Dance Curriculum Through Lived Experience: A Semiotic Analysis

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

This study investigates the curriculum practices of two experienced middle school dance educators. Drawing on literature in semiotics, curriculum theory, multicultural education, and dance education, this research situates the teachers as curriculum creators and investigates their lived experiences in dance education with particular attention to the ways they facilitate multimodal semiosis, or the process of meaning-making through multiple types of signs, in their classes. Using a qualitative case study approach, this dissertation addresses the question: How do dance teachers engage in and promote an embodied process of multimodal semiosis through their enactment of dance education curriculum?

To artfully describe the lived experiences of dance educators, data is first presented in the form of narrative portraits depicting the dance teachers as educators and artists within their curriculum work. Interpretations and analysis of their work are then offered, addressing themes such as the overall structure and sequence of their curricula, the influences on their processes of creating curriculum, and the role of particular types of signs in their curriculum, including language, music, movement, costumes, and props. Particular attention is given to the ways that the “elements of dance,” commonly listed as body, space, time, and energy in formal curriculum documents, are referenced and incorporated into the different curricula.
Discussion of themes in the data first addresses common attributes that make a good dance education curriculum: it is locally responsive; fosters a serious appreciation for the art form and work being done by students; is built on the individual teacher’s experience as a significant source of body, cultural, and academic knowledge; and includes a variety of semiotic resources through which learners and teachers can construct meaning. Following this, areas that are problematic within the dance education field are addressed; in particular, I focus on the issue of content frameworks—commonly described as the elements of dance—within formal curriculum. It is argued that this conception of dance content, while useful across many teaching contexts, represents a particular value system and orientation toward knowledge construction that is not appropriate or applicable across all dance education contexts and does not capture the range of sign types that dance educators use to promote meaning-making. A conception of an alternative framework, based on the idea of an emerging lexicon, is presented, and possible applications of this to future formal curriculum projects are discussed.
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Fields of Study

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# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgments......................................................................................................................... iv

Vita.................................................................................................................................................. vi

List of Figures ................................................................................................................................ x

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 21

Chapter 3: Methodology ................................................................................................................. 112

Chapter 4: Narrative Portraits ....................................................................................................... 177

Chapter 5: Description and Analysis of Dance Curricula ......................................................... 238

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions ....................................................................................... 351

References .................................................................................................................................... 424

Appendix A: IRB Notice of Determination .................................................................................. 441

Appendix B: Consent form ............................................................................................................ 443
List of Figures

Figure 1: The emerging lexicon.................................................................388

Figure 2: The emerging lexicon in the context of dancemaking ...............390

Figure 3: A framework alternative............................................................392
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

As a child I loved going to dance class. I was simultaneously enthralled and slightly intimidated by the studio, where two walls were covered in fading posterboards with the teacher’s careful script defining ballet terms: *arabesque, échappé, tendu, plié, pirouette*\(^1\)…. I liked to stand by “*entrechat quatre*”\(^2\) because it looked mysterious; my mind did not connect it with the little beating jumps, which to me were “andra-she-cots” and always made me think of jumping apricots in class. I was twelve, and what I didn’t know in facts I made up for with enthusiasm and incredible creativity.

I remember my mother taking me to see *The Nutcracker* where I eagerly took in the movements and matched them to the words in my mind; I was thrilled with myself when I could name all the steps I saw on stage. My mind whirled away—“*tombe-pas de bourée-glissade-assemblé!*!!” I was now an insider in the dance world. I “knew” ballet.

Later in the year came trips to the Fiesta where Mexican *folklórico* dancers twirled their

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\(^1\) Ballet terminology is based on French names for steps.

\(^2\) *Entrechat quatre* [ahn-truh-SHAH KA-truk]: An *entrechat* “is a step of beating in which the dancer jumps into the air and rapidly crosses the legs before and behind each other. Entrechats are counted from two to ten according to the number of crossings required and counting each crossing as two movements, one by each leg; that is, in an entrechat quatre each leg makes two distinct movements.” (American Ballet Theatre, n.d.)
skirts. I could not name what they did; not a pirouette was to be found and so, while they were pretty, that could not possibly be real dance.

Of course, the dance educator in me now cringes at this memory. I sometimes think of my teaching practice as an evolving process of unlearning and relearning so many things that were lacking in my own education, illuminating what I might reconsider as I pass on ideas to my own students. This anecdote calls out for us to notice so much: the responsibility and power of the teacher; the need for critical multicultural arts education; the need to promote dance literacy as we simultaneously question what that involves; the power of language to shape our ideas and understandings; the potential of many signs across learning spaces to provoke diverse meanings; and those discourses that, despite our best hopes, will always involve some misunderstandings.

Two key ideas stand out for me in reflecting on this story in relation to my current interests in the ways that teachers conceptualize and communicate about dance. One: If I can name it, I can know it. This was referenced recently at a dance education conference by a number of participants who emphasized the need to determine the vocabulary that a lesson would focus on, particularly when introducing dance to teachers and students in an arts integration lesson or when working with English language learners. Likewise, student writing in response to dance has been shown to improve when students are given specific vocabulary through which to relate their viewing and interpretations of dance, as discussed by Beth Megill (2010). I too have found this to be true in my own teaching. Yet, as I will discuss, equating labeling with a true sense of understanding, which I did as a child, masks the complexity of knowledge in many fields, including dance, and it re-
inscribes the privileged position that language holds among sign systems in our culture. However, for many students it is possible that labels constitute an important step toward recognizing the possibilities for knowledge, particularly in new areas.

Two: If I can know it, I can own it. Following labeling, students’ ownership of their learning is also promoted as students have access to a vocabulary through which to express and thus claim their knowledge. As a child, I felt an ownership of my ballet learning once I could “name” steps and perform them with only a teacher’s verbal command. As a teacher, however, I sense a conflict here. The idea of ownership through language has tension—it can empower students to take an active role in their own learning and enable them to participate in a shared community of knowledge. But as illustrated by the previous anecdote, it also has the power to exclude those forms of knowledge which do not fit into the shared vocabulary of a teaching/learning community, as well as to limit students’ access or desire for access to forms of knowledge not in keeping with the language paradigms they have been taught. Even worse, it may lead some to assume knowledge of a form simply through command of the language of that form. Knowing the names of the steps and some historical facts—whether about ballet, Mexican folklórico, or one of the many forms of American modern dance—is not a substitute for the embodied knowledge gained and enacted through committed dancing in one of these forms. Similarly, while I would like for all dance students to be able to converse clearly about their experiences, in many instances the physical engagement with movement, music, and other people constitutes the primary dance teaching and learning context, and verbal language is tangential. Effective teachers develop great skill in using
demonstrations and musical choices to help students learn. Just because one does not talk about dance does not mean one has not come to know the art form in a meaningful way.

How we use and structure language as a force for enacting and critiquing curriculum and pedagogy, then, has profound importance not only for learning dance as an art form, but for students’ and teachers’ understandings of themselves as political and cultural agents in the world. “Languaging” dance, therefore, is an important aspect of the co-creation of knowledge as students and teachers adopt a specialized vocabulary within their shared community—here, “language” becomes a verb. It remains, however, a limited verb, for verbal and written language is only one—albeit a privileged one—of many sign-systems operating in the dance classroom, and I find it useful to consider verbal and written language as situated within the complex semiotic world of dance education.

The appearance of a binary in the previously stated tension between knowing and owning is misleading, for issues of language in dance are complex and best characterized by a multiplicity of forces and ideas that individual teachers mediate in their own teaching practice. Although many teachers work with national or state standards to guide their curriculum, there is currently not a unified dance education curriculum in the United States. Through their language, other signifying practices, and a host of other curriculum choices, dance teachers heavily mediate their students’ encounters with content. Curriculum in dance education, then, is not one static entity that remains relatively constant across space and time; rather, it is a constantly evolving idea with multiple influences and iterations.
Borrowing Goodlad’s (1979) terms for curriculum inquiry, while we may look at ideal, formal, perceived, operational, and experienced curriculums, it is the operational and experienced which I find most compelling; these give the most interesting picture of what is happening in dance education as teachers negotiate multiple influences in their enactments of curriculum. While I feel it is fair to say that student learning is at the forefront of most teachers’ concerns, issues of advocacy are also not far from their minds, and teachers need to communicate to parents, policymakers, and students that yes, indeed, dance has important content. Making content explicit is one clear expectation of language in dance, though the process for doing this is anything but direct, and the goal of explication is not one that can be simply or readily met. Language again functions as a privileged sign system, but it is only through its interactions with other signs in multiple modalities—visual, movement, touch—that its potential within dance education can be realized. Formal curriculum in the form of documents, standards, and prescribed outcomes certainly may influence dance education practice and offer substantive depictions of what dance education involves, but a deeper understanding of curriculum, as well as the way it intersects with language and other signifying practices, can only be gained through an engagement with dance education as it is actually lived.

As a dance educator working primarily as a teaching artist and professional development facilitator, I have visited many schools, some of which had other dance educators there as well. The classroom teachers I worked with frequently requested lists of “dance vocabulary” and asked for my assurance that they were using the right terms with their students. They desired, like I did as a young dancer, the reassurance of
established terminology, the correctness of labels. I offered what I could, constantly aware that any terms I presented would always privilege some aspects of movement while obscuring others and that the terms, often placed into neat displays of vocabulary lists on teachers’ “word walls,” had little value outside of the lived experience of dancing. But language is one among many signs in a complex social system, and at schools where other dance educators worked, I learned (the hard way) to always inquire about the terms students had been taught and the frameworks for categorizing dance that were implicitly and explicitly in place and that formed a significant component of the enacted curriculum—starting with, “what words are on your wall?” Everywhere, the words were different.

The differences I noticed among vocabularies being formed in different dance education contexts were just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, in revealing a wide range of classroom practices and curricula being enacted in dance education programs. Within the overall scope of the lived experience of dance education, such vocabularies may take on significant importance—for example, in a class based on Laban Movement Analysis where terms such as “bound flow” have very specific meaning and are used regularly—or may be tangential, with descriptors used loosely to support teaching that relies more on physical demonstration or musical cues. However, as the professional field of dance education strives for increased presence in K-12 public, private, and charter schools, the expectation that formal curriculum documents can be created that will clearly delineate a single set of appropriate curriculum guidelines has increasingly occupied educators’ attention; underlying these instances of formal curriculum development is the question of
what constitutes the subject matter of dance and what language can best be used to organize and communicate this on paper.

As I have personally become more involved in the field of dance education, my own questions about “what term should I use when I teach this idea?” and “what implications does that hold for what students will learn?” seem to have greater relevance when placed in the context of the rich diversity of dance education contexts that is, or ought to be, possible. Some recent professional experiences have brought these issues into greater focus. The National Dance Education Organization, the professional organization for all dance educators in the United States, recently announced their participation in the creation of new National Core Arts Standards and solicited applications for participation on the writing team. While I did not apply for this position, I was asked to meet with a task force of interested individuals during the October 2011 national conference. This task force was asked to address the issue of content frameworks used in dance education by gathering, discussing, and reviewing existing documents and making recommendations to the writers about the language that could be used in the new Standards.

After a brief in-person meeting at the conference, an online repository was established, and members were asked to contribute documents they had located that could serve as sample content frameworks. These are curriculum documents that map out the territory of dance as an art form and a school subject, delineating the elements of dance and creating a categorization scheme. As of June 2012, approximately 20 documents representing different frameworks used in artists’ studios, state curriculum documents,
university dance courses, professional development seminars, and published textbooks had been located and added to the database. Contributors were asked to locate frameworks that met the following criteria: presented a large schematic understanding of dance, existed in print, had been in use for at least twenty years and by three generations of educators, underlay a teaching philosophy, and are wide enough to be applicable across genres. Many of these documents had considerable overlap and showed the influences of European modern dance and movement analysis pioneer Rudolph Laban and American modern dance educator Margaret H’Doubler as interpreted and developed by successive generations of their students and contemporaries. While important differences can be found across these different documents in the vocabulary used and the organizational schemes involved, what strikes me instead is how similar they are. General categories such as body, space, shape, time, and movement qualities can be found in most of these documents. Some include a category for relationships, and some include choreographic structures such as A-B-A, theme and variation, and cannons among the elements. In my own review of the shared documents I found that most would be perfectly reasonable to use for guiding the development of creative dance or modern technique classes of the kind I frequently teach, even as they leave enough room for exploration and analysis of a wide range of dance experiences.

It would be tempting to see the general consensus among these curricular frameworks as an indication of their comprehensive nature and suitability for the project of defining, on a national level, what should constitute the content of dance education. However, as I sift through the different files, a few nagging questions begin to grow in
my mind: What else is out there? Just because these frameworks and categories can be applied across dance forms, does that mean they should? On paper, the written terminology and in some cases, the notation symbols, seem to state ideas clearly—but what about other ways of communicating about dance, and more importantly, other ideas that don’t have a clearly established label? Where do ideas about why we dance or what we are expressing when we do so fit into a content framework? Most importantly, what do these frameworks look like in actual practice? How are real teachers using these ideas, and what happens to these seemingly clear structures when they are subjected to the creative processes of teachers working with their students in diverse contexts?

The problem of stating upfront in language the expected content of dance education was further reinforced for me when I served as a member of the Writing Team for the Ohio Department of Education Fine Arts Content Standards revision in 2011–2012. Many of my colleagues and I wrestled with the difficulties of describing dance learning outcomes without wanting to dictate dance forms or worldviews that educators must teach. For instance, the idea that students should learn to use dance concepts and terminology when responding to their own and others’ performances was expected; following that, the question comes, what concepts and which terminology? While we are each prepared to answer that for our own practice, we were sensitive to not want to impose our own ways of thinking about dance too narrowly upon others who might use these documents. Furthermore, we recognized the vast potential of ways that one might enter into a descriptive process and did not want to limit the creativity of educators.
Compounding this problem was a lack of detailed information about what has actually been taking place in dance education classrooms and the ways that previous curriculum documents have been interpreted and used in school settings. The revision process that we were asked to undertake was driven by a matter of policy; we were told that according to state law, content standards were to be revised every seven years. However, we had precious little information about how the previous iteration had fared in use, and, in effect, the teaching practices and recollections, as well as preferences, of those on the committee came to be the primary source of information driving our collective statements. In the end we created a document that I felt was serviceable if not ideal, but all along I craved more detailed information and a wider lens on curriculum that might inform the process of writing statements that ought to guide dance education practices. I felt that a detailed look at the work being done by experienced educators might shed important light on the features of quality dance education and the possibilities for conceptualizing it within a curriculum document; more importantly, looking closely at how dance curricula are enacted and inquiring in-depth as to how these come about could have the potential to raise important questions that we should be discussing during these forays into educational policy-making.

This research, then, has come about from both personal and professional experiences as a dance student and educator, and it reflects my desire to investigate issues that will both impact my own work as a teacher, teacher educator, and leader in the profession, as well as potentially influence the work of others in teaching, program and curriculum design, and policy-making. While as a student and researcher I find much of
interest in theorizing about dance and education through reading and writing, it is ultimately in studios and classrooms where the real work takes place. This challenging work is being done every day by many teachers who do not, for a variety of reasons, enter into research and policy-making roles; nevertheless, their experiences offer a rich source of insights that deserve attention. Therefore, I have undertaken this dissertation research in an effort to closely consider the ways that practicing dance educators enact curriculum to foster meaning-making through a variety of signifying practices, as well as the implications that their work has for theorizing dance education within arts education curriculum and teacher education.

Statement of the Problem:

Embodied semiosis in dance education curriculum

Eliot Eisner (1998) has said “We learn to look for those qualities that are labeled, but especially for ones that have particular value for us … our aims influence our language, and our language influences our perception” (pp. 66–67). Although he was speaking about qualitative researchers, the same statement could be made regarding the student in a K–12 dance program. In a comprehensive approach to dance education, such as that promoted by prominent dance educators (Gilbert, 2006; McCutchen, 2006; Sofras, 2006; Stinson, 1998), students will learn not only to perform dance with a degree of technical proficiency, but they will also develop dance literacy as they explore dance through a range of possibilities, create their own dances, and represent their ideas about dance in many formats, including writing and speaking. As they investigate the qualities,
structures, materials, and cultural contexts of dance, students take on the language of practitioners, incorporating a specialized vocabulary that both enables them to discuss dance and influences the aspects of dance they attend to when performing, choreographing, and viewing dances.

In an intra-disciplinary model, such as the one suggested by the Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts (National Dance Education Organization, 2005), students are expected to speak and write thoughtfully about their understandings in dance in a way vitally connected with—perhaps inseparable from—their physical experience of dance. This connection between physical experience and cognition, otherwise understood as an embodied philosophy of mind (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Sheets-Johnstone, 2009), while critical for all educational experience, is foregrounded in dance education contexts. It is imperative, then, that consideration is given to the sign systems that students are taught, as these come together to build an entire semiotic world that will shape their understandings and practices of, as well as communication about, dance education experiences.

Researcher Carey Andrzejewski (2008), in her study of dance teacher preparation, describes the significance of this process:

Therefore, I am what I say, and what I say determines who I am. This is true of teachers in general and dancer teachers in particular. It is also true of dance artists in the sense they have adopted the discourses, both those enacted in speech and those enacted in movement, of the community of dance artists. They have acquired the talk and the walk of those who belong. (p. 190)
Andrzewski describes a process that can also be understood through a socio-cultural lens of multimodality, where “concepts emerge in practices as situated responses to what is happening in a world of non-linguistic representations” (Ivarsson, Linderoth, & Säljö, 2011, p. 205). By understanding that learning in dance takes place through a range of interacting sign types, some of which come to also be known through associated linguistic concepts, we begin to see that any investigation of language use in dance will be inextricably tied up with an investigation of other sign types in use, such as movement, visual images, and music.

Research on dance curriculum as well as published curriculum materials intended to guide teachers’ practice are minimal compared to other fields (Blumenfeld-Jones & Liang, 2007). In the absence of strictly codified language and classification systems, dance educators develop their language of professional practice, as well as the language and sign systems that they share with their students, from an amalgamation of sources such as published curriculum materials, teacher training and professional development workshops, established language systems in their own institutions, and their own artistic and educational experiences. Certainly, my own teaching practice has been, and continues to be, shaped by influences such as these, though I have not ever clearly mapped the genealogy of my dance signifying practices. Other dance educators are similarly influenced in their own unique patterns, and the process of tracing influences is one aspect of this research.

As we teach dance, signs expressing the ideas we value rise to the surface and are shared with students, who also contribute to the community of discourse, and new signs
can emerge from the ideas and interactions among participants, forming what dance critic Marcia Seigel (2007) describes as an emergent lexicon, tailored to the needs of the dance under investigation. These interactions, of course, take place in an environment focused on movement and the body where the texts under study include dances made by teachers and students, so that spoken and written language are among many signs contributing to meaning in the environment. While some published work has discussed the benefits of specific teaching practices that include attention to language (Root-Bernstein, 2001) or other highly codified symbol systems, such as Language of Dance/Motif Writing (Heiland, 2009; Parrish, 2005; Warburton, 2000), these works often focus on defined teaching approaches that were implemented in the classroom being studied. These studies have not holistically considered teachers’ process of using sign systems within their dance education practices; nor have they explicitly connected these sign systems to larger issues of embodied knowledge and curriculum theory as they inform dance education.

Discussions of semiotics, the theory of signs, offer the potential for considering the multiple and intersecting modes of communication referred to as multimodality (Jewitt, 2011a) taking place in a dance class through sign types such as language, movement, spatial arrangements, visual imagery, and music. However, literature in semiotics rarely positions the body theoretically as a critical agent in the process of semiosis, or meaning-making through signs—a crucial theoretical step that will be necessary for a full application to theory and practice in dance education. Therefore, this study adopts a semiotic perspective to dance education, investigating a range of
signifying practices that interact in a process of meaning-making within the enacted dance curriculum.

Primary research question

Building from my experiences as a dance student and teacher, my conversations with colleagues and service on committees, and my engagement with dance education literature, this dissertation investigates the teaching practices of two dance educators working in dance programs in Ohio schools. Rather than imposing a clear distinction between curriculum and pedagogy that sees content being taught as separate from how it is taught, this research builds on literature in curriculum inquiry and situates dance teaching practices as a process of enacted curriculum, a lived experience influenced by a range of sources including educators’ own life experiences and professional development, their school culture and the context in which the teach, and the institutional expectations delineated in formal curriculum.

Within this investigation a theoretical framework is built using semiotics, or the study of signs. Within semiotics it is understood that all meaning is created, communicated, and understood through signs: through our interactions with language, images, objects, and sensations, we come to learn about the world around us. The process through which we use signs to make meaning is deemed semiosis, and indeed, all of education can be understood as a semiosic process. Investigating curriculum through this framework invites attention to the way that sign types often formalized through curriculum, such as language, intersect with sign types that are often overlooked in
education but that are critical to the meaning-making potential of dance, including movement, music, spatial arrangements, visual imagery, costuming, and props. Despite the fact that this notion has been obscured in much literature within semiotics, all signs are understood through bodily engagement—through vision, hearing, touch, movement, and so on. Thus, multimodality and the embodied nature of meaning are understood as a necessary feature of dance education; the complex ways that this unfolds through teachers’ work are given attention in this study.

Therefore, the primary research question investigated in this dissertation is, how do dance teachers engage in and promote an embodied process of multimodal semiosis through their enactment of dance education curriculum?

Research sub-questions

As I engaged in the qualitative research process, three sub-questions have been used to guide my collection and analysis of the data created by observing and interviewing two experienced dance educators and reviewing documents used in their programs. First of all, I have focused on identifying signs used in their teaching that appear to have significance within their curriculum as evidenced by the focus and attention given to these signs. While anything present in the environment can potentially be taken as a sign by anyone, I recognize that an exhaustive accounting of all signs is impossible. Instead, I follow the lead of the teachers and consider those features of their enacted curriculum that seem important; in particular, I am interested in looking beyond the specific movements they teach and the verbal vocabulary they use to also consider
how signs, such as music choices and costuming, create a matrix of meaning in the classroom. Therefore, the research is guided in part by the first sub-question, *how do dance educators guide their students to attend to and make meaning from a range of signs, including language, movement, music, and visuals, in the dance classroom, and how might these meanings come together to shape understandings of dance in the world?*

In Chapter Four: Narrative Portraits, readers are introduced to two dance educators through detailed descriptions of their classroom practices where such sign-use occurs. In the following chapter, Chapter Five: Description and Analysis of Dance Curricula, I share excerpts from interviews where teachers discuss their curriculum contextualized within the descriptions of classroom practice taken from my observations and discuss the possible meanings that may be interpreted from these signs as significant, though not always attended to, aspects of dance education.

Recognizing that each teacher’s practice is shaped by her unique and ongoing process of semiosis, I was also interested in understanding the influences that led to her ways of enacting dance curriculum and the choices she made regarding the signs being used in her classroom. Open-ended interviews, understood in tandem with my observations, were crucial in probing my second sub-question, *how do teachers negotiate multiple influences, including formal curriculum, school culture, and their own artistic and educational backgrounds that impact their use of signs in the dance classroom?*

Chapter Four: Narrative Portraits, provides detailed descriptions of each teacher within the context of her teaching practice, while additional analysis concerning the relationships between the teacher’s own educational, artistic, and cultural backgrounds
and her curriculum is offered in Chapter Five: Description and Analysis of Dance Curricula.

Finally, as I review the data collected and consider it in conversation with my own experiences developing dance curriculum and serving in leadership roles along with my reading of formal curriculum documents, I turn to the implications of what I have found in the data. Although the experienced dance educators who participated in this research embody excellence in their teaching, my understandings of their enacted curricula do not clearly map on to established formal curriculum documents. This becomes an opportunity to rethink foundational ideas in dance education curriculum, in particular the preponderance of documents that rely on some form of the dance elements, understood as body, space, time, and energy, as adequate frameworks for mapping the range of concepts and meanings promoted in dance education. Therefore, the third sub-question guiding this research is how might close investigation of the curriculum enacted by experienced dance educators provoke questions about future work in dance education, including the ways that dance content knowledge is conceptualized in curriculum development and teacher education? Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusions addresses this question, using the information gleaned in Chapters Four and Five to consider the potential impact of this study for curriculum development and theorizing.

Organization of the Study

Building on this Introduction, Chapter Two: Literature Review introduces ideas from a range of sources that inform this study. Semiotics—in particular the reading of
Peircean semiotics proposed by Floyd Merrill (2003) that situates the body as an agent in meaning-making along with Yuri Lotman’s\textsuperscript{3} (M. Lotman, 2002; Y. Lotman, 1990, 2005; Merrell, 2001) conception of the semiosphere as the space where meaning-making through signs takes place—is discussed as a viable theoretical stance through which to investigate dance and dance education phenomena. Curriculum theory is then addressed, with attention to approaches by scholars such as Goodlad (1979), Dillon (2009), and Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995) to breaking apart the complex phenomenon of curriculum into questions and ideas that can be considered for study. Finally, literature in the fields of multicultural education and dance education is reviewed with consideration of ways that this dissertation will attend to aspects not previously addressed within those fields.

Chapter Three: Methodology discusses the selection of qualitative research methodology used in this study, explaining the theoretical underpinnings of this approach to research along with the specific study design used in this dissertation. The basis for qualitative research through a case study is explained by building on the writings of Eisner (1998), Hoffman Davis and Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), and Stake (2008). The intersection of semiotic research and qualitative inquiry, with attention to the idea of semioethics (Petrilli & Ponzio, 2010), is also considered. The research participants are introduced in this chapter, and the strategies for data collection and analysis are explained.

\textsuperscript{3} In translation from Estonian, the elder Lotman’s name appears in English publications as both Yuri and Juri; for consistency it is referenced as Yuri throughout this document.
Chapter Four: Narrative Portraits offers detailed portraits of the two dance educators who participated in this study. Through these narratives tracing in detail a day spent visiting the teachers, observing their lessons, and talking, I present biographies of both teachers as dance educators, drawing attention to key aspects of their curriculum as lived experience. Chapter Five: Description and Analysis of Dance Curricula follows with explanations of the major themes found in the data. Extensive quotes from interviews with the participants are woven together with detailed descriptions drawn from classroom and performance observations to give a thorough depiction of the overall curriculum being enacted in both dance programs. This is followed by discussion of specific issues related to the research questions: influences on and development of the curricula, the role of “dance elements” within each curriculum, and the use of specific sign types including props, costumes, drawings, and music.

These categories are further interrogated in Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusions, where they are put into conversation with the literature introduced previously and the research questions described above. The implications for this research for theorizing about dance education practices, creating curriculum documents, and guiding teacher preparation and professional development are considered, along with areas for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

To address questions related to semiotics in dance education curriculum, this study will draw upon literature from a number of areas: semiotics, curriculum theory, multicultural education, and dance education. Connecting these areas of inquiry is a major goal of this research, which seeks to demonstrate a clear conceptual linkage among them and provide ways for readers to understand dance teaching practices as they exist at their intersections, informing the development of new theories. While interconnectedness is ultimately an important consideration, this literature review will address each area in turn for the purposes of clarity in laying out the respective viewpoints that inform this study.

Semiotics

Put simply, semiotics is the theory of signs. Within this branch of theory, the word “sign” takes on a broader meaning than it does in everyday English, where it generally refers to a tangible display of text and/or images to convey information, like a stop sign that gives a directive or a storefront sign that labels its contents. However, for me this was a useful starting place for thinking conceptually about the idea of “sign.”
then was able, with significant guidance from teachers and literature sources that I will mention shortly, to widen my understanding of what a sign is, and how semiotics as a theoretical body could inform my thinking of dance education practice. Charles Sanders Peirce, an American pragmatist philosopher who was influential in the development of semiotics, is often quoted as saying “Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign” (as cited in Chandler, 2007, p. 13). The idea of drawing attention to aspects of our world, and specifically the “world” of dance education classrooms where meaning-making through signs of movement, music, language, and images occurs, is what drew me to semiotics as a theoretical basis for this study.

A very useful starting place for understanding semiotics is Daniel Chandler’s (2007) accessible book, *Semiotics: The Basics*. In this work, Chandler gives an historical overview of semiotics, clarifying that it is not a unified theory but rather an approach to inquiry that originated in linguistics but has since been used in a range of fields including anthropology, media studies, and education. This multidisciplinary possibility of semiotics is one aspect that attracted me, as research in dance education necessitates approaches that can be applied broadly and flexibly.

Chandler (2007) describes the origin of semiotics in the work of philosophers Ferdinand de Saussure, who proposed a dyadic model of the sign consisting of its signifier (for him, in the form of a sound pattern), and signified concept; and Charles Sanders Peirce, who proposed a triadic model where the sign is made of an representament, interpretant, and object. Both models have influenced the development of semiotics and the practices of contemporary semioticians, though my own work draws
more heavily on Peircian models, to be discussed below. In any approach however, it is important to foremost the holistic nature of the sign; Chandler (2007) reminds readers, “The signifier or representamen is the form in which the sign appears (such as the spoken or written form of a word) whereas the sign is the whole meaningful ensemble” (p. 30).

Semiotics has roots in linguistics and structuralism, along with mathematics and philosophy, but importantly for my study, its application has been widened to a range of fields and to a variety of signifying practices. Indeed, the privileged status granted to spoken and written language among all sign systems is one that is particularly challenged in dance education settings. While some semioticians have attempted to force a linguistic model onto all sign systems and discover ways that artistic practices such as film, music, and painting could be broken into discrete and combinable units of meaning, a poststructuralist approach considers instead the unique meaning-making ensembles and potentialities for complex readings in the semiotic analysis of images, sounds, and movement. Chandler (2007) cites philosopher Susanne Langer in his discussion of the limits of a linguistic model:

Rather than dismissing “non-discursive” media for their limitations, however, Langer argues that they are more complex and subtle than verbal language and are “peculiarly well-suited to the expression of ideas that defy linguistic ‘projection.’” She argues that we should not seek to impose linguistic models upon other media since the laws that govern their articulation “are altogether different from the laws of syntax that govern language.” Treating them in linguistic terms leads us to ‘misconceive’ them: they resist “translation.” (p. 7)
The impossibility of translation was also argued by Emile Benveniste, who explained that “the ‘first principle’ of semiotic systems is that they are not ‘synonymous’: we are not able to say ‘the same thing’ in systems based on different units” (as cited in Chandler, 2007, p. 224). This resistance to translation into linguistic terms that is characteristic of many artistic processes relates to a fundamental tension in dance education settings: the need to discuss the dances and dance experiences among teacher and students in language, which can never fully capture all aspects of the dance experience. It is not my goal to resolve this tension, but rather, to explore and work with it in productive ways throughout my research process. Indeed, the issue of multimodality is an emerging trend in semiotics as researchers explore the way different media represent experience (Chandler, 2007, pp. 224–225; Jewitt, 2011a).

An important concept in semiotics is the idea of the materiality of the sign. Chandler (2007) explains that “the Peircian model explicitly allocates a place for materiality and for reality outside the sign system which Saussure’s model did not directly feature … the object was not just ‘another variety of “interpretant”’ (citing Bruss, 1978, p. 96), but was crucial to the meaning of the sign” (p. 33). He later goes on to stress, “there is no such thing as a sign without a medium” (Bolter, 1991 as cited in Chandler, 2007, p. 55). In dance education, a variety of signs, including those created, represented, and experienced through the body (which, we will later see, encompasses all signs) come to bear on the teaching and learning process; how signs with different material representamens operate in concert with one another is an important and unique aspect of each dance classroom. While semiotics can at times appear abstract, I feel the
grounding of abstractions and interpretations in materiality is an important consideration for creating research that has potential applications to the lived experiences of dance education. For too long education has ignored the signifying (and thus learning) potential of the body; therefore, any semiotics I use must address the body, starting with a material understanding of signs.

*Where is the body in semiotics?*

As much as Chandler does a comprehensive survey of the field of semiotics, and as much as he does note that the privileging of spoken and written language in our society and educational systems needs to be challenged, I find myself deeply disappointed that he does not give any consideration to the body as a major element of all signifying practices. Perhaps this is because that is too obvious. After all, speaking and writing are practices dependent on body actions, and reading any sign is dependent on body sensations. However, I think it is indicative of a larger trend in philosophy that ignores the meaning of the body, one that is echoed in the narrow, structuralist positions of linguistics where Saussurean or French semiotics got its start. In looking through Chandler’s index, I found no mention of the terms *embodiment, body, or movement*. He does briefly mention gesture in his discussion of analogical modes for communication (p. 48), but this is absorbed into a larger discussion of nonverbal communication as a means of “giving us away” (p. 48), hinting at the potential untrustworthiness of the body in our culture, another reason I detect the lack of serious attention to embodiment. In surveying other general texts on semiotics, such as those by Marcel Danesi (2004) and Johansen and
Larsen (2002), I also notice a similar lack of substantial attention to the body as a major component of signifying practice.

I take this not as an oversight or omission by these authors, but as an overarching commentary on general literature tagged “semiotics”: it simply has not yet, in any major way, caught up with the “corporeal turn” in contemporary theory and cognitive science (S. Gallagher & Zahavi, 2007; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Noë, 2010; O’Loughlin, 2006; Sheets-Johnstone, 2009). With its origination in the “linguistic turn” and gradual acceptance, through Barthes and other scholars, of the “visual turn,” semiotics as a field is moving along. However, in order for semiotics to be a useful theoretical lens for dance education research, this corporeal turn must be taken. I now turn to specific authors whose writings can be used to build a branch of embodied semiotics that can address the concerns and interests of dance scholars and educators.

In his book *Diagrammatology: An investigation on the borderlines of phenomenology, ontology, and semiotics*, Danish scholar Frederik Stjernfelt (2007) explicitly connects embodiment and semiotics. In chapter 12, *The signifying body: A semiotic concept of embodiment*, Stjernfelt notes, “In traditional semiotic thought, however, the body has been almost ignored” (p. 257). He goes on to explain the call for “a body concept which entails semiosis.” (p. 257) Stjernfelt gives an overview of five theoretical positions that can contribute to a theory of embodied semiotics: cognitive semantics; von Uexküll’s umwelt as “a sensori-motor body conception, described in semiotic terms” (p. 261); Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology; complexity theory; and biosemiotics.
In his inclusion of cognitive semantics, Stjernfelt points to the work of philosophers such as Lakoff and Johnson (1999) who argue for the bodily basis of language through their discussion of conceptual metaphor, explaining how we understand the world and speak of it in the ways we do because of our nature as embodied beings. He notes how the explicit label of “semiotics” is not necessarily used for this body of work: “Cognitive Semantics covers a large field of semiotic issues; thus it constitutes one of the main developments of semiotics from 1980 onwards—even if it most often does not explicitly use the term ‘semiotics’” (p. 258). He furthermore explains how “the relation between embodiment and general semiotic competences is fairly underdeveloped. If a body is characterized by instantiating (some of the) Gestalt schemas mentioned, this does not in any way imply that that body is necessarily able to understand, still less represent such schemata nor build language with them” (p. 260–261). In other words, he does not build a strong theoretical case of a semiotically active bodymind that makes, takes, and integrates a range of sign types but still prioritizes the act of building language as the pinnacle of semiotic advancement.

A clear connection between the body and educational practices within semiotic theory is offered by Andrew Stables (2010), in his chapter Semiosis and the Collapse of Mind-body Dualism. He calls for “a fully semiotic perspective” that “regards all living as semiotic engagement, not merely the conscious communicative practices of human beings” and which “depends on a rejection of Cartesian mind-body substance dualism” (citing Dewey, 1925) (p. 21). He offers a sound theoretical basis for this position and discusses how both Peircian and Saussureian semiotics can inform it, taking a holistic
view of the practices of human meaning-making:

To be “fully semiotic,” semiotics must acknowledge that its scope cannot simply be defined by human language and other conscious sign use, such as visual imagery, in recognizable “texts” including those of film or art. Rather, the boundaries of what constitutes signs are, at best, fuzzy and at worst, totally uncallable. (p. 25)

Stables defines his position as necessarily “critical of the categorical separation of mind and body,” and he notes that other dualisms prevalent in education must be challenged also, such as separations between “language and mere communication, between reason and instinct, between thought and feeling” (p. 25).

Stables (2007) goes on to show an inkling of how his thinking applies in educational contexts, arguing that “all learning must also be semiotic engagement” (p. 26). A key idea from his argument is that “every individual experiences a situation from a unique vantage point, both in terms of physical location and personal orientation” (p. 26). His earlier assertion that “signs, though ubiquitous, do not have fixed meanings or identities” (p. 25) supports this, contributing to a larger understanding of semiosis as an individual process within a shared community, where meaning is not contained within signifiers but in our interactions with them. (A similar argument, coming from the other side, was made by neuroscientist Alva Noë (2010) who has argued that consciousness does not reside “in” our brains but rather in the interactions between self and world.) The task of teachers, then, is to support these interactions through awareness and acknowledgement of signs, but Stables (2007) cautions, “no individual (including a
teacher) can ever be fully certain of how another individual (including a student) has responded to a particular situation” (p. 26). Stables elaborates to develop a brief theoretical position of how these ideas apply to curriculum and educational policy, with a focus on the agency of the learner throughout. Stables’s attention to the need to reject mind-body dualism as it manifests in both education policy and semiotics literature is definitely a necessary precursor to any dance education research. However, for semiotics to be fruitful as a theoretical support for dance education research, additional insights regarding how signs are connected with our embodied nature are needed.

Semiosis is ongoing and corporeal

Here it is potentially useful to distinguish between two interrelated terms: semiotics and semiosis. Semiotics is an approach to inquiry concerned with meaning through signs, while semiosis refers to the ongoing and ubiquitous process of making and taking such signs. We are engaged in semiosis whether we acknowledge it as such or not, continually using signs as we make meaning in the world. Umberto Eco (1997) referred to this process as “unlimited semiosis,” (p. 69) whereby our engagement in making meaning of one sign always involves another sign, which itself invokes yet another, and so on. Semiosis is, of course, an apt subject for semiotic inquiry—How do we do what we do with the signs we make and take? And what happens when we do it? However, when many researchers—students and published authors alike—enter into a deliberately semiotic inquiry, the focus often becomes on the signs and systems themselves, situating them “out there” as objects to be researched and obscuring the fact that these signs,
whatever they may be, only have relevance when we as subjects engage with them in the process of *semiosis*. For the purposes of dance education research, then, our work might be better suited to an investigation of *semiosis* rather than *semiotics*. Admittedly, such a distinction is artificial, for they are intricately bound up in one another, but shifting our attention (and our search terms, it seems) to *semiosis* has the potential to establish the inquiry on more favorable theoretical ground that takes the body seriously as a locus of meaning-making.

The work of contemporary semiotics pioneer Floyd Merrell provides a tremendously useful, albeit challenging, discussion of semiosis as an ongoing process inseparable from our corporeality. In his 2003 book *Sensing Corporeally: Toward a Posthuman Understanding*, Merrell returns to the seminal works of Peirce, reading them through the lens of current research in both philosophy and neuroscience to give a thorough account of the bodymind’s involvement in semiosis. He underscores the importance of change throughout the process:

> The process of signs becoming (translated into) other signs is in principle endless. Everything is incessantly becoming something other than what it was becoming. Consequently, for Pierce there is no ultimate meaning (interpretant). The meaning of a given sign is itself a sign of that sign. This second sign must be endowed with its own meaning, which is in the process of becoming yet another sign. So there can be no final translation. (2003, p. 40)

Embedded within this understanding of semiosis is the notion of the triadic sign as knot. Merrell uses this figure, rather than the triangle often used to schematically represent the
relationships among representamen, interpretant, and object, because it conveys the ongoing-ness or fluidity in the interplay between these aspects and avoids the tendency for the sign to be construed as a series of dyadic relationships, some which might be posited as more important than the others. Merrell explains that the “representamen is *something* that enters into interrelation with its *object*, the second component of the sign” (p. 35). He clarifies the ontological stance necessary for understanding the sign in this way:

The semiotic object can never be identical to the “real” object in our physical world, since according to Pierce our knowledge of the “real” is never absolute. Our knowledge can be no more than an approximation to the “real” world as it is—or better, is becoming. (p. 36)

The third sign component, the *interpretant*, “is quite close to what we would usually take for a sign’s meaning” (p. 36).

A less sophisticated reading of the sign components might suggest a hierarchy, privileging the meaning conveyed by the interpretant (in some schematics placed at the top of the triangle; see Chandler, 2007, p. 30) as the ultimate goal of semiosis. But semiosis is not goal-oriented; it is an ongoing process and Merrell’s sign model conveys this, with each aspect of the sign actively engaged in mediating the others:

What I mean by mediation is that a legitimate sign component acts as an *intermediary* between the two other sign components. In this act of mediation, most prevalent in the role of interpretant, the sign component becomes involved with its two companions in such a manner that all three enter into interactive,
interrelated interdependency. A full-fledged sign, then, must have a representamen, a semiotic object, and an interpretant. (p. 37)

Thus, the components making up the sign are inseparable in our experience of the sign. Academic discussions, of course, attempt to separate out and label these components for purposes of analysis, demonstrating the ways that meaning is made from a variety of signs. These theoretical demonstrations are themselves signs, displaying traces of their authors’ semiosis as well as engendering semiosis in their readers. It is important, therefore, to keep in mind the “interactive, interrelated interdependency” of sign parts, even as they may be artificially separated in discussion.

Furthermore, Merrell explains, “the meaning of signs—especially linguistic signs—is found in their interrelations and interdependency with other signs” (p. 39). This interdependency is the foundation of semiosis, as the interpretant of one sign becomes the representamen of another, coming into new interactive interrelations with interpretants and semiotic objects, ad infinitum: “semiosis becoming semiotics is a never-ending process” (p. 39). Merrell’s emphasis on the ongoing nature of semiosis makes his orientation to semiotics particularly useful for theorizing dance education because our readings as teachers and researchers of dance education settings are not of finished, complete texts but of active processes of teaching and learning. Merrell invites readers to always keep in mind the continual unpredictability and dynamism inherent in semiosis by continually repeating that any sign is “incessantly becoming something other than what it was becoming” (p. 40, emphasis added), invoking a sense of motion in the direction of the unknown. Although his writing is complex and challenging, my experience of reading
Merrell—unlike my experience of reading Chandler, Danesi, or some of the other semiotic scholars mentioned previously—is one that evokes physical sensations of movement, spiraling, twisting, returning, breathing. Both his positions and his style provide access to semiotic theory in a way that supports the aims, as I see them, of dance education research.

In addition, Merrell’s discussion of Peirce’s theories is particularly useful for theorizing semiosis in dance because of the emphasis he places throughout his work on nonverbal signs and his adamancy that corporeality is the foundation for semiosis. As a base for his arguments, he describes Peirce’s categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness: “In schematic form, Firstness is possibility (a might be), Secondness is actuality (what is), and Thirdness is potentiality, probability, or necessity (what could be, would be, or must be, given a certain set of conditions)” (p. 43). He later gives a slightly different schematic for Pierce’s categories: “Firstness is quality, Secondness is effect, and Thirdness is product in the process of its becoming” (p. 46). The importance for Merrell’s project of this categorization scheme, which is also fluidly conceptualized in a knot-like relationship, becomes apparent when he clarifies:

Firstness, in and of itself, is not an actual concrete quality…. It is nothing more than a possibility … it cannot (yet) be present to some conscious semiotic animal as such-and-such…. It is simply what it is, as pure possibility. This pure possibility, it bears mentioning, is almost entirely absent in the Cartesian body/mind distinction … [which is] prevalent in Western science’s obsession with what there purportedly is, and what there is is what has been actualized and
presumably can be properly measured, mathematized, and cognized. Pure possibilities elude such manipulation, and are therefore usually categorically ignored. (p. 47)

Merrell’s project is to return attention to these possibilities of Firstness, which he does throughout his discussions of semiosis. He describes Peirce’s nine sign functions, an array from the *qualisign*, a “possible sign of pure feeling, before there can be consciousness of the feeling as such” (p. 49) to the *argument*, and notes that “as we move from qualsigns to argument, then, the more developed signs are interrelated with the less developed signs by inclusion” (p. 51). He goes on to show how these nine sign functions engender ten sign types, from *feeling*, involving “an exceedingly vague feeling of something or other” (p. 52) through *realizing*, also termed “argument (text, discourse, narrative),” “the most efficient sign for making some aspect of the world ‘semiotically real’” (p. 59). He reminds readers “the categories are by no means precise, for the lines of demarcation between them remain fuzzy; also they are not categories in the ordinary sense, but processes” (p. 61). Merrell interweaves his theoretical discussions with cases drawn from the writings of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (2000) to explain how contemporary research supports Peirce’s early twentieth-century theories, along the way illustrating the necessity of all levels of sign function for a fully semiotic individual to engage appropriately with the world.

While the discussion of Damasio’s patients helps underscore the importance of all sign types, including those prior to conscious awareness, for making meaning and thus functioning in the world, it is Merrell’s larger proclamations about all individuals,
drawing on the importance of corporeality, that have significant relevance for semiosis and dance education. Although he does not discuss the relationship between semiosis and education explicitly, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that educative processes that dismiss the “lower” levels of sign function have the potential to be similarly detrimental (in type though of course not degree) as the impairments experienced by Damasio’s patients. Likewise, our research into education needs to acknowledge, even though we cannot readily observe or test, that signs of Firstness play a vital role in the meanings that students and teachers are able to make from their classroom and life experiences. Merrell supports this assertion when he discounts approaches to meaning that rest on a formal linguistic model, and instead reinforces the centrality of the body and non-verbal semiosis, explaining how understanding and interpretation are never entirely grounded in language. Rather … language itself is grounded in those more encompassing signs chiefly of Firstness and Secondness, of iconicity and indexicality, signs of body as well as—and in many cases even more than—mind; signs of bodymind. (pp. 89–90)

This relationship between nonverbal experience and language is explored more thoroughly by Horst Ruthrof (2000), who contends, “language does not mean at all, unless ingredients are brought to bear on it that provide the kind of specificity which we associate with meaning: nonverbal signs” (p. 33). (Interestingly, although he and Merrell develop very complementary arguments in their respective texts, neither one cites the other.) Ruthrof, in his discussion of what he terms corporeal semantics, focuses extensively on an aspect of semiosis known as “intersemiotic corroboration” which
occurs “among nonverbal readings and between nonverbal signs and language as necessary condition for meaning” (p. 71). Ruthrof explains that semiosis involving different types of signs results in “the collaborative strengthening of meaning as event” (p. 44). Educators rarely rely on only one type of sign to communicate with their students, and dance educators have a particularly wide range of signs to work with. Thus, investigating intersemiotic corroboration and how teachers facilitate this process is a potentially fruitful strategy for studying semiosis, one that would not be possible with a narrow focus on discrete, readily identifiable signs. Building on the work of Merrell and Ruthrof to understand semiosis as a continual process of making meaning from bodied experience with a range of signs is key to the full potential of theorizing the semiotic processes at work in making and engaging with dance.

*The semiosphere*

In addition to a theoretical basis grounded in the body and the ongoing quality of semiosis as a process, it is important to consider also that this process unfolds within a learning community. Just as semiosis should not be thought of as a series of isolated, discrete steps taken to arrive at a final known meaning but is understood as temporally fluid and connected, so should it not be thought of as the work of discrete individuals operating autonomously. Spatial continuity operates much as temporal continuity in semiosis, and while we may certainly separate instances for the purposes of analysis, it is important that we keep in mind a complete conceptualization of the largest possible realm within which semiosis can take place.
Such a conceptualization of the cultural environment where semiosis occurs is found in Yuri Lotman’s (2005)\(^4\) description of the semiosphere, “the space outside of which semiosis itself cannot exist” (p. 208), the “whole semiotic space of the culture in question” (Y. Lotman, 1990, p. 125). Lotman (2005) stresses its holistic quality, describing “a unified mechanism … [where] primacy does not lie in one or another sign, but in the ‘greater system,’ namely the semiosphere” (p. 208). Lotman gives us a conception of semiotic space operating on multiple levels through which we may theorize the relationships among semiosic activities taking place across different individuals, groups, and cultures: “The levels of the semiosphere comprise an inter-connected group of semiospheres, each of them being simultaneously both participant in the dialogue (as part of the semiosphere) and the space of the dialogue (the semiosphere as a whole)” (p. 205).

One key element of the semiosphere is the notion of a boundary through which ideas are translated between the semiosphere and that which lies outside of it. Lotman (2005) explains, “the border of semiotic space is the most important functional and structural position, giving substance to its semiotic mechanism. The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa” (p. 210). This boundary “represents the division of the self from other” (p. 210), where the notion of “self” can refer to both the individual person and any conception of a community or culture. Indeed, the point of view of the observer determines the location of a semiosphere’s boundaries. Keeping in mind the ongoing,

\(^4\) Originally published in Russian in 1984.
dynamic nature of semiosis, we must now understand this border as ever-shifting and contingent on the many processes taking place within and across it. Indeed, the border is a site of “accelerated semiotic processes, which always flow more actively on the periphery of cultural environments, seeking to affix them to the core structures, with a view to displacing them” (p. 212). Considering a classroom as a semiosphere, we can inquire into where the borders are and what kinds of accelerated processes are taking place there as new learning continually makes and re-makes such boundaries.

A second key component of the semiosphere is that of semiotic irregularity—just as the border of a semiosphere is in constant negotiation, so too are the levels within that semiosphere as they are in active interactions. Lotman (2005) explains that within the semiosphere, “the hierarchy of languages and texts, as a rule, is disturbed: and these elements collide as though they coexisted on the same level” (p. 213). This structural heterogeneity makes the creation of new information within the semiosphere possible as information crosses the borders of structures and sub-structures within it: “the continuous semiotic ‘invasion’ to one or other structure in the ‘other territory’ gives birth to meaning” (p. 215). This notion of internal irregularity providing the conditions for meaning is consistent with theories of learning that emphasize its dynamic nature, and therefore the notion of the semiosphere is quite useful for theorizing educational practices.

Zylko (2001) traces the development of Lotman’s work and draws attention to the shift from his earliest conceptions of “culture as a bundle of unambiguous signs” (p. 398) and “a device for storing and transferring information” (p. 400) toward the holistic nature
of the semiosphere as a concept for understanding culture. Even so, Merrell (2001) points out that Lotman’s writing contains multiple limitations in the form of binaries, which he (Merrell) seeks to destabilize through an analysis of the nature of the triadic sign. In keeping with his emphasis on the corporeality of semiosis, Merrell, like Stables (2010) discussed previously, is attuned to binaries that mimic a supposed mind-body separation; here, he gives a thorough theoretical (albeit geometrically complex) strategy for reconceptualizing these dualisms. Merrell then moves to a larger discussion of cultures and hegemony, in particular seeking to complicate understandings of power struggles beyond simple dichotomous notions of us-them, have-have not, and dominant-subservient. Instead, he describes the power of semiosis within cultures to provoke “cultural guerilla’ strategies” (p. 404) as individual meaning makers oscillate within the irregularities of the semiosphere between heterogeny and homogeny. While Merrell’s conception of culture as process gives substantial breadth to inquiry and invites consideration of complex issues of social justice within semiotic study, he remains mindful of his own situation within Western traditions (something that Lotman, by many accounts, failed to do) and reminds us that “no matter how much we manage to say about some particular aspect of our world, our saying will always be incomplete” (p. 405).

Although Lotman (2005) himself, writing in 1984 and expanding on the theoretical idea of the “biosphere,” claims that semiosphere should not be understood metaphorically, subsequent scholars such as Winfried Nöth (2006) acknowledge both the physical space as well as mental space where semiosis occurs and allow for the metaphorical nature of this idea. Certainly, that opens it up for theoretical flexibility and
applicability to a wide range of research contexts. Again, for the purposes of dance education research, the holistic and dynamic nature of the semiosphere, as theorized initially by Lotman and further developed by recent scholars, makes it an ideal concept through which to think about processes taking place in dance settings as cultural environments.

**Multimodality**

A final important aspect of semiotic theory that is essential for its application to dance education research is multimodality. Carey Jewitt (2011b) explains that “multimodality describes approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attend to the full range of communicational forms people use—image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on—and the relationships between them” (p. 14). Clearly, any attempt to understand the semiosic processes at work in a dance education setting will necessitate a multimodal approach. Jewitt further outlines four key features, or underlying assumptions, of multimodality. The first is that, while “language is part of a multimodal ensemble” (p. 14), it functions within a whole array of modes that all contribute to the construction of meaning: “From a multimodal perspective, language is therefore only ever one mode nestled among a multimodal ensemble of modes” (p. 15).

Secondly, Jewitt explains, “each mode in a multimodal ensemble is understood as realizing different communicative work.” This strongly underscores the importance of the materiality of the sign and emphasizes that even signs that may appear to point to the
same concept are nonetheless engendering different meanings in the semiotic process. 

Jewitt further explains the relevance of this for educational research: “Different modes have differential potential effects for learning, the shaping of learner identities and how learners create reading pathways through texts. The choice of mode, then is a central aspect of the epistemological shaping of knowledge and ideological design” (p. 15). This ties closely to the third principle of multimodality, that “people orchestrate meaning through the selection and configuration of modes. Thus the interaction between modes is significant for meaning making” (p. 15). Although Jewitt does not invoke Lotman, we begin to see here that conceptions of multimodality and the semiosphere, while drawn from two different theoretical approaches, are highly compatible. We cannot look at signs and talk about their meanings in isolation; we must attend to the way that signs interact, with attention to the fact that the forms they take will not necessarily be the same.

Furthermore, the users of any modes, operating together in a semiosphere, will shape the meanings that are possible. Jewitt’s fourth principle for multimodality reflects the social nature of semiosis. Meanings “are shaped by the norms and rules operating at the moment of sign-making, influenced by the motivations and interests of a sign-maker in a specific social context” (pp. 15–16). Therefore, we cannot understand signs as abstract entities, separated from the ways that people use them. While Jewitt does not invoke embodiment per se, we can also begin to see that her conception of multimodality is highly compatible with an embodied approach to semiotics.

Jewitt offers one additional concept related to multimodality that is important to research in dance education settings: the notion of semiotic resources. On the surface
“semiotic resource” has a meaning similar to “sign type,” but upon further reflection we can see that this concept shifts agency to the embodied sign-user acting within a social situation:

A person (sign-maker) “chooses” a semiotic resource from an available system of resources. They bring together a semiotic resource (a signifier) with the meaning (the signified) that they want to express. In other words, people express meanings through their selection from the semiotic resources that are available to them in a particular moment: meaning is choice from a system. But this choice is always socially located and regulated, both with respect to what resources are made available and to whom, and the discourses that regulate and shape how modes are used by people. (p. 23)

In dance education, then, we can begin to understand that one of the goals is to expand the semiotic resources available to include not only movement, but also music, visual images, costumes, and props. All of these resources operate in a social environment where their meanings are not fixed but are actively made and remade in relation with one another. While an initial observation of a dance education setting might concentrate on the sign types being used, further analysis must reconceptualize these as semiotic resources and attend more to the way people are using them in practice.

**Semiotics and the research process**

In thinking about the relationship between individual signs and the semiosphere as a whole, it is important to understand that these concepts come from different schools
of thought and that the understandings we create about them and their relationships
depend in large part on where we begin our analysis. Mihhail Lotman (2002) (scholar and
son of Yuri Lotman) explains:

One of the most important special features of Tartu semiotic school is that simple
semiotic systems are not treated as prime elements, from which more complicated
systems are formed, but vice versa: elementary semiotic systems are abstractions,
simplicity means here simplification. From the viewpoint of semiosis,
semiosphere as a whole is the initial unit which is divided into simple subordinate
systems. In this respect Tartu semiotics differs in principle from Peirce’s
semiotics, the centre of which is (single) sign and its qualities; sign in Tartu
semiotics is not something which has been given immediately, but the product of
analysis. (p. 37)

Dance and other arts education scholars who reject semiotics as an appropriate or useful
theoretical approach for their inquiries are often put off by the focus in Peircian semiotics
(as understood here by M. Lotman) on the individual sign as the entry point for analysis,
correctly understanding that assembly of discrete signs will not result in a satisfactory
whole, an idea repeatedly echoed by Yuri Lotman (2005). Particularly when concerned
with any phenomena relating to groups of people interacting together, the notion of the
semiosphere as a point of entry for research seems wise.

However, this does not mean that we disregard all we have learned from Peirce;
instead, we recognize that those elements we choose to pull out, define, analyze, and
write about from within the semiosphere did not originate as discrete elements, fully
formed and packaged for our ready dissection. The act of analysis is an act of creation, producing the signs as we come to know them. Such an orientation allows us to approach the act of semiosis from both ends, should we choose, for we are not tied by loyalty or training to one school or another. We can engage in considering the entirety of the semiosphere as a space for meaning-making as well as isolating and analyzing specific acts of semiosis and the signs they are concerned with for the purpose of more focused inquiry. While the M. Lotman quote above may seem to suggest that the semiosphere is an already-given, it too is a product of our analytical choices. Peeter Torop (2005) reminds us that “semiosphere is simultaneously an object- and a meta-concept. Semiosphere is what is being studied in or as culture, and semiosphere is the means that is used in studying culture” (p. 164). Therefore, as researchers we are part of the research process; our own semiosis—in the act of choosing and defining the semiospheres we are concerned with as well as identifying the particular signs within them and constructing relationships among these aspects—is deeply entwined with the semiosis we study.

Curriculum theory

The second major area this study draws from is curriculum theory. This is admittedly an area with an exceptionally large scope, where theorists deal with questions of \textit{what should we teach?}, \textit{how should we teach it?} and \textit{how should we decide?} These discussions take place through the process of forecasting or prescribing curriculum approaches, reflecting on and critiquing existing curriculum, and creating conceptual
structures for organizing and theorizing about all aspects of curriculum, necessitating an expansive field of inquiry.

Indeed, to speak of curriculum theory as if it were a single theory, or even a single approach to doing theory, would be erroneous. Keith R. B. Morrison (2004), in his critique of what he terms a narrow approach to the field by Wraga and Hlebowitsh (2003), advocates for a wide view of what constitutes curriculum and therefore, curriculum theory: “If there is to be a prescription for a curriculum theory, authenticity, discovery, diversity, novelty, multiplicity, fecundity, and creativity should be the hallmarks of the refashioned field” (Morrison, 2004, p. 488). He argues that

It is perhaps misplaced to seek a single theory of the curriculum or view of its development….If the curriculum theory world is to survive … then it must come out of the protected, perhaps introverted world of academe and must embrace the complicated, tension-ridden, uncertain, complex, contradictory, messy, uncontrollable, and wonderful world of people; conception and execution must unite. (p. 489)

Morrison’s expansive view of curriculum theory is one I take to be of possibility and a wide range of applicability, concerning all ideas and practices that come to bear on any educational situation. While this expansive view ultimately has to be narrowed in the process of application to any specific research context, I find this broad view to be a useful starting point that recognizes the multiplicity of influences on teaching and learning. Indeed, Morrison conceives of the questions of curriculum as being about “everything that can be learned, how they can be learned, why they are being learned,
with what justifications, by whom and with what consequences” (p. 490). He cautions that it is “impossible to delimit what curriculum theory will or should be” and advises that “we should be looking everywhere for multiple theories of the curriculum” (p. 492).

While rejecting the notion of a “grand theory” for curriculum invites possibility and a distribution of power, it does pose a problem when thinking about what research and theorizing should address in particular contexts. Numerous curriculum scholars, therefore, contribute to the project of curriculum theorizing by suggesting ways that one can slice up the range of experiences and texts that we can call “curriculum” in order to look more deeply into particular aspects. The categories that result reflect the authors’ particular orientations toward understanding curriculum; none are complete and, as curriculum and theories about it reflect the political nature of teaching and learning, none are value-neutral. Some approaches to breaking apart the expansive “whole” of curriculum theory that I find useful for my research are offered by Goodlad (1979), Dillon (2009), and Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995).

*From documents to practices: Goodlad’s domain approach*

John Goodlad (1979), a leading scholar in the field of curriculum inquiry, proposed several domains or aspects of curriculum that can be researched and theorized, applying terms that continue to be used by curriculum researchers (Bresler, DeStefano, Feldman, & Garg, 2000; Robertson, 2004; Sæbø, 2009). These are the ideal, formal, perceived, operational, and experienced curricula, and all come to bear on any moment in a classroom. The ideal curricula refers to the values and ideologies put forth by those
engaged in planning the curriculum and are often represented by textbooks and other documents created outside local school systems. Formal curricula are those dictated in documents that are intended to guide practice, such as pacing guides. The perceived curriculum refers to what teachers understand the curriculum to be, including the goals and strategies for student learning, as well as the rationale for implementing them. The operational curriculum comprises what actually occurs in classrooms, including the totality of events as enacted by students and teacher, while the experienced curriculum describes the individual experiences of learners as they participate in the social life of the classroom. To these ideas have been added the hidden curriculum (P. Jackson, 1990), the implicit ideas about schooling as social life that students must master to be successful, and the null curriculum (Eisner, 1994, p. 60), that which is not taught and thus communicates to students what adults do and do not deem valuable knowledge.

This structure, as described by Goodlad (1979) and interpreted by subsequent scholars (for example, Ennis (1986) discusses it within the context of physical education curricula, while Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead (2005) introduce it to educational administrators) provides a conceptual framework for understanding curriculum holistically—beyond documents, textbooks, and plans—and helps underscore the potential for substantial differences between what is planned and written as curriculum, what teachers understand and teach, and what students learn. In researching and theorizing about curriculum, it is important to keep in mind that what is revealed through the investigation of any one of these cannot stand in proxy for the others, despite their deep interconnections. It also helps to avoid an artificial distinction between curriculum
and pedagogy, between what is taught and how it is taught, as these become largely inseparable in the operational and experienced curricula.

As an entry point for my research, this very basic conceptualization is helpful. When I ask about the nature of dance education curricula, then, I first mean all of it, not just what falls in the (very limited) scope of published standards, textbooks, and other curriculum guides. Revisiting Goodlad (1979), I see them as interconnected, though their connections are far from clear and predictable. An initial reading of conceptualizations of these curricular domains poses the danger of seeing their relations as hierarchical. This may in turn imply that people who enact curriculum are entrenched in a chain of command that implies diminishing levels of both agency and importance: policy makers and academics theorize and prescribe the ideal and formal curricula, teachers have a hand in determining how they perceive and operationalize it, and finally it reaches students, who experience it (and become problematic when they don’t do so as expected).

This potential for “curriculum as flow chart” is clearly shown in a boxy diagram by Baron (as reprinted in Glatthorn et al., 2005, p. 28), where information flows through the written, supported, taught, and tested curricula (all new names for the formal, perceived, and operational curricula), which lead to the learned curriculum (suggesting a more passive, yet achievement-oriented approach to the experienced curriculum). Curriculum flows only one way in this model, an understanding I find limiting and thus reject. In my own experience, particularly in dance where written curricula are minimal, I find that the sources of curriculum are rich and varied, the “ideals” coming from an array of both educational and artistic aspirations. As a teacher I do far more than
“operationalize” a curriculum generated elsewhere, and when my students “experience” the curriculum I expect them to do so as active agents in the process. The fallacy of a flowchart approach to curriculum is made evident in studies of teachers’ classroom practice, such as in Shkedi’s (2009) work, which found “the conception of teachers as ‘obedient’ to a written curriculum … is inconsistent with teachers’ own curriculum thinking” (p. 834). Thus, the diagram that I envision uses categories such as Goodlad’s with fluid and overlapping boundaries, where the lines between them spiral and connect in many ways, showing a multidirectional flow of information and ideas originating with multiple actors. Separating them conceptually is a useful research strategy, but only when the artificiality of such boundaries is kept in check. I heed Morrison’s (2004) warning: “The field of curriculum theory and development cannot be guided or bounded by a few disarmingly simple labels or guidelines” (p. 492).

With this in mind, Goodlad’s (1979) domains do offer an entry-point for thinking about curriculum, and in particular, destabilizing the notion that when we think about curriculum, describe the curriculum in a given setting, or suggest plans or changes to curriculum, we are discussing primarily the formal (in many cases government mandated) curriculum. Certainly this is an important domain to attend to, but we must specify what aspects we are referring to in any given situation. The present study focuses primarily on the perceived curriculum (as it is described by dance educators) and the operationalized curriculum (as I am able to observe and discuss it with them). These can also be understood as connected through the more organic notion of curriculum-as-lived, a concept offered by Japanese-Canadian curriculum scholar Ted Aoki (2005) that
prioritizes teacher’s lived experiences of curriculum. Aoki contrasts this with the curriculum-as-plan, a construct that encompasses Goodlad’s (1979) domain categories of ideal and formal curricula. Through keeping an understanding of interconnected domains in mind, I am able to consider how these operate within a larger understanding of curriculum, knowing that even the best description of any one domain would still be incomplete.

