

COLLABORATIVE DANCE COMMUNITY: CRAFTING, DISTILLING, AND
ARTICULATING LANGUAGE OF SHARED EXPERIENCE

by

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Title: COLLABORATIVE DANCE COMMUNITY: CRAFTING, DISTILLING, AND
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Dr. Jenifer P. Craig

This qualitative and experiential research focuses on the nexus of language with educational and artistic goals within dance communities. The study shares descriptive language identified during my Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community's collaborative processes, as we explored "skill training" and "art making" in dance over a period of 10 weeks. Recommendations emerge through discussion of current dance dialogic models and collaborative language resources for dance. Reviewed resources outside the dance field provide additional support and context. Based on the community's shared experiences and the researcher's investigations, suggestions are made for increasing quality of practice in dance and language articulation. Practical applications are offered.

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For my father, who taught me that vision and artistry make a difference when people are considered and honored in the foundation of the work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In my dancing life, shared experiences are the greatest informants in my learning and my artistry. Retracing embodied steps and recalling the people who were present in the midst of my processes of change enlivens the meaning of each experience. For me, the lens through which I experience dance education and artistry is directly related to the time and space shared, felt, and traversed with other people, with my community. Therefore for me, a community of people is an essential component in dance education and artistry. Exchange of information, lived movement experience, and shared expression is inextricably linked to the people who define that community. When people move together, progressing simultaneously as individuals and as members of a collective, connections can be cultivated and revealed.

In effective collaborative processes, multitudes of beliefs, personalities, talents, and ambitions are incorporated into the communication mix. Challenges are likely; however, potential solutions can evolve as dancers move through shared experiences moment by moment. Collaborative language, exchanged via dialogue, text, and movement, emerges through practice. Navigating shared dance processes, crafting experiences, and making choices requires openness and keen determination by all

involved participants. Collaborations can succeed or fail based on collective responsiveness to these complex and dynamic challenges.

Artistry and education should not be parsed from collaboratively shared movement and dialogic processes involving dance. Their partnered existence has the potential to strengthen collaboration. For me, the artistry of a well-crafted dance technique class plan is undeniable, but because it is contextually explicit, a well-crafted dance technique class plan often goes unnoticed and undocumented as such. Similarly, the educational value and skillful application of a well-crafted performance work is undeniable; however, because it is not explicitly prescribed beyond its performance, a well-crafted performance work also goes unnoticed and undocumented as educational practice.

Increasing the means for collaborative exchange in dance pedagogy and dance artistry is a driving aim of this research. The roles defined in dance and the operational facets defined by traditional dance models can create stigmas and boundaries that prohibit such exploration and development. In particular, these stigmas and boundaries may limit the communication exchange within a community of dancers. I believe describing movement in words, a recognized challenge in the dance field, and examining how these descriptive translations can integrate dance practices in diverse settings, is the crux of what collaborative processes can contribute to the field. Successful collaboration integrates invaluable components in dance: people, vision, and resources, through shared communication and experience.

Significance of Study

This research is one attempt at capturing and focusing how we speak and write about the ephemeral, complex nature of dance and the unique, diverse nature of people. More specifically, it gives context to the journey of dance process through written language, elaborating on what happens beyond points of inception, actualization, and reflection. My research leads me to believe that investigation into examples of varied language practices will positively impact the scope of dance scholarship and accessibility for broader application. Similarly, my research directly connected me to exceptional existing resources. I hope this research offers practical applications to the field of dance and to the people who work together in communities through dance.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to share language from my Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community's working processes, to discuss dialogic dance models in current practice, and to recommend specific collaborative language resources as tools for the field of dance. My Master of Fine Arts Movement Project was the experiential lab for my thesis inquiry. Based on my experience, I believe practicing how we communicate in the same way we practice movement skill training and art making is essential to developing language that represents process and captures the heart of what may resonate as meaningful to the people who participate in the journey. Increasing the means for collaborative exchange in dance via shared talking, writing, listening, responding, and moving is a driving aim of this research. Attention to how we practice

crafting, distilling, and articulating language of shared experience in dance directly supports this aim.

Assumptions/Biases

This research assumes that collaborative community experiences are attractive and valuable to other people, particularly to the participants in the research project. I prefer to learn via recognition of both my independent path and the connection I feel with my community. I feel I am always actively connected to community, no matter what the context; I am a part of community and my connection directly informs how I relate to the world. I affect and am affected by community. Therefore, how I define and value community and collaboration is intuitively based on my experiences and beliefs.

I was interested, for this research, in engaging with people who are receptive to collaborative environments. The project community selected for my Master of Fine Arts Movement Project was a collective of people I knew and who I believed were interested in collaborative dance ventures. I did not explicitly know what each member of the project community believes or associates via experience in regard to community and collaboration. Also, I could not gauge how each member of the project community values shared practices and experiences. Possession of this information did not drive this research; however, opening lines of communication for mutual exchange was a desired aim of this research.

I believe people learn about themselves and about each other when they work together, move together, and communicate together. Collaboration often encourages a willingness to share and in turn, it likely creates space for reciprocal sharing. The

exchange is mutual and commonalities, valuable reference points, are discovered in the process. This research assumes the presence of multiple mutual exchanges and notes that a majority, if not all, of these exchanges involve language, in terms of movement, dialogue, or text. Movement is considered language in dance. As people work, move, and communicate together, as a community, this research posits that common language is generated through the continuum of shared process.

Delimitations

Processes initiated in my Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Movement Project, the active research lab, evolved in ways that inextricably inform and propel my thesis work. As I note this trajectory, I address delimitations for my MFA Movement Project design and transition to the delimitations for my thesis.

The choice to work in the same environment I interact in daily and to invite dancers I know, who are also university students, to participate in my MFA Movement project community was a deliberate choice. University of Oregon courses adhere to 10-week terms; therefore, I paralleled the 10-week time period in my research. However, I deliberately designed the 10-week timeline to be equally split between summer break (five weeks from August 17-September 18, 2009) and Fall Term (first five weeks of the term from September 29-October 30, 2009). The choice to work with a community of nine dancers was intentional. For the context of this research, it was important to work with a group greater than five but less than ten due to scheduling and logistics. Variance in dance experience and background was also important to community demographics.

