is not the moon. In a sense it is living knowledge, transmitted from the body to a body very often through learning-by-doing. (p. 22)

The gap between embodied practice and scholarly practice is rooted in old entrenched ways of thinking about knowledge. Positivist schools of educational thought exclude the body from their learning systems. That which exists below the neck, (the body), essentially just goes along for the ride. Elliot Eisner (1998) paraphrases a positivist perspective, “What one wanted was pure mind, unencumbered by emotion or by the misleading qualities of the empirical world” (p. 113). It is this pure emotionally unencumbered mind that I think is at play here. It is still influential even though clothed in progressive thinking. Although the body is valued, admired, and studied, it is through the scholars’ voice that the bodies work is brought to a place where intellectual respect is adjudicated. Dance discourse is, ironically, distanced and disconnected from the body.
Some classic, non-western schools of thought regard the body as an avenue to elevated perception rather than an impediment. Acupuncture, Yoga, Ayurveda, Native American are some that systematically map the intricacies of mind body interaction. And there are some, such as Buddhism, that value a deliberate suspension of intellect as a means to access purer understanding. In such schools of thought, the intellect in isolation is regarded as an entity that interferes with meaning.

There is awareness of this split. It is addressed, wrestled with and problematized. Bold individuals seek to bridge the embodied and intellectual worlds in creative exploratory ways. But these attempts still can’t compete with pure abstraction and are often regarded as fascinating, interesting offshoots of the art form. And they themselves become further material for abstract analysis. Dance scholar Randy Martin (1998) looks at this split:

The distinction between theory—the effort to grasp something whole in order to reflect on it, as if from the outside—and practice—the experiential engagement with something as if from within the process of doing it—retains some utility only if reflection and experience are not treated as separable acts but as two interconnected moments of the same activity. (p. 5)

The positivists subscribe to the idea that certainty and truth are found in discourse stripped of excess or the unnecessary. The abstract realm is the highest, purest intellectual goal. But the body is, of course, not an abstraction. The body,
even within the dance culture, becomes disembodied. The hierarchy of scholarship that favors an abstract, language based representation of embodiment prevails. The intellectual, academic voice and perspective are privileged.

In the public school space, a disconnect from the body happens to teachers and students alike. The body, in institutional spaces risks becoming a stranger to itself. Imagine, if you will, the school space in the following metaphoric terms, as birds in an aviary. The mamma bird (the teacher) gets food (curriculum) that is provided by whoever is in charge of the aviary (administrators, politicians) and delivers it to the open waiting beaks of her babies (students).

The mamma birds’ instincts for searching out food are unnecessary in captivity. As a result, her ability to navigate and read the natural environment beyond captivity is dulled and lacks acuity. If she remains in captivity too long she will never be able to fend for herself beyond its boundaries. She is dependent on those who are facile in the outside world. Many of her natural instincts will have been dormant for so long that they won’t be accessible to her should she venture beyond the borders. She will therefore be vulnerable and out of touch with her instinctual self.

She will be unable to recognize or penetrate the borders that separate her world from the world beyond it. Through denied access, the natural environment is rendered foreign and hostile. The natural instincts become anesthetized and through the haze of anesthesia, the ability to respond to stimuli is muddled. The mamma bird teaches the baby how to live in captivity—how to live outside and
unaware of the instinctual self. The instinctual self atrophies and becomes useless.

In this metaphoric context, the embodied (instinctual) self is unable to evolve.

**The Body in Community**

The charm and popularity of *mob dances* (spontaneous dances done in usually public places) lies in their animation of neutral spaces. It challenges us to think about the unconscious physical self and to think about it in among community. *YouTube* posted an event at NYC Grand Central Station during rush hour where approximately 100 dancers were scattered throughout the station and then froze in mid-gesture for a few minutes then melded back into the crowd. During those minutes, commuters looked on in befuddlement, amazement, delight, bewilderment. People were snapping pictures with their cell phones. There was another one at Paddington Station in London where about 100 dancers of all ages busted out in choreographed pop dance as a music medley played over the loudspeakers. Again, commuters looked on and some actually joined in. There are many of these. They are a small underground movement. These efforts pull at the seams of assumption about our physical selves in space. They break the tacit rules of physical conduct. They also remind us that moving together is a fundamental human activity. I think the students at Castillo similarly broke rules of physical conduct. They worked in non conventional spaces with non conventional props and non conventional training.
An Experimenter in the Classroom

Technique itself springs from play, because we can acquire technique only by the practice of practice, by persistently experimenting and playing with our tools and testing their limits and resistances. (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 42)

I felt the need to evolve. I needed to feel a sense of forward movement, not treading water. When work became formulaic the juice went out of it and it flattened. The muse was no longer in it. For this reason I think, I experienced a constant itch to seek new territory. Plugging in a curriculum felt stultifying to me. It was like pumping glue through my veins. With no sense of forward movement I felt like I was atrophying, exerting energy and going nowhere. So, I became an experimenter in the classroom.

I remember working with third graders. We were in the midst of a lesson dealing with levels in space. We had already done a good bit of moving and were heading toward the end of class. I was intending to wind them down by having them close their eyes and listen to music. As they were listening there was energy in their bodies. It wasn’t the kind of energy that needed release as was often the case at the beginning of class, meaning either an energy borne from sitting or a general fidgetiness. Their bodies had what I sensed as a pulse or hum of motion in them - under the surface. They didn’t need release. I perceived the energy as awaiting form.
I asked them to be still as they listened and see the music as lines of energy traveling through their arms and legs, head and torso. See your bodies becoming the lines of energy in the music. I asked them to move just their heads the way the music moved inside them keeping their eyes closed. Notice how the music carries you. Let it tell you how to move. I incrementally added fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, chest, back and waist so that all parts were moving together.

They moved subtly, articulately, riding and playing with energy dynamics. Periodically I would say, “Whatever you’re doing right now—do more of it, even if it’s little. Show me more of what’s going on right now.” See the music as energy both inside of you that now goes outside of you too. Does it want to rise and fall—tumble, fill up, swirl? Let your body and the music become the same thing.

The reach and intensity of their movement swelled which spurred me to continue commenting and directing—to push them toward a goal I wasn’t even sure of. I had them move with closed eyes between a low and middle level. Let your bones become soft so that if you bump someone or bump the floor they’re soft and not hard. No matter how little or big your movement is, it’s filling the whole room. Let your body take you where it wants to go. You may want to dance with someone and you may want to be on your own. Everyone’s energy is mixed up with everyone else’s. Let the music take you inside of it. It felt like I was nudging, step by step in a direction that called out. They eventually spanned all
levels and danced throughout the room keeping their eyes essentially closed -
open just as much as needed - a little and not all the time.

There was fullness to their movement that was right up to the edge of abandon.
They were playing that edge. As I watched them I did not just see command and
mastery of material but something more. They were swept up in something else. It
felt like something took flight. They were dancing! Being in the presence of that
and feeling that I’d had a hand in drawing it out was exhilarating. And because it
happened and I knew it was possible, I was compelled to try and draw it out again
and to build on it.

The magic of that moment was fleeting and couldn’t be packaged or made
into a lesson plan. It couldn’t be broken down into a series of steps. It hinged on a
seizing of the moment or perhaps more importantly, an openness to the moment.
So rather than trying to recreate the experience, (which I couldn’t) I became open
to similar feelings and occurrences and pursued them in a like manner. I became
far more receptive and responsive to unplanned occurrences—to what was before
me in the classroom. There were many times when misbehaviors and deviations
from directions bore some wonderful material. Certainly not always, but often
enough.

In a laboratory setting, trying out ideas and experimenting is an expected,
understood practice. The scientist awaits an outcome not knowing entirely what it
will be. An element of uncertainty is always present. Experimenting includes the
presence of some unknown and a potential for discovery. Steven Nachmanovitch
(1990) addresses the similarities of science and art. “In science, we sit face to face with the perpetual gap between nature’s mysterious data and our capacity to know them and frame them. In art we face the same gap, between our half-intuited feelings and imaginings and our capacity to know them and frame them” (p. 154). As this quote suggests, the process involved in looking at the unknown is similar in both art and science. Through curriculum by accident I am saying that processes directly involving the unknown, as Nachmanovitch applies above to both art and science, also have a valuable role in learning and teaching as well.

I experimented with many ideas for the sheer interest in seeing what might happen and where they might take me. The repetitive nature of teaching had grown to wear on me. The days became repetitive as did the schedule and the curriculum. As a teacher you have virtually no opportunity to alter the structure of your day because it is so highly regimented. You’re scheduled to the minute. If you want to step outside for some air during class, you can’t. Use the bathroom during class—not going to happen. I recall many a morning when the delayed diuretic effects of coffee had me anxiously watching the clock. We were at the service of the schedule—not the other way around.

So there was the repetition of days, weeks, years and the curriculum. At times I felt like I was in a time vacuum—as if nothing changed, nothing moved and time stood still. And that experience was disturbing to me. There was a physical sensation that accompanied it—a blankness, a feeling that the circuitry of
the body was static, stopped up. It felt like some kind of space needed to be made for something to happen, something new and fresh.

I remember having a similar feeling with performing. Although I loved it, there was a point when the repetition got to me. I needed to constantly find ways to infuse a performance with something lively and there was a point when a piece just felt worn out—like I was running grooves into the stage. I felt like I was done with it and needed new material. I remember being in a company, performing five shows a week and asking the choreographer before performance if she wanted to try something new, see something different which she often did. It became a friendly and enjoyable ritual between us. I know other performers who regard the same situation as an opportunity to make their performance better, more refined and nuanced. It’s just a personality difference.

I felt that if I didn’t find ways to make my classes interesting and lively, I could fall into a rut - dig a groove so deep I wouldn’t be able to get out. Tracing the same neural pathways over and over felt numbing. I engaged in multiple inner dialogues. This is deadly boring. Nothing is happening. I’m stuck. I’m not giving these kids anything valuable. I can’t do this year after year. Something in me is dying. But, I have to have a job.

The unknown became a refuge, a place to escape that slow pull. Curriculum theorist, Philip Phenix (1975) speaks to this very sensation:

To be human is to create. The fashioning of new constructs is not an exceptional activity reserved for a minority of gifted persons; it is rather
the normal mode of behavior for everyone. Dull repetitiveness and routinism are evidences of dehumanization. In this respect the institutions and practices of education have often inhibited, rather than fostered, humaneness, by inculcating habits of automatic conformity instead of imaginative origination. (p. 328)

I remember several occasions of standing in my class waiting to see what was there, waiting to feel a sense of direction. This was not a response to a lack of lesson plans or not knowing what to do. It was a honing in on something—a metaphorical equivalent to sticking one’s finger in the air to see which way the wind is blowing.

Ironically, there were advantages to the public school schedule - to the everydayness, the day in day out of being there. While a few pages back, I talked about how difficult and numbing that schedule felt to me, it also had an advantage. A constant effort was called forth everyday regardless of how I felt or what I thought. I was there in the studio with these students and they were there with me. The discipline of a daily practice (whatever that practice is), brings results that could not be known another way.

It was like the tide, lapping the beach with a relentless rhythm. Occasionally something interesting washed ashore unexpected so I took to watching the water in case something interesting might wash ashore again. The students also developed an interest in what got washed ashore and became active observers. I just got up every day and went to work. The students came to class
everyday and an attempt was made on my part to construct meaningful dance experiences. Sometimes I was tired. Sometimes I was sad or angry as was the case for the students as well. But we all showed up everyday.

There was a great long hallway down the wing shared by fine arts and junior high. I thought it was such an interesting and peculiar space that could lend itself to something really unusual. I talked to the other arts teachers and we planned an arts event. Our principal, at the time, said we could have one arts class period a month for an arts event. He said we could shut it down and do what we wanted. Of the principals I had while at Castillo, he was the most arts friendly.

The audience (consisting of junior high students and a few teachers) were plastered against the wall of the hallway. I had huge elastic loops that trios of dancers got inside placing the elastic at waist height and flung themselves in a pattern down the hallway. I had also borrowed these small plastic platforms on casters from the PE teacher. They’re intended to be laid on belly down and are just inches (about 5) from the ground. We choreographed a tight sequence on these. Dancers laid on their bellies and propelled themselves with their hands along the floor. They attempted precision unison doing spins, rollovers and other dancers dragging the ones belly down on the boards, jumping over them and doing all kinds of stunts. Theater students spoke scenes they were working on. Students from the instrumental music class put together an ad hoc marching band. Choir sang from positions along the wall. We set up a light tree at one end which
made it look a little like a train with its white hot blast of light coming down the
hallway.

I expanded basic lessons because doing the same lessons again and again
was numbing. A basic movement activity known as sculpting in which one person
sculpts the other’s body into a still shape, became a narrative study. The sculpted
shapes were placed on a line. Onlookers looked at the arrangement of shapes and
created a narrative out of it. What was happening? Was there a story? What was
it? Which shape needs to be moved somewhere else? Let’s rearrange them
entirely and take them off the line and into space. What’s happening? What’s the
story? Who wants to change the story? What happens if we change just the facing
of the shapes—we just shift where they’re facing? How is it affected if we shift
just one? If we put a shape or two on the counter what happens to it? Is it still in
the narrative? Let’s put all but two shapes on the counter. Now what happens to
the narrative? I ask one of the students to, “Go ask Mr. T. if he’ll let a few people
come down here from his class (drama) and interpret this, ok? If they’re in the
middle of something, just forget it.” Maria went up and put an athletic shoe on
one of the gesturing hands of a statue. It looked like a good idea to me. The statue,
Yesenia, threw the shoe down saying, “Get that dirty thing off me!”

“Ok, you can add one physical object to the sculptures: a shoe, a hat, a
pen, piece of paper, sweater. Be considerate. If they don’t want a shoe on their
hand, don’t put it there. The other group will have a turn doing the same to you.
Use something that’s right here. Attach it to the sculpture or place it somewhere
else. How does it change it? Does it change it? Do you like it better with it or without it? Let’s say we can change one thing at a time. You can go up to the arrangement and re-shape a person or place them somewhere else or remove them. Or you can move or take away one object.”

Then we added one sound (that was not a word) to be done sparingly and randomly: a cough, a sigh, a groan, a tongue click, a finger snap. “What did it do to the narrative character? Who are these figures? What are they doing? Ok, now let’s say you go in one at a time and tap somebody. That means they’ll leave and you place yourself somewhere in the scene.” Fairly soon, the scene was replaced by new people and changed.

It also became a study of composition arranging the forms with the singular intent of looking at forms in compositional space - looking at symmetry, asymmetry, weight, space and tension. Then we added simple minimal gestures to the still shapes—a turn of the head, brushing hair off the forehead, a weight shift, smoothing a wrinkle in a pair of pants. They were done sparingly at random.

The following are some representative examples of experimentation in the classroom.

- I did sound studies. I brought in various objects that made sounds. I dropped a heavy book, ripped paper, poured water, turned on a blender (to name a few), and asked them to see the sounds—draw the sounds. And they brought in their own sound ideas. We created sound choirs. We made a whining choir, a laughing one and a pissed off one. I asked
one student to step out and act as the choir director. The sounds now
rose and fell, stopped and started. Several wanted a turn being the
director. We got balloons and made a squealing balloon chorus by
pinching inflated balloons. We made a chorus of cheek poppers (when
you stick a finger in the cheek and pop it out quickly).

- I brought in a red cabbage one day and students did a movement study
  based on the design inside the halved cabbage.

- We analyzed poetry looking for the shape, texture and quality of the
  rhythm of the words, the imagery and content and translated them to
  movement and actual performance pieces.

- A second grade teacher and I created a lesson attempting to possibly
  recreate the experience of birth with her students who were mostly
  seven year olds.

- We did what I called “freeway dances”. Several concurrent solo
  movement studies confined within long narrow lanes that I marked off
  with masking tape.

- We did what I referred to as “choreographic personal narratives”.

- I did an emotion study in which students did metaphoric word
  associations with emotions and then created a movement structure
  incorporating those words and phrases spoken while moving.

- I did a study in which one person was the voice and the other the body
  of an emotion. One person was the body of anger and could only move
but make no sound. The other person was only the voice but could not move.

- I took kids outside with floor patterns drawn on 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper and had them draw their floor patterns in chalk on the basketball courts. I transferred their original patterns to clear transparencies. We laid them on top of each other in different combinations analyzing the potentially interesting traffic patterns and designs and then students physically moved along the patterns.

- In a study of positive and negative space we made a human board game covering the whole floor with bodies.

- I had students do quick sketches of each other moving. They drew the dancers themselves and also the shapes under the dancers in the air. I taped great long sheets of butcher paper around the studio and directed them in a study in which the dancer dances and draws the dancing at the same time.

- We did algebraic choreography. Students created a symbol system where they could direct another student with a movement score on paper. They grouped movements and directed what was to be done with them through an equation. They divided, repeated, multiplied, grouped,

- We made up games joining movement based verbs and adverbs.
• I brought in masses of newspaper and masking tape and let them make costumes and construct props. One group had a paper baseball game. They left class filthy with newsprint.

• I brought in several huge physical therapy balls and after playing, experimenting and inventing movement with them in the studio, we created a dance with a strong narrative component.

• We looked at dynamics within visual art and moved like them.

• I brought in tons of dress up clothes.

At one point, a fairly small seventh grade boy put on a huge pair of adult male pants and a shirt and began stuffing them with other clothes. Interested students joined in stuffing him until he looked the size of the Michelin tire figure used in ads. He was stuffed so full he could barely walk, but he could get knocked over and not get hurt. He became something of a soft bowling pin. This impromptu character was a cross between a person and a cartoon. He looked like a three dimensional Fernando Botero painting (the Columbian artist who paints oversized figures with pinched faces.) The kids insisted he go down the hall to show other classes. I told him no.

Class time was sacred. Students were told to not disturb classes, be respectful and very quiet in the halls. Jose insisted he would be quiet and just wanted to show one teacher who had a prep period anyway (meaning he had no students during that hour). He discovered it was fun to roll along and bounce off the hallway walls but forgot that if he fell down, which he did, it was very
difficult to get up without assistance. People come out of classrooms to see what was going on and called other people out to look at him. Now he had an audience, which he loved, and completely exasperated some teachers and amused others. We made a dance with this rotund caricature of a junior high student to none other than Tom Jones.

**Curriculum by Accident and Improvisation**

A dance is like a house. It’s a place in which things happen. You can go back to the house, but you can’t occupy it in the same way you did earlier.

(Albright, 1997, p. 139)

Curriculum by accident refers, in part, to unknown opportunity in the immediate learning environment, to elements that we are not consciously aware are there. These elements may hold promising and meaningful directions that could not have been planned for but are nonetheless valuable. Curriculum by accident could seize something in the moment and that something could pull a subject far a field, find a trajectory of its own and blossom into a fully realized albeit unexpected event. The unique energy and intelligence present in a given context reveal themselves and ares responded to.

But it is not, however, a random response but a response *to* something. The *something* is not always clear or understood and may well emerge from the unconscious or a realm of the unspoken. It is what improvisers work with. Curriculum by accident is a curriculum that deals with learning and teaching in a
way similar to the means improvisational artists work with the elements of their craft.

The parallels between curriculum by accident and improvisational theory are many. Both regard the unknown as an element of opportunity. Ruth Zaporah (2006), improvisational performance artist, speaks about teaching and being with her students:

I begin every session sitting in a circle with the participants. I sense the mood, the energy present and respond with the first exercise. Each class builds from what I see is happening or not happening, combined with the basic work that I intend to cover. The order is haphazard and immediate. I make up new exercises, veer off on tangents if need be. I watch the students and observe details. They teach me what to teach. Since every exercise has within it many teachings, what comes up each day and why it comes up, is dependent on what was occurring at that time. (p. 21)

Zaporah (2006) comes to the circle with her own artistic history, reflecting the development of the aesthetic body of work that is emblematic of her. So what she sees in front of her “the mood and energy present in the students” stirs through and is informed by that information (p. 21). She has created a vibrant curriculum that has taken years to develop and has a constant unfolding energy built into it. It is never finished. She is artistically engaged with teaching in a way that is similar to her improvisational work. Her work as a teacher has strong echoes of her work as an artist.
Chapter 5:
EMOTION, INTERSECTIONS, GENDER, LONGING

Prelude to Narratives

There were Mariella and Gladis and Daniela, Juan and Tomika and so many more. They all had personalities of all stripes; strong ones, passive ones, sweet, intense, brilliant, hilarious, conflicted, wise, angry and tragic. They and their personalities were there everyday. These young people could not be ignored, nor could their personalities be separated from the work in the studio. And dance? Dance for them was hip hop and this wasn’t hip hop. It also wasn’t, as they imagined, people in tutus spinning. In fact, this wasn’t dance—as they repeatedly let me know.

I don’t know how many times kids asked, “When are we gonna start dancing?” The following are comments of former students I interviewed about their experience of dance at Castillo. I asked them about their initial impressions of dance when they started at Castillo.

Mariella: “I was really really good at hip hop so to me like dancing was like that and cumbias and stuff—that was dancing and then what you were doing was all weird. I was like, what is she doing—or what’s wrong with her?” (personal interview, 2009)

Gladis: “I remember thinking, wow this is really different. And everybody was all complaining—what is this? This isn’t dance. Where’s the hip
hop and everybody was talking about that all the time.” (personal interview, 2009)

Daniela: “Well, when I first was in there—I wasn’t really into it and I was like, ‘I’m not gonna do this—this is lame. This is not me—I’m not gonna do this! I can’t move like she wants me to move and stretching my body’—I was like ‘No, I’m not into that!’” (personal interview, 2009)

Juan: “Well, when I first started I wasn’t used to the fact of dancing or—well, at first I felt weirded out. I felt—I wasn’t quite comfortable dancing, you know. Especially in front of all my friends. It was a little embarrassing I can say. But after a while I kind of started getting more comfortable and I kind of started to get more involved. And talk to people and I felt free to do more stuff. You know what I mean? Like I just felt more comfortable and I felt like I could try different things without being embarrassed. I think I was more comfortable because everybody was beginning to do everything. They were starting to just open themselves and I was like well, if they’re doing it I guess I should give it a try.” (personal interview, 2009)

Tomika: “Well my first thought was like ok well you gotta do this for a class Tomika. Because most of the people I was in the class with, I didn’t like. So, I was like—dang I don’t really like these people but I do it for this grade. So then I was like, wait, this could be fun. This
could really be fun. So, I started thinking and it gave me the opportunity to apply myself more than just well ok, it’s just 1, 2 and 3 and 4 and 5 and … So, we stepped out of that. It was thinking outside of the box. I mean I never really did that type of dance before. So, I was like, What? This is kinda new. Like regular dancing, like hip hop—ok, it’s 1 and 2 and 3 and 4—you know - but when it came to contemporary dance it was like ok you move this way, you move that way, you bend this way, you bend that way. You stick out. You make it bigger. And the especially because we had to make stuff bigger. How do you make that dance move bigger? You know like—I was kinda wondering. How do you make a dance move bigger? But then afterward, it was—Ok, ok, I got this, I got this.” (personal interview, 2009)

As I’ve mentioned in Chapter 3, I couldn’t turn to my own dance education and background as a pedagogical guide. What I did was take the components of dance, mix them up and extrude them in a different way - same ingredients, just different proportions. There was movement, creative exploration, practice, and performance—without dance clothes, dance language, dance culture.

The Narratives

As questions and answers unfold we feel the excitement of being onto something, of following a lead, as in a detective story. Among all the diverse and confusing circumstances of a fictional murder, we seek the
simplifying quotient, the whodunit. Among the welter of material that comes up in an improvisation, we seek to simplify all that doodling and noodling up and down the keyboard and find the answer to the question, ‘What is the deep structure of theme, pattern, or emotion from which all of this arises? (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 104)

I’ve tried to identify the deep structure of theme and pattern in curriculum by accident. Like headwaters, they sprang from many sources. They emerged from work in the studio specifically but were also fed from more diffuse sources such as school, family and neighborhood. When I started teaching, I found myself in a world of circumstances, contexts and people that were new and foreign. The students and I came from worlds unknown to each other. As I look back I see that my responses and decisions were largely motivated by survival and then later, lovely surprises sprang up. Much of this exploration into curriculum by accident is an analysis of these lovely surprises.

A good portion of the “noodling and doodling” Nachmanovitch (1990) referred to happened in the studio. Many choreographic ideas arose there and pedagogical direction was influenced by studio work. Dispositions and emotional states experienced by students and me were brought into the studio and became situated in that work. There was a well of creativity within the students. It was capricious and mercurial but clearly there nonetheless. I had my own strong desire for creative immersion which dovetailed with their creative natures. It arose from
both artistic and personal needs. An unspoken camaraderie developed between the students and me.

There are four broad overarching themes that stand out: They are *Intersections* of Castillo dance students with outside groups, people and contexts. *Emotion*, both mine and theirs as it influenced choreography and pedagogy with its variable presence on a daily basis. *Gender* played out for both boys and girls as a theme. Adolescent boys dealt with notions of masculinity within a world saturated with homophobic myth and stereotypical expectation and girls steeped in a sexist culture experienced their bodies in new ways. Lastly is *Longing*. Dance made me feel like myself. The daily teaching grind did not. I missed dance and longed to be in it and managed ways to do so.

The following section presents these themes through a series of narratives, preceded by introductions. The themes I’ve identified weave in and out of many of the narratives; therefore the individual narratives do not focus on one theme alone. I’ve organized this writing in such a way that a given narrative will *highlight* a specific theme but the reader is asked to be aware that other themes are also present. I’ve organized them in this way to maintain cohesion of the individual narratives. Additionally, I’ve inserted excerpts from interviews to present the people’s voices as directly as possible.
Emotion

Life changes fast.

Life changes in the instant.

You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends. (Didion, 2005, p. 3)

I never imagined I would be a teacher in public school. It wasn’t a calling.

But it did come knocking much later in life when I became a single parent - a role that befell me through an unexpected crisis. Teaching was an expedient way to make a living. I had a bright beautiful seven year old daughter who needed stability and a mother not seeking her aesthetic destiny but a regular job with benefits. I borrowed money and returned to school to get certified as a teacher.

I cannot remember the teacher certification program I was in. I cannot remember the building, the coursework or what even one teacher looked like or if they were male or female. I was tuned to some distant place where shock takes you. Nine months later, with certification in hand I got the job at Castillo.

Needless to say, my own emotional state was still up and down.

The children were not as practiced as I was, at managing their emotions. I may have gone into work with last night’s anger or last week’s sadness, but I knew it was not the place to express it. There are appropriate times and places to express emotions, an understanding I acquired as I grew up. But the children I taught didn’t have this understanding. They were not practiced at managing their emotions. Who they were, what they felt, and how they behaved were not really
separated. They easily cried when they were sad or hurt and exploded when they were angry.

The presence of emotion in curriculum by accident is described in the following narratives. These narratives target younger children, but there was significant emotional content with older junior high aged students too which I’ve addressed immediately following these narratives.

Mrs. Seneca

In our own culture, death is usually out of our hands, and our elders are usually out of our sight. The way we shield ourselves from death exemplifies the way we shield ourselves from direct experience in general.

(Steinman, 1986, p. 131)

Catherine Seneca, a colleague at my school had a terrible thing happen: her husband died suddenly and unexpectedly. Mrs. Seneca taught a combined second and third grade class. The shock of the death reverberated through the school. Many staff members went to the funeral which was held in an old established Catholic Church in downtown Phoenix.

It was full of worn wood pews and sweeping beams that arced and met very high above the sanctuary. Formally clothed people packed its seats. A sober light passed through stained glass windows. In addition to the smoothness afforded by time, the pews’ smoothness, worn by human contact, seemed also to retain the joys and sorrows of the lives that had touched them.
The casket sat in the front. The church was filled to overflowing. I always find it a little jarring to see a professional colleague in a completely different setting. I could see the back of Catherine’s head in the front row. After the service, the casket was escorted to the next part in this mystery of death and ritual. Then the family processed down the long aisle out of the church. I watched Catherine as she walked by, two men at either elbow. She was drained of color and looked glazed and stunned.