_Inquiring about curriculum: Dillon’s questions_

The whole of curriculum theory can also be parsed out through a consideration of the kinds of questions being asked, or the kinds of answers being given, by the theorist. This approach to curriculum theory is addressed by J. T. Dillon (2009) in his article, *The questions of curriculum*. He starts by offering a definition of curriculum given by the influential theorist Joseph Schwab (1983), and then invites the reader to consider

To what question, it may be asked, was Schwab giving an answer? That would be the great question of curriculum; and the parts of his answer—even the adjectives that modify them—would respond to the basic or essential questions which together constitute the domain of curriculum. (Dillon, 2009, p. 343)

The focus on posing questions—and identifying those questions that have been implicitly posed and answered in various conceptualizations of curriculum—indeed undergirds the entire practice of curriculum theory as a process of inquiry, hence the term *curriculum inquiry* which is used synonymously in many cases with *curriculum theory*. The notion of curriculum theory as a process of responding to questions as a means of curriculum
development harkens back to the Tyler Rationale, presented in Ralph Tyler’s course syllabus and publications and later discussed in articles by Herbert Kliebard (1995;1970), a series of four fundamental questions that guide curriculum planning:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (Kliebard, 1970, pp. 259–260)

Such questions still guide much work in curriculum, both in planning and implementation in classrooms—the relationship to curriculum elements of content standards, classroom objectives, learning activities, and assessment is quite familiar—as well as in larger debates taking place in both academic and public spheres. However, the Tyler Rationale and contemporary manifestations of it overlook larger questions not only of the social, cultural, political, and moral dimensions of curriculum but also of the nuances of individual lives within the learning communities where curriculum is actively created.

Dillon’s (2009) article can be seen as extending the inquiry beyond questions concerning a narrow definition of curriculum as objectives, activities, and assessments and into larger social, political, and philosophical arenas. Dillon categorizes curriculum theory into three broad categories of questions, dealing with the nature of the curriculum, the elements of curriculum, and the practice of curriculum, which he elaborates into an array of sub-questions (p. 344), covering, if not the entirety of curriculum theory, at least
a substantial body of ideas and experiences that could be connected to it. He offers a range of possible uses for these questions, including as a means for understanding curriculum by giving us a systematic way to grasp curriculum proposals and programs, speeches and directives, theories and positions, contemporary controversies, and the like. When these make propositions and assertions, which questions are they answering or emphasizing, and which not? What answers are they giving, and how do these sit with other basic questions-answers that they adduce or omit? (Dillon, 2009, pp. 357–358)

This basic focus on categorization through questioning is useful not only for, again, understanding the range of ideas and experiences that can be considered “curriculum,” but also for understanding that that curriculum, in all its forms, exists as a response to questions about the nature of knowledge, education, teaching, and learning, all situated within complex social, cultural, and political realities. Considering what questions are and are not being implicitly asked and answered in any instance of curriculum, while also posing additional questions to them, is a potentially useful strategy for moving beyond mere description and probing the interests and values that shape what we come to call “curriculum.”

I am particularly interested in Dillon’s (2009) framing of practice, as this is not limited to notions of teaching practice or the “operationalization” of curriculum; here practice encompasses all aspects of “doing” curriculum. Dillon explains, “practice in this field is not a matter of brute action but of thinking-in-action” (p. 349). He goes on to pose
two questions that characterize this idea: “What are the questions to bear in mind as we as educators do curriculum? or What questions are we answering in action?” (p. 349). By clearly understanding the questions that are implicitly being answered in various forms of curricula and curriculum theory, we can better engage in an inquiry that sees them as related. Furthermore, the notion that curriculum is something that is “done,” created repeatedly as educators engage in their work and reflect upon it, reinforces the dynamic, ongoing nature of curriculum—an idea that also resonates with our understandings of semiosis discussed previously and echoes Aoki’s (2005) curriculum-as-lived. Dillon’s questions also provide useful, albeit challenging, ideas to explore with teachers in the research process, questions that move us not toward definitive answers but to active exploration throughout the development of data creation and analysis.

Dillon (2009) hints again at the relationships among forms of curricula when he discusses how these questions can combine to form a nearly infinite number of possible complex questions about curriculum (p. 347). However, his project here does not extend toward any substantive conceptualization of how these various types of questions work together and how inquiry into one creates a lens through which others are understood. Neither does he offer a substantial suggestion as to how his broad categories of questions can connect in meaningful ways to important issues just outside of the loosely demarked boundary of curriculum. Just as the Goodlad (1979) framework discussed earlier provides a useful structure for beginning to conceptualize the pieces of curriculum but ultimately must be understood as only a scaffold that must later be removed for the whole building to be seen, so does Dillon’s delineation of questions provide only a starting place.
Certainly, Dillon himself challenges readers: “Could we now (please) make something better than a list of questions?” (p. 357).

Curriculum as a text: Pinar et al.’s orientations to curriculum theory

In a comprehensive survey of the curriculum theory field, Pinar et al. (1995) offer a way of understanding curricula based on reading them as texts that tell us something about the world we are living in and its orientation to educational practices. Their title, Understanding Curriculum, conveys their notion of the curriculum field as one that has moved beyond a narrow focus on technical means of curriculum development and instead is concerned with questions of why, seeing curriculum “beyond exclusively school materials to curriculum as symbolic representation” (p. 16). This focus leads to a presentation of curriculum as text, referring “to those institutional and discursive practices, structures, images, and experiences that can be identified and analyzed in various ways, i.e. politically, racially, autobiographically, phenomenologically, theologically, internationally, and in terms of gender and deconstruction” (p. 16). These various discursive lenses, then, become another way of separating and organizing the field, providing the reader with a variety of orientations from which to consider the whole of curriculum theory. This treatment is necessarily more comprehensive than a simple enumeration of domains of curriculum or questions that can be asked and answered by curriculum; the focus here is not on examining specific instances of curriculum but on ways of conceptualizing the entire discourse about curriculum. The “slicing up” that Pinar et al. do is a comprehensive organization of scholars in the field based on how they
examine curriculum as a text. The authors are careful to note, however, that the boundaries between these orientations are porous, and that any mapping of the field changes through research practices (pp. 51–52).

While all of the possibilities that Pinar et al. (1995) offer for understanding curriculum as text—historical, political, racial, gender, phenomenological, poststructural, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological, institutional, and international—are instructive and could come to bear on the curriculum practices of dance educators, two interest me most directly: understanding curriculum as phenomenological text and understanding curriculum as aesthetic text.

Curriculum as phenomenological text

Pinar et al. (1995) define phenomenological inquiry as “a form of interpretive inquiry … which focuses on human perception and experience, particularly on what many would characterize as the aesthetic qualities of human experience” (pp. 404–405). Applied to curriculum inquiry, phenomenology addresses topics that often fall out of the mainstream of educational research, focusing on the lived experiences of those in educational situations. Pinar et al. cite specifically the work of Max van Mannen, Maxine Greene, Madeline Grumet, and Ted Aoki as addressing curriculum as phenomenological text. Such a treatment of curriculum is undoubtedly intertwined with the research methodology employed; in this case, currere, “a phenomenologically related form of autobiographical curriculum theory” (p. 414), is discussed, as “it seeks to depict and reflectively comprehend the impact of milieu as well as the subject’s past upon the
educational experience of the individual in the present” (p. 416). This approach enables understanding of the curriculum as a lived experience of teachers and students, a meaning of curriculum that extends beyond documents and observed lessons and allows for the blurring of boundaries between categories and questions as discussed earlier, making the individual a central focus of the inquiry.

The orientation of curriculum as phenomenological text is clear in Aoki’s (1993) conception of the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived, which he brings together in posing an understanding of multiplicity. Aoki explains “it is time not to reject but to decenter the modernist-laden curricular landscape and to replace it with the C&C [for curriculum & curriculum] landscape that accommodates lived meanings, thereby legitimating thoughtful everyday narratives” (p. 263). While an appreciation of the differences between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived again provides a potentially useful reminder that they are not the same and that we must attend to lived experience to garner a holistic understanding of curriculum, it is Aoki’s strategy of bringing these together in a landscape of multiplicity, rather than replacing a privileged one with a now-to-be-privileged other, that I find to be a fruitful theoretical ground. In working with experienced dance educators, gaining an understanding of their curriculum-as-lived and the ways that their experiences as dance students, artists, and teachers intersect as they engage in true lifelong learning is a primary goal of this research, something which will be explored more fully in Chapter Four, which offers portraits of these educators.
Pinar et al. (1995) also describe the work of Margaret Olson as an example of curriculum as phenomenological text, and they cite her discussion of “the nature of pedagogical space,” where she explains

It is a shared space. The contents of the room hold personal meaning for all who inhabit it…. The presences of teacher and students pervade the space, not as isolated individuals, but as a mingling of thoughts and actions, each enhanced by the other. (Olson, 1989, p. 183 as cited in Pinar et al. 1995, p. 431)

Although not explicitly termed semiotics, this brief quote from Olson resonates with our understanding of the semiosphere and begins to point to how we might consider the relation between physical space and pedagogical space, between signs and lived experiences, and among multiple modes of communication toward an understanding of embodied semiotics as a central aspect of curriculum. Another hint toward embodied semiotics in curriculum is offered when Pinar et al. (1995) cite the work of Mikio Fujita (1987), who proposes a “study of lived meaning” he terms “semiogenetics” (p. 18, as cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 431).

Pinar et al. (1995) further discuss the work of Madeline Grumet and her conceptualization of reading as an embodied process (p. 434). In her chapter “Bodyreading,” Grumet (1988, pp. 129–152) acknowledges the “sadness” that comes with this notion:
The very need to present it seems to come from a sense that it expresses a continuity and integration that we have lost—that it describes a place where we once were, a way of being that we can only remember. (p. 131)

She goes on to acknowledge the educational structures that have led to this sense of loss and cautions that “it is our responsibility as educators not be caught in an understanding of symbol systems that reduces them to elegies for lost worlds” (p. 132). Emphasizing the intentionality of the reader, she explains how reading and writing are about “bridging the gap between public and private worlds” (p. 135). Although her focus is on written language, for my purposes I see a connection to a range of sign systems which can and should be “bodyread”; this conceptualization is fruitful both for conceptualizing dance education curriculum phenomenologically as well as providing a theoretical basis for building an understanding of embodied semiotics. Without explicitly invoking semiotics, Grumet eloquently describes semiosis when she reminds readers that “meaning is something we make out of what we find when we look at texts. It is not in the text” (p. 143).

Each of these notions of curriculum as phenomenological text reminds us that curriculum is so much more than a set of teaching plans and directives and that investigating the whole of the teaching-learning process invites us to reflect on larger meanings and connections, especially as they pertain to the lives of teachers and students. Thus, the current research with dance educators is concerned not only with descriptions of classroom events and particular decisions regarding dance as a school subject, but with how these connect to the larger meanings that both dance and education have for the
teachers who dedicate their life’s work to engaging young people. Furthermore, phenomenological readings of curriculum have the potential to ground investigations of teaching and learning in the concrete and everyday realities of life in schools rather than floating abstractly as policy statements of what should or might transpire in projected, distanced locations.

Curriculum as aesthetic text

The considerable overlap in Pinar et al. (1995) between the discussions of curriculum as phenomenological text and curriculum as aesthetic text reflects the importance of lived experience to many conceptualizations of artistic learning. While many of the scholars discussed work in the field of arts education, their focus is on how curriculum, broadly conceived, is understood as an aesthetic text; thus their scope extends beyond arts education curricula. (Indeed, it is possible to study arts education curricula through any of the discursive lenses introduced in the book.)

The scholar given the most attention in Pinar et al.’s chapter on curriculum as aesthetic text is Eliot Eisner, for his work reaches far beyond art education into a consideration of the way qualities can be discovered and communicated in many forms. His focus on the aesthetic nature of curriculum is one that I find very useful for considering dance education curricular practices situated within the broader context of K–12 schooling. He reminds us that “language, while a central and primary form of representation, is by no means the only form of representation” (2002, p. 8). This understanding connects well to my own interests in exploring semiotics in dance
education and considering how signifying practices, or in Eisner’s terms, forms of representation, intersect in the teaching and learning of dance.

Separately, however, Eisner alludes to the importance of spoken and written language in shaping our interaction with complex phenomena: “We learn to look for those qualities that are labeled, but especially for ones that have particular value for us … Our aims influence our language, and our language influences our perception” (1998, pp. 66–67). I earlier mentioned this quote in a discussion about how the signifying practices that dance students are taught influences what they will attend to and thus what they will learn about the dances they engage with. This statement has relevance for research and theorizing about curriculum as well: Investigating language choices has the potential to reveal much about those aims that teachers hold for their curricular processes, just as investigating the language that theorists use can help us understand the qualities in curriculum that they value. However, Eisner also cautions us not to get too carried away with the importance of language and again invokes a central tension in my research: he warns against “the assumption that linguistic descriptions of artistic performance will be adequate for describing the nuances of such performance…. Language is often a very limited vehicle for the description of qualities” (2002, p. 165). Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2009) similarly cautions that “language is not experience; it is the means by which we describe experience—or try to describe experience, for ‘the gap between the experiential and the linguistic is not easily bridged’” (p. 239; citing Sheets-Johnstone 1999a, p. 148). I heed these warnings also; in describing dance education curricula through written language, I am aware that, like any researcher, what I can convey will be limited, and
what I read in others’ studies of dance education is also limited by the nature of linguistic
description.

In engaging with dance education settings for this research as an observer and
sometimes participant, the notion of curriculum as aesthetic text seems particularly
useful. I find myself watching classrooms in many of the same ways that I watch dance,
and similarly I rely on many of the same skills I need to view or make sense of dance
when I watch what transpires in a lesson. I find myself drawn to singular moments that,
for one reason or another, seem particularly interesting to me. I notice themes, variations,
and surprises, and I challenge myself to see both the parts and the whole, the moments
that to me invoke beauty and those that, admittedly, might be a bit boring. I watch with
my whole body and attend to the way I breathe with the teacher and students. I call upon
my prior knowledge of codes and conventions of dance classes and performances to feel
comfortable with the genre of “dance class.” Most importantly, I allow myself to be
comfortable with, or at least tolerant of, the unknown and unfamiliar, with not
immediately translating something seen and felt into a ready narrative, a simple
description. Years of watching contemporary modern dance and improvisation has taught
me not to rush to an explanation but rather to sit with a performance for what it is, allow
it to draw me in, and enjoy the challenge of seeing the world anew. Such is also the
challenge of studying curriculum.

With these understandings of curriculum that can be parsed into sections for
theoretical scrutiny and understood as produced through a variety of discursive practices,
I now turn to a discussion of literature within the domain of multicultural education, which illustrates some of the social and political discourses surrounding curriculum.

Multicultural Education

Yuri Lotman (1990) described the semiosphere as “the result and the condition for the development of culture” (p. 125). In considering a dance class as a semiosphere, we can then ask questions about the ways that it provides the conditions for culture to develop as well as the resulting cultural understandings that emerge from it. (This, of course, requires us to always keep in mind that any understandings we do have about the semiosphere and the cultures within it are always partial and incomplete.) The idea of dance class-as-semiosphere then asks us to call upon the literature in both semiotics and curriculum theory, and it invites us to expand on these areas with specific ideas about the ways that arts curriculum is or can be deliberately constructed to teach about and pass on cultural ideas, norms, and values.

While any educational setting can be interrogated and understood as teaching about culture, in many instances this is not made explicit, and indeed the notion of “culture” would often fall into the null curriculum—that which is not overtly taught and therefore positioned as unimportant or not valuable, or the hidden curriculum, where understandings about what cultural practices are valued are passed on without deliberate mention. The field of multicultural arts education looks instead to place questions of culture explicitly within all aspects of arts curriculum. This research seeks to understand the ways that dance educators use a range of signs in their classroom to promote
meaning-making. A review of literature concerned with multicultural education highlights for us how this meaning-making process is culturally situated; it provides a grounding in the relevant discourses and the potential to develop strategies for theorizing about semiosis specifically as an educational process whereby culture is actively and constantly made and remade.

An overview of multicultural education

Multicultural arts education builds on the broader multicultural movement in education and considers ways that the study of artworks, art processes, artists, and arts communities can contribute to understanding of social, cultural, and historical issues from a range of perspectives. As practiced in the United States, multicultural education has roots in the Civil Rights movement, where the demands of disenfranchised groups to have their voices, histories, and cultural viewpoints included in the school curriculum led to a growing recognition among educators and policymakers that education should meet the needs of all students through changes in both teaching strategies and content. Davenport (2000) clarifies a distinction between multicultural education, which focuses on issues of diversity, human rights, and acceptance within one nation, and global education, which addresses these issues in an international or cross-cultural context. Such a distinction is far from clear-cut, as many cultural groups within a nation such as the United States maintain important connections with peoples outside of the US. To study these cultures as if they clearly fit within national boundaries misses the larger understanding of diasporas and cultural change. Desai also challenges the frequent co-
mingling, under the banner of “multiculturalism,” of domestic and international groups, which fails to “distinguish between the representation of racially subordinate groups in the United States and culturally subordinate groups throughout the world,” leading to teaching that “falsely re-presents them as equal, despite significantly different historical and political relationships of power” (p. 127). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this literature review I will focus primarily on approaches to multicultural arts education in the United States that relate to diverse cultural groups and social justice struggles within our nation, recognizing that these issues and associated teaching practices do not exist in isolation from larger global movements.

Even within the United States, the term “multicultural education” is attached to a range of meanings and associated curricular practices rooted in different conceptions about the purposes of education, orientations to the social status quo, and allegiances to cultural groups (Boyle-Baise, 1999). A number of scholars map out these differences, helping teachers to understand the dimensions of various approaches and how they intersect in educational endeavors (J. A. Banks, 1993; J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks, 2010; Blocker, 2005; Sleeter & Grant, 2008). Such mappings can provide a useful starting point for conceptualizing approaches to multicultural education within specific domains of visual art, music, drama, and dance.

Sleeter and Grant (2008) identify five different approaches to multicultural education and how each relates to social and school-specific goals, conceptualizes the “target” students, becomes enacted through curriculum and instruction, and interfaces with other school resources and concerns. While they attempt to present fair critiques of
each approach, the arrangement on a continuum from conservative practices, where little overall change from a traditional curriculum is expected, to more politically liberal approaches, ones that actively encourage teachers and students to challenge dominant ideologies, makes it apparent that they, and educators who follow their lead, do not see all approaches as equal, particularly in their potential to effect substantial transformation.

The first approach identified by Sleeter and Grant is *teaching the exceptional and culturally different*, which focuses on the larger goal of fitting into an existing social structure through mastering the traditional curriculum. In this approach, which Sleeter and Grant critique as assimilationist, teachers adopt strategies for reaching a range of learners without questioning or changing the underlying dominant cultural values in the existing curriculum. The second approach they describe, the *human relations* approach, focuses on helping students to develop “feelings of unity, tolerance, and acceptance within the existing social structure” (p. 86) through actively teaching about such issues as stereotyping and prejudice, enabling students to develop more positive orientations towards others. This approach may be used in a curriculum that otherwise remains highly traditional. What Sleeter and Grant term the *single-group studies* approach is based on academic areas that focus on one group in particular, such as those defined by race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, or disability in order to “promote structural equality and recognition” by encouraging “willingness and knowledge among students to work toward social change that would benefit the identified group” (p. 123). In this approach, one group becomes the focus of study with attention to the unique cultural
attributes, history, and contributions of the group, which advocates note are frequently omitted in mainstream curricula.

The imperative to change curriculum and instruction as a means for transforming society is carried into Sleeter and Grant’s fourth approach known simply as *multicultural education*, where curriculum is organized to reflect contributions, perspectives, and concerns of multiple groups, with attention to instruction that promotes critical thinking and analysis of divergent viewpoints. Students’ backgrounds and interests are used as assets as they are expected to actively contribute to the learning process. Multiple ways of knowing are encouraged and validated within the classroom, school, and community. The curriculum is necessarily widened when this approach is taken, and critics challenge implementation measures that cannot adequately address all aspects of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, and class. Indeed, working within this approach is a tall order, and educators may find that they emphasize one area at the expense of in-depth exploration of another or that they fail to fully engage students in understanding the intersectionality of multiple aspects of cultural identity.

Another critique of the multicultural education approach is that it focuses too much on cultural issues without challenging structural inequalities or equipping students with the skills to transform those inequalities through democratic practices. This is addressed in the final approach identified by Sleeter and Grant, *multicultural social justice education*. This approach builds on the previous one, but stresses the need to “prepare citizens to work actively toward social structural equality” (p. 199) through a curriculum that is organized around social issues. Rather than teaching only about
cultural groups defined by race, ethnicity, gender, and so on, this approach actively addresses racism, classism, sexism, etc., as experienced by a range of groups in the United States, challenging students to develop skills and strategies that address these issues in their lives and communities. As the most overtly political of the approaches, it opens educators to a range of challenges relating to free speech and students’ actual capabilities for action once inequalities are recognized, presenting a vision of teaching that educators can work toward but which cannot be easily or simply implemented in most schools. Reflecting on the categories and associated challenges described by Sleeter and Grant, it becomes apparent that the field of multicultural education reinforces the idea described earlier that “curriculum” is not just one singular construct; instead, it is a large, multidimensional concept that encompasses not only those aims and activities made formal through documents but also the processes of learning and teaching as social endeavors that communicate values to students and build their capacities for action (or inaction). Furthermore, although Sleeter and Grant present these versions and visions of multicultural education within discrete categories, we must keep in mind that educational practices, like the identities of the teachers and students engaged in them, rarely fit in one box; both the philosophical underpinnings and practical actions found in any classroom setting may have attributes that cross categories and show combinations of different ideas.

James A. Banks offers a different way of conceptualizing both aspects of multicultural education (Banks, 2010a) and approaches to implementing it in schools (Banks, 2010b), explaining ways that different features contribute to the overall aims of
multicultural education which goes beyond the inclusion of specific content related to ethnic groups. Banks notes that when teachers perceive multicultural education as strictly about content related to social groups, they fail to see how it applies to subject areas such as math and science and how it is integral to broader school reform. Banks (2010a) identifies the components of multicultural education as content integration, “the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures”; knowledge construction, “how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed”; prejudice reduction, modifying students’ racial attitudes; an empowering school culture that attends to the way practices throughout the school—including sports participation, student grouping, and student-staff interactions—support students from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender groups; and an equity pedagogy, which exists when teachers adapt their teaching in ways to ensure academic achievement of students from different groups (p. 23). Within this dissertation, although all of these components are relevant to understanding the lived experience of dance curriculum, the areas of content integration and especially knowledge construction are particularly relevant to my questions regarding the ways that content frameworks and conceptualizations about the nature of dance are enacted in schools.

Within the overall category of content integration, Banks (2010b) explores different levels of implementation that can occur in schools. Like the simpler approaches named by Sleeter and Grant, what Banks terms the contributions and additive approaches infuse content related to different cultural groups into an overall curriculum structure that
remains unchanged. The added material may still be viewed within a larger narrative of Euro/Anglocentric dominance. The next two levels represent a more substantial effort toward multicultural education; the *transformation* approach includes changes to content and goals of the curriculum to incorporate perspectives from diverse groups in deep and meaningful ways, challenging students to develop understandings of the complex nature of US society. The *social action* approach calls for teachers to support students as they investigate social problems of relevance to their lives and interests and undertake projects to address their developing concerns. While his favor for the latter approaches is evident, Banks notes that they present significant challenges to educators choosing to implement them, including inciting controversy in school communities.

*Clarifying “culture”*

Embedded within the dialogues about multicultural education is a larger understanding about what is meant by “culture” and, therefore, what is meant by “multicultural.” As it grew from the Civil Rights struggles in the United States, the “culture” in multicultural education initially was equated with teaching the history, concerns, and practices of previously excluded racial or ethnic groups; the label *multiethnic education* might more accurately describe those important efforts. Such a limited view of the term “multicultural” still persists, however, and is evidenced in articles and curriculum guides that focus on ethnicity as a primary aspect of culture.

A more expansive view of the reach of multicultural education is put forth by authors who acknowledge that culture is related to a range of socially constructed
attributes, including gender, sexual orientation, social class, exceptionality, language, age, and religion, in addition to the more widely acknowledged race and ethnicity (Banks, 2010a; Gollnick & Chinn, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 2008). Each of these attributes contributes to a person’s experience in the world and can be the basis for group formations, with attendant issues of power, privilege, and visibility that should be addressed in the school curriculum. Indeed, the single-group studies approach identified by Sleeter and Grant (2008) is often based on such group identifications. It is important to also recognize that while individuals may attend more or less to certain aspects of their cultural identities, and while certain group identities may be more or less prominent in curriculum, all aspects of identity are potentially relevant at any time. Identities and group affiliations intersect in our experience and influence each other in powerful ways, so that even within a group, members will have vastly different experiences based on the other identities and positions that they occupy.

Conceptualizing culture as social categories and group identifications is important for moving beyond a narrow equation of culture with ethnicity. It can also draw our attention to the varied ways that people may be marginalized in society as well as to the different approaches to being in the world that characterize humankind. It is difficult to address aspects of experience without first naming them, and social categories provide labels that can prompt teachers and students to question assumptions about aspects of social life and broaden their understanding of the full range of human diversity. For instance, in recent decades educators have called for sexual orientation and gender identity to be included among the aspects of cultural identity addressed through
multicultural education, bringing into question larger social norms that assumed all students to be heterosexual and that silenced narratives about relationships and identifications that fell outside of the dominant heterosexual discourse (Lampela, 1995; Mayo, 2010). Similarly, ideas about social class, already a difficult topic in American culture where membership in the “middle class” is claimed by those with huge income disparities, has been named as a category deserving of attention within multicultural discourses (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002; Persell, 2010).

While the category-based understanding of culture can focus attention on important issues that could otherwise be overlooked, it also has the potential to reduce culture to discrete attributes and to homogenize understandings about the experiences of individuals with similar group identifications. Thus, a more fluid and nuanced understanding of culture as lived experience is called for in order to acknowledge the dynamic and situated nature of individual and group experiences in society. Art educator Patricia Stuhr (1999) explains:

And many of these aspects of a person’s cultural identity are always in flux and dynamic; they always move on. So all we can ever understand is a part of a culture based on a member’s momentary lived experience as they report or express it. And that is all there is: partial, temporal understandings. (p. 183)

This view of culture, one consistent with earlier discussions of the ongoing quality of semiosis through which individuals create and re-create meanings, nonetheless presents significant challenges to educators. Stuhr reminds us “there is no such thing as a homogenous culture … ‘an’ African American culture or ‘a’ Native American culture
that you can completely get to know” (p. 183). Thus teaching strategies must present artists’ voices—voices of people who identify with different cultural groups through their writing, speaking, and artworks—not as definitive statements of unified group identities but rather as individual voices of those engaging in different ways with collective identities. Developing multicultural understanding, then, cannot rest on general secondary sources such as textbooks or packaged curriculum materials as students’ only contact with multicultural content, though these may provide important contextual and background information. Educators and students must seek out a range of texts representing different cultural experiences, which may be contradictory and which will always be situated and incomplete.

This recognition of cultural identities as fluid and overlapping within communities opens the door for multicultural education practices to consider the multiple cultural identities of students as important for study, as these affect how we relate to the identities of others and help us to acknowledge the complexity of both our own and other cultures. Hicks (1994) argues “that it is a mistake to suppose that multicultural education is simply a matter of developing knowledge about other cultures…. This cannot be done reliably unless it is accompanied by serious knowledge about one’s own cultural experiences” (p. 154). Rivière (2005) calls for educators to “pay closer attention to how students perform their social identities” which are “not based on a fixed identity per se, but, instead, upon a reciprocal process of engagement, wherein the student makes identifications based on many points of reference” (p. 352). Stuhr, Ballengee-Morris, and Daniel (2008) clarify these possible points of reference by situating identity within
overlapping spheres of personal, national, and global aspects of culture, which together “make up a fluid, dynamic mesh of an individual’s cultural identity and are wholly integrated into an individual’s personality and lived experience” (p. 88). Such understandings of cultural identity support multicultural education efforts to go beyond the limited contributions approach identified by Banks (2010b) or the teaching the exceptional and culturally different orientation described by Sleeter and Grant (2008), since “we all have cultural connections because we all live and exist in social groups” (Stuhr et al., 2008, p. 85). Investigation of these cultural connections in ways that guide students to understand and challenge issues of representation and power moves multicultural education approaches toward those complex, inclusive, and democratic practices favored by Banks (2010b), Sleeter and Grant (2008), and others.

Rivière (2005) explains that multicultural education could be focused away from reflecting back identities (as in mirroring an essentialized identity back to students), and toward reflecting upon identities (as in critically engaging with the complex, and sometimes contradictory, ways students make connections with schools’ multicultural education policies and practices). (p. 352)

These complex understandings of culture present opportunities to consider education as a process of engaging students with multiple, intersecting, and sometimes conflicting understandings of themselves and others. Such an orientation poses significant challenges consistent with the multicultural and multicultural social justice approaches (Sleeter and
Grant, 2008) and requires substantial commitment to inquiry within the teaching-learning process.

**Multicultural art education**

Building on the larger movement in multicultural education, art education considers ways that the study of art and visual culture can contribute to students’ understandings of concepts, issues, and concerns from a range of viewpoints, and it shares the goals of making educational experiences equitable and relevant for all students while engaging them in contributing creatively towards a more just society. This work is integrative by necessity; the study of art cannot be divorced from its cultural context, so skills and processes from disciplines such as history, geography, and anthropology are incorporated into comprehensive approaches (Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, & Wasson, 1992; Stuhr, 1994). Multicultural art education challenges more traditional ways of teaching art, and like multicultural education generally, it appears in a variety of forms and guises with attendant socio-political aims. Similarly, art educators face a number of challenges as they research and develop multicultural curricula with their students.

Many art educators consider issues of power, privilege, representation, and context when developing curricula and choosing artworks for students to study. Stuhr’s (1994) frequently cited article uses the approaches described by Sleeter and Grant as a framework for discussing multicultural art education, putting forth a view that multicultural art education should both embrace a social reconstructionist perspective where democracy is a fundamental part of school practice as well as challenge curricular
structures that do not meet this aim. Stuhr explains how the discipline-based approach to art education, when adapted to address multicultural content, is inadequate when exemplars from diverse groups are included among the artists studied yet when the overall curriculum remains the same, “based on the assumption that there is a specific body of knowledge to be learned, favoring a fine art world view” (p. 172). She notes, “the practice of democracy is not developed” in this approach, which “upholds dominant knowledge/power concepts” (p. 172). Furthermore, art works from outside the Western fine art world that are incorporated into study are often chosen based on criteria and understandings from the dominant viewpoints and are removed from their sociocultural context when presented in this way. Hicks (1994) also challenges such uncritical, decontextualized incorporation of images and objects into art curriculum and points to larger issues of power and knowledge creation that underlie teachers’ decisions:

Both identification of cultural boundaries and the selection of objects for study are conceived as free of political or cultural assumptions and prejudices. The similarities that define the boundaries of the supposed cultures under study appear as objective facts about the world, rather than cultural constructions of reality that require reflective criticism and contextualization. (p. 152)

Similarly, Desai (2000) objects to multiculturalism that can unwittingly lead to stereotyping, when “it has reduced non-Western cultures to some constructed ideas of their essential characteristics that supposedly can be represented authentically” (p. 126).

How, then, should art educators avoid these pitfalls and enact curricula that incorporate artworks of diverse cultures into their teaching? Stuhr (1994), Hicks (1994),
and Desai (2000) all point to underlying issues of power, privilege, and conflict as important to the study of artwork, as these are always part of the cultural context in which art is made. No artmaking is value-free, and to present it as if it is—to shy away from the difficult questions and painful realities of social life—is to miss valuable educational opportunities and to overlook the true aims of multicultural art education. Situating artworks within their contexts of production and reception is an important aspect of teaching. Stuhr (1994) suggests that “teachers interpret the examples [of artwork] from the perspective of the group being studied” (p. 175) and advocates for incorporating the voices of artists and community members into the classroom. Similarly, Hicks (1994) stresses that teachers should “provide opportunities for social, political, religious, and economic analysis of images and artifacts, in addition to traditional formal aesthetic analysis” (p. 153). Both of these ideas point to the necessity of an approach “grounded in a politics of location and positionality” where teachers representing another culture in art class have “the responsibility to position that culture in relation to our own in term of matrices of domination and subordination” (Desai, 2000, p. 127).

Many educators face anxiety due to their own limited knowledge of cultures outside of their own. How do we responsibly teach what we do not fully know? Desai (2000) confronts this question and acknowledges teachers’ “vulnerability in terms of understanding the art of another culture. It signals the possibility of not knowing, that is, the incommensurability, in understanding art from another culture” (p. 127). Teachers cannot expect to be, and should not present themselves as, all-knowing experts. The investigative strategies suggested by Stuhr (1994) and others, where teachers invite artists
and community members into the classroom, take students on field trips, and undertake collaborative research projects with students can help mediate this, positioning teachers as facilitators and co-researchers who help students access and make sense of new information and meanings. Even so, these meanings will always be incomplete, and Desai (2000) underscores the importance of teachers’ remembering so:

It is important for us to discuss the issue of incommensurability with our students. This does not mean we cannot learn to work across our differences. Rather, it requires us to discuss how our social position and the location from which we speak are connected to the way we choose to represent a culture within structures of domination and subordination. (p. 128)

Clearly, multicultural art education has the potential to put teachers in a challenging position, requiring them to engage in their own critical inquiry before presenting and teaching artworks and processes to students. Importantly, it destabilizes notions of teachers as all-knowing and of formal curricula as adequate guides, and it instead encourages the active creation of knowledge by all members of the classroom community.

*Art education for social justice*

Arts education provides many avenues through which teachers and students can develop projects to investigate and take action towards greater social justice. Students actively consider issues of power and privilege as they are manifested in their communities through selecting, investigating, and responding to issues of relevance.
Students use artmaking, as informed by diverse sociocultural perspectives, to build their understandings and present possibilities for action. While any good multicultural curriculum is constructed within and responsive to the needs, interests, and contexts of the locality it is in, this is even more important for a social justice approach to multicultural art education. Thus, educators can describe projects they have implemented in their own schools and give suggestions for implementing new projects, but one-size-fits-all curriculum guides will be inadequate to prepare teachers for the challenges of this approach, which “would always be in a state of flux” (Stuhr, 1994, p. 177). Similarly, while other approaches to multicultural education might be marginally successful when implemented in only a single classroom, a social justice approach to multicultural art education requires involvement over time by a range of school and community participants.

Art educator David Darts (2011) describes a project that took place in his high school class and that exemplifies the social approach to multicultural art education. The complexities of social justice issues cannot adequately be addressed in a single art lesson, and like many educators working with this approach, Darts relied on colleagues, guests, and community support to implement a large project over many weeks, in this case culminating in a festival that replicated a street arts scene. Darts explains that in the planning and preparation for this event, students and teachers focused on issues related to “the street” where they “paid particular attention to topics related to poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, and the sex trade” and that they wanted their festival to “serve as a site of inquiry into the social issues that too often remain invisible or absent
from community and school-based functions” (p. 50). This project incorporated traditional modes of research, some community investigations, and drama-based research supported by guest presenters from a community group. Rather than being a social-consciousness project separate from other aims of art education, Darts emphasizes how this type of work relates to that of socially engaged contemporary artists that students also study.

_Music, drama, and dance in multicultural education_

Just as art education, predominantly based in the study of visual art and visual culture, has contributed to multicultural education, so too has performing arts education. While some similarities to art education are present in both approaches and challenges, the nature of performing arts study presents additional opportunities and challenges based on the needs, resources, and practices in each form, and it reflects varying orientations toward the importance of physical practice in artmaking. For instance, many authors writing in the area of music education stress the need to teach music from both Western and non-Western cultures, though the approaches taken vary considerably (Reimer, 2002). The writing of many music educators reflects an understanding of culture based on ethnic communities and traditions and so is not always concerned with societal transformation to the degree that authors in other disciplines might be. The need for teachers to present a diverse range of musical traditions in their classes is stressed, and attendant concerns reflect the difficulties for educators of training in multiple musical traditions that have different techniques, structures, and instrumentation.
Palmer (2002) clarifies a distinction between learning through music and learning about music, and he stresses the need for active engagement with all musical processes of listening, playing, and composing music in multicultural education. It is not simply enough for students to listen to and discuss a particular artist’s work in multicultural study; they must also make music. Such an emphasis on participating in artmaking in different cultural traditions permeates concerns of performing arts educators, who then must wrestle with complex issues of representation when guiding students through those making processes. Palmer sees this active, embodied process as critical for multicultural music education:

If we are to learn from the inside, we have to replicate as much as possible the process of learning, for therein lies both the form and content of the culture. We can then understand as the cultural members understand what it means to be human from their point of view. Learning through, as contrasted … to learning about, is the sure way to engage in the widest range of possible experiences that leads to knowing from within. Until we walk in another’s shoes, we don’t understand the journey, musically or culturally. (pp. 43–44)

While the need for active engagement in artistic processes that reflect appropriate cultural traditions is an important aspect of multicultural arts education, Palmer and educators who share his approach overlook larger issues of societal inequalities that impact people’s experiences within cultures. It is doubtful that students can understand aspects of cultures outside their own, especially in the sense of “walking in another’s shoes,” if attendant issues of power, privilege, and representation are not addressed meaningfully in
the classroom. Simply learning to play and appreciate music is not enough. Furthermore, while some aspects of traditional performance training may be important to bring into the classroom when studying those forms, these are also open to question. For example, if a performance form is traditionally divided along gender lines, with certain instruments and parts assigned to males and others to females, educators must consider how to engage students in this form while also promoting gender equality in their classroom. It is important for teachers and students to discuss these issues in a critical dialogue and to recognize that they might not end with a wholly satisfactory solution.

The necessity of teacher preparation for multicultural arts education is also a considerable issue, particularly in performing arts areas where teachers are involved in guiding students through embodied participation in the artmaking process as expressed in different cultural traditions. Volk (2002) notes, “past research on attitudes of teachers toward multicultural music education has shown that most teachers are in favor of it but feel inadequate about teaching it” (p. 25). The years of study required in order to develop competence as a musician and teacher in any tradition are substantial, and teachers need additional training if they are to adequately teach a range of musical styles and traditions. Volk describes significant interest on the part of teachers toward attending multicultural and world music professional development events. However, a fundamental shift toward substantive curricular changes will be necessary for teachers to adopt a multicultural educational philosophy rather than just adding additional content.

Educators in drama and theater are also concerned with issues of representation as they engage students in improvising, devising, and performing work that addresses
multicultural and social justice issues. Cousins (2000) “questions the educational value of the traditional school play” (p. 86) and explains how, in American high schools, the selection of plays and musicals, which occupy substantial in- and out-of-school time and resources, upholds mainstream culture and asks many students to participate “in a theatrical tradition and a set of values which have nothing to do with their history or culture” (p. 89). She suggests instead that drama education based on non-mainstream theater practices where students collaboratively research, improvise, devise, script, and stage their own work, based on themes and issues of relevance to them and their community, is educationally and artistically more effective and leads to productions that students have ownership of. Such approaches engage students in exploring theater’s capacity for causing social change, and challenge them to “make intelligent choices about what they wish to say and how they wish to say it” (p. 91).

The approach for which Cousins (2000) advocates, however, is not always readily accepted in schools, and she notes that it could entail “telling principals that the material might not be sweet and safe” (p. 92). Other drama educators probe situations where students and teachers resisted attempts to move beyond surface-level, celebratory multiculturalism into activities that challenged the status quo of white privilege. Saldaña (1999) describes leading a workshop using the technique of Forum Theater from Augusto Boal’s *Theater of the Oppressed* with groups of high school students. While the students from low-income, minority, and working class communities readily engaged with Saldaña’s challenges to envision and disrupt scenes of oppression drawn from their interests and experiences, a group of students from a White, middle- and upper-class
school chose instead to focus on scenes mimicking television sketch comedy, using audience engagement not to seriously probe issues but rather to demonstrate their power as performers with comedic ability. Saldaña reflects:

The actions by these upper-class adolescents consisted of: denying the existence of more serious social issues in their world, subverting the facilitator’s “authority” to control their own desires, suppressing others’ ideas in favor of one’s own, and contemptuously treating the working-class salesperson [a character in one of the scenes] as an annoyance to be expunged. (p. 17)

Building on this experience, Saldaña explains that when addressing issues of class, multicultural educators must consider not only the culture of poverty but also how to meaningfully engage students from privileged backgrounds. Saldaña notes “otherwise, pedagogical agendas for raising social consciousness through drama could become adolescent targets for devaluation and ridicule” (p. 18).

Even using scripted works that fall out of the mainstream, acceptable discourse can “rock the boat” in drama education. Gallagher and Rivière (2007) discuss a high school production of Trey Anthony’s *Da Kink in My Hair*, a “play [that] explores various issues such as sexual orientation and homophobia, child molestation, the joy of female companionship, and ultimately, learning how to feel comfortable in one’s own skin” (pp. 324–5). The drama teacher in charge of the production chose only certain monologues to present at the school based on her sense of what would be tolerated, yet she still faced accusations of “reverse racism and discrimination” (p. 327) and noted how reactions to the play highlighted racial divisions within the school. Gallagher and Rivière offer no
simple, easy advice to drama educators who desire to engage students with challenging multicultural content that disrupts the status quo, but they clearly encourage educators not to shy away from these issues.

Dance educators confront similar questions as music and drama educators when implementing multicultural curricula. Concerns with teaching a range of dance styles often dominate discussions of multiculturalism, and indeed the same issues that music educators face—the need to become knowledgeable and proficient in a range of techniques in order to teach them well—are of concern to many dance educators. However, dance educators also recognize the limits of what Banks (2010b) would term the “additive” approach to multicultural content, where “world dance” forms are tacked on to a curriculum that primarily consists of ballet and modern dance techniques and where many movement practices are removed from their sociocultural contexts (Risner & Stinson, 2010). They also address issues of bodily training in dance, understanding that physical practices are never culturally neutral and that the movement vocabulary students are asked to engage with in any dance class—even for less apparently artistically driven purposes such as technical training or physical conditioning—holds cultural meanings that must be addressed with the same critical care as artworks or other texts used in multicultural teaching. Rowe (2008) acknowledges that training practices have cultural influences that might initially go unnoticed: “A training based on the use of foreign aesthetic principles … might thus be seen as presenting an insidious form of cultural hegemony, subtly reinforcing very specific aesthetic ideals within the dancers” (p. 12).
Becky Dyer (2009a) notes that some modes for teaching specific contemporary techniques have evolved into codified structures divorced from the spirit of experimentation and individual exploration from which they began, and she advocates for democratic teaching practices that make room for students to explore individual and collective meanings associated with movement from a variety of artistic traditions.

Rather than the attainment of specific aesthetic values being viewed as the ultimate outcome and goal for learning, values can constitute the physical content for meaningful inquiry that is grounded in both technical and social understanding. Teaching from a perspective that balances physical techniques, movement concepts, and socially relevant modes of learning will allow us to maintain understandings of long-established aesthetic values while challenging biases, assumptions, and present limitations to constructing more effective, empowering, and socially sensitive dance pedagogies. (p. 119)

Through the approach she outlines, dance educators and students engage with technique vocabularies as texts that serve as metaphors for larger socio-cultural values. Dyer does not outright reject the technical training that is integral to many dance programs in US high schools, studios, and universities but instead offers a way for teachers and students to engage with it in a democratic and student-centered manner that supports many of the aims of multicultural education.

While such a democratic, student-centered approach to pedagogy is favored by many dance educators who also strive to implement a multicultural curriculum, these aspects of education are not always mutually compatible. Dance educator Linda Ashley
(2010, 2012) studied the challenges faced by educators who were expected to teach dance from contextual perspectives as called for by the Arts in New Zealand Curriculum, which “emphasizes both theoretical and practical investigations of ‘traditional Maori dance and the multicultural dance heritage of New Zealand’” (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 21, as cited in Ashley, 2010, p. 1). Although she writes from the specific context of New Zealand schools, many of the challenges she describes are quite similar to those faced by educators in the United States. (Dance curricula in New Zealand are heavily shaped by many of the same influences found in North American and European programs, including a strong reliance on creative movement and understandings about dance elements inherited from pioneers Rudolf Laban and Margaret H’Doubler.) Importantly for the current discussion, Ashley (2010) highlights the ways that “creative (contemporary) dance in education and theater is … traditionally shaped by ethnic western values and meanings” (p. 43). An emphasis on individual creativity and innovation along with democratic social structures within the dancing community—hallmarks of the creative dance pedagogy that has infused much of American dance education—are sometimes inconsistent with the cultural contexts where non-Western dance forms, called for in many curricula, are traditionally practiced. To teach from what the New Zealand dance curriculum terms “contextual perspectives” requires first an acknowledgement that the context within which dance education often takes place, a progressive, liberal educational environment that is highly prized and sought after by many well-meaning educators, may be at odds with the values called for by a particular dance form. Ashley contends that attempts to address this by fusing creative dance with
traditional forms can result in practices that “can seem harmless, [but] potentially [are] invasive and can perpetuate dominance by Eurocentric modern dance” (p. 169).

Instead, Ashley advocates for an understanding that all dance is culturally situated and that attention to contextual perspectives be given throughout dance teaching, so that the “artistic” and the “cultural” are not isolated. Just as art educators Stuhr, Ballengee-Morris, and Daniel (2008) call for students to first interrogate their own cultural identities and positions before studying others’, so too does Ashley’s (2010) work suggest that teachers first need to interrogate the cultural positioning of both the dance forms they regularly practice and teach and the overall educational context they work within before considering how to engage learners with a wider range of culturally diverse dances. Importantly, Ashley’s work highlights the difficulty and complexity inherent in preparing and supporting educators to teach dance in such a way as to fully acknowledge and investigate diverse cultural perspectives.

Doug Risner and Sue Stinson (2010) are similarly concerned with helping dance educators develop cultural competencies to teach in diverse school settings and meet the expectations of multicultural dance curricula. While Ashley’s (2010) focus on preparing dance educators to teach culturally diverse dances from contextual perspectives does not include overt discussion of political or transformative aims, Risner and Stinson (2010) openly advocate for a social justice approach. They recognize the substantial obstacles, including scarcity of resources and curricula dictated by external accreditation standards, faced by teachers who implement multicultural education approaches. Risner and Stinson survey a number of examples of teaching for social justice in dance education and dance
teacher preparation that often involve long-term, collaborative projects. Their examples illustrate once again that multicultural social justice education cannot be inserted into a single lesson, but reflects a shift in pedagogy as educators “help students reflect upon the ‘strangeness’ of their own lives as they become more familiar with the lives and experiences of others” (p. 19). Clearly, multicultural social justice education in dance, like in all art forms, presents significant challenges that teachers must address.

Dance Education

The final research area that this study draws upon is in dance education, specifically as it is understood within school-based contexts. Within the overall scope of dance education research, I will focus mainly on literature connected to curriculum issues that also—even if not explicitly stated—is concerned with ideas surrounding meaning, symbol systems, culture, and/or language, while keeping in mind a necessarily broad understanding of the term curriculum that encompasses a wide range of practices and experiences as suggested by Morrison (2004) earlier. The work of Risner and Stinson (2010), Ashley (2010), Dyer (2009), and Rowe (2008) discussed above, for instance, provides insights into the ways that dance educators theorize complex issues related to cultural practices in dance curriculum, ideas that are relevant to this current research on how teachers use a range of signs to promote meaning-making in their classrooms. In addition, dance education literature addressing classroom practices, curriculum development, pedagogy, somatics, and movement analysis will inform this study.
**Curricular domains in dance**

I begin with the work of Donald Blumenfeld-Jones and Sheun-Yan Liang (2007), who undertook a comprehensive review of dance curriculum research. Since the explicit label “dance curriculum research” is rarely attached to a text, they discuss the process of locating such research by evaluating literature on its applicability to questions of “curriculum deliberation, curriculum designing, curriculum enactment, curriculum evaluation, and/or curriculum experience” (p. 245), noting that “curriculum is more complex than conventional understandings of it” (p. 246). They include in their review both empirical and philosophical work and note that they selected sixty texts for review that fell within their guidelines of dance curriculum research, which they organized using a framework borrowed from Goodlad’s (1979) delineation of curricular domains: explicit or formal curriculum, operationalized and experienced curricula, and hidden or null curricula, with additional sections on curriculum deliberation and curriculum evaluation.

Blumenfeld-Jones and Liang’s (2007) review found that “a preponderance of work is not particularly robust, including what [they] would consider an over-reliance on surveys, questionnaires, and psychological inventories” (p. 256). In reading their review and scanning the related literature myself, I am forced to agree. Dance education literature, on the whole, lacks a substantial mass of studies showing both empirical depth and theoretical complexity found more broadly in education or art education research. This observation is somewhat dodged by the authors of *Research Priorities for Dance Education: A Report to the Nation* (Bonbright & Faber, 2004), who focus on giving a lengthy analysis through a matrix combining various research areas, populations, and
areas of service as a way of determining underrepresented research foci in the documents collected through 2002. Little attention is given in the reporting process to the substance or importance of reviewed research; within the scope of published materials in dance education (other categories include unpublished documents and research in other areas applicable to dance education) the emphasis in the recommendations is on filling in the “gaps,” areas found in a category count to be underrepresented in research. Texts addressing pedagogy and curriculum rank first and third, respectively, in a rank ordering of service areas addressed in published documents in dance education from 1926–2002 (p. 40). I feel this is misleading, because although curriculum and pedagogy might indeed be well represented numerically in dance education research, the field as a whole still lacks substantive research across all areas, a point the authors concede to: “The preponderance of articles in Published Literature in Dance Education are not research based nor do they reflect the dedicated scholarly approach that is expected in academe today” (p. 42). While it is important to address areas not previously studied, relying on category counts to determine the importance or suitability of research topics seems narrow and shortsighted in a field where so little quality research is available in the first place.

Nevertheless, following citations included in Blumenfeld-Jones and Liang (2007), I located several substantive articles and dissertations that used empirical methods to examine aspects of formal, operational, and/or experienced curricula in dance education that have relevance to my research question. Empirical studies in dance education provide important insights through both their research strategies and conclusions; in
addition, while each of these studies is complete in its own right, consideration of the aspects of curricular experience not addressed confirms that the current study speaks to an area of dance education not already explicated in the literature.

Connections among curricular domains

Two studies both attend to the simultaneity of formal, operational, and experienced curricula at work in the classroom and offer information about each of these and how they work in relation to one another. An observational study by Sandra Minton (2007) “explored how middle school students construct meaning from their dance making experiences in comparison to the meaning attached to these experiences by an outside observer” (p. 104). Because a discussion of the teacher’s documented lesson plans was included, the article also addresses some degree of the formal or intended curriculum, even though this is not a major point of the analysis. While the paper does provide some interesting insights on student ownership and self-expression as important facets of student meaning-making, the design of the research limited the depth to which these ideas, and others related to the curricular content, could be examined. Although the researcher engaged in a substantial number of classroom observations (twenty-two), data collected from teacher and students were limited to lesson plan documents and short questionnaires, respectively. Without the opportunity to probe deeply and engage students and teacher in discussing their meaning-making processes through interviews, the analysis is limited. The discussion of the study as revealing two “different worlds”—that of student and that of researcher—stopped short of conceptually integrating or
reconciling the two into an understanding of communal meaning-making from multiple perspectives. The article does allude to some of the gaps between the teacher’s intended lesson and what actually occurred in the classroom, particularly as related to the vocabulary to be discussed in class:

According to the lesson plans, the teacher also wanted the students to use Laban’s Movement Analysis to discuss their work, but this element was not a part of any class discussions. The students drew a diagram of the floor pattern of their dances as well, even though this strategy was not described in the lesson plans. (p. 113)

However, the researcher does note that the students employed some dance vocabulary in their discussion of each other’s work and that they commented on learning new terminology in their questionnaires. Minton’s example here reinforces the need for researchers to collect a range of types of data and underscores the fact that lessons rarely proceed according to plan. Within the article, had detailed descriptions of the dance vocabulary introduced in the lessons and analysis of how it was used been probed more, an understanding of the semiotic processes at work in the classroom could have been more fully developed.

A very different study by Edward Warburton (2000) used a quantitative approach to document the effects of different semiotic approaches to teaching a dance unit with fourth-graders. Because information about the formal curriculum (in the form of detailed lesson plans), the operational curriculum (including specific details about how lessons presented to each of the three groups were similar and different), and the experienced curriculum (in the form of student assessment data), were included in the study,
Warburton’s research addressed, in some way, each of these aspects of curriculum simultaneously, though any one of them could of course be studied more deeply. Warburton was concerned with testing his hypothesis that notation-use, in this case through elementary dance education lessons built on the Language of Dance approach to Motif Writing5, would “help young children learn how to recognize and understand dance when they see it.” (p. 7) The approach that Warburton used is based on a set of symbols that stand for general movement concepts or a “movement alphabet” that can be arranged into a score, showing a sequence of movement ideas in a dance. As I am among only a small (but growing!) number of dance educators trained in this system and have used it successfully in my own lessons, I was very interested in Warburton’s work.

Of particular interest in Warburton’s study is that he included a control group that received dance lessons without symbol use or detailed movement descriptions plus two treatment groups, one that received detailed verbal descriptions of movement and one that received the detailed descriptions supported by notation symbols as part of their dance lessons. He used a scripted verbal pre- and post-test along with a video of dance movements to test the students’ ability to recognize and describe observed movements, and he found that “dance instruction emphasizing verbal language showed fewer gains in students’ recognition abilities than instruction based on notation-use” (p. 65). He theorizes that dance notation is a “semantically disjointed” system with unambiguous

5 The Language of Dance (Guest & Curran, 2007) is a particular approach to Motif Writing, a process of using pictorial symbols for movement concepts to record, analyze, and generate ideas about dance. It is closely related to Labanoation, a more detailed and structured form of dance notation created by Rudolph Laban and his colleagues. While Labanoation and Motif Writing are not the only forms of dance notation, they are the forms most commonly taught in US colleges and universities when notation is included in the curriculum.
categories of meaning that offers more descriptive power than verbal language as an instructional approach (p. 68). This finding is of particular interest and suggests that for some instructional purposes in dance, use of one sign-system may provide not only different meanings but also more targeted and instructionally relevant meanings that facilitate students’ mastery of specific lesson objectives.

Since only a handful of dance educators are trained in the notation system Warburton employs (he estimates a half-dozen as of 2000, a number that has since risen but still remains marginal), we may ask how other non-verbal and non-movement semiotic practices are used by dance educators and their students in relation to the specific intentions set for their classes outside of strictly controlled lessons that are part of an experimental design. For instance, Warburton’s study focuses only on easily discernable movement actions, commonly thought of as the “what” of movement, but it does not address the more subjective area of movement quality, often referred to as the “how” of movement. While multiple symbol systems, such as Laban’s Effort graph (Newlove, 2003) and Hutchinson Guest’s Dynamics (Guest & Curran, 2007), do exist for representing these ideas notationally, they are inherently more complex to work with yet still address an area of dance education that is important for students to investigate. How, then, do teachers working with these qualitative ideas express them to children? On a different note, the positivist orientation of Warburton’s dissertation did not allow for discussion of his own interests in this system, but I remain curious: why notation? What in his background and worldview led him to study and implement this approach with his students? How does one’s own dance education background influence the kind of sign-
systems employed in a teaching context? Similar questions could be asked of many of the teacher/researchers whose work is discussed here.

The experienced curriculum in dance

An empirical study that focused specifically on the experienced curriculum was done by Linda Nilges (2004), who used a phenomenological approach to investigate the movement meanings of fifth-grade students in a creative dance class. Nilges’s analysis of interview, video, and document data revealed students’ meanings to be multifaceted, which she organized along five domains: expressive, sensory, experiential, competency, and intersubjective. Because Nilges was also the teacher of the class she investigated, some information about both the perceived and operational curricula is also included, though this aspect of the study does raise several questions. The dance lessons were focused on the idea of variation of movement qualities or dynamics, based on Rudolf Laban’s theories of Effort, and encompassed a range of possibilities within the categories of force (strong/light), time (fast/slow), space (direct/indirect), and flow (bound/free) (Nilges, 2002, p. 301). Even within such a specified vocabulary, my personal experience tells me that there is wide variation in how these terms are interpreted and used and that, since they are abstract concepts, teaching them to children requires significant discussion, modeling, and comparison to outside situations and examples, strategies Nilges no doubt employed. While she does give brief descriptions of the tasks that students engaged in and connects her lessons to the South Carolina Curriculum Guide for Elementary School Physical Education (p. 302), detailed description and interpretation of the teaching
strategies and classroom experiences that led to the students’ meaning-making are not offered. Therefore, the otherwise excellent article leaves me wondering, how did Nilges as a teacher make meaning from her experiences in the classroom and engage her students in this process with her? What specific signs did she employ in her teaching, and how did they function together? Since a somewhat codified vocabulary was being presented, how did Nilges understand that vocabulary and present it to her students? Such questions speak to the range of my own interests more than any fault in the published article, which does provide a framework of categories for meaning-making that are potentially useful analytical tools.

*Operational and perceived curriculum in dance*

I found myself asking similar questions and wanting more detailed descriptions of classroom practices to complement the analysis in the dissertation study by Juju Masunah (2008), which investigates the multicultural teaching practices of two dance educators and considers how these practices might be applicable to contexts outside of the United States. Her case study offers a thorough discussion of teacher’s practices and a model through which theoretical ideas (in this case, about multicultural education) can be understood as reflected in specific classrooms. More detailed descriptions of the classroom events that led to generalized statements about teachers’ practices would enable readers to gather a greater understanding of specific signifying practices employed in the classrooms that support the ongoing construction of (multi)culture in dance.
Another significant study was conducted by British dance educator Kerry Chappell (2007), who examined the operational curriculum of three teaching artists working in a residency program sponsored by the Laban Centre. Her inquiry is focused on “teaching for creativity” and is shaped by the political and curricular influences on the environments her participants taught in, where creativity is a somewhat elusive but much sought-after commodity that dance educators are charged with developing. Her study is framed around a discussion of how dance educators balanced “personal/collective voice and craft/compositional knowledge” (p. 39) in their teaching. Her project seems more concerned with theorizing about the pedagogical models her participants employed and thus leaves little room for rich descriptions of practice that could inform the reader of the signifying practices that teachers and students engaged in and how these related to the two categories being investigated. However, her article does point to the importance of embodied knowledge in the dance classroom, and Chappell discusses the dance experience of her teacher-participants through understandings that resonate with concepts of semiosis. She articulates a concept of “movement literacy” that requires “‘a connected thinking body-mind’ … ‘whole self-awareness’ … [and] an emphasis on reciprocity” (p. 44) and later concludes that “aesthetic knowledge grounded in embodied knowledge might be said to be the glue that binds the intertwining or the connection between personal/collective voice and craft/compositional knowledge” (p. 51). While her dichotomous categories seem rather limiting for a holistic understanding of semiotics in dance education, the focus on embodied knowledge as foundational for any process of meaning-making and the thorough discussion of the ways in which teachers negotiate
Madeline Lord (2001) also presents an example of empirical research concerning the operational curriculum by focusing on teacher practice in her study of improvisation in high school dance classes. The emphasis in her discussion is on delineating what teachers do when they teach improvisation and on breaking the lesson into discernable phases that may then serve as a pedagogical model. Lord draws attention to the fact that improvisation, a standard practice in creative dance lessons and thus an integral component to the work of many dance educators, can often appear random but in fact is highly organized by the teacher to lead the students through their own discoveries. This leads me to understand that the verbal language and body-movement signs used by teacher and students in a dance improvisation lesson are thus not “random” events but are employed with the specific purpose of generating ideas within a structure, which serves a critical function of prompting semiosis. Lord’s work also illustrates the importance of working with ongoing observations and deep engagement in the research context, so that analysis can go beyond a simplistic reading of observed events.

Using action research methodology as a powerful strategy for investigating operational curriculum in dance, Shu-Ying Liu (2008) (published after Blumenfeld-Jones and Liang’s (2007) comprehensive review) specifically addresses how different sign-making modalities intersect to promote learning for kindergarten students in a collaborative research project. With her teacher partners, Liu created and documented creative dance lessons with two groups of students that used movement concepts from
Mollie Davies’s (2003) framework (itself built on Laban’s movement theory) along with Beijing opera masks and stories as stimuli and that included structured opportunities for drawing and painting as a means for documenting and reflecting on dance experiences. Because of her detailed descriptions of classroom practice, along with a study design that reinforced cycles of learning and action for both teacher-researchers and children, Liu’s (2008) study provides compelling evidence of how learners integrate multiple sign types to strengthen their meaning-making:

When the teachers only used movement concepts, most children responded with static representational movement and drawings, for example by drawing biceps to symbolize *big and strong*…. Their narrative movements were directly translated from movement vocabulary. Although these movements and drawings served a communication function, facilitated the child’s development of imitation schemas, and fostered a sense of belonging, they lacked individual story character development and creative expression.

However, the children became more imaginative once objects (such as clothes, fabric, and masks) were introduced, and they drew and danced more abstract and complicated forms. (pp. 195–196)

Liu’s work illustrates that, although the verbal and movement vocabulary used in a lesson impacts the meaning-making process, teachers also incorporate additional sign possibilities into their dance curriculum and provide students with a range of opportunities to actively construct meaning across movement, speech, writing, and drawing.
Another empirical study of operational curriculum is, like Chappell’s work, deeply concerned with the meaning of the body in dance education practices. Liora Bresler (2004) observed the classrooms of three dance specialists in Illinois elementary schools over a two-year period and “examine[d] the learning opportunities for the body in the operational curriculum with a focus on school dance” (p. 127). Among the studies reviewed, Bresler’s points most clearly toward my project of understanding embodied semiotics in the dance classroom. In a discussion of one teacher’s practice, Bresler reflects:

Contrary to some common assumptions, analysis and vocabulary go hand in hand with kinesthetic experience and exploration. Jenny’s prompting and responsive pedagogy invites the children to expand exploration, to increase observation beyond the surface level. Vocabulary of movement qualities as well as mind states is important in this dance/drama class. The vocabulary is always connected to direct experiences in the analysis of student’ creations as well as in the observation of others. Students are expected to show their understandings and learning in words and even more prominently, through the movement and shapes they make. (p. 134)

Within her article, this analysis is supported by detailed description of the classroom observation that led to it, providing a source of reliability in this writing. The description and analysis of classroom practices inspired me to learn more about how the vocabularies and other signifying practices in dance education environments operate, and such details leave me curious about how the teacher’s own background and interests shaped her
engagement with the children. Bresler provides a substantive argument for understanding meaning-making processes as embodied “interaction[s] of inside and outside worlds [which] extends to self and others” (p. 144), a description that again resonates with concepts of semiosis and the semiosphere and invites us to understand these in dance education practices not as clearly defined or fixed constructs but rather as evolving processes that are always in flux.

Movement analysis and dance curriculum

Any discussion of dance education curriculum must acknowledge the influence that the work of movement pioneer Rudolph Laban has had on both the formal curriculum documents as well as the personal teaching practices of many dance educators working in school-based contexts. The studies described above by Minton (2007), Warburton (2000), Nigles (2004), Liu (2008), and Ashley (2010) all reference dance curriculum and teaching practices that draw on some aspect of Laban’s work. While Labanotation (LN), a system for recording and recreating dance scores, is taught in some higher education programs, it has limited applicability to dance in K-12 contexts. The Language of Dance (LOD) (Guest and Curran, 2007) uses many of the same or similar symbols as LN to create a “movement alphabet,” organized around concepts such as action and stillness, duration, flexion and extension, rotation, traveling and pathways, shape, and relationships, each with associated symbols which progress from simple and general to detailed and complex. LOD creates a scaffolded, conceptual system that can be
used flexibly to promote the exploration of the movement ideas through reading, writing, and dancing.

As LOD gains wider recognition as a viable framework for describing dance experiences and promoting engagement with dance symbols, dance educators incorporate it into their teaching in a variety of contexts. Loren Bucek (2004) describes her work teaching motif notation to middle school students and highlights how motif notation and dance composition can be taught together so that students experience investment and ownership of their work. Mila Parrish (2005) gives a detailed description of a curriculum she created for K-5 dance based on progressive exploration of movement concepts with motif description. Susan Gingrasso, Tina Curran, Teresa Heiland, Beth Megill, and Michael Richter (2010) see LOD as part of a comprehensive approach to dance literacy and describe applications to a range of educational situations, including professional development for dance educators.

Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is another branch of movement theory that has had tremendous influence on the development of dance education curriculum. LMA is concerned with the more qualitative aspects of human movement and is based on a conceptual framework for considering a range of movement attributes and their associated personal and cultural meanings. Although there is considerable overlap between the systems of LN and LMA and many practitioners have studied both, a simplified clarification is that LN is primarily concerned with the what of movement description while LMA attends to the how and why. In the words of LMA teacher Ed Groff (1995),
LMA provides a comprehensive vocabulary for identifying the ingredients of movement expression. It forges links between a conceptual framework of movement and the sensations and observations of movement itself. It is through this abstraction of physical experience that LMA becomes a form of knowledge in movement description, interpretation, and prescription. (p. 2)

The theoretical framework of LMA is based on four inter-related categories: Body, Effort, Shape, and Space. The Body aspect of movement is concerned with aspects of body parts and their relationships and the anatomical and kinesiological investigations of movement. Attention is given to developing efficient movement patterns in the body, particularly through the study of Fundamentals as developed by Laban’s colleague Irmgard Bartenieff. Effort addresses movement qualities and dynamic changes through aspects of weight, flow, space, and time. Space is concerned with the three-dimensional environment around the mover and how movement is structured through directions, levels, and proximity to self and others. The Shape category deals with how the body shapes itself, including basic descriptions of body shapes and more nuanced understandings of how the body changes shape, relating inner and outer environments. These general categories provide a framework, which, while capable of engendering sophisticated distinctions in movement observations as evidenced by the years of study of rich and complex concepts undertaken by practitioners, can also serve as a simple outline of general movement ideas that can be approached at varying levels of detail and adapted to a wide range of contexts in dance education and research.
**LMA in Higher Education**

Laban Movement Analysis is often included in the curriculum in higher education dance programs, where it may be taught separately in one or more courses on movement analysis or integrated into courses in technique, composition, repertory, dance writing, or somatics. A number of authors describe projects where LMA contributed to dance teaching by providing a framework for conceptualizing, describing, and analyzing challenging movement concepts so that students could move with increased clarity and efficiency, perform movement with greater stylistic range, improvise and choreograph movement beyond their comfort zones, and describe and interpret movement with greater sophistication. For example, Melanie Bales (2006) describes applicability of the general system using Body, Effort, and Space to university dance technique classes, while Cadence Whittier (2006, 2010) describes her applications of LMA to the teaching of classical ballet with an emphasis on integrating function and expression. Mary Williford-Shade and Martha Eddy (as described in Fortin, 1998), Julie Brodie and Elin Lobel (2004), and Becky Dyer (2009b) use LMA to help their students engage in somatic inquiry and develop functional and efficient movement patterns based on whole-body connectivity. Kerr (1993) and Christopher (2000) describe approaches to teaching performance of existing dances supported by LMA to help students develop understanding of dance styles and associated clarity in their movement. Susan Gingrasso (2006) uses LMA, along with LOD, to provide her students with detailed movement descriptions that are then used as the basis for peer-to-peer assessment in her college technique classes. Bill Evans (2005) integrates many of these goals in his two-semester
movement analysis course focused on “a process of self discovery” and “the acquisition of theoretical tools to be used in creative problem solving” (p. 1).

In addition to its application to studio-based work, LMA is also used in higher education as a basic vocabulary for describing and interpreting movement, even when the specific theory is not taught. For example, Phillips (1995) advocates for the inclusion of dance viewing in an interdisciplinary humanities course and gives a general overview of the features of space, time, and energy as a strategy for “develop[ing] the vocabulary of our students so that they can learn to read dance as a visual text” (p. 16). Zimmerly and Lloyd (2003) specifically include LMA vocabulary in their article about teaching skills for dance criticism “to help develop a descriptive language of movement that will aid in the refinement of critical evaluation skills” (p. 15). In the classes described by these authors, LMA is used primarily as a strategy for describing movement, but the interpretations of that movement—contextualized in personal and societal associations—fall on the boundaries of LMA theory.

**LMA in K-12 Dance Education**

While the applications to higher education courses in technique, performance, and dance appreciation could certainly be relevant for dance teaching in K-12 contexts, additional literature is specifically focused on the ways that LMA is used in teaching dance to these younger students. The relevance of principles from Laban’s framework to the teaching of children’s dance has long been recognized, though, like any educational paradigm, it has undergone many shifts as the prevailing discourses evolve. In the
introduction to the second edition of *A Handbook for Dance in Education*, (titled *Modern Educational Dance* in earlier versions that were first published in 1963), Laban’s student and colleague Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1980) notes that in framing the Laban theories for educators, she has

taken the movement material and removed it from the strongly creative methods associated with Modern Educational Dance. In their place are methods more in line with the notions of aesthetic education today. The narrow concept of modern educational dance has been replaced by the wider-based concept of dance-as-art.

(p. xv)

Laban’s work has also influenced the development of teaching methods for children’s creative dance, as evidenced in the works of Joan Russell, Joyce Boorman, and Mary Joyce, who published works for teachers in the 1960s and 70s (Davis, 1995). As methods for teaching dance from a conceptual, rather than step-oriented, approach find favor in the United States, dance educators continue to advocate for a Laban-based approach to teaching children’s dance. Dance educator Jacqueline Davis (1995) explains:

The beauty of Laban’s work is the structure and flexibility it offers as an evolving system. Rather than being given preset dance sequences, teachers are provided with movement principles and materials, and then encouraged to find uses which are most appropriate for their students and for each particular teaching situation.

(p. 2)

Davis goes on to give general suggestions for using the LMA vocabulary as a starting point for teachers and students to develop and reflect on movement experiences,
emphasizing the importance of questioning the choices and possibilities that are available when any movement expression is probed and its complexity increased.

As noted in the discussion of curricular frameworks in Chapter One, Laban-based concepts have greatly influenced the development of K-12 dance education in the United States. While not explicitly labeled as Laban-based (and indeed, a number of other theorists, artists, and educators have contributed to the work that continuing to associate it only with Rudolph Laban would be attributing the work unfairly), the 2005 *Standards for Teaching and Learning Dance in the Arts* published by the National Dance Education Organization use categories of body, space, time, and energy (effort) in organizing the “Performing” strand. Not all dance educators have access to advanced theoretical training in the LMA system, so the concepts and ideas become modified as successive generations adapt them for use in their own teaching contexts.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to literature illustrating the applicability of LMA concepts to contemporary K-12 dance education is through the work of Seattle educator Anne Green Gilbert. Her work, including *Brain-Compatible Dance Education* (2006), explains a conceptual basis for teaching dance and includes a number of activities and lesson plans illustrating her ideas. Gilbert uses a list of fifteen dance concepts (p. 66), “adapted from Rudolph Laban’s movement vocabulary that relate to other arts, interdisciplinary subjects and to many aspects of living” (p. 11) spread among the general categories of Space, Time, Force (Effort), and Body, for lessons at her studio and in residency projects she conducts at local schools. A single concept is used as the focus for each creative dance lesson, with activities structured to explore that concept through
teacher-directed and student-created movement. Other concepts support the primary idea, and Gilbert and her teachers cycle through the concepts so that students revisit the same ideas in new ways and with increasing complexity as they progress through their curriculum.

In addition to the conceptual focus based on LMA, Gilbert also works with an adaptation of the Bartenieff Fundamentals, a part of the Body aspect of LMA developed by Irmgard Bartenieff that is based on human developmental patterns. While Fundamentals classes typically involve movements done lying on the floor over a long period of time, Gilbert notes that such time and space is often not available in children’s dance classes, particularly those occurring in a school context. She terms her adaptation, which can be done standing or sitting, the BrainDance, and claims it is based on the primary developmental movement patterns that wire our central nervous system, the brain is reorganized each time we move through them. The BrainDance is sequential and holistic. It effectively integrates the mind and body…. The BrainDance helps students become focused, energized and ready to learn. (p. 36)

While attention to the somatic aspects of LMA is often given in higher education contexts, such focus on mind-body concerns, as well as practical applications for addressing those concerns within the constraints of public school environments, is often not apparent in literature for teachers of children. Gilbert’s contribution, then, rests not

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6 Another somatic practice based on developmental movement patterns, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen’s Body-Mind Centering, also influenced Gilbert’s approach to the BrainDance.
only on continuing the call for more attention to mind-body issues in schooling but also on adapting the theories already in use through the LMA system to the context of schools. Indeed, adaptability is one of the hallmarks of Gilbert’s approach, and throughout her work she offers myriad suggestions for modifying lessons based on the available space and time, student and teacher interests, cultural contexts, and students’ readiness.

Providing ongoing training and professional development that will meet teachers’ needs is a concern across education, and dance education is no exception. While many dance teachers may have had an LMA course in their own undergraduate education, opportunities both to revisit the material for their own learning and enjoyment and to consider its applicability to their current teaching practices are important for practicing dance educators. British professor Maggie Killingbeck (2010) worked with a group of seven secondary school dance teachers who participated in a twenty-hour Laban studies workshop, and she used a number of strategies to gather data about their experiences learning and then applying the material with their students. The teachers Killingbeck worked with all had prior familiarity with the LMA concepts and had incorporated them into their teaching. The workshop focused on Choreutics, a term used in Britain for the space-oriented aspects of Laban theory, and the content Killingbeck describes is detailed and challenging. Following the workshop, participants were asked to describe how they incorporated their learning into teaching and what changes they noted in student learning, particularly regarding dance performance and composition tasks. Killingbeck concludes,

The research subjects considered that central to the value of Laban’s analysis was the language, which, through its comprehensive application, facilitates accuracy,
precision, depth, innovation and subtlety. This combined with the systematic approach to understanding human movement they felt enables progression from the very simple to the extremely complex. (p. 123)

Killingbeck’s project details a professional development program that was challenging and built on prior specialist knowledge, allowing teachers to go in depth and develop their own movement understandings before being asked to translate this into lesson activities for their students. While other authors describe working with the general categories of the LMA framework as an effective strategy, Killingbeck demonstrates the potential applicability of more intensive study in detailed aspects of LMA for teachers, and she underscores the need for access to intensive and sophisticated training if educators are to truly take ownership of working within any conceptual framework. This also speaks to the level of complexity within LMA and the potential for scaffolded learning through this system.

These articles detailing how Laban-based systems have been applied and used across dance educational contexts provide a useful background for understanding the influences that this work has had on dance education, while also highlighting the diversity of approaches that can be found amongst those using similar entree points. Because both dance educators I worked with in this study had some experience with a Laban system, further discussion of the benefits and issues surrounding the application of LMA to dance education are offered in Chapters Five and Six.
Conclusion

The literature described here presents a range of theoretical viewpoints and practical applications across a diverse range of academic areas: semiotics, curriculum theory, multicultural education, and dance education. Collectively, they provide a multifaceted base from which to consider the research question: how do dance teachers engage in and promote an embodied process of multimodal semiosis through their enactment of dance education curriculum? Putting these diverse literature sources in dialogue with the data collected in this study will illuminate the connections among these diverse research areas while also providing a strong base for building new theory.

Moving on from this discussion of literature that informs the study I now turn to a discussion of methodology in the next chapter, describing the features and process of qualitative inquiry that shaped how this work was undertaken, including a discussion of how semiotics as a theoretical construct also serves as an aspect of the research process. I will then describe the specific strategies undertaken in this research for collecting and analyzing data and briefly introduce the two participants whose work and reflections provide significant insights into the practical realities of curriculum and dance education.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

To investigate questions of dance education curriculum related to teachers’ use of signs in the dance classroom, I use a qualitative case study, which provides an appropriate framework for conceptualizing the problem, gathering and analyzing data, and communicating the results and insights artfully. Qualitative research is first and foremost concerned with qualities, the specific features, characteristics, and nuances of the phenomenon under investigation. Within a semiotic orientation, these qualities are understood as signs that become real to us—part of our reality—through our relationships with them. Rather than testing predetermined theory, qualitative research is about generating new theoretical insights through careful attention to and exploration of the signs being probed through deep engagement with people, places, and contexts.

While his work does not specifically address semiotics, I find that the writing of Elliot Eisner (1998) is especially useful in framing my explanation of qualitative inquiry. As other authors situate qualitative work first in opposition to positivist or quantitative approaches that have a greater foothold in social science research, Eisner instead starts by claiming his own ground: qualitative research is about qualities, and developing as a
researcher is about attuning oneself to notice, experience, inquire, question, and communicate about these qualities. Out of this understanding comes the opportunity to position qualitative research endeavors in relation to more quantitative ones; a clear understanding of the kinds of understandings one can gain from an investigation into qualities of a phenomenon makes it quite clear that we are on different, not lesser, epistemological ground than when engaged in positivistic endeavors.

The selection of research methodology, then, is not about choosing the “best” overall approach but rather about aligning the kinds of questions being asked with the most appropriate ways of seeking answers. For my questions about the kinds of signs being used to promote meaning-making in a dance class, then, I am interested in the qualities of the signs and the kinds of meanings being promoted in specific dance classes by specific teachers. I understand that there is not one objective reality “out there” that I can stand apart from, measure, and write up and that there is, instead, a complex web of intersecting realities that we each create and become a part of as we relate with our worlds.

These intersecting realities can be thought of in terms of the semiosphere, the space where meaning-making takes place. Semiosis is the process of making meaning through relationships with signs and with others similarly engaged, and through it, the semiosphere is created. This concept was articulated by Yuri Lotman (2005):

Since all levels of the semiosphere—from human personality to the individual text to the global semiotic unity—are a seemingly inter-connected group of semiospheres, each of them is simultaneously both participant in the dialogue (as
While we may theorize the entire universe as being one semiosphere, we can recognize the impossibility of ever comprehending it fully. Each of us operates within the semiospheres that our experiences make possible; while we share these semiospheres with others, our own journey of semiosis (meaning-making) is ultimately unique, so that our own experience within and perceptions of the semiosphere will likewise be individual. The process of semiosis in the dance class that I studied for this research project is deeply entwined with my own process of semiosis as a researcher; a qualitative approach takes advantage of this layering of meaning-making as an integral part of inquiry. Nevertheless, an explicit connection between semiosis and qualitative research is not often made in methodological texts aimed at guiding researchers. Therefore, this chapter also attempts to recast research as semiosis and to explore the aspects of theory within the literature on semiotics that are applicable to qualitative inquiry.

This chapter will explore the methodology used in this study—the orientation towards developing knowledge that guides the research; introduce the participants and sites accessed for the research project; and explain the specific strategies for data collection. To explain more about the features of qualitative research and how they apply to my study, I begin by borrowing Eisner’s (1998, pp. 32–40) helpful list of six general features of qualitative inquiry, offering this list only as a starting point from which to discuss points made by other authors as well. From there, I move into a discussion of the role of semiotics within qualitative research and explore the process of semiosis as
inseparable from qualitative inquiry, referencing the concept of semioethics as an orientation towards the body, lived experience, and relationships that is particularly apt for qualitative inquiry. This leads to a discussion of frames and lenses as a conceptual metaphor for discussing the orientation to the research contexts and the choices I have made in connecting my questions to my research strategies. I then turn to a significant issue in all research—that of ethics—and consider it within the purview of relationship through the writing of Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997). The final section of this chapter gives readers an initial introduction to the participants in this research study and information about the specific strategies for data collection and analysis used.

Features of Qualitative Research

Field-focused

First, Eisner (1998) explains that “qualitative studies tend to be field focused” (p. 32), taking place through the researcher’s engagement in schools and other sites where learning takes place. Eisner emphasizes that while human interaction is an important aspect of the field research, attention to objects, architecture, displays, and other inanimate features is also significant, because these too shape the kinds of learning that can take place and give important information about the values, beliefs, and practices being promoted in educational settings. Eisner explains that qualitative research is nonmanipulative, and “qualitative researchers observe, interview, record, describe, interpret, and appraise settings as they are” (p. 33). While qualitative research can
encompass action research methods where researchers do actively influence the environments they study, such a level of engagement is not a feature of the research approach Eisner describes, nor is it any part of the strategy I used for this study. Instead, the dance class settings were taken “as they are” without an overt attempt to influence them for the purpose of study.

Nevertheless, it is impossible in the intimate space of classroom research not to become involved in some way in the research setting. Within this study, I acknowledge that my views and ideas are always influenced by my physical presence. To be field-focused requires an acknowledgement that the “field” is fundamentally different from the lab or office; it is not a discrete, bounded space that one can be “inside” or “outside” of absolutely but rather a continuum of physical and conceptual spaces that the researcher moves into and through for the purpose of learning about them. Anytime researchers engage with something conceptualized as the “field” they have the potential to affect it; the difference between qualitative approaches and experimental ones is that researcher effects are not the primary foci of study.

Being field-focused, then, also situates my work within what Denzin and Lincoln (2008a) frame as the constructivist paradigm, which “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (p. 32). Thus engagement in the field is synonymous with naturalistic inquiry and consistent with my understanding that multiple realities exist and that the research process involves my participants and I together co-creating understandings; however, I
also want to elaborate further on the notion of the naturalistic setting or field. For my study, in one regard “the field” is represented by those physical spaces where I collect data—the dance studios I observe classes in, offices I conduct interviews in, and hallways, auditoriums, parking lots, and cafeterias that I pass through and in which I gain a sense of the context. For the most part, “the field” in this sense is a place I would not have ordinarily gone were I not undertaking this research. I am a guest, and although one of the school sites was a place I had worked with previously, in this instance entering the field was a deliberate physical and intellectual move from the work I do in my own office and classroom.

Yet another notion of “the field,” one not discussed by Eisner, does come to bear on this research: the professional field of dance education. It can be a loosely defined collection of individuals, practices, and places concerned with both the theoretical problems and practical realities of the work of educating people in dance, made up largely of the teachers who do the work day-in and day-out. It is a field in which I participate regularly, and it is one to which this research is addressed. Yet when I enter the specific field of my research context—the dance classrooms where I did the bulk of my observations—I am also entering, in a deeper way than I normally engage with, the larger field of “dance education.” Dance education, a phenomenon described and theorized in many books and journals that line my shelves, becomes tangible, lived, and sensed; the theoretical constructs and advocacy aims are given form in concrete space and time. The professional field influences what I see and how I conceptualize ideas when I enter the physical field, and what I make of this through my research will in turn
influence the professional field in times to come. Yvonna Lincoln (1995) describes this as the communitarian nature of qualitative research, which “takes place in, and is addressed to, a community” and ultimately will “serve the purposes of the community in which it was carried out, rather than simply serving the community of knowledge producers and policymakers” (p. 280). With this in mind, the notion of qualitative research as field-focused takes on an added meaning, an imperative to engage with the specific in order to speak to and benefit the larger field while simultaneously being informed by the larger field in order to ask questions of and give meaning to the specific.

The self as an instrument

Eisner (1998) next points to the notion that, in qualitative research, it is the researcher who is the primary instrument through which the inquiry takes place. Eisner’s earlier insistence on sensed qualities as the material through which meaning is made leads logically to the importance placed on the self in the research, the self that is able to see, hear, smell, taste, and feel the many qualities that have relevance for an educational research problem, the self that simultaneously creates and acts within the semiosphere. Yet sensing alone is not enough; the researcher also brings her own sensibilities, experience, history, tendencies, and interests to the setting as she “engages the situation and makes sense of it” (p. 34). Eisner sees the subjectivity of the researcher as an asset because each person’s reality is unique:
This means that the way in which we see and respond to a situation, and how we interpret what we see, will bear our own signature. This unique signature is not a liability but a way of providing individual insight into a situation. (p. 34)

Thus, in this inquiry, I try not to obscure my “I” but instead own my “I”/ eye, which allows me to sense and make sense of the observations, interviews, and other forms of data I encounter in the field.

This notion of the unique signature is explored by Alan Peshkin (1985), who acknowledges that since subjectivity is a given in social research, a more pressing question is “which of the researchers’ personal qualities will a research experience elicit?” (p. 267). Any given research situation calls upon certain of our own prior experiences and brings to the forefront particular aspects of our identities as we focus on some ideas to the exclusion of others. As Peshkin explains, “my subjectivity is simultaneously enabling and disabling, as it impels me to entertain and develop some research possibilities and restrains and delimits me from developing others” (p. 278). The key is to acknowledge that our research is always partial and situated and to create a compelling narrative in the research document that engages this subjectivity, providing relevant details regarding the personal qualities that come to bear on the research so that readers can see how the researcher’s perspectives are informed and illuminated within the research context. Without subjectivity we would be nothing more than undiscriminating video recorders set at overlapping intervals, left to run 24/7, offering depiction but little insight. Instead, we select and discard, are invited in or given a cold shoulder, attend and ignore, all because of our own subjectivities. These shape both what unfolds for us in the
research context and how we share it with others, or as Peshkin says, “by virtue of subjectivity, I tell the story I am moved to tell” (p. 280).

Subjectivity is not simply a theoretical move to account for the biases a researcher brings to the work; indeed, to view it this way implies that, since researching without subjectivity is impossible, the next best thing is to own up to it through some sophisticated rhetorical posturing before moving on to the real business. This stance not only misses the richness that subjectivity can bring to a study but, more importantly, also overlooks the physical situatedness of the researcher in qualitative work. Subjectivity is not theoretical; it is practical, embodied, and concrete. I am the one driving to schools, sitting on the floor of a dance studio, struggling to hear what the teacher says, curved over a notebook as I scribble what seems relevant. This I that I speak of is not just a loose collection of memories, academic affiliations, and identity categories; it is an I that has been, and continues to be, actively, physically engaged in studying the phenomenon of dance education.

Positioned this way, it seems obvious to say that subjectivity is embodied in the physical self of the researcher. However, I think it is a point that bears repeating, because a fully embodied subjectivity has to be acknowledged as necessary for the investigation of qualities that Eisner (1998) speaks about. I cannot see, hear, smell, or feel without a body, nor could I make any sense of the information received. Without being in my body, I could not sense the stuffiness of an overheated room that seems to be inciting drowsiness in the students or the clear sunshine and crisp breeze wafting through windows that mimics the sense of expansiveness a teacher calls for in a performance.
Such nuances separate artful research from mere recording and reporting, and while even taking the most procedural of notes would also be impossible without a body, an upfront acknowledgement of embodiment as essential to knowing goes hand in hand with any discussion of researcher subjectivity.

While being a dancer investigating dance education I am of necessity drawn to focus on embodiment, embodied subjectivity is not unique or exclusive to dance phenomena. All of our subjectivities are embodied because it is through our bodies that we come to know and make sense of the world. Just as we admit the importance of not erasing the thoughts, experiences, and ideas that help the researcher conceptualize the world in unique ways, so too must we not erase the physicality through which these conceptions are made possible. As dance educator and researcher Sue Stinson (2006) reminds us, “theories are our creations rather than truths we discover; the only place that theories exist is in the human imagination. And … imagination is fueled by what we know in our bones” (p. 206). Through this research, then, I share a story that came to be, in part, because I was able to share space and time with very generous participants and allow myself to be physically immersed in and attentive to their environments.

*Interpretive character*

Eisner (1998) explains that qualitative studies have an interpretive character; here, he builds on the dual meanings of interpretive as both offering an explanation as to “why something is taking place” (p. 35) as well as the more substantive exploration of the meanings that events hold for the people involved with them and the larger world they
inhabit. Eisner explains that qualitative research must penetrate the surface, moving beyond observation and description (p. 35). He invokes the oft-cited anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), who, building on the idea from Gilbert Ryle, popularized the notion of “thick description” as writing which involves the structures of meaning that underlie events (p. 7). Geertz (1973) explains that the researcher must contend with “a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (p. 10). Grasping and rendering, then, are interpretive acts, going beyond the mere “thin description” of recording obvious features toward description that tells a story of meaning.

Telling a story of meaning is key to all qualitative research, but it is especially highlighted in the methodological approach known as portraiture, described by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997). According to Lawrence-Lightfoot, portraiture seeks “to combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression” (p. 3) as “a method framed by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm, sharing many of the techniques, standards, and goals of ethnography” (p. 13). Although portraiture as a distinct method is used in the writing of only part of this dissertation (Chapter Four: Narrative Portraits), much of what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis describe is applicable to the entirety of my research. Specifically

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7 This dual-authored book is divided into sections clearly attributed to one or the other author. Therefore, subsequent citations of specific quotations will reference only the author credited for the section a citation is taken from.
discussing the interpretive character, Davis also points out that the research process does not end with the final draft of a report:

In portraiture, the researcher—the artist—interprets the subject of the portrait internally by searching for coherence in what she observes and discovers. The researcher represents that interpretation through the construction of the portrait intentionally employing aesthetic aspects in order to convey meaning. The reader—the perceiver—makes sense of the subject that is portrayed through his or her active interpretation of the portrait. (p. 30)

Throughout their book, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis emphasize the importance of writing for a reader, a feature not emphasized by many researchers yet clearly applicable to the entire enterprise of qualitative inquiry. It is primarily through writing (though indeed, other methods of presenting research are emerging in the academy) that the research story is told; understanding that the reader contributes to this process of interpretation is an asset of qualitative work.

In my research, the interpretive character is foregrounded: I am constantly aware that what I choose to attend to and describe are themselves interpretive choices, as are the more obvious interpretations I offer in Chapter Five. I aim to offer the reader thick descriptions that suggest my own interpretations while also allowing space for her own; in other words, I invite readers to this conversation. I introduce readers to those things that stood out for me, grabbed my attention, or softly whispered a hint that I should look deeper; by describing them thickly I hope readers will be drawn in as well and engage in their own interpretations. I explain why I think these events, ideas, or constellations of
signs are significant, what meaning I think they have for the dance teachers, their classes, and the enterprise of dance education as a whole. Interpretation is woven throughout, for we cannot separate our experiences of sensed qualities from the meanings we make of them and still offer compelling enough insights to warrant the label of qualitative inquiry.

Expressive language and the presence of voice

Eisner explains that a fourth feature of qualitative work is that it is carefully crafted with expressive language and is told with a clear and evocative voice. Closely related to the embodied subjectivity of the researcher is his or her presence in the text. Unlike positivistic approaches that attempt to mask the fact that real people authored them, qualitative research is explicitly framed through acknowledged authorship. Subjectivity does not disappear when it is time to write about the observations we have had and the meanings they held for us; instead, subjectivity comes front and center as the “I” takes its rightful place in the research document. Or rather, I, Marissa Beth Nesbit, doctoral candidate, dance educator, and qualitative researcher, stand here before readers—better yet, sit down next to you—and talk about the story of the time I spent with two amazing, inspiring dance teachers. How much of this “I” readers will experience as they move through qualitative work is a matter of degree, and qualitative researchers must make deliberate choices about when, where, and how their own voice should intersect the themes research document by carefully considering how their voice can support the evolving story. In Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1997) work in portraiture, voice is a major theme, but this doesn’t give the researcher license to turn any project into
her own autobiography. The focus remains on the subject of the portrait:

The portraitist’s voice, then, is everywhere—overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through the central themes. But her voice is also a premeditated one, restrained, disciplined, and carefully controlled. Her voice never overshadows the actors’ voices. (p. 85)

Lawrence-Lightfoot describes the researcher’s voice on a continuum from a witness, purposefully situated “on the edge of the scene” (p. 87), to one engaged in a dialogue with the actor, “purposefully [placed] in the middle of the action” (p. 103). She emphasizes that the use of voice is a purposeful choice and while the researcher incorporates much of herself into the work, the goal is “not to simply produce a self-portrait” (p. 105).

Esiner (1998) also explains the role of expressive language in qualitative research, a theme that pervades Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) work as well. To communicate about qualities and experiences requires immersive and evocative language, not distanced measurements and reporting of isolated facts. The goal is to “help readers understand what other people experience” (Eisner, 1998, p. 38). We could also think of this as providing a means for readers to intersect with other people’s semiospheres; qualitative researchers do this through crafting language that captures the nuances of the research context, empathizing with the actors and, by way of skilled writing, bringing the reader into this empathic relationship as well. As Richardson and St. Pierre (2008) demonstrate, it is not a softening of scientific standards to write in this way but instead
demands both rigor and creativity to find the right words to express one’s experience of qualities.

In this study, I find that situating my own voice and writing expressively, paradoxically, come with both natural ease and perplexing difficulty. There exists, for me, a double meaning here because one of the themes I am working with is itself expressive language, the ways that dance teachers communicate a range of features about movement and dance with their students. So I find that I am crafting language about language, a task that is infinitely challenging. A simple solution would be to simply stay out of the way, to just report on the teacher’s language as it is, sitting as far away on the sidelines of the action as possible. Yet, in a qualitative study interpretation is woven throughout, and any act is an interpretive one. Even the most eloquent speaker may appear horridly inarticulate to one reading an unedited transcript because spoken and written language follow radically different conventions. It is not enough to simply restate on paper what I heard in the classroom or interview. At the same time, for me, these classroom and interview moments were full of expressive language and moments of empathy and excitement, which I aim to render for my readers.

Attention to particulars

In order to help readers gain a sense of the experiences of others, qualitative inquiry attends to the particulars, and researchers cultivate “sensitivity to what might legitimately be called the aesthetic features of the case” (Eisner, 1998, p. 38). Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) explains that we are concerned with “recording the subtle details of
human experience” (p. 14) and reminds readers that in data collection, “no detail is too small to warrant attention” (p. 45). While researchers ultimately want to tell a story of meaning, this must be grounded in the particular details of the cases being studied, and it is through evoking the specific details, drawing them into patterns, and reflecting on them that qualitative research builds compelling arguments about real people living and working in specific places. While their identities may be masked for privacy, the reader should understand that they were not anonymous respondents or aggregate constructions but rather actual people who lived these stories that have larger implications—or as Lawrence-Lightfoot reminds us, “in the particular resides the general” (p. 14).

The focus on particulars is woven throughout Robert E. Stake’s (2008) discussion of case study research, which is based on “methods of disciplining personal and particularized experience” (p. 142). In order to achieve the voiced, expressive writing that qualitative research is known for, researchers must find a balance between attending to the particulars in their own observations and drawing out concise and useful depictions that connect to larger meanings for their readers. As Stake explains,

Thus, the methods for case work actually used are to learn enough about the case to encapsulate complex meanings into a finite report but to describe the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can experience these happenings vicariously and draw their own conclusions. (p. 129)

Again we see that the interpretive act, on the part of both the researcher and the reader, is key to qualitative inquiry. This interpretation is based on the particulars—particular
settings, events, and conversations within a case, as well as the case itself as a particular instance of meaning in the larger world.

This leads some who are comfortable with research that traffics in generalities and large sample sizes to question the utility of a case study. They ask about the uses to which such particular information can be put; what good is it to know about the specific if it cannot be relayed into a pronouncement of the general? The implication that only information that can be said to arise from an amalgamation of sources, blended and diluted so that particularities are obscured and generalities secured, is of value is to ignore the vast range of meanings we seek in our lives that do arise from the particular. We read biographies and follow newsworthy court cases; both rely on particulars of people, locations, and minor events that cumulatively engage our interest and connect to larger social, cultural, and political ideas. Such is the same with case study research. While our pursuit is more academic\(^8\) and our methods more explicit, we still understand that particularities, documented with care and processed through contextual and reflective lenses, can offer great insights.

This move from particularity to insight, however, can seem elusive, their relationship mysterious. It cannot be described by a general statement that clearly

\(^8\) The notion of qualitative research as an exclusively academic pursuit is called into question by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), who explains that in her method of portraiture, “the attempt is to move beyond academy’s inner circle, to speak in a language that is not coded or exclusive, and to develop texts that will seduce the readers into thinking more deeply about issues that concern them” (p. 10). While I recognize that as a doctoral dissertation this document must adhere to many conventions of the academy, I attempt to write in such a way that my readers, fully accustomed to the academic text, will nonetheless be “seduced.” Put simply, I would like you to enjoy this dissertation. Meanwhile, I also consider the possibility of framing this work for different publications, namely, to engage the dance teachers who are actively living these issues on a day-to-day basis in their professional work.
delineates how one can go about finding insights or making them apparent for readers. Again, the particularities win out; it is in specific instances of research and writing that we find especially artful connections made between a case and a larger issue, but each of these instances will approach it a little differently. Stake (2008) advises researchers to organize their work around relevant issues, but in dealing with complexity he warns that there is no tidy or responsible way to leap to generalities; the focus must remain on the case.

Issues are complex, situated, problematic relationships. They pull attention both to ordinary experience and also to the disciplines of knowledge…. Qualitative case researchers orient to complexities connecting ordinary practice in natural habitats to a few abstractions and concerns of the academic disciplines. This broader purview is applied to the single case, leaving it as the focus, yet generalization and proof (Becker, 1992) linger in the mind of the researcher. A tension exists. (p. 126)

The goal, then, is not to resolve this tension firmly once and for all but to cultivate it and be mindful of how we perceive the knowledge gained in a case study and our orientation to the conclusions we draw from it. When I read Stake’s advice, I hear him cautioning us toward humility about what we can proclaim we know from a single case even as he simultaneously urges us to not underestimate the profound value in the meanings to be made from particulars.
Coherence, insight, and instrumental utility

The final aspect of qualitative research that Eisner (1998) discusses relates to the criteria by which readers may judge the success and trustworthiness of the research endeavor. Eisner explains that “qualitative studies typically employ multiple forms of evidence, and they persuade by reason” (p. 39). He contends that persuasion, the presentation of information and ideas that allows the reader to see things the way a researcher does, is the aim of all research; in qualitative work, the crafting and presentation of an argument built from multiple sources takes center stage, or as Eisner puts it, “the facts never speak for themselves” (p. 39).

In building a persuasive argument, qualitative researchers identify a number of strategies for establishing that their work is reliable and valid. Measures of reliability and validity cannot be adopted from those used in quantitative methods but must instead be constructed to address the specific features of qualitative work. Establishing coherence is one of these strategies for ensuring quality work, where researchers attend to how the particulars come together to constitute a convincing whole. In order to support this, qualitative research relies on multiple sources of data and recurrent instances of evidence, what researchers commonly call “triangulation” of data (Glesne, 2010; Lichtman, 2009). Although qualitative research is concerned with particularities, these are situated within a complex whole through which their significance is established.

Eisner (1998) cautions, however, that coherence can be misleading, and in the quest to establish a coherent argument, researchers also must attend to other interpretations of data and to parts of the data that don’t fit the conclusions. This strategy
of searching for disconfirming evidence is one that complicates qualitative research as it invites depth in the process of gathering and analyzing data. While researchers may yearn for neat conclusions, data rarely present themselves in orderly ways. Again, a tension exists between crafting a coherent argument and allowing for ideas that resist easy assimilation into such arguments; however, these moments of resistance also provide fruitful ground toward another criteria, the utility of qualitative research. While research that presents a thorough and coherent discussion of a phenomenon is useful for helping readers to see what is going on more clearly, another aim of qualitative research is to help us see phenomena in ways that exceed or counter our normal, everyday explanations. Data that resist conforming into the coherent or desired story may be pointing us toward another previously unimagined story, and even when research cannot present this new story definitively, it can generate the questions that open up the possibility. Qualitative research demonstrates reliability and trustworthiness in how it handles these points of data that might otherwise be see as “outliers”; acknowledgement of the unknown and the emergent are not weaknesses in research but rather, when handled well, become points for further inquiry and potential challenges to the status quo.

In order to establish coherence we must first have a wide swath of data with which to work. In this study, multiple sources of data have been used, including interviews, classroom observations, and document collection. While each of these data sources can provide information regarding what is being taught in the dance classroom, they all give different kinds of insights and, taken together, complement one another. In addition, in order to establish trustworthiness, data are collected over a sustained period
of time. These are not one-shot visits but rather an ongoing conversation aimed at deepening understanding about what is happening and the larger meanings that it has for dance education.

Building a sense of coherence also requires that the data be situated within the larger context that it is a part of; in qualitative research, data is not tacked on or inserted as a logical follow up to already established facts within a body of academic knowledge. Although it is tempting to read a research document and infer that an orderly sequence of events—identifying the problem, reviewing literature, collecting data, and analyzing and reporting the results, and providing conclusions—proceed in a linear fashion, the experience of creating qualitative research is much more cyclical, the aspects of research interwoven with one another. A research strategy that deliberately includes a dialogue with relevant literature as called for by Glesne (2010), who states that “reviewing literature is an ongoing process that cannot be completed before data collection and analysis … [researchers] need to review previously unexamined literature of both substantive and theoretical nature” (p. 32). In this case, some of the literature itself becomes found “data” to be examined alongside that created by the researcher, who must again search for patterns of coherence and new insights across this large constellation of signs. For instance, in this study, data in the form of dance curriculum documents, articles, and content frameworks are considered not only as background information encountered prior to the study but also as signs within the larger semiosphere of dance education as a field; they enter the analysis in dialogue with the data collected within this study.
There are indeed surprises to be had, and in my process of working with data I have attempted to attend to those surprises, those instances of disconfirming evidence, and to show through my writing how I am handling them. I oscillate between crafting a coherent and compelling whole which supports my conclusions and calling out the points that don’t easily subsume to the larger narrative so that we may—my reader and I—together wrestle with the questions and interpretive possibilities they invite. I attempt to write in a way that substantiates both what I have found and what I question, providing enough detail and insight that readers too will find the discussion useful. I find that such a strategy, far more than a neat discussion of triangulation, the data corpus, and an audit trail (certainly important strategies but not ultimately enough to ensure both trustworthy and meaningful research), honors the incomplete and partial nature of all knowledge while simultaneously inviting trust in the small slice of new knowledge being created here.

Semiotics and qualitative research

In gathering and analyzing the data for this study, I have employed a semiotic research perspective within the larger umbrella of qualitative research. I understand the teaching and learning process in dance to be one of semiosis, or making meaning through signs, a process discussed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, when investigating issues of curriculum, especially those pertaining to vocabulary, constructions of meaning, and implicit definitions of dance, I am looking at the signs being employed by teachers as they construct their curriculum. Many of my research questions are explicitly about stated
signifying practices. Therefore, it makes sense that a semiotic approach to data collection and analysis would be called for.

This methodological decision, however, may require some clarification. As discussed previously with regards to scholars who felt that a semiotic approach to dance analysis would be to narrow, external, or formal to address lived, embodied experiences in dance (see Chapter Two), so too has semiotics, perhaps unfairly, been saddled with a reputation that places it at odds with qualitative research in an interpretive paradigm. Guy Spielmann (1999) addresses this issue head-on:

Let us state for the record that semiotics is not “the science of signs,” (which would imply an atomistic ontology), but of signifying systems, so that every human activity that produces meaning may fall under its purview…. It is not epistemologically bound to structuralism. (“Semiotic Axiology,” para. 2)

For Spielmann, it is unfortunate that semiotics “does not enjoy a status of any particular distinction in American qualitative research” (para. 3), though his assertion is certainly supported by the lack of a serious discussion of semiotics as a practical method or methodological underpinning in many mainstream qualitative research texts. Glesne (2010) devotes scarcely one page and neither Eisner (1998) nor Lichtmann (2009) register it at all, while semiotics is barely a blip in the index of the dense Denzin and Lincoln (2008b, 2008c, 2008d) research handbooks.

In clarifying the appropriateness of semiotics for a qualitative research perspective, Spielmann (1999) goes on to explain the overarching project of semiotics, an orientation consistent with my understandings and research questions:
Semiotics (in the broadest sense) reflects what is best described as a systemic approach to the production and exchange of meaning, its goal being to describe phenomena in terms of coherent relational networks and analyze the way they function. In fact, virtually all interpretive activity can be legitimately described as semiotic, since its purpose is to make sense of phenomena which are considered to possess some internal coherence in how they generate meaning. (“Semiotic Axiology,” para. 3)

Gary Shank (1995) delineates points that support the inclusion of Peircean semiotics in a qualitative research endeavor focused on education. He asserts, “education is a fundamental and relational human phenomenon,” explaining that his choice of the word “fundamental” goes beyond constructs of education limited to institutional structures of schooling and reflects the fact that “educating and learning is something we do as humans that is … basic to us” (“The Third Crossroad,” para. 2). Furthermore, education is “real as a relation between learning and teaching…. It has primary semiotic reality” (para. 2). He explains, “by ‘semiotic reality,’ I am talking about an entity whose reality is determined by its status as being understood or even understandable by virtue of the fact that it brings certain things into relation to each other” and continues, “as such a relation, it not only completes other relations, but it brings something new into the world” (para. 3). Reminding us of the relational nature of the sign, such an orientation invites researchers to look at educational processes not in order to “pick out” signifiers as discrete elements and determine their meaning in an abstract and disjointed way as some
might assume, but instead to attend to the relationships humans have with the world around them that make meanings possible.

Shank (1995) further asserts the necessity of semiotics to qualitative research:

Qualitative inquiry is a systematic empirical inquiry into meaning, and as such, is foundationally dependent upon the concepts and implications of semiotics. Qualitative research looks upon the data of the world not as facts, but as signs. Semiotics allows us to understand the ways in which natural human phenomena, including the phenomenon of educating and learning, can be informed and changed by the inter-penetration of the specifically linguistic semiotic action of anthroposemiosis [the human use of signs]. If this is the case, then the search for meaning that characterizes qualitative research is not just an action to describe the role of education in culture, but should transform that role in the process. (“The Third Crossroad,” para. 4)

This notion of an imperative to transform is also reflected in the approach to inquiry characterized as semioethics, which Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio (2010) clarify “is not intended as a discipline in its own right, but as a perspective, an orientation in the study of signs” wherein a major issue is “‘care for life’” (p. 150). They explain, “By contrast with a strictly cognitive, descriptive and ideologically neutral approach as it has largely characterized semiotic studies, semiotics today must recover the axiological

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9 I interpret Shank’s statement of specifically linguistic semiotic action to refer especially to the researcher’s semiosis in the cyclical writing process that characterizes much of qualitative data analysis, and not to the whole of human semiosis which encompasses far more than language; indeed, I see semiotics as useful for moving qualitative research and educational theory away from an over-reliance on language as a primary signing system.
dimension of human semiosis” (p. 151). They stress an orientation towards care that emphasizes listening, understanding, and developing an ability to discern and interpret distinctions and details, an idea thoroughly consistent with what qualitative researchers describe as attention to particulars, those “subtle details of human experience” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 14). Furthermore, while much educational research begins with naming a “problem” or deficiency, the perspective of semioethics, much like that of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), avoids “the paradigm of normal/abnormal, healthy/ill” (Petrilli & Ponzio, 2010, p. 151) and focuses on interpretation across a range of signs and meanings.

Additionally, the semioethic perspective to semiotics is consistent with an understanding of all knowledge as embodied and a respect for the body as necessary for a meaning-making relationship with self, others, and all signs in the world around us. Although Petrilli and Ponzio’s (2010) discussion of semioethics operates at a somewhat abstract level, not addressing the specifics of a qualitative research context, their discussion of relationships in human semiosis seems particularly apt as an orientation that researchers should take when interviewing and interacting with participants:

The symptoms studied by semioethics are always social, but at the same time they are always specified singularly, according to one’s singular relations with others, the world and oneself. Consequently, each idea … examined by semiotics as a symptom, is embodied, expressed by words, the singular word, the embodied word, that is, by voice. Semioethics carefully listens to voices. This implies the capacity for listening and dialogical interrelation. (p. 152)
Petrilli and Ponzio make a compelling argument that through semiosis, “signs and life converge” (p. 153), underscoring again the role of embodiment to semiosis: “dialogism is not reduced to the exchange of rejoinders among interlocutors but indicates the permanent condition of intercorporeal involvement and reciprocal implication among bodies and signs throughout the semiosic universe” (p. 153).

Perhaps most obviously, the discussion of semioethics offered by Petrilli and Ponzio (2010) stresses the ethical imperatives when one is engaged in semiotics research. Again, this is not couched in terms of qualitative research per se, but the principles of respect for research participants are apparent within the larger scope of “care for life” and the emphasis placed on individual autonomy: “Semiotics is specifically interested in the other. The other is not the other understood as means but as end … the other for its value in itself” (p. 156). While their contention that “semioethics investigates the ‘properly human’ outside the space, time and values of the already made world” (p. 152) and their “allusion … to the capacity for earthly transcendence” (p. 153) may appear to put them at odds with other conceptions of embodied meaning-making and may appear to discount the need to situate research in a cultural context, the imperative to listening ultimately

\[10\] In *The Meaning of the Body*, Mark Johnson (2008) articulates the concept of embodied spirituality, in which he addresses the concept of transcendence and distinguishes between *vertical transcendence*, “the alleged capacity to rise above and shed our human form”, a notion refuted in his thesis, and the more compatible idea of *horizontal transcendence*, where “transcendence consists in our happy ability to sometimes ‘go beyond’ our present situation in transformative acts that change both our world and ourselves. This is tied to a sense of ourselves as part of a broader human and more-than-human ongoing process in which change, creativity, and growth of meaning are possible” (p. 281). Such a notion of horizontal transcendence is entirely fitting with Petrilli and Ponzio’s semioethics as discussed here; this elaboration also resolves my initial perception of conflict between their discussion of alterity and an embodied philosophy of mind.
offers a very useful reminder of the uniqueness of the qualitative research interview and the entire research enterprise:

To listen to the voice of the other “out of place” … implies a return to the world that listens and makes a gift of time to the other and for the other. Out of place is the place of encounter with the other, of unlimited responsibility for the other, unlimited answerability to the other. (Petrilli & Ponzio, 2010, p. 156)

In educational research, where participants are often in busy, complex environments where little time or attention can be afforded to many of their concerns, the interview and researchers’ presence can be, if situated with attention to care and respect, a true “gift of time” that may have the potential to effect transformation.

While the bulk of the discussion of semioethics applies to qualitative research at an epistemological level, providing a philosophical orientation regarding the aims and purposes of knowledge creation, Petrilli and Ponzio’s (2010) article does also hint at the relation between semiotics and the practices of data collection and analysis involved in qualitative inquiry, as indeed, these processes are semiosic in nature. The authors clarify the difference between simply experiencing and employing signs as we all do in daily life and taking a conscious stance of study and reflection; in a qualitative research methods context, this is the difference between just visiting somewhere and actively observing, or the difference between having a conversation and conducting an interview: “We can approach signs as objects of interpretation undistinguished from our response to them. But we can also approach signs in such as way as to suspend our responses to them, laying the conditions for deliberation” (p. 157). This process of using signs to reflect on
signs is one of metasemiosis; using such metasemiosis to reflect on the science of signs\textsuperscript{11} is metasemiotics, the project of the qualitative researcher. However, I would like to clarify that the “suspension” of our own responses can never be absolute, just as we can never be outside or removed from our own semiosis. This has practical considerations as well; for instance, in an interviewing context there is a constant tension between, on the one hand, withholding comments or further questions that might flow forth in an everyday conversation with the same participant and, on the other hand, engaging and responding enough so as to be prepared for appropriate follow up questions and making decisions about which ideas to record. When this conception of semioethics is applied to a qualitative research situation, at least, we might better describe it as a special kind of dual semiosis, where the researcher operates in a space of both being suspended and actively plunging in.

Because semiotics is not given much attention within the realm of qualitative research methodology literature, there exists little guidance on practical strategies for carrying out a research project. Within the data collection and analysis, a semiotic orientation calls for attending to a wide range of signs, how they interact, how research participants interact with these signs, and the meanings that we as researchers make from what we find. We also have a set of philosophical and ethical principles to guide our orientations towards the people and communities we are learning from and the knowledge we gain, as discussed above. Proceeding from a general theoretical position grounded in semiotics, we “[look] upon the data of the world not as facts, but as signs”

\textsuperscript{11} With acknowledgement that this phrase ought to be, following Speilmann (1999), put to rest.
and treat the data gathered in a qualitative study—such as the interviews, observation notes, recordings, and documents—as texts and follow a semiotic analysis. A semiotic orientation allows the researcher to “see relationships that I had not been aware of before the analysis” (Feldman, 1995, p. 19).

When it comes to specific named strategies for data analysis and semiotics, as a researcher I have had to be aware of the implicit and explicit orientations to knowledge that underlie different schools within semiotics, and I have had tried to choose approaches consistent with my theoretical foundations. This has proven difficult, however, because so few texts explicitly discuss data analysis strategies, and among those, most adopt a structuralist stance. For instance, Peter Manning’s (1987) *Semiotics and Fieldwork* does give several examples of data analysis, but all are founded on the assumption that language is the basis for understanding all sign systems; similarly, Feldman’s (1995) discussion of semiotic analysis rests on an assumption that an underlying structure of meaning can be discerned. In contrast, many texts on semiotic analysis, such as Van Leewen’s (2005) *Introducing Social Semiotics*, often assume the data to be in the form of fixed and stable texts available a priori to the researcher, such as written documents, visual artworks, advertisements, films, or architectural spaces. The semiotic analysis of data created by the researcher (in such forms as interviews and fieldnotes, themselves written products generated in a process that refuses a clear demarcation between data analysis and data collection) and approached from an interpretivist paradigm—though clearly undertaken by many scholars, particularly those working in multimodality—has not been thoroughly described in the literature.
Within this research, then, my approach to data analysis has been based on a general approach to qualitative analysis by developing categories and exploring them through writing, searching for explanations and counter-explanations. Strict attention to practices of coding and especially the use of structures such as a semiotic square (Feldman, 1995) were not appropriate to the data created or the questions of this study; indeed the writing itself is the primary process of data analysis. Elizabeth St. Pierre (2008)—a researcher who does not claim any affiliation with semiotics but whose reflections on her process can nonetheless be read as an elegant insight into semiosis—explains that thought happened in the writing (p. 488); my own experience of the research resonates with her explanation:

I used writing as a method of data analysis by using writing to think; that is, I wrote my way into particular spaces I could not have occupied by sorting data with a computer program or by analytic induction. This was rhizomatic work (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) in which I made accidental and fortuitous connections I could not foresee or control. (St. Pierre in Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008, p. 488)

Semiotics, then, enters the picture not as a strict formula for “analysis” but rather as an orientation within the writing process, inviting a search for patterns and connections, providing guiding concepts and more importantly, a framework for questions that were ever-present. What signs are the dance teachers using as part of their curriculum? How are the teachers encouraging meaning-making through their use of signs? What forms do these signs take in dance class, and how might those signs shift and change over space
and time? How can I think about my observations metaphorically, and what new insights might these metaphors bring? What relationships do I see among the signs I observe, and how might I map them? With the inclusion of such metaphors and mappings, then, the writing takes place through language, but was also informed through drawings and diagrams in my notes.

Through this process, I bridge methodological orientations that, within the literature at least, may appear incommensurable but which I find are both useful and compatible. From semiotics I find a way in, an initial approach to complex phenomena that orients me toward my questions and encourages me to keep a wide view, for anything can be a sign that we attend to in research. From qualitative research I look at curriculum as a lived experience that calls for active engagement in fieldwork to create the data, rather than relying only on already-produced texts for analysis. Together, they provide a powerful methodology for generating insights into dance curriculum as lived experience.

Situating the research—Frames and lenses for the study

Within the guiding questions posed for this research, several frames become necessary as ways of conceptualizing the phenomenon of dance education that I engage with in this study along with lenses that guide what I attend to within these frames. The metaphor of frames and lenses is appropriate to this study for several reasons: it functions semiotically as a guide for both data collection and analysis, while also bridging concepts from the literature with the practicalities of conducting research. While my aim is and has
been to remain open and curious, without some guiding structure I would be waiting for ideas to jump out, meanings to “emerge” as if by magic from aimlessly collected data. Such a strategy would be both ill-advised and would lack the transparency that is needed to establish the credibility for solid qualitative work. Instead, I offer this discussion of the ways I am conceptualizing some different aspects of the work I encountered when visiting the schools to observe teachers and talk with them and reflecting on the cultural, ethnographic, and personal significance of the “dance curriculum.” These frames are not rigid formulas that data must fit into, but remain flexible and open structures that guide my attention.

*The frame of “goodness”*

Possibly the most important frame used in this study is found in the notion of “goodness” as described by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997). She explains that many studies of educational phenomena begin with an assumption of deficit, an aim to describe just what is wrong and prescribe an approach to fixing it. Her method of portraiture, in contrast, “resists this tradition-laden effort to document failure” (p. 9). We begin instead by searching for what is good in a research situation, figuring out what this means for the participants involved and how it manifests in their particular contexts. Certainly, imperfections will be part of the case, and beginning with a frame of goodness does not mean that we turn a blind eye to any problems that arise. However, the overall orientation is one that assumes goodness is there to be found and it is the researcher’s job to take this seriously by asking, *How does goodness manifest in this situation?*
Working with an assumption of goodness was a difficult but necessary step for me as a researcher. In other contexts where I have observed teachers teaching dance, my task has been more evaluative; the underlying assumption was that I, as an observer, supervisor, or guest, already had defined a set of criteria establishing “goodness” in dance education, and the purpose of my visit was to see if and how a particular teacher or class measured up. Even in those situations I found I needed much flexibility, for appropriate approaches and activities in one context would not necessarily carry over into another. Still, a set of basic assumptions about orderly classroom management, appropriate content, and multisensory presentation of material would pervade my expectations. For most of the time, I probably would have found these, and many more of my own cherished markers of excellence, in the classrooms of the teachers I worked with in this project had I set out to look for them. But this is not the point. In order to find goodness in a research situation, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot, we have to set aside our previous notions of what this looks like and be open to finding it anew. We ask, “what is happening here, what is working, and why?” (p. 142). For this project, I set aside any evaluative aims and embrace a holistic stance beginning with an assumption of goodness and moving forward to an investigation of qualities.

Entering with an assumption of goodness freed me from the need to make judgments about what I saw happening, or rather, challenged me to set aside my judgments, as they were shaped by my own criteria of goodness. Working with educators who were many years my senior, this also allowed me to position myself with humility and forego the need to prove my own expertise by calling attention to the imperfections I
could spot in their classes. I believe that such a stance would have been necessary even if I had worked with younger teachers, because it allows the question “what can I learn here?” to take over as I attune myself to the full range of qualities taking place in their classrooms. While judgments reflecting desirable, positive, and useful attributes tied in with undesirable, negative, or questionable ones may ultimately take place through the process of careful consideration of the data, these proceed from within an overarching frame of goodness. Lawrence-Lightfoot explains:

The shift of research stance—from focus on weakness to pursuit of strength, from preoccupation with disease to concern for health, from inquiry into dysfunction to examination of productivity—does not mean that the former attributes are neglected in favor of elevating the latter. Rather we assume that the latter qualities—of strength, health, and productivity—will always be imbued with flaws, weaknesses, and inconsistencies, and that the portraitist’s inquiry must leave room for the full range of qualities to be revealed. (p. 142)

Any instance of curriculum will of necessity always leave some areas out; we learn to be mindful of what is missing while still immersed in productively learning the whole of what is offered. Such is the same with research.

The frame of curriculum

As a central object under study is the “dance curriculum” as it is constructed in these teacher’s classrooms, it is important to consider how curriculum can be approached in qualitative methodology as a frame for understanding a larger and perhaps unwieldy
notion of teaching and learning as semiosic processes. Here I find that the work of Madeline Grumet\textsuperscript{12} (2008) provides a useful conception of three strands of inquiry that can be woven together to enable a rich study of curriculum: “the study of the curriculum phenomenon as a cultural object,” “the study of the curriculum object as an event,” and “the study of curriculum in the perspective of the researcher” (Madeline Grumet, Anderson, & Osmond, 2008, pp. 137–138). Grumet challenges researchers to investigate these three aspects of curriculum so that “each is subject to the critique and correction of the others” (p. 139).

The qualitative case studies that form the central part of my data collection are thus focused on curriculum as event, but, keeping Grumet’s challenge in mind, I do not isolate this from the larger cultural considerations of curriculum nor my own experiences as a teacher/dancer/researcher in either the collection/creation of data or the analytical processes of writing and re/presenting my new understandings. It is easy to reduce the idea of the “curricular event” to a narrow focus on the bell-to-bell sequence of classroom events, and certainly with a keen eye for detail and rigorous reflection, such a focus could still provide plenty of rich data to work from. However, in considering both the individual “curriculum as event” strand that Grumet describes as well as how it might weave together with the other strands, I find that this aspect of research spills outside of the classroom walls into, for example, the public performances that students give and the thinking about curriculum that transpires when the teachers and I have a conversation

\textsuperscript{12} While the full chapter is written by three authors, it is clearly divided into sections contributed by each author. References to Grumet thus indicate ideas taken from her section.
together. These become instances of learning that also invite me to think about their cultural constructions—how do public student dance performances communicate the cultural values of a school, for instance—as well as reflect on my own curriculum as both a student and teacher.

Finally, although I have already alluded to personal experiences as both a dance student and teacher in presenting the impetus for this research, I also engage in substantive personal reflection surrounding ideas of dance education and the associated signifying practices, as well as the ways these have shaped what I come to know and understand as the discipline of dance. We are all shaped by our curricula, and just as all qualitative research builds from the researcher’s embodied subjectivity as discussed previously, Grumet’s three-strand approach to curriculum research extends this into both method and subject. To make this weave even more complex, I find that doing the research itself becomes part of my lived curriculum as a graduate student. As I present iterations of this research in meetings and conferences, I find that the ensuing dialogues also shape my emergent understandings. Again, research is not a linear, one-shot attempt at understanding but an ongoing process that becomes its own curriculum.

The frame of dance education

While the frame of goodness as discussed above provides insight into the philosophical conceptualization I hold for the settings I researched, the following discussion focuses on more practical matters concerning how dance education is defined for this study. Although semiosis could be investigated in any number of dance education
settings, for this project I situate the inquiry in Ohio middle school programs where dance is offered as part of the regular school day, either as a required course or as an elective. Dance education is positioned only marginally in Ohio schools; a discussion among dance educators at a recent roundtable meeting revealed cuts in the number of school-based dance programs with certified dance educators (as opposed to short term residency projects led by visiting teaching artists). Currently, it is mainly magnet schools for the arts in urban areas and private schools that have dance programs, so study participants were recruited from these sites. Ohio has in place Content Standards for dance for all grades K-12 (Ohio Department of Education, 2012), and while these are not directly aligned with the *National Standards for Arts Education* (1994) or the *Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts* (National Dance Education Organization, 2005a), they represent common themes and expectations that students will create and perform dances, respond to their own dances and works created by others, and connect dance concepts to other content areas in and outside of the arts. Thus the study relates to a larger United States educational context of dance situated as an art form in schools that is officially recognized as part of the curriculum yet fully realized in only a small number of schools.

Middle school represents a turning point in many ways in regards to dance curriculum: while basic creative movement lessons that are appropriate for elementary children may not provide enough physical or conceptual challenges to fully engage adolescents, they also may not be ready for a more technically focused dance program that is offered in high schools, itself sometimes modeled on college and conservatory
structures. Middle schoolers are, in many ways, stuck in the middle, and their teachers must find ways to build basic movement skills, develop conceptual underpinnings, and provide support for creative challenges. In many cases, middle school dance students may not have had prior dance education experiences, so they are “beginners” to formal dance education but already have many years of experience as movers and consumers of dance in social contexts and popular media. They are actively constructing, challenging, and dismissing a variety of meanings, but they depend on teachers and peers for guidance and affirmation. They are neither here nor there, and as shared by a dance education colleague at a meeting recently, “middle school gets forgotten.” At a time when students undergo dramatic physical changes and intensive personal searches for identity and community, dance educators are in a position to respond and nurture student learning in powerful ways. How they do that through facilitating embodied semiosis is a focal point of this study.

The clearest practical frame for my work, then, is what is called “the middle school dance class.” In some ways, it is already plainly defined. Temporally, it occupies slots in the school’s course rotation, each group of students meeting at a designated time each day or week for a defined term. Spatially, it is also defined by activities occurring in the dance room or studio, with occasional adjustments to a school auditorium for a performance or to an offsite location for a field trip. These boundaries set the dance class apart from other activities and contexts that the teacher and students come from and go to, such as the hallway, full of movement and social interactions; the locker room, sometimes a prerequisite for dance that presents its own challenges; the faculty lounge, a
source of both rest and stress for many teachers; and all of the other classes and events that teacher and students are part of each day. Dance class is also set apart by these spatial and temporal boundaries from teachers’ and students’ non-school lives as they interact with friends, classmates, colleagues, family members, and others in home and community settings. The boundaries of studio walls and scheduled time-frames are, in many ways, artificial constructs that influence, but do not completely direct, experiences of space, time, and learning in dance.

These boundaries, thus, provide a convenient but not necessarily accurate means for delimiting the phenomenon of middle school dance education. They provide a focus for observations and data-gathering, representing one possible nexus of meaning-making as teachers and students come together in shared time and space for the officially stated purposes of teaching and learning about dance. Other purposes, of course, are always in play; students may be concerned with meeting a requirement, displaying adherence to adult expectations, socializing with friends, or establishing and maintaining a role in the social hierarchy. Teachers may be concerned with social control and classroom management, imparting the values and norms of school or business culture, displaying professional competence, or simply getting through the day with minimal crises. These purposes may not always be stated or evident, but a recognition of the permeable boundaries goes both ways: while constructing meanings related to dance may take place outside of the time and space of the dance class, the meanings and purposes within the dance class are not confined to dance, either.
As a researcher, I find that this poses a challenge. Teachers and students do not necessarily view dance education as a bounded entity, and even if they do conceptualize it this way, the boundaries around each person’s experience do not necessarily coincide with the spatial and temporal boundaries of dance class. (As a child, I learned as much about ballet and the images and shapes I desired to create with my body from staring at the posters I hung in my bedroom as from what was actually taught in my lessons.) However, researchers do not have access to the many spaces and times in participants’ lives that come to bear on any event or situation. This research is a window into the phenomenon of middle school dance education as experienced in the school sites; it is not an exhaustive accounting of the entire scope of experiences related to dance education that impact the meanings made by participants. It is necessarily incomplete, as all knowledge is and also becomes, through the process of my research as informed by Grumet’s (2008) methods, woven together with larger ideas about the cultural construction of curriculum and my own experiences as a curriculum participant. The frame is malleable and shifting. Nevertheless, I offer some additional boundaries and conceptual strategies that I use in order to guide my focus and make informed decisions about creating and analyzing data.

Focal point: Dance educator as facilitator of meaning-making

Within the permeably bounded setting of dance class a group of participants are engaged in processes of moving, creating, and reflecting on dance, among other aims. As an event, it could be investigated as an emerging social construction, as a laboratory
where participants construct identities, or as a site of surveillance and control of bodies, among many others. All of these are certainly valid understandings of what happens in the setting of dance class and could potentially be relevant to my inquiry. However, the conceptualization of dance class I am most interested in is one of a context wherein a dance teacher acts as a mediator of curriculum and a facilitator of meaning-making. This does not completely exclude any number of other understandings of the events happening within a “dance class,” but it does provide a lens for my investigation. I am interested in the curricular choices that a dance educator makes, among them his or her use of language and nonverbal signs within a semiotic process that is focused on students’ learning. Thus, the teacher becomes an entry point for my investigations but is situated within a context of interactions that are highly relevant to my questions.

Investigating the phenomenon of meaning-making in middle school dance education with a focus on teacher as facilitator does entail a narrowing of the experience under study but not a complete, uni-dimensional focus on the teacher. As I work with teachers who adopt a holistic, student-centered approach (as opposed to a teacher-centered, command-style pedagogy) in their classes, I necessarily attend to how the students engage in the class as well. As teachers respond to their students, how they do this, the aspects of students’ participation they attend to and build on, and how they discuss their choices all become relevant to understanding their work as facilitators. Teachers make assessments about students’ experience as a matter of course in their teaching; how these assessments guide their choices and efforts to advance meaning-
making, including the signs they attend to as they engage students in a semiotic process, is a central focus of this study.

Looking through frames: Connecting inside and out

With a chief focus on the dance educator as facilitator of meaning-making within a permeably bounded dance class event, it becomes necessary to consider how ideas, events, and meanings “outside” of the focus are connected to those “inside.” As an observer, I only have access to a limited slice of what happens during the classroom events that I am present for. Through teacher interviews, I can gain access to information and ideas that contextualize these events in a larger scope and construct partial understandings of how teachers connect inside and outside as they continually make decisions and act within the classroom event. The temporal and spatial boundaries of dance class as an event standing for middle school dance education are partially breached as teachers provide insights on events that came before the class, including their own training, background, and artistic processes, their development as teachers, and their history with the particular group of students. They describe how they see the dance class connected to larger aims within the school and broader educational contexts, as well as how they project future class events.

The spatial and temporal boundaries around dance classes as events represent just one way of breaking the phenomenon of dance education into identifiable parts. Teachers may use the boundaries of each class as one way of categorizing their teaching work, but investigating other ways that they break apart and organize their participation in dance
education is also a useful strategy for understanding what occurs inside the class as event in relation to factors outside of it that shape teachers’ choices. For example, breaking dance education into groups of students (such as majors and general elective students), into broad categories related to purposes and goals (performance preparation, technique, and creative movement), or into career phases (student teaching, professional, supervisor) are ways that teachers can conceptualize their work that cross the permeable boundaries of dance class as event yet significantly impact their teaching strategies. The categorization schemes that teachers use to organize their work relate to the way that they organize information, and facilitate semiosis, in their classes.

What teachers share in interviews is one way of attuning to inside/outside issues, though it is certainly not the only way and, like any component of the research process, represents only partial understandings of a complex phenomenon. As a researcher, I remain aware that everyone involved—myself, teacher, students, and other visitors—experiences the event of dance class as both bounded and permeable in different ways. What each participant brings to the event from outside must be acknowledged as shaping the meaning-making processes inside, even though an exact accounting of what is brought in remains unattainable. Likewise, not all learning and meaning inspired by the events that constitute dance class will be readily apparent within that event, and this too cannot be thoroughly accounted for. Indeed, educators who aim for transfer of skills and lifelong learning hope that all substantial meanings would not be determined while students are present in the classroom setting; we expect meanings to carry out into students’ out-of-school lives. There is simply no way to research the entire spinning web
of signs that intersects students’ and teachers’ participation in the dance class event, yet this semiosis definitely crosses the permeable boundary of dance class.

Returning to a focus on the teacher as curriculum mediator, then, I start with her as a guide. What signs from outside are actively brought inside the classroom in the teaching process? In what ways does the teacher connect ideas in the dance class to larger artistic, cultural, and educational contexts? What experiences does the teacher encourage students to bring in, and how does she communicate this? What acknowledgements of outside are clearly present with the dance class as event? Likewise, what signs from outside are denied, either overtly, through discipline and redirection, or covertly through omission? Similarly, what signs from within the dance class are projected outward? Do teachers actively stress this inside-outside connection? In interviews, do they mention connections made with ideas and contexts outside of class, and do they attend to ways that students might bridge inside and outside?