The diverse perspectives present in my MFA Movement Project community indelibly shaped the shared experiences and the terms of exchange. The scope of topics investigated is not as significant as the specific context of language use in correlation with the community's response. The focus is on investigating how dance language is crafted, distilled, and articulated via shared practice and exchange. From a place of reflection, after the active navigations inside the project community concluded, I gained additional perspective on the salient aspects of the work. I realized the act of finding, honing, and communicating language, particularly impromptu talking and writing, was the greatest challenge for the community. Language practice evolves over time and benefits from awareness of and adaptability to multiple perspectives.

Fresh in my realizations and inquiry, I sought out additional resources specifically addressing language practices in dance. In order to synthesize what transpired in my Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community experience, I focused on sources with both narrative components and practical applications. Sources written to embrace a community perspective were of particular interest due to the complex interplay of voices and values. As a result, my research connected me to resources in the field of community-based arts and constructivist collaboration in the field of education. Although I am unable to make claims about the scope of community-based arts or constructivist collaboration research, I apply noted principles from these fields to the context of this research.

Limitations of Study

The Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Movement Project aspect of this research did not take place in a controlled environment. The community demographic and the material presented and created was in flux, to some extent, throughout the scope of the study. The outcome was not known nor defined in totality in advance. Tracking information and insight on the characteristics of community in the blended dance environment as it developed through shared processes illuminated the research. However, identifying what is significant in shared processes is not for the researcher to control or act on alone; it requires community conversation and active response.

As researcher, the role of facilitator was not to be misused as power of authority; however, guided language and a communication framework was relayed and prepared by the researcher/facilitator. Decisive responsibility was sometimes amorphous. Similarly, community member expectations were personal to the individual, varied throughout the collective, and often unknown by the researcher/facilitator. Therefore, the multiplicity of voices, although welcomed and acknowledged, cannot be fully articulated by the researcher.

Coalescence in this research journey cannot be referred to in finite terms. Process implies some level of continual progression; therefore, describing process can have continuous trajectories. This research extrapolates and describes “phases” of experiential processes with a focus on language. Discussions, writings, and movements emerged through experiential processes. Inevitably, some of the continual nature of process and its dynamic relevance will be lost.

Definition of Terms

The definition of terms clarifies terminology that informs and supports my research. Terms are listed in alphabetical order for easy reference. Some definitions, due to language variation, diverse application, and field specificity, require more in-depth discussion.

Art making, defined in my own words for this research, represents the creative and collective act of generating movement to be shared through performance. The artistry and artful contributions of each individual inspires the collective choreographic process. Art making was used instead of “dance choreographic rehearsal” in the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project blended dance environment to investigate how dialogue and definitions impact the overall development and operational foundation of a collaborative community. Dancers in an academic environment often classify what they actively participate in by descriptors of “class” and “rehearsal.” This research intentionally combined the activities usually identified separately by these descriptors with the goal of realizing a new forum for language possibilities or a clearer representation of the actions already enlivened in the experiences.

Collaboration most simply means to work together. In the dance field, working definitions of collaboration, versus dictionary examples, provide important context for this research. Established educators and artists Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Founding Artistic Director of Urban Bush Women and Liz Lerman, Founding Artistic Director of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, practice collaboration in their dance companies as well as in broader community contexts. In the March 2009 issue of *Dance Magazine* Michelle

Vellucci recognizes Zollar and Urban Bush Women in her article entitled, “Phenomenal Women: Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Urban Bush Women Celebrate 25 Years of Creating Art as a Catalyst for Social Change.” On the topic of collaboration in Zollar’s work and quoting Zollar directly, Vellucci writes:

More than vessels for Zollar’s choreography, the members of Urban Bush Women are collaborators and co-creators of the work. ‘Dancers are still trained to duplicate steps, and being in a collaborative, investigative process is for the most part a new experience for many of them,’ she [Zollar] says, ‘particularly if they come from a classical background.’ (Vellucci 2009, 28)

Vellucci also writes, “Collaborative problem-solving is also key to Urban Bush Women’s work outside of the studio. The company’s two primary programs are community engagement residencies...and the Summer Institute, which trains both artists and non-artists in community engagement practices” (Vellucci 2009, 30). Expounding on Urban Bush Women’s community engagement residencies and emphasizing language in collaborative settings Vellucci quotes Zollar:

‘You bring people who represent different aspects of a community and talk about what is important to them, what they would like to see addressed and celebrated, and how we can have a process of mutual collaboration,’ Zollar says. ‘We try to establish a common language around issues that affect the community: racism, systemic poverty, who has power and who doesn’t. It’s a common establishment, through a creative process, of what determines a community’s identity.’ (Vellucci 2009, 30-32)

Liz Lerman and her company, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, uphold dialogue as an essential component in their collaborative artistic work. Edited by Pam Korza and Barbara Schaffer Bacon, *Dialogue in Artistic Practice: Case Studies from Animating Democracy*, highlights Lerman and her company in a chapter entitled, “Liz Lerman Dance Exchange: An Aesthetic of Inquiry, An Ethos of Dialogue,” written by the

company's Humanities Director, John Borstel. Succinctly addressing viewpoints on both collaboration and communication, Borstel writes:

The Dance Exchange often gathers people of diverse bodies, brains, and perspectives to collaborate, listen, and make something together—a process of understanding and problem-solving in which clear and constructive communication is essential. The dance is never exactly the same in any two places; as artists and participants move gradually into unfamiliar territory, they are constantly challenged to collaborate in order to adapt. The artists and their community collaborators engage in topics that are current, vital, curious, unexpected, and always sparking dialogues within and beyond the work. Artists, participants, and audiences are consistently engaged at a level where values are at stake, and where human integrity is on the line. (Borstel 2005, 58)

Collaboration requires reciprocal communication; therefore how we talk and write is vital to the shared experience. Lerman and Zollar's astute awareness and application of language in practice offer tremendous insight to the field of dance and community-based work as a whole. Both educator artists and their work are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two "Review of Related Works."

Collaboration, for the purposes of this research, refers to the active practices of a collective of people agreeing to work together in a mutually beneficial way.

Accentuating language, I parse out the word "lab" from "collaboration" and define it as a place where knowledge is sought and discovered through active investigation and crafted process. The second word I parse out is "labor" which I define as work or the act of doing work. Applying these distilled personalized definitions for lab and labor, I define collaboration as the exchange actualized by people agreeing to work together in a mutually beneficial way, seeking knowledge through active investigation, and doing the work via crafted process.