Catherine was out of school for a number of weeks. During that time, a substitute taught her class. Her students were fully aware of the death and its magnitude. We always began class sitting in a circle. The first time they came to dance after the death I asked how they were. Was it strange to have their teacher gone? I asked them if they’d like to do something special for Mrs. Seneca. Without hesitation they responded, “Yes!” I asked what ideas they had and what they might like to do.

There were many suggestions such as making cards, paintings pictures or a welcome back banner, decorating her desk, getting a gerbil or snake for the classroom or writing a story. Several thought they should have a car wash and give her the money. They had older siblings and friends and a location in mind.

“I was thinking more along the lines of something to do with dance.” I said, “Do you have any ideas that might involve dance?”

A few students suggested making a dance for her. Several girls got excited, “Yea, let’s do a dance for her!” Others didn’t like that idea.
“We should do a dance about death.” Maritza said

“Yeah!” several others chimed in.

I wasn’t sure what I felt about that. Death is one of those topics you tread very carefully around, especially in public school. It may be mentioned but is not a subject to explore with children. Several students became very animated about it. We talked a little more and then I asked, “How many of you like the idea of making a dance about death?”

Most of the hands shot up.

I didn’t know how we should look at the topic or think about it. I had my own experiences and my own understanding of death but I wasn’t sure how they would fit here. I was somewhat familiar with the stages of grief outlined by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross that have become part of contemporary knowledge about death, although perhaps dated by this time. They are: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance. We spent a lot of time talking about death and many children eagerly shared personal experiences. Their attention was piqued in a way I rarely saw. They became very animated. On a number of occasions I had to stop the conversations and get the kids up and moving or we would have talked for the whole class period. The dance curriculum was not watched or monitored and I pushed ahead into this. Maxine Greene (1995) speaks about the potency that can reside in art experience:

> [m]any of us teachers believe that the shocks of awareness to which the arts give rise leave us (should leave us) less immersed in the everyday and
more impelled to wonder and to question. It is not uncommon for the arts to leave us somehow ill at ease or to prod us beyond acquiescence. (p. 135)

I spoke about sadness and how huge it can feel and draining and weighty. We talked about the texture of it, the color, shape and sound and what time of day it was and what animal, what kind of voice it had, what it said, we pretended to brush our teeth sad, put on our sweaters and jackets sad, our shoes, and on and on. They spoke to each other about an experience of sadness with only their hands—no voice. They made shapes with their bodies that represented sadness. They did it with their eyes closed and then opened. They watched each other’s shapes.

I created a movement structure to be done in trios. I set the kids up for the activity. They were spread out and in place all over the studio. One little girl came up and said she needed to talk to me. I said, “Can it wait? We’re just about to start.” I had my hand poised at the CD player. She said, “I can’t do this.”

“Why?” I asked

“Because I have a problem.”

“What is it?”

“I think if I dance about sadness I’ll cry.”

“It’s ok to cry.”

The movement activity started and she did indeed cry. She streamed tears and her classmates danced as did she. It didn’t seem to get in the way of her moving at all. She moved fully. I don’t remember what the music selection was;
only that it was something classical. But I have a clear picture of this little girl, streaming tears and dancing fully with the rest of the class dancing too.

I talked about the concept of shock, thinking it would be a very difficult one for them to grasp. I described it as feeling like everything is weird, off balance, strange. You can’t wait for things to feel normal again. I expected it would be too abstract a sensation for them to grasp. I thought I would just touch on it briefly and move on. One little eight year old boy, Javier, said, “I know what that is.”

“What is it?”

“It’s like when your soul falls; like your soul falls down but then your body stays standing up.” It stopped me. I looked at him and said, “That’s such a very very good way to say that.” I walked over to my desk and wrote down his words.

I talked about anger saying you can just feel angry and not even know why. Sometimes you just feel angry at everything. You’re mad for no reason. Sometimes you’re mad at the person for dying. You’re mad for being left without someone you love. Javier said he knew all about that because when his mother died he got so angry he jumped out of his window.

There is little opportunity for children to reflect on the topic of death. We are culturally uncomfortable with it and keep it well on the periphery of daily experience. Children are often protected from it, or perceive the emotional intensity associated with death and dying and understand that it’s a fraught and
loaded topic. In the course of this project, I grew to regard death as the same powerful mystery to children and adults alike. The mystery, significance and profundity surrounding death are experienced by children as well as adults. Anna Halprin, a pioneer in movement exploration, wrote the following about children’s dance.

Child-oriented activities deny that children have the same expressive resources as adults, and the same expressive potential. And in our computerized rational, spectator-sport society, adults do not understand young people who live straightforwardly and sensually. Adults, so long denied freedom in sensory awareness and opportunity to experience fully the expressive aspects of movement, cannot identify with the experiences of young people. The adult is constantly asking the child to rationalize and justify in words that which is non verbal and experiential in value. The result is that our children are not integrated into society, that they have built their own society which recognizes no total responsibility. (Halprin, 1970, p. 156)

Creative process evokes the whole human being of which emotion is a part. The emotional aspect of art has been recognized to the point that theater, dance, visual art and music therapies (as they apply to behavioral health) are now recognized, credentialed programs regulated by state agencies. While it is the therapeutic potential within the art form that is focused on and developed in these
The Wheeled Guest

The reconceptualists … emphasize the importance of authentic personal experience and claim that much of schooling remains external or superficial to the deep private life that all humans possess. Education, they claim, occurs when those engaged in events or activities do so out of choice and with a deep personal commitment. (Eisner, 1985, p. 71)

I have a brother in a wheelchair. He was a victim of crime—a shooting—that happened to him at the age of 21. This was many years prior and he has reconciled to his quadriplegic state—at least in his waking life. The word reconcile here is every bit a verb as the disabled live life against the current of an upright and mobile world.

Joe visited our family regularly. During one of his visits he wanted to come down to Castillo and see my classes. The drama and music classes joined my dance class on this occasion. Joe asked me ahead of time what he should say if they ask him why he’s in a wheelchair. I said I wasn’t sure. “Let’s just wait and see what happens.”

As the kids came into the class they were very curious, stealing glances at Joe, others were more direct saying hello. He smiled and said hello back—waving his contorted, braced hand. All wondered who he was and why he was there. They sat on the floor in a huge circle. They were clearly fascinated with this stranger in
a wheelchair in their studio. There must have been about sixty children there. Joe sometimes gave informal talks about disability awareness and was very active in efforts to tighten gun control. He liked children. He could be silly and gentle and present with them.

He called me Susie rather than Ms. Bendix. This was amazing. Some kids laughed at hearing my first name spoken so familiarly and started trying it out. “Hey Susie.” It was a novelty to roll around in their mouth, “Hey Susie, what are we going to do today?” “You want me to close the door for you Susie?” as if it was terribly daring. Removing this formality exposes a forbidden aspect of a teacher—namely that they are human with a life beyond school. It is an aspect of teachers that students don’t get to know about. They wanted to know what we did as kids, what games we played, where we lived, what we did for fun, did we fight, did we get in trouble, what did we eat, how many kids were there in our family.

He pointed out, that while in his wheelchair; he was very close to their height. Some kids stood up to measure themselves next to him. Some were eye to eye, some were a little taller. He explained that when going to a restaurant or business, the able bodied people in his party were the ones spoken to first. An upright stature commands preferential treatment and people are unaware that they are doing it.

“How come you’re in a wheelchair?” asked ten year old Eduardo.

Joe paused and told them the truth. The atmosphere in the room shifted. It wasn’t the daily fare with a little added novelty. It became something else. Some
looked at him with wide eyed seriousness. A few made tasteless comments about
shoot-'em-ups on TV and video games seeming to want to deflect the seriousness-
take the tone in another direction. But even their bold and tasteless laughter was
tempered by what Joe said. Clearly a chord was struck. The vulnerability and
fragile limitation we know as humans was understood at that moment. Joe said,
“Do any of you know someone who’s ever been shot?” All but a few hands shot
up. I was amazed. A welter of feeling rose in the group followed by a flood of
anecdotal accounts.

One child said, “My brother’s girlfriend’s brother got shot. He was in the
hospital for a really long time. He almost died. It was really gross. He showed me.
Now it’s just a little hole.”

“My brother’s friend got shot. He died.”

“My dad got shot. He’s in jail.”

“My neighbor across the street, he got shot.”

“My friend Maribel, her sister got shot in a car in her face.”

“There’s this house down the street. A bunch of people got shot there.
There was all these cop cars.”

This exchange went on for quite some time. They wouldn’t stop. Each
child wanted a turn to tell their experience. They weren’t interested in out doing
one another or really in comparing their stories. They just seemed eager to have a
turn telling theirs.
Here was concrete evidence that there is violence in our communities and that there is a human toll and response to it. It was also evident to me that children want to tell their stories. They want to be heard. Stories are powerful.

I speculate that some of these events—this one and making a dance about death, described in the preceding piece, contributed to the dance program being a place where personal subject matter knew a welcoming tone. Students brought themselves directly into the work. Their feelings had a part in what we did.

I am not suggesting that dance alone drew this kind of personal response from students. Creative writing, theater, music and visual art certainly do as well. But, it became an important part of the dance curriculum and contributed to the tone of the program.

I have to say there was something in the student’s openness that was very good for me as well. The way children express emotion is not a brooding kind. They are what they feel. Sad children cry. Angry ones erupt. I had my own little pocket of pain and anger tucked away and while I couldn’t express it in my classes, I found that being around such direct and unmitigated emotional expression was grounding. I recall some occasions when I went to work very sad or upset and found just being with them felt like a good place to be.

My brother, while adjusted to disability surely has a longing or a phantom self who feels motion the way amputees feel sensation in their missing limbs. He still dreams of being mobile and I dream of doing things with him as I remember
him before he was shot. He was surprised at the number of kids who had such proximity to violence.

As emotion is described in the preceding section about younger students, it was certainly a factor among the junior high students as well. The following are excerpts from interviews with former Castillo students who participated in the dance program. The first, Mariella, is responding to a question about choreography. She was 17 years old at the time of the interview, but 12 and 13 years old when she was at Castillo.

Susan: Can you talk about the experience of putting together dances in the studio?

Mariella: I remember me and Blanca, you had us do our own choreography and told us to think about something in our life that’s happened to you. I remember going out in the hallway and it came so easily to me that we made a whole piece on what we were feeling and at that time I had some things going on that were weird and kind of hard and we just went out there in the hallway and did it.

Susan: Do you remember what you did?

Mariella: Yea, um I did a lot of turns and like falling to the ground and I don’t know. It felt really good because I was upset. I don’t remember exactly what I did but I know every move I did had a meaning.

(persomal interview, 2009)
The following comments are by Carlos who at the time of the interview was also 17 years old. This excerpt is a response to my asking at the end of the interview, if there was anything he wanted to add that I hadn’t asked.

Carlos: Um, yea. I think it influenced me a lot to just be more—not open, but just take more risks, you know. Because you know when you would teach us in class you would do these weird moves and we were like, *what is she doing?* And then you’d just be like, don’t think about it, just do it—don’t have doubts, don’t have any second thoughts just do what you feel. And like Mariella was saying when she’d do the turns and stuff, she was just doing it because that was how she felt. And whether it was weird or not it was beautiful because you know that was kind of like our speaking out and like you know, us telling a story, you know. And I think doing that with just, you know, not caring about anything and just dancing and not caring about what anybody else says—I think that has made me more like—even more outgoing than what I already am. And it kind of structured me to be, just to not care about what people say. (personal interview, 2009)

The following are comments by former junior high Castillo dance students. Artemio and Daniela were both 20 years old at the time I interviewed them. I’ve included these comments for their reference to feeling states.

Susan: Did you enjoy performing?
Artemio: I did enjoy performing. And I’m not a performer—a natural performer. I have real anxiety—but I loved it.

Susan: What did you love?

Artemio: I think I kind of lost myself.

Susan: What do you mean “you lost yourself?”

Artemio: I kinda like zoned out and I lost myself in the sense that I wasn’t focusing so much on everything going on around me—I was focusing on my body movement, things that I wanted to express, things that I wanted to do with my body instead of focusing on “oh, this is what they’re telling me to do.” Like I was taught movement but I wasn’t moving to like the things I was taught.

Susan: What were you responding to?

Artemio: I was responding to something different while doing the things that I was supposed to be doing. So, I think I focused more on like the feeling because I remember having like really comforting like amazing feelings—especially when I closed my eyes. I had my eyes closed all the time.

Susan: When you danced?

Artemio: When I danced, yeah.

Susan: When you performed?

Artemio: Yeah. I remember just closing my eyes and just kind of like moving away and… So I was just—I had to be aware of the things
around us and I think when I was dancing in Castillo I really had like that awareness. So I didn’t have to have my eyes open. Like I kinda knew, I could sense the things around me when I’m dancing and I just really enjoy that.

Susan: Is it different than the kind of sensing in your everyday life?

Artemio: I think it could qualify for like the sixth sense. Almost. I wasn’t visual about it. I wasn’t paying attention to things that way—I think I just had like a greater awareness of what was happening within my body and the things going on around me. (personal interview, 2009)

The following are comments by Daniela about her performance experience at Castillo.

Susan: What did you perform before?

Daniela: Step—that’s the only thing I performed in front of people was stepping.

But as for dance—no- but the fun part about it was doing something I never did before.

And so the excitement that I had in my body was just like amazing.

Susan: The excitement you had in your body”—please tell me what you mean by that.

Daniela: The excitement is like, how should I say it? Um, it’s like the joy. My heart was there and I felt like—Oh my gosh, this is something I love—it’s right there.
Additional comments by Daniela.

Susan: Can you talk about the experience of putting together dances in the studio

Daniela: It was stressful

Susan: Stressful?

Daniela: Yes, it was very stressful. Because you were telling me to over exaggerate on the move and I was like I don’t know how to over exaggerate on the move—I could just move. You were like, go for it, more, more, and I was like more of what?

Susan: Did it ever make sense?

Daniela: Yea it did. You wanted me to be big. You wanted me to open up more. Open up my body more—like do something that was comfortable but was interesting to look at. (personal interview, 2009)

**Intersections**

Comments by Martiza, age 17, former Castillo student:

Um, I liked it a lot. The capoiera dancing I liked a lot. And then I liked the poetry. I thought it was so cool to have someone different because they have different ideas. So like when I came in 7th grade I was like shocked because I was thinking, what is this? And until I got used to you like after a while and then the guest teacher came and then it was - what is this?!
Like I’d never seen it before so it was like a good experience. I felt like I learned more. (personal interview, 2009)
The 2003 Microsoft Office, Encarta Dictionary: English lists the following definition: “Intersection: 1. Crossroads: a place where two roads or paths cross each other. 2. Crossing point: The place or point where two things cross each other.”

The following section focuses on intersecting worlds that came together in the course of the curriculum development. Castillo dance students interacted with diverse communities and contexts outside of the school. The joining of these worlds; these *intersections*, became a significant and important aspect of the curriculum. I sought these outside experiences for several reasons. The section below explains some of those reasons.

The stage at Castillo was at the opposite end of the cafeteria across from the kitchen. It had tattered curtains, that were two toned due to the collected dust in their folds, and I believe they had never been laundered. The dimensions were not at all conducive to dance or theater. There were three flat walls, one in the back and at either side of the stage. It was like a big shoe box with one side cut out. There was no wing space. Actors, dancers or performers of any type made their entrances from either a door at the back of the stage that led down a short stairway or from the hallway.

A standard stage has wing space (space on the sides of the stage - beyond what is seen from the audience) where performers can enter and exit. Dancers at Castillo could either enter from the hallway or stand on stage, pressed against a wall so they could make their cues. If any speed was required for an entrance, it
was basically impossible to do. There are often running or jumping entrances and exits in dance. It seemed that there had been no consultations about the specific physical needs of dance and theater when the school transitioned into a magnet arts school.

We performed on this stage, usually for assemblies. The audiences were students and teachers and sometimes a few parents. As a fine arts school, assemblies included something from the performing arts classes. This usually meant choir or dance. Asking the junior high dance students to perform in front of their peers was very difficult at first. The younger classes were more amenable. But the stage space couldn’t accommodate the kind of atmosphere that enhances or supports transport into a choreographic idea. The students would look great in the studio and then hold back in performance. There was a self consciousness about them that I felt was borne, in part, from performing for their peers and being in their neighborhood school.

That reality could not be blocked out. Bells rang, announcements came through the speaker system summoning this or that person. Doors opened and closed during performances. Smells from the kitchen wafted through. Sometimes we could hear pots and pans banging. There was nothing sacrosanct about it. It was just another event at the school. There was not a psychological or physical space that held performance separate. In an interview with a former Castillo student, I asked Daniela to talk about the difference between performing at Castillo and on a professional stage. She said, “When we performed at Castillo we
didn’t have a big crowd. It was mainly just kids. It wasn’t adults that were interested.”

Susan: Was it important to have adults?

Daniela: Yea, I like performing for everybody not just a little class, high school or junior high. I want everybody to see it. You have different views of how people interpret that dance. I feel connected with a bigger crowd than just a little crowd with that same ethnic background or just that little class. The intersections of different ethnicities and communities were important. (personal interview, 2009)

Just as a visual image is contained within a frame, or set within a space—so too is a dance image contained within the frame of a stage or set within a space. Of course a stage is not the only place for dance. There are magnificent uses of non stage spaces and the reasons for such choices are broad and diverse ranging from aesthetic, artistic, philosophical, sociological, practical and political. Choreographers ask us to think about dance and the human form, where it’s seen, who sees it, to think about space and how we inhabit it and interact within it, to question how we as physical forms, comport ourselves. Whatever the performance space however, there is a degree of sanctity about it and the work. The environment—the space and the dancer conjoin. Dance and space are intimately connected. Dancer and space or location intersect. The dancer relates to, interacts with and occupies space.
Key to these alternative spaces is a conscious decision by choreographer or director - a deliberate placement of dance in a space. The dancer and viewers will have an experience (regardless of how unconventional or successful) that is intentional. The seasoned dancer who has some performance chops can adapt to the creative choice. The Castillo students were brand new to dance and performance. With a stage that was so spatially limiting and an environment so full of distraction, it seemed impossible. I wanted them to perform in a setting where they could fully dive into a dance experience, where they could feel transported by it.

I arranged to have them share informal concert space with Arizona State University dance students. The stage space at the university was magnificent with huge dimensions, a sprung floor and excellent technical capabilities (sound and lights). It was a turning point. They performed for an enthusiastic respectful audience of college students and dance faculty and were met with great warmth and support. The space and setting allowed them to be fully present in their work. And Castillo students got to go off campus, which they loved.

I approached the university dance department about setting up a formal partnership with Castillo dance. The partnership with DART (Dance Arizona Repertory Theater) lasted nine years. DART was the dance department dance company. The following section highlights the multi-faceted intersection of junior high Castillo students with DART students.
Deborah Hay is a revered, well known experimental choreographer. She was commissioned to set a piece from her repertory on the combined group of Castillo and ASU students. The intersecting worlds revealed through this project were many. The following narrative is the story of the intersection of junior high aged school children with college dance students; the intersection of the professional dance world with untrained youth from the barrio; the intersection of communities and ethnicities and the intersection of approaches to dance education.

**Deborah Hay Residency**

It is only in the experience of a beginning that persons feel themselves to be the initiators, the authors of what they are doing or intending to do.

(Greene, 1995, p. 21)

The studio is impressive. The ceiling seems tall enough to hold a stand of mature pine trees and the floor is like the surface of a vast still lake. There is a grand piano at one end that looks anything but in the expanse. Way overhead there is an industrial looking grid of pipes. It is a design statement inside of which hang lights. “Take off your shoes,” we tell the twelve and thirteen year olds from Castillo School. “You have to put your food away, too.” There is a flurry of movement like a messy squiggle as the twelve or so kids drop their backpacks, purses, jackets and the food they’ve nabbed from vending machines. They shove in last mouthfuls of chips and hot Cheetos and take final swigs of coke and mountain dew. They are loud and chatty. They kick off bulky athletic shoes and
sandals and various footwear. The ASU dance students do the same, but this routine is not new to them. It is well known; a reverential behavior they have practiced for a long time.

You can’t wear shoes in a dance studio. The floor surface must remain untainted by the crude matter a shoe comes in contact with. The students run onto the floor like dogs let loose at the park. They run and yell, bump into each other and play variations of tag. Several boys are wearing pants that are too long and look much too big for them. They’re walking and slipping on the pant legs. A few girls hold hands and spin fast. I hear a loud thud. Someone has fallen down, hard. There are some gasps and exclamations of, “Are you ok?” I look over, alarmed and see the girl whose fallen is in peals of laughter. The ASU dancers are with them. They have a physical elegance borne of dance training and a beauty suggestive of the adults they are becoming. They wear dance clothes that support comfort and movement like second skin. Some are silly themselves welcoming bits of their own vestigial youth. Others seem somewhat bewildered by the junior high students’ energy.

Sarah, one of the dance professors involved in the project says, “Let’s get started”. She has a soft voice. She says it again but much louder this time. Her voice strains. She is not accustomed to yelling. The ASU students and a few junior high kids start to move toward her. I interject my teacher voice, a vocal skill enabling the voice to cut through the thickest din. The rest of the group slowly makes their way over and we all sit on the floor together. The ASU
dancers and the junior high students are now one creative unit. They are not a series of crude and elegant lines but make up one composite picture. They will fulfill one choreographic idea.

These students are preparing for a performance. The choreographer, Deborah Hay has been commissioned to set her work, *Exit*, on the combined group of junior high and ASU dance students. Deborah sits and speaks to the group about the piece. It is a conceptual one. There are not steps to learn but ideas and concepts to understand and embody. She speaks carefully. She doesn’t talk about an idea but enters it like a pool of light inviting you to join her. It seems like language swirls around and through her thoughts. She is generous and warm and speaks with intimacy and clarity. Words are brought in carefully and artfully—reminiscent of the way a pianist accompanies a vocalist, coming under and around the voice. She and language are in a duet. The listening group is keenly attentive. She smiles easily and frequently and speaks about life and death, the past and the future, impermanence, longing, the unknown. She speaks about the experience of being human. This is what the dance is about. The listener’s are alert. The ASU students are in the presence of a sagacious and well known dance artist. The junior high students are unaccustomed to being spoken to in such adult and human terms.

Deborah Hay is in her 60s. She is a small woman with a very soft voice and gentle demeanor. Her face is lined but does not bear resignation or life weariness. Vitality and luminance offsets the message a lined face often signals.
She has a compelling presence. She holds something rare. She is barefoot, dressed in simple loose fitting black clothes. Relaxed tousled curls frame her face. She speaks as if she has roots reaching into the earth while tuned to something distant and beyond it. The ideas and concepts she works with have a presence more formidable than just a thought. It’s as if she is having a direct interaction with them while also speaking to the group. She speaks with a voice that is both distant and right here. She seems very comfortable. She is in her element. The ASU dance students know her from their dance history classes. She is an icon in experimental dance. A major figure in the tradition they are now seriously entering. The junior high students have no idea who she is. There is an intersection of vastly different stores of dance knowledge.

Hay was a major figure in the post-modern, avant-garde dance movement of the 1960s. She was involved with the Judson Dance Theater, a group of New York dancers, choreographers and artists who vigorously questioned much about traditional dance forms and experimented freely. Dance scholar Sally Banes (1993) describes the Judson Dance Theater:

They rejected the codification of both ballet and modern dance. They questioned the traditional dance concert format and explored the nature of dance performance. They also discovered a cooperative method for producing dance concerts. For young artists who did not want to be judged by older authorities in the field, or who wanted the freedom to experiment in a familiar space that was easily accessible, this was an alternative to
uptown juried concerts. Attracting the grassroots audience of Greenwich Village artists and intellectuals, the Judson Dance Theater affected the entire community and flourished as a popular center of experimentation.

(p. 38)

The Castillo students too were, though unaware, challenging tradition and expectation. They too, experimented. Because of the absolute lack of prior knowledge or exposure to formal dance, the Castillo student’s exploration was unimpeded by ideas of how something should look or feel. The physicality stemmed from who they were and how they experienced their bodies. They danced in street clothes. Students developed aesthetic identities. They explored movement. They didn’t imitate it.

The formal dance “academy”, from which the Judson Church group veered, knew a clear definition and strict protocols. To dance seriously, one studies technique and begins at a fairly young age, especially ballet. With that most basic of requirements, one enters the dance world. Through technical study, dance comportment is learned and observed throughout a dance career. This includes the way to think about dance aesthetically, behave and dress. Those who study dance understand the cultural capital that accompanies it. Studying dance requires an investment of time and money, both of which are in short supply for members of inner city populations. The intersection of the traditional dance world and an emergent or nascent one becomes a focus.
In addition to challenging forms of dance and choreography, the students in the dance program at Castillo also challenged assumptions of gender, class and race. They chipped away at stereotypes. Boys danced and they danced expressively, energetically and commandingly. Girls brought intellectualism to movement and took physical risks. Both of these put a crimp in their respective gender stereotype.

The ethnic composition of the group was predominantly Hispanic but included some African American, Vietnamese and an occasional Caucasian. The ethnic make-up of classical studio dance classes (where dance training begins) is almost exclusively Caucasian with few minority students. Although the population in the Southwest has the highest proportion of Latino’s in the nation, only a small fraction are involved in classical studio dance training. This work created an intersection of ethnicities.

*Exit* is an extremely (and deceptively) simple piece that requires no technical dance skill. It does, however, require keen committed attention and full psychological and emotional engagement in the work. Hay is one of the prime movers in the intersection of differing ideas and movement practices. The piece takes place on one long diagonal from downstage right to upstage left. It involves only one passage along that path. It is a seven minute dance. In performance the only light is a high intensity white vertical shaft illuminating the full diagonal.

Every moment of our lives we are leaving the past and entering the future. The present bridges these. *Exit* is an exploration and embodiment of this idea. The
dancers look in one direction toward their past. They linger there, look and absorb whatever their psyche has brought before them before turning, looking and moving into the future direction. It is about impermanence and the present.

Deborah reads segments from a prepared hand out she has written for the dancers:

When the music starts the dancer hears an appeal to exit. In so doing, she notices she is also entering. The two experiences are as inseparable in life as they are occurrences in her body. The weight of the past mingles with the weightlessness of becoming. The combined consciousness of these two equally moving events splits her into tremors of responsiveness, and she hasn’t even taken her first step.

Each time the dancer turns to look back, she feels an overbearing recall of personal history steeped in heartbreak, and loss. When the last turn is made, instead of contemplating the past, the dancer keeps turning, passing through the past back into the present. She disengages from the past, but it is not erased. In a moment’s absorption the past is recognized and carried forward—past and future, exiting and entering, direct yet without linearity, wound and suspended. (Hay personal notes, 2002)

After she is done, her ideas hang midway in the air. The dancers are quiet, mulling them over. She responds to something unspoken. She elaborates. She makes the abstraction of her words, something tangible. She brings them easily into the dancers’ lives.
The dancers get up and head to the dance floor. There is a single arm gesture and a simple turn that breaks the individual dancers’ diagonal path. The dancers are thoughtful and carry the weight of the discussion with them as they walk across the dance floor. Deborah walks over with them. They learn the arm gesture and the turn. Some of the ASU dancers have questions about arm and hand placement and details about the turn. The junior high students look thoughtful. Thirteen year old Maria watches intently and practices the gesture. Some seem a little unsure. A few are chatting quietly with each other. We hear some giggles. I tell two girls to spit out their gum.

Each dancer begins to move when they want and proceed along the diagonal at their own pace. Each dancer travels their own channel within the diagonal. Each dancer inserts the turn and arm gesture when they see fit. Deborah has spoken for at least 30 minutes by this point. “Are we ready to give it a try?” She asks. “Shall we?” There are a few sures and yeses.

Shannon, an ASU dancer who is about five feet tall and is like a kind of artsy cheerleader says, “Hey Castillo, you ready for this?”

Mario smacks his fist against his hand and says, ‘yeah, yeah - let’s do this”. He’s light on his feet like a boxer or athlete, as if they’re heading out onto a football field or into a fight. His peers laugh.