I cannot definitively resolve the question of inside-outside connections by imposing a rigid boundary or by disregarding boundaries altogether, attempting to capture ever-increasing bits of data, chasing after continually growing chains of semiosis. I can return to my focus on the teacher as mediator of curriculum, and the dance class as a permeably bounded event where meanings and experiences flow in and out, recognizing that I am only privy to some of them as an observer and probing those to the fullest extent possible. Considering the ways that different meanings cross boundaries, and how teachers address this, is one important aspect of the research.
Researching well: Ethics and relationships

Because qualitative research relies on stories and events in people’s lives, ethical concerns are an important dimension of research practice. Carefully crafted research questions, thorough review of the literature, and thoughtful design of data collection procedures are meaningless toward the larger enterprise of knowledge creation for a better world if they are done without thoughtful care towards those participating in the research. Researchers are expected to follow ethical guidelines, such as those put forth by the American Anthropological Association (1998) or universities’ Institutional Review Boards, to ensure that participants give informed consent, have their privacy respected, and are treated fairly during the research process. Despite the seeming thoroughness of such documents, they provide only an initial baseline for ethical conduct in research endeavors. Just as qualitative research relies on researcher’s subjectivity and attention to particulars in finding and interpreting data, so to are these contextual nuances part of the process of researching ethically.

While many “codes” of ethics and writings about ethical dilemmas in research contexts exist, many of these are framed as procedural necessities. In my research, such steps seemed hardly adequate for thinking about the relationships I was building with dance education colleagues that I had known previously. Again, I turn to Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) for what I find to be a more authentic conceptualization of research ethics that resonates with my experiences in this study. She situates research ethics not as a code or set of rules but as an ongoing process of developing and nurturing reciprocal relationships that bring forth new knowledge, explaining that “the portraitist views
relationship as fundamental to self-understanding, to mutuality and validity, and to the
development of knowledge” (p. 136). From the beginning, her choice of the term
“relationship” implies reciprocity in an ongoing process, a far different connotation than
that typically engendered by traditional research texts:

Other researchers working in the qualitative realm often take a more limited and
pragmatic approach to relationship. They have a more circumscribed view that
focuses on relationship as a tool or strategy for gaining access to data—a
boundary that must be negotiated to “get the goods” from the “insiders.” From
this point of view, relationship almost begins to be seen as a barrier (to entry)
rather than connection (to self, to other, and to knowledge), as something to be
gotten through rather than something to be engaged and embraced. (p. 137)

Shifting the terms through which the research process is defined from procedural notions
of barriers to relational ideas invites a richer conversation to unfold; it also demands
increased engagement and sensitivity from the researcher.

As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) outlines the attributes of successful, ethical
research relationships, it becomes apparent that she does not let researchers off the hook
of stringent guidelines. Indeed, the level of accountability is increased as researchers are
not asked to uphold an abstract standard of “doing good” but instead are invited to
develop deep appreciation for the actors they work with, to invest not only their
intellectual, scholarly selves into the work but also their personal identities as they
intersect with the meanings generated through the research relationships. Lawrence-
Lightfoot delineates the criteria for this approach: “At the center of relationships,
portraitists hope to build trust and rapport—first, through the search for goodness; second, through empathetic regard; and third, through the development of symmetry, reciprocity, and boundary negotiation with the actors” (p. 141). Each of these characteristics has manifest in the way that I conceive of and approach working with the two teachers in my study.

Previously I discussed how the notion of “goodness” provided a frame for my study. In my case, the search for goodness became not only a relational approach but also a foundational principle guiding my questioning and interpretations. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) notes, much educational research is concerned with documenting problems. As I proceeded with interviews and observations, it became apparent to me that neither of the teachers I worked with were implementing dance curriculum in ways that could be seen as entirely consistent with state and national dance education standards. It would have been a simple matter to offer a straightforward critique of this and propose alterations to their curriculum so that it better aligned, from an outside perspective, with what experts have deemed important. Such an approach is likely to be expected by readers familiar with that brand of educational research, and as I became sensitive to the possible critiques that my own interpretations of their work may invite from such readers, I doubled down on my commitment to foregrounding goodness in the research. Entering with an assumption of goodness is important for establishing a productive and respectful research relationship, but more importantly, it invites rigor into the research process. As Lawrence-Lightfoot makes clear, we know that the qualities of goodness will always be laced with imperfections. Contextualizing these within a frame
of goodness shifts questions from, for example, “X is not happening in this classroom, what can be done about it?” to “I don’t see a lot of X happening in this classroom that I know represents good dance education. Why is this? What does this mean for our thinking about dance education and the necessary activities that support it?” This then opens the door for a deeper dialogue with participants and a more nuanced interpretation of the data, while also fostering a more respectful and open relationship.

This understanding of goodness as foundational paves the way for empathetic regard. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) explains, “In listening and responding to the actors, the portraitist tries to develop an understanding of their perspective” (p. 146). Empathetic regard in research relationships is built upon “quality of attention, the connection of life experiences, and the deep understanding” (p. 148) that researchers bring to the situation. Lawrence-Lightfoot explains that, in order to connect with actors, the researchers have to create the common ground from which to build connections:

The researcher does not need to be able to reflect back perfect mirror images, but the actor should be able to see refracted resonance in the researcher’s eyes. This not only requires an open-minded, generous stance, it also requires a knowledge base, a level of understanding, and a body of information from which the researcher can draw connections and contrasts to the actor’s reality. (pp. 148–149)

In my research, I was fortunate to have much in common professionally with the two teachers I worked with. These experiences gave me insight into some of the situations the teachers described, but were also different enough that I never felt that I automatically understood their situations; I still needed to ask plenty of questions, to clarify their
responses, and to seek out what was unique about their teaching. Empathetic regard paves the way for connections, but seeing things from someone else’s perspective does not mean that their perspective becomes yours or vice versa. It builds on background knowledge and understanding but recognizes that this background is not a substitute for what can be learned from the actor.

Finally, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) discusses reciprocity and boundaries as important aspects of the research relationship. Again, while formal ethical guidelines dictate the need for documentation of informed consent, the notions of reciprocity and boundary go further in situating this as an ongoing commitment:

But in all research relationships, the portraitist navigates the distance, the depth, and the intensity of the encounters by seeking a symmetry and reciprocity with the actors, by staying focused on the work, and by developing a contract (written or oral) with the participants that clearly articulates the commitments and responsibilities of the relationship. (p. 153)

In my research, in addition to formal consent forms outlining the research agenda, it was through ongoing formal and informal conversations that I was able to foster the reciprocity needed. Many dance educators operate somewhat independently in their schools, as they are often the only ones teaching dance in their buildings. Without fellow dance colleagues to discuss ideas with, the experience can be somewhat isolating. Whether within formal interviews or talk over lunch, part of the research process involves collegial dialogue on issues that dance educators rarely get to discuss within the school
day. Reciprocity, then, is built into the process when educators are given an opportunity to talk about subject-specific ideas with a knowledgeable and interested colleague.

Research strategies

The discussion in this chapter thus has been about my philosophical orientation to the research process, the methodology of qualitative research, the frames used for conceptually organizing information in my study, and the ethical parameters of developing a research relationship with the teachers in this study. I now turn to a discussion of the specific strategies and data collection methods that were used in this study.

Research participants

To investigate questions relating to dance teachers’ use of multiple signs to facilitate meaning-making in their classrooms, I worked closely with two experienced dance educators who currently teach in middle school environments in Ohio. Both teachers are professionals I knew prior to this study; they are also teachers who were suggested to me when I informally asked other colleagues whom they thought I might work with for my research. Both of these teachers have full-time teaching appointments, graduate degrees, and credentials to teach dance, as well as over ten years of teaching experience. Both have also served on curriculum committees and in other leadership roles in dance and dance education in Ohio. Both were open to being part of the research and seemed eager to share their expertise with me, and both provided important help in
introducing me to their principals and facilitating my visits to their schools. The combination of expertise and availability was critical, and I remain grateful for all that they did for me. In asking them to work with me on this research, I was following the advice of Robert Stake (2008), “to choose the case from which we feel we can learn the most. That may mean taking the one most accessible or the one we can spend the most time with” (p. 130).

My approach to choosing participants is referred to in the literature as purposive sampling, where participants are identified through “a series of strategic choices about with whom, where, and how one does one's research” (Palys, 2008, p. 697); these choices are closely tied to the objectives of the research. Within the purview of purposive sampling, the approach in this research can be further categorized as paradigmatic case sampling, where cases are selected because they are exemplars of a certain class; in this case, the teachers are those with many years of experience, a successful teaching record, graduate degrees and certifications, and high regard by professional colleagues. While convenience and ease of access were certainly considerations, I ultimately was guided by the oft-repeated advice to “think of the person or place or situation that has the largest potential for advancing your understanding and look there” (Palys, 2008, p. 698). Both teachers were colleagues that I knew prior to the research in friendly, but not particularly close, relationships. I approached them about participating in the research because I knew of their reputation as outstanding teachers and had personally experienced insightful conversations with them about teaching; I also informally asked colleagues in the area to recommend teachers who taught dance at the middle school level who would be excellent
examples to observe and discuss teaching, and both of their names were mentioned. Colleagues suggested additional teachers, and I attempted to make contacts with these other teachers as well but ultimately was unable to connect with them and pursue a research relationship.

When the teachers decided to participate in this research and gave their informed consent to do so, it was stressed that the dance education community in Ohio is rather small and that readers familiar with this community may be able to deduce the identity of teachers even though pseudonyms are used and specific identifying details are removed. In addition to this discussion about revealing participants’ identity, I also shared with the teachers my goals for the research, the strategies—interviews, classroom observations, and document collection—that I would be using, as well as my estimates of the time commitment involved. The participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary, and they could modify their involvement or withdraw at any time. After we discussed this verbally, they signed a written consent letter and were provided a copy for their own records.

The first teacher, Gloria Banks\textsuperscript{13}, teaches sixth through eighth grade dance at City Center Middle School, an arts-focused public middle school in an urban environment. Her school enrolls approximately 517 students, of which 80\% are African-American and 80\% are classified as economically disadvantaged; the school is designated with high-poverty status (as reported in the 2010–2011 Report Card, the latest year for which data is available from the Ohio Department of Education). The school provides opportunities for

\textsuperscript{13} Names of participating dance teachers, their colleagues, students, and schools have been changed.
students to study across all art forms: in sixth grade students select a major course to take for one semester and then rotate to the other art forms for shortened courses during the other semester; in seventh grade students select a major art form and a minor art form to study; and in eighth grade students select only a major art form to study each day. Gloria also taught occasional lessons to a self-contained special needs class in collaboration with that teacher. During the time of the research, Gloria taught six different classes: eighth grade majors meeting each day in a year-long course, seventh grade majors meeting three days per week in a year-long course, seventh grade minors meeting two days per week in a quarterly rotation, sixth grade majors meeting each day in a semester course, and sixth grade general arts rotation (two half-semester sections meeting each day). Since this research took place only in the spring, observations of the seventh and eighth grade major classes only included the second half of their respective courses.

The second teacher, Anna Tyler, teaches students from selected grades across pre-K-12 at Woodbridge School, an independent school for girls; our discussions and observations focused on her teaching of the eighth grade dance classes in her school’s middle school program. Anna’s school enrolls 830 students in total; 33% are designated as students of color and 30% in grades K-12 receive financial aid (School website; unnamed for confidentiality reasons). At her school eighth grade dance is a required one-semester course for all students, meeting two days in every six-day course rotation. Fifth, sixth, and seventh grade students do not have the opportunity to take dance at school. In addition to her other duties (teaching in the pre-K-fourth grade program and teaching and choreographing for high school students after school, teaching contexts that were not
explicitly part of this research), Anna teaches four sections of eighth grade dance each year, with two of these occurring during the spring semester when this research took place. Students also take courses in music, visual art, and drama, both required and elective, during their middle school program. The school has a strong and well-established dance elective program for students in grades nine through twelve; one goal of the middle school course is to prepare students to enter that program should they wish.

Data collection

Qualitative data were collected by visiting, observing, and interviewing both teachers during the period from February to May 2012. The goal of data collection was to gather information about the dance curriculum at each school, focusing on the teacher’s point of view as she created and experienced the curriculum and on her observable actions and choices as she enacted that curriculum with her students. In response to the different environments, contexts, and teaching practices in each teacher’s context, data collection proceeded quite differently for each one, with a result that the data collected are different in each case.

School visits

Gloria Banks teaches at a school less than five miles from my home and has dance classes that meet every day of the week. She was very generous in opening her classroom to me and made me welcome at any time that I wished to come visit. I scheduled approximately one observation per week with Gloria, alternating days each
week as my schedule could accommodate, allowing me to visit each class numerous times. In total, I visited Gloria’s school thirteen times, for two to six hours at each visit. During the classroom observations, I observed and recorded hand-written notes, either during classes or immediately following. As will be discussed later, Gloria’s curriculum during this time was largely devoted to choreography for the dance concert her students presented to the public at the end of the semester, and her teaching was often in the form of directing students, arranging their choreography, and giving feedback to the whole class as well as frequently working with small groups of students. We also met together for three formal interviews, which I recorded and transcribed; an additional impromptu conversation near the end of the research veered into relevant topics, and with Gloria’s permission I recorded that as well and included it with the interviews. Gloria shared with me copies of published documents that she referenced in her teaching as well as documents she created, such as written examinations and project rubrics. Gloria provided me with a copy of the video of the students’ public performance for later review, as the choreography for this performance became an important text within the curriculum. In addition, because her schedule included a planning period and lunch break in the middle of the day, we often met and had informal conversations about a range of topics, including dance and teaching. Although I did not record these conversations or take notes, they did contribute to my evolving understanding of Gloria’s teaching philosophy and experience. Finally, because I was geographically nearby, I was able to accompany Gloria as a chaperone for a field trip where her students performed at a local dance
festival, and I also attended and assisted with their public dance concert; notes about each of these events contributed to my observations.

Anna Tyler teaches at a school that is over two hours’ drive from my home; therefore, my opportunities to visit with her were more limited. In addition, the course schedule at her school rotates, so that her eighth grade dance classes did not meet on the same days every week. Anna was very generous in working with me to determine the days when her teaching coincided with my availability, and she helped me to schedule visits to her school in advance where I could observe both sections of her eighth grade class. In total I visited six times with visits spaced throughout her course; two additional visits were scheduled but had to be cancelled due to last-minute scheduling changes at the school. At each visit I observed her teaching the two eighth grade lessons of approximately fifty minutes each and remained at the school for four to five hours each time to account for breaks and time for interviews, assisting Anna and her colleague as appropriate, and meals and informal conversations. During her lessons I primarily observed from the edge of the classroom, taking detailed notes. Because this was the first dance class for many of her students, Anna often instructed whole-class lessons, and I was able to record many aspects of her teaching. Anna assisted me in obtaining consent to videotape her lessons, so this provided an additional source of data. However, the video, and particularly audio, quality I recorded was less than ideal, and this source of data was ultimately not used for my analysis. Anna and I met together for two formal interviews, which I recorded and transcribed. A third interview was scheduled but had to be cancelled due to a change in schedule, and therefore the second interview
encompassed both the dance curriculum generally as well as reflection on specific lessons and activities. In addition, we frequently ate meals together and visited between classes, and again, although I did not record or take deliberate notes on these occasions, they contributed to my overall understandings of Anna’s teaching and her experience. Anna also provided me with copies of the curriculum materials used in her classroom, including the handouts that she gave to her students for their dance notebooks.

Observations and fieldnotes

In general, with the exceptions of the interviews, my visits to Gloria’s school and accompanying note-taking were much more frequent and much less formal. Because of the environment where students worked frequently in groups in a rather small studio space, prepared for a major performance, and attended a field trip, I often did not find it feasible to position myself as an unobtrusive observer and take detailed notes; the often loud and busy environment was not conducive to this. Instead, I frequently assisted Gloria by giving feedback to groups when she asked, organizing and recording music, and preparing costumes for performance; many students came to think of me as her assistant. In contrast, my less frequent visits to Anna’s school, along with her carefully planned and timed lessons, resulted in more distanced observation and less interaction with the classes, and my note-taking there was more formal and detailed, though less frequent. Each of these observation styles evolved in response to the context, and neither resulted in better or worse data but rather reflected my best attempts to attend to what was significant in each teacher’s work in ways that were respectful.
A major concern in collecting data through observation is to protect the information both from loss as well as from unauthorized access. Because I was traveling back and forth to each of the school sites, I was especially concerned about the security of my notes. I considered using a laptop to take notes on but ultimately decided against it. Although I can type notes much faster than I can write, I was concerned about the potential for it to be seen as obtrusive, especially in a dance class environment where tables, chairs, and computers are not commonly in use by students. In addition, I did not want to appear absorbed in my notes but instead actively engaged in observing as appropriate, and I feared that a laptop screen might be in the way. Instead, I used a digital pen and grid paper, a device which appears like an ordinary pen and notebook, but which is capable of recording a digital copy of each page. After returning home, I filed the paper copies in my file box and transferred the digital copies to my password-protected computer, keeping redundant copies of each set of notes. While no risky personal information was included, this strategy was still important for preserving the security of the data as well as easing my anxiety that something important could be lost.

Interviews

The interviews with each teacher provided a very rich source of data. Both teachers are highly articulate experts eager to talk about their experiences as dance teachers. Although I prepared interview questions ahead of time following a protocol I developed, I found that I rarely referenced them. Beginning each interview with a general statement about what I wanted to focus on in our time together was often enough; I asked
follow up questions to clarify something they had told me or to explore an area that I had not thought of before. In reviewing my initial questions, I found that many were either answered prior to the interview in informal conversations or over the course of my observations. Within the interviews, my goal was to learn about each teacher’s background and experiences in dance and education, to gather information about her curriculum, and to hear her reflect on certain instances and aspects of the curriculum that I had observed. Therefore, I spaced the interviews throughout the time we spent together, so that in early interviews I could get to know the teachers better, while in later ones I could ask them more specific questions about their teaching.

The interviews were scheduled for about one hour each at times convenient to the teacher when I was already visiting. Interviews with Gloria were conducted in her office at school; Anna and I met once in a conference room and once in her studio when it was not occupied. I was very fortunate that both teachers were able to set aside time to meet with me for these interviews, and with the exception of occasional announcements or knocks at the door, we were rarely interrupted. This focused time allowed us to go in-depth into topics, and my approach was to listen as much as possible with the focus being the participants describing their experiences. I recorded each of the formal interviews using a digital voice recorder and later transferred the recordings to my computer and used a transcription program to listen to and transcribe each interview. I took minimal notes during the interviews, focusing my attention on being engaged in the conversations. Again, I was concerned with protecting the data from loss and unauthorized access, and I
stored the audio recordings, my notes, and the transcriptions on my password-protected computer.

Analysis

While describing the ways that I collected data is somewhat straightforward, analysis of qualitative data is less so. Instead, I worked through a process of revisiting, writing, and questioning based on themes I indentified in the data. For me, the process was somewhat akin to choreographing, working with sections of material that are arranged, rearranged, developed, and discarded, with certain motifs emerging as significant that then get probed again. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) describes this as a process of searching for patterns, an idea consistent with a semiotic approach.

Validity of interpretations

Because researcher subjectivity within a cyclical and often unpredictable process is a critical feature of qualitative research, it is important to also take steps to help ensure that the data is collected and interpreted in ways that maintain integrity and present a credible account of the research findings. Because the paradigm on which this research is based does not aspire to one single account of truth, the notion of validity calls not for researchers to prove that the findings are the only possible explanation but rather to purposefully incorporate strategies to promote a credible and consistent interpretation of the data within the analytical process. In this dissertation study I have incorporated three strategies that help ensure the interpretations I offer are valid.
Triangulation of data sources, whereby information is collected using a variety of approaches, methods, and sources (Maxwell, 2005), is the first strategy used. As mentioned previously, the data collected in this study include interviews, observations, and documents. While any one of these sources could provide important information, by putting them in conversation with one another, I am able to identify corroborating evidence from among them as well as to pinpoint possible inconsistencies that deserve further attention.

The audit trail is a strategy that stresses organizing all information relating to the study so that it can be reviewed and reflected upon. The audit trail includes the raw data, such as audio recordings and handwritten notes made during observations, as well as subsequent documents that show how these data were transformed, analyzed, and reflected upon. In this dissertation I have maintained organization of all of these materials, allowing me to go back and revisit original documents and notes as I develop subsequent ideas.

Member checks, or respondent validation (Maxwell, 2005) have also been used as a strategy within this research. With this strategy, participants are given the opportunity to review the analysis and are asked to offer comments regarding the appropriateness of the interpretations. In this dissertation, participants have been given copies of the relevant sections of initial drafts where their data is addressed and have been asked to give feedback and clarifications on the interpretations presented.
Writing as data analysis

While much of my analytical work takes place through writing and notes, as discussed previously it is my sense of these teachers and my lived experiences of being with them that pervade the work; it is as if I hold an image of them in my bodymind as I reread transcripts and revisit observation notes, placing myself once again in the situation with them while simultaneously attending to my newer questions and emerging ideas about what is happening. In a larger study such embodied re-imaginings might not be possible, but among the advantages of working in a small case study is that, despite pages upon pages of data, a close connection can still be maintained. Likewise, working with categories and codes as a primary analytical tool, undoubtedly a useful strategy for some qualitative research projects, did not feel appropriate here. As Lawrence-Lightfoot explains:

Without contradicting the requirement of rigor, other researchers—working in the interpretive or hermeneutic tradition—resist the use of rigid, discrete codes and give less emphasis to the organization of data into analytic categories. They are more interested in discovering the nuanced connections among themes, in looking for subtle changes over time, and in maintaining the integrity and complexity of human thought, feeling, and action than in identifying broad categories of behavior. (p. 191)

I began by reading and rereading my notes and transcripts, both my descriptive notes as well as my notes in the margins that indicate what I was thinking. I added layers of notes in the margins, describing themes or patterns that seem somehow significant. I
ask questions of the data, most often “what if?” or “why?” Signs spin continuously; analysis is, fundamentally, a semiosic process. This, like so much writing and artmaking, is essentially a private act; to stop mid-sentence or mid-movement and try to articulate what one is doing and why would be to interrupt the flow. Unlike quantitative research and even some forms of qualitative work where the stages of data analysis and reporting can be clearly separated, in my research they are tightly woven together. As stated in the discussion of semiosis earlier, the analysis is the writing. Trying on different explanations, searching for competing arguments, clarifying and supporting the emerging ideas—these all happen through writing. Some ideas get discarded, and some get developed more and makes their way into what you read here. Like all knowledge, the final product is partial and incomplete, and it is always both more and less than the experience of collecting the data. In the interpretive tradition of qualitative inquiry that I contribute to here, it is my hope that by being thorough, evocative, and reflexive, I have succeeded in telling a compelling story that engages readers in my questions as I have been engaged.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the methodology used in this study by describing the orientation of qualitative inquiry, explaining decisions made in framing the study and approaching the research context, and specifying the research strategies undertaken for data collection and analysis. In the next chapter I will introduce the participants in greater detail, drawing for the reader portraits of each of them as teachers. Because so much of
their curriculum is impacted by who they are as teachers and artists, these portraits will offer an introduction and context for the remainder of the data, which will be explored further in Chapter Five.
Chapter 4: Narrative Portraits

Introduction

After spending considerable time with both dance educators, I collected significant data related to their curricula and teaching practices. In this chapter I begin to synthesize my experiences as an observer and interview partner, drawing on transcripts and field notes to convey key ideas that are essential to exploring my research questions:

How do dance teachers engage in and promote an embodied process of multimodal semiosis through their enactment of dance education curriculum?

How do dance educators guide their students to attend to and make meaning from a range of signs, including language, movement, music, and visuals, in the dance classroom, and how might these meanings come together to shape understandings of dance in the world?

How do teachers negotiate multiple influences, including formal curriculum, school culture, and their own artistic and educational backgrounds that impact their use of signs in the dance classroom?

Before addressing specific themes that I found in the data individually, I offer holistic narrative portraits of both dance educators. Following the portraiture
methodology of Sara Lightfoot-Lawrence and Jessica Hoffiman Davis (1997) discussed in Chapter Three, these portraits are constructed in order to artfully convey to the reader aspects of each teacher’s identity as influenced by my experience of the context in which dance education takes place in their schools, as well as the ideas, activities, and dances that make up their lessons. At the center of each portrait is the dance teacher, the creative and dynamic educator and artist whose lived experiences inform, in ways both observable and invisible, the dance curriculum that is enacted in each studio.

While these portraits are descriptive, they also reflect both analytical and aesthetic choices. Each portrait depicts a single day in the school; however, the specific events, experiences, and dialogue are crafted from data collected at different points in time and selected as indicative of key ideas I experienced throughout my time on each campus. Dialogue is used within the narratives to portray the kinds of conversations that happened frequently during my visits, and, like the other details offered, is assembled from notes and conversations and recreated here. When the dialogue includes a direct quote taken verbatim from interview transcripts or field notes, it is followed with a footnote indicating the speaker’s initials, data source, and date. In all other instances in this chapter, readers should infer that dialogue has been crafted for the purposes of the portrait and does not represent a direct quotation.

A Portrait of Gloria Banks

The smell of yeast and the sight of orange construction barrels signal my approach to the entrance for the City Center Middle School. The newly constructed
building sits near a highway exit ramp undergoing a major renovation; as I take the last possible turn before a looming “Do Not Enter” sign I scan quickly for students walking in the road. The sidewalks have been blocked off or torn up, and although the middle schoolers should be in class by now, students from the nearby high school and community college dodge parked cars and orange cones as they make their way to school, work, and bus stops. After having made this trip several times, I finally notice the sign for a major grocery chain’s baking operation across the street. The scent of rising dough mingles with exhaust fumes and tar as I pull into the large parking lot for visitors to the school.

I arrive after the school day has officially started, now that the commotion of busses and carpool lanes has died down. I switch my phone to silent and tuck it into my laptop bag before heading up the hill to the building entrance. I am greeted by signs letting me know that guns and drugs are illegal here and that as a visitor I must announce my presence to the office. I press the button to be let in, and I strain to hear the faint click of the lock letting me know that the door will open. Coming into the front office, I say hello and chat with the kind women working behind the front desk. A newspaper sits on the counter, but it isn’t one whose banner I recognized when I first started coming to the school. Above the fold of the thin paper are headlines that strike me as blatantly partisan, but after seeing several editions of this paper I realize it is a local paper targeting the African-American community. Next to the newspaper is a massive binder; I flip through it to the section marked “visitor” and reach for a flowerpot nearby. Artificial flowers are strategically duct-taped to the pens; I pull one out and enter my name and destination:
“dance room.” I know the room must have a number, but I can never remember it. The square where I am to indicate “purpose” gives me pause. “Research,” although accurate, seems too clinical and stuffy; likewise “observation,” which someone above me has entered, feels distanced. I settle on the vague but neutral “visit,” doubtful that anyone ever checks these logs anyway. “You know where you’re going, hon?” asks the kind woman managing a ringing phone, flashing computer screen, and three students who have arrived late.

“Yes, down to the dance room.”

“All right, you have a nice day dear.”

“Thanks, you too!”

The dance studio is down the main hall, across from the open cafeteria. When class is in session, the hall is mostly empty and quiet. Colorful mass produced posters adorn the hallways, reminding students to stay in school and graduate or to not bully their peers. As I approach the dance studio, the wall hangings become more personalized, with handmade bulletin boards describing dance events and student projects. One has clippings from a local newspaper and pictures of a young girl in ballet clothes, a student at this school that has performed in a local production of *The Nutcracker*. Another bulletin board catches my eye—8 ½x11 color printouts of students in the dance studio are arranged at contrasting angles. A question above explains the context: “What forces push or pull people from a community?” Students are depicted pushing and pulling one another physically. I’m used to looking at photos of dancers, and although they only capture one moment in time, as I look at the images I start to understand a lot about the
investment and preparation of the students pictured. Some are shown with intense focus and strained muscles, clearly tense as they are leaning their weight away from each other. Others stand in postures reminiscent of boredom in the lunch line, and I imagine them reluctantly entering a tableau directed by a classmate. Still others appear to be in that spot in the middle, physically awkward and a bit hesitant but willing to try moving and performing with their peers. The choreographer in me wants to coach them into more clear expression of their movement ideas—oooh, a little deeper in that bend, reach that back arm behind you a little more!—while the teacher in me smiles, admiring not only their work but the bulletin board itself, an excellent example of making dance learning visible. Lists of social forces at work are stapled next to the photographs: “Push: violence, no jobs, crime; Pull: good schools, family, jobs.” Looking again at the photographs, I see not only the physical enactment of pushing and pulling forces at work but also gestures and expressions on the young faces suggesting that, for these performers, this was not an abstract lesson enacted from descriptions in a social studies textbook. While the gestures and staging of these tableaux are clearly stylized, the emotions expressed are nonetheless relatable. I make a mental note to ask more about the project that led up to this display.

The door of the studio clearly proclaims that this is the dance room: publicity materials from dance companies and performances are arrayed across it, including covering the narrow window above the doorknob. A postcard from Urban Bush Women sits at eye level; on it, a slim African-American dancer in short shorts pops her hip out to greet me today as she does every time I visit this room. I recall fondly the time I saw the
company perform on tour with a jazz band. I try the knob; like all classrooms these days it is kept locked, so I knock softly on the door, not wanting to interrupt. I wait and try peering in beneath the poster taped over the window. Through the slit I can see feet moving, so I know the class is in there. I don’t want to interrupt the flow of a lesson, but I go ahead and knock again hesitantly. Still no answer. I can hear the muffled sounds of music through the door, mixing with the chatter of adolescent voices. I wait and knock again. A maintenance worker passes by me in the hallway and smiles. I smile back awkwardly. I really don’t want to interrupt their dancing, but I feel awkward just standing there waiting, wishing I had timed my visit to coincide with the change of classes. Finally I knock a little louder, and when I am about to pull out my phone and text Gloria, the teacher, to let her know I am here but can’t get in, the door springs open, two twelve year old girls apparently fighting for control of the handle. The noise of music and chatter floods out into the hallway as the girls step aside to let me in.

Although I have visited this studio many times, I never can seem to get used to how small it is. The school was recently constructed with the arts program in mind, so I am baffled about the tiny space of the dance room, less than a third of the size of the studio space at the elementary school nearby. The walls are at an odd angle too, as if the back corner of the studio got chopped off by the intrusion of the curved hallway on the other side of the wall, those precious few square feet made up for with space jutting out from the opposite corner forming an alcove where a glass door, covered in butcher paper to block the view, leads to the field behind the school. Stepping into the room from the hallway I notice a small slope upward; the shiny wood floor is at least raised off of the
concrete foundation, though not sprung in the way professional dance floors are. Still, given the small space and roughly twenty adolescent bodies already occupying it, I continuously feel like an intruder, unsure where to place myself. Pulling my laptop bag from over my shoulder, I try to find an unobtrusive place to settle into.

To the left of the door is a counter and cabinets stretching about eight feet toward the side wall. I slip off my shoes and set them, and my bag, in the corner. Gloria stands in the opposite corner near the stereo cabinet, and she waves to me in greeting. She wears a solid-colored polo shirt and loose black cotton pants; I have come to think of this as her no-nonsense dance uniform. Her dark brown skin is typically unadorned with makeup, though small gold earrings often dangle from her ears. The angular cut of her short dark hair hides just a few curls of gray. Her muscular frame, softened only slightly by age, reveals her history of dancing in athletic, physically demanding traditions. Upon meeting Gloria one gets the sense that this is a woman who has no time for frivolity, yet her warm smile and energetic laugh make friends and colleagues feel welcome almost immediately.

After the first visit where she formally introduced me to the students, they all seem used to my presence and now continue with their work as I get settled in the room. A concert is scheduled for the beginning of May, and each class has at least one dance they will be performing on the program. The seventh grade class at the beginning of the day is rehearsing to Michael Jackson’s *Man in the Mirror* (Garrett & Ballard, 1988), a choice that initially surprises me because it is both dated and in the genre of pop music, which many educators I know seem to dismiss as inappropriate. The students appear to enjoy this song, though, and some even lip-synch lyrics as they practice. The scene
reminds me of my own dance classes during middle school, when Jackson’s album \textit{Bad} was at the height of its popularity and regularly accompanied our jazz class warm-ups. As I watch the class work, however, I notice that unlike my own dance experiences at their age that largely consisted of forming straight lines and copying the teacher’s movements, these students are engaged in composing the movements that will be part of the concert performance.

To make my way across the room and greet Gloria I weave throughout clusters of students. Gloria frequently gives them tasks in small groups and alternates this work with coming together to rehearse as a complete ensemble. Today the seventh grade class has been assigned to work on their performance of a previously taught phrase. I learn from Gloria that she had assigned groups to compose phrases, and after everyone viewed them all, the class made decisions about which phrases everyone would learn. The choreographers taught their movement to the rest of the class, and now students are working in groups to help one another refine their movement performance and teach the sequence to those who were absent. Gloria alternates between her post at the stereo cabinet—a location where she can play the CD on request and also survey the landscape of the entire studio, her sharp eyes on the lookout for errant behavior—and moving throughout the room, providing feedback and assistance to the students as they work in groups.

As I watch this particular class work, I am impressed by the complexity of the movement phrases they are working on. While the timing is relatively constant, falling into the familiar eight-beat phrases of popular music, they have constructed movement
quences with some difficult weight shifts and changes of facing. The challenge of this movement becomes apparent when the groups re-assemble to run through the beginning of the dance together with the music. Gloria invites me to watch the group perform. They face the wall opposite the door where a large dry-erase board is flanked by bulletin boards with an array of dance posters; this has become the assumed “front” or downstage area in the studio. I sit on the floor against this wall and quickly realize that I have to pull my legs in underneath me in order to avoid tripping a dancer, but before I can do this I am drafted into the performance as a prop. After scattering to the sides of the room representing the offstage area, the dancers slowly enter the performance space as the soft chords of the song begin. “Lay down!” one of the dancers whispers to me. “Yeah, you’re homeless!” another reminds me. I comply, remembering that Gloria has told me another dance in the concert is to address homelessness. When this dance begins, dancers from that other class are to be seated and lying in the downstage area; I have been recruited as a stand in, so I take my place lying on the floor, my back pressed against the wall to surrender as much space as possible to the students. I sincerely hope I won’t get kicked in the face, an occupational hazard made all the more likely by the impossibly small classroom we are in. As the seventh graders walk in with serious strides and downcast eyes, they gesture towards me solemnly, then turn their heads and walk away.

Before taking their places in the ensemble, the dancers move toward Gloria, who holds a coffee can containing what appear to be drum mallets that the students take out, one by one. I am temporarily confused, wondering what they need giant lollipops for and how this has anything to do with homelessness. Dancers re-enter the space, mallets in
their right hands held at eye level. I eventually gather that they are done directing movements toward the homeless figure I am representing, and I re-arrange myself into a seated position to watch about thirty seconds of choreography that they have thus far. The gestures in the choreography seem somewhat transformed since they practiced in small groups; while the addition of the prop seems to clarify the intention of the eye gaze and arm movements, the weight shifts and timing become less refined. I sense that all of their focus has gone into the prop, and for many this means the lower body has been neglected, the steps and kicking movements less precise. While everyone seems to have the basic sequence of the movement, there are some differences in how it is being performed. Because the facing changes, the dancers don’t stay looking at the same person the entire time and thus can’t easily see what each other are doing to stay in synch. There is a sideways movement that could be a step on to the ball of the foot or a flat foot; there is a head turn that could be an isolated movement or a continuation of the previous movement. Nonetheless, the gestures with the mallet—I later learn that this is to be replaced with a hand mirror in performance—are relatively consistent.

After they are done, Gloria asks me to give the group some feedback. She has the dancers fill me in on the theme of the dance, which, in keeping with the song lyrics, reflects the necessity of looking inward at our personal choices if we are to have a positive impact on society:

I’m starting with the man in the mirror
I’m asking him to change his ways
And no message could have been any clearer
If you want to make the world a better place

Take a look at yourself then make a change. (Garrett & Ballard, 1988)

The head turning movements toward and away from the mallet/mirror prop and the hand gestures toward the homeless figure downstage begin to make sense. Indeed, without them, the narrative sense of the dance and reinforcement of the theme might be lost; the gestures toward and away from the face and chest would be in danger of being read as just decorative flourishes added on top of more standard walking, turning, and leg gestures found in many basic jazz and contemporary choreographies. Gloria explains that the class has been talking about the importance of getting feedback, and I quickly try to gather my thoughts to offer something positive and useful. I compliment the class on their choreography and mention some of the interesting movements I recall, and then I say there are a few places where I noticed different things happening although I think they intend to be in unison. I describe and briefly demonstrate the movements in question and then quickly try to hand it back to Gloria to determine how to actually help them all do these movements together. The students begin to assemble for a second run through of their choreography when the flow of action is abruptly halted by the ear-piercing shriek of the bell on the public address system.

No matter how much time I spend in schools teaching and observing, I never can get used to the bells. They strike me as rude and invasive, domineering signals from above interrupting the flow of the creative process. It also seems as if the bell comes abnormally soon—a feeling I also would never get used to during all my visits with Gloria. In each class, just as the students get warmed up, review their work thus far, and
become engaged in adding choreography or refining their performance, the loud DDDDDIIIINNNNGGGGG invades, quickly putting everyone on alert. Students drop whatever they were doing as Gloria hurriedly tries to hold their attention for instructions about what they will do next time and reminders about proper behavior in the halls. The cabinets lining the back wall of the room open up as students take out their shoes and sit against the wall, quickly putting them on. Those who have “dressed out” gather clothes and rush down to Gloria’s office, a space which, in the absence of any locker rooms at this end of the building, serves as a girls’ dressing room. Cabinets smack shut, and within two minutes the room is completely empty save for Gloria and me. She looks over my way a bit frazzled, before making her way to the door to check on hallway behavior. Even now, with everyone gone, the room is hardly quiet—the noise of running and yelling from the hall spills in through the open door. Individual students come in to say hello, get progress reports signed, and inquire about things left in the dance room. I make my way back to my bag, propped on top of my shoes in the corner of the room. I take out the notebook I had intended to use to take notes and start to scribble what I can about what has just transpired.

“Do you know where my jacket is? Hey. Miss. You seen my jacket?” I look up to see an inquisitive face addressing me.

“Oh, I’m sorry, um, let’s look around. What does it look like?” I stand up and try to address the young girl’s question. We walk over to the corner of the room near the doors that lead outside. A table sits about six feet away from the door, blocking off a small storage area where some large stretched canvases sit along with the boxes of props
and costumes that Gloria has been assembling for the program. On the table sits one
computer with a bulky monitor and in front of it, two chairs. Students will sometimes use
this computer to do research projects on famous choreographers; when the classes aren’t
engaged in the research portion of the courses, the chairs often become a holding spot for
clothes discarded by dancers as they warm up during a lesson. We find a zip-up hooded
sweatshirt on one of the chairs, but it isn’t the one this girl is looking for. I tell her I will
keep an eye out for the one she describes, black with pink lettering. “Hey thanks. So
you’re Miss Banks’s assistant, right?”

“Yeah, I’m Ms. Nesbit,” I remind her. “I’m writing about how she teaches dance,
and I’m also helping her out with some things for the concert.” I’ve settled on this
description as the easiest way of explaining what I am doing. Although we talked about
my research project on the first day I visited, the nuances of that discussion have long
since left their imaginations, and most of the students have seen me helping Gloria—
gathering materials, moving costumes, taking notes, and occasionally accompanying a
small group down to the “pod” at the end of the hallway that serves as an additional
rehearsal space. Gloria has supervised a number of student teachers over the years, and
since I am very obviously younger than she is and I come from the university, they
assume that is what I am there for.

“What are you doing in here? You’re supposed to be in someone else’s class right
now!” Gloria’s loud voice cuts right through our conversation.

“Miss Banks I can’t find my jacket, my black one, you know I had it on yesterday
when we were doin’ that dance!”
“Dionna, I tell you all, over and over, take care of your stuff! I am not your mother!” Gloria responds sharply as she tries to shoo the girl out of the studio. Another group of students has entered and the brief calm of the break is clearly over. One girl is practicing handstands, precariously close to her classmates. Two thin boys stand awkwardly by the cabinets, their plaid boxer shorts clearly exposed beneath the low waistbands of their regulation khakis. A tall girl with beautiful braids pops bubbles with her gum, while a thin, quiet girl next to her slides effortlessly into a long-legged split.

“Man, how you do that? I wanna do that!” says a third friend, a somewhat less flexible girl who squats down next to her and struggles to bring her leg forward into the enviable position. Her bent knees and awkward grimace make it clear that she is straining, before she flops heavily to one side, legs resting on the ground in defeat. “Ugh! That is so hard!” she says.

I turn back to see Dionna, the girl looking for the jacket, still hovering by the door. She has taken a bottle of lotion out of one of Gloria’s cabinets and is now spreading it across the backs of her hands, clearly stalling. The mega-perfumed scent of Bath and Body Works’s idea of vanilla, apparently designed in a lab to appeal to precisely this demographic of thirteen-year old girls, hits me and I really hope she isn’t planning to slather on much more. “Go to class Dionna!” Gloria yells from across the room, immediately turning her attention to one of the other students that has entered. Dionna looks up, about to protest, then seems to realize the inevitable as the bell once again pierces our ears. “See ya,” she says in my general direction as she drops the pink glittery bottle on the counter and walks out.
The general commotion in the room continues as Gloria makes her way through clumps of kids back to the door. Just as she starts to shut it, two girls approach her, sweatpants in hand. One is wearing a short pleated skirt, the other, a stretchy sweater dress and tights. “Can we have the key?” the first one asks, and Gloria searches amidst stacks of papers, CDs, and paintbrushes on her counter.

“Where are my…” she trails off as her hand lands on the heavy set of keys with one of those stretchy, coiled plastic rings that teachers and nurses seem to always have at hand. “Hurry,” she says with a direct, serious stare as she hands the keys over so the girls can use her office as a changing room. A few other girls dart out behind the first two, slamming the door shut behind them. Gloria reminds the rest of the class that they should be warming up. Some of the students appear to take this seriously, sitting down and moving into stretches, while others continue their conversations or, in the case of the tall girl with the gum, wander through the room. I notice that on the side wall there is posted a sheet with warm up-choices describing some steps and simple stretches that the students can do to construct their own warm up. The lettering and accompanying illustrations are small, though, and compared with the bold dance posters that fill the room, unlikely to grab anyone’s attention. “We’re going to work on those duets today,” Gloria tells the class. One pair of students who often seem quite dedicated gets up and starts to review some simple partnering movements; others continue talking and stretching. “Let’s start with reviewing the dance from the beginning,” Gloria instructs the students a few moments later. As they start to gather into a close clump in the center of the room for the beginning of the dance, loud banging erupts. Three students immediately
bolt from their positions and race to the door, eager for the privilege of being the one to let the grinning dressers back in. By the time Gloria can address their behavior, the outburst has died down and the remainder of the cast, now dressed in sweatpants, take their places. Backs to one another, gazes to the floor, the students look serious as they wait to begin.

The opening of the song is so low I can barely make it out. The students hear it, though, and on cue, right hands pop up in front of faces, fingers spread, and forearms chop through the air, shielding their eyes. The quick motion, repeated three times, still lacks strength and percussive quality in this rehearsal; several of the students seem less than committed and muddle through the gesture. Nonetheless, the solidarity expressed by this simple opening movement is impressive, and when they do, much later in their rehearsal process, finally manage to execute it with the sharp, staccato quality Gloria coaches them toward, it will be downright intimidating. In less than five seconds the dancers are established as a unit, separate from, and markedly cooler than, anyone watching. They stomp forward forcefully—or rather, should stomp forward forcefully, since some of the students continue to move without much sense of investment. As the opening lyrics to The Temptations’ (Strong & Whitfield, 1970) *Ball of Confusion* come on, the ball of students in the center of the space expands and contracts, students stepping in and out, pivoting to change directions.

People movin' out

People movin' in
Why, because of the color of their skin

Run, run, run, but you sho' can't hide

A pair of students burst out of the clump and step downstage to mime punching each other as a third stands behind them, grinning as she raises her arms in emulation of Nixon’s victory sign gestures.

An eye for an eye

A tooth for a tooth

Vote for me, and I'll set you free

Rap on brother, rap on

They rush back to a clump and another pair springs forth; a charismatic, muscular girl emphatically shakes her fist at the audience while nodding her head. She might not seem too engaged in the group section, but this is clearly her moment.

Well, the only person talkin'

'Bout love thy brother is the preacher

Before she can resume her place in the clump a few more have stepped out in the opposite direction. Two boys take their place sitting on the floor, looking up at the thin, mild-mannered girl who stands above them, miming opening a book and reading from it.

Nobody is interested in learnin'

But the teacher

Yes, I think, after eight years or so of formal schooling, she has teacher gestures nailed.

This trio runs back to the clump, which immediately disperses into chaotic running all over the room as Dennis Edwards sings out:
Segregation, determination, demonstration,
Integration, aggravation,
Humiliation, obligation to our nation
Ball of Confusion
That's what the world is today
Students assemble now into three rows spread out across the dance space as the next verse comes on. They move into a section of unison movement with many arm and leg gestures and frequent nods of the head. There are quarter turns and half turns embedded throughout the choreography, and like the class before them, some of these students struggle with the frequent facing changes. I’m watching them from my seat on the floor, again perilously close to the girls in the first row. One of them, clearly a more experienced dancer, seems highly confident in the movement; I’m pretty sure she had a fairly significant role in coming up with much of the choreography in this section. In contrast to the sharp and somewhat aggressive gestures in the opening section, the movement now has a weighty, rebounding quality, and the girls who have mastered the sequence exude a sense of relaxed coolness.

The confident projection quickly deteriorates as the dance moves into the next section, which requires a change of formation that unintentionally illustrates the confusion of the song’s title. The next section is a series of duets that the students have been choreographing, and it is apparent that this is about where they stopped working last time. A couple of the duets keep moving, working on their own sections simultaneously, while the rest of the students, now unsure what to do, stand around or move somewhat
aimlessly. Eventually Gloria stops the CD. Chattering ensues, quickly rising to the level that I can’t make out any of it. It is as if the focus required to remember the choreography temporarily held their intense need to communicate verbally at bay, but within seconds we are back to the chaotic scene from the beginning of class. In all fairness, this phenomenon isn’t unique to these students or even their age group; I’ve been in rehearsals with professional dancers where immediately after a run-through everyone turns to someone and starts talking; sometimes the commentary is about the dance they just did, but not always. Gloria, who usually strikes me as very even and calm, has to put on what I come to think of as her “mean teacher” face and redirect them sternly. “Nah-ah-ah-ah!” she calls sharply. “Get back in your places!”

She directs them to return to the opening position and calls out a major problem: people moving when they are supposed to be still. She’s right, I note; the freeze-frame quality of the opening sequence is completely destroyed when even one dancer fidgets or steps at the wrong time. This is a group of generally inexperienced performers, and she has to remind them how these behaviors, when done on stage, will draw the audience’s focus away from what they should be looking at. Gloria then turns to the hand gesture—it should be done as three discrete, though rapid, repetitions, each time the hand getting a little lower. Instead, some of the students have been blending the actions together resulting in a singular, fluid movement that lacks the dynamic impact she is after. Gloria, perched on a tall stool in the corner, calls out instructions as she emphasizes the discreteness of each movement and slows down her counting: “Here we go… seven… eight and … ONE and (pause), TWO and (pause), THREE.” She goes through this same
movement several times, calling out students who are getting it and those who need to work at it more. Each time she speeds up a little until she has them moving at the tempo of the song while maintaining the distinct stops in between each movement. Once the group has demonstrated this short section to her satisfaction, Gloria moves on to address other moments in the group unison section. As I suspected, the turns in particular are a source of confusion and some students argue about which direction a particular turn is in. While I watch Gloria work, I admire her ability to help the students refine their performances by coaching them through specific movements. There are so many parts to the dance that need attention, and to try to fix them all at once would be counterproductive. Gloria artfully chooses the moments where there is both the greatest potential for significant improvement and where these improvements will result in the biggest overall impact for the audience. There is simply no way, in the short amount of time that she has, to address every possible detail. “Pick your battles” appears to be a lesson that Gloria has internalized well.

After addressing some specific moments and running through the dance again, Gloria directs the students to work on their duets. They have been assigned to create partnering movements and many of them seem interested in doing pushing, pulling, and fighting gestures reminiscent of the imagery invoked in the opening section of the dance. Some groups go right to work while others stand around, looking somewhat lost. I see Gloria working with one duet, and another pair of girls, tired of waiting for her attention, approaches me. I have, after all, been dubbed the “assistant.” “Can you help us with our dance?” they ask.
“Sure,” I say, and move closer to where they are. “Show me what you have so far.” I take a step back, trying to give them room to move, and find, once again, that I have almost bumped into another set of dancers. I scoot to the side and hold my arms tightly around my waist, dodging a student who is running across the room. After watching, I ask questions about their movement, and like many students, they want to answer verbally. “Show me,” I say, redirecting their efforts, encouraging them to be clear about the choices that they have made. “OK, this next part, I think you have some ideas about holding hands and pulling away. I want you to work on that now. I will come back in a minute, after I see these other dancers.” As I was watching them, other students have come up and asked for my help too. I catch Gloria out of the corner of my eye and see her gesturing to another duet as they lean in towards one another. I really want to hear what she is saying to them, but first I have promised my attention to this second pair.

I repeat the process with this duet, asking them questions about a couple of movements that seem unclear. The students aren’t moving in unison but instead have a cause–effect relationship with their actions, which requires that they figure out their timing in relation to one another. They have great ideas, but, like many dancers who are choreographing their own work, need an outside eye to help guide the process. I compliment them on the work they’ve done so far and then try to break away to the other side of the room so that I can watch and see what Gloria is doing. I notice that the first pair I worked with is now seated on the floor, one girl twisting the other’s hair. The noise level in this small space is overwhelming, and even when each pair is working on task, the overall sense in this room is one of chaos with excited voices piling on top of one
another while swinging limbs fly dangerously close to unaware heads. I finally make my way to Gloria to see her working with a pair that has used a lot of large, sweeping arm movements with mirroring and unison moments. These are two of the dancers who are frequently in front in the group section, and I suspect they are among the more confident movers—as long as they can do the same thing as the people next to them. Gloria has to balance their desires for conformity and group identity with encouraging some contrasts that will ultimately make the choreography more interesting. She looks up to thank me for helping the other pairs. “Oh, no problem,” I tell her. “I think those girls on the side have some interesting stuff.”

“The ones that aren’t working?” she asks. I glance over at the improvised beauty shop.

“Yeah…. I think they’re waiting for an audience again.”

Gloria sighs, then claps her hands and looks around the room. “Okay, lets see these duets. Everybody, in front of the cabinets.” Some protests ensue, but eventually the students comply and sit by the wall, their backs leaning against the cabinets. One at a time Gloria calls the duets forward to perform. A wide range of preparation is evident—some of the pairs have a pretty clear sequence, while others have not managed to agree on much past their opening pose. Gloria has one group stay out in the space after they perform. They have incorporated gestures reminiscent of fighting, except their movement quality is very light and indirect, completely ineffective for the movements they have choreographed. I abhor the phrase “throw like a girl,” but if ever someone was to be accused of it, I fear these young women might be the targets. Despite the fact that their
arms move through a nearly full range of motion, it still feels like they aren’t invested in what they are doing. Gloria coaches them through their movements, one at a time. The academic in me would say that they need to use more strong weight, bound flow, and direct focus, but as far as I can tell, Gloria uses none of these terms outright. Instead, she coaches with directions the kids can relate to, encouraging them to feel the movement, be strong, take their time, and look at each other. Her voice carries a sense of demand and urgency, and although I know she has the proverbial “eyes in the back of her head” and is monitoring the row of watchers along the cabinet wall, it appears that for a moment, these two dancers are the sole recipients of Gloria’s intense attention.

I see them add more visible tension as they pull their fists back, stepping away from one another as if preparing for an exaggerated punch. The movement that previously seemed reluctant and weak now looks like they are straining to wield a bow and arrow, the tension visible in their arms. They gaze intently at one another as they quickly move toward each other, now adding more of their body weight as they lean before one turns and is caught by her partner. As I watch them develop the movement in response to Gloria’s cues, the movement shows much more tension and results in dynamic changes that, as a viewer, I find more interesting. The challenge will be to see if they can maintain this kind of performance when they have to rehearse on their own.

After all the duets have performed and received some comment from Gloria, she re-assembles the group to rehearse the dance again from the beginning. Then, just as they are getting to the new part where the duets come in, a glance at the clock reminds Gloria that time is almost up. She offers a few comments in conclusion and notes that they will
continue with the duets next time, and then students disperse to change for their next class. Almost as quickly as it started, it seems, class is over, the creative rush halted by the bell, and we are once again left in a quiet studio. As I pick up my notebook to try to capture some thoughts, Gloria suggests that we go down to her office.

As if in consolation for the impossibly tiny dance studio, the school has assigned Gloria a rather sizeable office a few doors away. Large bookcases line the walls, filled with an impressive array of books on dance, photography, history, African-American culture, and education. A bulletin board displays dance posters along with pictures of colleagues, certificates, and memos from the school district. Framed photos of Gloria’s own children, now nearly grown, sit atop a small refrigerator. Her desk is often piled with papers and books, and nearby, a large filing cabinet houses a decade of lesson plans and official school documents. Another bulky computer occupies a side table, and taped next to it is a memo with instructions for how to contact the IT department. Technology isn’t quite Gloria’s thing, and even if it were, the blocking software installed by the school district means that access to sites, such as YouTube, that would be of interest to dance teachers is limited. In fact, for one project Gloria works from home to find YouTube content she wants to use, and then she sends me the link so I can download it and put it on a CD for her. Behind her desk is yet another bookcase, filled with an enviable collection of dance books and videos, many now out of print.

Gloria’s schedule is such that in the middle of the day she has a planning period and then a lunch break, so we frequently come in here to talk between her classes. Sometimes we do formal, recorded interviews, but on many days we end up just talking.
Gloria fills me in on the progress of her semester and the work toward her dance concert. Most of her classes are year-long, and so while she leads many more structured lessons in the first half of the year, class time during the spring is largely used to prepare for her annual concert. This year’s theme is “Dance and Society,” and Gloria began the process by asking each class to brainstorm social issues that they were concerned about. Students wrote in their journals and made lists as a class, and taped to one of her cabinets is a paper compiling these various lists. Violence, discrimination, the objectification of women, technology, homelessness, bullying, and absent fathers are among the issues that Gloria has selected for the dances. I’m impressed at the seriousness of the themes, but I know Gloria is not one to shy away from difficult topics, and indeed the potential of dance to create a platform for engaging with social issues is an important part of her own background.

After a brief introduction to dance classes as a child, Gloria was primarily involved in athletics through high school. In a college PE class, she performed a solo as part of a dance unit and was encouraged by the teacher to consider studying dance. Gloria describes herself as a shy person, but she was intrigued when her mother mentioned an acquaintance who taught dance in the community. She began studying Dunham technique and, enthralled with the live drumming and again encouraged by a teacher, also took West African dance. From there, Gloria became involved with Kuumba Na Nia, a dance and theater performance group that was formed by college students who had not been accepted into the University dance program, or who had been accepted but did not like the department’s approach. Gloria credits this group, whose name means “creativity with
“purpose” in Swahili, with exposing her to African-American culture through literature, politics, and performance. As she describes rehearsing in the community-based dance and theater events the group held, her eyes sparkle and her voice quickens. She relates how the group came together to give performances that her mother feared were too radical, but which provided the kind of education and inspiration that spoke to Gloria’s passion for dance.

Gloria earned her bachelor’s degree in education and was working as an elementary classroom teacher when she was recruited to return to the University for a master’s in dance. She described this experience as “culture shock” that sapped her love of dancing, where the overly analytical approach to dance and movement was combined with a postmodern orientation to technique that rejected the clear progressions found in the classical modern dance lineages of Horton and Graham that Gloria excelled at. Many of her fellow African-American students experienced a similar sense of alienation in a program where faculty members frequently dismissed African-American contributions to dance and music in their comments to students, deriding the legitimacy of Alvin Ailey as a modern dance choreographer or declaring Donny Hathaway’s music unsuitable for a dance composition. Gloria describes her own graduate work as more on the “scholarly end” of dance studies rather than in the studio, and she recounts her process of researching the history of African-American dancers in her master’s thesis. When she returns to talking about dance history, I can tell that her expertise lies here, an expertise she developed independently since none of her professors could offer much guidance in this particular research focus.
Her frustration with those who imposed narrow, academic definitions of dance, sometimes coupled with overt prejudice, did not end when she left graduate school. Gloria recounts a harrowing time when she took a group of elementary school students to perform at an international dance festival. After tremendous work to fundraise so the trip would be affordable to all families, her group of mostly African-American students was met with harsh racism when they arrived in Utah. At the hotel swimming pool, other children quickly got out when her students came in, and the festival was programmed in such a way that groups of predominantly minority students such as hers were scheduled to be in rehearsals during the celebratory banquet. Gloria had to help her students to deflect the hushed whispers of “nigger!” as they walked by other groups eating lunch. Although she tried to help her children have a positive experience at the festival, the overwhelming tone was one she found unwelcoming toward any non-white group. In a showcase meant to celebrate dance forms from around the world, Gloria found herself surrounded by teachers who loudly critiqued performances that did not adhere to their notions of Western theatrical dance aesthetics. She tells me once,

   Everybody's talking about global this, global this, global global global. But we go back to our same old stuff again. We're not really global. Because we still want to keep things the way they were, operate the way they were, have the same criteria, and force everyone to adopt that worldview, which is not everybody's worldview.\(^{14}\)

\(^{14}\) GB interview transcript, 5/29/12
Time and again, discussion of aesthetic criteria and worldviews filter into our conversations, these heavy topics weaving in amongst more casual discussions of weekend plans and the coming spring weather.

As we talk in her office during her planning and lunch hours, Gloria frequently gets up, peruses her shelves, and hands me a book to underscore a point she has made. One time, the book is about adolescent development, and Gloria declares that it would clear up so much about why her students act the way they do. Gloria loves photography, and when describing how she engaged sixth graders in thinking about work as a source of movement ideas, she hands me a copy of a beautiful National Geographic book showing images of workers around the world. This time, the book is a picture book, its content much more suited for adults than young children. “I used this when we did a unit on slavery,” she says as she hands me a copy of Tom Feelings’s (1995) *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo*, and she describes a lesson where students have to stand, then try to move, within an impossibly tiny space she has marked out on the floor. She warns me, though, that such sensitive topics can elicit difficulties with adults; when she presented this lesson to teachers at a professional development workshop, she had one woman begin crying, overwhelmed by the brutality of the images. A colleague knocks on the door, and Gloria excuses herself to attend to some administrative business at the school. I am left alone to contemplate the book, slowly turning the pages filled with charcoal drawings depicting the worst of inhumanity. While Gloria can talk about curriculum planning and lesson objectives with the expertise and jargon of anyone who has spent the last twenty years employed in a public school system, I begin to sense that
for her, the book in my hands, along with its many cousins across her shelves, is the core of the curriculum. Although she can heave a binder full of planning guides and standards down from the shelf at my request, the tender excitement with which she pulled Feelings’s book out and placed it in my hands speaks volumes about where her heart really is in teaching.

I’m not sure I can afford, at this moment, to get drawn into the book, to give it the attention it deserves. I’m grateful then for a knock at the door. I roll over in the wheeled stool I am sitting on and pull down on the handle. “Is Mrs. Banks in here?” inquires a trio of sixth graders, two boys and a girl. The lunch period has started, and the overwhelming wave of sound from the cafeteria comes crushing in to the office. They look at me hopefully with sweet faces and large eyes, and I sense they have come to Gloria’s office for refuge from the relentless noise and challenging peer interactions that middle school lunch demands. I recall that Gloria did say that they might be coming to work on their paintings.

“Yes, she’ll be right back,” I tell them and move aside so they can come in. “Did you eat yet?” I ask, and they nod. We pull a bucket out from under the sink and fill it with water. When Gloria returns, we all make our way back to the dance studio and the students pull one of the large canvasses out from behind the computer table and carefully set it on the floor. Gloria dispenses acrylic paint on to paper plates, and the students set to work. One of the arts teachers has received a grant to create murals depicting the different subjects taught at school and has provided paint, brushes, and canvases to teachers throughout the building. It is a great idea, but there is no time within her already too-short
class periods to take on a project like this. These studious sixth graders, however, seem more than willing to give up their lunch break to complete the artwork. As they fill in the penciled figures, I ask one of the students to tell me more about it. He complies, and as he points to the various figures woven together in the mural, I realize I couldn’t ask for a better summary of the sixth grade dance curriculum:

“That’s a mask for Mardi Gras, that’s that choreographer, David, David Peters…?”

“David Parsons?” I ask, knowing that Gloria has used the choreographic units from the American Dance Legacy Initiative in her lessons.

“Yeah him, we watched his video. And Michael Jackson, and there’s a Chinese dragon coming around him, and these dancers are doing that dance we learned….” His voice trails off as he points to the dancers in deep second-position pliés.

“The Buschasche!” another student chimes in, correctly identifying the Pearl Primus work, also made accessible through ADLI, that Gloria has used.

“That’s from Treemonisha.” Another boy looks up from the pair of figures he is filling in, and I recall that Gloria has shown me pictures from a fall performance where students staged a version of the 1910 Scott Joplin opera about the importance of education for the African-American community.

“And that’s ballet, and that’s Katherine Dunham.” The students seem satisfied to have been able to fill me in. I notice a spot of paint has landed on the floor, and I quickly step over to the counter to grab some paper towels and wipe it up. This must be a sign, I think, as Gloria soon declares that it is time to clean up. Gloria hands us the keys

206
to her office, and one boy follows me, carrying the bucket full of now-dirty paint water.

After the bell ushers another wave of loud adolescents through the hallway, Gloria returns with her own Styrofoam lunch tray and thanks the boy for helping to clean before sending him off to class. We eat lunch and chat about an upcoming festival where her students will perform.

The eighth grade class is working on several dances now, and one of them, temporarily titled “the women’s piece,” is inspired by students’ concern for women who have been victims of war, genocide, domestic violence, and trafficking. I’ve seen this dance unfold over many classes and rehearsals, and of all the pieces her students are working on, it is one of my favorites. From the way she talks about it, it is one of her favorites too—but that doesn’t mean that directing it is easy. There is never enough time, and since the entire class isn’t cast in this piece, she has to give instructions for other students to work on their dances independently. As we talk about logistics for the upcoming field trip, which I have offered to help chaperone, a knock at the door interrupts us. This time, it is a cluster of eighth grade girls who rather reluctantly have given up part of their lunch break. Due to transportation issues, after-school rehearsals are impossible, and Gloria often has the eighth-graders come in before their class period so she can squeeze in a few more minutes to work on one of their dances.

“Are we rehearsing today?” they ask, and unlike the sixth graders who came by previously, I think they’re hoping to be dismissed. No such luck for them, however, and Gloria and I quickly gather our things to surrender her office, a.k.a. the dressing room, to the group.
Back in the studio, Gloria pulls out a box of brightly colored fabrics and hands them to the students as they take their places scattered about the floor. Once her commands of “Places! We’re starting!” finally sink in, the girls do find stillness, and their previous expressions of adolescent “attitude” soften. Gloria has told me that when they started working on this dance, the students had discussed issues of domestic violence and news stories they had heard about women displaced from their homes due to war and genocide. She doesn’t mention if any of the students have disclosed firsthand experience with domestic violence, but it is clear that it is a topic that interests them. She described that when she first gave them the props, she told them to imagine that everything had been taken from them, and the scarves represented the last thing they owned that belonged to them. As the dance begins, it is clear that the students have internalized this imagery.

They sit on the floor in varied shapes, the pieces of fabric spread out before each dancer. Some smooth the fabric out on the floor and caress it lovingly as the slow vocals fill the room. One by one they pick up the scarves and wrap them around heads, shoulders, and waists, transforming their everyday sweatpants and tank tops into costumes. The seriousness with which they approach this task amazes me, and they carry this solemn focus into the opening section where they have each developed a short solo. As they individually rise from the floor, reach out toward the audience, turn, and bend, they maintain a focus that is sharp and serious, yet tinged with sadness. They run to the downstage right corner and forcefully grab hands; the fluidity of their solo moments is broken when they turn suddenly and stomp angrily toward the upstage corner. As they
drag their feet together slowly and stare down at the imaginary audience, a feeling of intense solidarity seems to fill the room.

I know that Gloria has acted more as director rather than choreographer in a traditional sense, tasking her students to come up with movement phrases that she then guides them to assemble as a class. Nonetheless, this moment of the choreography strikes me as decidedly Gloria, and I can’t imagine that it would have come about with anyone else in charge. In everyday life, she comes across as a somewhat reserved but friendly middle-class mom driving her kids to athletic practice in an SUV, shaking her head at the frustrating bureaucracy of a challenged public school system. But in her dance class, she becomes the artist, the political activist, the historian. When the students clasp hands and arch their backs, circling their heads as they pull against one another, I see traces of Gloria in each of them. In this moment, her voice comes out, a voice of history, of struggle, of compassion and spirit, of community and celebration, a voice that I hope her students realize they are lucky to have heard.