Community, defined in my own words, is a collective of people connected through shared interests, passions, ambitions, and practices. A community possesses individual and collective knowledge and resources. I view the dance technique classroom and the choreographic rehearsal setting as communities that often operate with exclusivity, but for me, they are interconnected. The project community for my research was designed to integrate skill training and art making.

Noting the breadth of potential interpretations and meanings of community along with the imperative use of “community” in my research, I found it necessary to bring definitions into the fold from the relatively new field of community-based art and performance. In the 2005 text, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*, author Jan Cohen-Cruz offers this description: “Community-based art is a field in which artists, collaborating with people whose lives directly inform the subject matter, express collective meaning” (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 1). Verifying the historical context of this field, Cohen-Cruz states: “Its [community-based art] immediate roots are in the turbulent 1960s and early 1970s, when nationwide questioning of the status quo led to significant expansion of art vis-à-vis potential creators, sites, subjects, audiences, and funding policies” (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 1).

Community-based performance envelops concepts of community. Exemplifying this, Jan Cohen-Cruz simultaneously describes both community-based performance and community, stating:

It is a collaboration between an artist or ensemble and a ‘community’ ... at the source of community-based performance is not the singular artist but a ‘community’ constituted by virtue of a shared primary identity based in place,

ethnicity, class, race, sexual preference, profession, circumstances, or political orientation. (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 2)

Community-based arts organization, Alternate ROOTS, the Regional Organization of Theaters South, defines the particulars of community as “place, tradition or spirit” in Kathie deNobriga’s 1993 *High Performance* article “An Introduction to Alternate ROOTS” (deNobriga 1993, 13). Richard Owen Geer, community-based performance scholar-practitioner, describes community-based performance as “work that is *of, by* and *for* a particular community of spirit, tradition, or location” in his 1993 *High Performance* article “Of the People, by the People and for the People: The Field of Community Performance” (Geer 1993, 28). According to Geer, “community performance is synonymous with community change” (Geer 1993, 28). He offers this metaphor:

When a community performs its beliefs and traditions it makes meaning. Fuel, oxygen and heat are required to make fire, and a similar relationship exists between the elements in community performance. People are the fuel, their beliefs and traditions oxygen, and performance is the heat. Metaphorically, fire and performance are similar. Fire makes nutrients valuable for digestion and provides illumination and warmth. Performance cooks experience into meaning, provides illumination and security. In tribal societies fire and performance occur at the community’s center. (Geer 1993, 28)

The working definitions of community and community-based art can be embedded in ways that skew contextual parameters. Consequently questions arise. Cohen-Cruz addresses a few of these questions in her text, *Local Acts*, writing:

Do we do ourselves a disservice by reinforcing fixed categories of community? ...Identities are so complex and multiple that it may not be obvious who is of ‘the community.’ Who makes such determinations? If professional artists are moved by the same subject matter as people with a material bond, do they become part of ‘the community’ When community is grounded in geography, for how long must someone have lived there? (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 3)

Since I am unable to answer these questions definitively, it was my responsibility as a researcher of collaboration and community, to acknowledge the complexities in the vocabulary I utilized. Cohen-Cruz, in addition to addressing questions, boldly takes on the challenge of parsing potential meaning and value from semantic components.

Constructivist collaboration is a term created by Linda Lambert, Michelle Collay, Karen Kent, Anna Ershler Richert, and Mary Dietz in their 1996 text, *Who Will Save Our Schools? Teachers as Constructivist Leaders*. They describe it as:

...the actions and interactions among willing participants that result in learning. Constructivist collaboration usually involves a combination of talking, listening, observing, doing, thinking, and reflecting. Collaboration has a variety of purposes and is often initiated by a specific focus or need. The process of collaboration may lead to discovering emerging understandings, purposes, and needs. (Lambert et al. 1996, 75)

For the purposes of my research, which is collaborative in nature, constructivism is viewed through a social lens. George W. Gagnon, Jr. and Michelle Collay identify social development as an informant to constructivism in their 2006 text, *Constructivist Learning Design: Key Questions for Teaching to Standards*. Applying ideas on socially constructed knowledge in the context of an educational environment, they write:

Individuals thinking alone first make personal meaning. Then they test their thinking in dialogue with others to construct social meaning. Next, they construct shared meaning by reviewing their thinking with the class or in a larger community. Finally, the teacher leads students in considering the standard meaning among local communities and the broader society. Movement through these four phases of meaning making embodies the process of socially constructing cultural knowledge. (Gagnon and Collay 2006, 78-79)

This idea of phases of learning in regard to meaning making and shared knowledge was valuable to me as a researcher working with a community of dancers.

Gathering, defined by the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community of this study, represents the time spent in shared process and practice. Upholding the integrity of this research as both trial and lab, it was important to leave room for the community to cultivate and further define its function and characteristics. Thus, the community was invited to consciously craft language about the collective's work. "Gathering" is the word chosen instead of dance class or rehearsal by the entire project community to describe daily one-to-two-hour project meetings throughout the 10-week research period. It became contextually important to describe our shared time and experiences with a word that reflected the community's collective investigative interests.

Hermeneutics refers to theoretical study of interpretation. Sondra Fraleigh's 2000 *Dance Research Journal* article entitled, "Consciousness Matters," describes hermeneutics as discovery "through the descriptive process—what the experience itself has uncovered" (Fraleigh 2000, 59). Informed by improvisatory sensibilities, hermeneutics brings "a rendering of meaning derived from the lived experience" to consciousness (Fraleigh 2000, 59). Dance educator Susan W. Stinson utilizes a hermeneutic methodology in her dissertation entitled, "Reflections and Visions: A Hermeneutic Study of Dangers and Possibilities in Dance Education." Stinson writes: "A hermeneutic methodology, based upon a model of the process of doing art, is used for the study because it allows the author to connect the personal, professional, and social worlds in which the dance educator lives" (Stinson 1984, vi).

For the purposes of this research, hermeneutics refers to the intersection of language and meaning. Joann McNamara elaborates on this intersection in the 1999 text

Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry. In the chapter, “Dance in the Hermeneutic Circle,” she defines hermeneutics as “a tradition, an approach used to examine the meaning of a text and how its meaning is constructed” (McNamara 1999, 163). She continues by clarifying her working definition of text: “The term *text* here refers to all symbolic constructs of meaning which, in the world of dance, may include dances, the social and cultural activities surrounding dance, books about dance, the language of dance, and so forth” (McNamara 1999, 163). Movement, an integral part of the dance, is considered language in dance. On language in hermeneutic study, Joann McNamara writes: “Rooted in language, as well as a particular historical and social situation, human expressions communicate what has been, what is, and what can be. Interpretation or other human expressions can be acknowledged as a never-ending process of being” (McNamara 1999, 179).