The ASU dance professors and some other observers and I sit down on the floor at the studio’s edge. A photographer has joined us. The dancers are in place and becoming quiet. After a long settling pause Deborah signals and the music
starts. It is Samuel Barber’s Molto Adagio in G, a magnificent work. I had no idea this was the music. It is a piece I utterly love—hauntingly beautiful - an absolute favorite of mine. Surprised, tears well up a little as it starts. It is as if for a fleeting unexpected moment my deep or true self showed up, flooded in—it was there with me, as if there was a place for it - not protected or sequestered but as is. Briefly, my work and who I am were together for a delicious moment.

The dancers begin the slow passage. Weight shifts. A deliberate step is taken. A dancer steps forward while another lingers looking back. A hand carefully lifts; full of thought. This happens over and over. There is a slow turn. It is a field of dancers looking in different directions, seeing different things - some standing still, some shifting weight. It looks like a kind of slow motion alluvial flow. The mind is not there to assist, interpret or manage choreography, keep track of beats, entrances and exits and spatial patterns. It is an invited and vital partner in this dance. Each dancer is on his or her own, but is also part of the group. There are about 25 dancers. If they drop out momentarily (which they do)—if their attention wavers (which it does)—if their presence is less than full, it’s quickly visible.

This is not an unlikely conglomerate intersection of bodies, although it is. It is not inner city junior high boys and girls with baggy t-shirts, saggy pants, lots of lip gloss, hair sprayed and moussed and gelled, tight shorts, chubby legs, skinny legs and lots of jewelry. It is not beautiful dancers in their late teens and early 20’s, of all ethnic and gender stripes, full of promise and ambition, with
water bottles, day planners, cell phones, various orthopedic support devices
strapped on ankles and knees, athletic tape on toes and feet, who embody
composure and concentration and hold the mantle of modern stress. It is human
beings together.

They are part of a continuum. It is the same continuum I occupy. I would
love to do this dance. I feel like I’m on the edge of the world I love, unable to be
completely in it. I’m in the hallway between teaching and dancing. Here the
intersection isn’t a line crossed but a line lived, the continuum along which we
each find ourselves.

There is beauty in these two populations joined in these ideas, in this
project, in this intersection. It is human experience that pulls them into one artistic
concept. None of us know the future. None of us know how our personal past will
mingle with that future. Mystery and the unknown lie between (and beyond) these
points. These simple but profound human conditions have a transcendent
capability. The larger human experience is the mortar that binds the two disparate
groups.

The truth is, however, that they are miles apart and this brief intersection
is just that. Even though the premise of the dance, the existential,
phenomenological, origin of the ideas are so very basic to human experience, very
few have the opportunity to dwell in them particularly in such a concentrated way.
Of course anyone can choose to dwell anywhere they want mentally, but mental
spaciousness is needed for study and contemplation. Tending to daily needs can
easily fill up that space. The demands of daily existence take time, energy and can
eclipse the most philosophical inclination.

We wondered how Hay could create a professional life that allowed her to
be so deeply wrapped up in such abstraction and on her own terms. It’s
remarkable and enviable.

There is genuine affection between the two groups. They fascinate and
charm each other and develop strong bonds. The ASU dancers welcome the
opportunity to direct their energies toward non performance (academic and
artistic) ends. The Castillo students don’t experience the kind of stress college
students do. They have different stresses. Castillo students love the opportunity to
interact with non authority figures outside their school environment. They love
physicality.

The ASU students are somewhat like older siblings and through this
relationship, the intersection of age and family membership arise. Sometimes the
polite stranger veneer drops away and exchanges are more like those between
actual siblings. “Stop screwing around and get over here!” “Stop eating! We’re
running the piece!” “I don’t know about you, but I want to look like I know what
the hell I’m doing!” And, when opportunity arose, Castillo students would get
their own sarcastic jabs in there, “Shannon, we’re waiting for you!” “Shannon is
so not focused!” “Nicole is texting!”

When they go their separate ways, after the school year ends they make
pledges to stay in touch. Those efforts are short lived with the very best of
intentions. When I come across either former Castillo dance students or ASU
dance students, they ask me about the well being and whereabouts of specific
people. At year’s end of project, there were always hugs, some tears and an
exchange of phone numbers and email addresses. The bridge that joins the
intersecting groups falls away. Both sides travel the bridge and now see that it is
gone. Free travel between differing worlds is no longer available. It has come to
an end.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with one of the ASU dance
professors about the Castillo and DART (ASU) students working together:

Susan: What benefits, if any did you see in the two groups working
together?

Sarah: I saw a lot of benefits. I saw a lot of beautiful bonds being formed
between them—between the DART students and the Castillo students.

Susan: What kind of bonds are you talking about?

Sarah: Social bonds. They got close to them in a way that maybe you
didn’t expect -through the kind of work we were doing. I also saw our
students being taken to a different place creatively and reminded about
some of the really simple beauty of dance. Most all of them would tell
me afterwards that they—that it took them back to like the essence of
what dance is.

Susan: Can I get you to elaborate on that?
Mary: Ok, what I mean is for most of them they came from studio backgrounds—very traditional dance training—and some of them would actually use these words, *it blew open their world* again and reminded them that the most fundamental things are often the most beautiful things to them and the most important things to them.

Susan: What do you mean by fundamental things?

Mary: Ok, something with no technical training, pure expression. Very genuine, not artificial, something authentic. (personal interview, 2010)

Efforts to bridge and address these social and cultural disparities are in the interest of all. The dance field suffers from this gap. The dance world cannot, of course hope to resolve the socioeconomic inequalities that plague our society. However, arguably we do bear some responsibility to assure that a full range of artistic perspectives and voices inform the field. Young people who are extremely creative and have the potential to offer innovative, socially relevant subject matter to dance, lack opportunities to develop their talents and artistic perspectives, leaving dance narrower and less fully representative than it could and should be.

The following reveals another dimension of “intersection.”

Susan: Can you comment on how (or if) the relationship with Castillo students impacted your students?

Sarah: I know that for a lot of them it completely changed their lives. At one point I interviewed them—I think I wrote something that you saw. For a lot of them it ended up changing their career directions. Many of
our students would come into ASU thinking they just wanted to be a performer or they wanted to be a choreographer and after working with DART a lot of them went into education. Several of them did the Teach for America program. Some of them established their own companies that worked with communities. So for most of them it kind of broadened their overall goals in the field and broadened their understanding of how dance could be used in the field. (personal interview, 2010)

I watch my students. I know bits and pieces of many of their stories. Mario’s mother died a few years ago and he’s being raised by his father. Some have fathers (and mothers) in prison. I know that some have traveled here from Mexico and are far away from family members. Some struggle terribly in school and some don’t. Some have warm loving families and others very troubled ones. All have hopes and dreams. I watch them in this dance and wonder what they’re thinking. Clearly, they are thinking. They are not in the everyday. They are in a place where the everyday connects to something else. They are immersed in the ideas Deborah has laid out. I am immersed in them too.

I am a dancer down to my bone marrow and in every cell of my body. Life circumstances and practicality, as they have a way of doing, forced me down a different path. I bring my students here partly so I can be here too. Studios feel like home to me in a very deep and basic way. Clothing is worn to enable physical motion, rather than contain or disguise it. Space doesn’t tell you where to be or
how to be in it. I think the Castillo students respond to the studio space the way they do (when they first arrive), with that kind of explosive exuberance because they can unleash their physical selves.

Dance has settled in a new way in me. I am looking through different eyes. The dancer that I am is transforming, taking in elements I never thought of and thinking about movement and ideas in wholly unanticipated ways. I’m noticing the pure and rarified field of professional dance as rather limited and isolated, cut off from much that is out there. I am in an intermediary space between myself as the former dancer I know and the dancer that awaits me.

I have a foot in two worlds, in the intersection between art and public education. I need to be the person that I am in my work. Otherwise, work feels mechanical and disconnected—lacking grounding and center. I didn’t stop being a dancer because I became a teacher. I am a dancer as a teacher. I teach an embodied form from an embodied position. The pedagogy and curriculum that emerged did so from this position. I long for time spent in the physicality of ideas whether it’s a design idea or a shape idea or an ideological, literary or philosophical one—it is a kind of knowing, experiencing through the heartbeat, the muscle, sweat and flight of it that compels me. This is what I know dance to be and this is what I hope for my students to experience. I see dance as so much more than learning steps and routines and styles. I’m not attempting to guide them toward a life in professional dance, although some clearly have such an expressive integrated physicality that they could. As a teacher, I’m hoping to find
the little portal through the styles and routines that will allow them to experience what I have known of the rich aspects of dance. I might not have discovered all this without the intersection of my dancer life and my educator life. Intersections are vantage points, moments from which to discover something about one side of the intersection or the other. This is furthered by embodied knowing. “Embodied knowing” according to Betty Block and Judith Kissell (2001),

is the ability to interact with a thought or an experience holistically that involves the integrated power network of the total person. The integrated power network includes neural elements, efforts, memory, language, perception and attunement and are found integrated throughout the body, not just in the brain. (p. 6)

This kind of understanding of physical knowing that Block and Kissell refer to was evolving in me. I had always intuited and sensed it but never had occasion to think about or develop it as a base from which to operate.

There is substantial scholarship on dance, or movement, as a learning modality, as inseparable from and intertwined with mental and spiritual realities. A canon of complex systems of movement analysis and practice that regard mind, body and spirit as an integrated intelligent whole, have been developed by movement researchers: Rudolf Laban, Irmgard Bartenieff, Moshe Feldenkrais, F. Matthias Alexander, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Mabel Todd, Anna Halprin to name a few. They all reflect deep investigations into the perceptual capabilities of physical experience.
Anna Halprin’s work revolves around movement as a deep learning tool and a means for understanding the self and being in community. Louise Steinman (1986) writes about the choreographer Barbara Dilley who “asks her students to acknowledge the voice’ of their bodies. Instead of following the master-apprentice model, where one attempts to take on someone else’s highly individual movement style, you work from the inside to recover your own body’s native language” (p. 14). Howard Gardner, though from quite a different point of origin, brought the body into the public education lexicon as he acknowledged its value including it among his classification system of varied learning modalities known as the *kinesthetic learner*.

When the dancers finish the dance, Deborah talks to them about what she saw, what was working well, what wasn’t. She speaks with incredible attention to subtlety and nuance. She has a razor sharp eye for detail. She asks the dancers to talk about their experience of it. The ASU dancers speak quite readily. Some welcome the opportunity to reflect and analyze. They listen closely and influence and spark each other. There is little mention of specifics. The focus is mostly philosophical. The Castillo dancers don’t volunteer much. But when asked directly they respond. They share images of what they saw that they were looking at in their past. They share the sensation of uncertainty in being between the two worlds. They talk about unknowns in their lives.

I interviewed Deborah Hay and asked her questions about working with the Castillo students.
Susan: When you set Exit on the group in Arizona, did you have any preconceived notions about what these students would be like before you started working with them?

Deborah: No, not at all

Susan: Really, nothing at all?

Deborah: Well, I guess I was wondering—that’s not true. I guess I was wondering whether or not they would be able to touch the experience—whether or not they had lived long enough.

Susan: So, what did you think?

Deborah: I can remember being moved by some of them—very strongly moved.

Susan: Can you tell me what you mean, what you remember?

Deborah: I really can’t remember anything specifically. But I recognized the fact that what I thought to be true was not altogether correct.

Susan: Did you feel they were able to grasp the abstraction of the concept you were working with?

Deborah: I mean there was really not much abstract about it. I just think the limitation of it physically in the realm of dancing and the strictness of the choreography—what they can do, what was appropriate and what wasn’t. I wasn’t sure about that. Just the depth of the experience, of looking back when you’re so young, you know - God, and the world
is still your oyster. I didn’t know how effective that language would be in touching them. It felt like in some cases it certainly did touch them.

Susan: Can you talk a little about setting choreography on a group with such a mixed level of dance training, backgrounds and ages?

Deborah: Well there’s just such a richness. I’ve made dances primarily for untrained performers for almost 30 years of my career. And it’s that overview of humanity that the audience gets to see that is so compelling - you know with just a little direction, it gives the audience a frame for looking at themselves - you know, rather than dancers. They get to see the poetry of people, you know without… To make the point maybe a little clearer - people talk about, use the language, certainly from my generation post modern, they use the language “pedestrian movement”. That almost makes me want to vomit. What is pedestrian about someone with no dance training moving through space, you know with some direction and care and thoughtfulness? So it was a great way for me to learn a lot of lessons.

Susan: Can you talk about your thoughts on the role of dance or movement in education, in public education

Deborah: The fact that there isn’t room for dancing in public education is you know - it’s beyond pathetic. It’s so sad that that’s not a given - that it’s not a given that children and young adults, pre-teens don’t have a place to be celebrated in their bodies. (personal interview, 2010)
The polite regard for space between bodies has dropped away. They are lounging now. Maria is lying on her side, resting her head on Julia’s thigh. Julia is making tiny little braids in her hair. Melanie, an ASU dancer and Maritza have linked arms and lean on each others shoulders. “Can I get a drink?” Jose asks. “Here,” Margaret passes her water bottle over to him.

The boys don’t have physical contact with each other the way the girls do. Leaning or casually resting against each other is not done as it is with ease among the women and girls. Some of the boys will have contact with girls but not other boys. The ASU men limit their physical contact to other ASU dancers. They are friendly and attentive with the Castillo students but highly aware that they must be vigilant about contact with minors.

Sadly, their relationships cannot include the relaxed physical closeness that females of all ages can. During free time when the group is not seated, the ASU men and Castillo boys often play around with contact improvisation lifts and some capoeira type movements, but the context and contact is in the realm of physical strength and skills. They cannot be casually physical. Girls and woman can be supportive with each other both figuratively and literally. Boys and men find other ways to be with and support one another. Here the intersections of age, training and ethnicity have given way to gender. Girls can be physically close with each other but boys cannot be close with other boys. The demarcation between those worlds is a sharp one.
“How much more time do we have?” Deborah asks looking for a clock. “I think we should take a break. Let’s take about ten minutes and we’ll run it one more time before we end”. The Castillo kids spill out into the hall. I don’t know what it is about vending machines that have such a lure. The same products on a store shelf aren’t nearly as appealing as those that live behind the glass barrier of a vending machine. They crowd around the junk food alter, delighted and feed it their coins and dollar bills. Paying a dollar for a little bag of chips strikes me as crazy. But, I remember loving them as a kid myself. “Watch the time” I say. “You have to be back and ready to go in 10 minutes!”

 Kids in public school are used to a tight regimented management of their time. Bells tell them when the school day starts and ends. The clock tells them precisely when it’s time to leave one class and go to the next. It tells them when they will eat and when they will stop eating. If they don’t respect time as it is organized, there will be consequences. The points built into the day where time can be slightly altered, such as going to the bathroom during class, are strictly monitored.

 This kind of relaxed attitude toward time is new and makes them a little giddy. They are running around and yelling out in the hallway and flying in and out of the bathrooms. Jose and Tanya go out on the studio floor and do a little hip hop phrase they’ve been working on. Shannon goes over and does a little with them. She punches it up. The Castillo kids are impressed. Jeremy, another ASU dancer, goes over to them. He tries to do some of Shannon’s moves. He struggles with them and laughs. She is short and compact. He is very tall and thin. Time,
timing and a sense of rhythm are managed in school in addition to physical conduct in space.

It’s at least a half hour bus trip back to Castillo at rush hour. A few minutes into the next run of the piece I see our bus driver standing at the far door. I go over to him and ask, “Can we have about five minutes—is that ok?”

“I’m illegally parked right outside. I’ll wait for you in the bus.” He lingers a few minutes, watching the dance. “What are they doing?” He asks. “It’s a dance about leaving the past and entering the future.” He watches for another minute and leaves.

The work with Deborah Hay was instigated through our partnership with ASU dance. The ASU Castillo relationship was invaluable on many levels. The Castillo students and the university students created bonds with each other. The dance faculty and I worked together which was stimulating for me and I think them as well. Both groups of students and teachers spent time in each others school studios so time was spent in both neighborhoods. But an additional significant feature about this partnership was the fact that it went on over such a span of time which meant the work and relationships had a chance to grow some roots and evolve. Guest choreographers were brought in on a regular basis but not every year.

But every year the combined groups made a collaborative piece of choreography that was performed for the public at a site off the Castillo campus. I interviewed a number of ASU dancers who worked and performed with the
Castillo students and the Castillo students themselves. I also interviewed the
dance faculty we worked with.

This next section sheds light on three different perspectives of the
partnership—this intersection. The perspectives presented are those of dance
professors, ASU students and Castillo students. The ASU and Castillo students
interviewed were in the program together the same year. The dance faculty was
also there that same year. Following these perspectives is an excerpt from an
interview with a Castillo student who worked with ASU a different year and looks
at a different aspect of the experience.

The first comments are those by one of the dance professors who worked
with me and the Castillo students for all nine years. The first question here is
about aesthetics. I was asking about artistic process and what affect the Castillo
students, who lacked training and maturity, might have had on that artistic
process.

Susan: Can you comment on the aesthetic components—were your
aesthetic sensibilities affected, compromised or changed in your work
with Castillo?

Jessica: Absolutely, my aesthetic components were affected. I don’t see it
as anything compromised—I see it enhanced. I think particularly in
dance education, there is a certain vernacular and paradigm that people
are shoved into and there’s all the discussion and then you layer
yourself in there as opposed to finding that integration. And finding
the honesty in movement and looking through the lens of a different
culture and seeing how they move and how they see space and how
they use space and their sense of personal space and how that’s all
shifted. It makes you start thinking outside of your box. (personal
interview, 2010)

Jessica’s remarks describe an unexamined state of dance education with
little flexibility. She is speaking about higher education here. But, rather than
emphasizing organic discovery or integration, the process of dance training is
characterized as more one of adaptation—finding where you fit in what is already
firmly in place. The experience at Castillo seemed to address some of those
givens because everything about the partnership was new to all of us. The ASU
dancers had not worked in the inner city. The Castillo students had never worked
with professional dancers. I had not worked previously with the university in this
capacity. All intersecting parts of this partnership were new to each other, so we
all had opportunity to think outside of our boxes. As a feature of curriculum by
accident, “newness” was important. Not just new ideas but new contexts,
relationships and experiences. These intersections influenced experiences. Below
is a response to the same question by the other dance professor:

Susan: Can you comment on the aesthetic components. Were your
aesthetic sensibilities affected or compromised?
Sarah: Yeah, definitely my aesthetic sensibilities totally changed from
working with Castillo. Again, I came in with more formal training—I
appreciate strong technique but I also worked with a choreographer who was questioning that all the time.

Susan: Who was that?

Sarah: Kai Takei and she was always trying to find what she termed, “natural movement” like going back to a very pure place of movement, unadorned movement—so I had an appreciation for that already as a choreographer—even though as a dancer I always wanted to challenge myself in new ways in terms of movement. As a choreographer, the part I appreciate most about dance is really seeing who someone is. The humanity of dance - so for me I’ve lost more and more interest in the kind of technically adorned movement and I keep trying to go back to something a little more what I would call pure in my own aesthetic.

(personal interview, 2010)

The following excerpt is from a Castillo student I interviewed. He was 20 years old when I interviewed him and had spent 7th and 8th grade in dance at Castillo. He participated in the partnership with ASU dance both years. Artemio worked with DART.

Susan: Can you talk a little about putting together dances?

Artemio: I think it was great in general. I think that you guys as well as the choreographers we had did a really good job of like having us work with each other.

Susan: Are you talking about DART now?
Artemio: Yeah. And um then like the college students—working with them as well. I think it was really good that we all had a chance to not only work with each other but work with other people and just have that experience. Especially, like they had a lot of experience. The DART students had a lot to offer us. I really enjoyed it. I learned a lot.

(personal interview, 2009)

During Artemio’s time at Castillo we had Marlies Yearby as a guest choreographer. She was commissioned to create original choreography for the combined DART and Castillo dancers. Yearby is a New York choreographer who choreographed the Broadway musical RENT and was nominated for a Tony Award.

Susan: What about working with Marlies Yearby. Do you remember putting that dance together?

Artemio: I recall some of it. I think she put together a lot of the phrases. I remember she did a lot of movements with like the sounds of the body. I forget.

Susan: Breath?

Artemio: Yeah, like the heartbeat or the pulse or something like that. She did something with breath too. I remember her going off on that. So it was just really interesting that she gained inspiration—that kind of movement from just listening to things that are happening in our every
day lives. And it was interesting how she kind of put the pieces together. Especially how she grouped people. I don’t know.

Susan: What stands out for you about working with guest choreographers?

Artemio: I worked with a few. Was it—a guy who was kinda bald, shorter.

Susan: Pablo Cornejo?

Artemio: Was it Pablo? Is that his name? I think he had an accent. I thought working with guest choreographers was great. I never worked with a choreographer outside of the program with you. But I thought it was interesting that they were choreographers from around the country. But, I don’t remember anything profound.

Susan: Did your family come to see you perform?

Artemio: I’m not sure. Well, but my mom’s always been really supportive. She’s always been really supportive but I don’t think she ever saw any of the performances that we did at Castillo.

Susan: Did you continue taking dance classes in High school?

Artemio: No, I didn’t take any classes in high school. I did a couple classes after and in the summer between junior high and high school. I didn’t do any in high school.

Susan: How come?

Artemio: I wasn’t interested in anything they had in high school.

Susan: What did they have?

Artemio: They had a couple of hip hop classes, some jazz classes.
Susan: Why weren’t you interested in those?

Artemio: I think I wanted something just more traditional. I really like the modern contemporary kind of expression. I wasn’t interested in doing any hip hop because it didn’t appeal to me at all. (personal interview, 2009)

The following is an excerpt from an interview with one of the ASU dancers who danced the same year with the same guest choreographer as Artemio, the student interviewed above:

Susan: Can you talk about being with the Castillo students, doing creative activities and spending time before we started to build dances together?

Jamie: I was nervous. Yeah, I was really nervous.

Susan: How come?

Jamie: You know, it’s so funny, because the age difference, you would think that I wouldn’t be nervous—I think I was nervous about what the students would think of me. Definitely! But before we started making work I was kind of just trying to calm my own nerves and get to know them a little bit and reach a comfortable place with them.

Susan: What about some of the various activities that preceded choreographic process—building

Jamie: It was great. I know that doesn’t really tell you anything. I think that it was certainly surprising to see how quickly they, I think that we
knew—obviously they’re in a dance class. They’re working with you year round—they’re very talented. But I think about how quickly we were able to escalate our plans—how they were total middle schoolers but we were able to bring their focus back when it got a little scattered. But they were just really focused and excited.

Susan: Were you there when we worked with guest choreographers?

Jamie: Yes

Susan: Can you talk about the experience of working with guest choreographers

Jamie: I don’t know what past years were like, but we worked with Marlies Yearby. I felt our experience was really unique, maybe it was, maybe it wasn’t. She set work on us and the students who were all there together working with one idea. That experience really just definitely cut through all the nerves I was talking about - it put us all at the same level and it was really great to work with Castillo as peers actually.

Susan: How so?

Jamie: It seemed really easy. The exchange of creative ideas with them - between those groups working - We each had a partner and I remember my partner was a middle school boy—it was Jesus—he was totally wierded out by being so close to a girl. I think he was in 7th
grade that year. Once we got over the, *ok we’re gonna have to you
know, hold hands now*—it was totally great.

Susan: How did you think the Castillo students influenced the aesthetic
outcome of the pieces you were involved in?

Jamie: Well I think that they just brought their own unique movement
styles to the project. I feel like you look at the DART group and we all
have our own unique voices but we’re all trained by the same people at
that point—most of us were in our junior year—we were in the
program for 3 years. We were coming to that place where we all
moved pretty similar. So I think that the Castillo kids just really
brought their own voice—you could really see a separate unique voice
in all of them. A separate voice from DART and from each other

Susan: Did performing with Castillo students differ from performing with
your own peers?

Jamie: I don’t think that it actually did differ much for our group—I think
performing with the Castillo students - I think we all felt a little more
conscious of wanting to be perfect for them—like wanting that piece
to be like perfect. When it was just us performing it would be more
focused on wanting to perform well and wanting to do good for
ourselves, and of course for the group but performing in that piece
really had more of a group focus and wanting it to be the best piece for
the whole group. (personal interview, 2009)
This excerpt reveals some of the internal processes from a DART participant’s perspective in the DART–Castillo intersection. There was nervousness, amusement, creativity and a sense of responsibility.

The following comments on studio work by Carlos describe the nitty gritty of dance and the intersection of honing an aesthetic idea through physical work and an unfamiliarity with that process.

Susan: Can you talk about the experience of putting together dances in the studio?

Carlos: Oh, sometimes I remember at ASU—remember there was a huge space and it had like a rubber black - whatever it’s called - floor. And I remember repeating and repeating and repeating and repeating the same dance over and over—or maybe it was like one part. That was kind of a drag. Just, I mean I guess some people were slow learners, but for those of us that were fast learners we were like, Oh my God, I’ve got to do this again?! Or, like the timing was off and I don’t know. But I had fun, I guess it was just, Oh my god, I’ve got to do it again?! (personal interview, 2009)

There were other points of intersection in which the Castillo students and outside people, places and experience came together.

Additional intersections of Castillo students and new communities, spaces and ages are represented through the following:
ASU invited us to perform with them in several contexts such as museums and site specific events, lecture demonstrations in addition to sharing concert space. The intersection of DART and Castillo created a cohesion of its own that blended and then intersected with other communities for whom they performed. They performed for senior citizens, children and general audiences. The students experienced new contexts as they performed choreography in museum spaces and created new choreography that reflected dynamics of the visual art on display.

A partnership was established with the Herberger Theater Center in downtown Phoenix where the Castillo students were able to perform regularly for three years. Professional theaters are staffed with professional staff. The Castillo students were treated professionally and respectfully. Their work was taken seriously.

I brought in guest artists in capoeira, yoga, modern dance, contact improvisation and some cultural groups. The dancers from Cambodian Stories were performing at ASU. Cambodian Stories brought Cambodian high school aged students and custom to the Castillo studio. Capoeira brought Portuguese language, culture and movement as the form is accompanied with a specific Portuguese instrument, conducted in the Portuguese language and rich with cultural meaning. Yoga is an East Indian form that also has cultural importance.
embedded in the practice. These experiences were ethnic intersections. Contact Improvisation brought a new physicality—a new way to think about physical weight and energy flow.

The following narrative sheds a slightly different light on the idea of intersections and their relation to curriculum by accident. Although the junior high students were the ones who participated in the ASU partnership, and focused on performance and choreographic invention, some younger students watched the older ones keenly. Marcos, who is described below, was one such student. The younger students, though not especially focused on performance, responded to movement material in their own creative and unexpected ways. Marcos happened to be particularly responsive to the art form of dance, while other young students had different reactions to and interactions with movement.

The story of Marcos attempts to animate the character of the curriculum through narrative. The unexpected, unanticipated and unplanned for, were dynamics that played a vital role in the curriculum. This narrative differs from the previous ones. It is longer and more story like covering a range of experience. It reflects more nuance and brings far more contextual variation that capture the interactive dynamics and relationships among the multiple intersecting worlds. Its thematic focus is not as pointed as the previous sections. There are many threads and they wander far but remain a part of the same fabric. Hopefully the many parts offer a more complete picture of experience.
The Story of Marcos

Does the poem exist before it is written? Does the idea exist before it is known? Definitely! Where do we go to listen to the music that has not yet been heard? There is a place in our body to which we can turn and listen (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 159)

I walk into the nurse’s office and see Marcos sitting at Ms. Moore’s desk. I say hello to him and ask what he’s doing.

“I’m trying to call my mother” he says emphatically. He leans way over inclining his head toward Ms. Moore, and with eyes very wide he says theatrically, “but sheeeeee won’t let me.” He’s quite small and I wonder how it is he’s come upon such adult mannerisms.

“Why do you want to call your mother?” I ask.