A Portrait of Anna Tyler

Approaching the Westbridge School, I pull into the large circular drive and quickly realize my mistake. The only open spaces are designated for visitors to the school’s admissions office, and since the school day is already underway, the visitor spaces along one side of the drive are occupied. I loop around and exit, glancing back to the large, looming brick building in my rearview mirror. I turn right and head into the neighborhood surrounding the school, looking for a gap among the long row of late-
model Nissans and Hondas lining the street. There isn’t enough room for all of the staff and students within the school lot, and I have been warned that I might need to park a couple of blocks away. While the sweeping grounds and beautiful buildings of Westbridge do blend seamlessly with the grand older houses of its upper-class neighborhood, I notice the school has taken over the lampposts lining the street. Colorful banners with faces of smiling girls peek out among the bare grey branches proclaiming the values of leadership, innovation, and lifelong learning that the school promotes for generations of young women. On an otherwise quiet street, the banners and row of parked vehicles are the only reminder that school and work also exist among the domestic calm of winding streets and storybook houses.

I successfully parallel park my decade-old, dented Volkswagen between a pair of shiny SUVs, the one in front proudly proclaiming its children’s musical and athletic affiliations via those window decals that are a hallmark of suburban families. I pull out my school bag, lunch tote, and coffee mug, digging to make sure I have everything. I don’t want to have to make the trek back out here if I leave something behind. Although I suspect I am now actually quite close to the side of the building that is my destination, I don’t know the paths through the back of the school and decide it is just safer to loop back around to the front. I walk through the front door and still feel strange that I am not signing in; after years of guest teaching at public schools it is a habit that is deeply ingrained. The first day I came out to observe, I waited patiently by the counter to be greeted by a secretary. “I’m here to visit Ms. Tyler’s dance class,” I explained.

“Does she know you are coming?”
“Yes, I’m observing the eighth grade class.”

“Oh, well, let me call a student to show you down.”

“Oh, I know where it is, right down this hall.” Years ago, I had done a project with another group at the school, and in the fall, had come for a meeting here. The main part of the building was familiar.

“Well you can just go right down then.” She looked a little perplexed that I had even dinged the little bell on the counter; the polite but quizzical look on her face seemed to say, “Well what do you need me for?”

“Where would you like me to sign in?”

“Um, no, you don’t need to do that. Just head right down this hallway here. Have a nice day.”

From then on, whenever I enter this school under the watchful eye of the pearl-clad donor whose portrait hangs in the hallway, I always feel an ever-so-slight tinge of guilt upon not signing anything official to record my presence. I make my way down the carpeted hallway towards the dance studio. Along the way I pass walls with framed portraits of student athletes, beautiful action shots of swimming, volleyball, and field hockey with brass plaques recording each girl’s achievement and class year. A bulletin board has been set up with a large map of the United States, asking seniors where they have committed to attend college in the fall. Pins marking their intentions seem to multiply on each of my subsequent visits; alongside the map are shiny recruitment posters from various colleges and universities, their landscapes not too unlike the one I now find myself in.
The double doors to the dance studio are propped wide open, and a crumpled sign posted on one reminds students to remove their shoes before entering. I slip out of my clunky Dansko clogs and drop them beside a chair; I smile to see an almost identical pair just to the side of the other door. The gleaming golden floor spreads out before me; this is a beautiful dance space that many professional companies would covet. At the other side of the room, a glass door sits propped open, and a fan sitting in front of it ushers in cool air from outside. Open windows are surprising for March in this part of Ohio, but I later learn that the dance studio sits atop a boiler room and the best means of temperature control seems to be opening and closing this outside door. So, perhaps the space isn’t entirely enviable after all. Shelves covered in canvas drapes line the far wall, and a series of cabinets continues along the back of the studio. There is no “costume shop” space, and so decades of costumes and props are strategically arranged within the classroom. A folding screen sits to the right of the door; there also is no convenient dressing room space, so a corner of the studio is sectioned off to provide a changing area for the students. A narrow table, counter, and stereo cabinet sit along the side wall, leading to another corner that has been sectioned off with desks and shelves for the two dance teachers. A row of mirrors lines the front, and I smile to see that the skeleton standing guard in the corner is now proudly displaying the T-shirt for the high school student dance club.

A lone student is seated on the floor, her legs outstretched in a wide V. She looks up and smiles. I tell her I am here to see Ms. Tyler. “Oh, she was just here, I’m sure she will be back soon,” the young woman tells me. “Where are you from?” I explain that I’m
visiting as part of a research project, and we chat about the dance program and her college plans. She is a senior in the high school program, and as we talk, a few other older dancers enter the room. The fluidity of the scheduling at this school, particularly within the high school program, still surprises me. While the middle school students attend classes during each period of the day, the high schoolers arrange their own schedules, and many, especially the upper-level students, have free periods or study breaks during the day. When the dance studio is available, some will come to work on projects, warm up before their lessons, or hang out. I frequently see groups of students seated in the hallway clustered around laptops while classes are in session. In contrast the middle school students, clearly recognizable because they are the only ones required to wear uniforms, travel together in groups between classes, their unsupervised time kept to a minimum. Still, the relative calm, at least in this corner of the building, and relaxed attitude toward hallway behavior is in sharp contrast to nearly every other middle or high school building I have ever been in.

Anna walks in and greets me, stepping out of her shoes and rushing toward her desk. “Are you hungry?” she asks as she unclicks her phone from its dock in the stereo system and shuffles some papers on her desk. I hold up my lunch bag. “Oh, that’s good. But you can save that for your drive home if you want and come eat in our cafeteria. Evelyn’s class will be in here in a sec.” More of the high school students filter in and greet Anna, and she fields some questions about the upcoming rehearsal schedule. I’ve met a few of them on previous visits, and some of the dancers smile and ask how I am. As I wait for her to get ready for lunch, I get pulled into reading the notices on the
bulletin board inside the studio. I love looking at dance posters, and it appears that the teachers here are on the mailing list for every dance performance in the state. Postcards advertising local performances and touring shows mix together with announcements for auditions and summer workshops. A news clipping describing a residency conducted at Westbridge by a local professional modern dance company catches my eye, the accompanying photos taken from about where I am now standing. Beside it is a sign-up sheet for students who want to attend an upcoming performance in the downtown area. It would be tempting to dismiss these artifacts as just yet more evidence of the school’s abundant wealth, yet I know that these projects and events aren’t just about money. Both of the dance teachers are closely connected with the surrounding community and have been for years; they work tirelessly to help connect their students with performances and workshops by fundraising and pursuing outside grants.

My musings on the performances and workshops being offered here are interrupted by a loud and friendly voice: “Oh hi honey! How are you? So good to see you!” Evelyn approaches me with a hug. She is the other dance teacher at this school, responsible for the high school dance classes and student performing company. I’ve known her for a number of years and we have worked on some projects together in the past. She radiates energy even amidst what seems to me to be a constantly chaotic schedule. “How was your trip up? I’m about to teach class now but let’s catch up this afternoon? No wait, I have to go pick up this fabric before rehearsal. Well how is school going? We are just so busy here honey, but oh good, is Anna taking you to lunch? She will fill you in—” Evelyn is in constant motion, but I know she isn’t dismissing me, and
we will catch up later. Anna nods to me and I move toward the door, waving to Evelyn as she starts issuing reminders to the group of dancers gathered around her.

As Anna and I walk down the wide, carpeted hallways to the cafeteria, she fills me in on the happenings at Westbridge since my last visit. Because the school is about a three hour drive from where I live, and because of the difficulty of reconciling Anna’s teaching schedule with my availability, I don’t visit as often as I’d wish. For research, this is less than ideal. However, from the moment I casually mentioned my research topic to Anna, she showed intense interest in discussing issues in dance education and curriculum and was tremendously welcoming. During this break between her classes, Anna tells me about preparations for the high school concert, for which she is choreographing, as well as her frustrations over scheduling issues. The eighth grade class that was to have happened this morning has once again been cancelled—math exams, field trips, and guest speakers seem to intrude with alarming frequency, disrupting Anna’s carefully planned out sequence of lessons. Anna is also responsible for administrative duties within the school’s entire arts program, and she has been concerned with scheduling issues on a larger scale as well as she tries to carve out a more prominent place for dance within the middle school. On top of all this, Anna and her husband are expecting their first child, so planning for her maternity leave is underway.

We approach a large open hall and walk down a wide staircase to the cafeteria. This is a newer section of the building, and the brick exterior of the original school is visible along one wall. Abundant natural light filters through the tall windows, and the high voices of preschool students, led past us by their teacher, fill the air. Anna passes a
lunch slip for me to one of the cafeteria workers as I take a plate, piling it with vegetarian
meatballs and salad. Colorful signs with crayon lettering remind us to take only what we
will eat and to make healthy choices, and as we make our way to a table Anna tells me
that they have had a school-wide sustainability initiative in place this year. We pass
tables of elementary aged girls, and again I am struck by how quiet this cafeteria is
despite the chatter from excited eight year olds. We settle in to upholstered chairs around
a warm wooden table, and I recognize the choir teacher from a previous visit and say
hello. Anna introduces me to some elementary teachers, telling them about working with
me on my dissertation, and I get the feeling from their questions that they are both used to
visitors and familiar with the grind of academic research. They tell me I have picked a
good place to visit, and it is clear from their comments that both Anna and Evelyn are
held in high regard by their colleagues. A few of the teachers rush off quickly, explaining
that busses are waiting for them to take their children for an afternoon field trip to a local
nature area.

Anna and I return to our previous conversation, and I sense that the scheduling
issues are continuing to bother her. Her eighth grade classes—the ones that I am focusing
on for this project—are only a one-semester course, and this is the only dance class
offered to students in the middle school program. While Anna has built up dance at the
preschool and elementary level over the years by collaborating with teachers and adding
classes until the school made her position full time, she has not had as much success
making inroads into an already-saturated middle school program. In addition to the
importance of preparing students for dance in high school, I begin to understand that
Anna is driven by something deeper and less tangible: she has so much to share with them, but she needs time in order to do all that she, and they, are capable of. Moreover, Anna has a finely honed sense of developmental progression and sees that her students need to move sequentially through progressively structured movement concepts. Meeting only two days in every six-day rotation for one semester, Anna has carefully mapped out her curriculum for the exact number of lessons she will have with her beginning-level students. She adapts, of course, to missing one, then two, class periods, but each subsequent interruption and cancellation requires her to re-think what she can afford to leave out. “You’ll see,” she tells me. “Fourth period has had two more lessons than second period. You’ll see the difference in the girls. Second period, they are still not sure about three-dimensional movement, but the girls in fourth period are moving a lot faster.”

While I will continue to be impressed with all that she accomplishes with beginner students, I do notice the difference that even a few missing class periods can make in their overall confidence as well as the movement vocabulary they are familiar with.

As we carry our trays back through the main dining area toward the compost bins, cheerful voices ring out, “Hi Miss Tyler!” and Anna turns to greet some younger students. Although I am here to see her middle school lessons, these are only a part of what she does at this school. She frequently collaborates with other teachers and has been working on a project with a music teacher and the third grade classes. While one would expect a level of familiarity at any small and close-knit school, it appears that nearly everyone in the building knows who Anna is. “Hello girls,” she answers back, looking directly toward them. “And how are you today?” Her friendly voice drops in volume
from their greeting, a gentle but effective reminder to use what teachers of young children often refer to as “inside voices.” The more I spend time with Anna the more I admire her unique ability to relate to young people in a way that is both personable and very adult; her direct yet nurturing demeanor seems to inculcate maturity and seriousness in students without squelching their joy. After one of the students helps me navigate the system of bins for trash, organic matter, and dishes, Anna and I make our way back up to the dance studio. As she prepares for her lesson, I take up residence at a table by the door, alternately writing in my notebook and watching Evelyn’s high school class conclude with a beautiful travelling combination of turns, jumps, and cartwheels.

The older students applaud at the end of the lesson and make their way behind the screen, emerging a few moments later now donning scarves and boots as they head off to calculus and English classes. For a few moments the studio is empty before the thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds come in and head back to the dressing area. Someone finds Anna and explains that she has forgotten her dance clothes. “No jeans” is Anna’s response. While students here are expected to “dress out” for dance, the dress code is fairly relaxed compared to what one might find at a performing arts school or conservatory. Middle school students don’t wear leotards and tights, instead dressing in shorts and T-shirts, sweatpants, leggings, tank tops, and the occasional pair of pajama pants. Athletic uniforms and t-shirts promoting various events at the school mix with logos from Abercrombie and Victoria’s Secret Pink; dance class is likely one of the few times of the day when the middle school girls aren’t held to the school uniform code and can display such trademarks. Anna herself seems to have an endless supply of the loose black pants
that are somewhat of a hallmark of modern dance teachers, and she also frequently wears T-shirts emblazoned with the school logo. Anna wants her students to be unrestricted in their movement, but beyond that, not much overt attention is paid to what anyone looks like.

I set myself up in a chair directly across from the door where I will have a good view of Anna as she teaches and hopefully be able to hear most of what she says. While in most dance studios the mirrored wall becomes the default “front” of the room, I’ve noticed that Anna usually has her girls facing the side wall. She frequently positions herself there, in close reach of the stereo cabinet and white marker board. Some girls emerge from the dressing corner and head across the floor to the mirror, scrutinizing their faces as they pull their hair into ponytails and twists. As we wait for class to begin, clumps of girls form and talk, some holding their arms self-consciously around their waists. I understand the feeling—without the backpack, chair, or desk that usually constrain movement during the day, it can feel strange to suddenly have open space around oneself. Students are barefoot as well—again, not something one typically encounters at school. One student who obviously has a gymnastics background makes tumbling passes across the length of the room, repeatedly arching backward into one-armed stands and sliding out into splits. While I am impressed with her skills, I gather everyone else is used to this as she garners little attention. A few other students sit on the floor and stretch, carefully moving themselves out of the pathway of the oncoming acrobat.
The chatter in the room gets a little louder as more members of the class enter the space. Anna calls out, “Girls, let’s gather together in a circle for the beginning of class.” Her voice raises slightly, its clarity and firmness tempered by the warmth of a genuine welcome. Amidst all of her other duties throughout the day, teaching is, after all, what Anna is here to do, and in just a few words, she conveys a sense of purpose and subdued excitement about the start of the dance lesson. Anna moves into the open space and takes a seat as the girls fill in around her. While they obviously have more restraint than preschoolers who will fight for places near the teacher, they also don’t leave any gaps at Anna’s side. “Hurry, girls, we have a lot to do today,” she says to those just entering the room. In a few moments the circle is complete. “Is everybody feeling okay today?” she asks, and is met with some nods and murmurs. She explains the situation with the boiler room and propping the outside door—it has begun to get warm in the room, but the cold air slicing through from the propped door is also uncomfortable to those in its path who rub goosebumped arms. A few students take the relaxed tone of the dance studio a bit too far, leaning forward and then sliding their legs around until they are lying on the floor, propped up on elbows on a fellow student’s lap. Anna quickly reminds them that this is school. “Sit up please” is all it takes to establish her expectations, and she doesn’t miss a beat, launching into the beginning of the day’s lesson.

“What do you remember from our last class?” There is a brief pause before students’ voices begin. “Mirroring,” “echo,” and “shadow” jog their collective memories, as the girls recall the improvisation exercises where Anna asks them to attend closely to a partner. A student gestures with a pointed foot that then becomes flattened on the ground,
each joint moving in sequence. Dancers call it “rolling through the foot,” and this articulation is a basic technical skill in many dance forms for landing smoothly without injury. Another student describes a combination where you “roll down and then move around,” referring to a warm up sequence that combines stretching forward while standing in one place with improvisation that travels through the room. “The stretching combination” is invoked as well.

“Do you remember yield-push-reach-pull?” Anna asks hopefully. Some blank looks and murmuring that it sounds familiar establish a general consensus of “not really” and no one wants to offer a demonstration or explanation in response. The students have my sympathy. Anna is referring here to a concept from Laban Movement Analysis that is referenced often by Bill Evans, a highly respected teacher with whom we have both studied. I first encountered this idea in a modern dance class in graduate school and struggled to understand it then. I am slightly jealous not only that the students are being exposed to these ideas at such a young age but also that Anna’s casual weaving of them throughout a lesson reinforces the everyday simplicity of ideas that academics might tend to over-intellectualize. The idea here is that yield-push-reach-pull is a basic pattern underlying effective movements. First the mover yields, or gives weight into the floor before pushing away. In order to complete the movement, the mover reaches out and pulls herself into the direction of the movement. In actuality, these components happen seamlessly in most everyday movements like walking, making them difficult to notice—until one encounters a problem with a difficult movement and a teacher like Anna gently suggests “yield into the floor first” or “find the pull when you stand up.” The simplicity
of Anna’s comments to her students belies a highly sophisticated understanding of movement and finely tuned observational skill.

“Okay,” Anna responds. “Let’s move into your three lines for our warm-up sequence.” The students stand and move to positions in three rows facing the side wall. As is common in nearly every dance class, those exhibiting a little more confidence gravitate toward the front row, while the more hesitant students take places along the back and sides. The first time I saw Anna’s class take their positions I assumed she had assigned places to them in each row because the girls moved with a sense of purpose and what movement analysts like Anna might term “direct spatial intent.” I haven’t often encountered this in children given free choice about where to place themselves in a room. Like so many aspects of her teaching, however, Anna has given them the freedom to choose and, along with it, the responsibility to make choices that support their learning. They move with directness because a sense of purpose pervades nearly everything Anna asks them to do; indeed, almost as soon as they arrive in this spot, standing with feet apart in second position, Anna has dropped her iPhone into the stereo dock and upbeat music flows from the ceiling-mounted speakers. The students begin to move through a stretching sequence that they have done previously, moving in four- and eight-beat phrases encompassing long lines stretching backs and hamstrings, low lunges, and seated twists. The movement takes them through a series of shapes that reinforce two-dimensional movement, a key idea Anna has explored before. As they progress through the already-familiar sequence, Anna walks around the room, weaving herself among them and calling out verbal reminders of each movement to come: “Long diagonal. Flat
back. Now release the upper body all the way down.” Her words are simple and direct, incorporating instructions like “runner’s stretch” that mark movements in a colloquial manner with terms such as “right body half cross over” that invoke her movement analysis background but are nonetheless basic applications of everyday language—here, she is simply reminding them to cross the right arm and leg over the left.

After the sequence is finished Anna offers some reminders and clarifications. In one movement she wants to emphasize the length of the spine, and in a brief demonstration she brings her hand above her head and mimes pulling a string from her skull that causes her back to straighten out as her head moves upwards. This gesture is one that many dancers are used to seeing from their teachers, a temporary reminder to use a sense of spatial pull to gently lengthen upwards. Anna’s beginners, however, assume it is part of the choreography, and several students repeat the movement, copying her gesture hesitantly. “I’m just doing this as an image,” Anna clarifies. “Use that image of your head pulling away as you stand up.” While moving from standing to sitting is fairly smooth for most of the students, the transition back up— including the moment Anna has just been explaining—is altogether more difficult to do gracefully. I continue to be impressed that despite her pregnancy—Anna has commented about how it is changing her center of gravity and ability to jump and twist—she appears to float up from the floor with marked ease, her legs simply unfolding beneath her.

“So do you use your hands to get up?” a student asks. Ah-ha! I then recall that of course, Anna’s right hand had been tucked in next to her hip on the floor, providing a crucial lift into the movement.
“Yes, absolutely, on the yield and push,” she replies, solving the mystery of this otherwise difficult transition while reinforcing the vocabulary that the students earlier seemed less than familiar with. She talks the students through part of the sequence again so that they all practice this challenging part together. “Head and tail reach away as you twist,” she reminds them, again briefly gesturing the pull upward from her own head. As they finish this sequence, Anna comments that “next time we do it I would like to talk less” and then moves on to an improvisational exercise.

“Okay, arcing and spoking, does that sound familiar?” The students nod before Anna begins instructions to “arc” and “spoke” as they move around the space, drawing their attention to the relationship between the individual body and the space around it. Although this too is somewhat specialized vocabulary drawn from LMA, the terms reflect their everyday meanings. An arc is a portion of a circle, and when “arcing” dancers move body parts through the air as if drawing parts of circles in space. Anna gives a refresher on spoking: “Like the spokes in a wheel, radiating out from the center.” In a spoking movement, the dancer draws body parts in to the center and then extends them away, drawing an imaginary straight line in space. Anna wants them to layer ideas in this dance, suggesting “I could add other things” as she demonstrates variations of leaping, walking, and turning, all while clearly using her arms and legs to draw the curves and lines in space. She reminds them not to worry about anyone watching before summing up the instructions again: “Arcing, spoking, or both at the same time. Use the space.”
The students begin this improvisation, some relying on basic gestures reminiscent of punching and waving as they wander self-consciously through the studio. Gradually the confidence of the more comfortable movers takes over as students move a little out of their familiar territory. Some begin to explore drawing curves to their sides as they incorporate arcing leg gestures, while others try spoking a hand upwards while simultaneously turning and jumping, following the gesture with their eyes as if to say “look at that!” Some make eye contact and giggle, and I sense that, at any moment, the playful spirit Anna nurtures could cross the line into ridiculousness. She keeps a close watch on this unfolding dance, and indeed enough students embody seriousness that the sheepish laughter doesn’t have a chance to spread. After students have explored these movements on their own through the improvisation, Anna gathers them together to review a traveling movement phrase she taught previously.

This traveling phrase is a triplet, a walking combination where the accent is on the one—essentially a waltz, though I don’t notice Anna using that term. While the feet step in alternating patterns—left, right, left/right, left, right—the arm movements change between a sweeping overhead arc and a direct, piercing spoke. The class moves to the back wall and gathers together to progress across the floor towards the mirror—one of the few times Anna ever has them face this way. She reminds them that they will be reaching forward with their toes, and as the group moves together, Anna’s voice accompanies them, “Right left right, left right left, arc two three, spoke two three.” She challenges them to add focus, following the gesturing hand with their gaze. Some of the girls seem to seize on this instruction, as if being told clearly what to do with their eyes takes away
the distraction of other bodies and the mirror looming at the far end of the space. They appear intense and actually do this movement quite well, I notice. “Girls! Very nicely done! This is a tricky thing to add on!”

Their memories refreshed, the girls form rows of four, side by side, and everyone backs up against the cabinets, leaving as much space as possible to dance before reaching the mirror. Their brief chatter while Anna adjusts her iPhone subsides quickly when the opening chords of Aretha Franklin’s *A Natural Woman* (Goffin, King, & Wexler, 1967) ring out. The students smile in recognition and the more confident dancers, having placed themselves in the first row, get ready. Anna verbally counts off to help them know when to start—“one two three four five SIX”—as the first row takes off. Ideally every six beats another line will filter in, but this skill isn’t fully developed yet for all of them, and triple meter can be a little trickier than the common duple found in most pop music. Indeed, despite having heard it many times before, it never occurred to me that *A Natural Woman* is in a three. Anna supports patiently from the side, counting verbally when the group’s timing is off and jumping in to lead when some of the girls need a visual reminder. Her movement is direct and clear, and I admire her ability to use the mirror to monitor those behind her as she moves into and then away from the traveling groups of students. After all of the rows have completed their passes across the room, Anna turns down the music and issues a new challenge: “I would like you to imagine that this is a race. This is a length race, not a quickness race, and you must stay on the beat! You cannot go faster, but you can take bigger steps.”15

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15 AT fieldnotes, 2/23/12

Instinctively, the first row of girls inches forward, and
Anna moves them back to indicate an imaginary starting line. She starts the music over from the beginning, turning the volume up.

And then, dancing happens! Real, full, joyous dancing starts to fill the room as the students visibly relax, more confident now that they know the timing and have been encouraged to take up space. After the first row of students reaches the mirror—taking at least one fewer repetition of the phrase this time since they are reaching more fully through their legs—they turn and carefully walk around the edges of the space, taking up their places again at the back of the group. Toes reach and extend forward, propelled through space by soft yielding in now-confident steps. Arcing arms get longer, their curves through space more defined. For some, the piercing quality of the spoking gesture intensifies, eyes staring down the tips of fingers into a confrontational sign that evokes giggles, which then settle into faint smiles. Anna’s expression mirrors them as she backs away from the dancers, surrendering the full studio space. They know what to do now. Those waiting their turn start to feel the music from the sidelines, lifting their faces and lip-synching along to Franklin’s crooning “Yooouuuuu make me feel….,” before softly bending, coming together with foreheads almost touching, their dropping weight mirroring the descending tones of “…like a na-tur-aaaal woman…” Anna lets the music play on, and the students continue to repeat the phrase, looping back across the room, some of them propelling so far that the first step of each triplet becomes a small leap. They seem eager to keep going, showing no signs of boredom despite the fact that this dance really is only an endless repetition of the same six walking steps and two arm gestures. Anna lets the song play through as they keep taking turns dancing and lip-
synching, a few doing both at the same time. As the notes die out, Anna gathers the girls together for a brief conclusion to the lesson. “Very nicely done girls,” she compliments them as they applaud. The group breaks up, most heading behind the screen to change as individual students approach Anna with questions. A few dance their way over to the dressing area and threads of singing “…you make me feel…” float through the air.

A loud, electronic-sounding BBBRRRRIIIINNGGGG intrudes over the loudspeakers. Lured by both the casual freedom of the hallways and dining room as well as Anna and Evelyn’s relaxed yet studious approach to teaching, I found myself feeling as if I was back in the dance studio at the small liberal arts college where I had studied years ago. The bell, that demanding institutional timekeeper, jolts me back to reality. We are, after all, at middle school, subject to the rituals and symbols that mark educational life, even those, like the ringing bell, that seem to serve little purpose. Upon second thought, I do recall that I have heard bells periodically here before, but no one seemed to pay much attention to them. I glance around at the posters and memos on the wall but can’t find a “Bell Schedule” prominently displayed anywhere in the room. During the lesson I see Anna periodically glancing at the clock hanging above the doors, but she has been doing this so long it seems as if she has an inner sense of time, knowing just how long each activity should take. For as much as her concerns over scheduling and lack of time dominate our conversations, her teaching demonstrates an easy flow between activities, and the sense of urgency she conveys when talking about her curriculum is all but indiscernible when watching her teach. I envy her ability to transition the girls from one exercise to the next smoothly and directly, moving from idea to idea without ever
appearing rushed. I know that every minute she is making decisions about where to go, what to give more time to, and which ideas she can let go of for the moment. The end result, however, appears perfectly choreographed; her lessons conclude with a satisfying cadence that appears carefully planned.

“Can I get you some tea or anything?” Anna asks. “I’m headed over to the elementary school in a bit.”

“Yes, that would be great,” I reply, following Anna out the door. Next to the dance studio is a teacher workroom, a narrow, stuffy space that smells of copier toner and flavored coffee. “Beautiful lesson, by the way,” I mention as we wait for the water to boil. When Anna and I were making the arrangements for me to observe her, I stressed that my role was not evaluative in nature but rather that I was there to learn from her, not to make an assessment about the quality of her teaching. Still, I find it difficult to stay away from these judgments, and, knowing that Anna sometimes feels unappreciated by the administrators at her school, I want to offer encouragement.

“Yeah thanks. You know it’s still hard, that difference between the body-side and cross-lateral. I need more time to help some of them get that pattern.” I nod, recalling that I did indeed notice some students having difficulty with this, adopting an awkward-looking body-half pattern in the final across-the-floor sequence when a cross-lateral pattern was called for. In Bartenieff Fundamentals, a part of LMA that is concerned with body patterning, these are two distinct but related patterns. In a body-half movement, the dancer will move as if the body is divided in half, with the arm and leg on the same side of the body moving together. Cross-lateral movement, in contrast, involves the arm and
leg on the opposite side of the body moving together. The most common example of this is in everyday walking, where the arm naturally swings forward as the opposite leg steps. Walking with a body-half pattern often looks stilted or robotic. When negotiating a new sequence of movements and trying to coordinate arms, legs, and directions in space, however, the natural arm-leg coordination of walking can get confused.

“Yeah, it seems that initial step is what got some of them,” I reply, marking out the phrase in my own body, recalling that while the left arm makes the most obvious movement at first, it is the shift onto the right foot that is actually the beginning of the phrase. Because the phrase repeats, if a dancer is “off” at the beginning, it can be difficult to correct while dancing. Anna and I continue to chat about the phrase and challenges in teaching body patterning as we wait for the water to boil. While working on her bachelor’s degree in dance at a program that had a strong ballet emphasis, Anna was briefly introduced to Laban Movement Analysis and later went to do a certification course in LMA at another university. Several years into her teaching career at Westbridge, Anna and Evelyn began taking workshops on the West Coast with Bill Evans, a noted teacher who has developed his approach to teaching modern dance from LMA principles. While I have attended some of these summer programs as well, Anna has done the full sequence of courses and requirements with Bill and is certified to teach his technique. I do notice many similarities not only in terms of the movement sequences she gives her students but also in her emphasis on learning from one another in a respectful community—a hallmark of Bill’s teaching that sets him and his colleagues apart from what can sometimes be a ruthless and exclusive dance world.
Anna’s skill at observing movement and recognizing underlying patterns strikes me as especially astute, and in one of our early interviews she attributed this to what she gained in studying Evans technique. “You see it so clearly, and then with your teaching, you see what’s happening with your students so clearly, you can pinpoint—‘this is what you need to do in order for this to happen for you.’ It’s like that!”—she had snapped her fingers sharply for emphasis—“but it took a lot of practice…. When you have spent four or five years with Bill, you feel like when you started you were blind.”¹⁶ Thinking about the value that Anna places on observation and analysis, it makes sense, then, that she is incorporating those skills into her teaching. Her emphasis on concepts and patterns made simple and accessible, rather than steps and performances, aligns perfectly with the pedagogy of her mentors. She seamlessly incorporates the vocabulary of LMA not because specific terminology is targeted in her lesson plans per se but because this is the language through which she has come to think about movement. She also seems to never stop thinking about teaching, and even when we are just chatting casually, the conversations seem to frequently veer back to teaching.

“OK, I need to go meet with the music teacher. I’ll be back in about half an hour,” Anna says as she hands me a mug emblazoned with the school logo. I thank her and head back into the empty dance studio, sipping my hot tea and again getting drawn in to the posters that line the studio walls. Professional-quality publicity posters for the high school musicals and dance concerts mix with autographed posters from the Paul Taylor Company and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. Collected over the years, these

¹⁶ AT interview, 2/16/12
are propped over the storage cabinets and mounted above the mirrors. I notice the bookshelf above Anna’s desk where several familiar titles catch my eye. Propped in front of the books are small, framed pictures of Anna and her husband. I smile to see Anna in a simple cream colored dress in a wedding photo, gazing at Ben; she married only recently and commented once that she thought perhaps her development as a teacher was impacted by the fact that she didn’t meet her partner until she was older. While others spent their twenties and early thirties dating and starting a family, Anna had been immersed in her career, first as a dancer, then as a teacher. “Being single” during that time, Anna said once, “gave me a lot of time to focus on what I love to do.” She described spending those years thinking intensively about how to build relationships with her students, how to reach the ones who seemed uninterested. “I think that affected my teaching greatly, having that amount of time to spend focusing on that.”

Looking at Anna’s photos, it strikes me that, like many teachers and dancers I know, she describes her work as love. Yet in our conversations, the word “love” doesn’t enter often. It hovers beneath the surface of her words; the clarity with which she describes her curriculum could only come from one deeply invested in thinking it through, examining both the nuances and the large concepts. When Anna talks about what motivated her, for instance, to pursue a Master’s degree in teaching or to do professional development workshops in Orff Schulwerk (a music education approach) or creative dance, it becomes apparent that she had to do these things, not because any institutions required it but because of her curiosity and search for ideas that would make

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17 AT interview, 2/16/12
her a better teacher. Listening to Anna narrate her professional vitae I feel a bit overwhelmed and under-accomplished myself; since her teenage years she has been traveling across the country to attend workshops where she studied an impressive range of dance techniques including ballet and modern dance in the Graham and Nickolais-Louis traditions. After college Anna, like many dance graduates, pursued a performing career while also teaching at various studios, but after frustration with the audition process—an experience that seemed in marked contrast with the positive feedback she received from students and parents—she gradually realized that teaching was what she was suited to do best. She describes a seemingly endless progression of experiences that have informed her teaching—a Master of Arts in Teaching degree where she petitioned to create a dance education focus for herself where none existed, summer workshops with dance education expert Anne Green Gilbert, formal certification with Bill Evans. However, within an institution that seems to value accomplishment, I note that Anna’s “office” space displays none of the degrees and certificates she holds, and when we talk, she never mentions the credentials until I ask. “So then I went….” dominates her narrative, one experience leading her to the next, always with a focus on learning more.

My gaze settles on another picture of Anna and Ben, this time with her wearing a puffy blouse and long skirt kneeling next to him in a pair of lederhosen, between them a small child I don’t recognize. Anna’s mother was an immigrant from Germany, and both she and Ben actively participate in a local German cultural organization; I gather this photo was taken at one of their events. I’m still struggling to articulate what sets Anna apart from the many other educators I know who have described their love and passion
for dance and teaching, when it dawns on me that “passion,” although possibly true, is too cliché for Anna. Her reserved demeanor and calm expressions, even in the midst of sharing what she so clearly loves, would never result in the jumping-on-the-table, Robin Williams-in-Dead Poets Society kind of moment that people associate with passionate teachers. As I gaze at Anna’s arms wrapped around the child in the photo, somewhere in the back recesses of my mind my thoughts land on the word funktonslust. I haven’t studied German at all, and it was actually through a dance improvisation group that I encountered this term for “the joy of doing that which one excels at.” This is Anna, I think to myself. Her joy in teaching dance appears subdued because it is focused, continually returning upon itself, the joy of absorption in purpose. Anna has spent a lifetime in the academic study of dance and has aligned herself with mentors who emphasize nurturing relationships; learning to see and understand movement as a physical, relational, metaphorical act—a truly human phenomenon—keeps her ever-engaged as a lifelong learner. Through her serious but gentle demeanor, she is working to pass this along to her students. While I will go on to ask her endless detailed questions about the structure of her curriculum, the vocabulary she gives her students, and the assessments she uses, I will eventually come back to this: Anna’s lived curriculum is funktonslust—immersing herself, and her students, in the joy of moving.

Conclusion

Two portraits of very different dance classrooms and dance teachers are presented so that readers may glimpse into their professional lives and teaching practices. As I
visited each school over the course of the semester, I was privileged to witness two very different varieties of excellent teaching in dance. In the day-to-day occurrences in each classroom, however, there were no overt proclamations, no awards, no spotlights that shone down from above saying, “watch this!” Excellent teaching does not come packaged with a label calling attention to itself; in fact, the work that both Anna Tyler and Gloria Banks did each day was exceptionally humble. They each approached their teaching in very matter-of-fact ways, thinking about what needed to be accomplished each day and slowly, steadily guiding the students toward their collective goals. As I sat with my notebook and recorder, I found I could not capture everything, but I tried to attend closely to moments that struck me as interesting. I gathered many details, not knowing which would end up in this final portrait; indeed, for every detail conveyed here, tens more remain in notes and memory, supporting my analysis but not drawn out for the reader.

As a portraitist, my goal was to seek out what was good in these educational settings (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and render it for the reader as the kind of everyday experience that it was. The acts of teaching that collectively build a dance curriculum are not isolated, heroic moments of performance but instead are continuous manifestations of an ongoing accumulation of a lifetime of wisdom artfully enacted in specific times and places with particular groups of students. While these portraits have compressed time, space, and individuals for the purposes of conveying in a short space weeks’ worth of data, they also aim toward specificity. It is highly significant for this research that Anna and Gloria are not just any dance teachers; they are real people whose
enacted curricula were unique cases of dance education, shaped by their own education, worldviews, and teaching contexts. As authors of their curricula in the most immediate sense possible, Anna and Gloria put themselves directly into those curricula, giving their students the best of their time, energy, and expertise. In order to understand dance curriculum fully, we need to understand its authors; as I spent many hours sitting on the floor of Gloria’s studio, trying to keep my legs out of the way of her students, or walking through the halls of Westbridge as Anna mused about her teaching strategies, I felt tremendously privileged to be allowed insights into their curriculum that would not be apparent from a single visit or glance at a document. Knowing them as teachers was crucial to my understandings, and through these narrative portraits I have given readers a glimpse into my experience learning about their authorship.

While woven into a narrative form, the specific details shared in this chapter have been chosen as illustrative of overall themes I drew when considering the data as a whole. The “school days” presented here are typical of the overall curriculum at each school: Anna’s focus was largely on sequential classroom lessons to prepare her students with foundational skills in dance technique, improvisation, and composition, while Gloria’s spring semester curriculum was primarily devoted to building student’s technical, performance, and creative capacities through the practical experience of preparing for a public performance. Both teachers were heavily influenced in their work by their own experiences as dance students, dancers, and choreographers, artists drawn to particular ways of seeing and re-presenting the world through dance. Gloria’s interests in history and community action, her love of a range of dance forms including classical modern
techniques and dances of the African diaspora, and her acute observations about aesthetics and power in the dance world contributed to a curriculum that placed community engagement and social commentary at the forefront. Anna’s interest in LMA, her love of modern dance, ballet, and creative movement, and her ongoing professional development endeavors led her to build a curriculum that fostered academic engagement with dance as an art form within a supportive environment for girls new to dance. Both curricula were clearly shaped by the teachers’ sensitivity to student needs and their ability to navigate the institutional cultures they worked within.

By presenting the data in this way, I evoke the experience I had of visiting and getting to know these teachers, moving back and forth between insightful conversations about dance education and firsthand observations of their enacted curricula. Keeping these holistic portraits in mind, in Chapter Five I move into a more thorough discussion of the overall curriculum in both schools and explicit discussion of themes identified in the data.
Chapter 5: Description and Analysis of Dance Curricula

Introduction

Building on the detailed narrative portraits presented in Chapter Four, I now turn to a discussion of the overall curriculum in both of the middle school dance programs. Drawing from interview transcripts, classroom observations, and documents, this chapter addresses the curriculum in each program as a full sequence of learning and teaching activities guided by the professional and artistic experiences of each educator, allowing readers to contextualize the previous portraits within a larger scope of the dance programs as a whole. This chapter begins with an overview of each of the curricula and then moves into discussion of specific issues related to the research questions: influences on and development of the curricula, the role of “dance elements” within each curriculum, and the use of specific sign types including props, costumes, drawings, and music. Although the style of this discussion is more explicit than that of the narrative portraits in Chapter Four, readers are encouraged to keep the detailed descriptions of curriculum as lived experience in mind when envisioning how the activities and ideas described here developed in classroom practice.
The descriptions in this chapter rely on data taken from interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and documents provided by the teachers. Unless otherwise noted, quotations taken from interview transcripts have been edited to promote ease of reading. Repeated words and verbal fillers (“ah,” “um,” “like,” “you know,” “so,” and “kind of”), unless integral to the meaning of the statement, have been omitted. When other parts of the transcription have been removed, their omission is shown with ellipses (...). Square brackets [ ] are used to convey additional information that the reader may need in order to fully understand the statement, such as implied words or contextual references. Information appearing in parenthesis ( ) describes gestures, laughter, or other intonations that are helpful for understanding the statements being made. For direct quotes taken from non-publicly available sources, such as interview transcripts and written materials provided by the teacher, footnotes are used to acknowledge the source of the data, but this information does not appear in the reference list.

An overview of two middle school dance curricula

I take the broad view of the term curriculum that encompasses the range of lived experiences and ideologies that constitute the processes of teaching and learning. In conversations with teachers I find that the term is often initially understood more narrowly as referring to step-by-step descriptions of the planned sequence of learning activities that unfolds over the course of a school term for which they are responsible. While many teachers might colloquially separate the sequence of activities (conventional use of the term “curriculum”), one’s approach to teaching those activities (pedagogy),
and one’s process of assigning value to the results of those activities (assessment) as
different aspects of education, through my conversations with Anna and Gloria it became
apparent to me that my research was best served by understanding these aspects
collectively through the notion of curriculum as lived experience. In interviews with both
teachers I asked them to spend time describing their curriculum for me, to “walk me
through it”; in the course of these conversations, I sometimes asked for a clarification
regarding how they approached teaching a specific idea, what students demonstrated in
response, and how they assessed student learning. Through these discussions I was able
to get a glimpse into the full sequence of learning activities as the dance educators
reported it, contextualizing my observations within their descriptions of broad goals and
key activities and assignments. As the teachers recalled lessons they taught previously,
their descriptions often included mentions of the way they had approached a particular
idea, how their teaching had changed over time, and why they felt particular approaches
were worthwhile—details that all contributed to my understanding of curriculum in the
fullest sense. While the narrative portraits offer a detailed picture of each teacher within
the context of her dance education work in one day, the discussion of curriculum that
follows considers the overall range of learning activities and goals being implemented
within each program over time.
Gloria’s dance curriculum

Overview and sequence

Gloria Banks taught multiple dance courses that were differentiated by grade level for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders and that were further classified, for the sixth grade students, between those for students who have chosen to “major” in dance and those who have selected other art form majors and thus are assigned to a dance class as part of their art form rotations. Overall, Gloria’s curriculum was concerned with a broad exploration of dance techniques and practical applications, connecting ideas learned in class with the study of specific choreographers and their works along with the process of composing and performing dances based on themes that are relevant to students’ lives and interests. Dance concepts were not presented abstractly but were grounded in a connection to culture, history, and social issues. Although not all students would take the full sequence of sixth–eighth grade courses, Gloria described her curriculum as progressing from year to year.

The sixth grade dance course was designed to be introductory, and Gloria did not expect her students to come in with any prior dance education experiences. While one school in her district does offer dance education at the elementary level, and other K-5 schools have partnerships with arts organizations that may include dance teaching residencies, in general, her students did not have a sequential dance education experience prior to entering her class. However, she was quick to acknowledge that all of her students have had exposure to dance of some kind through media, performances in the community, or their own participation in formal and informal dance activities. In
describing her sixth grade curriculum, Gloria stressed its accessibility for all students and the importance of including a range of experiences and perspectives:

Sixth grade really is a basic … level that an entering student who has not ever had dance can feel very confident in doing. In sixth grade we also do, sometimes I will teach a very short dance … some choreography that I will teach them. And we also learn about the dances of their cultures, we look at those different perspectives and do research—any time I teach anything about any culture I always teach the context in which the dance comes, and a little bit of history about the people and the dance.18

When describing the seventh and eighth grade dance classes, Gloria clarified the constraints and responsibilities placed upon her because of the way credit is awarded in her district. Students enrolled in the eighth-grade dance course earn high school credit for completing that course and, if they attend the district’s affiliated arts high school, they will be able to enroll in the second-level dance course there. This puts pressure on not only what she must cover for the eighth grade class but also on how she will work backwards to help students in seventh grade prepare for that work:

Seventh grade—what has changed over the years is the fact that now, all of a sudden, eighth grade is a high school course. And so, sixth grade is pretty much just kind of introduction, but what I found is for a seventh grade student to jump from seventh grade to ninth grade is tricky. So, in seventh grade now I will begin to introduce, not necessarily in a real serious way, but introduce some dance

18 GB interview, 4/5/2012
technique to let them know that there are certain ways in which people will train the body to move, and how technique is important and how its used, and we go through the elements [of dance].

Technique gained additional emphasis in eighth grade, and Gloria gave students movement combinations drawn from the traditional techniques she personally studied, including Lester Horton and Martha Graham. She did note that time constraints prevented her from really being able to offer the level of physical training and immersion one needs to become skilled in these difficult techniques, which have also been emphasized by the high school teacher. Instead, she focused on core concepts and their relation to choreography:

So, we talk about the major idea of her [Martha Graham] was the contraction, and how things emanate from that center…. With him [Lester Horton] we talk about the lines, the flexibility, and we looked at some of his pieces and how his work influenced [Alvin] Ailey and some other folks.

Study of artists and artworks

Studying movement in relationship to choreographers was an aspect of the curriculum across all three grade levels. Gloria noted that early in her career as a dance educator, prior to the establishment of national content standards for the arts, she and her colleagues taught almost exclusively through a project-based learning approach, where

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19 GB interview, 4/5/12

20 GB interview, 4/5/12
all of the arts teachers came together to create multi-disciplinary projects that involved the students in researching and creating works in response to a broad theme such as “the price of freedom.” Although she moved away from an exclusively project-based approach and no longer frequently collaborated with other teachers as intensively as she once did, Gloria still retained an emphasis on having students research and create work as part of her class. She described many instances where she has students investigated the work of a particular choreographer as a way of deepening their study of a dance concept:

What I will try to do is have them do a project-based piece. We'll learn something and then they then will create within that movement style or the characteristic of that particular movement, such as every year in seventh grade I do *Rooms* [an etude based on the 1955 work by Anna Sokolow], and they learn a little bit of the choreography and then they have to take it. We talk about the themes, and I’ve actually had, not that dance itself but the work that the kids did [in response to it] on the concert before, we did the chairs and the theme, the isolation, and they did a really nice job with that. And it’s also a way for me to talk about dance that is not always so literal, and how it can still be expressive. So, we do that every year in seventh grade. We also do, um, the *Buschasche*\(^{21}\) [an etude based on Pearl

\(^{21}\) Both *Rooms* and *Buschasche* that Gloria refers to are etudes, short choreographic studies made in the signature style of American choreographers. The American Dance Legacy Initiative produces these etudes through cooperation with living choreographers and executors of choreographers’ estates. Educational packets are made available to educators with videos, scores, audio recordings, and other teaching materials, and teachers are granted the license to have their students study and perform these works without additional royalties.
Primus’s 1949 work] which gets, you need to tie in a little bit with strength, and so its a piece that you have to (laughs), I mean you have to be strong to do it!22 Gloria described her process as one of looking for connections between different areas that are called for in the dance standards and other curriculum documents, which allowed her to both cover multiple areas at once while also working in the project-based approach:

One thing … I’ve learned over the years, is there’s so many interconnections that you can find. So, I know if I’m going to study the elements, I can tie in a choreographer with space, who uses space in an interesting way. And then you know I've already covered—you’re supposed to look at different choreographers and their works, so I’ve already covered looking at that through that element.23 She described several choreographers whose work she introduces the students to in relation to the elements of dance:

I start out with the elements but I tie it in with different choreography in their work. Like Martha Graham … we looked at strength and body shape and line. And then this year I actually showed them Witch Dance [by Mary Wigman], and I asked them to talk about the emotional sense that they saw in that, and um, its very striking! The kids are like, “whoa! That's scary!” And this is eighth grade— “Oooh! That's scary Ms. Banks!” (laughs) And we talked about…[German expressionism] …Mary Wigman, she was in [the expressionist movement], so we

22 GB interview, 4/5/12

23 GB interview 4/5/12
talked about what that was too. So with eighth grade I try to get in to a little bit of the philosophy of people and their thinking too, what they are creating.

As Gloria described the choreographic work she shared with students, she explained how this was tied with an exploration of both themes in the work as well as the movement techniques that are being used across a range of examples:

We talked about fall and recovery, we watched the Charles Weidman piece…. Its a video about him, his life, and its a very nice documentary, usually talking about modern dance and its beginnings, and he discusses that and there’s some footage of him dancing with Doris Humphrey, doing the fall and rebound, and the kids really like that... So I try to pull people that, as we’re studying the elements [are related], so it makes a little sense with application, real life application with dancers and choreographers. And we talk about Lester Horton, and we watch Beloved, we have a big discussion about that, with the symbolism in it, like the chairs, why do you think the women are behind the chairs, like this, and holding onto the bars, and what’s happening in the piece, what’s the emotional feeling that you get from it? And we talk about his technique, and the line, design, flexibility… and I show them the [documentary video of] students in class [demonstrating] the technique.24

Following the video viewings, discussion, and movement activities that she did with the whole class relating to the dance elements and work of selected choreographers, Gloria then asked students to interpret these ideas in their own compositions:

24 GB interview, 4/5/12
They then have to take that, that idea and they have to make their own dance…. I've retained the element of the problem solving and their own expression so that, [students have an assignment] where they start doing their own [composition] work, but using, based on the idea of the movement of the person they’re studying.  

At the end of the school year after the large concert is over, Gloria assigned the sixth and seventh grade classes an independent project where they research a choreographer of their choosing.  

The sixth graders and the seventh graders at the end of the school year will do a project. And it will be to look at a choreographer—and I usually give them a list, because the list I give them [includes only choreographers that] usually I have the footage on them…. They can find the information, but I think it is really important for them to see the footage. And, you know we never seem to have enough time, because … I only have one computer in there now. They had to do the research, and they had to do the poster, and then they have to explain it to the class, they have to tell about the person in an oral presentation. And then one year [when] we had more time, I was actually able to say that you had to choreograph a one to two minute dance, based on the work of the person you were studying.

25 GB interview, 4/5/12

26 GB interview, 4/5/12

27 GB interview, 4/5/12
Gloria used this same assignment at the end of the year, and I was able to watch as groups of students researched a diverse range of choreographers such as Peg Leg Bates, Bill ‘Bojangles’ Robinson, Mary Wigman, Bill T. Jones, and Michael Peters. Gloria guided them to think about the time period the choreographer worked in, the dance style he or she used, and the signature movement ideas that he or she was known for. Their meager resources limited their abilities to embellish, but I found that I was usually able to correctly identify the choreographer they had chosen.

_Concert choreography and performance_

A significant portion of Gloria’s curriculum was concerned with preparing dances for an annual public concert. During the time I visited, the majority of the class sessions I observed were spent choreographing and rehearsing the dances that each class would perform. Gloria selected the theme of “Dance and Society” and began by asking students in each class to discuss and write about aspects of society that have an effect on their lives, and from there she worked with each class to select the themes that their dances would address. Gloria described how she tied this in with some of the choreographers that students studied earlier in the school year:

I also talked about with her [Wigman], and some of the others early modern dance artists, the fact that they were, that they needed to express themselves, things in life, in society. And we talked about expressionism and Germany and how that influenced Wigman, and that she was, around that time the experience she was having with the Nazis. So our whole year was geared around this whole [notion
of] societal [issues], and how dances can express that. So that’s how the concert came about. Then I asked the students to recap, you know we started the year…. “What are some things that you think directly affect you as a young person? Ah, you know something that’s happening today, or historically?” And that’s when we came up with the list. 28

Because the preparation for the concert occupied class time for over three months, the concert dances themselves became significant texts within the curriculum, and the process of creating, rehearsing, and performing choreography for public performance offered a substantial opportunity to teach composition and choreographic elements, rehearsal skills, and performance skills. In each class, Gloria gave students prompts to generate movement material, which she then arranged and directed for the entire ensemble. Through the process of creating their own dances and viewing those created by other classes, students were exposed to a range of possibilities wherein dance functioned as social commentary. In sixth grade, the majors class created and performed two pieces, Techno, which was in response to the increasing impact of technology in their lives, and Missing Dad, which came about because several students responded to Gloria’s prompts by writing about their sadness that their fathers were not living in their homes. The sixth grade minors class, composed of students who had just begun studying dance that semester, created We Wear the Mask, a piece about bullying that included a reading of the Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1895) poem by the same name. The seventh grade classes created and performed Ball of Confusion and Look in the Mirror, pieces whose rehearsal

28 GB interview, 5/24/12
process and choreography have been described in detail in the narrative portrait in Chapter Four. In addition to For the Women, which was also described previously, the eighth grade class had a number of small ensemble and solo and duet dances, including The Real Me—which addressed beauty standards and the limiting expectations placed on women and was set to India.Arie’s Video (Broady, India.Arie, & Sanders, 2001)—and Without a Home, which depicted the struggles of those facing homelessness.

In working with students to generate movement related to their chosen themes, Gloria frequently directed their attention to imagery and ideas they had brainstormed related to the topic, encouraging them to return to these ideas when they were creating their dance phrases. This strategy became particularly important with the group of students who were creating the dance related to homelessness. For this dance, Gloria had selected the song I Can Do Bad All By Myself performed by Mary J. Blige (Blige, Harmon, & Smith, 2009); the melody and instrumentation of the song suggest both vulnerability and anger, and the lyrics, though not specifically about homelessness, can be read as depicting the struggles of someone who is unable to fend off judgment and rise above limiting social structures:

I know that for the good of life there’s a price we all gotta pay
But I’ll pay till I’m poor and I still don’t know what it is to have a good day, yeah
Since everybody knows what it is that I need to do
Well do me a favor, let me worry ’bout me and you worry ’bout you

The students, however, often chose to create phrases that appeared pieced together from steps they had learned elsewhere, such as at cheerleading camps and studio jazz classes,
or that emulated popular media sources that bore little apparent connection to the theme.

Because this class was rehearsing several dances simultaneously, Gloria could not
supervise the entire process closely but instead had to give them a specific task to guide
their work and support their creation of movement phrases that would relate to the theme.
During one lesson, she gathered these students around the board and asked them to think
of descriptions of feelings associated with homelessness, and she wrote their list on the
board:

- closed in
- strong
- trapped
- afraid

Gloria then directed the group of about eight girls to use this list as they worked
independently: “Think about these—how many different ways can you show these ideas?
Use your whole body to show these. Work on this today.”

Although the resulting choreography still incorporated some movements reminiscent of the popular dance moves
that students enjoyed, they were able to also develop movements related to these more
specific images, such as actions that pulled the shoulders forward into a rounded upper
body posture, turned the head away from the audience and covered the face, or crossed
the wrists and brought the hands into fists, coupled with turns, traveling movement, and
lowering to the floor. This example clarifies the process of generating imagery in relation

29 GB observation fieldnotes, 3/28/2012

30 GB observation fieldnotes, 3/28/2012
to a social theme that would drive the creation of dance movement—a process that Gloria used throughout her teaching.

In each of the ensemble dances that Gloria directed, she used a range of choreographic structures to compose the dances and artfully accommodate many of the ideas and movement sequences that students generated. In addition to sections of unison movement, many of the dances included mirroring, cannons, and partnering, with sections being performed by different groups of students. In the seventh and eighth grade classes, prior to working on their concert piece, Gloria showed *Dynamic Dance: Principles of Choreography* (Roston, n.d.), a DVD that illustrates different choreographic devices that can be applied in ensemble work. Gloria explained that her overarching goal “is to have my kids … explore other movement possibilities.” In many of the movement prompts that she gave, she explained, students would “revert right back to the old stuff,” relying on repetition of simple movement phrases made popular through music videos and other media—what students often referred to as “hip hop” but which, as we often discussed, lacked the both political thrust and the full movement and athletic range of early generations of hip hop performers. Students’ preferences often involved staging movement where they would stand side-by-side, face forward, and move completely in unison. Although such a formation can be powerful, if overused it will eventually lose this appeal to the audience. While respecting their interests and background, Gloria also strived to encourage them to incorporate new ideas:

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31 GB interview 5/24/12

32 GB interview 5/24/12
So what I try to do is get them to break out a little bit. And I go through the whole year of just introducing them to different forms of dance, and this and that. And they will take in some, but you will still see their style.\textsuperscript{33}

The finished concert dances represented a blend of students’ ideas and movement preferences, along with application of some of the strategies discussed in the video for building contrast and focus through staging of dances.

Throughout the process of creating the dances, but particularly once the choreography had been set, Gloria also taught technical and performance skills that were immediately applicable and relevant. As students rehearsed, Gloria addressed specific technical movement skills that had been incorporated into the choreography, such as pointing the feet during jumps and leg gestures, spotting (maintaining an constant eye focus in front of you while turning, so that the head is the last body part to start a turn and the first to complete it) during turns, and using a full deep plié (a bend of the knees) to prepare for a jump. Once the classes were able to use the stage area in the school’s multi-use cafeteria/gym for rehearsals, Gloria taught them how to adjust the spacing within the choreography to fit within this larger space. Particularly for the beginners who had limited experience on stage, knowing how to find one’s place in relation to others and marks on stage indicating center and quarter locations was an important skill. About a week prior to the performance, Gloria posted on the board a reminder of etiquette and important performance skills and referenced it in many of her lessons:

\textsuperscript{33} GB interview 5/24/12
Things NOT to do when dancing on stage:

- talk to each other
- fix your clothes
- play with your hair
- chew gum
- make strange faces when you or someone else makes a mistake

**No Half-Stepping!**

Point your feet

Have energy in your movement

Complete all of your movements\(^{34}\)

Although these rules seem obvious to experienced performers, Gloria made them explicit, particularly in addressing behaviors such as fidgeting with clothes or hair that were likely to intrude when students got nervous. Gloria also worked with one class to develop and perform a short skit illustrating for the audience inappropriate behaviors and the preferred alternatives in order to assure that friends, siblings, and other guests would keep the event pleasant for everyone.

**Assessment**

When Gloria described how she explained to students what they would be assessed on, her emphasis was on what she saw as their physical and emotional investment in the dance movement:

\(^{34}\) GB observation fieldnotes, 3/28/2012
I'm looking at, what is it that you’re putting into it? Are you really trying hard, are you working? … We’ve gone over this over and over. There should be something that I should see that makes it more—your expressiveness, the dynamics should be a little stronger…. As far as fullness, commitment, even if you make a mistake, you’ve done it big, you’ve really committed to the movement, you’re going to do it, you’re trying to really complete all the movements.\textsuperscript{35}

Gloria’s focus on commitment as a feature of performance preparation both incorporated the specific lessons of technique and performance etiquette, while also reinforcing the accessibility to a diverse range of learners that was a hallmark of her program:

I’m looking at what they put into it. I guess I’m trying to look at it as on a more personal level…. And I’m sure that somebody that’s in a high school or performing arts center is going to be looking at this [performance skill rubric] totally differently. But what I can do is adapt it for what I do with my kids.\textsuperscript{36}

In our conversations, it was clear that despite the size of her class roster, Gloria still looked at her students individually and assessed them qualitatively with attention to their specific challenges, emphasizing growth and placing value in her curriculum on what each student was able to learn personally within the context of the beginner-friendly classes she taught.

While the sixth and seventh grade classes completed a choreographer research project at the end of the school year, the eighth grade class had to prepare for and take a

\textsuperscript{35} GB interview, 5/29/2012

\textsuperscript{36} GB interview, 5/29/2012
written final exam. Although the final exam addressed topics students have learned about over the course of the full school year, it was more heavily weighted toward those topics explored through the preparation and performance of the concert pieces. Gloria also used this final exam as an opportunity to reinforce concepts and vocabulary that students will be expected to know if they enroll in dance in high school. Many of the vocabulary words addressed on the final relate to choreographic structures, such as unison, canon, improvisation, mirroring, phrase, and transition, and Gloria used the *Principles of Choreography* (Roston, n.d.) video again in her review lessons. In the movement identification section, Gloria demonstrated specific named steps from ballet, jazz, and modern techniques, which students must correctly identify on their exam pages. Short answer questions addressed technique and performance concepts, such as sudden and sustained movement, fall and recovery/rebound, and the importance of warming up. Students were also asked to “explain African derived dance characteristics and provide specific examples” and to “describe what is meant by the term ‘dance as social commentary’” as well as “explain how a dance that you performed in the concert relates to the topic of dance as social commentary.” A final essay question asked students to reflect on the process of choreographing, rehearsing, and performing in the concert.37

*Conclusion*

Overall, the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade dance curriculum that Gloria taught at City Center Middle School provided a comprehensive and sequential introduction to

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37 Gloria Banks, 8th Grade Dance Majors Dance Final, 5/29/2012
many aspects of dance as an art form embedded within social and historical contexts. Movement from a range of dance techniques—including modern dance, ballet, and jazz and other dances of the African diaspora—was integrated into the curriculum, which emphasized real-world connections to artists and artmaking, as well as attention to the relationships between dance and society. As students learned about dance techniques and concepts, this information was contextualized through both viewing historical and contemporary dance works and physically engaging through improvisation and composition activities. Likewise, performance and composition skills were further developed in a practical context as students spent significant time devoted to engagement in the process of preparing dances for public presentation to the school community. Students worked closely with one another, under the guidance of their teacher, to create dances based on themes and issues that had relevance to their lives and that may have resonance with parents and friends who viewed the work.

The dance program functioned within a school context where adults regarded the arts as a component of a well-rounded education and an opportunity for motivation and meaningful engagement with different subjects, while adolescents seemed to value connections with their peers and opportunities to make their opinions and ideas known. Perhaps because of this, Gloria’s dance program appeared to situate community values—including the chance to work and dance together, the opportunity for individuals to be seen and heard within a larger group, and the importance of attending to the community’s collective histories and valued symbols—as a primary entry-point from which to engage students in the study of varied dances and dance techniques and to broaden their
understanding of dance as an art form and their associated movement repertoire.

Anna’s dance curriculum

**Overview**

At the middle school level, Anna Tyler taught only one course, eighth grade dance, which met for one semester. All students were required to take this class during fall or spring of their eighth grade year. There were no other opportunities for middle school students to study dance as part of the school day during middle school at Westbridge. Students who have attended Westbridge since kindergarten have had class with Anna when they were in elementary school. In addition, some of the middle school students studied dance at a private studio outside of school. Middle school students also studied music, and in addition to general music many participated in orchestra or choir. The eighth grade class that Anna taught, therefore, was designed to be an introductory course in modern dance that would be accessible to all students and that would prepare them with basic skills should they choose to take dance in ninth grade, where the program is heavily based on a Laban-Bartenieff approach to modern dance.

When I asked Anna to describe her curriculum to me, she explained that she thought about it as integrating technical and artistic components:

I look at it as two essential components to dance, the art of dance. The one is technical, the actual physical body and how you use the body, and the other is the
artistic component of it, of creating work, of being able to improvise, to understand some of the historical aspects of dance, that whole side of it.\textsuperscript{38}

Anna was very careful, however, to emphasize that these components complement one another and are woven together throughout the course:

When I rework my curriculum every year I really think about those two aspects, the technical and the artistic aspect, and how to have them live within the same class. The same 50-minute class has to have some technical and some artistic component to it.\textsuperscript{39}

Within that structure of including both technical and artistic components in each lesson, Anna allowed herself the freedom to adjust how much focus each one received. In my observations, I found that lessons earlier in the course tended to include more technique instruction, with a large portion of the class time spent in teacher-directed activities. Moments of improvisation or other creative work were incorporated into every lesson with specific instructions. As the course progressed toward the end of the semester, increasing time and attention were given to artistic components as students worked on directed improvisations that became the foundation for a final composition process.

\textit{Technique}

Anna often drew on her background in Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and Bartenieff Fundamentals to create and present movement phrases that then led into

\textsuperscript{38} AT interview, 5/11/2012

\textsuperscript{39} AT interview, 5/11/2012
improvisations. As described previously in the narrative portrait, Anna frequently used the language of body patterning both in explaining the movement sequences to her students as well as when describing her teaching to me. “Head-tail,” “core-distal,” “body half,” and “cross lateral” all refer to different kinds of basic movement patterns founded on the relationships between parts of the body. Anna explained that this structure of beginning with more focused and technique-oriented activities enabled her to meet the needs of the students and to provide a strong foundation:

We really started heavily into the body and focusing on technical aspects of dance, because the girls seemed to feel comfortable going there; they wanted to be told what to do. Within that aspect, I would infuse an improvisation within every single technical movement experience we did, and I would give them really clear directives about what they could do and what they could not do. So for example, if we were focusing on whole body movement like core-distal movement in some sort of patterning, and then head-tail, after I give them a structured phrase of movement, I would say, “all right, now you’re going to have to improvise movement, traveling through the room, and it has to be body half oriented now. So that means that the right arm and right leg are going to be doing something while the left is doing something else. Or, the right body half is staying stable while the left is doing something.” So I would get very specific about that, and if I didn’t get the results I was looking for, or creativity, then I would give even more
directives. So actually, bringing them much more focused actually helped them to be much more creative.\footnote{AT interview, 5/11/2012}

Although LMA clearly pervaded Anna’s work, she also described her teaching as coming from a “hodgepodge,” of influences, including classical ballet, the modern dance techniques of Alwin Nickolais and Murray Louis and of Martha Graham, the creative dance approach of Anne Green Gilbert, and music education work in Orff Schulwerk. When presenting technique combinations to students, she drew on many of these elements. For example, she included foot articulation work to emphasize rolling through the joints when stepping and stretching through the foot on a tendu or degagé, stretching and warm up combinations that included spinal flexion and extension, balance, and core strength, and seated and lying combinations of rolling that called attention to body parts that would initiate a movement. She also often included traveling combinations where students would take turns moving from one side of the room to the other; these would incorporate walking, jumping, leaping, balancing, and rolling to the floor.

When guiding students to conceptualize movement, I noticed that Anna often stressed the broad concept of “space” with her students. In one lesson early in the term, she began by explaining that this is a concept that would go all the way through their dance work: “the idea of space around us that we choose or are told to use.”\footnote{AT observation fieldnotes, 2/16/2012} She then moved into clear demonstrations and structured explorations of movement in one, two, and finally three dimensions. I sensed from her teaching that the goal was to help the
students differentiate between these, exploring the movement possibilities within the rather limited range of one- and two-dimensional movement and then allowing for a more complex relationship with three-dimensional movement. When doing one-dimensional movement, for instance, students could only move up and down on a vertical axis or forward and backward along a sagittal axis. Combining them together affords the opportunity to explore movements that move in the sagittal plane, such as walking forward while jumping and then lowering, or moving in “donkey kicks” or somersaults. Anna repeated explorations of single axes combined into planes for the vertical and horizontal plane, and she then quickly quizzed students, asking for demonstrations of movements in each plane. After they did this, an astute student asked, “what is three dimensional?” and Anna guided the group to explore this by first rising and sinking, then adding forward and backward actions, and finally incorporating side to side movements until students were moving in large circles.