The hermeneutic circle begins with consciousness and cycles around to conscious reflection as a means to “assess the value of an interpretation” (McNamara 1999, 181). Bringing the focus to dance, McNamara states: “Using language to convey the meaning of a dance, for example, one must apprehend the lived experience of the dance and then express, through language, that experience as it arises” (McNamara 1999, 178).

Language, for me and in the context of this research, includes movement, dialogue, discussion, conversation, feedback, typewritten text, and hand-written text. With technology in the mix, emails and communication via electronic networks are also considered language. Semantics, word choices, and concepts, both artistic and pedagogical, are part of language as referenced in this research. The way language is

presented informs potential responses and potential meanings. Tone, timing, and delivery can impact response. This research is interested in language as it correlates to collaborative preparatory, investigative, and reflective phases in dance. Acknowledging individual and collectively shared perspectives, language is examined in relationship to these associated phases of development.

From the vantage point of researcher and facilitator, language also includes prompts, cues, and questions expressed primarily through verbal exchange. Language is communicated and exchanged by people with people. It is crafted in the present moment and dependent on its form and usage, language can exist beyond the time of original generation if preserved in text or transferred through memory recall and repeated physical practice. Movement, like words, is communicated in forms, phrases, categories, lists, and impromptu ways. As dancers, collaborators, and people, we respond and react differently to language; however the utilization of language is imperative to communication and translation of experience.

Phenomenology, for the purposes of this research, refers to theoretical study of description. In *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* 1998 text edited by Alexandra Carter, Sondra Fraleigh clarifies her use of phenomenology and credits philosophers in the field in the chapter entitled, “A Vulnerable Glance: Seeing Dance Through Phenomenology,” writing:

When I use the term phenomenology I mean existential phenomenology, the development of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy by later twentieth-century existentialist philosophers: Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sarte, Paul Ricoeur, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gabriel Marcel. The common concern of these philosophers was to describe existence from the ‘horizon’

(Husserl's term for the 'context' in which experiences arise) of being-in-the-world. (Fraleigh 1998, 136)

In phenomenology, consciousness is transcendent and perception of phenomena is not static, it exists through time. Fraleigh describes existential phenomenology as “vulnerable” because it “rests on experiential descriptions of the lived world; more precisely, human experiences arising always in particular contexts of being-in-the-world” (Fraleigh 1998, 136). Applied to dance, a phenomenologist approaches the task of describing a phenomenon, a dance or dance experience for example, as though he/she is “seeing it fresh for the first time” (Fraleigh 1998, 138). Phenomenology attempts to remove biases and assumptions from consciousness. The idea of describing “fresh” experiences and their meaningful essences is the phenomenologist's challenge. For this research, keeping collaborative practices “fresh” was a collective challenge.

Post positivist, a term with various applications and practitioners, refers to a belief that reality is socially constructed. *Researching Dance: Modes of Inquiry*, the 1999 text edited by Sondra Fraleigh and Penelope Hanstein, includes a chapter entitled “Postpositivist Research in Dance” written by Jill Green and Susan W. Stinson. Green and Stinson note that postpositivists “tend to believe that we construct reality according to how we are positioned in the world, and that how we see reality and truth is related to the perspective from which we are looking” (Green and Stinson 1999, 93). This approach purposefully leaves room for emergent patterns and themes.

Skill training, defined in my own words for this research, represents the act of honing technical, cognitive, social, and communicative skills. The skill sets each individual cultivates and brings to a shared experience are of great educational and

artistic value and they are diverse in potential. Skill training is used instead of “dance technique class” in the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project dance environment as a means to study how dialogue and definitions impact the overall development and operational foundation of a collaborative community.

Methodology

This research journey, a continuum of beginnings, progressed through inception/design, active investigation, and culmination/reflection phases. The inception or design phase of the research was sparked by my personal experiences as a Graduate Teaching Fellow in Dance at the University of Oregon and as a participant in the 2009 Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute in New Orleans, Louisiana. During this phase, which was more independent in nature, I gathered a diverse sampling of resources. The 10-week Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community trials and discoveries defined the active investigation research phase of the research. The collective directly informed this second phase. Resources were both prescribed from my earlier design phase and emergent in response to the community’s interests and needs. The culmination or reflection phase of the research acknowledged individual and collective feedback in response to the shared movement project experience and posited further inquiry and practice. During this third and final phase, the working context for me transitioned from collaborative to independent. The resources I sourced after the research project culmination support the research processes, outcomes, and a call for action. Tracing facets of the unfolding research journey, Chapter Two “Review of Related Works” is organized in correlation with the three identified research phases:

inception/design, active investigation, and culmination/reflection. Chapter Three “Discussion” addresses progressions from these research phases in reference to practices in crafting, distilling, and articulating language of shared experience.

Inception/Design Research Phase

My experience as a Graduate Teaching Fellow in the University of Oregon Department of Dance allowed me to explore dance inquiries based on my own instincts and curiosities. Particularly, I noticed categorization and separation in practice between dance technique classroom modes and choreographic modes. In response, I designed an environment to investigate possibilities in the practical integration of both “skill training” (technique) and “art making” (composition/performance). Community interaction and collaborative exchange were desired research outcomes. Initial research resources included: collaborative constructivist theory specific to professional development in the field of education, dance pedagogy, and collaborative dance company models. The collaborative dance practices of Liz Lerman, Artistic Director of Liz Lerman Dance Exchange and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Artistic Director of Urban Bush Women influenced the design of this research.

The resources on Zollar and Urban Bush Women provided context on their “community engagement” and “Summer Institute” programming. Intrigued to learn more about their collaborative community practice and with support from the University of Oregon Department of Dance, I attended the 2009 Urban Bush Women (UBW) Summer Leadership Institute in New Orleans, Louisiana. I gained direct knowledge about conscientious language practices at the UBW Summer Leadership Institute. The

vocabulary Zollar and Urban Bush Women used illuminated important facets of our community practices and shared values. We were asked to be accountable for our actions and words. As a result, movement and discussion practices were cultivated collectively with respect for multiple voices. Aware of my voice in the process, I critically examined how I worked and contributed inside the Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute framework.