Ms. Moore says hello to me. They are in the middle of something. “I don’t even think your mother is at home.” she says, “You need to use your inhaler Marcos.” She’s friendly and direct in that RN no nonsense way. I often see her wiping playground detritus out of wounds and scrapes while tearful children watch in fascination. Some whimper and some are very brave. Others act like they’re dying. Ms. Moore has seen it all and can usually get a smile out of them. Drama, blood and chaos seem to be background noise to those in medical professions.
Marcos is sitting on her rolling chair now, reaching for the phone. He looks little on it and has discovered the casters. “She’s home. I know she’s home. Let me call!” He’s pulling himself up and down the length of her desk.

“I don’t think you’re going to get anywhere with this.” She says looking the opposite direction into her computer screen—chin supported by her hand and elbow on her desk. She’s on a rolling chair too.

“Marcos, use this.” She rolls over and puts the inhaler on the desk. There is something globby spilled on his shirt, the cuffs are wet and grimy and his hair looks like he just got out of bed. His glasses are askew. He continues pulling himself up and down the length of the desk, adding a little more force now.

“Why does he want to call his mother?”

I see a fresh lunch tray from the cafeteria. “Why are you eating in here?” And then louder, “Marcos, why are you eating in here!?"

“Why is he eating in here?”

“He got in trouble”. Ms. Moore says, “All of his recesses are taken away for a week—so he gets to spend lunch here with me all week.”

It’s a small room and sees a lot of traffic move through. There is a regular rhythm of kids coming through for medications. There is often someone lying on her cot, looking like they should not be at school at all. All manner of bodily fluids are tended to here.
Marcos’ glasses are sitting on kind of a diagonal across his face. He takes the inhaler and pumps out a dose, missing his mouth and hitting his glasses. The stuff is dripping down one lens.

“Why should I be here?” he says throwing up his arms and looking straight at me. “What’s the point of being here if I can’t go to recess? I want to talk to my mother.”

He has this kind of Jack Benny resignation about him. The world is full of absurdity and what can you do?

“My teacher won’t let me call either. Do you have a cell phone I can use?”

“Are you kidding me Marcos?” I can’t help but laugh at him. He hasn’t fixed his glasses. He reminds me of something out of Dickens.

Marcos is seven years old - a little Napoleon.

I don’t even ask what he’s done. I’ve had him as a student for the past year and can well imagine any number of scenarios.

Marcos loves to push the edge. In fact he loves to play right on the edge. This isn’t exclusively rooted in power or attention seeking although no doubt they play into it. He is not hostile or emotionally neglected or needy. He actually has quite a lot of composure for such a young child. He seems to want to experience the outer edge of things, to feel them strongly. He pushes a little farther than most kids. He’s not mean spirited or looking to wreak havoc. He is intense and seems hugely curious. He has a very active mind and you can see him thinking. He is self aware. He evaluates people and situations. What will happen? How will this
feel? Why can’t I do this or that? His judgment is not always excellent. He gets in trouble and pays for it.

When Marcos was in the third grade he started coming to after-school junior high dance rehearsals. He was in an after school program for young children at Castillo and had permission to come to our sessions. Or so he said. He often came with a buddy, another little boy. It was not at all unusual to have young children at our rehearsals because many of the junior high dancers had younger siblings that they took care of after school.

After school rehearsals included the ASU dancers at this point. From about ten to fifteen ASU dancers joined us in our little studio. We were creating a collaborative choreographic piece and were preparing for a performance.

After school there was an entirely different tone and code of conduct at Castillo. It was like the Wild West while the school day was, by comparison, like Victorian England. There was a gap between the end of school and the arrival of the ASU dancers. This gap of approximately 20-30 minutes was “free time”. They were just killing time which, for kids accustomed to a highly structured day, meant running wild. It didn’t matter how firmly I lectured them, reasoned with them or threatened them about behaving themselves and staying close to the studio and remaining on campus - this transitional time was chaotic.

They always assured me that their activities were thoroughly innocuous and I shouldn’t worry so much. They promised that they would go to another room and do their homework, or get help with it or get a snack and a little air
outside the studio. Sometimes older students who were relatives would come by.
When one of the Castillo dancers was personally escorted to rehearsal by a
custodian, flushed with tousled hair, I realized they were not relatives at all. Later,
I got the full details of junior high sexual experimentation from the custodian who
discovered them in the boys’ bathroom. Another dancer had stood guard.

At regular intervals, the principal would come down to the studio in her
suit and heels and lay down the law to them, reviewing the rules for after school
behavior, the parameters of where they could and couldn’t go and what would
happen if there were more reports of these rules being abused. They listened with
dead serious demeanors, standing or sitting stock still, full attention to the
principal. When the principal was satisfied that her message was sufficiently
absorbed, her dramatic wrath effective, she left. Normal after school chaos usually
took a few weeks to get back up to speed.

When the ASU dancers arrived on our campus, the Castillo kids, rather
miraculously, almost all made it back to the studio. When the ASU dancers
entered the studio, it was like thoroughbreds meeting wild horses; same species,
but oh so different. There were a number of times when ASU dancers themselves
would go looking for stragglers and bring them back.

The dance studio was packed for these rehearsals. There were about
twenty Castillo dancers, ten to fifteen ASU dancers, two ASU dance professors
and me. There was a mountain range of piled backpacks and shoes along the
room’s edges. And there were several younger kids, Marcos among them. Our rehearsals lasted about an hour and a half.

This particular day I left a few minutes early. As I walked out, Marcos was in the hallway working on some kind of movement. He said, “Hey Ms. B., you wanna see my dance?” I needed to leave and asked him to show me the next day. The ASU dancers stayed later and used the studio after our rehearsal.

Later in the evening I looked at my email and saw a note from one of the ASU dance professors. It said “Marcos!” in the subject line. I froze, imagining something awful. I was often nervous that something terrible would happen and my program would be shut down and it would be proved that my teaching methods were ridiculous and I had no place in education. I did a lot of things that could have brought disaster. There was one teacher who regularly warned me of the dangers in taking kids off campus and doing what I was doing. He told me over and over that my job was at risk and the kids were at risk.

I took dance students off campus a lot. They ran all over the massive ASU campus escorted by ASU dancers that were young enough to be their older brothers and sisters. We traveled out of town. We had evening performances at off campus theaters. Sometimes students had to wait backstage while I worked with others on stage during long technical rehearsals. An adult was always with them, but new surroundings harbor great opportunity for mayhem. On several occasions I gave students rides home after rehearsal which was strictly forbidden. But the school was located in a bad neighborhood. It was getting close to dark
when we finished rehearsing and stories would unravel (or not) about why their ride couldn’t make it to pick them up. I couldn’t leave campus knowing a 13 year old girl was going to walk or take public transportation and would be traveling in the dark. I just gave them rides.

In the early days we traveled on public buses. We weren’t allowed to spend money on school busses. The kids and I walked quite a distance along very busy streets to catch our bus. We often carried props with us. I was always highly aware that I was walking a thin line; that something could go awry.

On one of these occasions, it was a two bus journey requiring a transfer. We were in downtown Phoenix waiting for our second bus. Someone spotted a nearby McDonalds. I told them they couldn’t go. There wasn’t time. A few had already set out for it. I started yelling at them and they picked up speed.

“There isn’t time. Don’t you dare go order something!”

“We’ll be fast!” they yell.

“You can’t be that fast!”

“Just wait Ms. B. You’ll see. We’ll be so fast! Like Michael Jordon. No, we’ll be so fast it’ll be like we’re running from “La migra” (immigration). They’re laughing now, delighted with their own wit and running faster.

“If we miss the bus, I’ll kill you!” I yell at the top of my lungs.

Of course I’m responsible for all of them and they are never to be unsupervised. I have about 15 on this trip. I also absolutely have to respect the time frame that’s been agreed upon. The students have other classes and school
obligations. When I’m gone, my classes are either cancelled or someone else covers them. Classroom teachers’ preparatory periods coincide with specials classes. It’s not at all good for work relations when I’m late or classes are cancelled. It’s an inefficient public transit system. It’s not like San Francisco or New York where if you miss the bus, you wait 10 or so minutes and get the next one.

The boys who went to McDonalds sat happily eating their french fries on the bus. One of them looked in my direction and said, “She’s mad ‘cause we didn’t get her any.”

“I won’t take you on any more trips!”

“Ms. B, you want some fries?”

Another student says, “You’re gonna be in so much trouble!”

“Shut up bitch!”

I spin around, “Knock it off. All of you!”

“You gonna let him talk to me like that?”

I pictured being reined in, told that I couldn’t take kids off campus anymore and that I was going to have to change the way I ran my program. There was always a little knot of fluttery anxiety in my gut when we were out performing and traveling. That edgy nervousness was a constant little wind pushing from behind.

When I saw the note about Marcos, I was braced for the worst. Here is the email:
Hi Susan-

I just wanted to tell you about our experience with Marcos today. After you left, he continued to improvise in the hallway while the DARTO’s were rehearsing. He asked Jess and me if we could watch his dance when we finished. So…we went into the hallway with him and witnessed a truly amazing event. He danced like a fiend—on fire, clear and integrated. A combination of abandonment on the brink, and deeply personal gestures. And he continued to develop the motifs as he improvised into a gorgeous gem of a dance. My God!!! I don’t know what you’re doing with these students. What a gift he gave us today—do you know anything about his home life? He could become a brilliant choreographer one day—already is, really.

Thanks, Sarah (personal communication, 2006)

Creativity pulls us into new terrain. We may not understand what draws us to a particular landscape or experience. One never knows just how those new experiences will feel or play out, nor when necessarily, they will present themselves.

The little nervous wind at my back was similar to the one that pushed Marcos. Steven Nachmanovitch (1990) writes about such an aspect of creativity with the following insight,

Here the artist is, as it were, an archaeologist, uncovering deeper and deeper strata as he works, recovering not an ancient civilization but
something as yet unborn, unseen, unheard except by the inner eye, the
inner ear. He is not just removing apparent surfaces from some external
object, he is removing apparent surfaces from the Self, revealing his
original nature. (p. 31)

The junior high dancers performed regularly at ASU. I took Marcos along
with us and he performed the solo that he choreographed in the hallway. We lit it
(with theatrical lighting) and helped him find music for it which ended up being
pulsing and driving. Marcos is a small eight year old boy at this point. The dance
stage is huge and empty. Marcos’ dance was bathed in sound and light. He
commanded it. His father came to see him.

Marcos worked—choreographed, in the hallway. He chose a transitional
space that is outside, in between and connecting central spaces. It is unstructured
and intended to accommodate the flow of human energy which courses through it
like an artery. The destination is beyond it. Hallways are not designated for work.
Spaces designed for work contain order, intention and gathered energy. In fact,
hallways are eerily vacant during the school day hours. They are forbidden
territory. Their emptiness speaks of efficiency and order—everyone in their
assigned space. I sometimes saw kids sent into the hall briefly to cool off, or calm
down or to have a private conversation with a teacher. And I’d see them there
when they’re in trouble and removed from the class.

It is symbolic that Marcos worked in the hallway, outside the place where
dance happened at Castillo. The ancillary, content neutral nature of a hallway
suited him. He worked on his own. He was drawn to regions outside the norm, outside designated places and definitions. He made internal connections and tried to be the architect of his time and space which, as noted in the opening description, didn’t always work out so well. He was interested in the type of work we were doing in the studio but was far too young to participate in the project.

I spoke with Marcos and asked him about the experience of making the dance and performing it. He said it was fun and I asked him to elaborate. He was thirteen when I spoke with him again and preparing to begin seventh grade at a performing arts charter school.

Susan: Can you tell me why you made that dance? What it was that inspired you to go out in the hall and make the dance that you performed at ASU?

Marcos: I got inspired by watching the college kids dance. I was just taking some of their movement and mixing it up with mine.

Susan: Would you say the dance was your own? Did it come from you?

Marcos: No. Part of it did—I used a little bit of your moves and some of my own.

Susan: Can you tell me how studying dance is different from studying other stuff in your regular classroom?

Marcos: Um—in that class, in dance class you can let yourself out.

Susan: What do you mean by that - to let yourself out?
Marcos: When your body goes free when you’re in dance class- you start moving with the music and start doing your own kind of moves with your body.

Susan: What stands out for you about the dance stuff you did at Castillo?

Marcos: It was one of the funnest moments in my life.

Susan: What?

Marcos: Performing at ASU

Susan: What was fun about it?

Marcos: I got to let myself out. Kinda dance free. Make up movements.

Susan: Can you tell me what it felt like to perform?

Marcos: It’s really hard to describe. It was like being famous.

Susan: Yea? (personal interview, 2009)

Finding himself among people with similar interests was influential. Ken Robinson who researches creativity refers to this as finding one’s tribe. “It provides inspiration and provocation to raise the bar on your own achievements. In every domain, members of a passionate community tend to drive each other to explore the real extent of their talents.” (Robinson & Aronica, 2009, p. 118)

I interviewed Marcos and asked him to talk more about the actual experience of putting the dance together:

Susan: I remember walking out that day and seeing you really involved in whatever you were doing out in the hallway. I had to leave. I couldn’t
watch it. So what happened when you were out there putting it
together?

Marcos: I felt like I could do whatever I wanted. I felt like I was in charge
of my… I felt like I could take over the dance.”

Susan: You felt that you could take over the dance?

Marcos: Yeah

Susan: Was it a surprise to you or did it feel natural?

Marcos: Like kind of a surprise. I didn’t expect to come up with a
rhythm—but then I started doing the dance and some moves started to
kick in and I followed in with it. (personal interview, 2009)

Marcos responded to some kind of internal cues. I often got the feeling
that he had a very active mental life and spent much time deep in his own
thoughts. He seemed to have a kind of inner compass that he responded to without
hesitation. Something that was inside of him came alive when given the right
circumstances. The structure of school doesn’t easily support or align with deep
creative investigation. In this case it did. A nexus of events occurred that Marcos
was open to and availed himself of. Maxine Greene (1995) speaks to the kind of
intuitive awareness I feel Marcos responded to: “The arts are on the margins of
most people’s lives; the ‘margin’ being ‘the place for those feelings and intuitions
which daily life doesn’t have a place for and mostly seems to suppress” (p. 134).

Nachmanovitch (1990) also addresses this but more as a guiding presence.
“Reasoned knowledge proceeds from information of which we’re consciously
aware—only a partial sampling of our total knowledge. Intuitive knowledge, on
the other hand, proceeds from everything we know and everything we are” (p.
40).

Dance as a form of expression grabbed Marcos. It made a kind of sense to
him. From what I knew about him, I think he probably would not have produced
the dance in a class structure. If I provided a structured choreographic assignment
there’s a good chance he would not have responded. This was how Marcos
worked—on the outskirts, in the hallways, spontaneously, alone, on his own
terms, responding to some internal impulse.

He often would not participate in dance when he attended with his own
class. He liked to watch. He liked to stand apart, to be an onlooker, independent
agent, maverick or self appointed outlier—however one might describe such a
stance in an eight year old.

He exasperated teachers, myself included at times. Other students would
say, “How come Marcos doesn’t have to do what we’re doing?” It was a good
question that I didn’t really have an answer to. Marcos was not a brooding child.
When he felt like it, he was very social and played hard and joyfully. When I
would approach him in class and tell him he needed to participate he would either
participate just a little or not at all. It was unfair that he didn’t have to participate.
I didn’t want to be an unfair teacher or demonstrate favoritism by ignoring his
obstinate, poor classroom decorum. He and I would briefly engage in a futile
power struggle. The students would know that I was indeed fair. I wasn’t going to
change him. And what’s interesting is that there wasn’t a lot of scrutiny about Marcos by other students. There was some but not a lot. They seemed to understand that this was how Marcos was.

Marcos’ approach to dance and creative process wasn’t deviant. It was just different. His approach did exist outside the conceived and proscribed boundaries of the program. But in this case the curriculum expanded to include his approach to dance. It was not a closed curricular border. He could be exasperating but his way of exploring dance was viable and worth recognizing even though it lay outside what is considered conventional. Some of the last things I asked Marcos in our interview are the following:

Susan: Do you have a very favorite dance class memory?

Marcos: Doing flips

Susan: Let me ask you one more question here—do you feel like a dance artist?

Marcos: Yes, I’m gorgeous (personal interview, 2009)

Marcos had significant conflict with some of his classroom teachers. His parents eventually removed him from the school in fourth grade and put him in a different school.

Gender

The following narrative deals with the theme of gender. Adolescent boys face unique pressure as they contend with notions of masculinity in a world saturated with homophobic myth and stereotypical expectation. The boys at
Castillo wanted nothing to do with dance at first. There are powerful gender associations with classical dance. Men who study ballet or modern dance find themselves in a world of intensified gender stereotypes associated with men in dance. Dancer and dance scholar Doug Risner (2002) addressed the issue of gender in dance education. Looking through a social lens, Risner explored gender: “homophobic myths, unspoken truths, and the enduring silence that surrounds these issues in dance education” (p. 64).

Although classical dance training and performances were not a part of the Castillo children’s experience, the gender based lore and stereotype associated with it, found its way to their lives. Although there is a rich cultural history of men dancing in a variety of cultural dance forms, Western classical dance remains captive to this narrow biased stereotype. Young adolescent males for whom sexual identity is emergent, can find this aspect of the dance world especially difficult to navigate. I personally think many simply stay away from dance for this reason. Young men who are drawn to dance are forced to contend with this stereotype. Risner (2002) asks important questions:

Does dance education have a role to play in addressing homophobia and the prejudice that male students and colleagues (gay or straight) face as dancers? How do heterosexist assumptions and actions in the studio/classroom unnecessarily and unintentionally create an environment of shame, humiliation, or embarrassment for gay dancers? How do we as dance educators unknowingly reaffirm narrow gender stereotypes? (p. 64)
The focus of this dissertation doesn’t permit a full exposition of these questions. However, these questions are important and certainly gave me pause. It was fine for the Castillo boys to be athletic. They often played basketball at recess and did so intensely and roughly. Fights happened with some regularity. Being strong, fast and aggressive were all highly valued physical traits of boys. But to be physically expressive or regard physicality in aesthetic terms was different. The kinds of dance that could be considered at all masculine and non-threatening were hip hop or break dance.

**Tap Dogs**

A seventh grade Castillo boy’s answer to the question of why boys don’t dance:

Boys don’t dance. Dance is for girls. It’s all prissy and girly. Look at those guys prancing around in them tights and little slipper things or those guys that’s half naked in their bare feet! They’re not men. They don’t look like men. They’re fags. They’re little pussys. If a man is gonna dance it’s gonna be hip hop or break dance or. He’s gonna be grabbin’ up here, [his crotch] with a “I’m gonna kick your ass” look on his face. (personal interview, 2005)

Tap Dogs were scheduled to come to Phoenix. They are an Australian tap dance company of all men. Their shtick is blue collar grunge. The clothes (costumes) they wear look like they’ve come off a construction site—worn tattered blue jeans, flannel plaid shirts, work shirts, T-shirts. The aesthetic choice
here attempts to exude utterly casual disregard for what they wear—in an effort to mimic or personify the “typical” male regard, or non regard, for fashion. The irony of course is that this look of casual disregard has been very carefully and deliberately assembled. Their tap shoes are lace up work boots with taps put on them. The sets capture an industrial feel - stark, minimal also with a look suggesting an obliviousness to aesthetics as would be associated with “real or typical” men. The artistic statement suggested these guys could just as easily be sitting around drinking beer and watching a football game as dancing.

I called their business manager, knowing when major companies come into a town, they often do community events. It’s good public relations. To make a long story short, I talked them into coming to Castillo and giving a master class. I miraculously convinced them that Castillo was an ideal setting for their community efforts, that these kids are far too often left out of events like this and that this is where they should come. I told my junior high classes that there would be a master class after school with a famous dance company and they’re all invited.

On the day Tap Dogs come to our school they are preceded by a convoy of media. Local television is there. Newspaper reporters are there. Camera operators come in dragging masses of equipment and move around the studio as if it’s their own. They pull out miles of cord and plug this into that and snap this other bit on that larger one until there are huge cameras, tripods, light bouncers and
microphones. “Where is front?” a camera operator asks, meaning where will they be facing.

The Tap Dog dancers arrive in the midst of this with a local escort and a manager. There are four of them. They’re friendly. They’re young and look like any young man you might see on the street. They’re getting ready to teach, changing shoes, changing clothes. The junior high Castillo kids are there in the studio fascinated with the activity. “Can someone show me to the washroom please?” Armando takes the dancer down the hall. The dancers chat with each other and with the kids, the media people and me. Quite a lot of interest has generated up and down the hall. Curious younger students are coming to have a look. Of course I’ve cleared all this with my administration but I think they didn’t know just what the nature of the event would be. “You want to bring a dance company here? That sounds fun. I bet the kids will really like that.” Curious teachers wander down toward the commotion in the studio. The principal comes in stepping over wires and around equipment and I introduce her to the various people I’ve just been introduced to.

Polished well dressed reporters take the kids out in the hall and talk to them while a camera person films and another holds a light. Newspaper reporters do the same but with only notepads in hand. The end of the corridor where my studio is located, has become a headwaters feeding into other streams or activity. Another world has come into their world. They ask the kids questions like, “What do you think of having Tap Dogs in your school?” “What kind of dances do you
like to do? “Are you going to go to their concert?” “What kind of dance do you do here?” “Does taking classes from Tap Dogs make you want to be a dancer?”

Tap Dogs is aggressive masculine dance. Tap dance. It’s a brilliant concept accompanied with a genius of a marketing plan. The Tap Dogs dancers teach a fairly simple dance sequence to our students. Some lose patience easily. It’s an entirely new dance form for them. Some get frustrated. Others stick with it. They are very nice and patient with the kids. Every thing is being filmed. At the end of the class they do a demonstration. They show a few segments from their show. This means there is an eruption of fiery energy, slamming, skidding and yelling cues to each other. The scuffs, marks and divots they left on the studio floor lasted until we got the floor replaced. These guys dance like maniacs! They’re incredibly skilled, incredibly strong and incredibly masculine—pounding rhythms, virtuosic leaps and skids and spins.

They’re young guys, early 20’s mostly. No graceful nimble ghosts of tap legends Fred Astaire or Gregory Hines were floating around. This is, of course, not an entirely fair depiction of tap dance because there is a far richer and storied history to its evolution then the stereotypical one I’ve just referred to. However the tap dancer with the slick and nimble foot work and polished demeanor is often called to mind when tap dance is brought up. When the Tap Dogs dancers mess up, they laugh or spit out a frustration. The students laugh at this. They’re so real. Without the amplification afforded by the Proscenium Theater, lights, sound, sets, make-up, they just seem like young guys you might see anywhere—regular guys.
Theatrical effects have the capacity to elevate people to a magical realm making them seem often larger than life. While the talent itself is very real and can be most remarkable, it is through the process of amplification, as happens on stage, and production, as happens in marketing, that talent is pushed into another grander realm. It becomes something else, something beyond regular life. It is the business of star production - human commodification. Tap Dogs were in the Castillo studio without any of these effects. They were not the “look” portrayed on the dynamic publicity poster. There was no dramatic lighting, no surround sound audio system, no make-up. One of them kept blowing his nose because his allergies were bothering him.

So, it makes sense to ask, what is a “regular” guy? And the designation of a “regular” guy automatically situates him in relation to others who are deemed not “regular”. My use of the term “regular” guys refers to culturally and socially normed young men. Tap Dogs were young men that might be seen anywhere in the United States. There was nothing extreme or in any way extraordinary about the way they looked.

Their school, an environment as known and reliable as the neighborhood grocery store, was transformed. That immutable predictable place known as school, was briefly, not that place. Outside people were there looking and asking questions. The press wanted to know, what’s the story here? Who are these people? What’s going on? What’s interesting? How shall I think about this place? How shall I characterize it? These kinds of questions may be asked by people
associated with education itself such as parents, administrators, academics, researchers, educational specialists. But those with no affiliation to education don’t show much interest and don’t typically ask. People were looking at their school through a different and inquiring lens.

School is a place not readily thought about (at least by students) as set within a larger world view or context. In students’ eyes, school and what goes on there reflects a natural given order. It is not really questioned or examined. Circumstances can appear as naturally arrived at as leaves falling from a tree. There is little if any awareness of the underlying political, social and historical forces that influence the way schools are. Curriculum theorist Ivor Goodson (1997) speaks to the dangers embedded in the unquestioned given nature of school order:

> to take that curriculum as a given—is to forgo a whole range of understandings and insights into features of the control and operation of the school and the classroom. It is to take over the mystifications of previous episodes of governance as unchallengeable givens. We are, let us be clear, talking about the systematic ‘invention of tradition’ in an arena of social production and reproduction, the school curriculum, where political and social priorities are paramount” (p.18)

Castillo students and teachers, as is the case in many schools, participated in large part, in the kind of unquestioning acceptance of school and the classroom circumstances as given entities that Goodson refers to. Low income and high
income students make different assumptions about the nature of school. Castillo students knew an insulated existence. They didn’t go to live theater, dance or music performances in the cities elegant venues. They traveled very little—mostly to Mexico, sometimes camping a few hours out of Phoenix. When I asked what they did on breaks or summer vacation, most talked about going swimming in the public pools, playing in parks, watching TV, doing chores and visiting relatives. There is not much direct experience of the world outside their neighborhood, school and family.

Inner city students are strongly discouraged and disciplined if there is serious resistance to or questioning of school authority. There is little place for a voice that challenges protocol. The message is, “you break the rules, you learn to not do it again.” Misbehavior is quickly viewed as problematic and needing to be nipped in the bud and stopped. The energy and motivation, or human impetus behind the behavior is not central. It is not addressed or acknowledged in the same way it is in non inner city schools. This is not to say that there aren’t caring sensitive people responding to children in inner city schools. There are. But in general, inner city schools are so stressed (academically, socially, financially) that there is not the time and resources to sensitively respond to each act of misbehavior because there are so many.

At the other end of the economic spectrum it is a different story. The content and motivation of student misbehavior is processed very differently. The content and motivation are focused on. Among higher income students the
message is, “You break the rules, tell me what you were thinking and let’s try to understand it.” The energy and human impetus are acknowledged.

Having taught at both ends of the economic spectrum I’ve seen this first hand. I taught creative movement at the Seattle Children’s Theater, a well respected and supported private theater company in Seattle, Washington that serves a clientele of economic means. One year my schedule was such that I finished teaching at Seattle Children’s Theater one day, flew home to Arizona and started work at Castillo the very next day. With no buffering of time, the contrast between the two schools was glaring.

The various problem behaviors that came out in my Seattle classes were absolutely no different than what I had encountered at Castillo. What was different was the consideration given to the emotional tone that accompanied discipline. The number of students per class was kept small. Regardless of the class size, every class had a teachers’ aide. One of my classes had eight children.

By contrast, I had a kindergarten class at Castillo one Fall with 28 students. Many were Spanish speakers, which I am not. I repeatedly asked for an aide and was told no because the aides needed to help the classroom teacher. I had children urinate on the floor. I had children pressed against the door crying so loud that it was impossible to teach. When I went over to comfort the crying child the rest of the class lost any semblance of focus. I had an inconsolable, upset child run out of the studio because he was very young and scared. When I chased him down the hall, the rest of the class was left unattended and I returned to children
jumping off the counter and playing in the water. I carried the child back to the studio kicking and screaming and felt like a monster. The classes were a full hour which is far too long for four and five year olds. In an appeal to change this, I asked the assistant principal, a parent himself, how he would feel if it was his child standing and crying at the door. He told me his child had a very outgoing personality. He wouldn’t do that. I said I was philosophically opposed to teaching that way. The class was kept at a full hour I was not given an aide.

The tone that accompanied behavioral discipline at Seattle Children’s Theater reflected a distinct sense of calm and reason. Children’s behavior was never addressed with an angry tone. There was an unspoken assumption that the underlying motivation for the misbehavior was reasonable and honorably based. Furthermore, by steering a child toward reasonable thinking through calm words, the child could be encouraged to see, understand and therefore, through reasonable deductive means, correct or change the behavior. Whatever the negative behavior, be it lack of cooperation, an angry outburst, rude name calling, it was imbued with an inherent value. There is an assumption that the child is operating from good intent, the child is a good and decent person. No question about it. Scolding was not necessary, was not employed because it is degrading. Kindness, gentleness and patience were expected and applied. This kind of treatment was clearly an intentionally instituted part of the philosophy of the school. It reflected an expectation on the part of the clientele served that their children would be afforded courtesy and respect. It was a given.
For the Castillo students to get a glimpse of their school as existing within a much larger world was novel. It was not only that the outside world was in their school but that they were interested in who was there and what was going on. They weren’t parents or teachers or principles and administrators. The students were not just part of their own small universe but part of a much greater one.