“Three dimensional movement is encompassing the entire space around you,”42 Anna explained. As she had them move into practicing sequences they had previously learned, she instructed them to “keep that idea of space—one dimensional, two dimensional, or three dimensional.” After each exercise, she asked questions like “What did you recognize as single dimensional?” and then move into quick discussions analyzing a shape or movement the students recalled from the sequence. When they transitioned into a longer dance with slower movement, Anna prompted them during their dancing, “Are you thinking about the dimensions?” When they discussed a particular

42 AT observation fieldnotes, 2/16/2012
movement, she corrected some of their assumptions, particularly in regards to movements that should be three-dimensional but which students incorrectly understood as two-dimensional. She challenged the students by restricting them to a specific plane and having them repeat the movement, whereby they quickly realized that a third dimension was needed. At this point, they returned to a more full three-dimensional performance, strengthening both their conceptual understanding and their full-body technical performance. Throughout the lesson, Anna kept referencing the spatial orientation of the movements they were performing, helping the students to fully understand “space” as a dance concept and guiding them to think of the relationship of their body to the space around it each exercise.

In a subsequent lesson, Anna reviewed with students the dimensions that they had previously learned and then shared with them a handout that included pictures of a dimensional cross of axes, each of the planes individually, and an image of all three planes intersecting one another. She told the students, “When I put this in my mind, it helps me to be clear about my movement.” The top of the handout included a definition Anna provided for them regarding the kinesphere:

Your kinesphere is the space that surrounds you as a dancer. Imagine it as an invisible bubble of space that travels with you as you move. It changes facing, level, direction, and size with you. Within your kinesphere, you can choose to move in different dimensions.

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43 AT observation fieldnotes, 2/23/12

44 Anna Tyler, Dimensional Movement class handout, 2/23/12
She briefly helped the students think about this in context and explained that both cultural expectations and the length of one’s limbs will impact the size of one’s kinesphere—in the US, we typically favor having lots of space around us that we can use. A student hypothesized that in big cities in China, the kinesphere will be smaller, and Anna also explained that on a NYC subway, people would have more shrunken kinespheres or even kinespheres that cross over one another’s. As the class went over the handout together, she guided them to look at each image on the page, to visualize it in the three-dimensional space around them, and then to practice moving in relation to these images, all the while encouraging the students to integrate their physical experiences of moving with the visual and conceptual models of the cross of axes and planes. She frequently asked students to describe dances they have just done and encouraged their use of the spatial vocabulary that she has taught. When one student explained that a mirroring improvisation worked while the dancers were in the vertical plane but then faced difficulty maintaining their unison movement when they turned and moved away, Anna commended her observations: “Good. Thank you for using our terms.”

When teaching technique, Anna often used these explorations of space to promote clarity and awareness, which appeared to be main goals of the technique component of her curriculum. She told the students in one class, “When you are aware of what is happening, you are aware of possible change.” Conceptualizations of space went hand-in-hand with an understanding of the body. In addition to warm-up activities and

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45 AT observation fieldnotes, 2/23/12

46 AT observation fieldnotes, 2/23/12
combinations that were drawn from Bartenieff Fundamentals, the branch of LMA specifically concerned with efficient body patterning, Anna often cued her students to “sense” the movement from the inside, asking them to think about what it feels like. In addition to being able to develop clarity and awareness of their own movement choices when performing or improvising, Anna also used students’ understandings of space as an idea to support their learning of set movements that she taught them. In a seated movement where many students adopted a rounded posture, Anna asked them to think about “head and tail pulling away from one another,” not only reinforcing their awareness at the level of the body but also encouraging them to think about spatial tension as a support for movement. When she taught a movement known as an “undercurve” in modern dance, Anna used clear spatial imagery to help clarify the body movement pattern: “Its like you are drawing a “U” in space. Your pelvis goes down—bend your knees to accommodate the pelvis going down and then side and up.” Anna paused and demonstrated this movement, lowering as she stepped to the side and then straightening her legs as she completed the step. “It can either be sagittal or vertical,” she explained, referencing the planes in space as she added a similar movement going forward and backward.

Later in the semester Anna introduced another aspect of LMA: effort. While at the most basic, space in LMA is concerned with the “where” of movement, effort addresses the “how,” the quality of movement. The attributes of weight (strong or light), time

47 AT observation fieldnotes, 2/16/2012

48 AT observation fieldnotes, 2/23/2012
(sudden or sustained), flow (free or bound), and focus (or attitude toward space) (direct or indirect) are referenced as qualities that describe the way a mover embodies an action. While the same action, such as walking forward, can be done with either light weight or strong weight and still result in the mover’s body traveling in space, the feeling and appearance of the movement will be drastically different. Because these many qualities intersect and can require intense attention in both observation and performance to understand, teaching effort can be much more difficult than teaching other aspects of LMA to beginners.

Anna used her students’ familiarity with space, and in particular the three-dimensional cross of axes, to introduce the efforts through what is known as affinities. The idea with affinities is that movement in certain directions naturally induces certain movement qualities as the easiest way to perform that movement (though this, of course, assumes Western and able-bodied approach to physical work). For instance, rising, or moving upward, has an affinity with a light use of weight, while sinking or moving downward has an affinity with heavy weight. Anna used her students’ prior knowledge of moving through the different one-dimensional movements to lead into a very obvious experience of the affiliated qualities. She then showed how the individual qualities could be combined in the performance of different actions—such as dabbing, which is light, sudden, and direct—and guided her students in moving through these and reflecting on their experiences.

[^49]: The affinities in the dimensional scale are: rising upward with lightness, sinking downward with strength, advancing forward with sustainment, retreating backward with suddenness, spreading sideways on one side with indirect or wide focus, narrowing sideways on the other with direct focus.
Anna referenced these ideas during her subsequent teaching of technique and composition. For example, one technique combination included a movement where dancers were upside down with their hands and feet on the floor before “jumping,” temporarily transferring all of the weight into the hands, giving a feeling that the lower body is suspended in the air. This movement was rather challenging, and Anna encouraged her students to try the movement as a “dab,” accessing qualities of lightness, directness, and quickness, which would facilitate the execution of the movement. She also had them experiment with trying other effort actions, such as a punch (strong/direct/sudden) or a flick (light/indirect/sudden), so that they could experience how an appropriate quality can make it easier to do a movement. At the same time, she encouraged students to think about purposefully using unexpected qualities to generate exciting compositions: “Once you have these, you can make strange and interesting choices in your choreography.”\(^{50}\) She also used this to promote students’ thinking about how the expressive nature of the effort qualities could support the emotional and thematic aspects of choreography, such as when she asked students what qualities might be used in a dance about the Holocaust. While a complete accounting of effort theory is beyond the scope of this chapter, what is important here is that Anna introduced these complex ideas through her students’ understanding of space; she then used these understandings to promote both their execution of technical movement skills with efficiency as well as their exploration of qualitative options in improvisation and composition.

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\(^{50}\) AT observation fieldnotes, 4/13/2012
Improvisation and composition

What Anna described as the creative component of her curriculum was threaded throughout the entire course. Early in the term, the creative work took the form of simple, highly directed improvisation activities where students explored concepts, such as the dimensions in space, or worked with a creative movement prompt, such as mirroring a partner. As the class progressed, Anna made “a shift into heavier improvisation, longer and longer periods of improvisation, less and less specific.”51 Following many of these activities, Anna guided the students in a discussion of their performances and observations, encouraging them to highlight effective strategies both for working with continued focus and creativity as well as for creating movement performances that are interesting to the viewer. For example, in one activity the students were arranged in two facing lines, with each dancer standing across from her partner and mirroring, or directly copying, the other’s movements simultaneously. After half the class finished, Anna guided those who were viewing to see how a movement performance can provoke imagery in the viewer: “What was interesting was when there was a change of levels, with one couple going low and the others coming up behind them. This reminded me of the image of sun rays.”52 In modeling and then facilitating such talk, Anna bridged the movement concepts she taught previously with creative images, providing a foundation for students to compose movement as meaningful communication.

51 AT interview, 5/11/2012

52 AT observation fieldnotes, 2/23/2012
The improvisation work that Anna did served to prepare the students for a final composition project, an assignment that took place over several weeks during the latter part of the semester and culminated in original group choreography that was performed for classmates. However, Anna did not give the entire assignment at once but instead heavily mediated the process for students. Again, the concept of “space” serves as a core idea; here, space is referenced as a literal place that the activity is based on that will also become a metaphor for goodness, security, and inspiration:

The final project began as, “draw a … favorite place or space that you have actually been to.” And I have them close their eyes and we do a bit of guided imagery to try to get them to be very clear about this actual space that they’re thinking about, and I ask them to think of a space or a place where they find that they are their best self, that they really like who they are when they re in that place. And then I ask them to actually draw it on a piece of paper…. And from that drawing, this is how we expand into [activities that are] much more composition based or improvisation based, and the technique begins to support their creativity. [After] they draw it on a piece of paper, their first assignment is to improvise through the space. “What would you actually do in that space physically? Would you skip in it, would you climb, would you crawl, or would you lie down? What would you do in that space?” And then we start talking about abstracting movement.53

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53 AT interview, 5/11/2012
With her beginning students, Anna approached this task first by helping them to generate literal, pantomimed movements that reflected what they would be doing in that imagined space. Then, she guided them through changes in the spatial and body aspects of the gestures to create more abstracted dance movements:

So from that point on … you get them to abstract things. I would say, “Okay now, you’re going to open that same drawer, you’re going to take that object out of the drawer, but now you’re going to do it as large as you possibly can. OK now can you do it large and low? Alright now can you take the thing out of the drawer first and then open the drawer, so now we’re going to switch it up a bit. Could you do it with your feet, rather than your arms?” And they start to practice thinking outside of the box. “What different ways can I do this?”

From this abstracted movement that students composed into a solo, Anna had the girls work with partners to combine their solos into a duet “where they are picking and choosing and editing how they build that together and then eventually becomes a small group piece” when two duets joined for the finished piece.

As the students prepared their final group composition projects, Anna again returned their attention to the technique:

Then at the end with the project I ask them to go back and think, “What kind of—what techniques are you using you know right now, to show your own choreography? Are you still thinking about articulating through your feet? Are

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54 AT interview, 5/11/2012

55 AT interview, 5/11/2012
you still thinking about articulating through your spine? Are you doing whole-body movements right now or is it gestural, or what does that mean, and how are you going to support your creation with your physical body?"**56**

She also guided students to attend to ideas discussed and explored previously in class and consider how they could incorporate those into their group compositions. Around the room were several large posters that Anna and her colleague had printed. One chart listed the elements of dance, another described the body patterns in Bartenieff Fundamentals, and a third listed sixteen ways to manipulate a motif taken from the book *The Intimate Act of Choreography* (Blom & Chaplin, 1982). She explained the benefits of making this information accessible and how she posed questions to her students as they worked:

"You know, that has been so helpful that they'll go and gravitate towards it. “Well what about, Bartenieff Fundamentals? What are you already using in your piece, what can you use, what can you incorporate, what do you feel is lacking right now?”**57**

When Anna spoke about her overall goal for this project and for the course as a whole, she seemed concerned with helping her students to move beyond ways of moving that are motivated by a desire to gain admiration from peers and into explorations that would be more genuine. With this goal in mind, she carefully structured the process, giving students the instructions for only one step at a time; when they began with the

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56 AT interview, 5/11/2012

57 AT interview, 5/11/2012
imagery exercise and drawing their imagined spaces, she did not tell them that this would eventually lead into a group performance:

Because I find the more they know about the project, the less sincere the space is, and the less sincere their improvisation and the subsequent composition of the space becomes. They are thinking already about how they’re going to look to somebody else. And, the less I can allow them to think about that, the more genuine it becomes. Because in the end what I really want them to understand is that movement can come from any inspiration. You can gather inspiration from nature, from a favorite place…. Your inspiration shouldn’t be technique, your inspiration shouldn’t necessarily be, look how cool I am when other people are watching me.58

Anna remained acutely aware that, once students realized they would be creating a dance to perform, the potential judgment of others, coupled with the desire to look “cool,” could impact students’ choices.

There’s no way of keeping it [secret], once you start putting them in groups of people, that you’re not going to show this, of course you’re going to show this. [They have been] in the school system for how many years, working on group projects that you show at the end of the project. So now they’re thinking, “What is so and so going to think of us, let’s do something cool.”59

58 AT interview, 5/11/2012

59 AT interview, 5/11/2012
To some degree, this appeal to peer opinion is inevitable, and, because she also wanted to honor students’ ability to make their own creative choices, Anna couldn’t completely eliminate their desires to incorporate movements that are popular or that they have done before. She redirected their attention to the exploratory improvisations and impetus for the composition:

I say, “What is influencing our movement? Our favorite space is, or the place that we’ve imagined is our intention or our inspiration” … I have to constantly bring them back to the idea of what is our inspiration, what is our focus here? It’s the movement first and foremost.  

As the students progressed further along in their process, Anna devoted considerable class time to work on their compositions. Near the end of the semester, after a brief warm up, she gave them the entire period to work in their groups. She was available to assist groups as needed, waiting for them to come to her with questions. As the compositions developed, she allowed the students to explore musical accompaniment, and incorporated impromptu lessons, inviting others to watch as one group performed with different musical choices. While this one-semester class did not culminate in any kind of formal public performance, Anna did have the students share their finished group compositions with one another and discuss their work as a class.

60 AT interview, 5/11/2012
**Being a dance artist**

In addition to the aspects of the curriculum that explicitly fell into Anna’s categories of technical and artistic development, Anna also described several activities in her teaching that were geared toward helping her students learn how to work effectively as dancers and choreographers within a classroom community. Although she did not overtly describe these within the frame of “curriculum,” they did appear to be strong components of her enacted curriculum. In addition, they represented a process of enculturation, something that her students will need if they pursue dance classes in the high school program. She explained that one of the handouts she gave students during the first week of the semester was designed to help them become aware of the hidden rules within a dance classroom environment:

I give them a dance guidelines paper that has three paragraphs on it that explains—it is a protocol of a dance classroom and general expectations as a dance teacher for what they are to do to prepare themselves for class. It talks about good nutrition, it talks about being aware of the space around you and being respectful of other dancers and their space, and how to take a correction. There’s a nice little sentence in there that talks about a correction is a compliment, and that means that the teacher trusts that you are going to take this information and use it and make changes.⁶¹

Building trust was also important to Anna as foundational for the other goals she had for the class, and she described how she framed this from the beginning of the course:

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⁶¹ AT interview, 5/11/2012
I always start with something that’s really safe, to build trust. I talk a lot about trust, early on, that what happens in the dance studio stays in the dance studio, and all that little Vegas bit. And try to make them feel like “Let’s be able to laugh at ourselves a little bit, let’s think of this as a lab experience, so that we’re trying new things, and that if everybody’s worried about themselves, nobody’s really watching you and judging you for what you are doing,” and that’s a constant mantra all the way through.  

Anna explained also that as students became aware of the protocols of dance class and learned that the class environment was consistent and positive, they learned how to give and receive feedback in ways that would promote their learning in this and future classes: 

Before I talked about any of that, I saw more students having a harder time taking feedback and taking corrections. And now, it has spun into a more positive light. And then the feedback that they give each other is different now, because they understand that this person is really trying to help them, not to knock them down.  

In addition to preparing her students to function well in the interpersonal climate of a dance class, Anna also encouraged them to develop skills for working effectively on their compositions rehearsal-to-rehearsal. Anna stressed for students the need to document their choreography so they could remember it easily in the next class. She recalled that in previous years she had students use their notebooks to record their ...
movement, but this process was often difficult and inefficient because students lacked a practical, consistent strategy for taking notes about their choreography. Because Westbridge has a technology initiative in place where all students are encouraged to have a portable computing device for use at school, Anna has asked the students to bring them for use in class. She gave them freedom to choose which devices to use, and I observed students using the cameras on their laptops, iPads, and phones to record their dances in progress and then replay them at the beginning of the next class period. Anna made the use of the devices optional, and students who chose not to bring them to class used notebooks to record their work in drawings and written notes.

Anna explained that the decision to allow the use of electronic devices was new for her this year and that she has had to teach students to use this privilege responsibly:

I’m walking around the room, the second to last class, and I’m starting to notice that they’ve got ten minutes left of class to really work on these projects, and girls are Googling, and they’re working on some other projects. And at that point what I said to them was, “Everybody put your devices down for a minute, I have to say I am disappointed about this. This is the very first time I have asked students to bring technology, bring their devices into the dance classroom, for the sole purpose of documenting the material that they’re creating. And what I am seeing you doing is choosing to do other things with your devices right now…. Is this the legacy that you want to leave for next year’s eighth grade dance students? That I don’t use these devices, and they have to go back to writing things down and making drawings and hoping they remember it? Because this is what you’re
setting up, that that this is too much for you to handle, and you can’t stay focused on the task because this device distracts you, it doesn't actually help you.\footnote{AT interview, 5/11/2012}

Although her discussion was a reprimand, it also served an important function within her curriculum of helping to teach students how to work effectively in a dance class environment where artistic processes require both autonomy and discipline. Furthermore, I noticed that Anna, in recalling this incident, positioned the off-task use of the devices as a choice, consistent with her framing of other decision-making processes.

As Anna enacted her curriculum, learning to be a dance artist included learning that creative works are the result of artistic choices where more than one possible answer is correct. When students improvised, Anna frequently commented on their emerging dances, framing their actions as creative choices. When a group of students wanted to use a popular music piece to accompany their composition, although she made several more appropriate alternate suggestions and challenged the girls to think about why they thought the song was a good fit for their dance ideas, Anna ultimately maintained that the decision about music would be theirs. The technology incident above layered on another aspect of choice-making where, although the teacher has presented a clearly favorable option and realistic consequences, this was contextualized within a larger frame where many viable options were available for how students choose to use their rehearsal time—dancing, planning, reflecting, and documenting are all appropriate at some point.
Conclusion

Overall, the eighth grade dance curriculum that Anna has created at Westbridge was concerned with developing students’ foundational skills as artists within a contemporary modern dance and creative movement paradigm, preparing them for the ninth grade class. Students were expected to develop both their physical skill in movement, including increasing strength, flexibility, and coordination, as well as their creative skills in dance improvisation and composition. Anna taught students to work appropriately as dancers within the studio environment, providing a foundation for trust and a moving toward a high degree of autonomy. Skills in analyzing and discussing body movement, spatial patterns, and choreographic choices were also emphasized, along with habits of reflecting on personal and communal goals and processes through discussion and writing. Anna’s program was situated within a well-resourced independent school that places a high value on academic achievements across subject areas, creativity in the arts and sciences, independence, and leadership; and while many students are competitive athletes, as a whole their physical skill and confidence as a group of thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds is uneven. Perhaps because of this, Anna’s curriculum appeared to frame academic engagement with dance as a primary entry point from which to support the development of body awareness and creative decision-making.

Developing curriculum and changes over time

Although in interviews with Anna and Gloria I asked them to speak about their current dance curriculum, both teachers felt it was important to also discuss how they
developed their curriculum and how it has changed over time. While at first this background information may appear to be tangential, I find that it speaks to both the highly variable context that they both teach in as well as the dynamic, lived nature of curriculum as experience. Furthermore, understanding curriculum as a semiosic process that teachers engage in—one of meaning-making through signs that engender further signs—benefits greatly when we attend to their descriptions of how their curricula have developed and changed.

_Gloria’s curriculum development_

Gloria began her teaching career prior to the creation of the National Standards for Arts Education (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994) and subsequent Ohio state standards, and she also taught for many years without a lot of contact with fellow public school dance educators who worked with middle school students. It was up to Gloria to figure out how to transition her teaching experience from the elementary level, where she had started teaching, into work that would be appropriate for adolescents:

I will say that I probably changed my whole teaching strategy from when I first came, because I’m a little bit more informed—in the sense that I feel like middle school is always an age where you’re always adapting, and changing, and trying to figure out things because of the age group. When I first came to City Center, I was really lost, because there was no one else teaching middle school dance. And, at that time, there was no curriculum [document] that was a dance course of study
After her first year of teaching at the middle school level, Gloria was joined by another dance educator, and they frequently collaborated in the design and implementation of lessons in a project-based format:

We did a lot of project based stuff…. It was all problem solving for the kids. You know we would do maybe a warm-up, but the warm-up was never technical…. It was very project based, and as I look back on it, there was some wonderful things that we did…. The kids had to do the problem solving, we were just there to kind of give them feedback and guide them. And they had to do research, so it was a very interesting approach. I kind of like the approach, it was less taxing, I think for me, as far as movement-wise…. I’m a person that likes research anyway, so I get into the project-based stuff because I just, I’m a lifelong learner so I like learning stuff too. So for me, that part was fun.66

In recounting her own personal history, Gloria frequently referenced her love of Caribbean and West African dance techniques as well as the modern dance techniques of Horton and Graham. She also described her interest in historical research and her process of writing her master’s thesis in dance history; as detailed in the portrait at the beginning of this chapter, Gloria also was an avid reader. Perhaps because she positioned herself as a “life-long learner,” Gloria’s curriculum has changed year-to-year while still retaining some elements of research- and project-based learning. However in the intervening years,

65 GB interview, 4/5/2012

66 GB interview, 4/5/2012
the development of standards documents, the loss of her dance colleague’s position in the school, and the movement away from collaborative planning with other arts teachers all contributed to Gloria’s shift away from the predominant project-based model in dance to her current model that includes the study of both dance techniques and choreographers, in addition to the production of a concert. 

When I asked Gloria to speak about how she worked with national and state standards for dance education in the process of planning her curriculum, it appeared that her familiarity with these documents meant that she frequently referenced them in a general way but did not need to consult them closely on a frequent basis in order to feel confident that she was structuring her curriculum appropriately:

What I do, and probably fortunately for me having worked on the standards, I’m familiar with the overriding concepts that they want the kids to know. So I do have them in my planning book, I keep all three levels of the standards and I refer to them as I plan…. I tell you what I have not covered a lot of and that’s the economics of dance…. I don’t do much with production because I can’t. I just don’t have the facility for that. But the other things with composition, and learning about the history of different dance techniques, history and culture, I’m really familiar with that, and then it always starts with kind of looking at the elements.  

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67 GB interview, 4/5/2012
Gloria frequently alluded to time constraints that impact her curriculum; because the Ohio state standards for dance do address many different areas, Gloria could only spend a limited time on each area:

Unfortunately because … [in the standards] there’s a lot to cover, so I try not to spend too much time on one, you want to, you could spend the whole year…. You know, but it’s not possible.  

As explained in the discussion of her curriculum, Gloria frequently addressed this by pairing the teaching of a dance concept or element with teaching about the work of a choreographer and then having students improvise and compose their own studies in response. In this way, she was able to integrate within the standards, addressing multiple objectives within one lesson or unit.

As I sat in Gloria’s office and listened to her recount the story of her curriculum, it became apparent that her dance courses changed significantly year-to-year. Each year in the spring she has presented a concert, and the concert theme itself, as well as the specific dances each class created, became the texts for that part of the curriculum. While the learning goals for the rehearsal and production of the concert may remain relatively constant and aligned with state and national standards relating to dance composition and performance, the enacted curriculum shifted considerably. Gloria also described many different activities that became part of her curriculum over the years as she took advantage of resources in the community. For example, when one year the local science museum did a project on the science of sound and presented the IMAX film Pulse: A

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68 GB interview, 4/5/2012
Stomp Odyssey (McNicholas, 2006), she had students prepare a tap dance and a percussive dance with objects as part of the project. In other years she has had guest artists whose contributions have influenced the enacted curriculum. Gloria also kept records of her lesson plans so that she could reference them later, incorporating ideas from prior years while also generating new ideas for individual lessons and projects.

Gloria also described how changes in the structure of the school have impacted her curriculum. In the past, the school tracked students based on their math achievement level, so that advanced students enrolled in an algebra course in the eighth grade and pre-algebra in seventh grade. These students travelled together in a cluster, meaning that even the arts classes were segregated according to tested ability levels. Gloria describes the impact this had on the demographic makeup and attitude of the students in one of her classes:

When they came to dance class, number one they were overwhelmingly, cause at that time—our population has changed—overwhelmingly white, there were two black kids in the whole class. Overwhelmingly…. And, they were the kids who felt like they were too good for dance.\(^{69}\)

Although these students excelled in traditional academic contexts, they did not have the background skills or dispositions to initially succeed in the kind of dance class that Gloria had taught other groups of students:

They were so much into the analytical part of dance, they didn’t move. They couldn't move…. They couldn’t take a risk because they were so into the, “I'm

\(^{69}\) GB interview, 5/29/2012
THIS. I’m up here” (pointing to head). And why risk making myself look foolish, for something that I can’t do that well? And so it was … a very difficult class, because they wouldn’t take a risk and step out.\textsuperscript{70}

In order to engage this group of learners, Gloria recalls that she turned to dance notation, an analytical approach that would alienate many of her current students but which was highly accessible to this one class:

So it was then that I got … into notation, I got them to move, and that was real mathematical and they loved that. “Oh I love that Mrs. Banks!” So, that’s how I got them to actually, to think that dance was worthy enough for them. So … it was interesting for me to watch them because some of the kids in there [a recent awards ceremony] who get the [awards], like the 4.0 kids, they’re not necessarily the kinetic kids.\textsuperscript{71}

The practice of separating students into clusters based on math scores is no longer in place, and the dance classes during the time of this research were integrated across traditional academic ability levels—the only separation was done voluntarily as only students who chose to “major” in dance were placed in those courses.

Gloria’s sensitivity to students’ needs and preferences drove many of the choices that she made, and her awareness that many of the “kinetic kids” she had do not do well in traditional academic settings motivated her to approach dance in a way that capitalized on their ability and comfort with movement. Although she did not explicitly collaborate

\textsuperscript{70} GB interview, 5/29/2012

\textsuperscript{71} GB interview, 5/29/2012
with social studies teachers in planning her lessons, her concert theme of “Dance and Society,” along with the prior year’s theme “The Story of Us,” which presented dances from different periods in American history, reflected her awareness and attention to the cross-disciplinary potentials of dance education and the value placed on learning across subjects within her school. While her curriculum has shifted from its previous overt emphasis on collaborative planning and teaching across disciplines, Gloria retained the element of connecting purposefully to a range of ideas while also attending to the ever-shifting needs of the students she had each year.

Anna’s curriculum development

While Anna’s focus on integrating what she terms the technical and artistic components of dance made up the core of her curriculum planning and her intention to prepare students for the final project drove much of her day-to-day work each term, Anna also described a highly fluid and variable process of planning her curriculum:

So, curricularly, what starts to develop actually happens during the semester. I have a big giant general idea but if you asked me to write it down, write down everything that I was going to do in every single class from day one to you know, day eighty in the semester, I don’t know, and I can’t tell you what’s going to happen ten classes from now exactly. I can tell you generally what we’re going to do, but not specifically.72

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72 AT interview, 5/11/2012
Anna explained that her curriculum was largely driven by the needs of her students, some of whom have had prior dance experiences and strong technical training at private studios outside of school and others who have no formal dance background at all. Anna took this varied population into account, and she deliberately incorporated opportunities at the beginning of the semester to gather information from them that she would use to plan her lessons:

I usually [during] the first couple of classes … have the students … write down on an index card answers to a couple of questions…. What dance styles if any have you already studied? What strengths will you bring into the dance classroom every time you come? What challenges will you bring into the dance classroom every time you come to dance? And then what do you want me to know about you? And it doesn’t have to be dance related. And so once I get those cards back … I look at those cards, and I look at who I have, and … start to develop my ideas from what they’re saying to me on the card. 73

Anna explained that the information she has gathered on these cards confirmed her understanding that her students had a wide range of background preparation. She was particularly sensitive to the apprehension many students expressed about their lack of prior knowledge:

I have a lot of kids who seem to be writing, “I'm fearful of this.” I actually have kids every year, a good portion of each class of kids, writes down on their card, “I don’t know how to dance.” And it strikes me every year, I’m like, wow, okay, so

73 AT interview, 5/11/2012
they don’t, they can’t make the connection that you’re in dance class to learn how to dance; they think they need to know how to dance to come into dance class and dance.⁷⁴

Responding to the students’ apprehension drove many of Anna’s choices, particularly her emphasis on preparing students to be able to work appropriately as a dance artist within the studio environment.

When Anna described receiving so many comments from students who were fearful about being in a dance class, she explained that she addressed this by working toward building a foundation of trust that she saw as essential to the work she wanted to do with them. Although Anna did not frame the trust-building as an explicit goal the way she did with artistic and technical components of dance, it clearly was situated as an important aspect of her curriculum both in the way that she talked about her teaching and in the environment I observed in her classes. Her attention to students’ needs and subsequent adjustment was not limited to the initial survey; as Anna described her curriculum to me she frequently prefaced her explanations with a statement indicating that how she taught something depended on the students in a particular class:

And depending on—like I said, I feel like a broken record—because I am always looking at who is in the room. Depending on what they can manage, I either give them a lot of directives to put it together, or I let them sort of decide on their own.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ AT interview, 5/11/2012

⁷⁵ AT interview, 5/11/2012
From our conversations I gathered that having a secure teaching and learning environment would be important to Anna regardless of where or whom she teaches; however, within her current context of teaching beginners who are often apprehensive and unfamiliar with the kinds of tasks being asked of them in dance, attending to their needs took on a significant role in determining her curriculum.

As indicated previously, the context of her eighth grade dance course within the overall school performing arts program heavily influenced what she chose to focus on. Because I know Anna to be an artist who often thinks about the multitude of ways that dance is connected to life in general and to ideas outside of the arts, and because her school has such a strong emphasis on academics, I thought that perhaps cross-curricular connections might be a part of her teaching. When I asked her how she saw the dance course fitting in with the middle school curriculum as a whole, however, I found that this was not the case:

I don’t see it fitting in, frankly. It doesn’t fit in … for various reasons. Part of it is because I have to make a choice as a dance teacher as to what I’m going to focus on, what I feel is most important for those students to get by the end of their eighth grade year, to move on to the ninth grade year. If I were to try to do a lot of cross curricular activities, connecting with other, even other performing arts disciplines, I would be losing some of that time to prepare them to go into our high school dance program, which is heavily contemporary [dance] based, a lot of Laban and Bartenieff. And if I spent more time on some other curriculum or some
other discipline, then I’d be losing time for that. And because I see them so infrequently to begin with, I’ve got to make a choice.\(^\text{76}\)

Anna was very clear that this was a deliberate choice based on the constraints she worked within—namely, the limited time she had with her students—as well as the imperative to prepare them for continuing on in the program. When discussing this, I noticed that Anna framed it as a responsibility not driven by testing or credits but rather by the need to ensure that her students had the opportunity to successfully enter the courses that her colleague would teach:

> So eighth grade to me is a true link up into ninth grade. Now whether these kids really retain the material … until ninth grade, who knows, some do some don’t, but I feel that that’s my obligation and my job as the eighth grade dance teacher is to first and foremost make sure that everything that I’ve taught them will lead them somewhere in ninth grade … but by doing that … I lose a connection with the other disciplines in the middle school, and I have to make that choice.\(^\text{77}\)

Despite her choice to not pursue deliberate curricular connections with other subject areas, Anna did acknowledge that some of the broader skills—such as awareness of one’s own learning, cooperation, leadership, and self-advocacy—that she developed in her students did resonate with the culture of teaching and learning promoted across the school, which emphasized lifelong learning:

\(^{76}\) AT interview, 5/11/2012

\(^{77}\) AT interview, 5/11/2012
I think a lot of teachers gravitate towards that [lifelong learning] in their own personal lives. They live this education, of being interested and engaged and involved, at a very high level. And when you have teachers who are like that, you are more likely to have students who are like that, who seek out more information…. I find that year after year, those students already come to me somewhat prepared to learn in that capacity…. If I put a question back to them, they answer that question and then they ask more.\footnote{AT interview, 5/11/2012}

Although she did not frame her own high standards as a direct response to the culture of the school and the faculty’s emphasis on deep and engaged learning, Anna did speak about holding her students to high expectations while simultaneously promoting the joy of working in dance—something that reflects her own pedagogy but is nonetheless at least compatible with the school’s curriculum at large:

I think that I have a reputation for expecting more than what the students can give me, but in the end I think that they—my expectations are right on the money. And, I think that kids come into dance class, either dreading it or thinking this is going to be a lot of fun, but the idea of hard work does not really come into play…. Yes it is going to be hard work, but almost all the time it’s going to be fun.\footnote{AT interview, 5/11/2012}
When I asked Anna specifically about the school’s curricular requirements in dance, she explained that she and her colleague were given the responsibility for determining what needed to be taught and how it should be structured:

I love my autonomy; our administration does support what we deem as necessary for these students to learn in dance. I don’t have a curriculum put on me, but I do have to write the curriculum down that I’m teaching … and that does go on to a database until we make some sort of change. There is a curriculum committee in each division where if we want to, let’s say add a course, we do have to turn in materials that present what we’re going to teach, and why we want to teach it, and why we want to make a change…. I can’t think of any single time that we’ve been turned down.  

Likewise, because Anna, along with her colleague, developed her dance curriculum drawing from her own ideas and professional training as a dance educator, she described her relationship to state and national standards for dance education quite differently from how many other dance teachers might. In Anna’s case, again, addressing the needs and interests of her students took precedence over externally created curriculum guidelines:

I wouldn’t say I ever purposely align [with state or national dance standards]…. I’m totally aware of them, I know what they are. I find that more often than not I am meeting most of them by intuiting and sensing what the student needs throughout the year. It sort of happens. If I open up the national standards today, I would be checking off a lot of them—“and oh yeah, did this did this did this,”

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80 AT interview, 5/11/2012
even in just today's class…. So I find that … for me it's easier to work with who I have in the classroom first and foremost, and then think about standards afterwards. And then, like I said, most of the time I am covering it all by the end of the year.\footnote{AT interview, 5/11/2012}

Anna further explained that she found the ability to create her own curriculum much more “freeing” than it would be if she had been expected to start from an externally created standards document.

Anna described her curriculum and her approach to teaching as being influenced by a variety of sources, techniques, and teachers she has studied with. Many of these do have prescribed structures for teaching and learning, and Anna has been required to demonstrate mastery in their specific systems as part of the process of earning the associated credentials. Just as with our conversation about standards and school requirements, Anna conveyed a sense of independence and freedom when she talked about how she incorporated these varied approaches in her own teaching:

I think this is really has to do with my varied experience in teaching. That I’ve worked with music teachers, I’ve studied Orff Schulwerk, and then [worked with] other teachers that study Kodály.\footnote{An approach to music education based on the work of Zoltán Kodály.} I’ve studied with teachers that are Graham teachers, in dance, and then teachers who are contact improv heavy, and I think, that because I started to really accept my varied past, my crazy background, it was almost like a freedom for me to be like, you know what? This is what I do. I’m
using that material, whatever it is, Laban, Bartenieff, Evans, Gilbert, I’m using that material in a way that I understand, and then I’m going to present it in a way that I think is helpful to students. 

Although Anna’s curriculum shifts year to year, it is largely influenced by her own professional and educational background and her perceptions of students’ needs, and it is enacted within a school culture that both promotes engagement and lifelong learning while also trusting faculty members with the autonomy to make decisions and craft the best possible curriculum for their students.

Content frameworks and the “elements of dance”

Gloria and Anna were both aware of the state and national standards for dance education, though the ways in which they spoke about these documents influencing their curriculum were quite different. As a public school teacher, Gloria was explicitly expected to address the standards in her teaching and to structure her curriculum accordingly. However, because there is currently no mandated assessment in dance and also because her administrators were not familiar with dance as a content area, Gloria had considerable autonomy in creating and implementing her curriculum. Anna, in contrast, was at an independent school where their own course approval process supersedes the need to adhere to any outside curriculum document. Anna’s own professional experience and the trust placed in her by the institution allowed her to develop the curriculum

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83 AT interview, 5/11/2012

293
according to her own judgment; though as discussed in the prior section, Anna was aware of the standards and felt that her teaching prepared students adequately for meeting them.

Associated with many curriculum documents in dance education—including state and national standards documents, program materials for arts education institutions, and textbooks for dance education—are lists or charts that put forth a content framework, an outline of what have come to be known as the “elements of dance.” Although many different such frameworks exist, most use similar categories such as body, space, time, and energy or movement quality to organize lists of concepts that collectively are thought to capture dance as an artistic phenomenon and to aid in communicating about the moving body. As discussed in Chapter One, I was interested in learning about how these frameworks are used in classroom practice and how the elements of dance are conceptualized and communicated in the enacted curriculum of these dance educators.

*The elements of dance in Gloria’s curriculum*

Throughout many of our conversations Gloria alluded to “the elements”; however, her comments suggested that she did not position them as a core aspect of her curriculum but rather incorporated them out of a sense of obligation to both the standards documents and the high school curriculum that some of her students would enter. During many of our conversations the issue of aesthetic criteria for dance often arose, and Gloria was all too aware of the damaging effects that imposing one aesthetic viewpoint on all dances and dancers could engender. Gloria considered the dominant conception of the elements of dance as comprising body, space, time, and energy to represent a worldview
about dance that was not universally applicable. While many American and European teachers would position these categories as culturally neutral labels for analyzing and describing dance in a variety of forms, Gloria understood that the very process of analyzing dance itself represented an orientation and value system and that within that the categories used could never be all-encompassing. I sensed some ambivalence in her words when she described this aspect of her curriculum:

We talked about the quote-unquote [elements of dance]—I was a rebel with the whole dance element thing for many years, because, I felt like it just left [out] that perspective [of some students]…. That was just one perspective, yeah. When you look at dance as space, time, energy, the things describe da-da-dahdah-dah, I thought that was a very, I don’t want to say fragmented, because I think once you do a movement there’s so many … elements involved in just the one movement, but it was definitely one way of looking at dance. But, ah, hence, I still taught it.\(^\text{84}\)

The perspective of space, time, and energy as core elements that should be used to understand and describe dance seemed to permeate many of the curriculum documents that Gloria used, and because she recognized this as one valid perspective for talking about dance, she didn’t reject it outright. However, Gloria did frequently allude to her discomfort with the elements of dance model being unquestioningly assumed as a dominant construct for defining dance. At the same time, such definitions are difficult to tackle:

\(^\text{84}\) GB interview, 4/5/2012
[Another dance teacher] always wanted to start off asking her kids “what is
dance?” and I always think, well, I hate to ask that question because that’s
(pausing), I don’t know, that’s kind of out there, hmm…. You could ask students
what they think dance is but, and it’s interesting to hear their responses, but, ah,
eeehhh, that’s, that’s one of those kind of questions that it’s like, is there really an
answer? (laughs) You know really, seriously, everybody’s gonna tell you
something…. But … actually one of the books that we use, they start off “What
is dance?” and they talk about using space and time, dah-dah-dah-dah, that whole
perspective which is, well … neeeehhh, that’s not what I we, you know.85

In conversations I have had with other dance educators, it often seems that the acceptance
of “the elements of dance” as an adequate and acceptable framework for defining dance
is an unspoken given; after several conversations with Gloria, as illustrated above, the
inadequacy of these structures for capturing and conveying a rich dance experience
became more apparent. However, as seen in this mostly unedited transcript excerpt,
moving away from a clear reliance on one conceptual framework opens up many more
possibilities for defining dance, possibilities that are at times quite difficult to succinctly
and clearly name and converse with.

To better understand where Gloria is coming from, I found that one instance she
shared with me of a pedagogical moment helps to illustrate how such analytical structures
as the elements of dance, when assumed to be primary to dance experience and adequate

85 GB interview, 4/5/2012
for capturing what is important about that experience, can actually alienate students and audiences:

I never would forget, we’re doing all this stuff with shapes and things, and this kid comes up to me and says, “OK, but when are we going to do some real dancing?” And, I never will forget that quote because, it really made me realize that you have to … I think with any—this is a discussion that I had in the class I’m taking now, with contemporary art—is that you know sometimes, people who get into the university settings and they start [discussing] what dance is … they totally leave out the population of people.… And so I never will forget that comment by the boy in the class, he says, “Cause I can really dance. I’m not talking about this stuff you do, cause I can REALLY dance.” And so … that stuck with me a lot.86

When Gloria talked about this experience, it not only helped to clarify her perspective about academic structures as only one way of understanding dance but also demonstrated her inclination to take students’ views seriously. The boy conveyed an excitement for dance and pride in his own accomplishments, dispositions that many teachers would be happy to help their students develop. Although we did not discuss this incident further, I suspect that within the dancing that the boy wished to do were dance shapes that Gloria could have pointed out; however, the student clearly felt that his understanding of what was special about his dances could not adequately be expressed within the language of the shape lesson being presented. It is telling, then, that within Gloria’s enacted

86 GB interview, 4/5/2012
curriculum, such shortcomings of the lesson were not framed as failures by the student but as limitations within the curricular structure.

In describing her overall curriculum, Gloria mentioned that she frequently paired teaching of a dance element with teaching the work of a choreographer. For example, she described teaching Pearl Primus’s *Buschasche Etude* as an exemplar of the movement quality of strong weight. Because my visits occurred during the second half of the school year when her class time was devoted to rehearsals of the concert works and when she was no longer presenting these kinds of lessons, I was not able to see how she presented the dance elements for myself. I could, of course, recognize the dance elements within all of the choreography the students were working on, and I could categorize some of Gloria’s rehearsal comments within them. For instance, when she coached the students in the opening section of *Ball of Confusion* to refine their performance of the forearm chopping gesture, she was referencing the elements of time (timing of each discrete movement) and movement quality (strong weight, suddenness). Likewise, when the students in other classes worked on unison movements, their discussions and descriptions of the actions being executed could be understood as addressing the broad dance element of body. However, from my observations, this does not reflect the way that Gloria positioned her coaching of these movements in class rehearsals. Instead, it appears that she used her fall semester lessons to have the students explore the elements broadly within artistic contexts, and then she used imagery and colloquial language relevant to the context of each dance when discussing movement in rehearsals. All in all, Gloria did teach the dance elements of body, space, time, and energy within her dance courses, but
she did not use these concepts and the commonly associated language as a focal point in her teaching or stress them as a source of meaning-making for her students when preparing their work for the concert.

It is interesting to note, however, that despite her reluctance to embrace the framework of dance elements wholesale, Gloria did frequently stress the importance of dance terminology within her curriculum. Often the terminology that she felt was important, however, related to specific dance forms and fell outside of the elements of dance as they are named in many dance curriculum documents. Gloria indicated that when she introduced a new dance form to her class, she always began by giving the history and terminology associated with that form. Knowing her ambivalence surrounding the codified structures in the elements of dance, I was curious about why Gloria felt it would be important to include dance terminology. Her response reflects how her pedagogy has been shaped by her personal dance education, where she felt that access to this layer of information is helpful for understanding movement ideas:

When I did the ballet unit, we always start with the history of course. And then we talk about how the movement was basically codified, and I always use the English and French, and I just feel strongly that the kids should know this vocabulary.

When I was coming up as a young child … my dance teacher used to have us write, copy the terminology. I do that too … because I just feel like it helps you to

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87 Again, one could analyze many of the sets of terminology that Gloria used, and place them within the ‘elements of dance.’ For example, most ballet terminology that describes specific steps would be categorized under “body;” terms such as en dehors (outward) could be understood as describing spatial directions; and terms such as ballon (lightweight) classified as movement quality. What is important in this discussion is that within her curriculum, Gloria chose not to position them this way.
understand some things better and to understand the movement better…. Like *piqué* means prick, and we talk about what prick is, and, its the *piqué*. So I just feel like its important for them to know historical information, more about the vocabulary, but also to know the English translation to help them process some things too.  

Gloria continued on, explaining how, historically, many African-American dancers did not have access to formal dance training, and therefore knowledge of French ballet terminology and the associated understanding of movements were limited for many teachers and students. In ballet especially, dancers are expected to be able to perform movement combinations after given a verbal directive, and those who do not know the meaning of ballet terms are at a distinct disadvantage regardless of their physical skill. Gloria felt it was important that her students be empowered with contextual information about history and terminology that would allow them to participate fully in dance experiences once they left her program:

> My dance teacher, fortunately for me, was able to give us some vocabulary, but there was another dance teacher there too [at Gloria’s childhood dance school] saying, “Okay we’re going to do our twinkle toes.” That’s what, that’s the *bourée*\(^{89}\). Twinkle toes. And I just thought, “Naah.” … Well, at that time, in her period, you know she was Black, she couldn’t study formally, she just picked up bits and pieces where she could and named some things. And I just feel like it’s

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\(^{88}\) GB interview, 5/24/12

\(^{89}\) Small, rapid steps done en pointe or demi-pointe.
important for [my students] to know the dance vocabulary. They’re going to need that dance vocabulary to go over there [to the high school dance program], you go to the barre, there are certain things you need to know…. I just feel it’s important to know the vocabulary in any discipline. That’s how I am with anything. I don’t like teaching any dance form without knowing anything about the history, and having some vocabulary, to broaden the mind, and you go out and you have some information with you when you leave.\textsuperscript{90}

I found it helpful to understand Gloria’s views on teaching ballet terminology, often regarded as synonymous with academic conventions of dance, in order to contextualize her comments about dance elements. Considering her desire to give students historical information and relevant vocabulary related to any form they studied, I view her ambivalence about the elements of dance not as a rejection of academic structuring of dance knowledge but rather, as discussed previously, as an awareness that the elements of dance represent only one way of conceptualizing and framing understandings about a diverse art form.

In addition to the ballet terminology, Gloria also emphasized vocabulary related to jazz dance, and she shared with me a handout that she provided for her eighth graded classes in their fall unit on jazz. This list included French terms also found in ballet, such as \textit{pirouette} and \textit{jeté}, along with descriptive English terms important for jazz such as isolation, grapevine, pencil turn, and stag leap. She also included for her students photocopies of a jazz book that described and pictured important body positions (that are

\textsuperscript{90} GB interview, 5/24/12
also used in other forms) alongside the names they are known by among jazz dancers, such as jazz arms, jazz fifth position, the arch, and the flat back.

While the ballet and jazz vocabulary would be commonly found in many school dance programs and private studios teaching these forms in the United States, Gloria also emphasized for her students the overarching depiction of “African-derived dance characteristics” that have become incorporated as foundational elements in many American dance forms, including jazz, modern dance, and contemporary ballet\(^1\) and that are most readily apparent in American dancers’ performances of West African movement traditions.\(^2\) Gloria provided her eighth-grade class with a photocopied handout taken from *When the Spirit Moves* (Glass & National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center (U.S.), 1999, pp. 8–9) which listed and explained a range of these dance characteristics: African movement vocabulary, orientation toward the earth, improvisation, circle and line formations, importance of the community, polyrhythms, percussion, pantomime, something in hand, and competitive dance. Brief descriptions explained how some of these elements contrasted with traditional European ballet, while others, like circle and line formations, are shared by both African and European traditional forms. Unlike the dance elements described by many other dance education curriculum documents, which I found I could layer over Gloria’s choreography in my own discussions but did not seem always particularly relevant to Gloria’s teaching aims,

\(^1\) See Brenda Dixon-Gottschild’s (2001) work for a discussion of the influence of Africanist aesthetics on the choreography of George Balanchine, among others.

\(^2\) For example, the work of Chuck Davis’s African American Dance Ensemble in Durham, NC.
this list provided a clear vocabulary for describing what I saw as many of the most important features in both her finished concert choreography and in her creative process with students in the studio. For example, improvisation was used in the working process and even incorporated in some brief solos that students had within the set choreography. Pantomimed gestures and props (“something in hand” on the handout) were integral to the construction of meaning in many of the pieces. Throughout, I noticed that “importance of the community” surfaced in how Gloria generated ideas for the concert and in the groupings that students worked in, often emphasizing unison movement that shifted, when needed, into moments for a solo performer.

Gloria also provided me with a copy of the “Final Study Sheet” that she gave to her eighth grade students as they prepared to take the written final exam for their course. Although this was not intended as a holistic model for a curriculum framework, the inclusion of dance concepts and elements, jazz dance terminology, African-derived dance characteristics, and ballet terminology, along with cultural and historical ideas, such as German Expressionism, the Great Migration of African-Americans, and the Harlem Renaissance, suggest that the overarching content framework being realized in Gloria’s curriculum positions the dance elements as but one among many sets of ideas forming a constellation of knowledge about dance as an art form.

The elements of dance in Anna’s curriculum

A very different approach to the elements of dance as a content framework was evident in Anna’s eighth grade dance class at Westbridge. As discussed previously, Anna
has significant training in LMA, a system for understanding, describing, and developing
many aspects of human movement, including dance. LMA is embraced by many dance
educators and, through the contributions of many generations of dancers and teachers, has
influenced many of the content frameworks and associated formulations of dance
elements being used in dance curriculum documents. Two of Anna’s mentors have also
adapted LMA into their work; her teacher Bill Evans is noted for his development of
Laban-based Modern Dance Technique, while Anne Green Gilbert (2006), a noted
creative dance teacher with whom Anna has also trained, has published and disseminated
her approach to teaching creative dance which involves the investigation of fifteen dance
elements that are adapted from different sources including Laban’s work. As discussed
previously, Anna explained that while the many teachers she has studied with influence
her teaching, she does not incorporate any one system wholesale into her curriculum but
instead chooses and blends ideas from a range of sources. I found it important, then, to
look closely at how Anna implemented the dance elements within her curriculum.

In her classroom, several large posters were mounted on foam core board and
stacked in the corner, available for Anna or her colleague to pull out and arrange against
the mirror when encouraging the students to reference the ideas while working on a
project or discussing concepts in class. One such poster presented a collection of dance
elements and included the following concepts: Space (place, size, level, direction), Time
(speed, rhythm), Force (energy, weight, flow, pathway, focus), Body (parts, shapes,
relationship, balance), Movement (locomotor, nonlocomotor), and Form (recurring
theme, ABA, abstract, narrative, suite, broken form). Another poster included a list of
concepts specifically addressing the Space and Effort components of LMA: *Dimensions* (vertical, horizontal, sagittal), *Planes* (sagittal/wheel, horizontal/table, vertical/door), and *Effort Shape Qualities* (Effort actions with corresponding pathway, direction, and dimensions/planes).

As discussed in the section above describing Anna’s curriculum, while she frequently referenced LMA concepts in her teaching, the concept of *space* served as an entry point for many of her lessons. I observed several lessons where Anna directly referenced the concept of spatial dimensions, even providing her students with a visual handout of the cross of axes to support their learning of this idea. She guided her students to conceptualize movement within single dimensions, within planes, and within three-dimensional space. I find it significant and appropriate, then, that her LMA chart listed the spatial concepts (dimensions and planes) on top, and then moved into the effort qualities. When Anna taught the effort qualities, she did so by relating them to the points in space they have an affinity for. While this is certainly a viable way to introduce this idea that is consistent with LMA theory, I also found it to be an interesting choice because it positioned the understanding of movement quality, or effort, within an overarching understanding of space. I did not get the impression that this was a rigid distinction, for even in Anna’s other elements of dance chart, the ideas related to effort were positioned within the category of *force*, itself a separate category from *space*. Even within one curriculum, then, slightly different conceptions and organizational schemes, as evidenced by the different relations among concepts on the different boards, were acceptable.
In my observations of Anna’s curriculum, then, I found that she did not stress the dance concepts, as listed on her boards, with equal emphasis. *Space* enjoyed a position of importance throughout her curriculum, and *body*—especially the focus on body patterning through the incorporation of exercises from Bartenieff Fundamentals as well as through attention to the location, pathway, and relationships of body parts in space—was also clearly emphasized. *Effort* (the LMA term) or *force* (the more common term used on the other poster) was introduced through the structure of spatial affinities before being used more generally when discussing the improvisations and compositions students were working on. Although I observed Anna help her students understand the appropriate counts for movement combinations she taught, such as when she identified how an exercise would speed up to double-time on a repeat or how the across-the-floor phrase would be done in 3/4 time, I did not observe her focus on *time* as a movement concept specifically to frame a lesson. Similarly, while students did frequently work with partners, such as in a mirroring exercise, I did not notice Anna focus their attention on *relationship* (listed on her chart under the heading of *body* but understood in other frameworks as a separate element) as a core idea in a lesson.

Anna’s curriculum, then, can be understood as one that reflects her own orientation to the elements of dance through an LMA-influenced lens. Although she is certainly well versed in all of the dance elements and LMA components by virtue of her professional training, and even though the frameworks being printed and presented on her wall displays acknowledge a range of elements, close attention to her teaching reveals a nuanced, sequential approach that prioritizes focus on elements of *space, body, and effort*
in her introductory course. In our conversations, Anna frequently mentioned her acute awareness of the limited amount of time she had with her students and her understanding that her curricular choices were as much choices about what to teach as what not to teach. Her teaching of space, body, and effort, was, as I observed, characterized by attention to these elements as integrated in the dancing body, particularly through connections to that body in three-dimensional space. Approaching the teaching of dance elements in this way appeared to be both an organic expression of Anna’s understanding of movement as well as a deliberate choice to effectively and efficiently provide her students with experiences of movement concepts that would be foundational to the Laban-based modern dance approach adopted by the high school program she was preparing them for.

Within the dance program at Westbridge, the dance elements were understood not as discrete attributes or ingredients for dance but as overarching movement concepts. This orientation is advocated by many dance educators, who position it as a preferable alternative to teaching rote memorization and recall of steps as demonstrated by a teacher. As explained by Anne Green Gilbert (2006), one of Anna’s mentors and a prominent advocate of concept-based teaching in dance, “using a conceptual approach in dance class, rather than a rote, steps-only approach, creates a curriculum rich with novelty and meaning” (p. 11).

In addition to her teaching duties at Westbridge, Anna has also been an adjunct professor at two local colleges, teaching occasional courses on dance pedagogy for undergraduate dance majors. In order to help me understand some of Anna’s most foundational beliefs about teaching, I asked her to explain what she thought was most
important to impart to the college students who studied with her. Anna’s answer explains her understanding of dance elements as a tool for promoting conceptual engagement, deep learning, creativity, and clarity within a dance curriculum:

The creative component for dance is really what I want them to get, and it’s the most difficult to convince them about, along with conceptual teaching. I’ve had students say, ‘’but I can't teach hip-hop conceptually.” And my answer is, “yes you can, and you should.” You can focus on body parts during a hip-hop lesson, and talk about body parts…. Any dance concept goes into any dance form, and if you teach conceptually your students will do that with more interest. It doesn’t mean you slow down on technique … but they [college students] hit a brick wall almost. Because what they’re used to is plowing through a technique class and what I put back to them was, why are you doing this? And why are you doing that specific thing now? Because that’s the way that you were taught? Because here I am teaching you now, this is a different way to do this, where you can keep this class going and going and going like you want to, but still teach conceptually. And, you can offer creative components within that class, you don’t have to be barking directives the whole time… the creative component, the conceptual component, it already exists, you don’t have to create it. It’s already within it. Just allow it to happen, rather than one exercise after another exercise, which doesn’t make much sense.93

93 AT interview, 5/11/2012
In addition to clarifying the importance that Anna places on using the elements of dance as a conceptual scheme in dance education curricula, this explanation also serves as an important reminder about the role of dance education in communities across the United States. Although the elements of dance, understood as a framework comprising body, space, time, and energy, represents a dominant model for organizing and labeling the content of dance in curriculum documents for K-12 dance within the arts education field, this does not necessarily represent the teaching practices being used in private dance studios, conservatories, physical education, and spirit programs such as dance and drill teams, many of which continue to emphasize repeated replication of steps given by the teacher.

**Conclusion**

In exploring the way that the elements of dance as a content framework are implemented in both Gloria’s and Anna’s dance curricula, the differences in their programs, already apparent from the portraits and general descriptions of curriculum that began this chapter, are brought into sharp relief. It may be tempting to read these descriptions as pitting two viewpoints against each other, but I find such an approach limiting. Each teacher, informed by her professional dance background and life experiences, is making informed choices about how to implement the framework of dance elements within her curriculum to best serve the needs of her students and function within the larger school culture and curricular expectations of her institution. Before turning to the significance of these choices and the implications this holds for the larger
project of curriculum theorizing in dance education in Chapter Five, it is important to also consider what else? The dance elements as named labels for ways of understanding and communicating about movement do function within both teachers’ curricula as important signifiers related to knowledge in dance. However, they are not the only signifiers in place in dance education settings, and fostering a rich dance experience requires attention to a range of signs outside those explicitly named in curriculum documents. We now turn to a discussion of other signifiers used in Gloria’s and Anna’s enacted curricula.

Other signifiers used in teaching dance

As they enacted their curriculum, both Gloria and Anna used a range of signifiers to support students’ learning. Among those signifiers were the verbal and written terms and accompanying movements related to the dance elements, as discussed above; however, many more signs were actively being used throughout the lessons. While a full accounting of all signs operating in any given educational environment is impossible, I do find it useful to consider some of the specific signs that appear unique to the dance education classrooms that I visited. In selecting signifiers to focus on in this discussion, I chose to concentrate on those that appeared to contribute significantly to the construction of each teacher’s curriculum but which familiarity tells me are not commonly regarded as important aspects of curriculum outside of dance education settings. Those I describe here are ones that I regarded as being likely to promote a semiosic process unique to dance, where the dancer or audience member uses signs to engender other signs that
enable making meaning of the dance experience. In Anna’s case, I focus on possible signs being constructed within one of her daily lessons, while in considering Gloria’s curriculum I attend to signifiers used in the staged choreography presented in her school’s dance concert.

**Signs in the dance class: Anna’s curriculum**

As described previously, Anna was very concerned with helping her beginning students develop the confidence to move their bodies through space efficiently and creatively. She emphasized building a climate of trust, referring to her class as a “lab experience” where students would be free to make mistakes and try out new movements, and she used discussions, handouts, and positive reinforcement to help create this environment. Within the positive interpersonal climate, however, Anna also had to address the needs of students who were expected to learn to move their bodies in new ways. While seeing a demonstration of movements and then replicating them works for some students, making the connection between an external visual model and one’s own body experience is quite difficult for many people. Remembering a sequence of movements and developing a sense of how they relate to one another is also a challenge. In order to help her beginning students access the information and experiences they would need to be able to execute the movements she taught them, Anna used a wide variety of sign types in her class.

Like nearly all dance teachers, Anna frequently used her own physical demonstrations along with verbal cueing to present movement combinations. Sometimes
she would face students so they could see her movements from the front, and she would “mirror” the actions with them. At other times, Anna would turn her back to the students and have them follow along with her. She would give descriptions of movements, explaining them as she moved, often speaking rhythmically to help support the timing of the actions in combination. All of these strategies are very common for dance teachers, and although she used them effectively, these examples alone are hardly unique to Anna’s curriculum.

I did notice, however, that unlike many teachers who use these strategies almost automatically, Anna labeled her teaching actions for her students, letting them know what help they could expect from her as she also guided them with instructions about what they should pay attention to in their dancing. For instance, in one combination the students were to do a number of steps using an undercurve—a shifting of weight from one foot to the other combined with a dropping and rising of the pelvis—in different directions as they simultaneously moved their arms out to the sides and back in. This particular movement exercise had a number of components, and it was one that appeared rather challenging. Initially, many students had difficulty, and when they added the arm movements they appeared rather confused. As they prepared to practice the sequence with music and without a teacher’s physical demonstration, Anna stated to them specifically what she wanted them to focus on: “I am going to ask you to think about the idea of growing and shrinking as you do this.” With that statement, Anna helped to reframe their understanding of the movement from one where arms, legs, and pelvis

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94 AT observation fieldnotes, 3/15/2012
appeared to be doing different things that the dancer had to somehow execute simultaneously, into one integrated action of expanding and contracting, a concept they were already familiar with. Then Anna stepped back away from the students, faced them, and explicitly stated how she would support them: “Now, I watch, you do. I am going to help you with my words.” As the students began the combination, Anna timed her verbal descriptions: “Grow … shrink … grow … shrink … grow….” This entire incident lasted only a few minutes, but it demonstrated how signifiers that are common to many dance classes—verbal descriptions stated in time with movements—were paired with less common signifiers—verbal labeling to prepare for the sign to come. Anna’s preparatory comments, then, served to lay the foundation for the semiosic process she hoped students would enter, encouraging them to attend to her verbal supports without anxiety that her visual model had been removed. In Anna’s curriculum, such a strategy served not only to support the immediate technical goal of the exercise but also to sustain her goal of building trust and preparing students to participate effectively in the studio setting.

As discussed previously, the dance concepts of space and body dominated Anna’s curriculum. While many body movements are clearly visible, learning to visualize space—and the relationship between one’s body and the full three-dimensional space around it—can be rather challenging. In particular, the “back space,” the space behind one’s own body, is an area that many dancers have trouble relating to fully. Moving backwards can sometimes evoke a fear of falling, so that many dancers are hesitant with backward actions. Even experienced dancers often show less clarity and confidence moving into the space behind them than they would when moving forward or sideways.
Anna’s students were no exception. While many teachers might use verbal descriptions, repeated demonstrations, and statements of reassurance to encourage students to move more fully into their back space, I found it interesting that Anna used a student demonstration and a prop as important signs to communicate how the movement she was teaching related to body and space and to promote students’ confidence in their bodies as they moved.

In this combination based on patterns from Bartenieff Fundamentals, dancers were lying on the floor and then moved into a fetal position on one side, curled very tightly. In the next movement they expanded out into what Anna has called a “starfish,” reaching the distal points—fingers, toes, top of head—away from the center of the body, stretching out and supporting on the side of their torsos. The feeling in this movement is one of moving backward and slightly arching the back, opening across the front of the body. When some students did this movement, however, they hesitated and then stuck out their arms and legs; their limbs would appear disconnected from the center of the body, and the overall effect looked more like “pencil” than “starfish.” After they danced the entire combination, Anna asked for a student who would be able to demonstrate learning this movement. She gathered the other students around to watch and had this volunteer move into the curled up position on her side. Anna then brought over a large exercise ball, one of the kinds that are used for sitting on in physical therapy. Anna placed the ball against the girl’s back, and while holding the ball, guided her to begin the “starfish” movement. As the other students watched, Anna emphasized to the dancer that she should lengthen and widen her back from her core, wrapping around the ball.
While many dance teachers use physical touch and student demonstrations as signs for their students, Anna’s placement of the ball functioned as a signifier for many of the ideas that she was trying to convey. As a physical support, it signified to the dancer using it where her body needed to go, and the curved side of the ball physically induced the curved shape that the spine would make. While Anna did not devote the time to repeating this experience with the balls for the entire class, the single demonstration could have served as an important source of imagery for all students, who might begin to imaginatively sense the ball behind them. The ball also stood for the somewhat mysterious back space, visually marking the space behind the dancer. While Anna could have used her own physical touch of the student to accomplish some similar goals (and in other instances she sometimes did touch students after asking their permission), in this case the ball communicated different ideas: that student bodies are autonomous from the teacher, responsible on their own for relating to abstract ideas of space. The ball, as a more neutral, inanimate object, could offer physical support in a different way from how a teacher’s hand might. In regards to Anna’s overall curriculum goals of building both technical proficiency and a trusting environment, the ball itself became many signs, pointing to abstract space, physical boundaries, and individual autonomy.

In a very different example of relating body and space, Anna used a visual drawing that was then transposed into the body itself in a very interesting way. In the undercurve combination described previously in this section, students had to step back and forth in a very clear spatial pattern. Beginning with the right foot, they were to step forward, then shift on to the left foot and bring the right foot back to meet it. They
repeated this action, the next time stepping on a diagonal, then stepping side, then stepping to the back diagonal, and then stepping straight back. The constant changes in direction were quite challenging, especially with the addition of the steps to the diagonals. After Anna demonstrated, she moved to the dry erase board and proceeded to talk through the sequence again, this time moving the marker as if her hand was her right foot, tracing a birds-eye view of the pattern on the board in time with her voice: “forward, together, front diagonal, together, side, together, back diagonal, together, backward, together.” Some students kneeled near the markerboard, eyes focused on Anna’s drawing, while others backed away and moved along with the stepping pattern on the dance floor. Within this activity, the visual sign of the drawing on the board stood for the physical spatial pattern being created on the floor.

Although this in itself was interesting, what I found even more remarkable was how this sign was made into another sign for the arm movements. Imagine that the drawing is repeated on the left side, resulting in an asterisk-like figure with eight lines radiating outward symmetrically. As the feet step in the prescribed pattern, the arms will together draw this figure in space. When the right foot steps forward, the arms reach up overhead, and when the right foot comes back to join the left, the arms bend in, hands near shoulders. When the right foot steps to the forward diagonal, the arms reach forty-five degrees lower, halfway between straight up and out to the sides. When the right foot steps to the right side, the arms reach out sideways, and so on.