The Institute's design and implementation was pivotally insightful for me as a new researcher with collaborative inclinations. My shared experience as an Institute participant and the resources I accessed on Zollar and Urban Bush Women's working processes provided me with key support throughout this phase of my research. The practice of crafting, organizing how to implement and support trials in my own research, became most apparent during this initial phase.

Active Investigation Research Phase

As researcher, I flowed between roles of teacher, artist, and facilitator. The remaining community of dancers was comprised of nine undergraduate students. Invitations were personally extended to dancers, via telephone and email, with a description of the research environment design. This invitation process was my first opportunity to practice communication with dancers in the project community.

Opportunities to share descriptions of creative learning processes are often missed and unrealized. The field of dance can benefit further from recognizing communication as an active and descriptive craft that demands practice. Language is not limited to feedback and responsive exchange after the fact, after a witnessing of someone's work in

class or their presence in performance. Word choices that illuminate working processes in dance can clarify context. The committee members I worked with in my research are well versed in the field of dance. Engaging in process discussions with these dance professionals reinforced a checks and balances system for me inside the active investigation research phase. The specificity of their word choices and the clarity of their concepts informed my research practices. Per invitation, all committee members attended at least one of the community's two-hour gatherings during the 10-week timeframe.

This phase of the research took place over a ten week time period with the first five weeks designated during the later portion of summer break, August 17-September 18, 2009, and the second five weeks designated during the first half of the Fall 2009 academic term, September 29-October 30, 2009. The community of dancers met two-three times weekly for one-two hours at a time. The project culminating sharing entitled, "We Are the One, I," took place on Sunday, November 1, 2009 from 2-3 p.m. in the University of Oregon's Department of Dance Building, Gerlinger Annex Rooms 353 and 354. All community gatherings took place in the University of Oregon Dance Department studio space. Performance space was negotiated and arranged in compliance with Dance Department events and protocol.

Each project community member was invited to invest in the process actively, both in regard to skill training and art making. The consistently changing agenda fused both my resources and ideas with the resources and ideas of each dancer in the community. Codified exercises, methodologies, and dialogic dance company models,

such as those of previously mentioned Urban Bush Women and Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, were combined with experiential processes generated during the gatherings by the project community's preferences and background. Noting the range of movement variations, the fluid sharing of concepts, and the shaping of movement material that transpired within the dance environment, the research journey was a continuum of beginnings and an active learning lab. The goal was not to create a "new" dance approach, but to open the forum for collaboration and increased possibility through shared experience and language exchange.

Tools for analysis included journals, dialogue discussions, and written responses recorded on individual notecards or on the community notepad during project gatherings. Originally, journals were the primary form of documentation. However as the research progressed, the individual notecards and the community notepad also became primary forms of documentation. As researcher, I kept journals on my summer study including processes unique to my 2009 Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute experience, on the planning process prior to the start of the research, and continually throughout the shared research process as it occurred and in reflection. The community of dancers would occasionally journal during gathering time; however, most of the journaling was structured to take place outside of the project community as a reflective tool. The practice of journaling can give voice to what is uniquely known and felt by the individual participant inside the collective experience. Voluntary journal sharing with the collective was welcomed but not required. However, a majority of the participants

submitted their journals after the project culmination to aid me, as researcher, in reflection.

Language was crafted, distilled, and articulated in the midst of the community's working processes. Group discussions during gatherings gave participants the opportunity to discuss their experiences in an open format. The use of open-ended questions allowed for a broader scope of responses and inter-personal exchanges. Responses to questions were not only verbally discussed, they were hand-written on individual notecards or on the collective community notepad. Periodically and with the entire project community's permission, group dialogue sessions were audio tape-recorded. The community of dancers involved in the project met three weeks after the culminating sharing for reflective feedback exchange. In addition to group discussions with the community of dancers, I engaged committee members in open-ended discussion as an important outside collaborative facet of the study's design. Both one-on-one and collective discussions with committee members during the active investigation phase of my research provided important reflective opportunities for me as researcher-facilitator.

Resources like Liz Lerman's 2003 *Critical Response Process* text were referenced and implemented throughout the active investigation research process. Specific to the work of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Urban Bush Women, Michelle Vellucci's 2009 *Dance Teacher* article, "Phenomenal Women: Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Urban Bush Women Celebrate 25 Years of Creating Art as a Catalyst for Social Change," and Urban Bush Women company member Paloma McGregor's 2009 *Dance Magazine* article, "From the Heart: Why I Dance," were copied and handed out to the project community

during gatherings. It was important to identify resources I found helpful during our shared processes and to make them accessible. Therefore, a resource list was updated and shared with the community during the active investigation research phase. The practice of distilling, utilizing discussion to generate movement or movement to spark discussion with intentions to identify individual and collective focus and interests, pivotally informed the shared experiences in this constantly evolving phase.

Culmination/Reflection Research Phase

After the public culminating sharing on November 1, 2009, the community of dancers, less one dancer, gathered three weeks later on November 22, 2009 for feedback exchange and reflection. Informed by the evaluation questions I answered as a 2009 Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute participant and layered with my own research reflections, the questions I crafted in my personal research journal read:

What did you learn from the experience?

Reflect upon how you will use what you learned in the following areas:

- A. Educational settings
- B. Art making processes
- C. Community Life

How were you informed/affected by the dialogue/discussion component in this process?

Describe your movement connection in the process. How did movement inform you-inspire you?

As a community, we wrote our own responses on notecards and subsequently talked about the salient points as a collective. I collected the notecards and added them to our community process documentation. I also collected journals from community members who were willing to share their work with me. Journals were not viewed by the community.

The context of the culmination/reflection research phase transitioned from communal to independent as I began to write about the active investigation research experiences in my 10-week Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Movement Project lab. Significant realizations emerged during my focused writing practice. I felt inspired and overwhelmed by the challenge of crafting language to describe the shared processes and discoveries inside the active investigation research phase. I needed the words to convey the meaning and value of the actual lived experience, the collaborative dance community experience. Articulating active investigation and emergent trials through the writing process was a new and unfamiliar journey.