There was footage on the evening news. There were articles in the paper with photographs. Castillo students were quoted. There was jubilation! The world outside Castillo has noticed us. What is that outside world and why does it matter? Ironically, the students weren’t able to go to the Tap Dogs concert. The theater, or company management, wouldn’t comp tickets for them. They offered a discount but with ticket prices well beyond their economic means, it meant very little. Not one student went.

It is not unusual for inner city children to be exploited by major performing arts groups. Often performance contracts include “out-reach” events. Meaning performing arts companies are contractually required to provide out-reach performances for a designated number of underserved children. The most efficient way to do this is to bus students in during a school day. I took my students to a few of these and vowed to never take them again.

We saw a company that served the entire district (ten schools) in a single performance. Yellow busses wrapped around the theater like giant crime tape. The children enter the theater in much the same way they enter school. But because there are so many children and they are so excited and not in their school
setting, there is extra need for order. They get off the busses and line up. The attending teachers tell them where to stand and wait and then when to walk in where they are greeted by ushers who tell them exactly where to sit because it has all been mapped out ahead of time. They sit with their class and their teacher. The theater is a sea of dark haired excited children. They are not out taking in cultural events among and with the broader community. Social isolation is maintained. They could not wander around and look at the theater, public venue, at their own pace. It was a “look, don’t touch” message. They watch an abbreviated show and exit in the same orderly way they entered. I have been to some of these where in addition to introducing the students to what they’re going to see, audience behavior is also addressed. The assumption is that they lack manners.

Tap Dogs could not provide free tickets to the Castillo students. Company and theater management make these decisions and they were very sorry, but just couldn’t do it. The Castillo students participated unwittingly in the Tap Dogs publicity vision. The media presented Tap Dogs as generous and benevolent in an earthy, hands-on experience with local kids.

The irony is that their entire shtick is a quasi-homage to blue collar working people while in reality blue collar people could not afford their ticket prices. So, they exploit a group of people by appropriating their cultural accoutrements (blue collar) and price their performances so that they cannot attend.
It would have been invaluable for the Castillo students to work with the dancers in their school studio and then see them perform on stage. However, more irony - I didn’t detect any disappointment on the part of the students. I think part of this was because there was so much excitement at having them at school and the accompanying media coverage that the significance was eclipsed. But I also think it’s understood within their community, that this is the way things are. It is the norm. Although they would love to have gone, it’s like being denied something you’ve never tasted. You can’t know what you’re missing if you never had it.

This description of the Castillo students experience with Tap Dogs makes a number of assumptions and begs many questions. By bringing in Tap Dogs, was I further supporting the stereotypical notions of masculinity? Was I encouraging an already limited range of acceptable experiences for boys? Was I saying, “Yes boys, you are right; dance is faggy therefore here’s some real men dancing.”? Why not use my position to alter the damaging stereotypes of masculinity and support less stereotypical ones? Why not bring in some other dance form? Why not bring in Ballet Arizona?

Anyone who has been a parent or caregiver knows the trials of getting picky eaters to try new foods. If you take away the foods they know and like and replace them with strange new food in an effort to broaden their palette, the effort will likely be met with resistance. The child often won’t eat the new food at all.
However, if you introduce a little of the new food along with the familiar, the odds improves that the child will try it.

The same kind of thinking applied to boys and dance. I had to walk so carefully around the issue, that just getting boys into the studio was an accomplishment. The stereotype that associates male dancers with homosexuality was powerful. I wasn’t going to single handedly change it. Me, a white woman, telling pubescent Hispanic boys that it is otherwise was not going to get them into the dance studio - let alone working with movement ideas. Had I brought in male ballet dancers they wouldn’t have gotten near them. However, bringing in young men who personify the stereotypical notion of masculinity did. Students saw men dancing in the dance studio and the white hot ember of homophobia was set aside briefly. The excitement of dance (I hoped) became the focus and excited them. I hoped they would see human form and motion and feel stirred. Even though Tap Dogs embrace and perpetuate the stereotype of what masculinity is, the students were able to watch them without feeling threatened. They saw dance. They saw men dancing. They talked to them and learned that they studied for years. Going back to the food metaphor, I gave them some strange new food along with the familiar.

I took away many of the markers of “dance”. I called my junior high dance class *Athletic Movement*. I did not use dance language. I did not wear dance clothes. When I first began teaching at Castillo I saw that my classes were not going to be anything like I knew dance class to be. Physical education classes
were where movement was happening. I coaxed boys into class telling them that it
would be a lot like sports and it would be a really easy grade.

The Boys

Has anyone seen the boy who used to come here?
Round-faced trouble-maker, quick to find a joke,
slow to be serious, red shirt,
perfect coordination, sly, strong muscled,
with things always in his pocket: reed flute,
worn pick, polished and ready for his Talent
you know that one.
Have you heard stories about him?
Pharaoh and the whole Egyptian world
collapsed for such a Joseph.
I’d gladly spend years getting word
of him, even third or fourth hand. (Rumi, 1993, p. 13)

There was a dowel, about six or seven feet long, setting out in the hallway.
A custodian or someone had forgotten it there. Some boys grabbed it and started
playing with it. It was a microphone, a sword, a guitar, a pole vault, an assault
rifle, a baton, a roller to roll under their feet, something to climb. I went out and
bought several dowels the next day. I brought them in and had kids play with
them. They were way too dangerous. They would run and try to plant one end on
the floor and the dowels would slip out from under them and crash. I bought
liquid rubber to paint on and applied globbing masses of it. It peeled off like cheap nail polish as they worked with them. I consulted *Home Depot* who suggested pre formed, molded rubber tips. They looked like what you might see on the end of a crutch—but bigger. They were impossible to fit on. We all tried. I asked the math teacher, who had done a lot of construction, if he had any ideas. He held one in his two hands for a few minutes to warm it up. That little bit of warmth made them pliable enough to slip on. We all sat around holding these rubber tips in our hands. And then we gave them a try. They worked!

Boys and girls both played with them. They would run like a pole vaulter, plant one end on the floor and with hands high on the pole, send their bodies sailing through the air. Some of them managed what I felt were beautiful arcing passages sending their bodies out in front of them at nearly 90 degree angles. They were rhythmic and lilting and totally captivating to me.

My choreographic eye lit on them. They would run, set down an end, fly their feet out in front of them, land and repeat it. When several did it, it looked like flying fish or breaching whales or birds. I loved it! I wanted to play with configurations of this. I wanted to shape it. I wanted to build a dance around this particular idea. I asked them to try it in a number of ideas.

I loved to dance. But I loved to choreograph even more. It’s easy enough to dance by going to dance class which I often did on weekends. It is not the same as filling a piece of choreography with your own breath and performing it, but it’s dance. You can work on intricate spacious phrases and experience dancing in a
dance class. But to choreograph is a different story. The tools of the trade, (dancers, rehearsal space, performance space, time) are not easily come by.

Before I started teaching and before I was a parent, I was involved in choreography as much as I could be. It was my art form, absolutely. The process lit me up like nothing else. Choreographic ideas and imagery passed through my mind frequently. I saw choreographic possibility everywhere, in grocery stores, airports, streets, coffee shops. When I heard music that caught or moved me, I imagined a dance. I had little pieces of paper in my purse and all over my apartment with snippets of ideas that I didn’t want to forget scribbled on them; an image, a thought, something I wanted to try, and names of pieces of music I’d heard. Sometimes as I’d fall asleep an idea would waft through my mind that I had to get up and write down. At one point I remember working on a piece and I had so many little pieces of paper with ideas on them that I couldn’t keep them straight. I had my regional organization method, meaning I knew this one was somewhere in my bedroom pile and another was probably in my purse or car. But I wanted to use some of them and I was annoyed and wasting a lot of time searching through piles of papers. A friend suggested I get a big corkboard and tack them up. When I saw them all up on my wall I loved the montage of them and started arranging them and imagining a piece based on montage.

Nothing had the effect on me like being able to work on a choreographic idea that I found really interesting. When something started to blossom or gel it felt like a drug. I couldn’t get enough of it and I wanted it to go on and on until it
reached some end point that I would recognize. It had velocity and energy.

Nachmanovitch (1990) describes this well:

The work in progress can be experienced much as another person with whom we interact, whom we get to know. We begin to have conversations with our unborn creation. We can ask it questions, and it will give us intelligible answers. Like loving someone, commitment to the creative act is commitment to the unknown - not only the unknown but the unknowable. (p. 167)

My own choreographic direction had begun pulling in theater and text and props. The dance work I had done involved people with theater and dance training. But I had never worked with untrained bodies.

It is next to impossible to make a living as a choreographer. It is a tiny fraction of the dance population who are paid choreographers and there are probably many who would love to choreograph and can’t. University jobs are ideal for those with choreographic aspirations because all the tools of the trade are available. Before getting the job at Castillo I had become a single parent. I needed financial stability above all else. I resigned myself to the reality that it would be a long long time, if ever, before I would choreograph again.

What was going on in the Castillo studio was different than the dance process I knew. They didn’t want to stop and go into the nuts and bolts of making a piece of choreography. They wanted to play around with other ideas. I tried to coax them to work my idea. But they were too caught up in their own momentum.
They’d run and catch themselves on the wall. Ideas started flying between them.

“Hey, Armando, jump on me! I’ll crouch down and you land on me.”

“No, no, no, you guys! Somebody’s gonna get hurt!”

“Armando, right here. You ready?”

“Don’t, don’t! It’s dangerous! Wait!”

“Come on Armando” he says, waving him over. “Don’t worry Ms. B.,
We’ll be careful.”

They used these poles and tried all kinds of movements. Then they set
themselves up so they could light from back to back. The poles slipped and fell.
There were near misses. There were collisions. Poles flew and slammed on the
floor. They flew around within inches of faces and heads and the students laughed
excitedly. I’d flinch at some of these moments and run in worried - insisting on a
safety measure. I was reminded of the way dogs play with their tremendous
energy and ability to navigate and manage that energy with deft agility. They had
a clear idea they wanted to work out. There were multiple directors and multiple
movers and those roles got tossed back and forth. Once they got what they were
trying to master, I said, “Oh my god! It’s so incredibly cool you guys! Do it
again!”

They started running and landing on the counters, the mirrors, the barres,
the walls. These poles became instruments of motion, like a bike or a skateboard.
They couldn’t and wouldn’t stop. “No, don’t land on my desk!”
They were excited. I was walking a thin line between responsible teacher, nervous at the possibility of physical harm, litigation and career demise and movement artist exhilarated at what was happening and wanting to grab the creative sparks shooting around the room. Some students passing by came in to see what was going on. “Check this out man!” Carlos says demonstrating running up the wall, pausing as his bending legs cushion and absorb his weight and push him back to the ground. “Let me try!” says Javier.

“Look, you guys. You’re not in this class. We’re in a rehearsal. Where are you supposed to be? That’s where you need to go. You can’t just come in and decide to fool around in here. Go on now.” I said to them.

“No, no—let him stay. He’s really good!”

“Javier, come here - come here. Try this out man.” So, there’s Javier and then Jhobany and Annamarie and a few more. Everyone has their two cents to offer. Each has their own unique approach to playing with these props. I’m fascinated with this because each personality seems to light up and I see them in a new way. The less curious onlookers drift away. I’ve now become a spectator; an enthusiastic one. The students have grabbed the wave and are riding it.

Class control slid through my fingers but not by hostile takeover or a power struggle. It was a willing shift of power rather than seizure of it. I didn’t try to stop the process and was acutely aware of it. I watched it with an attitude of excitement and a little anxious nervousness. I felt like a spectator of something outside of myself. It was an interesting dynamic, a deliberate relinquishing of
power so that something else could come in its place. Control was temporarily
gone but with that, it was as if ideas were falling from the sky.

Elliot Eisner (2005) made the following comments about arts:

The arts teach that goals need to be flexible and that surprise counts; that
chance, as Aristotle wisely remarked, is something that art loves; that
being open to the unanticipated opportunities that inevitably emerge in the
context of action increases insight; and that purposeful flexibility rather
than rigid adherence to prior plans is more likely to yield something of
value. No painter, writer, composer, or choreographer can foresee all the
twists and turns that his or her work will take. (p. 134)

I rode the wave of the student’s offerings and only, later, with them,
helped shape it into what we call “dance.”

I didn’t know what would happen. It was a little like setting a toy boat
onto a stream, unsure where that current would take it but fascinated to watch its
course. A traditional notion of classroom control is one in which the teacher holds
the power. Students may be empowered under a teachers’ tutelage but she or he
holds distinct presiding power in that classroom. They have power over
empowerment. Ultimately of course I held power in this class as well. I could
have stepped in and changed the direction of the activity or called a halt to it or
insisted that our time be structured in a particular way. But power itself assumed a
degree of plasticity. It became a creative element, to regard anew. Had I insisted
on a short leash, the outcome would have been very different.
I don’t know what that outcome would have been. Had the leash been short and my parameters narrow it could have given flight to an entirely different array of ideas and exploration I’ll never know. The imposition of limitation has the ability to force one into realms and places that spawn new and surprising responses and ideas. In this case, the students needed to spend time with the materials (the props) they were working with. I had never worked with them nor had they. They needed to get to know them. It made sense to let them just play with them. In the process of doing so, a well of energy came with it. They were doing and discovering things I would not have imagined. It was this energy I was responding to.

As time wore on the students accumulated a vocabulary of manipulations with these props. Some naturally flowed into others making units or phrases of movement. Ideas occurred to me as I watched them. Sometimes I would respond to a high energy moment helping to smooth out a rough spot or accomplish something. At times we would all be in there problem solving. Ideas were evaluated. There was a tacit criterion. They had to be a little dangerous, but nobody could get hurt. I was definitely the safety monitor in these situations but I wasn’t alone. The students assigned each other as spotters (people put in positions to break a fall or avert a potential physical hazard).

My directorial position was often a design one. The students explored the range of possibilities with these props and developed vocabulary. I composed with their vocabulary and added some of my own. Ideas for variations or
extensions of movement occurred to me as I watched them as did compositional ideas. There was lots of experimenting. This description is much like any practice in dance. But I’ve left some parts out.

I would ask to see any number of permutations—try it this way or extend it that way. Repeat it facing a different direction. Try it in groups. Add a path. Try a different speed. Cushion the landing so we don’t hear it. This is how that went.

“So why don’t a couple of you try doing this in twos. See if you can find a rhythm between the two of you and stay right on it. Stay close to each other.”

“I don’t want to do that. That sounds gay!”

“Don’t say something’s ‘gay’. That’s ridiculous. I don’t want to hear it again in this class! Do you understand?”

Laughter

“Just try it. Come on. Raul and Rafael, grab a stick and give it try. You guys will do this really well. Let’s go.”

“I’ve got my own stick to grab!”

Laughter

“Oh my god Raul—enough already!. No more, do you understand?!”

“Ms. B. are you gay?”

Laughter

“Raul, just do what I’m asking, ok?”

“There’s nothing wrong with being gay. Rafael here’s gay.”

Laughter. Rafael slaps him on the head.
“Are you done Raul?” I ask

“I have a gay dog.” He adds.

Everyone’s laughing now. He cannot resist it. The conversation turns to descriptions of dressing up his Chihuahua and amorous Chihuahua behavior. Everyone’s adding to the conversation. I’m leaning against the mirror, arms crossed, waiting. He starts offering lewd details. “Don’t go there Raul!” I say. He goes for a physical imitation of his gay Chihuahua. He is an incredible comic with the ability to totally transform himself physically and vocally into the character he’s created. There is something almost plastic about this ability. He thrives on making people laugh. I’m watching this. The other students are falling over laughing which eggs him on. This utterly silly character he has hatched is very funny. He looks over and sees me laughing and says, “See, even Ms. B thinks gay Chihuahua’s are funny!” After this runs its course they try my idea

So what, may be asked, is the subtext here? The word “gay had become the pejorative of the day. Everything was “gay”. It was a multi-purpose word; seriously insulting, used in affectionate banter, a word for general disapproval or disdain. Word use has an interesting way of traveling through a school culture. Kids hear new words and try them out and they move through like an aggressive vine. The junior high students had particularly latched on to the word “gay”.

Words have the capacity to hold tremendous nuance and subtlety within them. Although the word “gay” had morphed and expanded in the way it was used, the basic root meaning was there. Like hybridized plants, the basic structure
remains even if the resulting variations are quite different. A word may be pulled and stretched but its basic meaning retains a presence amidst all the layering of nuance. “Gay” refers to homosexuality. The ember of that meaning is present throughout its broad application. Its use as an insult speaks to prejudice and disapproval. Its use in affectionate banter can infer an acceptance of what is considered a condemned behavior. Or the use of insulting language can suggest a kind of bond or ease with someone. But the general epithet—referring to something as “gay” was negative. “Gay” is a bad thing, an insult. It became an all purpose word for the denoting of negative sentiment about any and everything.

Ironically the dictionary definition of the word “gay” itself has gone through some modification. In the 1988 Merriam-Webster dictionary the fourth meaning of the word “gay” is “of, related to or used by homosexuals.” The first meaning is: “happily excited: merry, keenly alive and exuberant” (Merriam-Webster’s, 1998).

In the 2003 Microsoft Office, Encarta Dictionary: English, the first meaning is: “attracted to same sex; relating to sexual attraction or activity among members of the same sex.” It is followed by “merry; full of light heartedness and merriment.” Generally, the first definition refers to the most commonly understood use and meaning of a word. The weight of its meaning has shifted over time.

In part, the multipurpose nature of the word allowed it to be stretched far beyond its usual boundaries. For those inclined to play with language, stretching
and manipulating words can be irresistible. However, in this case there was added significance because it was being used in a dance studio where a reference to “gayness” or homosexuality has added seriousness.

Everybody was laughing at this exchange. Was the “gay” subject matter of the joking a subconscious effort to address the gay issue? Did the gay issue lurk in the edges around the work? Was this a way to relieve that stress—to acknowledge a tension that couldn’t be spoken of directly? Steam was let off as they laughed and carried on. It was part of a rhythm within a rhythm—a pause where energy and focus were gathered. Junior high aged students are at a time in their lives where sexuality is emerging. Through dance they were physically close with one another and physically expressive. The hot topic of sexuality is seeping in to their lives and identity. I had another choreographic idea I wanted to try.

I called over to the Properties Department in our district and asked about plywood. Did they have any? What size? Could they bring a few sheets over to the studio? A couple of friendly guys came in with two sheets of three quarter inch ply. “What are you guys gonna do with this?” one of them asked me.

“I’m not really sure yet”

They were big—about seven or eight feet tall and about four feet across. I basically just said, “Let’s see what happens with these.” I didn’t have a really concrete idea in mind—just vague ones. The students took over.

“Somebody hold it and let me see how far up I can run.” After several efforts at stabilizing the plywood, they figured it out. It took three of them to
stabilize one sheet. They found an optimal way to place themselves. They held it at an angle. Carlos ran up it as far as he could over and over. They shouted out tips and ideas. “Change the angle!” “There has to be a foot in the front.” “Let me try!” Jose said. Each of them took a turn. There were a few girls too. All shared equally in the tasks of holding the plywood and scaling it. They ran to the top of it, turned and jumped off. Jesus ran up, grabbed the top with his hands and did a flip. The various crashes and near misses were met with exuberant laughter. I would cringe and rush in with safety remediation.

This experience, though full of life and fun was happening in a community filled with problems. Unique challenges face inner city male youth. They have come to the attention of people in wide ranging disciplines; from poets and writers to politicians, artists, educators, psychologists, spiritual leaders, sports figures, sociologists to offer a partial list. There are startling statistics associated with adolescent inner city males in terms of crime, incarceration and high school drop out rates. The rate of incarcerated minority youth in the United States in 2006 was 828 per 100,000. The rate of incarcerated white youth in the United States in 2006 was 270 per 100,000, according to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in the U.S. Department of Justice website.

Visionary educators both in and out of academia have forged programs and curricula that address some of what have been identified as the unique needs that impede boys’ passage into healthy adulthood. Geoffrey Canada is one such educator. Canada has poured tremendous energy into an effort to pull the blighted
Harlem youth back from a throw away destiny by working to improve schools and loosen the grip of student apathy, cynicism and anger. He examined (among other things) the complex culture of violence Harlem youth are steeped in. The circumstances in which Canada has tried to effect change do not only affect males.

Canada (1995) grew up in the South Bronx projects, one of four sons raised alone by their mother who drew welfare and worked minimum wage jobs which he said “barely kept a roof over their heads” (p. 5). He saw violence first hand. The violence, although not without female participants, is weighted far more heavily among males. Though Canada’s work focused on schools in New York City, violence among adolescent inner city males is present in many urban areas. Phoenix is no exception. Canada attributes the availability and number of guns as a partial explanation for the intensification of inner city violence but turns his attention more to the glaring inequity between social classes as the root problem; the lack of opportunity for poor minority youth.

I did not witness first hand violence among the boys I worked with at Castillo. However, I do know that there were fist fights on a regular basis and there were occasions when the students were abuzz with news of kids from other neighborhoods planning to fight this person or that person. The reasons I heard for the fights stemmed from events outside of school usually revolving around issues with girlfriends, friends, or family. I remember talking with the whole class about fights encouraging them to not get mixed up in them. There was cussing and
storming out of class, but ironically, the only fist fight that happened in the dance studio was between girls during a rehearsal.

Castillo was on lock down with some regularity. One lock down occasion went on for days actually. During those days there was a flurry of emails. To keep the staff informed, we would be alerted over the PA system that, “An important email has been sent to the staff. Please read it right away”. The story assembled through emails and then elaborated on at a staff meeting was that a student’s father had been released from prison, denied access to his children and was planning to come to Castillo and take them. He was described as unstable and dangerous. There was an extra cop assigned to the school for those days. The classroom teachers of the two children of this man were given special instructions. I had coincidentally planned a field trip on one of those days. I had to call the school before I left our destination to return to campus and we had a police escort off the bus and into the Castillo building. The lock down ended by a confrontation with police. The parent had a weapon and was shot by police a few blocks from the school.

We had students whose families were directly impacted by violence. In my time at Castillo two of my junior high students had a brother killed by a drive by shooting. One family’s father was killed by a drive by while feeding the family dog. He had three children at the school. I’m certain that there was much we didn’t hear about as well.
Police would call the school when there was any kind of police activity within certain proximity of the school. Once, one of our custodians saw bullets fired into the irrigation water and we went on lock down. There was violence around us but I never saw it firsthand. The students had much more direct exposure. I just heard the stories and read about it in the papers. I drove home to my suburban neighborhood after work as did all the teachers.

Canada’s work focuses on providing high quality educational opportunity to youth in Harlem. He works in the schools with family and students. He saw a huge glaring need that he personally understood and felt compelled to address. His work is one of providing hope and opportunity to children who don’t have much. In this way, his work is one that indirectly addresses the inner spirit.

The writer Robert Bly (1990) devoted a good deal of his work directly toward issues of the spirit as it applied to what he felt were the unique and neglected needs of males specifically. He identified elements missing from contemporary male culture that he thought were essential to transition from boyhood to healthy adulthood—referring to emotional, physical and spiritual health. According to Bly, one of these missing elements involves experience that includes some kind of physical trial or test. He refers to this in terms of initiation and as a necessary means to become aware of one’s inner resources (strengths and capabilities) (p. 47).

The concept of initiation has been identified as an important missing element from the lives of many contemporary young people both male and
female. In response to increasing recognition of their value, initiations are incorporated into a number of programs for youth. I have participated in these. In this context, initiation or rites of passage, address the bridge between childhood and adulthood and situate them in the broader community. Michael Meade (1996), a contemporary of Robert Bly, describes the role of initiation in the following way:

The completion of a conscious transition creates points and moments of wholeness and mutual acceptance. In the ‘ritual moment’ the community accepts its youth completely. That gesture allows the youth to accept themselves as they are and creates their place in the society. (p. xxv)

I would not refer to this dance program as one designed to address the needs of my students inner spirits in the ways described by Bly or Meade. There were no initiation ceremonies and there was no ritual. But to some degree, it could be construed in such terms. Stepping onto a stage and performing dance for the public, takes courage. You are exposed and vulnerable. The material the students performed was not someone else’s. It was original. And, there was a degree of ritual to it. They stood in the wings, waited for their cue, and then went out there, took a risk, exposed themselves to a witnessing community—the audience. Afterwards, that community received them warmly. There is something akin to an initiation in bringing them, through dance and choreography, to a world distant from their own.

Meade (1993) goes on with the following:
When generativity, creativity, generosity, and the capacity to embrace life dry up, the Water of Life has gone underground. At such times, the earth becomes arid, life becomes devoid of meaning, the ground of culture cracks and splits, and gaps develop among peoples and between people and nature. Only water can bring the pieces back together, awaken seeds hidden in the ground, and enliven the parched “Tree of Life.” (p. xxv)

I think in my own way, I felt as Meade describes “dried up.” Being influential in helping my students access or draw material from their own spirits, which were so full of life, helped me inadvertently maintain a connection to my own. Through this reciprocity I think we awakened and enlivened each other although this too was accidental.

The work with these poles and boards remained interesting for quite a while. In the afternoons students came into the studio for a pick up game. I never knew just who would show up. They hauled out the plywood and inspected the tips on the poles. Some were beginning to break down. “You’re going to have to get some more of these.” Juan said to me. “These aren’t going to hold out.” They started calling out directions. Having grown a little tired of the previous day’s accomplishments; they turned their attention in new directions.

At one point they wanted to find a way to turn the boards parallel to the ground while someone was hanging on them—they wanted to do it from the point at which Jesus had scrambled up and was hanging from the top. They tipped the plywood very gradually but Raul had to jump off again and again so as not to
crush his peers who were holding it. It was very tricky but they figured out a way to do it. Raul was small in stature but incredibly athletic and nimble. I pictured him as a future jockey. He became a great ham as he danced on the now horizontal boards. They fine tuned the points of tipping and falling off and incorporated them into their repertoire of things to do with plywood.

We shaped a dance. Perhaps, to be more accurate, we took what we had done with these props and put them in a sequence with music. It wasn’t really a choreographic work with developed theme and intent, but it was a demonstration of my students’ imaginative, fearless and comedic natures. I often let them spill the paint (figuratively speaking) all over the floor and then came back to see what we had, compose and design with it, and then mop up and toss out the excess.

We couldn’t perform this piece at our school because there was no space large enough to do it. We performed it at Arizona State University in the dance theater. The audience, consisting mostly of college dance students and faculty, responded with enthusiastic applause, laughter and hollering. My students basked in their warmth and affection. I think they were a breath of fresh air at the university and the university was a place of wonder for my students. The Castillo principal at the time came to the performance. He’d never seen what we did and was the first principal to come and watch one of our performances. He said, “It’s pretty nerve wracking being a principal and watching these kids out there doing that.”
“Boys don’t dance!” We’re reminded by the opening passage. “It’s faggy and prissy.” But these boys did dance and they did so expressively and at times with real passion. The negative stereotypes of male dancers, as the opening passage exemplifies, were alive and well at Castillo. Somehow these boys were able to bypass the crippling stereotype associated with boys dancing. I cannot say that I fully understand how or why this was the case.

Doug Risner (2002), a dancer himself, speaks to the subject of homophobia in dance: “Male teens in dance are participating in an activity that immediately casts doubt on their masculinity and heterosexuality. Instead of dispelling suspicion, their dance talents invite speculation about their sexual orientation” (p. 68).

Most of these students were Hispanic—the cultural nexus for the notion of machismo. As inner city minorities they lived life on the margins already. Somehow they were able to dodge the powerful threat of the effeminate stereotype associated with male dancers.

The girls had different issues to deal with around dance.