95 AT observation fieldnotes, 3/15/2012
When the students were practicing the stepping pattern, they would naturally swing their arms back and forth to support the movement. After they had generally mastered the part for the feet, Anna guided them to add the arms: “You might notice that I am doing something different with my arms. They are mimicking the pattern on the floor.” In this example, the physical movement of one part of the body served as a sign for the movement of another part of the body, and vice versa. Anna’s verbal prompting guided students’ attention to this. As she did so, the semiotic relationships among the arm pattern, the stepping pattern, and the drawing on the markerboard became clarified. Although everyone was expected to do the same movement pattern, students were able to make their own decisions about how to conceptualize the relationships between the body actions and the space. The drawing on the board might be a visual “instruction” for both the leg movement and the arm movement, the arm movement might itself serve as a visual “map” for the leg movement (this is how I came to think of it when I tried to replicate the movement at home), or the images might be completely disregarded in favor of attending to verbal descriptions (front, diagonal, side, diagonal, back). Still another option is to imitate the movement that another does until the feeling of the movement itself becomes a sign indicating what comes next. Even this list does not begin to exhaust all the possible ways that a dancer might create meanings relating to the many signs Anna presented in this activity.

In just these few examples, we begin to see that the signs used in Anna’s beginning dance curriculum are not only different from those used by teachers in more

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96 AT observation fieldnotes, 3/15/2012
traditional classroom settings; we also see that these signs contributed significantly to her overall curriculum. Specific signifiers, such as the exercise ball and the asterisk-like drawing on the board, were brought into relationship with students’ moving body to promote meaning, and these instances of semiosis further contributed meaning to the understanding of the dance elements that Anna emphasized, particularly, body and space. They also contributed to the formation of other signs for ideas important to Anna’s pedagogy, such as confidence, autonomy, and trust. Together, these supported Anna’s curricular goals related to the technical and artistic components of dance.

*Signs used in concert performance: Gloria’s curriculum*

In the dance concert that Gloria’s students presented at City Center Middle School a range of sign types were integrated into the concert to promote meaning-making in regards to the societal issues that framed her students’ process. In a dance concert, the most obvious sign type used is body movement, and throughout this chapter descriptions of the movements that students performed have been given with attention to the kinds of meanings they might bring forth for both performers and viewers. Music selections, some described in the portrait of Gloria that opened this chapter, also functioned as important signs in the performance, and both Gloria’s and Anna’s processes of choosing music will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. The choreographed dances that Gloria and her students created, and which the students spent many hours rehearsing and then finally performing, became an important text within her enacted dance curriculum; here I
focus on costumes and props, signifiers that were physically related to students’ bodies in their performance of the dances.

In the process of creating and rehearsing dances for performance, costuming is often one of the last areas to be considered and realized, and in this respect Gloria’s concert preparation followed a very typical trajectory. A total of fifteen dances were part of the program, including an opening skit designed to remind the audience of proper behavior and some solo and duet pieces performed by students in the eighth grade class. For each of these dances, Gloria had to make choices about what costumes students should wear. Like nearly all dance teachers in public schools, her resources were limited; fortunately, since the program has been in existence for many years there were closets of old items that could be reused, and Gloria had a substantial personal collection of costume pieces she had amassed over her career. Gloria also had students bring items from home, and she assembled costumes from many pieces of everyday clothing. While the costuming may initially appear tangential to the core dance education experience, I found that the costumes, even when simple, had the potential to communicate important ideas to both the student performers and their audience.

One piece performed by the sixth grade dance majors, Techno, was inspired by students’ perceptions of the increasing influence of technology on society. Gloria used Kraftwerk’s Pocket Calculator (Hütter & Schneider, 1981) for this dance, in which relatively simple walking patterns and gestural movements were arranged with groupings, intersecting spatial pathways, and canons to create a visually engaging ensemble piece appropriate for the abilities of beginning students. For many students, this
concert represented their first public dance performance. The costuming Gloria used was simple but effective: Students brought their own black pants, and Gloria attached reflective silver tape down the outside of each leg; the look was reminiscent of athletic style pants with stripes, but much brighter. Boys wore button down white shirts, black ties, and sunglasses; girls wore brightly colored T-shirts. The theme of this dance was not as complex or challenging as some of the others, but the reflective tape and general uniformity of the dancers’ outfits did serve to reinforce for viewers the core ideas of regulation, system, and repetition, along with newness and coolness, that the choreography engaged. For the student performers, the addition of the reflective tape transformed regular school clothes into a “dance costume,” supporting the notion that performing was not a typical experience but rather one that is set apart from everyday activity. While students could have been told repeatedly that a dance concert is a special event, that the stage is not the classroom, and so on, the action of dressing oneself is very different from the action of listening to adults or moving to a new space and time of day for dance. Although severely constrained by resources, Gloria was able, with only a few rolls of (albeit expensive) tape, to convey the idea to these students that the performance itself is a special kind of activity worthy of heightened attention, one in which their physical selves become part of the text. This is, of course, true of nearly every performance and costume, and it is true even of dance experiences that are not deliberately costumed. For beginner performers, however, costuming is a signifier that has tremendous power to communicate what dance as a performing art is about.
Another dance, *Without a Home*, performed by students from the eighth grade class, used costuming, along with props and recorded text, to reinforce the theme of homelessness. As I viewed the dance in class rehearsals, I often wondered if audiences would make the connection to homelessness. While the students did brainstorm words associated with homelessness (closed in, strong, trapped, afraid) and create movements to illustrate these ideas, the dance often incorporated many popular movements, and the advanced students moved with exuberance and a polished unison that, to me, did not resemble the physical challenges associated with disabilities and poor health that many homeless individuals face. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the music (*I Can Do Bad All By Myself* performed by Mary J. Blige (Blige, Harmon, & Smith, 2009)) could be interpreted in relationship to homelessness, but within the pop music genre, absent any other information, it may be more likely to invoke thoughts of romantic relationships and breakups. Gloria and I discussed ways that the piece might be staged in order to reinforce the theme of homelessness in order to provide cues to the audience that this was the intended topic and hopefully to encourage viewers to read the performance through that lens. Gloria found a YouTube video featuring an interview with a woman talking about her experiences with homelessness and used an edited version of the audio mixed into the opening of the song. She borrowed a shopping cart from a local grocery store, and the opening section included a performer pushing this cart up the ramp to the stage, while other dancers entered from the sides and back of the auditorium, miming picking up items from the floor and taking things from audience members.
The costumes used for this dance were built from items the students already had. Except for the scarves, which had been repurposed from another costume and wrapped around heads, upper arms, and legs, the outfits that students wore for this performance looked—to someone unfamiliar with the subtle nuances of middle school fashion choices, at least—like the clothes you might expect to see teenagers wearing while out shopping or riding the bus. One dancer, for example, wore loose black pants, an olive green T-shirt with loose sleeves, and a white sweatshirt tied around her waist. Another wore a plaid short-sleeved shirt over a red T-shirt, all over a much longer striped shirt and black leggings. A few dancers wore jeans, and layered shirts were popular choices. The clothes certainly seemed less fancy, and more like “work” clothes than typical school outfits, but outside of the performance context, they would not demand attention as “dance costumes” or as obviously inappropriate attire for a teenager. Unlike the silver tape added to the pants for the Techno piece, which served to signal the separateness of dance from everyday life, the costumes for Without a Home were, as I viewed it, surprisingly ordinary.

The shopping cart and recorded interview, both positioned at the beginning of the dance, worked alongside the title to establish the theme of homelessness. Read through that lens, the costumes could be interpreted as, if not establishing the theme outright, at least not detracting from it. More importantly, they seemed to reinforce, albeit very subtly and perhaps unintentionally, a more profound lesson about the dance’s subject matter: this could be you. It was not necessary to find “special” outfits to convey homelessness precisely because, in the precarious economic situation that much of the United States is
in, even many middle class families face the reality that homelessness and poverty are a possibility. The fact that teenage students can easily pull items from their own closets to convey the image of homelessness means that it cannot be held separate from the fabric of their, and their audience’s, lives. Like many issues explored in the concert, even those without direct personal experiences of homelessness have often been impacted by it and are aware of its presence in the lives of the community. The costuming choice, while likely born of practical considerations, reinforced the social commentary of the concert, reminding both performers and viewers alike of the immediacy and personal and community relevance of its themes.

While most of the dances on the concert depicted their themes broadly, invoking a series of images that related to a central idea, one dance did include a narrative component. *For the Women*, the opening sequence of which was described at the end of Gloria’s portrait in Chapter Four, was one of the longer pieces in the concert. Two separate musical pieces were used: Mahsa Vahdat’s *Mystery* (Deeyah & Reitov, 2010) and the liturgical *In Paradisum*, performed by members of the City of London Sinfonia (Fauré, 1983). The transition between songs marked a change in the narrative, where the women who have been victimized meet their death and are pulled offstage, and who then return in the second half as angel figures, watching over the audience. While the movement and musical changes certainly establish this turning point in the narrative, the costuming and props used also developed and reinforced ideas in the dance.

The dancers wore identical white dresses that were manufactured as dance costumes consisting of a long-sleeved white leotard attached to a long, full white skirt
made of shiny, stretchy fabric. At the beginning of the dance, they wore an additional black skirt over the dress. Brightly colored scarves, which the dancers treated as props in the opening sequence, were tied around their heads as well. Gloria described the use of the scarves as very meaningful in creating the dance as a whole:

[The women using the scarves was about] more of a kind of caring feeling.... Still, there is still a tenderness, [that] still survived. The idea of tragedy, trauma, whatever, of still caring, and then to adorn myself with this caring part and then, of course they are going to take them off in the last section, to see that. And the head wrapping for women it’s very symbolic.  

As the first song ended, one group of dancers exited the stage, while those on stage moved through a series of slow, reaching movements and rolls on the floor which ended with them lying on their backs, stretched out with their arms reaching overhead toward the dancers offstage. Those offstage returned, dragging the remaining dancers away, one by one. When the last figure had been removed, a solo dancer, now wearing only the shiny white dress, returned, walking solemnly in circles, staring sadly at the audience. When the music changed into In Paradisum, she began turning, her skirt, no longer weighted by the black fabric, now encircled her legs, floating around her. Over the next minute or so the other dancers joined her, now only wearing white as well.

The costumes for this piece, clearly manufactured for dance with attached leotards and elastic fabric, certainly served to support both the visual image of the dance as a

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97 GB interview, 5/29/2012

98 The liturgical song that accompanies a body leaving the church in a Catholic funeral mass.
whole as well as the impact of the narrative shift from life, to death, to afterlife. While astute and patient viewers familiar with Christian symbolism who attended to the movement and musical signs would probably read this narrative shift regardless of what was worn by the performers, the change of costumes certainly did mark this transition clearly and reinforce the narrative for all viewers. The unity of the costumes, along with the symbolism of the colors—black, white, and multiple colors at the beginning, white only at the end—created a powerful visual image, particularly as the students stood closely together and rose upward at the end of the dance. While this group of experienced dancers had a very clear understanding of their choreography and the themes they wished to communicate to the audience, the costumes played an important role in making the piece accessible.

Moreover, the white dresses themselves resembled many traditional dance costumes considered beautiful and feminine, and being able to wear them seemed to subtly reinforce the status granted to the advanced students cast in this dance. While Gloria did not hold outright auditions, she did cast the dances for the eighth grade class based on her observations of students’ dedication and work ethic in class; *For the Women*, which was also performed off-campus at a local dance festival, was reserved for those students who demonstrated the most effort and engagement in class. Along with performing arguably the most technically challenging and longest dance on the program and with being able to leave school for an outside performance, these students, it could be inferred, may have found that wearing a beautiful costume, one created specifically for dance and not assembled from other clothing items, was a reward for their hard work.
In addition to the scarves used in *For the Women*, Gloria incorporated props into many of the dances on the program. In many of these instances, the props seemed to serve a dual purpose: motivation and positive reinforcement for the students, as well as reinforcement of the theme for both dancers and audience. Gloria explained,

Well here’s the downside of props. I don’t like to use them a lot in class because with that, what I find is that they attend to the props and not really movement, which is what I want to see…. The reason I used the mirrors, and the reason why I use a lot of props [in the concert], is to help the kids really get into the whole theme, the idea. That’s why we used the mirrors.99

As described previously, *Look in the Mirror* (set to Michael Jackson’s *Man in the Mirror* (Garrett & Ballard, 1988)) involved students holding small mirrors that they gestured with as they danced, holding the mirror in front of and then away from their faces before finally turning the mirrors outward toward the audience at the end. When I watched the students work in class, it appeared that they enjoyed working with the mirrors, as this brought an element of fun and excitement to their choreography. Gloria’s comments later reinforced my impressions:

Well actually one of the kids actually thought of that…. That’s why, I said cool, that’s fine…. Sometimes things get a little cheesy, but I thought, I’ll let them do that, and they were able to use it. I wish we could have done more with the mirrors in the piece, but we did what we could.

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99 GB interview, 5/29/2012
In another piece, the props were much more integral to the theme. *We Wear the Mask* was performed by the sixth-grade dance minors, a group of students who had only had about three months of dance classes and no prior performance experience at the time of the concert. This piece was about bullying, an issue that is pressing on the minds of middle school teachers and students alike. In class, students read the poem of the same name by Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1895) and used it as the inspiration for their process; in performance, a recording of Gloria reading the poem accompanied a section of the dance. For this dance, Gloria had students paint their own masks for the performance. After the opening section, where one group of students performed a series of still shapes expressing hurt and shame as mocking voices hurled insults at them, dancers retreated to the upstage area to pick up their masks and were joined from offstage by others wearing masks. While the intricate paintings students had made on the masks were not visible from the audience, the core idea of the masks was apparent. In a very literal fashion, the dancers put on the masks, symbolizing a transformation and its associated personal cost. Without the masks, students in the opening section physically recoiled from hurtful comments aimed their way; once protected by the masks, they were able to move more fully in dance movements that involved large arm gestures, stomping, turning, rolling on the ground, and working with partners—but at the cost of showing their faces, their individual identities. Only at the end did the masks come off as students finally looked straight ahead at the audience.

While in pieces like *Look in the Mirror* the props may be considered as interesting, but not necessarily integral, additions to the choreography, in *We Wear the*
Mask the masks served critical functions for both the audience and performers. For the viewer, the masks clearly marked the symbolic transitions in the dance as the adolescents moved from being bullied, to wearing a mask to hide their emotions, to finally removing the mask to show their full selves to the world. The masks clearly and directly reinforced the message of the poem and, like the silver tape lining the pants of the other sixth grade performers, communicated that something special is going on: this dance performance is not an ordinary event. For the families of these non-dance-major students, several of whom may not have seen many contemporary dance performances before, the masks worked to make the message of the piece clear, accessible, and relatable. For the student performers, the masks also served an important function in making the performance experience accessible. Because their faces were hidden, students did not have to worry about facial expressions in this particular performance—their entire focus could be on the full-body actions. While the eye holes in the masks allowed enough visibility to perform, it was not as likely, when wearing a mask, that performers would be distracted by seeing a familiar face in the audience. The physical, tangible mask offered reassurance, possibly enabling these inexperienced performers to more fully communicate about the metaphorical masks that are an all-too-pervasive aspect of middle school life.

The importance of the props for the performers’ benefit was probably most obvious in the piece The Real Me, a dance created to address the young women’s feelings of unrealistic beauty images being promoted in the media. In performance, students used feather boas and sparkly top hats as they performed a catwalk-like sequence, aimed at displaying the false reality of fashion and modeling. Compared to what I saw as the more
authentic use of props in the other dances, this appeared to me to be somewhat gaudy and contrived, though the student performers seemed to relish it. This dance was cast with those from the eighth grade class not involved in For the Women, and Gloria acknowledged that this meant it was composed of many of the students who had difficulty working responsibly in dance class, those who “rode the wave” of their peers’ leadership and decision-making. These students were also not selected to go on the field trip to perform at the dance festival, and Gloria knew that many of them felt disappointed by this, claiming it was unfair that all the “better” dance students had been placed in a separate dance.

After the concert, Gloria explained that her reason for allowing props in this dance was more to motivate the students than to create a clear artistic statement. Cast together without the benefit of any of the stronger leaders they were used to following in previous class projects, this group of students really struggled to come up with any movement phrases and to work together in class.

That was the biggest challenge. So I said, “you know what, you could wear this…. You could do all kind of things.” And so that’s the reason why I added props with this, because I was trying to get them to generate some ideas in their head, try to get them to feel good about the dance.\(^{100}\) Despite my own reservations about the artistic merit of the end product, it appeared that the audience members related well to the piece, including the props, with the result that,

\(^{100}\) GB interview, 5/29/2012
once the students finally succeeded in working together to assemble and perform their choreography, they did finish with a positive outcome. As Gloria explained afterward:

A lot of people in the audience they’re like (mimics voice), “Oh I really liked that dance, did you watch that dance? I really liked it.” And kids that saw it were [saying] “I liked it! I want to do one like that next year!” So, I think that they felt proud about the things they learned and they felt good about the dance.\textsuperscript{101}

Gloria’s use of both costuming and props, then, served a dual purpose: motivating students to become more fully engaged with the choreographic process and the social themes of the dances they were creating, as well as constructing a compelling performance that audience members could easily relate to and enjoy. Costumes and props, then, functioned as important signifiers promoting meaning-making for the students and the broader community attending their performance. Additionally, they supported Gloria’s curricular goals of connecting with important social issues, engaging in a prolonged choreographic process, and moving students outside of their comfort zones and familiar movements while developing and refining performance skills.

Music as a sign in dance class and performance

In both Gloria’s and Anna’s enacted curriculum, music played an important role in supporting students’ learning about dance. Neither school employed an accompanist, so—with the exception of the times that Gloria played drums to accompany the students’ dancing—both teachers relied on an extensive collection of recorded music to support

\textsuperscript{101} GB interview, 5/29/2012
their teaching. Although both teachers used music throughout their teaching, including when presenting warm-ups and technique combinations, when I talked with them about their musical choices, our conversations steered toward the use of music to support compositions and choreography. Their comments about choosing music and their decisions about how to engage students in this process must be considered in light of their overarching goals as well as the constraints and resources they operated with. In Anna’s class, choosing accompaniment as an aspect of the choreographic process was positioned after students had composed most of their dances; each group was then invited to consider the impact of musical selections for their in-class composition project. In Gloria’s class, she made choices about the songs to be used for each class’s concert piece at the beginning that in turn impacted the direction of the choreography and that served, like the costumes and props described previously, to enable both performers and audience members to draw on a range of semiotic resources to make meanings from the dance performances.

Anna’s classroom: Thinking about music as an artistic choice

In Anna’s class, music was positioned as an artistic choice most specifically when students worked on their group compositions at the end of the semester. Because she framed her class as a “lab experience,” her teaching about musical choices appeared in the form of some impromptu lessons when she noticed that students were beginning to play pop music to accompany their in-progress dances and that this music was in turn affecting their choreography. I observed one such lesson during my last visit to
Westbridge as students were finishing their dance compositions during their second-to-last dance class of the semester. After a brief introduction, Anna had given them the entire period to work in groups reviewing, documenting, and finishing their dances. Partway into the class period, some students began playing songs from their laptops, while others brought their phones to the stereo dock and asked to play their music over the studio speakers.

Afterwards, Anna explained that her decision to gather the students together and present a short lesson on choosing music was prompted by the direction she saw one group taking. When they chose a popular song by Katy Perry\textsuperscript{102} to accompany their dance—a song that, while perhaps supporting their desires to appear “cool,” did not necessarily relate to their original ideas or support their intentions—Anna recognized their need to access music options outside of their familiar playlists. Like so many of her curricular decisions, her actions in this class were motivated by her perceptions of both what her students needed as well as what they were capable of at that point in time:

I usually do something like that [a lesson on music choices] if I think that it’s necessary. And after hearing their choice, I decided it was necessary. I don’t plan that out, like I am absolutely during this class time going to do this…. But … because of the music choices they’re making over here in the corner, I thought, ok, this becomes contagious. And this group hears what they’re playing, and they go, oh! Let’s use this. And then the next group, and it already, it already started happening. So, I saw that they had a solid beginning, and it was all in unison, and

\textsuperscript{102}California Gurls (Broadus, Martin, & Gottwald, 2010)
it was all, it was all in a four, it was metered. So, I thought, they feel comfortable with [working] in numbers now, to be able to show in front of each other. So I thought, this is a good time to do this.  

During this working session, Anna gathered the entire class together and explained that there are many different ways of working with music. Some choreographers choose music and then set their choreography to it, such as Mark Morris, in whose work many viewers can see the musical ideas and patterns clearly laid out on stage. Other choreographers work without music at all, while some solidify their choreographic ideas first and then find music to support it. Anna commented that she was hearing some of the choices that students were making, and she wanted them to return to their inspiration as their artistic choices were evolving. She used one group as an example, and explained, “We are going to play different pieces and see what works and what does not.” She guided the students to consider, “Does this make sense—what you are seeing and hearing?”

She first had the group perform their composition in silence and then asked them to repeat their performance, this time while she played Journey’s *Don’t Stop Believin’* (Cain, Perry, & Schon, 1981) over the stereo. Both the performers and the viewers seemed to like this choice; it has a clear beat that fit with what the group had choreographed, and the rock style, although dated, seemed familiar to them. The class appeared ready to adopt this piece as a good fit for the dance, but Anna pushed them further. “What about

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103 AT interview, 5/17/2012

104 AT observation fieldnotes, 5/17/2012
the lyrics? Is there one girl? Does she look lonely? The dance began with a quartet of girls moving in unison, and upon further reflection Anna helped them understand that although they may enjoy dancing to a particular song, it might not be the best fit.

Changing genres completely, Anna next played an environmental piece that lacked a steady beat to accompany the composition. The students did not seem to like this choice at all, as the lack of a musical beat made it hard for them to maintain unison in their movements, and although I personally found the soundscape interesting, it clearly did not resonate for the teenage performers or viewers. Anna next had them try the dance with an instrumental piece taken from the soundtrack to the dance film *Pina* (Wenders, 2011). After this one, a student viewer commented that they were more in sync, but the general consensus was that, although it might be better than the previous two songs, they weren’t eagerly embracing this option either.

Anna’s teaching, then, went beyond the immediate aim of finding the right piece of music and instead was concerned with helping students appreciate that selecting music is a process. “Why is it starting to work?” Anna asked the class. “Why are you liking it? What is appealing to you?” She guided the students to begin thinking about the features of different songs that could support the choreography so that they might start to create their own criteria for an appropriate musical selection. She acknowledged the difficulty of this process and remarked that it might be changing the intention of their

105 AT observation fieldnotes, 5/17/2012

106 The lyrics to this song begin: “Just a small town girl /Livin' in a lonely world /She took the midnight train going anywhere.”

107 AT observation fieldnotes, 5/17/2012
pieces. After this brief demonstration of musical options, Anna left the choice still unresolved: “Three pieces, and we still haven’t found exactly what we are looking for.” Anna reminded the class that finding music to support their movement is a process itself, and she then had them return to working in their groups with ideas to consider as they refined the choices in their choreography.

After the class, I asked Anna if she knew what the group had decided on. Her reply indicated that the students still preferred music that was both popular with their peer group and familiar to all of the performers:

They would like to use the Katy Perry [song California Gurls]. But, I said to them, “I want you to bring in the Katy Perry on Monday, but I want you to bring in a couple of other options as well.”

Throughout the process, Anna maintained that, although she wanted them to consider the impact that musical features would have on their compositions, students would remain the final decision makers about their artistic choices.

And I’ll let them go with that, if it makes sense with their intention, or their inspiration. I’m not going to fight something that [represents] where they’re at. I try to meet them halfway. But I do talk about lyrics and how, if the lyrics are going to start to drive your movement, then you should have just started with a piece of music in the first place. And the point of this exercise is doing something new and different, that we start without music.”

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108 AT interview, 5/17/2012

109 AT interview, 5/17/2012
After the demonstration with the quartet in class, Anna continued to work with other groups of students who requested her help. From across the room I saw her working with a duet whose movement seemed to me to be some of the most interesting choreography in the class, incorporating partnering and contrasting movement qualities into what appeared to be an abstract narrative. I couldn’t tell exactly what Anna was saying to them, though I could see that Anna’s teaching was very directed and responsive to their ideas, engaging them in thinking about their creation and how they wanted to evolve it. As I watched them work, I noticed that when Anna played another song for them from the same *Pina* soundtrack, their movement began to show more strength and directness. As others in the class started to see what this duet was doing, Anna invited those who wanted to watch to observe the process, and a few students gathered around. “Did you see some happy accidents?” Anna asked the observers and pointed out that call and response was happening within the duet that the choreographers might decide to emphasize. Importantly, Anna told both the performers and those watching that she was “giving them a choice whether to work with this or not.” Afterwards, I asked Anna to tell me more about this moment and what her goals had been when working with this duet. Her response not only revealed how she approaches thinking about music as an important signifier in dance composition but also how she approaches working with student choreographers and takes their work seriously:

So, what I was saying to them is they were making some wonderful physical connections, in moments, but they weren’t going anywhere, there was no

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110 AT observation fieldnotes, 5/17/2012
resolution to them. They would start something and I would not … this is exactly what I said to them: “As an audience member, I felt like I was going to see something, and I never saw it, it just went away. So how could you use those connections, those physical connections … how could you actually make those connections go somewhere? What could actually happen from you connecting and maybe Aliah pushes a little bit further, maybe it goes into a backward shoulder roll, what happens because of that connection? Right now you just go away. And it makes me wonder, well what was the potential there, and why are you just going away?”

I then asked Anna if she chose the particular piece of music from *Pina* in order to emphasize this connection.

Yes, because Mara was so lyrical in her movement, and Aliah was so sharp and decisive in her movement, she has a lot of Kathak\(^{112}\) in her movement…. They have been seeming like two different characters to me, telling some sort of narrative. You don’t know what the narrative is, but you just know that there’s a relationship, and sometimes it’s not the nicest relationship. There’s a question about it, there’s intrigue. So, a lot of those *Pina* songs have some sort of narrative to them. Even if they have no lyrics, there’s something about it that helps to spell something out physically, so I use a lot of that music in different classes … just because there’s so many different feelings in that one soundtrack…. I mean how

\(^{111}\) AT interview, 5/17/2012

\(^{112}\) Kathak is a form of Indian classical dance.
peculiar was that? You know, it’s a peculiar sound, it’s a peculiar song, and they … have a peculiar duet.\(^{113}\)

Again, though, even after this discussion and what Anna saw as a very good musical choice to accompany their work, I found it important that she maintained that the choice would be theirs. “So we’ll see if they choose it or not, and then I leave it up to them,” Anna explained.

In the eighth grade dance curriculum, Anna positioned musical choices as an aspect of the choreographic process but deliberately had students wait until their compositions were nearly finished before she allowed them to work with music. Anna guided her students to attend to the impacts that music can have on both the and the audience’s impressions of a work. She encouraged the students to think about the tempo and meter of a piece of music, the presence or absence of a steady beat, the lyrics, and the instrumentation as they discussed the different possibilities that may be used, always returning their attention to the initial inspiration for their movement studies. In other contexts—such as when teaching a creative movement class for younger children or when choreographing a full piece for the high school concert—Anna might work with music in other ways and thus might reflect the range of approaches that contemporary choreographers and teachers can take with music. In the context of this one-semester course, however, she wanted her students to understand their musical choice as an important signifier that should support their previous choreographic ideas. Her discussion with the whole class and her consultations with individual groups about their music

\(^{113}\) AT observation fieldnotes, 5/17/2012
choices supported the artistic aspect of her curriculum as well as her goal of guiding students to work effectively as dance artists in the studio who make important choices about their work.

_Gloria’s dance concert: Music choices that relate to the community_  

In Gloria’s dance concert, the music selections played an important role in communicating to both performers and audience members the theme of the choreography. Throughout my many conversations with Gloria, I came to understand that music was very important to her, both personally and artistically. While even a single viewing of her dance concert would lead many viewers to conclude that the musical choices were an important part of the choreography, learning about Gloria’s background helped me to position her choices for the concert choreography within the overall frame of her enacted curriculum, which specifically emphasized community and social issues.

As she described her background in dance, Gloria frequently mentioned her love of drumming and the inspiration she gained when dancing in classes with live accompaniment. In many West African and Afro-Caribbean dance forms, the rhythms are an integral part of the dance lessons, and teachers always work closely with percussionists, training dancers to listen for musical breaks and other rhythmic changes that communicate important information about the dance. She explained that within some of the forms she had studied, the concept of _engoma_—music and dance together as one entity—was an important characteristic. Within Gloria’s choreography, then, the choices about musical accompaniment are important choreographic decisions.
The notion of music as not only important to the choreographer but also as situated within the context of community values also surfaced in our conversations. Many choreographers know that, especially when using well-known pieces of music, viewers will bring to the dance their prior associations with the song, which may support or detract from the choreographer’s idea. When lyrics are part of the song, audience members may be inclined to read the choreography as an extension or illustration of the lyrics. For this reason, some teachers prefer to have students work with classical, instrumental music. Gloria described how, when she was in graduate school, her professors preferred this approach, which many of the African-American students felt did not engage their own cultural backgrounds:

We had to do a compositional study using music, and, I forgot what piece I chose … but he [a fellow student] used a piece by Donny Hathaway…. The musician, over there, in the [dance] department … degraded that piece, [saying] “Well have you ever thought of using a CLASSICAL piece of music?” And—uh, huh—he was like “Why? Why can’t I use what I want to use? Why do I have to pick something that you want me to use? Why can’t I use something from my culture?” So it was very much like that … was very much a culture shock, and even today, I still feel that way about the university.114

For Gloria, moving with music is important for her holistic engagement with dance, and apart from her use of music in her class, it became apparent in our conversations that she is someone who loves listening to music of all kinds. She is deeply aware, however, of

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114 GB interview, 3/7/2012
the ways that music signifies cultural values, and in one conversation she clarified the term “classical music” when I expressed surprise at how familiar her students were with music from the 1960s through 1980s:

They know. One thing about it, you know people talk about “Classical Music.” You always think about, European people. But everybody has their own classical music. And so that’s a classic. Michael Jackson’s a classic. Talk to ’em, A-B-C, they’ll all sing it. (sings) “A, B, C!” My kids know that! Temptations, they know it! Supremes, they know it. Everybody has their own classics.115

Understood this way, Gloria’s concert, which incorporated music by Michael Jackson and The Temptations, was built around the classical music enjoyed by many of her students and their families.

Within the concert, then, Gloria’s music choices were both an important way to signify the theme of the dance and a useful structure for arranging choreography. Because it was so significant to understanding her curriculum, descriptions of the music used in Gloria’s concert choreography have been woven throughout this chapter and the previous one. One additional example illustrates how musical choices addressed the theme of the dance, provided a clear temporal structure for the movement, and facilitated valuable connections with parents and other audience members. Gloria explained how the dance Missing Dad was created in response to students’ ideas:

I’ll tell you about the father dance. The father dance was because of … that class in their journals, they didn’t write this on the sheet on the chart on the board, they

115 GB interview, 5/24/2012
wrote this in their journals. And when I read the journals, a lot that came out was
“‘I wish my dad was there,’” “‘I wish I had a dad.’” So that’s why we picked that
particular theme for the dance.¹¹⁶

The sixth grade dance majors performed this piece, a more serious dance than Techno,
which also featured the same students. In Missing Dad, the five boys in the class
represented the father-figures, and the girls stood more generally for both the sons and
daughters who were saddened that their fathers were not a part of their family life. In the
opening sequence, each “father” stood on stage, surrounded by a cluster of three
“children” arranged around him. In the next three sections, each of the girls danced in
turn with the father figure before exiting, the transitions coinciding with the structure of
the verses and chorus in the song. The ensemble ending featured the “children”
surrounding the “fathers” who then left the stage completely, depicting the absence of the
fathers from the students’ lives.

Gloria used the song Dance with My Father by the late R&B singer Luther
Vandross (Marx & Vandross, 2003) for this piece. The song itself was written for
Vandross’s own father, who died when he was a child, and the lyrics describe a child’s
longing to be reunited with his father:

If I could get another chance
Another walk
Another dance with him
I’d play a song that would never ever end

¹¹⁶ GB interview, 5/29/2012
How I’d love love love
To dance with my father again

Perhaps more than any other dance on the concert program, *Missing Dad* used a song whose lyrics clearly and emotionally conveyed the ideas students wrote about in their journals that formed the impetus for the choreography.

As I watched this dance unfold in rehearsals, I was surprised at how readily students took on their roles as “fathers” and “children” and how much they seemed to enjoy working on this dance. Perhaps because of their emotional investment in the theme, or maybe because their roles as “fathers” and “children” clearly positioned their male/female partnering as non-romantic, the students did not seem to have many qualms about physically partnering with the opposing gender. The ballroom-style couples dancing that formed the sequence of duets, set to a song that musically evoked a romantic ballad, would have, in any other context, likely been unacceptable to many of the sixth graders. However, the narrative for the piece, clearly established by the class’s chosen theme and reinforced by the song lyrics and assigned character roles, seemed to allow students the freedom to interact with one another in dance in ways they might not have otherwise. Gloria commented:

The gender lines [along which the students divided in the cast] was because the father, the male was supposed to show the father figure, and I didn’t think it would read—I didn’t know how it would read otherwise, if I did not have them as a father-figure. And, surprisingly I had a couple of comments, about [working with opposite gender partners], but surprisingly, they kind of just did it…. Usually
they’re—“well I don't wanna touch his hand” or “I don’t wanna, I don’t wanna” … but they didn’t say too much.¹¹⁷

In addition to creating a safe space for students to express their feelings about their fathers as they learned to dance with a partner in a context that was established as not about heterosexual romance, the song also resonated powerfully with the community. Many in the audience were likely familiar with the story surrounding this song, the last major hit Vandross had before he passed away. As I stood in the back of the auditorium, I noticed that the typically restless audience settled down considerably when this song came on; a sense of reverence seemed to come over the viewers, some of whom silently mouthed the lyrics or swayed along with the music. Gloria mentioned that her own mother said she cried when seeing this piece, and I suspect she was not the only one in the audience to do so. Within Gloria’s dance program, building connections with and support from the larger school community was essential; incorporating signifiers that reflect students’ ideas while also emotionally resonating with viewers was an important strategy within her overall curriculum.

When I asked Gloria how she chose music for the students’ choreography, she explained that she found music with and without lyrics to be viable options. For Gloria, the overriding determinant appeared to be the degree to which she could sense a connection between a piece of music and dance. In relating to her own preferences as a viewer, she prized this connection above any abstract understanding of movement on its own:

¹¹⁷ GB interview, 5/29/2012
I use the lyrics, sometimes I don’t. You know I don’t, I think probably this year, looking back, and I did this last year too, I’m not going to say that you can’t do either… I mean why does it have to be either–or? You know? Well, I’m going to tell you. One of the most compelling pieces that I’ve seen…was called *Love Songs*, and it was choreographed by Alvin Ailey, performed by Dudley Williams, to Donny Hathaway’s piece. And, I’m coming from an aesthetic where, there’s a holistic piece, it’s not about, you know, what the movement’s about, you can’t [separate it].

Gloria spoke about the connection between music and dance in much the same way that she talked about the unity of body, mind, and spirit when dancing:

> I told you I come from a community group that definitely is very African centered. And we did poetry, we did all kinds of things, but it was definitely, probably of all the things I did do, the most uplifting, because it was something that I could take out of. It wasn’t just, “Here’s my spirit and here’s my dancing body and they’re separate.” It was very much together.

Songs, such as *Dance with My Father* or *In Paradisum*, that supported the connection of mind, body, and spirit for dancers, and by extension audience members, held a prime place within Gloria’s curriculum.

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118 GB interview, 5/24/2012

119 GB interview, 5/24/2012
When it came to choosing music for the concert, while she respected that her students came from different worldviews and musical tastes, Gloria maintained control over the musical choices that would be used. She described instances in the past where students chose to bring in music that either did not fit the themes of their choreography or that more seriously, unbeknownst to Gloria, contained inappropriate lyrics; in another instance, students took advantage of her absence at a concert to perform sexually suggestive movements, possibly inspired by a song they were using. After confrontations with parents and administrators, Gloria explained that she retains control over the musical choices, with few exceptions. She described how a student wanted to use The Temptations’ *Ball of Confusion* (Strong & Whitfeld, 1970):

> [In] the seventh grade [class] … Elisa comes and says, “Mrs. Banks, we gotta use this one piece of music.” (sings) “People moving out, people moving in.” Everyday comes in singing. And so I said, “you know what Elisa, we’re going to use that.” I said, “That fits perfectly with the theme.” And she actually picked that piece.\(^{120}\)

*Ball of Confusion*, with its lyrics depicting cultural conflicts and political unrest—although originally describing the social-political context of the United States in the late 1960’s but highly applicable to current events as well—did indeed provide both engaging lyrics and a complex rhythmic structure that supported the class’ choreography.

\(^{120}\) GB interview, 5/24/2012
Within her enacted dance curriculum, the chosen song recordings played an important role in Gloria’s work, establishing the themes for concert dances, demonstrating a clear synthesis between music and dance, as well as promoting accessibility and interest in the dances across the school community. Many of the artists she used, such as Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, The Temptations, and Luther Vandross, were favorites of students and parents alike, and their work represented an aesthetic shared by many people across the community. After reading an initial draft of this research, Gloria offered further clarification regarding the relationship between her music choices and the community of dancers and audience members:

The audience was attracted to the music because we happen to share a cultural unity, based on our reality or how we view the world. I know you know all cultures share culturally specific symbols that outsiders don’t share. These symbols cross into so many aspects of life, including music and dance. The spirit of a movement or music is felt on such an interpersonal level that it is difficult to express. The shared experiences of a people are revealed in their art or approach to art. I don't think of how the audience will respond to the music. They just happen to relate because they are me and I am them. We just share a commonality.\textsuperscript{121}

Gloria positioned her music choices not as a specific strategy to engage the audience or make the dances more relatable but rather as a natural consequence of their shared cultural backgrounds.

\textsuperscript{121} GB email, 6/20/2013
Although the musical selections were certainly ones that Gloria herself enjoyed, she helped students to understand that liking a song, by itself, may not be reason enough to use it for a piece of choreography—it has to also resonate with the other ideas motivating the creation. By choosing the songs at the beginning of the choreographic process, Gloria modeled for students how music can serve as an inspiration for choreography and how musical structures can be used as the foundation for sequencing movement sections within a dance. At the same time, her holistic understanding of the relationship between music and dance meant that, within her concert pieces, the dance and music worked together seamlessly, becoming one new text that she and her students created together. In constructing meanings around both the individual dances themselves and Gloria’s dance curriculum as a whole, I found that music was a critical sign throughout.

Conclusion

This chapter presented detailed descriptions and interpretations of Gloria’s and Anna’s very different middle school dance curricula, positioning them as lived experiences created by the teachers themselves. While an overall description of the sequence of learning and teaching activities conveyed information related to what both teachers referred to as their “curriculum” when asked to talk about it, additional discussion of the development of their individual curricula, the role of the elements of dance as a content framework within the curricula, and the use of different signifiers such as props, costumes, drawings, and music provided ample evidence that the enacted
curricula relies on a far greater range of semiosic processes than what initially comes to mind when teachers think of “curriculum.” In addressing the overall research question, the teachers’ comments and my observations of their classes provide solid evidence that dance teachers use multiple sign types as they draw from their personal experiences and understandings of dance as an art form to create multiple opportunities for their students to make meaning from dance experiences.

Building on the descriptions and interpretations offered in this chapter, Chapter Six contextualizes findings within a larger discussion of dance education as a field, inviting consideration of how close investigation of the teachers’ practices through a semiotic lens might inform the overall project of curriculum theorizing in dance.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

Working from the detailed descriptions of dance teachers’ curriculum practices offered in Chapters Four and Five, I now consider how the analysis of these practices can inform curriculum theorizing in dance education. As described in Chapter Two: Literature Review, curriculum theory is, at its essence, a process of considering and reconsidering the question “What knowledge is of most worth?” (W. Pinar, 2012, p. xv), and this process itself is one of posing questions to and about the curriculum as it is enacted at different levels within the lived experiences of communities, teachers, and students. Returning to the research question that drives this dissertation—how do dance teachers engage in and promote an embodied process of multimodal semiosis through their enactment of dance education curriculum?—I position the final sub-question as one that will continue the conversation of curriculum theory by generating further questions:

How might close investigation of the curriculum enacted by experienced dance educators provoke questions about future work in dance education, including the ways that dance content knowledge is conceptualized in curriculum development
This chapter, therefore, synthesizes the information presented previously and situates it within the larger conversation of dance education curriculum, expanding upon questions presented in Chapter One about the role of language and other semiotic structures within dance education.

To begin, I return to the notion of “goodness” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) that underlies the inquiry process of portraiture, and I consider the question “What is good about the dance curricula enacted by Anna Tyler and Gloria Banks?” While the orientation toward goodness has been threaded throughout the portraits and discussion of their curricula, this chapter offers a pointed delineation of larger ideas that draw on examples of excellence in the conceptualization and implementation of dance curriculum that both teachers offered. I contend that, based on my experiences studying the curricula enacted by these experienced dance educators, a good dance education curriculum is locally responsive; fosters a serious appreciation for the art form and work being done by students; is built on the individual teacher’s experience as a significant source of body, cultural, and academic knowledge; and includes a variety of semiotic resources through which learners and teachers can construct meaning.

While current educational reform initiatives (or educational deform initiatives, as William Pinar (2012) refers to them) might discount the importance of individual teachers’ experiences as important sources for curriculum, the points above have been made, in various forms, as features to be sought in curriculum development in dance (Ashley, 2012; Kipling Brown, 2008; Shapiro, 1998; Stinson, 2005). Though they are not
necessarily new ideas, their importance, as supported by the detailed descriptions of practice within dance education contexts, cannot be emphasized enough. Complicating the conversation, I then turn to a discussion that addresses “What is challenging about the dance curricula enacted by Gloria Banks and Anna Tyler?” While close consideration of their curricula reveal many positive features, overwhelmingly, their teaching was impacted by limitations of space, time, and other resources, resulting in their needing to make difficult choices about what not to teach. Therefore, I frame this discussion of “What is challenging about the curriculum?” in this instance not so much as a list of features that promote rigorous learning and that challenge students. Rather, I frame the discussion as an invitation to consider two important challenges teachers and the broader dance education community face: both the specific challenges encountered by individual teacher-curriculum creators and the larger challenges we face in dance education when we closely consider and reflect upon these teachers’ ideas and practices.

One key idea that emerges from this discussion is a disconnect between content frameworks for dance—which are based on a conceptualization of dance content as organized through categories of body, space, time, and energy as delineated in many formal curriculum documents—and the far more nuanced and complicated ways in which dance content unfolds in the enacted curriculum. A model is presented for considering dance education content through the emerging lexicon (Seigel, 2007) as enacted by teachers understood to be connoisseurs (Eisner, 1998) of dancemaking as a holistic process. Further implications for the development and enactment of dance curriculum are then considered. Again, questions are posed to and about this model, and possible
applications to curriculum design are presented, considering ways that a conceptual model for dance education might be expanded beyond the dance elements. Finally, directions for future research are offered.

What is good about the dance curricula studied?

As described in Chapter Three: Methodology, the search for goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis, 2007) guided my research into the dance curricula being enacted by Anna Tyler and Gloria Banks. Although I am undoubtedly influenced by my own background as a dance educator, student of dance education, and mentor to others learning about dance education, I strived to set aside my own personal rubric for quality dance education and to instead remain open to seeing how dance education unfolded in each context. Indeed, had I approached either classroom with a set of criteria in mind and attempted to seek evidence that these features were or were not present, I would have missed some of both the richness in each curriculum as well as a more nuanced appreciation of the ways that each dance educator negotiated influences upon her curriculum choices. For example, judged against a rubric that placed value on incorporating multiple dance forms or building performance experience, Anna Tyler’s one-semester modern dance course would have been viewed as inadequate. Similarly, if in encountering many of Gloria Banks’s lessons, I had applied expected to encounter verbal discussion of objectives for each class period and clear reference to dance elements as foundational components of each lesson, my analysis and interpretation would have obscured many important features of her teaching. While as a dance educator
I do recognize the value of teaching multiple dance forms, building performance skills, organizing lessons to make daily objectives clear to students, and incorporating ongoing references to core vocabulary throughout teaching, it would not have been appropriate, in this research context, to enter with an expectation that each and every one of these criteria is necessary for a dance curriculum as a whole to embody goodness.

Very early in my research process I also realized that attempting to compare and contrast the curriculum in both settings could very easily lead to short-sighted value judgments. Although as I moved back and forth between schools I often found myself making mental comparisons, I tried to always return my thinking to the central question: what is good about this classroom, with this teacher, at this school? If I found myself noticing that one teacher emphasized something particularly well, I tried not to establish that in my mind as criteria or to ask if the other teacher did the same thing. Instead, I strived to remain open to the uniqueness of each context. At the same time, I fully recognize that the features I attended to are shaped by my own value system that emphasizes creativity, originality, community, and the intrinsic value of dance as an art form. As I further engage in the ongoing process of reflecting on the data and my interpretations of it, I now turn to consideration of goodness in a larger context as I name the features of dance education curriculum that comprise the curriculum practices of both teachers in my study.
Good dance education curriculum is locally responsive.

The dance curricula that Anna and Gloria created in their respective schools were as different as the schools themselves. Either curriculum, excellent in its own right, if removed and inserted into the other’s context, would have been inadequate. Both teachers attended to the needs of their students, the expectations of their institutions, the resources and constraints they operated within, and the cultural context of their schools in order to develop, implement, and reflect upon their curriculum. Both teachers described ways in which their curricula had changed over the years in response to shifts in institutional requirements, student needs and interests, or the demographics of their enrollment. Both teachers also described collaborations with colleagues at their schools, either through formal curriculum projects, such as the project-based learning activities that Gloria had engaged in previously, or through coordination of curriculum across grade levels, such as the planning that Anna engaged in with her colleague who taught the high school dance component.

While both teachers were cognizant of curriculum documents such as state and national standards and other resources to support dance teaching, their individual curricula were developed to address the local context in ways that authors of formal curriculum documents would not be able to account for. Gloria’s public concert, which required a significant investment of her energy and resources as well as a substantial commitment of teaching time, not only addressed learning objectives related to dance technique, composition, and performance but also served an important function of bringing families together at the school. She remarked that the dance concert was one of
the most well-attended events on the school calendar, and the standing-room-only crowd at the performance confirmed her assertion. The performance event also provided an opportunity for other teachers to casually connect with parents and former students and for school staff to distribute parent education materials as well. The music and thematic choices surrounding Gloria’s concert, discussed in detail in Chapter Five, also resonated powerfully with the school community. Anna’s curriculum also responded to the needs and interest of a school community that placed a high value on academic achievement, athletics, and the arts, and she frequently described how she surveyed students at the beginning of each course so that she could adjust her curriculum to their needs. Because she had only one semester for dance, and because many of her students had other performing opportunities through music and drama classes, a public performance would not have been an appropriate curriculum component within her current context. Anna instead recognized and supported the need for building community within the dance class itself, and she created a curriculum that would nurture interest among students who had the choice of many academic, artistic, and athletic pursuits competing for their attention.

It is important to understand that the local responsiveness that these experienced dance teachers wove into their programs was not simply a pedagogical choice to connect their teaching with students in front of them or to make their courses more enticing but rather was, at its core, a curricular choice. Both Anna and Gloria had to consider the question “what knowledge is of most worth?” within their specific local contexts. They did not simply adapt a general approach to dance curriculum by building relationships with students and colleagues so that it would fit in with larger school agendas; instead,
they considered this fundamental curriculum question within their schools and communities as they made choices about what to teach, what resources and activities to include, and how to engage students in dance. When we closely study their curriculum practices, it becomes apparent that a strong dance education curriculum must be built in response to local contexts—not simply adapted to them. This requires teachers who are aware of the importance of their community and school contexts, understanding of the changes that are always taking place in schools and communities, and committed to working with students, colleagues, and parents to craft responsive curricula.

*Good dance education curriculum takes students, teachers, and their work seriously.*

Throughout my time with Anna and Gloria I frequently noticed the ways that their classrooms resembled the rehearsal and performance spaces of professional artists. While their responsiveness to students’ needs and interests means that neither Anna nor Gloria took a professional artist model and imposed it on their classrooms, they did, in unique ways, embody seriousness and a sense of purpose in their work that reflected the ethos of those committed to the art form.

When Gloria discussed the choreography she was working on with her classes, she spoke about her work as an artist. In addition to the curricular goals for student learning that were woven throughout the process of creating choreography for the concert, artistic goals for the choreography were driving her choices as well. Creating dances that would resonate with the audience was a primary motivation, and Gloria frequently alluded to her own experiences being inspired when watching dance. Her
choices for music, titles, and costuming, discussed in Chapter Five, reflected an attention to detail that many choreographers are attuned to. It was clear that her thinking about the concert dances did not start and stop with the bell at each class period but rather was woven into her attention throughout the semester. As an artist, Gloria would not be content to replicate the same works each year, and thus her curriculum in many ways resembled that of a small dance company, where each season new works are created. The real-life context of preparing for and presenting their work to an audience also emphasized the seriousness of purpose for the students. The dance concert was not just another school activity, and preparing for it was not just another exercise in following a teacher’s expectations. By soliciting students’ input about topics for the dances, as well as their ideas for movement throughout, and then creatively incorporating their suggestions, Gloria created a curriculum that took the students, their ideas, and their work seriously as an integral part of a greater whole.

While Anna’s middle school dance curriculum did not include a component of public performance, a sense of seriousness of purpose did pervade her enacted curriculum. Anna’s reserved demeanor often projects a sense of seriousness to students and colleagues, but the seriousness towards dance in her curriculum was far greater than a personality feature. As Anna began her lessons each day, her directness in establishing goals for the students and communicating these goals set a tone of purposefulness that continued throughout her lesson. Although she did want her students to enjoy dancing, and indeed laughter and smiles were often a big part of the activities, she also expected them to work hard. She presented her students with challenging concepts that many
dancers do not encounter until college. Although the compositions that students created for their final project would not be shared with others outside of class, Anna approached the task with her students with an attitude toward artistic problem solving that indicated their task was a serious one. As students finished their compositions and went about selecting music, Anna engaged them in thoughtful consideration of musical choices, pushing them to try different approaches and not be content to simply “like” something but instead to wrestle with more difficult artistic ideas surrounding how and why a particular choice “worked.” When Anna consulted with a pair of students about their choreography, I noticed from across the room her absorption in their work and her focused attention; this reminded me of ways that I had seen artistic directors and choreographers work with professional dancers in the past. Pedagogically I know that Anna would not have wanted to give her students a “correct” answer to solving the problem of what song to choose or how to arrange their choreography, but more importantly, in the act of taking their work seriously, Anna recognized that engaging in an artistic process meant she could not offer a predetermined solution anyway. As artists, both Anna and her students needed to try out and work through many different possibilities.

In conversations with both Anna and Gloria it was apparent that they were both highly reflective teachers who enjoy discussing pedagogical and artistic processes and who both take their work as teachers and artists seriously. Since they both operate in contexts that allow them considerable flexibility in designing and enacting their curriculum, they were able to infuse this sense of purpose throughout their work. The
dances that they and their students created were never “just” classroom activities; each entry into learning, composing, and performing dance was situated as both an artistic and an educational endeavor that demanded to be taken seriously. While both teachers established this in their work for students, it was clear that they also took themselves seriously and approached their work as a source of personal and professional fulfillment. Unfortunately, both curricula sometimes operated in contexts that did not fully encourage or support the seriousness of the endeavors that the teachers and their students were engaged in; Anna’s struggles to advocate for more dance within the overall middle school program, or Gloria’s disappointment that school administrators did not attend the concert, reflect the reality that although they infused a sense of purpose throughout the aspects of the dance curriculum they could control, this did not always extend as far as they wished. Nonetheless, the notion that a good curriculum takes students, teachers, and the work seriously remains an important lesson emerging from this research.

*Good dance education curriculum is built on teachers’ experience as a source of knowledge.*

As is evident from the Narrative Portraits in Chapter Four, the curricula that both Anna and Gloria created were highly influenced by their own experiences. Understanding curriculum as lived experience means that the curriculum that teachers enact will necessarily be highly personal; rather than seeing personal experience as an obstacle to be overcome in the quest for “teacher-proof curriculum” (Macdonald, 2003), this orientation recognizes that teachers’ experiences are a significant source of interconnected body,
cultural, and academic knowledge within the curriculum. Both Anna and Gloria built their curricula around their own embodied understandings of dance and, as discussed above, their own engagement as artists with the ongoing dance texts that they and their students created.

Teachers’ body knowledge is a source of significant knowledge in any curriculum (Smith Franklin, 2003) but is especially prominent in teaching dance, where movement techniques are learned over many years and passed on to students through daily practice. In both Anna and Gloria’s curricula, body knowledge was enacted clearly in the moments when they demonstrated movements for students. However, unlike other dance teaching contexts where students may spend the majority of class standing behind a teacher and copying his or her movements, in these dance education contexts physical demonstration and replication was only one among many strategies used for building knowledge and skill. Both Anna and Gloria frequently used verbal descriptions and questioning strategies, counting and rhythmic speech, and gestures to communicate ideas about movement to their students. They drew on body knowledge extensively as they instructed students not only in the performance of dance movements but also in how they problem solved to give students appropriate feedback and support when needed to adjust or improve their performance.

Both Anna and Gloria also drew on cultural knowledge as they crafted their curricula. As participants in the cultural contexts of their schools and surrounding communities, they used the knowledge from their experiences to inform their curriculum choices as they responded to local customs and values. As participants in varied dance
cultures, they drew on their firsthand knowledge of taking classes, rehearsing, performing, and working with a variety of artists as they constructed a dance community within their classroom. The dance traditions they each studied also influenced their choices as they communicated to students the features of modern dance, ballet, jazz, forms of the African diaspora, and other dance traditions within their cultural contexts. While the knowledge and information that the teachers shared was supplemented with information from books, videos, and other sources, it was their first-hand experience as participants in different dance cultures that provided the foundation for their dance curricula. As such, the curriculum in each school leaned heavily towards both those dance forms and the approaches to making dance that each teacher had the most experience in.

Similarly, both teachers drew on their academic experiences as a source of knowledge in constructing their curriculum. While both teachers had a substantial knowledge base in dance across many forms, the ideas they were most passionate about and had studied in-depth in their own education came forth as significant components of their teaching. Gloria’s master’s thesis research in dance history was woven throughout her curriculum, where she referenced the experiences of African-American dancers, their struggles, and their sometimes unacknowledged contributions to the development of dance in America. Anna’s comprehensive study of LMA greatly informed her teaching of dance as she emphasized observation, the elements of body and space, and movement patterning throughout her teaching. By building on their own personal experiences as a source of body, cultural, and academic knowledge, both Anna and Gloria were able to
create curricula that were rich and detailed as they modeled for their students what full engagement in dance as an art form, an aspect of culture, and an area for academic study can look like.

*A good dance education curriculum engages a variety of semiotic resources.*

The process of knowledge construction in both Anna’s and Gloria’s dance programs involved the use of a range of semiotic resources, understood as types of signifiers connected with the ways that people use them to construct meaning (Jewitt, 2011a, p. 22). As described in Chapter Five, both teachers used a range of sign types, such as movement, verbal and written language, music, props, costumes, and visual models and drawings to promote semiosis—the ongoing process of making meaning through signs—among their students. It is important to understand that within the dance curricula, the meanings being promoted were highly varied and not necessarily made explicit through language. Providing a range of semiotic resources does not simply mean that the teachers found multiple ways of conveying the same information, such as by pairing a written word, the spoken word, and a picture symbol to create semiotic redundancy and to reinforce a concept. Engaging students with a variety of semiotic resources in the process of learning, composing, rehearsing, and performing dances goes beyond simple redundancy of information to invite all members of the dance class community to contribute to the process by which meanings are made and remade. The role of the learner, then, is not a passive consumer of signs but an active contributor to their making and re-making.
To understand this further, let us recall the discussion of semiotic resources offered in Chapter Two: Literature Review. Jewitt (2011) contrasts the concept of semiotic resources with a traditional notion of semiotic systems as “codes or sets of rules for connecting signs and meanings” (p. 23). She explains that as semiotic resources, “signs are a social process of sign-making” and “people express meanings through their selection from the semiotic resources that are available to them in a particular moment: meaning is choice from a system” (p. 23). When Gloria and Anna teach movements from different dance forms and engage their students in improvising and composing dances, they are involving their students in a process of learning that a particular movement should not be understood as having a fixed meaning that can also be expressed in language; they are inviting their students to use movement as a semiotic resource. When they discuss with students the process of making dances based on ideas from social issues, as Gloria did, or the challenges of choosing music that works for an idea still in development, as Anna did, dance educators are not simply teaching beginning dance students to encode and decode with a sign system that is new to them; they are engaging students in the process of accessing semiotic resources and contributing to the creation of the sign system itself.

This understanding of semiotic resources can be applied to an analysis of nearly any setting where dance education occurs, since body movement and spoken language, two very different types of signs, interact in most dance teaching contexts. Returning to our discussion of what is good about the dance curricula encountered in this study, we can understand that both teachers actively promoted the process of accessing a range of
semiotic resources when they deliberately brought multiple kinds of signs into use in the classroom beyond movement and spoken language. Moreover, they incorporated these semiotic resources in ways that allowed students the potential to construct meanings in a variety of possible ways. For instance, when Anna used the exercise ball to guide a student in a hands-on demonstration of the “starfish” movement, the prop as a semiotic resource could have stood as a visual reminder of the physical space in back of the dancer’s body, as a physical shape in space that the dancer could move against to feel the intended curve of her spine, or as a signifier of Anna’s desire to promote autonomy of the student from the teacher while still providing some physical support. In a very different example, Gloria’s musical selections, such as Michael Jackson’s *Man in the Mirror* (Garrett & Ballard, 1988), allowed the potential for a students and audience members to construct a range of meanings. The lyrics, rhythm, and tempo provided support to the dancers both in thematic imagery as well as a clear steady beat through which to synchronize their movements, while the incorporation of a well-known song by an artist who is considered a classic among many community members may have signified relatability and familiarity to those new to dance. Although a thorough accounting of the ways that students and audience members interpreted the signs being made in the dance education settings is beyond the scope of this research, it is apparent that both teachers provided a wealth of semiotic resources in their curriculum. The many different examples of signifiers used by the dance educators, described in detail in Chapter Five, underscore the idea that a good dance education curriculum will support students’ engagement with a
range of semiotic resources and their ability to construct a multiplicity of meanings through dance.

Collectively, this constellation of features of a good dance education curriculum—that it is locally responsive; takes students, teachers, and their work seriously; is built on teachers’ experiences; and engages a range of semiotic resources—is certainly not exhaustive. Rather, it represents key ideas that emerged from my sustained engagement with the dance curricula created by Anna Tyler and Gloria Banks. By attending first to their individual curricula and by searching for goodness as I captured data about their work and rendered it through writing, and then by stepping back to consider larger features of curriculum that were represented across two very different approaches to dance education, I was able to develop these criteria. Rather than theorizing what a K–12 curriculum should accomplish based on disciplinary allegiances, models inherited from higher education, or a recapitulation of personally held values and assumptions about effective teaching, a list such as this, grounded in close consideration of curriculum as it is lived in diverse dance education settings and open to a range of interpretations, may offer a useful counterpoint to dominant conceptions created by those in positions of power but removed from classroom practice. This is list is, of course, incomplete and admittedly idealistic. I now turn to some of the problematic aspects of dance education and consider potential conflicts between the curricula as I observed and interpreted them and larger trends in dance curriculum development.
What is challenging about these dance curricula?

While the features above describing aspects of good dance education curricula highlight many of the positive aspects of Anna’s and Gloria’s teaching, close consideration of their enacted curricula, particularly when held in consideration alongside documents such as the Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts (National Dance Education Organization, 2005a), reveals many challenges that dance educators face when creating both the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 2005). While the curriculum-as-plan is able to operate in an imagined setting where resources are plentiful and conflicts are minimized, the curriculum-as-lived unfolds in a far richer, yet far more complex and challenging, context. In considering the challenging aspects of the dance curricula I studied, several key themes emerge: resources of time and space impose limitations on the enacted curriculum; no dance curriculum can be complete and teachers have to work within an always-incomplete curriculum; and the structures of knowledge that frame any dance curriculum are not, and cannot be, value-neutral. Considering these challenges to curriculum, and the ways they were addressed by the teachers in this study, offers a useful reminder that the curriculum-as-lived is always an act of negotiation.

Resources and limitations

Only a small number of Ohio middle schools offer dance during the school day. Compared to schools with no credentialed dance educator or dance studio space, both Gloria’s and Anna’s schools are comparatively better-resourced for dance education than
the average school, and both are somewhat unique when compared with more typical neighborhood school programs. Gloria’s school was one of only a small number of public schools in the state with a stated arts focus, while Anna’s school, as an independent school, had a number of academic, athletic, and arts programs that are not typically found at public schools. Dance educators and advocates working at other schools where dance is offered only by a part-time, visiting, or volunteer teacher, scheduled in cafeterias or hallways, or relegated to after-school-only programs, may be inclined to see these programs as well-off. Every school environment, however, has limitations, and it is important to consider how the limitations that Gloria and Anna encountered shaped their curricula.

In both schools, time and scheduling impacted the dance curriculum. At Westbridge, Anna’s eighth grade dance class only met for two lessons in each six-day rotation for one semester, and during the spring semester, other school activities frequently resulted in the cancellation of one or more of her classes. Anna frequently expressed frustration at the limited time that she had with students. At City Center, students had the opportunity to study dance over the entire school year, but short class periods and interruptions for field trips and assemblies also intruded into Gloria’s plans. Whereas some dance educators will have a performing ensemble that rehearses after school allowing them to effectively increase instructional time, transportation issues made this impossible for Gloria’s students. On occasion, she had some of the eighth grade students come to class during the last part of their lunch period so that more rehearsal time could be created.
At City Center, space constraints also severely impacted the curriculum. Although the school included a dance studio, it was far smaller than the 50 square feet per student recommended for school dance programs (National Dance Education Organization, 2005b). Particularly in the eighth grade class, students needed to work in small groups as they rehearsed their dances. However, the small space made it practically impossible for students to move fully as they practiced their choreography when each group could only use a small section of the room. Although equipped with several small CD players, the acoustics in the room also prevented students from being able to play, and hear, the music that they were working with. As a result, while Gloria expected and encouraged students to work independently, in reality they had so many obstacles to overcome that it was difficult for them to remain focused, and these projects took much longer than they might have otherwise. This significantly shaped the curriculum that Gloria was able to offer because she could not simultaneously task students with small-group projects and encourage full-body movement.

In addition to the limitations that the space imposed on group choreography processes, I also noticed how much of the choreography that each class created tended to favor axial or in-place movements over locomotor or traveling movements. Many dance technique classes include a component of “across-the-floor” movements, where dancers learn a short traveling combination and then repeat it until they run out of space. Such exercises help dancers learn to move with large motions and develop a sense of the ways that simple movements like walking and running can be different in dance than in everyday movement. I noticed that, in general, much of Gloria’s and her students’
choreography did not include large locomotor movements and that when she did teach an across-the-floor combination, most students only got in two repetitions before coming very close to the wall.

At first consideration, these limitations might seem like small practical obstacles to be overcome with creative planning, removed from the more philosophical considerations of what ideas and skills are most worth teaching in dance. In looking closely at the enacted dance curricula that Gloria and Anna created, however, it is apparent that they did not plan for an abstract curriculum and then fit it into their teaching situations but, instead, that they had to envision their sequence of lesson activities within the very real constraints of space and time from the beginning. Despite this, both teachers frequently acknowledged their wishes for more space and time and the activities they would include if they were able to.

*Negotiating the incomplete curriculum*

Even if the dance educators had been able to access additional time and, in Gloria’s case, space, for their curricula, they would still have operated within some restrictions. No dance curriculum can ever be complete, because no curriculum can ever teach all that could be known about dance. Curricula are always situated and partial, and planning what to teach always involves a negotiation of what not to teach. When impacted by significant limitations, especially of space and time, teachers are faced with the choice to leave out some areas that they might otherwise wish to include. In considering how the enacted curriculum of both Anna’s and Gloria’s dance program
challenges thinking about curriculum, it is important to consider what these experienced educators had to leave out.

Anna’s curriculum, with her stated emphasis of integrating both technical and artistic aspects of dance, was very clearly framed within a paradigm of modern dance and creative movement, and within this frame students were introduced to technical concepts, movement analysis, and strategies for improvising and composing dances in a supportive environment. What was not emphasized in this curriculum was substantial attention to dance forms other than modern dance, in-depth inquiry into dance history (of any form) and the work of contemporary choreographers, connections between dance and other content areas, sustained inquiry in critiquing and writing about dance, and development of performance and production skills in a staged public dance performance. These are areas that might make the dance curriculum appear more complete. Operating within both significant time limitations and expectations to prepare beginner-level students for the high school dance program, Anna made deliberate choices about where to focus attention. As a holistic learner herself, Anna was aware of the many connections that she was unable to probe in-depth within her lessons; at the same time, her conversations with students often mentioned these other areas, giving acknowledgement that the scope of dance was far greater than what they engaged with in their course. For instance, when introducing effort qualities, Anna gave brief historical background information on Rudolph Laban. When discussing music and dance, Anna described the work of choreographer Mark Morris, who is noted for choreography that shows a clear and
detailed relationship with music. Similarly, she often frequently wove in stories about her own varied dance background and experiences with learning to perform.