Seeking additional resources to guide my practice, I focused on published resources in the field of community-based arts. It was insightful to see how community-based arts scholars and practitioners navigate descriptive language, narrative elements, and multiple perspectives. In addition, I sought published resources in dance pedagogy with practical applications and a focus on language practices in dance. These resources were crucial to the culmination/reflection research phase and they propelled me toward synthesis and suggestions for application. The practice of articulating shared experiences, giving context to collaborative moving, writing, and talking processes with what seems like a limited vocabulary and a personal viewpoint embedded in the felt progression, was the most prevalent challenge during this final research phase.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED WORKS

The research discussed in this chapter traverses a range of topics including: Teacher Collaboration, Community-Based Arts Practice, Dance Pedagogy, Collaborative/Dialogic Dance Company Models, and Dance Language Practice. This review of related works examines methods, shares findings, and critically reviews processes in relation to the interests and goals of this research. The format of this chapter is intended to support the unfolding journey of the researcher as designer, seeker of emergent themes, and advocate for broader understanding. Crafted to distill language as a descriptor of process, the literature reviewed under each topic header traces the research journey's progression toward synthesis. Therefore, the literature is presented in order of its application to my research. Grouped by topic, the resources I drew from during the research inception/design research phase are reviewed first. Resources I accessed as support for the active investigation research phase are noted second. Third and finally, works I sought out following the project culmination are reviewed as support for the culmination/reflection research phase. Each review concludes with statements identifying aspects of the work that informed the research project design, active research investigation, or the research project outcomes.

Teacher Collaboration/Community-Based Arts Practice

Research by Michelle Collay, Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at California State University, East Bay in Hayward, examined teacher engagement in professional learning communities. Her 1988 dissertation “Dialogue as a Language of Learning: An Ethnographic Study of Teacher Socialization” utilized an ethnographic approach to delve into her question: Where does one really begin to learn about teaching? Interpreting from her roles as Clinical Professor, Co-Teacher, and Participant Observer/Researcher, Collay investigated the process of new teacher induction. The development of a common language and open dialogue between professionals provided a context in which Collay posits one can know teaching. Shared knowledge about teaching was created as a result of this exchange.

Collay’s methodology included four rounds of themed interviews over a one-year period with a five-person sample. The assumption outlined by Collay directly coupled the development of a common language and dialogue between professionals with a context of knowledge or heightened means of knowing. Participants were both new teachers and graduate students. The interview format was flexible; deviation from her questions was encouraged, with greater importance placed on discussing topics of personal relevance to each interviewee. Collay concluded: teaching and learning are integral parts of knowing, levels of knowing increase through dialogue and collegial interactions, and the Teaching-Learning process, a term coined in 1970 by Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is open-ended. Emergent themes identified through

personalized interviews were showcased with sensitive attention to biases, reflections, and personal experiences of both the researcher and interviewee.

Collay's work informed the design of this research in the manner in which it explored emergent themes. Development of a common language and open dialogue exchange between the community of dancers in this research study did provide a context in which the individual, and the collective, came to know dancing. The reciprocal respect and attentive embrace of the lived process in Collay's qualitative research influenced me to develop and attend to some sort of checks and balances system, even in fluid circumstances, to preserve the integrity of open-ended processes.

Building on Collay's early work, in true collaborative spirit, Collay, Dunlap, Enloe, and Gagnon discuss constructivist collaboration in their 1998 text, *Learning Circles: Creating Conditions for Professional Development*. Active sharing of the collaborators' experiences through open dialogue, reflection, and group action focused on six essential conditions necessary for initiating and sustaining communities of learners. They include: "building community, constructing knowledge, supporting learners, documenting reflection, assessing expectations, and changing cultures" (Collay et al. 1998,8).

"Learning circles are small communities of learners among teachers and others who come together intentionally for the purpose of supporting each other in the process of learning" (Collay et al. 1998, 2). The learning circles focused on in the text are comprised of teachers or other educators engaged in their own professional development. According to Collay and co-authors, communities of learners can change only as

individual members learn. Individual members learn most effectively as part of small groups who support change. “People in a community, living or working in a common place, may feel some sense of belonging shared beliefs, proximity to others, shared customs, traditions, and perhaps reciprocal duties and obligations” (Collay et al. 1998,14). However to Collay and co-authors, community must be deliberate; it is created and sustained by each member.

Reflecting on this text, intensive dialogue, feedback, and reflection are required of the researcher(s) as they process individually and share collaboratively. Incorporating concepts of the learning circle can aid in strengthening the growth and transformation of the individual and the community. This text emphasizes the educator and the educator’s community. There is implied separation in this emphasis.

For the purposes of my research design, roles were fused and ownership was shared in order to create balance within the community. The collaborative dance environment in my research encompassed the “learning circle” concept focused on in the work of Collay et al. However, unlike the work of Collay and co-authors, the group discussions in my research included the entire community of dancers instead of being exclusive to those in designated educator or leadership roles. The educator and the educator’s community were not viewed exclusively; instead, the project community in my research viewed individuals, roles, and the community in an integrated context. This integration, a clear risk, was significant to the advancement of prioritized community potential.

A multiplicity of active voices in the field are highlighted in Keith Knight and Mat Schwarzman's 2005 Text, *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts*. The text is cleverly written in the style of a travel guide including illustrations and comic strip commentary. Knight and Schwarzman do not report on the collaborative ventures and successes of other practitioners in the field. Instead, they provide the literal framework for a shared journey that embraces multiple perspectives and experiential narratives. This text gives authorship to community-based arts practitioners; and, it celebrates the language artist-activist communities are crafting and practicing. Mapping out the overarching context, Knight and Schwarzman identify "five territories" of community-based arts processes using the acronym CRAFT: contact, research, action, feedback, and teaching (Knight and Schwarzman 2005, xxv).

CRAFT is the umbrella structure of the text, and the supporting material is the collection of experiential stories and practical insights included in the unique narratives. As the text recreates the journey, techniques are outlined by each community-based arts organization contributor and the information is offered to the field in lesson plan form. Tips and disclaimers are flagged in ways that foster reflective consideration and proactive preparation. The clarity of the language and the organization of the exercises provide readers with information that is both applicable and user-friendly. The *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts* promotes accessibility to resources and community engagement. Each section of the text calls attention to planning and implementation logistics, operational steps, and potential variations.