The Girls

When I started teaching at Castillo I noticed that most of the junior high aged girls either sat around at recess talking or strolled around the playground in groups talking. Most were not athletic. In fact there was something of a stigma attached to girls and athleticism. Little girls played physically and were athletic (kickball, softball, tag, running races, jump rope), but older ones were not. The
older girls disregard for physicality separated them from little girls. A lack of interest in athleticism seemed to be associated with maturity. This was not 100 percent the case but enough so that I noticed it. Boys were involved in team sports. Girls were to a very minimal degree by comparison. The physicality that was most often expressed by girls revolved around attractiveness.

The dance that was considered “dance” was hip hop which has a strong sexual component and is associated with maturity and being cool. For girls to experience physicality and focus their physical selves on something other than attractiveness was a challenge. I didn’t know how to address it. So I didn’t.

Boys who danced had to contend with negative associations - homophobia—a worry of being perceived as effeminate. But the boys had a degree of comfort with physicality in the form of athleticism. I tried to frame it and just move it into the studio. But most of the girls did not have that physical vocabulary.

Girls who danced experienced physicality in new ways. The girls’ sense of sexual identity was also threatened but in a different way than the boys. For the junior high aged girls, hip hop was a dance form and culture they admired and yearned to be a part of. That’s what dance class was supposed to be. It was associated with maturity, being cool and part of a hip older and revered crowd. Hip hop dance was cutting edge, risqué, angry, performed by men and woman who move with a sexual and aggressive movement vocabulary. Sexual maturity is
“hip” especially as it is depicted in pop culture, of which hip hop is now a part—as well as music videos, commercials and print media. Being a little girl is not.

Working on plies, body alignment, stretching, energy and space was an unknown movement vocabulary that didn’t have a place in their ideas of dance. The hip hop dancer was an ideal to aspire to. When they learned that I didn’t even know how to do hip hop they were disappointed.

Physical attractiveness and body image are complex subjects that pre-adolescent and adolescent girls seriously wrestle with. The whole topic is saddled with cultural history and expectation. Naomi Wolf (1992) addresses this: “The female body is always in need of completion, of man-made ways to perfect it. The Rites of Beauty offer to fire the female body in the kiln of beauty to purge its dross, to give it its ‘finish’” (p. 94). Wolf’s depiction of the female body as requiring alteration and improvement is a sensibility that girls understand long before they reach maturity.

During my first several weeks at Castillo, the junior high girls mostly leaned against the walls or sat on the counters in their street clothes talking with each other, using the mirrors for make-up while keeping one ear semi tuned to me. They were a little bit interested and a little bit curious as to what I was all about. But they made it clear that whatever went on between us wasn’t going to be gentle and cooperative. As I said earlier, asking them to take off their shoes was a huge thing. It was as if I’d asked them to take off their clothes. There was a clear division between what they’d say to me and what was said among
themselves, which was often in Spanish. I was an adversary but I didn’t know why. I was hired to teach dance. I was attempting to teach dance. My requests of them which seemed so minimal to me, were responded to as if I was from another planet. They gasped. They laughed. They pointed

I started teaching after the school year had already begun and didn’t have time to decorate my studio. I thought the girls might want to help with that. I got large sheets of butcher paper and asked them to outline each others body with markers. I had done this in workshops before and students liked it. The girls happily laid down and outlined each others body. They were to either leave the drawings as outlines or fill them with designs or clothe them as they wanted and then we would put them on the walls. But it was more interesting to add detailed secondary sex characteristics to the forms along with some tattoos and Eastside gang signs. Montserrat decided Ariana’s outline would benefit from a hermaphroditic addition. That caught on. They drew huge breasts on each others outline. “Alright, so much for this idea. I’m throwing these out.” I said. “And we were finally having some fun in here.” Cintia protested.

I knew dance teachers had preceded me. I imagined they wore dance clothes. Then I heard that the teacher who immediately preceded me, taught ballroom dance—so she wouldn’t have worn leotards and tights. The girls spoke Spanish and talked about me in my presence. I’d ask them how to say this or that in Spanish and they’d teach me the wrong word—a word that would make a fool of me if I used it. They didn’t like me. But I also knew it wasn’t entirely personal
because they didn’t know me. Regardless, it made me uncomfortable. It was
difficult being disliked. But, we all showed up everyday regardless of what we
thought. One can only be on guard for so long. It gets old and something else
takes its place.

It was when we started having conversations, that the ice started to thaw in
any significant way. A lot of the girls wanted to know who I was. Where did I
live? What did I like to do? Did I have kids? Show me pictures. Was I married?
Why not? What kind of car did I drive? Where was I before Castillo? How come I
was a dancer but didn’t know how to dance? Why did I do this weird stuff? How
much did they pay me to teach? I asked them lots of questions back. They told me
I was too skinny. I didn’t look good and I should put on some weight. Some
offered clothes and make-up suggestions. I would look a lot better if I did this or
that to my hair.

I had a thirteen year old step daughter and a seven year old daughter of my
own at the time and got very similar advice at home. Blunt advice. I’d ask how an
outfit looked and it was not unusual to get, “It looks horrible!” as a response.

“Thanks guys.”

I was used to girls.

One of my fourteen year old students had a newborn baby. She’d talk
about how the baby was up in the night and she was so tired. She was only at the
school for a few months before she left.
Several students I worked with in junior high had babies in high school. They brought their babies to Castillo to show me. Because many high schools accommodate students with babies, they were able to stay in school. Some stayed and some didn’t. There was a group of four girls I worked with at Castillo who made a pact in high school to have babies at the same time. And they did.

One of the early points of connection emerged when several strong personalities wanted tips to get in shape like Beyonce and Christina Aguilera. I showed them how to target specific body areas. It just so happens that dance hits all physical areas so learning various toning exercises ended up being dance exercises. I built a warm up sequence and put it to music. As we did it, I commented on technique and timing. The corrective comments I’d offer made them realize I knew what I was talking about. They felt muscles they hadn’t felt before. A small adjustment brought a large sensation. There were lots of dramatic moans and groans and laughing. They were doing a dance warm up even though it was based on making their bodies look good. It was brief, but a beginning.

This experience with the girls was similar to what happened with the boys. An interest in movement happened by chance. They needed to get to know me and they needed to trust me. The strength of the associations they had about dance diluted somewhat and made room for other ideas about dance. Of course it wasn’t dance anyway. It was something else that happened to involve movement.

The dance experience with the boys that had a break through character to it was the dance with poles and boards. For the girls there were two experiences
that served as major turning points - that brought them into the dance work in bold ways.

Creativity often came out in unconventional ways and at unpredictable times. I wasn’t able to count on its expression at a given time as it did not necessarily emerge when beckoned. At Castillo this meant it sometimes squeezed out around the edges unexpectedly.

There were times when material arose from students screwing around and being completely off task. I can remember getting very angry and yelling at students for completely ignoring me or seeming hell bent on de-railing class or undermining any sense of class control. However, there were incidents when that belligerence just happened to bear some very clever ideas. I couldn’t stay angry when an interesting creative tidbit grabbed our attention. I remember students poking fun at me later for getting so mad at them.

For example, I had a set of cupboards in the studio where I kept general supplies and personal items like my purse and a private tea and snack supply. I didn’t want students rummaging around in it. But one day two girls were busily doing something back there. It was time for class to start and I said, “Come on girls. You need to get away from the cupboard. It’s time to start.” They said, “Ok” but didn’t move, which was typical. They were giggling in that contagious, uproarious way adolescent girls do while continuing to fool around in the closet utterly oblivious to me. I got irritated that they were not only ignoring me but
distracting the rest of the class. I raised my voice. No, I yelled at them to stop
what they were doing and join the class right now.

“Ms. B., don’t have a fit!” Citlalli said with a sarcastic saccharine smile,
thoroughly amusing the rest of the class who of course laughed. I was ready to
charge over there and slam the cupboard shut.

Then several people started pointing and laughing at them excitedly. I
couldn’t see what they were doing. Yesenia walked toward me. She looked like a
bizarre cartoon creature. Citlalli had stuck a basketball into the hood of Yesenia’s
sweatshirt, placed it on her head and zippered it up over her face. So, what we
saw was a distorted elongated torso shape with an oversized orange bobbling
sphere for a head.

“Wait Yesenia!”

Citlalli yelled and ran over to her with a little beret. Another student put a
scarf on her. The students were laughing and yelling out things for her to do.

“Put you hands on your hips” “Cross your arms. Look pissed.” “Walk like
a gangsta” “Bust a move” “throw some signs” “Go sit in Ms. B’s chair” “Here,
pretend you’re reading this book.” “Go walk down the hall.” A student went over
and tapped the basketball (head). It fell over on the shoulder like it was
disembodied.

Maritza, a former student, commented on her impressions of this idea. “I
remember when we had the basketball heads. That was so cool. I was like, oh Ms.
Bendix is crazy. And then when we started doing it, I was like, oh my god this is going to be so cool. I can’t wait till everybody sees it” (personal interview, 2009).

The girls seized on this idea and created a series of dances based on it. They created stories and characters. I placed a small empty box in one student’s hood so there were round and square head characters. I put a circular plastic cookie container packed with scarves into a hood. So the audience saw a roundish shape with the hoods opening closed down tight and a swatch of brightly colored scarf dangling out. The dancer could pull them one at a time. Then I packed it full with one swatch of silky fabric that was about ten yards long. The dancer delicately pulled and pulled and pulled. I mounted a set of chimes into a box that a dancer plunked with a small mallet as a means of communicating. A student suggested putting a cell phone in one. I did and called it during performance. I put a closet push on battery light in one. The character communicated by pushing her own light on and off. I put strings of clear beads into one that spilled out and looked like tears. It went on and on. We wove tales with these wacky characters.

This describes a happy outcome and benevolent acknowledgement of the creative nature of children. It was by no means always like that. The giggling girls and the rude behavior were not always met with my appreciation. But what’s important here is that, on a regular basis, their creative ideas were indeed interesting, and drove the process. A number of the ideas were not outcomes of my lessons or things I was directing. They were entirely creative side events of their own.
The girls who hatched the basketball head character were just playing around. I could have easily gotten angry, stormed over to them and insisted they put the stuff away and stop what they were doing. I could have easily kicked them out of class for the rude comment. And perhaps on a different day I would have. But when I saw it, I was instantly intrigued. Regardless of the fact that I was irritated at them, their invention was clever.

After a well received performance with this odd assortment of characters Citlalli said to me in an almost scolding tone, “Aren’t you glad we were in there fooling around in your closet that day?”

The following are remarks about that dance from Tomika, a former dance student:

Tomika: Once we got creative—we thought we were just being funny—but then everybody was like, ‘Oh no. That was great. That was great!’ And we were like, Oh we just thought we was being funny—you know, it really came from nowhere. Like a lot of dances came from nowhere.

Susan: I asked what she meant by, nowhere?

Tomika: What is nowhere? Good question. Well to me, nowhere can be anything because like I read a book and everything—well, it was a short story—and the lady was like most of the time when people do nothing that’s when they’re really doing something. And I had to think, what does that mean? She was like in your free time if you’re
doing nothing what are you doing? You’re thinkin’. And if you get the opportunity to think what are you doing? You’re planning. And I was like, oh, ok, ok. So, like in basketball heads when we did that, I was thinking like, what am I supposed to go out here and do? I was kinda shocked—like what am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to do? But I got out there and it was like, it just came naturally to me. Whatever happened happened. It just flowed throughout my body.

(personal interview, 2009)

Another comment from Tomika:

So, in the 7th grade year I didn’t know what to do. Oh, come up with a piece and I’m like, I don’t know what to do. So when I got there and I was like, man I don’t know what to do and I didn’t have nobody to work with. And we had to do a duet. Jess [DART dancer] was like, I can work with you. I was like, oh, ok. So we kind of just—whatever music came on and whatever started happening just started happening and I was kind of thinking like, oh man I don’t know what to do, I don’t know what to do—but, because I’m a thinker—I can dance and I can think. But thinking and dance do not go together—’cause when I don’t think—or when I don’t think it works better.” (personal interview, 2009)

The potential for development of choreographic ideas, existed above and beyond behavioral problems. The behavior problems were just a sort of noise.

Without the student’s input and their idea generation we would not have had such
creative lively outcomes. Ideas of any type have a destiny similar to seeds dispersed by the wind. You don’t know where they’ll end up or if they’ll germinate.

On the part of the girls, the “noise” had its own character. There was a type of hostility on the part of some of the girls toward me that was unnerving. I didn’t like it. I didn’t understand it and I didn’t know what to do about it.

There was one girl in particular, Clara, who had strong antipathy for me. But, ironically she continued to participate in dance. She participated with DART and worked and performed with guest choreographers. She performed with just the Castillo students as well. But, her relationship with me was consistently hostile, regardless of whatever effort I made to shift it. It became something of a sport to her. I didn’t like her icy demeanor. I think she could tell I was befuddled by it. But again, it wasn’t totally personal because she didn’t know me well. We didn’t have enough of a relationship or history for it to be personal.

She was very social and was usually with friends. She took pleasure in saying hurtful things to me. I really had to bite my tongue because it was obvious she wanted a reaction. Quietly ignoring rude remarks was not a strength of mine. I wasn’t always able to do it. She liked to tell me how much more she liked other Castillo teachers and how much better they were than me. She regularly commented on the stupid nature of a movement activity often doing so by speaking loudly to other students while I was near. She wouldn’t make eye contact with me. She told me how much more she liked the ASU dance professors
than me. They were so much better at what they did than I was. When I asked her
why she stayed in dance if she disliked it so much, she said, smiling, “I don’t
know. I like getting out of school” and ran to join her friends.

But she continued being involved in the dance program. The Castillo girls
who participated with DART really enjoyed being with the ASU dancers. I think
the ASU dancers loved feeling so valued. They loved being in a setting where
they just had to be themselves. The relationships developed naturally. There was a
sweetness between them that seemed borne of the age difference. Clara enjoyed
the ASU students. Her dislike of me was masked when the ASU and Castillo
students were all together. She worked with guest choreographer Marlies Yearby
and was involved in developing choreography.

One year Clara was cast in Romeo and Juliet. The drama teacher and I co-
directed it and it was full of movement sequences. We performed it at the
Herberger Theater Center. Clara played the character of Juliet’s nurse. She had a
number of fairly long speeches which she memorized well. We did the show five
times—two day shows for district schools and three night performances. The
students’ performances strengthened over the course of the run, Clara’s included.

After the show on the last night of the performance she was backstage
crying. The drama teacher spoke to her and she was upset because it was all over.
She wasn’t going to be able to do the show again. He had a much better
relationship with her than I. I never understood her hostility. What I do know is
that she was the oldest of five children and had quite a lot of responsibility at
home. Her mother spoke no English and her father was out of the picture. I tried to contact Clara while doing these interviews and she didn’t respond.

As I mentioned earlier, most of them knew hip hop and dance from music videos, and some knew Latin social dance and some had participated in Ballet Folklorico when they were younger, which was offered occasionally after school by some of our classroom teachers. There were some grossly distorted impressions of dance, but no direct prior exposure. Their knowledge of ballet was a tiny morsel. Many students would put their hands overhead, touch their fingers together to the crown of their head, pick up one foot and hop in a circle claiming they were a ballerina. It was a joke but reflected the extent of their dance knowledge

They were not influenced by ideas of how dance should look because, at least at the beginning, they had never seen contemporary dance. They just knew that taking off their shoes, doing plies, bending over, stretching and doing movements with strange names was entirely too weird. Additionally there were comments like, “I’m not gonna pull my hair back cause it’s gonna to mess it up,” “My mother says I can’t take off my shoes because I’ll get sick,” “I can’t get on the floor today because my pants are new and they’ll get dirty,” “I have a skirt on so I can’t participate,” “I’m tired. I don’t wanna do anything.” There was no way they would have been caught dead in dance clothes.

I stopped wearing leotards and tights early on, opting for more sports type gear. I stopped using dance language. I didn’t even call my class dance anymore.
The junior high performance class was called *Athletic Movement*. I initially coaxed them in there telling them it would be a lot like PE and an easy grade. For the boys, this meant maybe doing something like sports. For the girls, I think it meant a class that wasn’t very serious. These decisions seemed to be the beginning of a détente.

At some point, something shifted in me. I stopped looking at the students in comparison to my idea of what dance was, to the dance knowledge and experience I carried inside of me. They were young people moving. An appreciation emerged for the movement I *saw* in them rather than a kind of movement I was looking for. It sprang from a new emerging personal aesthetic, a new way of looking at movement and thinking about it. Mary Starks Whitehouse (2003), a professional dancer and pioneer in dance therapy, describes her thought processes as she transitions through different phases of her own attitudes toward dance and movement experience:

As I looked at the modern dance of most concerts and classes in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, it seemed to me increasingly stereotyped in general content and form, increasingly skill-oriented. It had, in many ways, become an activity to be learned and I could perceive very little attempt to further its original impetus, which had consisted in the basic discovery that the dancer had something humanly significant to say. (p. 58)
According to Whitehouse (2003), whatever was “humanly significant to be said” was overshadowed by the codification of the form of modern dance itself which emphasized skill building and established content and form (p. 58). Because this was not at all an issue for my students, they had an unbeknownst to them, freedom to discover and invent anew.

Whitehouse (2003) continues:

Together we had to suspend a specific image of dancing and of my teaching them to dance in favor of the discovery of their own bodily condition, their own attitudes, assumptions and feelings in the experience of themselves moving. Then came another clue; we needed to know the something in Man that dances. Dance does not belong to dancers, it belongs to Man—and always has. (p. 59)

Something let go in me. My own impressions and adherence to “dance” unraveled and I saw my students differently and uniquely. As Whitehouse says above, I had to suspend my image of dance and of my teaching so that they could experience themselves moving. In this process, we (students and I) went into unknown territory. In this way, we were adventurers together. In this way both the students and I contributed to the curriculum in something of a collaboration. In this way, we were all artists and curriculum builders.

The second major experience that happened with the girls took place in the making of the dance, Snapshots. The entire dance was about teenaged experience. The students were often friends with each other. There were dramas between
them, hurt feelings, fights and tears and close bonds. One day I was coaxing them to stop there pre-class chatter. The chatter was high energy. I kept saying, “Come on, let’s start class”. The more I asked them to stop their conversation and start class, the more some of them whined at me in protest. I said, ok just keep whining but whine big. Whine really big! A few responded to the invitation. Then more joined in. They whined big and loud. The volume and intensity of the whining escalated and it became a case of one upping the other. The class roared with whining moaning teenagers.

For some reason, I was interested in cluster arrangements. I put the whiners in a tight cluster. They were agreeable. It was fun to do something they were usually told to stop. They slouched and pouted and made wretched hateful faces. One person cued them when to stop and start. When they stopped, their bodies went to a neutral standing posture. When they whined they heaved and sighed and rolled their eyes. Then they’d snap back to neutral. I asked a student to step out and act as choir director. They did a whining chorus with a solo, a duet and tone modulation all of which responded to the choir directors cues. This began Snapshots.

The cluster went on to portray various stereotypes about teenagers. There was a narrator who spoke directly to the audience about the ways teens are viewed and what they have to endure as the students went through various characters. The narrator spoke with a kind of intimacy toward the audience. The narrator said, “some people think we’re scary”. Two or three students aggressively push
through the group like tough guys—like little gang bangers and throw threatening gestures and mean expressions at the audience. The rest of the group take on their own mean still postures. Then they return to neutral.

Then the narrator said, “Some people think we’re idiots.” They pull great draws of gum out of their mouths, twirl their hair, stare into space, make goofy faces. And then, back to neutral.

The narrator says, “Some people just don’t get what it is that’s soooo funny” They all fall over each other laughing, knee slapping, high fiving. Between each characterization, the faces and body of the group snap back to a neutral standing posture.

The narrator says, “And then there’s the daily drama.” One girl drops to the floor sobbing. Another jerks her body away in outrage, crossing her arms. One snaps her wagging finger in another’s face. A few start mock fighting. “And there’s always romance.” A few boys and girls pair off. A girl comes and pushes one of the other girls away, taking her place, slinging the boys arm around her shoulder. The extracted girl does the same to another girl. A series of dramas happen. The girls are running the show here. The guys are rather inert. The girls direct all the romantic action. They’re very funny. They fine tune and adjust it endlessly. The audience loves them. Their gestures are subtle but they read well.

This dance had many sections—this being just one. The girls participated enthusiastically in constructing the dance. I certainly didn’t know enough about the fine points of teen experience to create it. I offered structural and
organizational ideas but they filled it in with their own material. The girls took charge. They really made this dance happen

Tomika was a character in this dance one year and the narrator the next. She made the following comments about it. She was 17 years old during this interview:

Tomika: My role was where we had to, the first thing was “so people think we’re mean” and I was like, ok I can do that. I can do that—you’re like, No you have to be meaner. Why do I have to be meaner? It’s like I thought that was mean and attitude enough and then some people thought we were dumb so. It was basically the teenage life but summarizing it up in an artistic way. In a stereotyped way. What people think teens are. And then my role, the second role for 8th grade year was I was the speaker. I was the person telling the story so I decided to make it—oh yeah, some people think we’re mean. You know, I brought my character into the person. I brought who I am to that person and I made a lot of people laugh. I made a lot of people like what they saw.”

Susan: Did doing it make you think differently about the stereotypes about teenagers?

Tomika: It did because I was thinking like, ok why do people think we’re mean? But then I had to think, as a teenager growing up it’s kinda hard because some people do look at us from our outside appearance
instead of getting to know the person. And we do kind of come off aggressive. Kind of mean cause of some of the stuff we say. And then—but after - I was like—wait wait, you know I’m the kind of person if I walk into a crowd I’m not gonna be the first person to fight. But somebody might think I’m mean or have an attitude but afterwards when they get to know me I start to open up and people start seeing me laugh and people are like, ok you’re not as mean as I thought you were. (personal interview, 2009)

In the last section of this dance the narrator says after she places three separated small piles of small stones on the diagonal “then there is courage”. Three dancers walk on stage and sit down by the rocks. They slowly place the rocks in a circle around them. The rocks are white. The stage is black marley. The dancers assume postures of isolation and pain. They curl into themselves, heads dropped. Some have hands over their heads. Some of them rock their bodies. Some shift these postures rapidly, agitated.

Three other dancers come out, each attempting to connect (emotionally) with the one encircled in stones. The encircled ones shun them, turn away, hide their faces, wave them away angrily. The ones outside try to connect with the dancers in stones but are rejected. They get frustrated. They walk away angrily. As the last one is leaving the stage, a hand reaches out from a curled up body with a buried face. The dancer returns, moves a few stones and tenderly touches the dancer, carefully picks them up and places them over their shoulder. The offstage
dancers make a path of the white stones. Each pair, with a classmate on their shoulder, stand waiting until all are lifted. They slowly walk down the stone pathway and offstage. I wept many times when I saw them do this.

This was a personal dance for many of the students. It required very little coaching to get them into character. My directorial comments to them were mostly about stage facings and technical aspects of the lift. The characterization came easily. Girls lifted girls. Girls lifted boys and boys lifted girls and boys. We did this dance several times with different casts.

I mentioned Robert Bly in the Boys section and his attention to what he saw as the neglected needs of the spiritual life of boys and men. The concept and practice of initiation was identified as a tool to facilitate such connection. It has been identified as an important and missing element in the lives of both male and female youth. Initiation or rites of passage, address the bridge between childhood and adulthood (Bly, 1990, p. 146).

I was invited to design an initiation for a thirteen year old girl who had experienced a recent trauma. I gathered all the adult women in her life, asked each of them to bring a physical object that symbolized something important about moving into womanhood, that they could speak about. The young girl stood and faced each woman individually. The woman spoke directly to the child about the object she brought, set it on the ground, took the child’s hand and asked her to step over it. Then the next woman did the same thing until all were finished. The variety of objects brought was amazing. One woman brought bubbles and had the...
girl jump over them—describing the importance of lightness and levity. One woman brought small construction tools, hammers, screwdrivers, pliers and spoke about learning to use her own inner tools. Another woman lay on the ground, told the girl to step over her body—and explained that the girl’s generation was to surpass the current one—be freer, wilder and bolder. About ten women were involved. The women’s words were placed in a book and given to the child.

In the Castillo community (and most Hispanic communities) there is an observance called a *Quinceanera*. It is a rite of passage for fifteen year old Latina girls. It is a community and family celebration full of tradition and meaning when a young girl is symbolically escorted into womanhood by her family and the event is witnessed by her community. I started getting invitations to *Quinceaneras* after some time at Castillo.

**Curricular and Artistic Process**

Sometimes, when working on dances, the students were quite agreeable. Sometimes they would do something I asked them to do deliberately poorly and wait for me to get frustrated and lose my temper. Sometimes I would ask them to do something and they would leave to use the bathroom and be gone for a long time or never come back. Sometimes, some would like an idea and try it out while others weren’t interested. I’d wait to see how the wind blew. If something caught on, the resisters could be influenced by the others and I wouldn’t have to coax them.
The following describes a range of emotional dynamics between the students and me. There was my own desire for creative experience. There was also anxiety on my part, stubbornness on the students’ part and a volley of power dynamics.

Rehearsals in general can be painstaking and boring. Significant time is spent ironing out details. There is a lot of repeating material, mastering material and trying it in many different ways and doing it over and over and over. Dancers are the choreographers’ palette. Often a lot of sketching is done before a final version is arrived at. I shaped dances. I was the rehearsal task master. I was the disciplinarian.

There were times when the students were lazy or just didn’t feel like rehearsing. I knew how to structure dances and they did not. With a performance date looming I knew how much leeway we had for wasting time. I knew what was needed to get them to a performance shape. Not infrequently, if torpor set in I’d say some variation on the following; “If you’re going to be in this dance get up and get to work. Otherwise you’re not going to perform. This is what you’re graded on in dance class. If you don’t perform you’ll get an “F”.” I’d call their bluff. They’d call mine. “So flunk me. I don’t care.” Or, “I don’t care. I hate this class. It’s boring!” Or “I’d rather play basketball anyway.” Or “I’m going to transfer—I want to go to Mr. T’s class. His class is fun.”

A number of factors contributed to this less than grace filled exchange. I was frustrated and throwing my weight around because I could. The students
pushed back. John Dewey would roll over in his grave. It was, however, a response to, exasperation, exhaustion and a complete absence of imagination. I was out of ideas. It was my own version of a tantrum. I wanted things to happen.

Many teachers employed such stern disciplinarian tactics. It was not at all out of the ordinary. In fact, teachers who were strict disciplinarians were considered by many to have more orderly classrooms and better classroom management. They didn’t waste time, take any crap and they got things done. By contrast, the teachers who were less inclined to be stern, were described by others as wishy washy, inconsistent and disorganized. It wasn’t unusual to walk by a classroom and hear a teacher yelling angrily at their class, especially in the junior high wing. Sometimes it was the less strict teacher who was frustrated and venting. But more often it was the disciplinarians yelling. I was behaving like one of those teachers.

The Seattle Children’s Theater I described earlier made a positive and nurturing emotional climate a priority within their school. It was by choice and design. This choice was not made at Castillo although there were many people working there who were incredibly good hearted people and cared about the students. It was simply not the disciplinarian climate or culture of the school. Had I directed angry frustrated behavior at students at the Seattle Children’s Theater, I’m sure there would have been parent complaints and I would have been reprimanded if not let go altogether. Had the Seattle model of discipline been dropped into Castillo it would have been regarded as touchy feely, coddling and
lacking backbone. I was playing the tough disciplinarian at Castillo because that card was in my hand. It was not in my hand in Seattle.

The following section describes the emotion present in my own personal longing for artistic engagement.

Cooperation by my students was hard to come by and I would get worn out doing gymnastics to get them to work with me. I knew there was potential in a movement idea we were trying to develop and what the students were capable of. If I could just coax it out enough so that they could see it too, we’d get some traction. They would get excited and I wouldn’t need to do the heavy lifting. It needed to be worked which required discipline and practice which was, at times, the absolute last thing they wanted to do.

My own desire to be choreographically active, felt thwarted by their behavior. In my own internal world, it was through these students that I got an art hit. Who they were, how they worked and the dances we created had become artistically exciting to me. They too valued the creative energy that got cooked up in the studio. So there was frustration. Additionally the idea of doing my job as just a job—with out some passion or excitement or genuine bubbling of interest, felt deadly. I was pulling out the big guns.