While the high school program, and Anna’s need to prepare students for it, significantly shaped her goals for her beginner students, knowing the areas addressed within that curriculum also allowed her freedom to let go of topics within her own eighth grade course. For instance, she acknowledged that the high school dance teacher incorporated more dance history and that special workshops and guest artists for the high school program provided those students with experiences in a range of dance forms. Similarly, the music and drama programs, which middle school students also participated in, provided the girls with experiences giving public performances. Therefore, although these areas were not specifically addressed in the middle school dance program, Anna’s students had or will have other opportunities to engage with dance history, multiple dance forms, and performance experiences.

Gloria’s curriculum, comprising three grade levels of dance courses in a middle school program, was allowed significantly more time to develop, and as a result the range of topics she addressed was considerably greater than in Anna’s one-semester course. Her strategy of creating and presenting a public dance concert, described in detail in Chapters Four and Five, allowed many objectives relating to performance, technique, composition, and the relationships of dance and social issues to be addressed simultaneously. However, the several months spent preparing for the concert limited Gloria’s ability to teach other areas during that time.
Most significantly, the area of dance technique, developed through sustained practice whereby students build flexibility, strength, and coordination in movements emphasized by a particular dance form or forms, appeared less of a focus in Gloria’s curriculum. When technique was part of the curriculum, Gloria did emphasize particular forms of dance and taught students key ideas within those forms, for example, the concept of “fall and recovery” that is part of Humphrey/Limon modern dance technique, the torso articulations important to jazz dance, or the positions and basic steps that are part of classical ballet. In giving her students a wide breadth of technical vocabulary and experiences, however, Gloria was unable to build in daily practice that would help students develop physical mastery of any one form. Gloria acknowledged that she often could not go deeply into any one area that students were studying and that her approach of preparing students broadly was to address the national and state dance standards as well as help promote familiarity with ideas students would need if they pursued dance in the affiliated high school program. In addition to the space limitations described above, limited resources also shaped the curriculum. For example, Gloria did not teach any aspects of dance production, because the multi-purpose space that students performed in was not equipped with lighting equipment or curtains. Video equipment was also not available, so Gloria did not teach students to record their work and view it to generate feedback. Likewise, having only one computer in the classroom with limited Internet capability meant that students’ access to information on choreographers they studied was limited.
Considering that, for all of the excellent features they included, the curricula enacted by both Gloria and Anna can be viewed as incomplete (as could any curriculum), we can then understand that negotiating through and within an always-incomplete curriculum is a key feature of teachers’ work as curriculum creators. While both Gloria and Anna were concerned with making the most of the time they had with students, integrating multiple objectives within one dance class and helping students see the interrelationships among technique and composition as they developed artistically, both teachers ultimately made choices that allowed little to no emphasis on some aspects of dance education. Whereas we might use criteria developed outside of their local contexts to critique Gloria’s and Anna’s work—and thus to highlight where they could give additional attention to certain areas—the approach of this study, one foregrounding goodness, allows us to see that curriculum negotiation is a complex process. In both cases here, the teachers operated within limitations of space and time; additionally, their dance curricula were contextualized in overall school programs that offered other opportunities. Teachers’ decisions not to focus on a particular area, such as dance history in Anna’s case or development of strong technique in Gloria’s, must be understood within the trajectory of the programs that their students had access to. These areas are ones that their affiliated high school programs would address, provided that the middle school educators helped students gain a basic level of familiarity and confidence to enable them access to these programs. In this way, looking at a dance curriculum also requires looking at what surrounds it, and teachers’ decisions as curriculum creators—their choices about what to
teach and what not to teach—must be contextualized within the scope of limitations, resources, and goals of their particular programs.

Structures of knowledge

A cursory comparison of topics and skills emphasized in both the enacted curricula and in curriculum documents reveals that, indeed, even comprehensive programs such as Gloria’s and Anna’s will emphasize some areas of dance education over others. A more nuanced consideration, however, reveals even more challenges to the dominant conception of dance education curricula. In the Chapter Five discussion of dance elements as part of the curriculum, we saw that this aspect of dance curriculum unfolded quite differently in these two dance programs. Anna’s curriculum, while clearly engaging a vocabulary drawn from LMA, did not equally emphasize all elements, instead focusing more on body and space as core organizing ideas within both the technical and creative aspects of her lessons. Gloria indicated that her curriculum, while including the overall elements of space, time, and energy, did not treat these as organizing concepts for shaping her overall approach to dance. As described previously, I could, when observing, see each of these elements as aspects of the choreography her students were working on; however, what was important for this study was the language and associated conceptual structures that Gloria used as the creator of her curriculum-as-experience.

In considering the question—What is challenging about the dance curricula created by Gloria Banks and Anna Tyler?—I find that perhaps the most significant challenge is the one they pose to notions assumed by many dance curriculum documents:
that the elements of dance can exist as a neutral or value-free categorization scheme that can be appropriately applied universally across all dance forms and teaching contexts. When we state such a sentiment this way, readers familiar with postmodern approaches to curriculum design in the arts and critical multicultural theory might scoff at the obviousness of such a statement. Given how ubiquitous the elements of dance are in dance education curriculum models (even those that claim the importance of a multicultural approach to dance), however, it is necessary to examine this ideological conflict further before proposing alternative models.

As described previously, the elements of dance are commonly conceived of as body, space, time, and energy (or effort or dynamics), with additional categories such as relationships and choreographic forms sometimes added. Numerous dance education curriculum documents, including state and national standards, textbooks, and program documents from arts education programs, use some conception of these dance elements as an organizing scheme for dance content. Most are based on the work of Rudolph Laban, Margaret H’Doubler, or a combination of their approaches (Stinson, 2005) as successive generations of colleagues and scholars have adapted and developed these frameworks. Although they can have some differences, as explained in Chapter One, in their core organization around abstract elements of space, time, and energy, they are remarkably similar.

In my own work as a dance student and teacher, I have encountered many of these different conceptions of dance elements and used them in a variety of teaching contexts, and I agree that they can be quite useful for teaching. Before furthering the critique, I
would like to point out, from my own experience, two reasons why the dance elements have become popular as organizing ideas within dance education. One is that the dance elements, as well as the sub-categorizations they use, can provide a very useful way of describing movements used in modern dance. Although forms such as ballet or tap have a clear vocabulary of steps that are named, taught, passed down, and arranged in generally recognizable forms in choreography, the legacy of modern dance is one where individual invention is highly valued. Choreographers have been praised for the movement vocabulary they create, and dancers have trained with specific choreographers or their progeny in order to learn the techniques and movement vocabularies associated with accomplished dance pioneers. When contemporary choreographers, dancers, and teachers increasingly study with a range of teachers and continually invent their own movements, and as the lineage of named dance techniques becomes de-emphasized in postmodern contemporary dance, it becomes difficult to rely on any one language for naming and describing the movements that one learns. The elements of dance, especially when elaborated into specific concepts for describing and analyzing aspects of movement, can be very useful in teaching and rehearsal situations for talking about movement, highlighting details that are important and establishing a way for teachers, choreographers, and dancers to talk about what they are doing when recognizable, named steps are not clearly visible. The elements of dance become a malleable vocabulary that can be adapted and used in many ways by those working to invent and explore new dance movements within the overall genre of modern or postmodern concert dance.
While many dance educators come from diverse backgrounds and have studied a range of dance styles, college dance programs in the United States are often based in modern dance, and as a result it is a form that many dance educators are most familiar with. In some instances, the elements of dance could be understood as the open-ended vocabulary of modern dance. Furthermore, as dance programs sought to become established within academia, many incorporated coursework in LMA to provide a theoretical foundation for studies in dance, with the result that graduates of many college dance programs have had basic coursework in LMA and related approaches and their potential applications to cross-cultural dance research (Vissicaro, 2004) and dance literacy (S. G. G. G. Gingrasso et al., 2010). Due to both its familiarity and adaptability, many dance educators have readily embraced the framework of the elements of dance.

A second reason that the elements of dance as a content framework may be popular in US dance education contexts is because it can be readily integrated into a concept-based approach to teaching dance. Such a curriculum emphasizes study of a concept, which is “a mental construct, that frames a set of examples sharing common attributes. One- or two-word concepts are timeless, universal, abstract, and broad” (Erickson, 2002, p. 164). Within dance education, authors such as Anne Green Gilbert (2006) point out how conceptual teaching contrasts with a model of rote memorization of steps copied from a teacher or practice drill of isolated movement skills. Teaching dance conceptually has many benefits: it promotes engagement with larger ideas about dance, allows learners to connect their technique learning with improvisation and composition, encourages scaffolded learning as teachers can return to the same concept again and
again incorporating new information, allows learners to assimilate ideas and make comparisons across dance forms and experiences, and promotes inclusive teaching since individual learners can engage with the same concept from different skill levels. As broad ideas, the elements of dance lend themselves to identification as core concepts that can be explored throughout a lesson or series of lessons. For educators who strive to teach dance with an emphasis on broad concepts rather than specific steps or skills, the dance elements provide a set of concepts appropriate to dance.

With this understanding of the rationale for using the framework of dance elements as an organizing idea in dance education curriculum, we now return to the critique brought about by this study. My interviews with Gloria, in particular, and observation of her lessons made it clear that despite the usefulness of the elements of dance in many contexts, they are not as universal as some would claim.\(^\text{122}\) As described in Chapter Five, Gloria readily acknowledged that the dance elements represent one worldview, one way of thinking about and organizing dance knowledge. This sentiment is shared by prominent dance educator Susan Stinson (2005) who reflects that she “once thought [of the elements of movement] as the entire content for the curriculum, and now see as only one lens for understanding dancing, dance making, and watching dance” (p. 225). Stinson adds *kinesthetic and aesthetic dimensions* and *cultural/historical context* along with dance elements to her holistic curriculum model and then goes on to remind

\(^{122}\) Despite many educators’ postmodern sensitivity to notions of universality, this idea remains strong. While writing this chapter, I received an email notifying me of a professional development course being offered by the National Dance Education Organization on the Elements of Movement: “This Mini Course explores the universal language used to describe movement, and dance in particular. This language, or elements of movement, is applicable to all dance styles, genres and techniques” (National Dance Education Organization, 2013, emphasis added).
readers that “considering the elements of movement as part of the curriculum of dance is neither a universal idea nor my particular invention, but rather a cultural construct” (p. 227).

Understanding that the way that knowledge is constructed, organized, labeled, and validated is itself an important component of curriculum, one that is often minimized or masked in dominant curriculum discourses. Multicultural educator and theorist James A. Banks (2006), whose work was addressed in Chapter Two, identifies knowledge construction as one dimension of multicultural education. Banks explains, “The assumption within the Western empirical paradigm is that the knowledge produced within it is neutral and objective and that its principles are universal” (p. 148). He explains that, within multicultural education,

The knowledge construction process encompasses the procedures by which social, behavioral, and natural scientists \(^1\) create knowledge in their disciplines. A multicultural focus on knowledge construction includes discussions of the ways in which the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the construction of knowledge. (p. 133)

Within the domain of knowledge construction, Banks identifies five types of knowledge: personal/cultural, popular, mainstream academic, transformative academic, and school knowledge (p. 150). When discussing mainstream academic knowledge, Banks explains “there are dominant canons, paradigms, theories that are accepted by the community of

\(^1\) Although Banks does not name artists among the scholars engaged in the process of constructing and legitimating knowledge, I feel it is fair to say that similar processes are at work in both the creative and scholarly practices of dance artists and educators.
mainstream academic scholars and researchers” but goes on to clarify that “mainstream academic knowledge … is not static, but is dynamic, complex, and changing” (p. 154, emphasis in original). Transformative academic knowledge, in contrast, is based on an assumption “that knowledge is not neutral but is influenced by human interests, that all knowledge reflects the power and social relationships in society, and that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society” (p. 155). Given that an aim of many dance educators is to help students improve their lives and society, it is important that we attend to the processes of knowledge construction in our discipline and understand the ways that both mainstream academic and transformative academic knowledge are incorporated into dance curriculum.

New Zealand dance educator and researcher Linda Ashley (2012) further explores this idea of situating the discipline of dance education broadly, and the professional field of dance education in Western countries specifically, within its cultural context. In Dancing with Difference: Culturally Diverse Dances in Education, Ashley describes her research regarding how teachers implemented the “Understanding Dance in Context” strand of the Arts in New Zealand Curriculum, “which focuses on theoretical and practical considerations into the roles that dance plays in, and the significances that it carries, for societies” (p. 7). Within her writing, Ashley points out how creative dance, often taught through an exploration of Laban-based dance elements and emphasizing creativity and innovation, is itself a dance form with a specific cultural context rooted in progressive, child-centered education along with European and American twentieth-century modern dance. Dance education, as a professional field and aspect of arts and
physical education within an overall school curriculum, is as well a cultural context with attendant values, norms, and customs, many overlapping considerably with creative dance. When educators sought to include a range of dance forms, conflicts arose between the norms and values of dance education itself, as well as the presumed neutrality of creative dance, on the one hand and the various forms being taught (many of them traditional dances of indigenous cultural groups in New Zealand) on the other. Ashley advises dance educators, when constructing dance curriculum, to be aware of the cultural context of all dance forms being taught as well as of dance education itself—in other words, to make the process by which dance knowledge is constructed, along with the underlying cultural values and relationships that inform analysis of dance, visible.

Brazilian dance educator Isabel Marques (1998) discusses a similar conflict between the LMA theory she studied as a graduate student and her own dance and pedagogical practices:

I had some difficulties in applying Laban’s theories to my work with young Brazilian dancers. I recalled that Laban, a white European man born at the end of the 19th century, imprinted into his movement analysis his own views of the body, movement, and dance that were inseparable from his personal, cultural, historical, and social condition. Understanding his work as a claim for universal movement, as Laban himself pledged at that time, meant to me resisting and opposing in many ways diversity, multiplicity, and a polyphonic educational process in which I believed. Above all, I concluded that Laban’s belief for universal movement
patterns did not meet or complete the needs of the multicultural Brazilian contemporary society. (p. 176)

Neither Marques (1998) nor Ashley (2012) outright reject LMA or Laban-based dance elements, and both cite their potential uses within dance education. Both scholars describe the considerable work to be done, conceptually and practically, to use these frameworks in multicultural settings. They describe ways in which the analytical language of the dance elements may be used to foster discussion about dancemaking from a range of perspectives, and they clarify the importance of including other languages and ideas about dance in these discussions. However, I suggest that perhaps they have not gone far enough in considering the limitations of this model. When Marques (1998) states “I see Laban’s work today not as the foundation for dance education but as a starting point for open-ended possibilities to explore and create dance in different contexts” (p. 177), I wonder if moving from “foundation” to “starting point” is enough. Perhaps we need other starting points as well.

Admitting the dance elements as a cultural construct is a useful first step in recognizing the potential limitations of this model. While acknowledging its usefulness in promoting a conceptual orientation toward dance education and its potential to help educators craft inclusive lessons, we must also be aware of the ways that one hegemonic model can limit theoretical and practical curriculum experiences and can exclude views and values we purport to include. From the descriptions offered in Chapters Four and Five it should be obvious that I found Gloria’s curriculum to be a rich and meaningful one that provided her students with opportunities to experience a range of ideas in dance.

383
and, perhaps most importantly, to connect their composition and performance experiences to social issues relevant to their lives. I was able to interpret her curriculum in this way in large part because I strived to set aside my previous conceptions of the necessary aspects of “good” dance teaching, which included an assumption that the elements of dance, in some form, should be explored or referenced in most, if not all, lessons. While I, as an observer familiar with the elements of dance, could use that vocabulary to describe the movements that students were rehearsing and performing and the ways that I saw these elements contributing to the meanings I gleaned in their choreography, if I had looked to Gloria to make those ideas prominent features of her curriculum, I would have found it lacking. Despite the plethora of dance posters and books lining her room, including those that described jazz dance and historical dance figures, I never saw an “elements of dance” chart displayed\(^{124}\). When Gloria gave feedback to her students, she often emphasized practical corrections with images that they could relate to immediately, but she did not turn their attention to dance elements such as effort/dynamics by naming these elements.

While Anna’s curriculum revolved heavily around creative and technical explorations of the concepts of space, body, and effort, supported with spoken and written vocabulary that labeled and emphasized these ideas, Gloria’s curriculum operated within a very different framework. Especially during the part of the school year concerned with creating and rehearsing dances for the concert, ideas about dance as

\(^{124}\) Gloria later clarified that she does have such a chart, which is usually displayed during her fall semester lessons. It may have been removed during the time I visited to make room for the many student-created posters that lined her walls.
social commentary became the central focus, with movement, music, props, and costumes coming together to create meaning. As these ideas developed they were in turn supported by classroom conversations surrounding imagery and practical performance considerations. Although I understood Anna’s curriculum as one that adapted a comprehensive framework of dance elements in order to focus specifically on elements that she selected and organized as foundational, I began to see Gloria’s curriculum as one that relied on a very different framework. Here, names and ideas from dance history, concepts and principles from multiple dance forms, and signifiers related to popular culture and students’ explorations of social issues came together in a complex, but sometimes difficult to name, framework as students choreographed, performed, and reflected on dances. Again, as a researcher I could impose the categories within the elements of dance onto Gloria’s curriculum and choose to see it strictly through that lens, concluding that while the labels of dance elements were not foregrounded in her teaching the elements themselves were still part of the dances; were I a curriculum consultant bent on seeing this way of thinking implemented I could advise her as to how to creatively make this particular vocabulary more prominent in her curriculum. Given the goals of my study, however, and my relationship with Gloria, either strategy would be shortsighted and inappropriate. Instead, I realize that a different way of thinking about the content framework of dance, one that more fully engages with the curriculum-as-lived of experienced dance educators, is called for.
Towards new thinking about knowledge construction in dance

*The emerging lexicon and teachers as connoisseurs*

Interestingly, I found the work of dance critic Marcia Siegel (2007)\(^{125}\) to provide a different way of thinking about the content of dance as it unfolds in a framework within the dance-curriculum-as-lived. Siegel explains her process of creating a “performance lexicon” for the dances she writes about, where she generates a list of features salient to a dance as she progresses through multiple viewings.\(^{126}\) The categories and terms used in her writing are not decided upon beforehand but “emerge” from her interactions with the work. She emphasizes focusing on movement and other elements within the dance performance before making attempts to address larger meanings related to narrative or cultural significance. Siegel certainly relies on her observational skills developed partly through LMA training, but she rejects LMA as a complete categorization scheme that can be adopted wholesale into the discussion of complex choreographies from diverse cultural positions. Siegel points out how the focus on movement at the level of the individual experience, for instance, makes it incomplete as an approach for describing group behaviors and ensemble choreographies, and she highlights other ways that LMA reflects Western aesthetic values that make it incomplete as an approach for thinking and

\(^{125}\) Siegel prefaces the document with this note: “The following essay was written in the early 1990s. Parts of it have appeared in different form in other publications, but the essay appears here in its entirety” (p. 1).

\(^{126}\) Although Siegel herself suggests that her work cannot be categorized as semiotics, stating outright “lexicon is not a semiotic device” (p. 16), I read her work as highly compatible with the approach to semiotics described in this research. Her rejection seems to be of a linguistic model of one-to-one correspondence, where movements have predetermined meanings, and not of a process of viewing and considering a range of signifiers related to the possible ways that a viewer might interact with them to create meaning.
writing about a broad range of performance experiences. In her work educating dance writers, then, Siegel stresses the need to work from the dance itself, and while she poses many questions that may be asked about dances, she does not propose a master list of movement attributes that can substitute for careful, repeated viewing, noticing, and thinking about the dances under consideration.

While teachers are not critics and thus Siegel’s model is not a direct fit, we can find similarities. Both teachers and critics develop considerable expertise about dance as an art form and cultural phenomenon, and both have the task of helping others to
understand, appreciate, and develop interest in it. Neither critics nor teachers are neutral conduits of information; both actively contribute to the construction of meaning through their work. While a critic’s work may proceed somewhat linearly, for the dance teacher a back-and-forth process of discussing and dancing means that she may never assert a finished statement about a work and instead operates in an ongoing, open dialogue about a range of dance experiences. Therefore, we need a more nuanced and flexible concept beyond simply adopting a “teacher-as-critic” understanding regarding the lexicon of a dance class.

To better think about what it is that teachers do, I first want to consider what it is that they are concerned with. While critics write primarily about finished works, teachers work in a process-oriented environment where they must guide students to make meanings from multiple aspects of dance. Here I propose to use the term dancemaking, not as a synonym for the act of choreography or composition, but as a much larger construct encompassing all the ways that dances come into being as meaningful entities, including dancing, performing, improvising, staging, viewing, writing, notating, teaching, learning, and so on.\textsuperscript{127} Dancemaking as a term attempts to dissolve the boundaries between different processes that have become separate in the academic and professional realms of dance, and it instead positions any of these acts as processes that allow individuals to engage in a semiosic process with some aspect of dance.

\textsuperscript{127} Although I cannot locate a published citation for the term showing this usage, I was first introduced to this idea by Dr. Penelope Hanstein at Texas Woman’s University, who emphasized integration across the many kinds of work in dance being done by students in the department.
Being so deeply concerned with dancemaking, teachers—dancemakers themselves—become connoisseurs as they develop expertise and the abilities to perceive and attend to the qualities present in all processes of dancemaking. Connoisseurship is a term used by Eliot Eisner (1998), which he defines as “the means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest” (p. 68). Teachers attend to a myriad of qualities related to the

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128 I use the term with acknowledgement that it is imperfect; the elitist connotations of “connoisseur,” as made clear by Smith-Shank and Koos (1999), are indeed problematic, especially when the result is a distancing of the educational critic or researcher from the classroom teacher and associated de-valuing of the expertise of educators. Positioning the teacher as connoisseur, while not entirely able to overcome the elitist connotations of the word, moves toward establishing the expertise of individual teachers and the importance that dance curriculum be built on their body, cultural, and academic knowledge.
multiple facets of dancemaking; through their practice they come to know a range of qualities and building on these, make judgments about their value. As I understand it, two key ideas differentiate the connoisseur from the critic and suggest that connoisseur is a more appropriate label for teachers as creators of the experienced curriculum. First, while critics such as Siegel (2007) may describe a more-or-less linear process of viewing dances, constructing a lexicon, and using that lexicon to develop a written discussion of a dance’s significance, teachers, dealing with the potential whole of dancemaking, operate within a non-linear process, spiraling through many ideas and encounters with dancemaking processes. Second, as Eisner (1998) explains, while acts of connoisseurship are essentially private, criticism takes this into the public sphere in the form of writing, speaking, or other means by which one asserts her findings. While it could be argued that teaching is very much a public act, the unfolding of the experienced curriculum, with little chance of editing but with many opportunities to revisit ideas anew, occurs much in the way that private acts of connoisseurship do. (In contrast, the creation of formal, documented curricula might be analogous to more public acts of dance criticism.) As connoisseurs of dancemaking, teachers do, of course, need signifiers for the qualities they discern in the multiple processes they interact with. Here is where we return to the idea of the emerging lexicon.
As teachers notice and guide their students to attend to different aspects of dancemaking, these labels become important for categorizing and organizing information. The emerging lexicon—first seen as a linear process originating with a viewing of a dance event and culminating in a written interpretation of that event—now becomes a spiral of ideas that appear continuously in the process of teaching and learning dance. This lexicon emerges continually when teachers respond to students, plan and present lessons, and verbalize their processes, and it is intimately connected to the dances.

Figure 3: A framework alternative
being created and studied. In looking at the curricula of both Gloria and Anna, I find the idea of the emerging lexicon to be a more valid conception of the organization of dance knowledge than predetermined content map. By building on the educators’ background and interests, an emergent lexicon that is situated within the ongoing process of dancemaking and is attendant to the school and community context can include not only specific verbal and written vocabulary but also movements, props, music, and so on as signifiers that have the potential to create a richly layered understanding of what dance is. While “lexicon” conventionally denotes a set of terms in spoken and written language, the curriculum-as-lived suggests that, when dealing with the whole of dancemaking, it must be expanded to embrace a full range of signifiers thus permitting engagement with multiple semiotic resources.

*The semiosphere of the dance class*

In order to be useful for our thinking about dance education curriculum, we need to attend also to the conditions that make it possible for a unique lexicon to emerge within dance educators’ lived curricula. Earlier I argued that a good dance curriculum draws from teachers’ body, cultural, and academic knowledge. This knowledge, however, does not exist and become shared with students in a vacuum; we need to consider the environment of teaching and learning which makes the lived curriculum possible. Here we return to Yuri Lotman’s (2005) conception of the semiosphere, first introduced in Chapter Two. The concept of the semiosphere encompasses the holistic and dynamic space and time where semiosis takes place, and is, as pointed out by Merrell (2001), full
of irregularities where individuals are able to build new meanings. One important feature of Lotman’s (2005) semiosphere is that it both constrains the meanings that are possible given the signs that are already in use, while also providing the conditions that make the creation of new signs and meanings possible. Those sharing a semiosphere are both constrained and enabled by it.

If we understand the dance education classroom as a semiosphere (one that exists within many larger semiospheres), we can begin to think about how it both constrains and makes possible the semiosic processes of dancemaking. The signs that teachers bring into their teaching—including the concepts they choose and the signifiers by which they make these concepts known—become part of the semiosphere that enables semiosis to take place. We can also understand that the boundaries of the semiosphere are continually crossed by both teachers and students—and that the semiosphere itself is always changing. To provide a semiotically rich environment, we expect teachers to introduce new signs into the semiosphere of the classroom and to help students understand how those signs relate to other signs—in other words, bring them into the process of semiosis. When those signs include labels and concepts, we understand that they help facilitate semiosis but also may constrain it. Just as every curriculum decision can be seen as one of both including and excluding aspects of learning, so too do the acts of boundary-crossing impact what is possible within a semiosphere.
If we return to Siegel’s (2007) notion of the emerging lexicon, we understand that within her semiosphere,\textsuperscript{129} she aims toward the use of new sets of linguistic signs (of course taken from the larger semiosphere she shares with other English speakers) and rejects any straightforward application of a system, such as LMA to her analysis and interpretation of dances. Yet, Siegel does have significant training in LMA; one key feature of this training is its emphasis on developing observational skills. Her ability to develop unique lexicons for each performance she critiques was likely heavily influenced by her encounters with LMA; at the same time, her ability to adapt and influence is shaped by her encounters with other semiospheres.

We can thus understand that within a semiosphere of a dance class, some conceptions of dance content, organized through the taxonomies of different dance forms and approaches to analysis (themselves ever-shifting), will be important for facilitating semiosis among students. They provide a starting place for learning. Just as Siegel’s lexicons are undoubtedly influenced in some ways by her encounters with LMA (as well as her other life experiences), a dance teacher’s enacted curriculum will be influenced by the taxonomies of dance forms, methods of analysis, and other approaches to dance that she has studied, whether or not these are deliberately brought into the classroom. The semiosphere that is created will both constrain the meanings that are possible while also

\textsuperscript{129} Among the points that Zylko (2001) highlights as significant about Lotman’s work is the idea of levels within the concept of semiosphere: “…semiosphere consists of levels, which range from each person’s autonomous semiosphere to the overall semiosphere of the contemporary world…” As a result, we can speak about an individual person’s semiosphere, the semiosphere of a class or school, or the semiosphere of any group of people who share semiotic resources or whose sign-use overlaps in some way, applying to them Lotman’s ideas of semiosphere as a concept.
providing the semiotic resources for invention, allowing new meanings to take place.

Dance teachers always negotiate an incomplete curriculum.

Building on this understanding of a dance class as a semiosphere, we can further consider how the emerging lexicon comes about, or within Lotman’s (2005) theory, *where* this lexicon emerges within the semiosphere. Zylko (2001) very clearly describes the organization of Lotman’s semiosphere in a way we can relate to:

The organization of semiosphere is marked by internal heterogeneity. The organization and structuring of particular centers can vary considerably. Lotman assigns special meaning to peripheries, what are less formally organized than centers and have more flexible constructions at their disposal. Besides, peripheries are not constrained, as centers are constrained, by multiple metadesccriptions (grammar systems). In this account peripheries are considered a reservoir of innovation and a source of dynamic processes, within semiosphere. (p. 399)

The emerging lexicon, therefore, can be understood as existing on the periphery of the semiosphere, or perhaps as transversing the space between center and periphery. Whereas more established lexicons—such as LMA, the elements of dance, the terminology of classical ballet, or the cannon of first- and second-generation modern dance choreographers and their choreographic principles—might occupy the center of the semiosphere of a dance class, at least initially, the emerging lexicon takes advantage of the flexible construction and lack of constraints at the periphery. As a “reservoir of innovation,” then, attending to the periphery of the semiosphere of a dance class offers a great potential for furthering our understanding of the possibilities in dance education.
curriculum. While many curriculum efforts are focused on the center of the semiosphere, turning our attention to the periphery—and within it the emerging lexicon as a viable conception of a content framework—may be necessary for taking curriculum planning away from a theoretical exercise in the rearrangement of established concepts and vocabularies and into a realm that considers teachers’ lived experiences as central to curriculum. In order to consider the periphery of the semiosphere as of equal (or perhaps greater) importance to the center in curriculum, we must value what happens there as educationally important and attend to the conditions that make such a rich periphery possible. Among those conditions is the presence of the teacher as connoisseur of dancemaking, one whose semiotic processes and ability to encourage semiosis in others are vital to the creation of curriculum. As we theorize such possibilities, we must remember too: “The relation between center and periphery is by no means absolute. Cultural dynamics consists in this fact above others: that nucleus and periphery can change places” (Zylko, 2001, p. 402).

We now can understand emerging lexicon to be a conception of the content framework that exists on the periphery of the semiosphere of a dance class. It allows the content of dance—what dance is—to unfold through multiple signs as teachers engage with their students in dancemaking informed by various cultural viewpoints. While compatible with our understanding of the teacher as curriculum creator, this idea poses several challenges to thinking about dance curriculum. First, it highlights the fallacy of thinking that all dance experiences can be adequately or appropriately be addressed from one set of concepts, however malleable and adaptable they are, that are placed at the
center of the dance class as semiosphere. It challenges us to consider the difference between an understanding of dance that imposes one lexicon across dance experiences and the far more difficult process of closely attending to the features of dance experience considered germane to dancemakers from a range of perspectives. Furthermore, in opening up to semiotic resources beyond written and spoken language and codified dance movements, it challenges us to consider how signifiers that don’t fit into a curriculum document or into dominant conceptions of schooling can be embraced and encouraged in a fully semiotic dance education. As we further think about channeling these ideas into theories and documents, we must reconsider previous approaches to organizing curriculum in ways that imply separation between the content of dance and the cultural contexts of dances being made. Instead we need to seek out language and other conceptual structures that will encourage the emergence of lexicons rooted in teachers’ and students’ lived experiencing of dancemaking. Additionally, while there will always be differences between the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived, conceptualizing dance content as an emerging lexicon acknowledges from the outset that teachers will draw on their own expertise as connoisseurs and curriculum creators. This results in an understanding of their role that is very different from models that place teachers as deliverers of curriculum created elsewhere.

Unfortunately, replacing a chart of terms encompassing body, space, time, and energy with an open-ended spiraling diagram, however useful for our thinking, is not a practical or realistic approach to the creation of academic content standards for dance or other written curriculum documents. I recognize a conflict between the need to open up
understandings of dance content to embrace those constantly being made by dance educators from a range of cultural perspectives and the necessity of clear documents that can communicate such knowledge to a variety of stakeholders across dance, education, and dance education fields. I now turn to a discussion of implications of this research for the creation of formal or documented curricula-as-plan and their use in the curricula-as-lived.

Creating curriculum documents

The elements of dance in current curriculum documents

In K-12 school-based dance education in the United States, several documents are available to support and guide teachers’ work on national, state, and local levels, including curriculum guides, collections of lesson plans, textbooks, and standards. Compared to other fields, however, dance education has considerably fewer publically available published curriculum documents. Those that are available often lack specific details and leave open the choice of materials, dance forms, music, and artists, and so on. In many ways, this could indicate that formal dance curriculum already features a high degree of flexibility and an expectation that teachers will bring considerable knowledge to the work as they develop and enact the curriculum.

In Ohio, for instance, the newly revised Academic Content Standards for Fine Arts-Dance (Ohio Department of Education, 2012) do not specify the dance forms to be studied, only stipulating that students will “perform dances from various global cultures, theatrical styles and historical periods” (p. 3, Eighth grade, Producing/Performing
Standard 1). Furthermore, while references are made to “movement concepts” and “dance elements, features, and choreographic principles,” nowhere does the document specify the concepts, elements, and principles that should be used. As a member of the team that created this document, I recall that we had many conversations about the difficulty of naming the dance elements or concepts that we wanted teachers to use and that we desired to leave the document open and flexible so that teachers from a range of dance forms and practices could adopt the language most appropriate to their practices. In addition, the directive that the standards for each grade cluster should fit on one 11x17-inch page limited the space we had available to clarify these ideas. It was proposed that an appendix would be created giving additional lists of appropriate terms and concepts that could be used, but this did not come to pass.

As discussed in Chapter One, in many other curriculum documents, lists of the elements of dance, also referred to as content frameworks for dance, have been created as references for use within standards, sets of lesson plans, or textbooks. These almost always use categories such as body, space, time, and energy/dynamics/movement quality as the organizational structure. Some will also include additional categories such as choreographic structures or relationship. These lists of dance elements are intended to be conceptual, eschewing terminology associated with specific dance forms and instead favoring broad and abstract terms that can apply to many forms of dance—though, as will be discussed later, the terminology used is in fact closely associated with modern and creative dance.
Somewhat similarly to the Ohio dance standards, though with more specificity toward a space/time/energy conception of dance elements, the *Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts* (National Dance Education Organization, 2005a) evidence a desire for curricular flexibility. The authors are careful to establish that standards alone are not a curriculum but are intended to guide the creation of more specific curricula at state and local levels. Indeed, they are written broadly so as to be appropriate for a wide range of programs and contexts. At fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades, these standards are categorized under broad headings of Performing, Creating, Responding, and Inter-Connecting, an organizational structure that has also been adopted for dance in the currently-in-progress *National Core Arts Standards* (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2013c). These headings are briefly described as follows in the current eighth grade standards:

Performing: Execute original or existing artistic dance movement or works of art using elements and skills of dance. (p. 18)

Creating: Express ideas, experiences, feelings, and images in original and artistic choreography. (p. 21)

Responding: Demonstrate critical and analytical thinking skills in the artistic response to dance. (p. 22)

Inter-connecting: Relate and transfer meanings, ideas and experiences from other disciplines and areas of knowledge to dance and movement experiences; relate and transfer dance and movement experiences to other disciplines and areas of knowledge. (p. 23) (National Dance Education Organization, 2005a)
This standards document does not specify the forms of dance to be learned and indeed does not even name dance forms that should be considered as options. Under the Performing standard of “movement skills,” it does state that movements should be performed and identified in “two dance styles, forms, or traditions” (p. 18). The exception to the lack of naming appears only in the section on somatics practices, which states, “demonstrate and explain three tenants [sic] of somatics-based practices (yoga, Pilates, Bartenieff Fundamentals, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais’ Awareness through Movement)” (p. 19).

The elements of dance are more explicitly named in this document than they are in the Ohio standards. Under the Performing standard, the elements of dance are listed discretely as space, time, and energy, with specific sub-categories and general statements of what students should be able to do within these categories. In the Appendix, “The Elements of Dance: An Integrated Model” (p. 99) is presented, providing readers with additional background information. Space, time, and energy are described first, followed by a statement of context:

These elements, however, are constructed within a context that is personal, cultural, and universal. In ever-arching rings, the dancing self performs and creates surrounded by the interrelated attributes of personal and cultural influences. The dancer is not separated from these in the aesthetic creation of meaning. (p. 99)
Further clarification is offered that attempts to situate the standards within a broad context and that encourages readers to see this framework as accessible and appropriate across cultural contexts:

In the model presented, these contexts [dancing self, body, motion, relationship, intention, and world view] surround the dance elements in an ever-expanding perspective from the dancing self to a wider worldview. The standards can be viewed from any entry point depending on the perspective of most value. A dance of personal significance can begin from exploration of “The Dancing Self.” If the dance has religious significance, standards can initiate from the “World View.” The model is an intercultural and inter-relational Mandela [sic] designed to be flexible for global perspectives in any genre. (p. 99)

From this statement, we see that the intent of the document was to be flexible and inclusive, encouraging educators to explore dance from a variety of cultural contexts.

As we have seen in this research, however, the elements of dance are not universal. While it may be argued that they could be applied universally, they are a product of Western twentieth-century academic dance, with clear ties to European and American modern dance. Despite their widespread use, their origin is far from universal. The stress on abstract categories, while useful for many forms of teaching and learning dance, does not resonate with the dancemaking practices of many. The emphasis on individual experience, and the individual mover as the unit through which the elements are first realized, privileges forms where individual experience, performance, and creativity are valued. Putting the individual at the center, while highly compatible with
progressive education, is not aligned with the value systems of many cultures and their
dance forms, and it has the potential to obscure attention to other categories through
which dance as a communal experience might be understood. Even when curriculum
documents, such as these 2005 standards, strive to embrace multicultural perspectives,
the dominance of the elements of dance—magnified by the expectation that they will
guide not only how students learn to move but also how they will respond to dances and
compare dances cross-culturally—undermines the potential of the curriculum as a whole
to nurture diverse approaches to dancemaking.

Given how central the elements of dance are to curriculum documents, and given
that many dance educators (including myself) came up in dance programs that included
LMA in the curriculum, it is no simple task to propose a viable alternative; our collective
thinking about dance education has been rooted in the dance elements for a long time.
Furthermore, when we address the theory of knowledge construction using Banks’s
(2006) terms of mainstream academic knowledge and transformative academic
knowledge, it is difficult to locate the dance elements clearly in one or the other
categories. Compared to a more traditional model of dance training where students study
dance technique—often classical ballet—for several years, silently copying movements
of a teacher before perhaps being allowed to choreograph as an advanced student, a
contemporary model of dance education where students create, perform, and respond to
dances through exploration of dance elements is indeed transformative. When European
classical dance aesthetics are understood to represent mainstream academic knowledge in
dance, the aesthetics and values of the dance elements and educational models that
include a range of dance forms are seen as transformative. But as Banks (2006) reminds us, “mainstream academic knowledge … is not static, but is dynamic, complex, and changing” (p. 154, emphasis in original). Recall also that in Lotman’s (2005; Zylko, 2001) semiosphere, the center and periphery can change places. What was once transformative we may now see as mainstream. While the model proposed in this research of the emerging lexicon begins to open the way for thinking, as stated previously, it is not developed or concrete enough to function as a clear substitute for the elements of dance within something as formal and established as the dance standards. Nor should it. The dance elements, in and of themselves, are very useful in many contexts of dance education, and I do not feel they should simply be abandoned. What I do call for is re-positioning the existing dance elements as only one aspect of a content framework, creating a more inclusive model that acknowledges other features of dance and encourages teachers to develop in their classroom communities emergent lexicons that capture both the big ideas and the details of relevant dance experiences.

*What can a content framework accomplish?*

Before proposing ideas for alternatives to the elements of dance as a content framework, let us first consider what they might accomplish within a curriculum. Returning to this research, Anna’s curriculum provides some useful insights. In her classroom, the elements of dance chart she provided helped clarify for students how information is organized through categorical headings and subheadings, which included terms that Anna frequently referenced in class. Although she gave information about the
ideas and concepts she wanted students to learn through a variety of signs, the elements of dance that she used and the chart she referenced helped to clarify the specific language and concepts that she wanted students to understand. As concepts, the dance elements that she used also facilitated her teaching toward larger dance ideas, not just specific steps or skills. Collectively these attributes—clarifying the way information is organized, specifying language and concepts, and encouraging teaching toward broad ideas—transcend the specific elements of dance being used and will be important for any content framework to incorporate.

We can also look to Gloria’s curriculum for ideas about the language and concepts that might be included in a reconceptualized content framework. Recall that Gloria frequently referenced “African derived dance characteristics” as a category within dance analysis. Within a handout that she provided to students, features such as community, competition, polyrhythms, the use of props, and orientation toward the earth were included. While some of these ideas might be accounted for within the more traditional dance elements—polyrhythms under time; orientation toward the earth under space—their specific conceptualization here is described differently from how general categories of time and space are often elaborated in more Western-centric documents. A reconceptualization would have to account for the cultural bias in ways that ideas such as space and time are described; it would also have to make room for features beyond the individual body, such as the incorporation of props, the significance of locations where dance takes place, and the ways that community is created and established. Diverse purposes for dance might also be acknowledged; structures for competition or status, for
instance, are embedded in many dance forms though they may appear quite differently. The term itself—African-derived dance characteristics—suggests the potential for another larger category dealing with cultural context or the attribution of dance knowledge.

Gloria’s curriculum also rested heavily on the relationship between dance and social commentary, particularly as it unfolded during the time I visited, since this was the overarching theme of her concert. Unlike the African-derived characteristics, however, this part of the curriculum was not built on a predetermined list; it was very much about the emerging lexicon in dancemaking as students brainstormed the issues they wanted to talk about and worked together with Gloria to craft choreography that would address these issues. However, I noticed that cultural constructions, in particular surrounding race, gender, and social class, hovered just beneath the surface of many of the dances. For example, the lyrics to Ball of Confusion (Strong & Whitfeld, 1970) referenced discrimination, segregation, and racial tensions, ideas that were further reinforced by the tense movements and fighting gestures used in the choreography. With the exception of some talk surrounding the themes in The Real Me (an eighth grade piece set to India.Arie’s Video (Broady, India.Arie, & Sanders, 2001), a song that deals with women’s body image and perceptions of beauty) and discussion of homelessness as students rehearsed Without a Home, however, I did not see topics of race, gender, and social class overtly named within class discussions. This does not mean that they couldn’t be made more explicit, however, with “social commentary” or “cultural identity” as umbrella concepts for dance study. Indeed, many scholars in dance studies address these
issues within dance (Desmond, 1998; Dils & Albright, 2001), and perhaps it is time to bring them to a more central place in dance education.

Those who are happy with the current model, where the dance elements are positioned as the de facto content framework for curriculum standards, will contend that these ideas, particularly cultural context in dance, are already accounted for elsewhere in the curriculum documents. They would be correct, but these claims rest on an assumption that the traditional dance elements of body, space, time, and energy, along with their conventional descriptions, transfer easily to become integrated into other areas of the dance curriculum. The assumption is that we first use these elements and the definitions associated with them to create, perform, and describe movements before we use these understandings to theorize the cultural context of the dance. What we miss highlights a disconnection that is highly problematic.

For instance, if the act of dancemaking I am exploring movements that take me into a deep bend of the knees and side-to-side weight shifts accentuated by forward movements of the shoulders and downward hand gestures, I have a number of ways to think about these movements. The description I have just given rests on an understanding of body actions. I could describe the timing of these actions as well, perhaps clarifying that while the weight shifts are sudden, the upper body movements are slightly slower and more relaxed. I could describe it from the perspective of space, emphasizing that the

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130 In the 2005 NDEO standards, the eighth grade Inter-connecting Standards 1.a.2 and 1.a.3 suggest this approach quite directly:
1.a.2. “Learn and perform dances from a variety of cultures. Compare the styles and movements of the different dances in relation to the elements of dance.”
1.a.3. “Describe how dances from a variety of cultures reflect the values and beliefs of the culture [sic].” (National Dance Education Organization, 2005, p. 23)
movement happens in low level. Alternatively, I could describe it again (through what some might also claim is “space”) by explaining that the movements are oriented toward the earth. This gives a very different impression regarding the movement. While talking about “occupying a low level in space” connotes an abstract, geometric understanding of space divided into levels or zones, being “oriented towards the earth” offers a very different connotation of natural space where the earth could be understood as ground or planet, perhaps inviting me to think about dancing outside of the classroom or studio or about connecting my movement to a particular place. Both explanations could be correct, both connotations could contribute to my exploration of this movement, and both connotations begin to suggest something about the cultural context of this movement and my observations of it—but only the second admits it. Stated as an “African-derived dance characteristic,” the idea of orientation toward the earth implies that this movement has some connection to dances of the African diaspora but leaves it open for further exploration what specific form or forms of dance this movement might be (or become) part of. In contrast, while we can now understand that Laban-influenced language like “low level in space” does indeed have a cultural reference, it is often assumed to be neutral. Without a label such as “European-derived analytical categories,” its roots have become obscured, seducing those to whom its familiarity rings true into believing that it is an appropriate, value-free label to use across dance contexts. Therefore, the elements, features, or concepts used in any dance curriculum framework that aspires to be multicultural must encompass ideas from a wide range of cultural perspectives.
Attempts at multicultural curriculum in dance education are thus undermined when further exploration of “dance styles, forms, or traditions” (from which students should be able to perform locomotor and non-locomotor movement) (National Dance Education Organization, 2005a, p. 18) is not situated within the context of performing or creating but is instead relegated to “inter-connecting” this dance knowledge to “other” disciplines, presumably cultural studies, when they “Connect and Compare Dance from Different Cultures and Historical Periods” (p. 23). While the intention may be to help students understand that dance exists within a cultural context, these documents fail to prioritize a range of approaches to describing dance and neglect an integration of these descriptions into statements of what students will do when physically engaged in the act of dancing (i.e. the performing and creating standards). Thus, we risk the danger of failing to situate all dance experiences within their cultural contexts and of overlooking the multiple and shifting features of these contexts.

Expanding a content framework

As explored above, desirable attributes of a content framework for dance include:

• use broad concepts that can be explored in a variety of ways
• show students how information can be organized
• clarify specific language and concepts that can be used
• represent a variety of cultural viewpoints, and make these viewpoints explicit
• include concepts related to the individual mover, movement of groups, use of a range of signs (music, props, costumes, images), purposes of dancing, and cultural contexts for dance
• acknowledge the cultural context of the curriculum as a whole

Such a framework, then, might include the traditional elements of dance, but it would situate them as elements of individual movement in modern and creative dance. In showing how information is organized, overlap with other dance forms could be illustrated, respecting the language or descriptive practices most germane to the dancemaking practices of those engaged in forms other than modern dance or creative movement. For instance, the concept of direction, usually found under the umbrella of space, is often described with general terms like forward, backward, sideways, and diagonal, the same terms that are used in elementary Labanotation. However, in ballet, directional terms are stated in French, such as derrière (to the back) and devant (to the front), and additional terms are used to clarify spatial relationships important for many ballet movements, such as dessus (over) and dessous (under), en dedans (inward) and en dehors (outward). Similarly, as discussed previously, the spatial concept of level, described often as low, middle, and high corresponding to the terms used in Labanotation and connoting an abstract understanding of geometric space, is related to, but not interchangeable with, the Africanist aesthetic principle of orientation toward the earth. A comprehensive content framework should include these different perspectives and, to help students understand how information is organized, show how they are related without subsuming them all under master labels derived from one cultural perspective.
Because the dance forms I am most familiar with are ballet and modern dance, I am unable to succinctly offer other significant examples here. Additionally, the contemporary flow of ideas across dance forms, along with the fact that cultural contexts themselves should more aptly be thought of as processes with shifting and overlapping boundaries, will complicate any attempt to delineate the specific forms with simple labels. This is indeed an area for further research.

Concepts that embrace perspectives beyond the individual mover should be included as well. In some version of dance elements, the category of relationship is presented. Again rooted in an abstract conception of space, the terms used often reflect spatial orientations (toward, away, near, far, above, below, and so on). Spatial forms of a group are also sometimes included, again reflecting geometric arrangements in space (circle, lines, clusters, square, etc.) common to many dance forms. This is a starting point, but it deserves to be explored further. The concept of community, for instance, might be used, and sub-concepts might be offered that explore ways of relating to others in a group, purposes of dancing alone or with others, and social structures within a group of dancers, such as relationships between performers and audiences, leaders and followers, movers and supporters, and so on. “Building community,” a pedagogical goal of feminist dance education (Stinson, 1993), might possibly be reframed as a goal of content, not just process. Again, the curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived should mutually inform one another. We continue to see the difficulty: such concepts are complicated and cannot easily be reduced to a list. However, community is an aspect of many dance forms and is one that deserves to be explored just as much as aspects of individual movement are
explored. Indeed, in many curriculum documents this idea is suggested already, such as in statements that students should “demonstrate the ability to contribute constructively to a duet or group dance” (National Dance Education Organization, 2005, p. 21).

Recognizing community, then, as an element of dance would help move such a statement beyond a goal related to control and monitoring of students’ behavior and would reframe it as an engagement with core aspects of the art form. Again, significant research is needed to explore the ways that such concepts could be framed and presented clearly in a holistic curriculum document.

In some dances, props, costumes, music, and text are integral to the dance and the meanings that dancers and viewers make from it. The privilege placed on the individual mover at the core of the dance experience within traditional understandings of dance elements, however, may encourage thinking that these signifiers are tangential. Indeed, many dancers have been confronted with the composition assignment to create a dance study to be performed in an empty studio, in silence, wearing only practice clothes, with the expectation that everything we needed to “say” would be communicated through movement. Again, in some modern dance and creative movement traditions, this is a worthwhile goal. But in a holistic dance education that expects students to engage with dance from a range of perspectives, investigation of the ways that elements outside the individual body interact with that body to create meaning is highly relevant. Considering the material of dance as a conceptual category, including but not limited to the body, might be an appropriate way to incorporate a more full range of semiotic resources into our understandings of dance content.
Further concepts that could be included in a dance curriculum document that move beyond the individual mover and acknowledge dance in context might include comparison, evolution, pattern, cause and effect, leadership, and freedom. These are concepts that many dancemakers have explored in their work, and as broad concepts they can potentially cross any perceived boundary between different dancemaking processes. These concepts are relevant to dancemaking in a variety of cultural traditions, though they do in many ways represent Western academic and democratic values. This brings us to the final point: that any content framework for dance, no matter how inclusive, remains situated in the cultural context in which it is created and used. Acknowledging this is critical to the appropriate use of any framework that purports to be applicable to multiple cultural contexts. Just as the experienced curriculum will always be incomplete, so too will any documented curriculum have limitations. Rather than aspiring to or claiming universal applicability, we must acknowledge the cultural context of dance education itself, being clear about the values and assumptions embedded within a curriculum and its associated limitations.

Conclusion: Reflections and directions for future research

The research process

In beginning this dissertation research, it was not my intention to propose a new model for curriculum. As a student of various approaches to movement analysis, I was curious about how other dance educators applied theoretical ideas, some of them conflicting, to their work with students in school-based dance education contexts. As I
considered literature from multicultural education, semiotics, and curriculum theory, I began to frame what I saw unfolding in the dance classes as a challenge to my earlier conceptions of dance education curriculum. Framing the final sub-question as an invitation to questions—*How might close investigation of the curriculum enacted by experienced dance educators provoke questions about future work in dance education, including the ways that dance content knowledge is conceptualized in curriculum development and teacher education?*—freed me from the pressure of generating a complete curriculum model. Approaching the end of this dissertation, I find that I am again at a beginning, wondering now about the possibilities for incorporating these new ideas into formal curriculum documents. Although I already knew that dance education is too large to fit inside any one idea of curriculum, and although I was already comfortable with the idea that the curriculum-as-lived is far more complex, interesting, and unwieldy than any curriculum-as-plan wants to admit, I did not foresee just how engaging it could be to examine the practice of curriculum as lived experience. As I became drawn into the curricula that Gloria and Anna created, and as I attempted to render it artfully through portraits and more analytically through a discussion of features of their curricula, I became ever more committed to the idea that a document can never adequately capture nor guide the range of experiences that make up a curriculum. I also became further committed to recognizing the expertise that dance teachers have as both artists and educators and determined to promote their ongoing individual and collective work. Indeed, if innovation is to happen in education, it will be in classrooms where teachers
are supported in their endeavors and are given the freedom to build upon their unique knowledge as they work together with students.

After putting together the ideas of the emergent lexicon created by dance educators as connoisseurs at the periphery of a dance semiosphere, I felt nearly done. I had successfully challenged an established framework and integrated theoretical ideas into a conceptual model that reflected not only what I experienced as a researcher, but the values I hold as a teacher as well. After a recent workshop I presented, someone remarked, “I want our teachers to learn to teach like you!”

Almost without thinking, I replied, “But I don’t want them to teach like me. I want them to learn to teach like themselves.” It is true. I would like to keep curriculum in flux, providing resources that show how dancemaking unfolds in a range of ways, allowing teachers and students to create the curriculum anew each year. Therefore, in this research, I would have been happy to leave it open, to let formal curriculum documents like standards be just one among many ideas that teachers could turn to, encouraging the emergence of new ideas and trusting that dance teachers will seek out a variety of viewpoints and resources to inform their work. I will admit my idealistic streak.

*Addressing national standards for dance*

But the question inevitably arose after a presentation of my work: “The standards are not going away. So, what would *you* like to see in that document? How do you
propose it be organized?" I fumbled my way through some vague answer, realizing I needed to give the question more thought. I later considered how my very open-ended model of the emergent lexicon as a framework might inform the creation of more structured delineation of dance content that would move beyond the narrow parameters of the traditional dance elements. While the guidelines offered above for creating a more holistic set of concepts represent an initial response to this question, it is clear to me that more work needs to be done, both in shifting our collective disciplinary thinking as well as in applying new ideas, perhaps drawn from cultural studies, to the creation of formal curriculum documents.

At the time of this writing, the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards is at work generating a new list of content standards for dance, visual art, music, drama, and media. An online wiki site (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2013a) includes documents showing their progress, but a draft of the new standards has not yet been released. The task force I was asked to be a part of at the 2011 NDEO conference, after assembling an online collection of various content framework documents, has not been revisited to my knowledge, and no new documents have been posted in the last year. Presumably the writers of the NCCAS have accessed and referenced that collection, but I have not been involved in any continued discussion. A draft of the Conceptual Framework for Arts Learning (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2013c) has been posted online. While this document clarifies the overarching structure of the new

131 With much thanks to Dr. Patty Bode for posing this question, and apologies that my recollection of her more nuanced and eloquent phrasing is incomplete.
standards, conceived of as “measurable and attainable learning events based on artistic goals” (p. 6), and while it indicates that the “National Core Arts Standards are based on the artistic processes of Creating; Performing/Producing/Presenting; Responding; and Connecting” (p. 9), no specific information is given about how the elements of dance will be used as, or included in, any content framework associated with the standards. However, given that seven of the ten members of the current dance writing group were members of the task force that created the 2005 standards, I expect that similar conceptions of the dance elements will be used to inform the new document.

More concerning, in light of this dissertation research, is the direction that the NCCAS has taken regarding the authority being vested in the document. While the *Conceptual Framework for Arts Learning* (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2013c) clarifies that the new arts standards are intended to be voluntary, used by state and local educators to craft their curriculum, the emphasis on assessments and alignment with Common Core (itself an education reform initiative that has been adopted with alarming speed across the country) indicates that this new document is intended to influence policy and practice in very substantial ways. Furthermore, the *Proposed Details of Next Generation National Arts Standards* (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education & National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2011) sets an alarming intention to remove many choices about the enacted arts curriculum from teachers:

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132 This information was obtained by comparing the list of the Dance Writing Team posted on the wiki (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2013b) with the names of task force members appearing on page 10 of the Standards of Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts (National Dance Education Organization, 2005).
National Arts Standards should help teachers focus their work, rather than providing an unrealistically broad scope.

In other words, standards should make more choices for schools/teachers than recent eclectic curricula and standards have been willing/able to make.

Thoughtful choices will cause some initial controversy, but ultimately be a great boost to education in the field. (Para. 5, No. 1 &2, emphasis in original)

The new standards, then, intend to minimize variation and choice. Protests in the form of “some initial controversy” are expected but will be overcome. Individual teachers will not be encouraged to innovate based on their own curricular contexts and body, academic, and cultural knowledge in dance but instead will be expected to comply with the directives made by these authorities, who have made “thoughtful choices” on their behalf. Any objections will be mere nuisances on the way to a “great boost” in education. To say this concerns me greatly would be an understatement.

Questions for professional practice

Recognizing that I am swimming against the current of educational trends in the United States, my commitment to trusting teachers to make fundamental decisions about their curriculum remains strong. I will share this research with those who are interested, and I will continue to explore ways to conceptualize the content framework of dance without exclusively emphasizing individual movement features in the traditional
elements of dance. Beyond the creation of curriculum documents, though, this research has broader implications for thinking about teacher education. If we want to educate future dance teachers so that they may work as connoisseurs of dancemaking and, together with their students, generate emerging lexicons through which to construct their own dance knowledge, attention must be given to the way they are educated in preservice programs. If we desire to move beyond the elements of dance as a satisfactory framework for the content of dance in dance education curriculum, then university dance education programs must engage students in exploring dance from a range of cultural perspectives. Making these perspectives known will be important as teachers-to-be explore how knowledge is created and propose structures for organizing this knowledge within their future curricula.

In reflecting on my interviews with both Anna and Gloria, I recall that neither of them completed a “dance education” degree. Gloria did her bachelor’s in elementary education, followed by an M.A. in dance, and she acknowledged that she synthesized these fields together for her own practice. Anna’s route, although different, relied on a similar exercise of individual agency: she completed a bachelor’s degree in dance and then crafted her own master’s in education, working with dance faculty at her university to adapt some of the undergraduate courses in dance education to independent graduate-level credits for her degree. The independence and self-direction that they each had in their own educational journeys has clearly continued in their teaching practices, and we cannot generalize their work to others entering the field easily.
As I complete this dissertation I embark on a new stage in my career as a faculty member where I have the responsibility to teach undergraduate courses in dance education and to supervise students pursuing their state licensure in dance. While I am excited for the possibilities this brings, I recognize that with this research I have set a tall order for myself in how I communicate about the field with my future college students and in how I encourage them to develop as their own educators. How do I make sure they are well versed in the elements of dance and other structures established in dance education curriculum, without leading them to believe that these structures are complete? How do I prepare them for the impending standardized assessments for dance educators while simultaneously helping them understand that no single assessment can ever capture the rich diversity of knowledge and possibility in dance? How do I help them feel that the curriculum they create is satisfying and complete, without allowing them to settle in one place? In other words, how do I prepare them for not only their first teaching job, but for a career of lifelong learning, growth, and change like Gloria and Anna have established for themselves? How do I negotiate the various institutional requirements and expectations placed on me while I allow an emergent lexicon in my own practice, and how do I avoid institutionalizing that lexicon for my students? As I reflect on both the process and conclusions of this dissertation, the ideas that stand out for me emerge as questions more than answers.
Directions for future study

In addition to the practice-oriented questions posed above, many of which will be fruitful grounds for formal research as well, I also consider where my research might go next. While I made a deliberate choice, as discussed in Chapter Three, to focus on dance educators in this research, I remained constantly aware that the experiences of students were missing. I know that if I were to ask students about their experiences of the dance curriculum, I would gain very different information. Now that I have explored dance curriculum as teachers experienced it, I would like to explore similar questions incorporating student viewpoints. What signs do students attend to as they experience dance curriculum, and what meanings do they make from these signs? What questions can this provoke for dance education curriculum? This question will prove fruitful for research for many years to come.

In addition, although I believe that case study research is valuable, I also recognize its limits. This research was conducted with only two participants, and many more perspectives deserve to be explored in relation to the research questions. Both participants were experienced dance educators; I am curious about how the perspectives and practices of new educators might be different. The dance educators in this study taught at the middle school level in diverse school contexts in Ohio; exploring similar questions with educators in different school contexts will provoke new insights.

Ultimately, this research represents just a starting place in my explorations of semiosis in dance education curriculum. While the research directions named above will certainly be important, the most significant outcome of this dissertation for me is in what
I gained from spending time with two experienced dance educators and attending closely to the features of their practices. While as dancers we spend countless hours in classes and rehearsals and thus are familiar with a variety of teaching and leadership styles, rarely do we have the opportunity to spend sustained time observing one another’s teaching and reflecting on what we have seen. Taking the time to be present to another’s curricular practices is truly a gift. While I am hopeful that my scholarship and leadership may contribute positively to curriculum and policy development on a state, national, and international level, many factors outside of my control are also at play. However, I know that I will be able to build what I have learned here into my own work as I teach young people and college students about the many ways we can make meaning from our dance experiences, drawing on the gifts I have received from Gloria Banks and Anna Tyler.
References


Consortium of National Arts Education Associations. (1994). *National standards for arts education: What every young American should know and be able to do in the arts.* Lanham, MD: R&L Education.


Appendix A: IRB Notice of Determination
Office of Research
Office of Responsible Research Practices

Protocol Title: LANGUAGE AND MEANING MAKING IN DANCE EDUCATION
Protocol Number: 2012E0025
Principal Investigator: Deborah Smith-Shank
Date of Determination: 01/25/2012
Qualifying Category: 01
Attachments: None

Dear Investigators,
The Office of Responsible Research Practices has determined the above referenced project exempt from IRB review. Please note the following:

- Retain a copy of this correspondence for your records.
- Only the OSU staff and students named on the application are approved as OSU investigators and/or key personnel for this study.
- No changes may be made to exempt research (e.g., personnel, recruitment procedures, advertisements, instruments, etc.). If changes are needed, a new application for exemption must be submitted for review and approval prior to implementing the changes.
- Per university requirements, all research-related records (e.g., application materials, letters of support, signed consent forms, etc.) must be retained and available for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended.
- It is the responsibility of the investigators to promptly report events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This determination is issued under The Ohio State University’s OHRP Federally Mandated Assurance #0006378. All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website: www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the Office of Responsible Research Practices with any questions or concerns.

Thanks,
Cheri

Cheri Petrey
Sr. Protocol Analyst | Office of Responsible Research Practices | The Ohio State University
T: 614.688.0389  F: 614.688.0366  E: petrey.6@osu.edu  W: www.orrp.osu.edu
Appendix B: Consent Form

Title of Project: *Language and Meaning-Making in Dance Education*

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Deborah Smith-Shank
Professor and Chair of Art Education

Co-investigator:
Marissa Nesbit, Doctoral Student in Art Education

Dear Dance Educator,

I am a graduate student at The Ohio State University in the Department of Art Education, and I am conducting dissertation research related to how dance educators use language along with movement in their classes as they guide students to make meaning from their dance experiences.

I would like to talk with you about how you teach dance, specifically how you speak about dance and encourage your students to speak and write about dance in your classes. I would also like to observe you teaching dance classes.
This is a research study and your participation is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You are being asked to participate in this study because you teach dance in a middle school setting and have professional expertise on the topic of dance education.

If you are willing to participate in this study, I would like to interview you up to three times to learn about different aspects of your dance teaching, including your background in dance and education, your approach to teaching dance, and specific strategies you use when talking to your students about dance. Each of these interviews will take 45 minutes to one hour, depending on how much you would like to say on each topic. I will audio record these interviews. I will also ask you to share copies of any curriculum materials that you use in your teaching, such as lesson plans, pacing guides, and student assignments, including those materials you have designed yourself for your classes.

Additionally, I would like to observe your teaching of your middle school dance classes at least five, but no more than twenty, times over the course of the winter and spring 2012. During these sessions I will be taking notes about how you and your students talk about the movements you are doing, the questions you and they ask, and the way you respond to each other. I will also make notes about the dance movements you and they perform. I will videotape some of these class sessions so that I may analyze them in more detail later, looking closely at how what was said relates to the movements being done.

Your words and descriptions of your actions and teaching strategies will be included in the final published document resulting in this study, however recordings of your image and voice will not be published or included in presentations.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may choose whether you want to be named in the final, published document. You may wish to have your name included so that your professional accomplishments, teaching strategies, and contributions to the research can be acknowledged. However,
you may wish for privacy reasons to have your name and identifying information kept confidential and not appear in the published document. If you choose to have your name and identifying information removed, your participation in this study will remain confidential. However, due to the small number of dance teachers in Ohio schools, it is possible that readers familiar with the field will be able to guess your identity.

My professor and I will be the only people with access to the data collected in this study, including audio and video recordings, written transcripts, and notes. Hard copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet and electronic copies will be stored digitally on a password protected computer for three years following the end of this study and then destroyed.

I am unable to offer you money or other compensation for your participation in this study. This research may not benefit you personally. I hope that your participation may benefit dance teachers and students in the future as we learn more about how teachers plan and teach their classes and how students learn in them.

If you have questions about this study or your participation in it, you may speak with me in person or contact me at the phone and email address below:

Marissa Nesbit
Nesbit.13@osu.edu
423-505-5269

You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Deborah Smith-shank, who is the principal investigator for this project, with any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study.

Dr. Deborah Smith-Shank
smith-shank.1 @osu.edu
For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

Once you have read this form and had any questions answered, if you are willing to participate in this study, please indicate your preference, then sign and date this form below:

_____ (initial) I consent to have my name and personally identifiable information included in published documents resulting from my participation in this study.

Signature                                      Date

Print name

_____ (initial) I consent to participate in this study, but request that my name and personally identifiable information be kept confidential and omitted from published documents resulting from this study.

Signature                                      Date

Print name

A copy of this form will be provided for you, so that you have a record of contact information.