More than synthesized information, Knight and Schwarzman's text is strategically written as a tool for practical use. The text synthesizes a breadth of experiences and meanings in a way that propels action and investigation. This community-based arts text encouraged me to try some of the techniques and exercises in my own dance community. In general, it supports active lab scenarios by explicitly outlining objectives, steps, and follow-up suggestions for implementation. The guiding language encourages trials. It provides context and suggestions to help balance open-ended frameworks. Talking and writing about what we do as dancers is a constant challenge. The inclusion of more resources modeling language that guides and describes practice, like Knight and Schwarzman's *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts*, would benefit the field of dance.

Jan Cohen-Cruz's 2005 text *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* discusses the history, principles and purposes, as well as the aesthetic diversity within the field. She describes the field as "unwieldy and seemingly contradictory," writing:

It [community-based art] spans performances committed to social change along with those whose purpose is the conservation of local cultures, sometimes both at once. Its practices range from grassroots oral storytelling to formal techniques created by professional artists. Its theories build not only on ideas about art but also on concepts from education, therapy, sociology, anthropology, the emerging field of dialogue studies, and community organizing. (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 1)

Cohen-Cruz elicits multiple voices to represent the collective practice and the stories that contextualize roots in the field. The multitude of voices includes a range of language from personal narratives to critical writings. Cohen-Cruz, Associate Professor in the New York University Tisch School of the Arts Drama Department, and community-based

performance practitioner and activist, includes her personal experience in the text's narrative exchange.

Early on in the text, a clarification is made between community theater and community-based performance. Cohen's personal perspective informs the definition discrepancy, stating:

Growing up in the small town of Reading, Pennsylvania, I performed in community theater—amateur productions, typically of plays that had thrived on Broadway at least a decade earlier. This is not to denigrate community theater, which is often amateur in the best sense, the love of doing it. In my own experience, community theater was an emotional oasis, a place to express feelings in a small, somewhat repressed town. But in contrast to community-based performance, community theater is enacted by people who neither generate the material, shape it, work with professional guidance, nor apply it beyond an entertainment frame. There need not be any particular resonance between the play and that place and those people, and there is rarely a goal beyond the simple pleasure of 'Let's put on a play.' (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 7)

Language, in terms of usage and implied meaning, in this case is very specific. How we use words directly relates to the value and meaning we associate with them. My experience with community theater may or may not align with Cohen-Cruz's experience, but we both have working definitions with relational meaning and value. Associations with "community" vary in ways that parallel stigmas about "art" and perceptions of high art. Community-based arts are not void of aesthetic form and development and the work, although diverse, values artistic integrity.

Cohen-Cruz refers to Liz Lerman and the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange in great detail throughout the *Local Acts* text. She interviewed Lerman on four separate occasions during the writing of this text: in person on January 21, 1995 in New York City, over the phone on June 28, 1997 and January 22, 1999, and in person on October 7, 2003 in

Takoma, Maryland. Lerman is referenced in discussions about form, aesthetic compositional approaches, and a need for criticism in the field of community-based art. The language Lerman uses has been conscientiously and artistically crafted via community practice; consequently, her voice and practices describe the interconnectivity between dance and community-based arts. Her practical knowledge and her efforts to diversify definitions are consistently noted throughout Cohen-Cruz's text. Critiquing prevailing notions of dance professionalism Lerman "finds overcompartmentalized," she expresses:

'You are a dancer if you take two technique classes a day; wait tables, behave and dress a certain way, perform once a year. ... You are not a dancer if you teach dance in a senior center. You are a social worker. You are not a dancer if once a month you work with the rabbi at the synagogue. You are a liturgical something.' In other words, the narrow definition of dance as art has led to a narrow practice. (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 173)

Similar to the way in which Cohen-Cruz addresses definitions informing community-based arts practices, Liz Lerman addresses definitions informing dance practices. Lerman talks candidly about integrating her passions: "I had the idea that dance could belong in a community and that there would be a mutual change in both the dancer and the community if it were there" (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 173). Cohen-Cruz describes Lerman's application of political organizing principles to dance as a way to build community. The organizing principles Lerman applies are: "meet people on their own turf, affirm what they already know, bring them together" (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 173).

Local Acts incorporates a variety of detailed stories and compelling examples from active community-based arts practitioners/organizations in theater, music, and dance. It weaves through the field's history and strives to capture both the breadth of the

field and the essence of its impact and implications. Cohen-Cruz acknowledges tendencies to marginalize community-based arts and in response, she suggests the genre of community-based arts belongs in the center of society. Cohen-Cruz concludes by describing the language used in the field, distilling essences of meaning and value from semantics.

The etymological root of *art*, ‘ar,’ means to fit together, such as numbers in ARithmetic, soldiers in ARmy, musical notes in hARmony. Including its variants ri, ra, and re, as in ritual, ratify, ratio, and reason, this root can be found in the words for many of the disciplines that we in the West separate, even perceive as opposites, such as art, reason, and religion. Some languages do not *have* a separate word for art. I am told that in Bantu, the same word is used to indicate agriculture, craft, art, and science. In certain Native American languages, art translates as ‘prayer made visible.’ The modernist idea of art as a self-contained domain is the blip on the screen. Community-based performance is in the great tradition of art integrated into people’s lives, expressing and bestowing meaning. (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 189)

Cohen-Cruz’s text delves deeply into theory, history, and practice of community-based arts in the United States. The thorough, critical nature of her scholarly work, fused with the rich complexity of voices and opinions, makes this resource both attractive and useful for me as a person who will continue to work with people through the arts. Cohen-Cruz’s parsed definition of “art” in the conclusion of *Local Acts* influenced my parsed definition of “collaboration” and heightened my awareness of word choice and resultant application. *Local Acts* champions creativity and community; the language strives to convey the value behind the work and the diversity of the work. The interconnected applications for the field of dance, as presented by this text, are invaluable.

Dance Pedagogy

Doctor of Education Edward C. Warburton examines and questions what skill sets influence high-quality teaching in dance. In his 2008 article, “Beyond Steps: The Need for Pedagogical Knowledge in Dance,” he argues that teacher deficiencies in the skills needed to teach dance content, or a teacher’s lack of pedagogical knowledge, pose the greatest threat to effective instruction. Content knowledge, or familiarity with the subject being taught, is not seen as a sufficient skill set for high-quality teaching. Warburton states, “truly effective teaching, however, requires consideration not only of *what* and *when* to present information but also of *how* to present it” (Warburton 2008, 8). The concept of “teaching for understanding,” contrasts with training which emphasizes the recall of steps and routines as a passive act, challenging teachers to address their own assumptions about dance. Teaching for understanding requires exploration of one’s assumptions about dance as a means to uncover deeper foundational ideas and structures in the discipline. “Creative and critical thinking” are present in dance instruction which explores these deep processes (Warburton 2008, 8).