There are a few things going on here. One was simple exhaustion. I worked alone. There was no entity in place to which I could say, I’m overwhelmed. I’m exhausted. I need some help because there was nobody familiar with dance that could have helped. Had I spoken to my principal about
feeling overwhelmed, he would have told me to not take the kids to perform. Cancel the date. Stop rehears ing after school. Because the stress was self imposed, (I put this program in place), it was easily removed. They were dealing with the stress of AIMS testing, pulling up ghastly reading, writing and math scores and the looming threat of a possible take over by the state. My stress was small and easily remedied by comparison.

And on one level, even if it had been available, I saw asking for help as a sign of weakness, as whining and complaining. Of course this was my own ridiculous pride but there is also a quiet understanding that good teachers work above and beyond their teacher duties, take on extra work, contend with exhaustion and do so without added compensation. If a lawyer works extra hours on a case, the client is billed for those hours. With the exception of coaches and certain specialized trainers, elementary teachers do not charge for billable hours of work as a lawyer or doctor may. When we were close to a performance date I worked with students at all times I could, during lunch, during preparatory periods and after school.

But fatigue doesn’t excuse or fully explain other influences behind such a crude disciplinarian approach on my part. I wanted choreographic ideas explored and dances to get made. I wanted performance dates to be met and students prepared. I wanted the creative essences within my students to be drawn out and take form. I think there was also a degree of desperation in me that the students could smell. There was something about making dances that felt terribly
important to me. At times the directorial methods I employed made for happy outcomes. But at other times, as mentioned, they were nothing to be proud of, as they were not only crude and lacking imagination they were a wielding of power because I had it.

School is a power system many of us know because many of us came through its ranks. And now, I was participating in that system in a capacity with some power of my own. I liked to think I was not swept up in it—that I was aware enough and smart enough to keep it in check but truth be told, it is a pervasive system of management that makes its way into deep recesses of our lives. I enjoyed thinking of myself as clearly above and highly aware of the shortfalls and problems in the power structure of school and therefore one who would not employ what I saw as crude, power wielding, unenlightened ways of dealing with children.

But as one with power within a hierarchy, I recognized its ability to serve me and I used it. I can’t say this was conscious and god knows I’m not proud of it. I was wildly throwing my weight around. My students responded to this use of power by becoming surly and even less cooperative.

And I think, secondarily, some of them wanted to see if I was capable of standing up and taking on a tough, iron fisted persona. It was seen by some as strength. I was a woman directing both boys and girls. I was telling them what to do with their bodies. I was asking them to trust me. If I was formidable and tough
they respected me and could count on me. At times I felt that provocation was intended to see what I would do.

As a parent I remember swearing I wouldn’t parent in ways I experienced as my own mother’s serious parental shortcomings. I would always be patient, thoughtful and kind. But in reality we reflect back what we experienced whether we’re conscious of it or not and stress can be a great catalyst. I was shocked to recognize myself behaving in ways my mother had - ways I swore I never would. The way we live and grow up has a powerful influence.

As a teacher I swore I would never be insensitive. I would be a caring and likeable person who was available to my students. As the image of parenting, so it was in teaching. What we live and work amidst are powerful influences. I conducted myself in ways I swore I never would.

It would have been much better for the dance program to have been weighted alongside rather than below other subject areas. Had it been valued by the administration and regarded as other subject areas were, there would have been less need for arm twisting of students and other teachers to make things happen. As it was, I had to impart the seriousness, value and importance of dance by myself. I was the cheerleader and the coach.

On a number of occasions it was not only the students who had to be cajoled into cooperation. It was also classroom teachers. Students knew that dance, as all the arts, had nowhere near the significance within our school culture that academic subjects had. It would have been enormously helpful if creativity,
aesthetics and art had a place in the conversation among other subjects. But they didn’t.

Performances and after-school rehearsals were held out as carrots. In the junior high there was a system of academic accountability called the IL (ineligibility list) and the WIL (waiting to go on the ineligibility list.) This list was prominently posted (on the wall by the principal’s office) weekly letting everyone know what a student’s academic status was. If they were below a “C” in any academic subject, they were on the IL. If they were very close to being below a “C” they were on the WIL meaning the fall was imminent. When a student was placed on the IL they could not participate in any after school arts activities, nor could they participate in performances. This created huge frictions. It was not nearly as problematic for choir which had three or four times as many students. But for dance, where people have significant roles that affect the entire dance, such as partnering, or solos, it was a catastrophe. I would argue, lobby, negotiate and go through contortions so a student could perform. Again, had dance been valued on a more even footing this system would not have been developed in this form. Teachers would come down to the studio as we were heading out to perform and announce that so and so was absolutely ineligible to perform and insist that they stay behind.

In response to my protests about these eleventh hour announcements, a time buffer was put in place. If a student fell on the IL within a week of a performance, they were off bounds to classroom teachers. So, in addition to
running my program I needed to stay on top of my student’s academic status. Additionally, classroom teachers would be annoyed at me because they were under pressure to pull these kids’ test scores up while I was engaging them in what many of them perceived as frivolity.

Participation in the performance aspect of the program was all after school and therefore voluntary. I couldn’t demand or insist that they stay. I could strongly underscore its importance, and did so, but I couldn’t require it. They could have walked out whenever they wanted with no repercussions. And some of them did. I fully knew what was required to get the students on stage and they really did not. But then again perhaps they did as they always got themselves to performance shape or at least to a shape where they could manage on stage.

But they so loved performing that after a performance the discord and cranky behavior evaporated. It was all about the performance with much animated commentary on what happened. It was much like a family in that rancor, stress and celebration could all exist together.

The following excerpt is from an interview with a Castillo teacher:

Janet: So, it was a struggle to get those kids to understand they couldn’t quit and they had to be involved. And the principal had a lot of problems with parents calling and kids coming up and saying “I don’t like dance. I want out. I don’t like this. I don’t like the teacher” And she had to say, “No, you made the obligation to be there. You have to stay there”. And what I found happen was the people who were
complaining the most in the middle of the process were the ones in the end who thought it was the best thing that ever happened to them. They don’t remember the struggle. I remember the struggle because I was the person in between you and the principal. The principal would come to me and say “What’s happening down there? Is she yelling at them? Is it too hard for kids to do? They’re complaining about the difficulty of this. Too much rehearsals and can’t she get it done in less amount of time and do the kids really need to come back on Saturday?” I’d say, “Yes they do and don’t let them quit”. I mean you’re telling them that if something gets hard they can quit and that’s not a good life lesson. This is a life lesson here - when they obligate themselves. Where other people are depending on them they have to stay.

Susan: Do you remember a particular situation?

Janet: No, I don’t. But, you know, it happened every year. And when we changed principals, I went into the principal and I said, “Ok now let me explain what’s going to happen.” And I said, “We’ve always done it this way and it always works out in the end so relax. Everything is frazzled. It looks like it’s going to fall apart and we won’t get it done on time. The kids are exhausted. They don’t want to do it. They want to quit, but we just have to stay firm to what we said in the beginning. They need to see it through. But, it was frustrating, even to the
classroom teachers that the kids were complaining. (personal interview, 2010)

The following are comments made by some of the students when asked about the experience of performing. Mariella, a senior in high school at the time of this interview, responded to the question, “Did you enjoy performing?”:

Yes, I enjoyed performing all the time. I think dance even more because it felt different. It felt amazing to be out there—because even though we couldn’t see ourselves from the audience view, you could just feel all of our energy was connected. (personal interview, 2009)

Maritza, also a senior at the time of this interview responded to the same question:

Maritza: I loved performing. I loved it. I miss it so much now. Being out there. It’s just a different feeling and I loved it. I loved it so much.

Even when we were just practicing and like not performing in front of everyone—I still thought like that someone was watching or like. I still got the thrill.

Susan: Can you say what was thrilling—why do you choose the word thrill?

Maritza: Because like you practice and rehearse and rehearse and then finally the day comes and you’re going to show them, like, look what I can do, and you’ve worked so hard and when you’re out there like
your heart’s beating all fast and you can’t wait. You’re out there and
you don’t want it to end. (personal interview, 2010)

Juan, a junior in high school, responded to the same question:

Juan: Oh yes, that was the best part of everything.

Susan: Why?

Juan: Why?—First of all that’s why we practiced, and we have rehearsals
for it. But performing was the part where you can get to show others
everything that you’ve been working on in the past few months. And
after the performance is done it’s just a great feeling to look around
and get all those smiles and to hear people clapping at what you just
did. (personal interview, 2009)

Carlos, an 18 year old at the time of my interview, responded:

I really enjoyed performing. I’ve always liked performing on stage and
being in front of people. But, this is something that was a little different. It
was—first of all, you’re always moving so I liked that. It’s never a huge
slow pace—there’s some numbers that are but you always have to think
about what’s coming next and you’re always moving forward. And it’s not
just you alone. I never had any solo dances but everything else was—it’s a
group thing, there’s different people adding little pieces that make up a
huge beautiful number and I always liked that about it. (personal
interview, 2009)

Jose, a senior in high school, responded:
I loved performing. I just liked the whole thrill of waiting off on the side of the wings and being focused and um, at the end everybody clapping. And during too, the whole like process is a lot of fun. (personal interview, 2009)

These students’ comments suggest they valued being seen and they valued having their hard work (in which they took pride) recognized and appreciated. It is the person themselves that is seen. In dance the person is the work. Ideas come through a living moving person. The person is not represented at a distance through a test, worksheet or paper. I don’t mean to suggest that academic work has some lesser value than art or dance. Obviously, I’m deeply involved in it right now through writing. It is just very different.

Performance was exciting to them. Two of these students used the word “thrill” in their description. Maritza’s explanation of that word choice, “then finally the day comes and you’re going to show them, like, look what I can do, and you’ve worked so hard and when you’re out there like your heart’s beating all fast and you can’t wait. You’re out there and you don’t want it to end (personal interview, 2009)

As a society - as educators, parents and community members - we want young people to develop a work ethic. We want them to work hard, take their work seriously and feel pride in it. These values were all present in these students. There is not another way to get from a nascent idea to a performance on stage other than going through plain hard work. But also of significance is that the work
process involves going into the unknown, into uncertainty a process that aligns with a pioneering spirit, a quintessential American value.

My analysis may include projection since I did a lot of performing myself. I remember loving being on stage because I could forget myself. This was not because I didn’t like myself, but performance offers an opportunity to experience something that feels beyond self. In a strong performance, I remember feeling all my senses heightened and a kind of integration that was far greater than its parts. There was an acute sense of immediacy—of the moment, that transcended time. I was quite shy and had trouble speaking to people but could dance for anyone.

In performance the Castillo students were also clearly separated from me. I wasn’t performing. They owned and brought life to the dances on stage. And on stage, they were their own people. When working on a dance, there is a point at which it almost takes on a life of its own. It becomes its own autonomous entity. A point is reached where it has form and substance, whereas in the process of building it, it’s vague and perhaps heavy in the concept but not yet non substantive in form. It is full of holes and incomplete parts that gradually get clarified and solidified until there is coherence and form. It is a point at which it feels a bit like the dance takes flight. There is certainly an equivalent to this experience in all the arts as well as other endeavors.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Cesar, who was 19 years old at the time of my interview. This excerpt speaks to this aspect of creative process:

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Susan: Can you talk about your experience of putting together dances?

Cesar: Yea, both at Castillo and at ASU the first thing was that impressed me was the studios themselves and seeing everything come together.

Well, at first everything’s a disaster. You start from scratch, you really do.

Susan: What do you mean to start from scratch?

Cesar: To start from scratch would mean just literally sitting in a room and brainstorming. I remember we would do that—just brainstorm what exactly it is we want our dances to look like. What kinds of concepts or moves we wanted to incorporate into the dance. And seeing that come together, because it would usually take about a month or two or three to actually put together an entire dance. Even when you think you’ve perfected something when you’re rehearsing the third month-like it’s still missing something. The process is frustrating but in the end it’s very rewarding knowing that you put all your efforts into it. Everything about rehearsal and performing was pretty exhilarating.

(personal interview, 2009)

We made space for something unknown. There are margins within school structure that allow for flexibility and range. Power is of course, everywhere and we are always in relation to it—in our homes, communities, cultures, defined by age, gender, race, economics etc. etc. The effects of power and politics seep into
every classroom in every school. This underlying momentum described here, had a constant presence and marked the character of the program.

In an interview with former Castillo student, Javier, I asked him if he had a favorite memory. He spoke about performing:

After was “Wow, we did great! That was a great performance. Did you hear the way they clapped and their smiles and…! ” All those things were very good memories. I think I’ll always remember that. The feeling you get before going on stage as well. It’s like you get nervous about not messing up and doing everything you’re supposed to. Those are the most unforgettable experiences I had. (personal interview, 2009)

And in the words of Maritza, also a former Castillo student:

Like you practice and rehearse and rehearse and then finally the day comes and you’re going to show them, like, look what I can do and you’ve worked so hard and when you’re out there like your hearts beating all fast and you can’t wait. You’re out there and you don’t want it to end.

(personal interview, 2009)

Within the small school microcosm of Castillo, the dance students were regarded as adventurers who had been to new places. The younger students came into dance classes and imitated dance moves they had seen performed by the older students. The dancers were big shots at our school. The following comment by a Castillo classroom teacher speaks about this:
If you had playground duty, you saw it. Because when I was out there, I could see kids repeating the movements they had learned in dance class. And they were arguing, “No, that’s not how you do it! This is how you’re supposed to do it?” So it became part of them and they would try things out just like if they would be a teacher at home. They would be a dancer because … they would take what they learned in dance class and show their little brother how to do it. (personal interview, 2010)

**Longing**

My curricular decisions were profoundly impacted by my desire to stay connected to my art. My artistic self and my teacher self sought congruity. Art was identity. Art was spiritual in the sense of its connection to my own spirit. I went into teaching during a difficult period in my life. Teaching was practical and helped me keep my feet on the ground. It became an aesthetic practice and a conduit to make art.

I missed dance. I missed choreographing and I missed the dance world itself. I felt like I was now on the edge of that world; somewhere between inside and outside. I was used to looking out from inside dance. Now I was seeing from a new different vantage point. I worried that I would become a spectator and watch it drift away toward a distant horizon without me. The prospect of that separation was painful. I did not want the annual Christmas card with updates on what I was missing. Longing was there like a toothache. It could be masked but it always came back.
I was a single parent with a full time job. Even if there had been opportunity to dance and choreograph I wouldn’t have taken it. I couldn’t be gone in the evenings. Logistics of childcare were already complicated. Before and after school care had to be arranged as it was. I couldn’t be additionally off dancing. I was tired and my daughter needed me physically with her and I wanted to be there. That was the way it was. It was how our life had unfolded—but, when I went to a dance concert I ached to be back in it. Choreographic ideas still wafted around my brain. I still kept a notebook with movement ideas in it. I took dance class on the weekend.

Dance made me feel like myself. The world of elementary education did not. So I stretched the curriculum to take in some of the dance world I longed for. Dance as I experienced it in public education was very different from the dance world I came from. If my teaching had been confined to just the school studio and school personnel, the curriculum would have been very different. We would have been learning about dance (maybe). We would not have been dancing.

In a way, I think the sense of losing all touch with dance scared me; like my soul or an essential part of me would slip right away if I wasn’t careful. I needed that connection. The intersecting worlds served both the students and me.

I am a dancer down to my bone marrow and in every cell of my body. I bring my students here partly so I can be here too. Studios feel like home to me in a very deep and basic way. Clothing is worn to enable physical motion, rather than contain or disguise it. Space doesn’t tell you where to be or how to be in it.
Dance has settled in a new way in me. I am looking through different eyes. The dancer that I am is transforming, taking in elements I never thought of and thinking about movement and ideas in wholly unanticipated ways. Something is morphing. Something is changing. I am still a dance artist but my palette is different. I am pushing this new type of dance through a membrane into the dance world I used to know. I am in an intermediary space between myself as the former dancer I know and the dancer that awaits me.

I remember taking my students to perform at ASU one point fairly early on. We shared an informal concert space. I remember watching the ASU dancers. They look like classical dancers. They’re trained. Their bodies are finely tuned instruments. Their bodies speak the language of endless studio hours; ballet barre, center work, aerial work, traveling across the floor, stretching and strengthening. But when the Castillo students took the stage, I remember looking at them and feeling like they were, in some way, my family now. I recognized them more than the other dancers.

I have a foot in two worlds, one in art and one in public education. I need to be the person that I am in my work. Otherwise, work feels mechanical and disconnected—lacking a center. I didn’t stop being a dancer because I became a teacher. I am a dancer as a teacher. The pedagogy and curriculum that emerged did so from this position. I long for time spent in the physicality of ideas whether it’s a design idea or a shape idea or an ideological, literary or philosophical one—
it is a kind of knowing, experiencing through the heartbeat, the muscle, sweat and flight of it that compels me. This is what I know dance to be.
Chapter 6:

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the narrative inquiry process used in this project. My research questions were as follows:

1. Why was a population that performs so poorly on tests (a measure of academic and cognitive ability) able to engage with abstract ideas in the obscure medium of modern dance?

2. What circumstances were in place that allowed these students to engage with ideas and develop artistically despite the fact that they were in an institutional setting full of systemic forces that did not understand, support or value creative development?

3. Did involvement in this work influence their perception of themselves as human beings, community members or learners?

4. Does *curriculum by accident* with its inclusion of the unexpected, address a viable educational focus?

Formulation of Questions

I had been thinking about these questions for quite some time. I wondered about the first three throughout my time working with the students but never as potential formal research questions. As I mulled over dissertation topics and arrived at this one, which was actually someone else’s suggestion, these questions were already in my thoughts. They were easily formulated as they had already moved in and out of my mind for quite awhile.
When I began working at the school I had virtually no awareness of students’ academic strengths or deficiencies and on a number of occasions, was surprised to discover that a student I’d worked with for a long time was a special education student or academically struggling. Once the IL (ineligibility list) was instated I became keenly aware of my students’ academic status.

Though Castillo was an arts school, there was little understanding of creativity on the part of school or district administration. The high stakes testing climate was well in place and administrative focus sharpened to address poor academic performance. The arts were peripheral and used as motivational tools.

I was interested in knowing what, if any, influence this work had on the students’ self perception. I was interested in terms of the studio work but also in terms of being out in the greater community away from their neighborhood.

As to the viability of curriculum by accident - it is an idea that will be mulled over and over.

Addressing of Research Questions

In approaching this research, there was a broad range of considerations when focusing on these questions. I was a major participant as were most of the people I interviewed, each with their own full compliment of history and experience and relationships with each other. Clandenin and Connelly (2000) “described narrative inquirers as being in the midst of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, always located somewhere along the dimensions of time,
place, the personal, and the social” (p. 144). The shifting roles of researcher and participant were influential.

In my proposal I mentioned hoping to capture the *narrative within the narrative*, meaning the narrative character of dance through the narrative inquiry process.

**What I Did**

I used my own memories which fit one leg of Clandenin and Connelly’s narrative inquiry triad. I also interviewed ASU and Castillo students, teachers, a principal, dance professors and choreographers. I asked each group a series of structured questions that were open ended enough to allow interviewees to diverge if they were so inclined. I hoped to ask questions that created a frame within which the interviewees “could shape their accounts of their experience” (Clandenin and Connelly, 2000, p. 110). I interviewed five former Castillo girls - now young women and six former Castillo boys, now young men. Additionally I interviewed four former DART dancers who worked with those students, two ASU dance professors, one former Castillo principal, two Castillo teachers and one outside choreographer. I transcribed each interview myself.

During the course of the interviews and in the process of transcription, as well as within the writing process itself, I had an eye out for themes. As I looked over the transcriptions, thematic through lines started to emerge. The themes, *intersections, gender, longing* and *emotion* had a repeating presence that signaled their significance. My thinking started to parallel these thematic choices and they
offered shape and form to the project. I used themes in the most pointed way to structure the narrative chapter. Once these themes were identified, I looked at their significance and influence in more depth.

I interviewed most of the Castillo students at the downtown Phoenix public library but I interviewed two at a coffee shop. I interviewed one Castillo teacher in her home and another at a coffee shop. I interviewed the ASU dance students at coffee shops. I interviewed the ASU professors at a bookstore and at a restaurant. I interviewed the choreographer over the phone and the former principal over the phone.

The following are a list of pseudonyms of interviewees:

- **Castillo Students**: Daniela, Mariella, Maritza, Tomika, Blanca, Juan, Artemio, Carlos, Cesar, Marcos, Jesus
- **ASU Dancers**: Jamie, Brittany, Sasha, Jan
- **ASU Professors**: Sarah, Jessica
- **Castillo Teachers**: Janet, Martha

**Overall Organization**

The larger organization fell into place as it became the *story* of the curriculum development. Use of the term *story* has become widely used. For the purpose of clarity, the use of the term story I’m most drawn to is that described by Robert Coles. In his book *The Call of Stories*, Coles (1989) relates an important personal experience he had as a psychiatric intern under his presiding physician, Dr. Ludwig:
He urged me to be a good listener in the special way a story requires: note the manner of presentation; the development of plot, character; the addition of new dramatic sequences; the emphasis accorded to one figure or another in the recital; and the degree of enthusiasm, of coherence, the narrator gives to his or her account. (p. 22)

I’ve tried to present storied accounts of my students and some of the other people in this work. The writing lent itself to an emplotted presentation. Plot, according to Polkinghorne (1988), refers to “the organizing theme that identifies the significance and the role of the individual events is normally called the ‘plot’ of the narrative” (p. 18). Emplotment, on the other hand, refers to a configuration of events and actions in such a way as to make specific meaning. It is not necessary to organize either temporally or paradigmatically. In writing this document, I moved the plot in many different directions in an emplotted way.

In Chapter 2, I used a narrative voice to illuminate the physical, professional, social and personal settings within which the curriculum formed. I reflected on my own experience within that setting. Chapter 3 situates the curriculum within a broader theoretical and historical framework. Chapter 4 leads the reader to curriculum narratives, which hopefully bring the players and curriculum to life.

**Narrative Inquiry Process**

Life as we come to it and as it comes to others—is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected
upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities.

(Clandenin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18)

By using narrative inquiry I hoped to understand the experience of the people involved in developing the curriculum. I did not choose to follow an analytical, paradigmatic approach to the research because such an approach suggests breaking things apart—looking at them in their component parts as a means of understanding the whole. I wanted to get at process and experience because both seem more suited to bring a deeper understanding of this topic.

Narrative analysis regards narrative as a place where meaning unfolds rather than where it resides. Rather than dropping a stain over the narrative for the purpose of drawing attention to specific elements, narrative analysis allows the eye and mind to travel where it will. The narrative encourages the reader toward a temporal, experiential knowing. Data is synthesized rather than broken into parts. Polkinghorne (1988) articulates this sensibility, “The natural and biological sciences have made use of categorization and typologies as the basis for formal explanation. In the human realm of meaning however, categorizing does not produce the same power of explanation” (p. 25). In the spirit of these words, I’ve chosen narrative inquiry as a method of framing this research.

**Determination of Themes**

Themes became evident through different ways. The theme of *Intersections*, was the easiest and most obvious to identify. Every person I interviewed, with the exception of Deborah Hay, referred directly to intersecting
experience in some way. The various perspectives the interviewees represented spoke about the joining of outside people and contexts with the Castillo students.

The theme of *Emotion* was a little less direct than *Intersections* but still quite discernable. Again, every person I interviewed referred to emotions in some way. The Castillo students talked about feelings as they happened in studio work, in relationships with each other and ASU dancers and choreographers. Many students commented on happiness associated with performing and with audience members’ response afterward. The dance professors talked about the emotional impact of the DART Castillo relationships on their students. Deborah Hay spoke of being moved by the Castillo students. The Castillo teachers commented on the emotional stress students experienced.

During the interviews, many Castillo students mentioned feelings though I asked no direct questions about them. The students brought them up voluntarily. The ASU students also brought up feelings—in terms of relationships, performing and creating choreography together as well as in anticipation of working with the Castillo students.

Additionally my own emotions played a role. This obviously was not something that came from interviews but became evident through the process of going back over the work. The presence of emotion in the work made it more meaningful. I’m referring to emotions in this sense as the ability of the students to feel comfortable to be themselves. I too needed to feel comfortable and this rapport enabled the work to emerge.
The theme of *Gender* was less obvious. Its influence and presence was deeply buried and came into focus through less overt ways. The influence of gender on behavior is subtle and diffuse and something I did not easily recognize. However, my own gender bias and participation in gender stereotypes was brought to my attention in the course of conversation and I saw how it permeated the work. Gender identity is fragile in young adolescents. Boys in dance experience tension associated with homophobia. Girls have strong feelings about the physical image they project. Neither boys nor girls at Castillo were comfortable with me asking them to use their bodies in what felt like weird ways. Classical dance was a form neither girls nor boys could relate to. The Castillo interviewees used language that described their initial exposure to it as foreign and strange. Some of the language described it in almost hostile terms. Issues surrounding gender were buried in this language.

The gender positions were firmly in place when I started teaching. Boys didn’t dance. Girls didn’t do the kind of dance I was teaching. They did hip hop. I tried to appeal to what I thought the boys would like, i.e. strong, aggressive, athletic movement, “masculine” movement. In this way, I participated in perpetuating entrenched stereotypes which became clear to me only after the fact. But, I also couldn’t undo centuries of gender attitudes.

The theme of *Longing* emerged in the course of speaking with all the interviewees and also in going back through my memories. I realized my own desires were a constant note throughout this work. The awareness of this theme
came into focus in the course of writing the narratives in particular. Dance and art were an essential part of my identity. A longing to honor that became a driving factor.

**Crafting the Narrative**

As I stated in the introduction, this is the *story* of curriculum change. The lives through which this curriculum traveled and the contexts in which it happened were vital. I used a narrative form in an effort to paint a more vivid picture of those lives and contexts. I wanted a portrait of experience and process.

The writing process itself led my thinking into nooks and crannies that I was unaware of. I often wrote without sureness of what the final product would look like or where it would take me. The experience of writing became influential in crafting the overall narrative. Energy and information were revealed in the writing and they influenced the overall course of direction. Additionally, the interviews and my own recollection of events, through writing and discussions, influenced the organizational decisions as to how best to shape this story.

Where things happened was important. Physical setting and context situated the curriculum process. The setting (the school and neighborhood) was critical as it was a portrait itself, filled with social and cultural symbol and metaphor. The curriculum and the setting in which it happened could not be separated. So, I chose to portray place. The first part of Chapter 2 is a detailed account of place. But that place was one inhabited by people so I chose a storied, animated representation of it. The people could not be separated from the place.
The sense of place became a collection of places and the way life was lived in them—place as stories that when considered as a unit offer kaleidoscopic vantage points. I felt that only through such a depiction could a sense of the school and community be captured with any sense of fullness. Place stripped of story, or place stripped of life lived in it felt incomplete.

How things happened and who they happened with were important. Representing my own experience of working in the school required an understanding of relationships within the school setting, i.e. administration, teachers, students and community members. Place, or school, was inhabited by life. Life, or people, lived in relationship—therefore it felt necessary to depict the people I wrote about through their relationship to me and each other. Were I to describe them in isolation, a vital dynamic would have been omitted.

Situations such as the stress associated with intensified testing and contexts such as staff meetings were experienced by people and people in relationship to one another. It made sense to me to depict it in those terms.

My own awkward grappling with educational formats such as the lesson plan was important. The lesson plan was metaphoric for broader educational bureaucracy. It was through this or in spite of it that the curriculum developed.

Chapter 3 defines curriculum by accident and situates it in the theoretical canon. The influences that determine our behavior are so often unexamined. The beauty of theory, to me, is that it sheds light on those unexamined forces that are often below the surface of our awareness. In the theoretical portion of this writing
I hoped to find a meeting ground for theory and practice - where theory is lived and practice is theoretically infused. A blending of voices and perspectives (educational theory, improvisational theory, art, personal) lent a textural complexity. I wanted to blend the voices because I felt that they cohabited in the work and could not be entirely separated from each other.

Chapter 5 was an effort to animate the experience of the curriculum through the identified themes. The themes were through lines that offered structure and focus to the work and were also constant notes throughout. In this way, they were present in a manner similar to music in that they reappear again and again in variation and in so doing, contribute to an overall shape.

A straight description of curriculum seemed far less informative than a narrative one. So I chose real situations (human and contextual) through which to animate the themes and the curriculum. Story, or narrative, captures dynamics and energy through a voice or voices that does not point to a certain interpretation or conclusion. This study does not hope to lead the reader to a conclusion or a specific interpretation. The choice of a narrative voice is for the purpose of describing experience. Interpretation or conclusions are left up to the reader.

In William Pinar’s book, *Curriculum Theorizing* (1975a), there are multiple stories going on concurrently. They present radiating bands of perspective from personal to global. Each contributing author has an autobiographical section that precedes their article. Each individual article presents a portrait of the author’s theoretical thoughts. These perspectives, in turn,
take their place in the overall story line unfolding in the field of curriculum theory itself.

Any one of these perspectives can be read individually and paints an interesting and informative picture. Each biographical sketch is interesting and telling of the author as a person. The reader learns of the people in the field. Each article is a thinking portrait of its own and can be read without the author’s biographical sketch. The reader who reads all the articles will likely assemble a bigger picture of the currents and contours of curriculum theorizing. Each of these perspectives, read alone or together, paint a different picture, offers a different point of view.

The narrative depiction I’ve chosen for this work also has multiple stories happening involving people, time and contexts and their relation to each other. When considered together they paint one picture—and when considered separately they paint a different one. The individual narratives offer their own snapshot of experience. Read together, the narratives offer a broad spatial, temporal and personal account.

There was the story of the students—their relationship to school, community, culture, me. There was the story of the curriculum—wrestling with it, making adjustments to it and making it happen in the school setting. There was also the story of dance - its history, protocols and explorations. There was the story of creativity—of finding ways to recognize it and tap into it. And there was my own story that wafted throughout. In this case as the narratives and multiple
story lines overlap and weave in and out of one another, they hopefully offer the reader a more filled in picture of the curriculum development.

I had also hoped to portray an additional band of perspective through the dance narrative that I attempted to capture within the written narrative. In the student interviews many spoke of the experience of dancing in temporal and expressive terms. Some even used the word *story* to describe what doing a dance was like. A few students said doing a dance was like telling a story. Space, time, shape and energy were narrative elements.

**Reflection**

The partnerships ended and the focus of the program became a hip hop emphasis after I left Castillo. There was difficulty finding qualified teachers. There have been three dance teachers in the three years since I left.

As I look back over this dissertation I realize I would never have understood the events and processes involved in the curriculum development had I not written about it. The writing itself steered me toward understanding; unfurled meaning and allowed me to peer into the experience with a good deal more clarity than if it remained unarticulated.

As I mentioned repeatedly in the writing, my arrival in this teaching situation was not a gentle touch down but more a crash landing. I was in the midst of tremendous change and adjustment that felt overwhelming. Life was busy with little time for reflection. Therefore much of what I did at Castillo went unexamined. A sense of understanding came only in retrospect.

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While teaching, I was propelled toward creative experience with an urgency I didn’t entirely understand. It seemed to hold something vital - a sense of growth, of forward motion. Treading water felt like drowning. But motion did not - even if it was a thrashing motion. Creativity was a metaphoric lifeline that somehow enabled me to stay connected to myself. This wasn’t clear at the time, but seems accurate as I look back. I was at one and the same time wading through the aftermath of grief while also picking through a thicket of obfuscation in my work. I was looking for a beauty that seemed so hidden.

Throughout those first few years, a kind of gray despair lurked around the edges of everything—sometimes at a low level and sometimes not so low. I felt that many doors had closed. Too much change had gone on to really process. Through a catastrophe I was a single parent—no longer a family. Financial need meant I was no longer able to even think about being an artist. Dance and choreography do not pay the bills. I was a teacher now. I was a small piece in a large bureaucracy. I think I was fighting losing myself. I didn’t want my spirit broken. I didn’t want to die. But the thing about death is that out of it comes life.

When I went back and contacted former students it was so wonderful to see them. We met in coffee shops and libraries - places with no formal connection to school. It allowed us to be more ourselves with each other. We were just people with a shared past. And time had passed. Most were between 17 and 22 years old when I interviewed them and junior high aged (12 -14 years old) when they danced at Castillo. They had matured and the dynamic of the teacher/ student
relationship was changed. They were animated and interesting people and enjoyed sharing their thoughts and impressions.

My last encounter with them had been as their teacher. But at this point they were grown up (or growing up), pursuing their own lives and interests. I was pursuing new interests as well. They were intrigued with what I was doing. Many seemed tickled to know that I was writing about them. We exchanged gossip about former students and teachers and families. It didn’t take long to reconnect. I just enjoyed their company. They were so likeable; just real and themselves. I had forgotten how refreshing and lovely they were.

It is my feeling that school, especially in the inner city, is a regimented place lacking soul, human nurturance or connection except in fleeting ways. Don’t get me wrong. There are incredible people working in inner city schools who are brilliant, dedicated and caring. I worked with people I was completely awed by. But the problems are just too big. Inner city schools are not places where the human spirit of its inhabitants is celebrated. Rather, it is a place where all too often, it is broken. Inner city minority students often feel inferior, inadequate, unworthy, uncelebrated, incompetent, and like outcasts. Many drop out. Over the course of this writing, and before, I heard about several Castillo students who dropped out of high school. A number of them had babies. I know that a few ended up in juvenile detention centers. Other’s dropped out for reasons I don’t know. But I also heard that two former Castillo dance students were accepted into the dance program at ASU.
My own personal history was not entirely different. Of course I grew up in a different time and had the ultimate advantage. I was white. But I was not a good student. I hated school and sought stimulation elsewhere. I didn’t know or understand what it was about school I resisted. I just didn’t want to be there. Those feelings and experiences never entirely left me. I was still that person who looked out of those same eyes. I found my way to higher education through back doors. I was lucky.

No social consciousness motivated me to work with underprivileged students. I was not on a mission to save kids through art. Frankly, it was enough of a chore to take care of myself at the time. As in Anne Tyler’s *The Accidental Tourist* (1988), which I referred to earlier, worlds opened up to me as a result of accidents and their fallout, while others shut down. A series of accidental circumstances placed me in this teaching situation. Once I was able to take in who was around me, I recognized that they were creative, inventive, bold, strong young people with a great capability for art making.

Another thing I recognized in this process was the fact that curriculum is very much a living thing. This is certainly not a novel idea as many have said this before me. But I’ll add my voice to theirs and say my experience supports that it is so very much the case. It is a lived thing by teacher and student. The world is full of mystery. A life is almost always filled with conundrums and obstacles. In this way, regardless of ones place within a life span, the duality of being both a leaner and a teacher never ends. In fact, if it does end, I think we’re in trouble.
The older you are the more you know about some things. The younger you are the more you know about other things. These perspectives go together. They need each other. I needed the spirits of my students. They needed, I think, my belief in what I saw in them—what they couldn’t see or articulate.

We were at vastly different points in our lives but the experience galvanized a feeling I’ve often felt - that all of us are in this together. Wisdom and life experience exist at all ages. Being human is so basic to who we are and how we experience the world. But it is also so easily lost sight of. I was not always a perfect teacher. The students were not always model students. But we were all there together.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

HISTORY OF DANCE: TEACHING MODELS THAT EXIST
The following are a number of prominent programs currently operating in the United States. These programs, with the exception of Arizona School for the Arts, are independent of public education. Arizona School for the Arts is a public charter school and therefore connected to public education.

Liz Lerman’s Dance Exchange is a program that uses creative movement techniques and gears her pedagogy to non-dancers as well as dancers. They share equal emphasis. The novelty and signature of Lerman’s work is the breadth and diversity of populations she works with, spanning groups such as elderly, disabled, political, social, research, corporate, community and special interest groups. She is visionary and ambitious. Her projects (so far) tackle questions of faith, genomics, contemporary blended families. Some recent projects have included an investigation of mining communities and a project with Harvard Law School called “Small Dances About Big Ideas”. She is also a marketing genius. She brings creative movement experience to people in “unlikely” contexts—to places where dance would not at all be typically associated. She has gathered many activities mined from the fields of somatics, dance and theater and placed them on her website “toolbox”.

The OMA Foundation (Opening Minds Through the Arts) is a program based in Tucson, Arizona. It is an arts education program that is in partnership with Tucson Unified School District. OMA hires and trains artists in visual and performing arts to go into K-8 schools and offer academic enhancement to students through arts integration. The program espouses the benefit of arts on
learning supporting it with the current strength of brain development research. Because the arts are present in support of academics they therefore subordinated to them. They are present in the schools for their ability to serve academic ends. OMA works with public education in support of the structure that is in place.

The Creative Dance Center in Seattle, WA was established by Anne Green Gilbert. She works from a private studio targeting her classes to a broad spectrum of populations such as teachers, children and community members. She has a performance group of children. Some of her courses are geared to intergenerational groups. She has a strand of courses that incorporate principles of brain research and has coined the term, BrainDance. Her courses revolve around principles of creative movement rather than technique. Children come to her studio after school or on weekends.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts sponsors an educational program called, Education Community Partnerships. The Dance Theater of Harlem has worked with the Kennedy Center for 14 years offering 18 week classes to youth in the DC area. “The purpose of this residency is to provide long-term training to students from diverse backgrounds who demonstrate an affinity for classical dance training.” They target students with evidence of talent who, because of circumstances, would either lack awareness of such training or accessibility to it. Courses are taught by company members and held in studios at Kennedy Center.
Arizona School for the Arts is a charter school in Phoenix, Arizona with a strong track record in both arts and academics. Their school day is set up so that the entire morning is spent in academics and afternoons are in arts. There are two principals; one for academics and one for arts. The dance program is focused on classical ballet. The school contracts with Ballet Arizona, which is the school of the only professional ballet company in Arizona. Students are bussed daily to the Ballet Arizona studios for classes. The quality and concentration of training is such that serious in depth study can occur.
The literature on dance teaching falls along a fairly clear gradient from an emphasis on organic creativity to one on technical precision. Varying combinations of creative and technical emphasis were present in most all of the literature. Interpretations and analysis of these emphases were also present. For some, dance education was a metaphoric prism reflecting social, political, philosophical, and existential issues. Others focused on the value of dance in the school setting. Others felt the significance of dance education was to be found in its influence on personal development.

The basic gradient between the two philosophical polarities is as follows:

1. A discipline based approach to physical mastery, including skills, styles and rhythm. The body is an entity to control, master and develop. Movement knowledge exists in external, technical models (Graham, Limon, Cecchiti) that are taken in and replicated by the body. Much of the teaching is oriented toward physical precision. The result is a finely tuned instrument capable of expressive, interpretive dexterity. This would be considered a route for professional dancers. Technical ballet instruction and exams would fit here.

2. The body itself possesses vast and diverse information. Mastery is not the issue. Rather, through development of awareness derived by way of kinesthetic exploration a student accesses and comes to know what is in the body and its potential. It is through physical exploration, and development of awareness that the student reaps benefit. Spirit and self
are integrated in the body. Freedom is an inherent physical condition.

Creative movement and the theoretical forms would fit here. (p. 45)

Much of the thought about dance education incorporates elements of both of these. However it is in the way these two approaches are proportionately represented and blended in pedagogy and curriculum that is informative. The curricular choice that weighs heavily in the second (the creative) description regards the body as something to be accepted, nurtured and explored. This approach is more prevalent for use with young children than older ones. Madeline Grumet (1988) points out in her book *Bitter Milk*, that the body is an extension of the home and mother. Therefore, a nurturing attitude toward the body would make sense within that thinking.

The more stringently disciplined, technical forms are taught to older students. Learning becomes distanced from the body as a child ages. The body ceases to be a place of exploration—a site of learning as the focus shifts to one of control and mastery. The body is explored but it is more in the sense of what it can do rather than what it knows or contains. Training becomes a strong focus.

Studies in dance education take the basic components of human motion; time, space, energy and shape and interpret them in accordance with their philosophical bent. These interpretations range from the deeply personal and spiritual, to a practical integration among other learning modalities, to socio-political, to a disciplined focus on the discreet physical mechanics to cultural reproduction.
Of interest among this literature is the preponderance of “how-to” books within dance education such as those by the following authors: Mary Ann Brehm, Anne Green Gilbert, Mary Lowden, Valerie Preston-Dunlop, Susan McGreevy-Nichols, Rita Allcock, Barbara Mettler, Ruth Lovell-Murry.

They describe lesson nuts and bolts, literally outlining how to organize and implement movement material in a classroom. These books include introductory or interspersed sections where the author reflects on dance education, each with an insightful, individual perspective on that value. But the main portions of these books are actual lessons many of which are imaginative and creative. But the fact that there were so many was interesting to me. It suggests that there is a demand for them but also an assumption that many readers either don’t know teaching or don’t know dance. Most of these books lacked a discussion bridge from dance education to art and aesthetics.

In Creative Dance for All Ages (1992) Anne Green Gilbert emphasizes the importance of basic dance concepts. “If a dancer is to truly understand dance and be able to create and view dances, he or she must learn and explore the elements or concepts of dance” (p. 3). She is a champion of the value inherent within the basic building blocks of dance. These building blocks hold the keys to meaningful dance experience. Her work is a detailed methodology, also breaking the elements of dance into lessons. More recently Gilbert has been looking at dance education from a “brain compatible” perspective. A more recent book of hers, Brain-compatible Dance Education (2006) looks at recent brain development and
provides creative movement activities that are considered essential for cognitive growth. The activities are very similar to her first book, but emphasizing and referencing the developmental role that the building blocks of movement play in brain research.

Mary Ann Brehm lays out an organizational template for dance instruction in her book *Creative Dance for Learning* (Brehm & McNett, 2008). It is almost like a flow chart and offers numerous examples of curriculum design. Her book is filled with specific lessons including a large number involving arts integration. Her approach to shaping, executing and assessing lessons is very much aligned with the traditional classroom, meaning she includes rubrics and assessment tools that are familiar in the classroom. She emphasizes the role of creative input on the part of the teacher referring to it as significant in terms of its effect on student performance. She credits dance education pioneers H’Doubler, Mettler and Laban as deeply influential in her own work.

Several writers offered more of a balance in terms of presentation of theory and practice. Representative of this list are Mary Lowden, Valerie Preston-Dunlop, Ruth Lovell-Murray, Allcock and Bland These books were less nuts and bolts containing more reflective, scholarly perspectives.

*Dancing to Learn* (1989) by Mary Lowden holds a basic philosophical belief in the inherent value and meaning of dance education and also offers numerous curricular examples. She emphasizes the linguistic nature of movement. Movement is a part of our “social language” and one in which we all participate.
“The gestures and postures of the body are felt utterances” (p. 29), she says. Therefore, they are communicative, representing a feeling state. The body and mind are inexorably fused.

Virginia Tanner (1915-1979) was a prominent figure in children’s creative dance and established a creative dance center for children in Utah that remains in existence. She spoke of creative movement as possessing a tremendously positive almost magical nature. “The child’s world is filled with fantasy, which is frequently dimmed when parents, teachers, and friends turn down the lights in his treasure house of imagination.” As this quote suggests, Tanner is a strong advocate of creative exploration by children, suggesting it should be fostered and protected. In words taken from a philosophical statement from the Virginia Tanner Creative Dance Program website, Tanner (n.d.) is quoted, "The motivating force behind my work is not only developing excellent dancers, but more importantly, developing young people who are useful, imaginative, worthwhile human beings." Her use of the words “useful” and “worthwhile” suggest that she believes that creative movement education has the potential to ultimately influence these qualities in people.

Authors Allcock and Bland (1980) emphasized the need for emotional involvement as a way to deepen understanding of movement concepts. They felt teaching movement concepts in isolation were a poor choice because teaching in such a way strips away what can be understood through context. So it is the careful selection of the subject that has special significance. It must “relate
directly to the child’s experience, for only if it does so is the lesson likely to come alive” (p. 1). So, again it is what the child knows that is central. These authors made a strong distinction between theme and subject. They distance themselves from using the movement theme in favor of what they refer to as a dance subject. Through appropriate subject selection the embedded movement themes will automatically be revealed. But it is the child’s personal interest that is the guiding feature, not the movement theme. Their book opens with a quote by Goethe—defining art as, ‘an interpretation of reality-not by concepts but by intuitions; not through the medium of thought but through that of sensuous forms” (p. 2). This quote is followed with a statement that teachers of dance “must help to awaken these intuitions and spark of the creative process, expressed through the ‘sensuous forms’ of movement.” (Allcock & Bland, 1980, p. 2). Like Virginia Tanner, Allcock and Bland have deep belief in the inherent creative nature of children and feel it should be a guiding presence in dance education.

Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1980) revised a version of Laban’s Sixteen Basic Movement Themes found in his Modern Educational Dance, 1948. Her work is a basic reorganization of that text with an effort to make it more contemporary and accessible. It is highly structured, technical and almost mechanical in nature. Concepts are broken into many separate parts for the purpose of making them more incremental. It lacks the richness of Laban’s original ideas, in my opinion.

Jacqueline Smith-Autard (1994) sees dance education as broken into schools of opposing thought. They are: product vs. process, emphasis on
development of creativity vs. emphasis on development of theatre dance
knowledge, emphasis on subjectivity of experience vs. objective ends, (trained
bodies for performance), emphasis on principles as content vs. emphasis on dance
techniques as content, and emphasis on problem-solving as a pedagogical
approach vs. emphasis on directed teaching. These opposing tensions, which she
found prominent, steered her to devise and chart a middle zone between them.
She advocates for what she calls a “midway model” where features of both are
joined. She does include some pedagogical examples and lesson suggestions.

Authors whose work was strongly weighted toward critical and social
issues in dance education are Sue Stinson (1988), Donald Blumenfeld-Jones

Stinson (1988) and Blumenfeld-Jones (2008, in press) look at power,
liberation and meaning in particular. Sue Stinson (1988) describes dance
education as not only personally meaningful for children but functioning to
balance and benefit their education in general as it enhances cognitive learning,
self-esteem, concentration and focus, body awareness,. The body simply cannot
be separated from the person. Stinson (1988) says, “The body is the first self that
we know; awareness of our bodies is an important aspect of knowing ourselves”
(p. 4) She strongly supports the value of children’s aesthetic experience through
dance and kinetic exploration, viewing such experience as containing power and a
transcendent capability. Additionally, she problematizes the stereotypically
positive nature of creative dance citing patriarchal influences and a tendency to
paint too cheery a picture and promote escapism at the neglect of real problems in
children’s lives. In other literature Stinson turns her eye to issues of liberation and
communion conceiving them within a vertical and horizontal metaphor and
characterizing them as dual but divergent human needs with which we engage
throughout our lives. She investigates dance education probing into ways in which
it could “limit human personhood.”

Donald Blumenfeld-Jones has looked critically at dance curriculum from
perspectives of social change, consciousness, democracy, liberation and
aesthetics. He writes with one foot in critical thinking and one in dance
experience. He reaches inside dance process, laying out that experience in ways
only one who has been in it possibly can. He pays acute attention to what is below
its surface yielding a complex of social, political and aesthetic problems. His
work reflects an incisive critical gaze that carefully uncovers theoretical
weaknesses. His (2008) article about Howard Gardner’s Bodily-Kinesthetic
Intelligence is an example of this.

Anna Halprin (1970) speaks of children’s dance not as a subject in school
but an important and needed part of community. She bemoans their (children’s)
lack of integration into and appreciation by society, attributing it to adult demands
that they “rationalize and justify in words that which is nonverbal and experiential
in value” (p. 156). In other words, children’s unmediated, non-linguistic ways of
experiencing life events is an unrecognized or undervalued one. Children live
“straightforwardly and sensually” (p.156), she says, describing that quality as a needed (and missing) way of being in a balanced community. Halprin describes the interwoven nature of artistic and psychological processes experienced in the body as site and catalyst for personal transformation.

J. L. Hanna (1999) looks quite comprehensively at issues embedded within dance education reminding us that dance is rich with social, personal, and educational complexity. She offers no program templates or suggestions for lesson plans. Hanna covers a broad spectrum of issues including gender, at-risk youth, cultural diversity, teacher training, and poses important questions such as “Is dance a form of therapy and an agent of personal and social change? Or, is dance an art form only?” (p. 111). She explores the role of dance in education arguing for its inclusion as part of a greater vision.

Martin Haberman (Haberman & Meisel, 1970) focuses on the special problems facing the artist in education. “The creation of art can only come about in a non-judgmental, stimulating environment under the guidance of those who have struggled with similar problems. The pressure for all artists is to maintain freedom from entanglements in order to stay fresh, observant, and original to create. Some artists can never be a part of the educational system” (p. 46).

While I agree with Haberman’s (Haberman & Meisel, 1970) statement in large measure, I also feel he makes assumptions that cannot be taken in their entirety. The requirements he describes as essential for the creation of art are overly idealized and narrow. The boundaries that limitation itself imposes can
actually be *catalysts* for creative responses. The comment about “staying fresh” while it is true of artists it is by no means uniquely so as it applies to plenty of professions. It is more an issue of connecting with an authentic interest and sense of aliveness about one’s work. So, it is, in my opinion, more of a human issue than one unique to artists.

It’s important to bear in mind that even ideal circumstances, as Haberman (Haberman & Meisel, 1970) describes, can become stale. It is not necessarily ideal circumstances that are needed for art making but in fact can be conflict and tension. Places where there is life, regardless of the quality can be places full of creative opportunity and content. The problems facing the artist in education that Haberman is talking about, has more to do with consciousness and less with circumstances in my opinion. What’s lacking in schools is the cultivation of the psychological largess that includes working, thinking artists as part of the school culture.

Jenny Hunter (1970) looks at the significance of creativity claiming that it faces dangers in education. She says:

“\[I\] believe that the destruction of the creative impulse in children (and therefore in adults) is one of the most common, wasteful, and tragic kinds of damage possible, and has as its root the widespread misunderstanding (through our own miseducation) of the nature of creative growth and of art. We must begin with ourselves, since the creative impulse is either crippled by or does not survive poor teaching.” (p. 122)
Creative instinct, according to Hunter, is therefore, more than a pleasurable, enriching engagement but an essential and necessary one that should be fostered. And the absence of creativity comes with deleterious consequences. Of additional significance in her statement is that teachers have a strong influence in the presence or absence of creative expression in students lives.

Writing that tailors dance to existing educational organization is represented by author Brenda Pugh McCutchen (2006). In her book *Teaching Dance as Art in Education*, she inserts dance into traditional, existing structures of knowledge practiced in public education. The architecture is in place and her curriculum fills the shape and size of the rooms. It is organized and set up much the same as an academic course but is physical and takes place in a studio.

Material is broken into dance standards and their evaluation. Aesthetics and creativity are incorporated into this organization. Adaptation to and justification for its inclusion in public education is a focal point. The language is *education speak*. Lessons are described with clear objectives, guided inquiry, evaluation tools, directed teaching, instructional approaches. Harry Wong is repeatedly quoted as motivational. Use of Blooms taxonomy is encouraged.

This book contains a massive organizational web that charts dance from kindergarten through high school. The standards, curriculum and educational organization have an authoritative and unquestioned presence. Although this curriculum includes artistry and aesthetics, their significance seems primarily and ultimately measured in their ability to align with national and state standards and
evaluation criteria. In the meeting of standards and lessons lies the formula for successful dance programming.

The thinking here appears to me to reflect that which lends itself to being clearly articulated in rational terms has priority in inclusion in the canon of valued knowledge. That which is difficult to articulate in rational terms such as the ineffable qualities of art and aesthetics, remains out of focus and therefore out of consideration.

What is significantly missing from approaches to teaching that spell things out in minute detail (such as McCutcheon’s book) is the creative individuality within the teacher herself or himself. It is reminiscent of what I mentioned earlier about the lesson plan. The plethora of templates and completely structured lessons available on the web and in books eliminates the need for a creative, individual teacher who approaches teaching from a personally conceived perspective—who interprets information through her own being.

Rima Faber’s (1997) doctoral research focuses on the development of arts standards in public education and the benefit they present. Dance education specifically is supported through claims of the value of “active learning experience” (Gardner, Dewey, Piaget). Through inclusion in National Standards arts become educationally legitimate.

State standards in dance, a relatively recent occurrence, have afforded dance a level of inclusion andrespectability in the larger world of school curriculum. Content areas that are represented in the state standards are
recognized and therefore elevated to a level of respect. I know that in the state of Arizona there was a celebratory response when dance standards were written. It meant that dance was acknowledged as a viable content area by the state and therefore in the larger world of education.

Academic content area standards are arrived at and diagramed through a process of sorting, identifying and categorizing. This act itself echoes, in my opinion, scientific method and positivist attitudes. Content areas are broken down into their component parts. The arts (and creative process) are subjected to this same “scientific” treatment. The language used within the dance standards, describe creative process as components or bulleted items under a larger heading. The creative process becomes a schematic, a fragmented representation of itself—a sum of its parts. It becomes a check list to be ticked off rather than areas of aesthetics or consciousness to be experienced. Therefore inclusion in the standards is a double edged sword. On the one hand it is laudable to be included alongside other recognized content areas. But it is also subject to a sterile mechanism that risks, in my opinion, leaving it lifeless.

Jacqueline Sawyer’s (1996) doctoral research into dance education concluded that there is an apathetic, disinterested attitude within curriculum design for inclusion of creative dance instruction in K-2 grades. She points to four factors that place dance education at risk. They are: 1. Lack of support to incorporate creative dance in the classroom, 2. Lack of access to dance specialists, 3. Administrative support is lacking to integrate creative dance into the k-2
classroom, 4. Lack of time for peer collaboration and lack of time for reflection. She questions the derivation of such attitudes wondering if they originate in trainers of early childhood teachers and policymakers or elsewhere. I’m in agreement with her identification of these influential factors because they are ones I’ve seen first hand myself. Though she is speaking specifically about kindergarten through second grade, these factors are present throughout all the elementary grades.

There are some scholars of creative dance for children and dance education. Sue Stinson and Jill Green from the University of North Carolina Greensboro are both prominent scholars in dance education. Generally speaking however, dance in public education is still a nascent developing field and one needing strong advocacy to elevate its visibility in the domains of public education and scholarship. Jill Green (2007) addresses this topic:

I contend that by focusing on what many in performance studies have referred to as ‘dance studies’ without acknowledging the broad and relevant body of dance literature in fields such as education and somatics, these ‘outside’ disciplines may be marginalized. I call on dance scholars to break disciplinary boundaries and include the body in dance education in the overall work done on the body in dance. Only through an understanding of how we can explore categories and boundaries of dance scholarship without abusing or leaving behind one particular field of study can we enrich the total literature of the body in dance. (p. 1,125)
My anecdotal knowledge of high school dance programs suggests a strong inclination to reproduce the body in exploitive, objectifying ways. Advertising and the media are prominent in the lives of urban youth and it is filled with young women portrayed as sex objects and young men as tough guys.

Dance classes are electives and therefore competitive in terms of the appeal to students. High school dance teachers need to attract students and keep them in the program. The high school student dance concerts I’ve seen in the past few years in Phoenix, features student choreography that imitates music videos, advertising or movies. The music is usually contemporary top 40. Sexy, trendy, edgy, risqué all drive a marketing outcome. I think many adolescents take that world in as prescriptive rather than the marketing tool that it is. In other words, advertising covertly conveys messages about ways to behave and belong as it lures people to spend money.

In these concerts, the movement is almost entirely imitative. There is little movement invention going on or evidence of work with ideas or concepts. The body is not a site for exploration but one to reproduce the media and commercial culture around them. Much of the focus is on stringing movements together and memorizing them. I’m sure there are teachers and programs that are different from this description, but this is what I have seen in the high school dance concerts I’ve attended in the past three years.
Jill Green (2007) refers to the body in dance education specifically, but I think that attitudes toward the body in general education are at the root of the body in dance education.