Warburton champions a refocus on the dance learning and teacher enterprise, where content and pedagogical knowledge find balance. Warburton’s case study with expert dance educators used ethnographic methods and focused on dialogic exchange with people in the field. From observations, talks, and participation with the group, he discovered a common emergent theme that addressed issues of “personal beliefs, teaching approach, and learning advantages” (Warburton 2005, 11). Elaborating on this theme, deemed the “100 percent” doctrine, he writes:

Expert dance educators appear to believe in critical-thinking activities for all learners, and they hold high expectations for everyone, including themselves. Instead of ‘talent will out’ instructional tendencies, these experts believe ‘achievement will out’ regardless of students’ ability, motivation, or previous knowledge in dance *as long as the educators’ pedagogical knowledge is leveraged in appropriate and systematic ways*. Most experts told me a variation on the same theme: namely, that if they did not get 100% of students to achieve at a high level, then they did not believe they had done their job as a teacher. (Warburton 2005, 11)

Warburton embraces reflexive aspects of pedagogy, and, in order to improve dance teacher quality, he supports the idea for some regulatory certification standard, acknowledging the work of the National Dance Education Organization in addressing professional development. Warburton writes,

The individuals involved in these efforts [creating certification and professional development opportunities in dance education] understand that once dancers know what, when, how, and who they are teaching—when pedagogical knowledge is as valued as content knowledge—our community will be stronger, more informed, and more respected. (Warburton 2005, 11)

Warburton credits dance educator Sue Stinson, particularly her 1994 “Research as Choreography” lecture, as inspiration for his work. Stinson’s lecture is discussed later in this literature review. Warburton concludes, “I believe that nothing in dance education will change until we convince young dancers that pedagogy, like choreography, is their work” (Warburton 2005, 11).

Warburton’s work influenced my research project design. The intentional fusion of skill training and art making is an undeniable facet of the pedagogical knowledge Warburton promotes. Similarly, this research embraced reflexive practices that required each member in the project community, including the researcher/facilitator, to examine assumptions and biases linked to personal experience in order to cultivate new and shared

knowledge. Creative and critical thinking were both active facets of this research project community's learning processes.

Pedagogic models in dance education often skew towards either a product-based or process-based acknowledged foundation. With 42 years of experience teaching dance in secondary and higher education, noted contributions to pedagogical theory, and teacher training in dance, Jacqueline M. Smith-Autard categorizes a pedagogical dance model that acknowledges product and process work equally. Based in Great Britain, her work is recognized internationally. Classifying the process-driven model as "Educational" and the product-driven model as "Professional," Smith-Autard adds what she calls a "Midway" model (Smith-Autard 1994, 27), which absorbs aspects of both models. She describes the "Midway" model in her 1994 text, *The Art in Dance Education*, and identifies the "three strands of the model: creating, performing, and appreciating" (Smith-Autard 1994, 28). The third strand, appreciating, is conceptualized as an over-arching constant in dance education. Smith-Autard illustrates this concept stating dance education is "appreciation through creating, performing, and viewing" (Smith-Autard 1994, 28).

Her model, which floats between traditions in education and in the professional dance realm, serves to enlighten a multitude of options and to provide a broader foundational context. The essence of Smith-Autard's model is one of true fusion and hybridization. The "Midway" model promotes educational development with artistic, aesthetic, and cultural components. Smith-Autard advocates for continued investigation and reflection on the art in education model. "The art of dance in education model has

developed over a period of time. However, like all teaching/learning models, it is not static. Teachers should reflect on and develop their own practice so that dance teaching is always dynamic and responsive to change” (Smith-Autard 1994, 50).

Her clear fusion inspired the blended dance environment designed for this research. The blended dance environment was not intended to exclude product or process; instead, it provided room for content from both models to exist and emerge in unique ways. The language I crafted, particularly *skill training* and *art making*, was used in my research as an attempt to examine and diversify what is associated with traditional educational and traditional professional dance models. Smith-Autard’s “Midway” model diversifies options and provides language that supports trial investigation, as in my research. For me, Smith-Autard’s “Midway” model as discussed in *The Art of Dance in Education*, offered guiding contextual insights and a reference point for dance education practices.

Noted dance educator and researcher Susan W. Stinson embraced the challenge of writing about dance in her 1984 dissertation entitled “Reflections and Visions: A Hermeneutic Study of Dangers and Possibilities in Dance Education.” Art and poetics serve as the methodology for her research and her reflections revolve around the act of doing art and recognizing relationship connections. Stinson writes:

The task of the artist became not creating the relationships, but becoming aware of them, and revealing them in a form. The task of the observer, in looking at the form, is to look as an artist, rediscovering relationships. It is this tradition for doing art that has the most relevance for the kind of research I have pursued. (Stinson 1984, 20).

According to Stinson studying dance and teaching dance require self-inquiry. “We must also study ourselves, reflect upon who we are as persons, define and redefine our values in dialogue with other voices” (Stinson 1984, 153). Stinson described arts education as a combination of both vertical and horizontal dimensions, growing and being with people while reflecting personally. Investigating phenomena of shared experience can help to describe the relationships and connections created in dance learning environments. As Stinson stated in the “Summary of the Journey” section of her dissertation, “It is time to recognize we can also look critically at that which we love, and transform it” (Stinson 1984, 156).

The intersected dimensions Stinson highlights reinforced my research interest to blend intersections of skill training and art making in an environment inhabited by a community of dancers who supported each other in efforts to “grow” and to “be” in the experience together. Stinson views research as a journey and she recognizes both love and critical examination as necessary components for transformation in the field of dance. My research journey was sparked by Stinson’s call for action.

Susan W. Stinson shares her thoughts on dance research and its creative connection to choreography. In her 1994 National Dance Association Scholar Lecture entitled “Research as Choreography,” Stinson describes teaching, choreographing, and researching as parallel ventures. All of these tasks involve attending and reflecting, sensing and making sense. She asks the question: How do participants in dance make sense of their experiences? Referencing her experience teaching a Dance Research course to Master of Fine Arts (MFA) students at the University of North Carolina, at Greensboro

she links personal experience with thinking about research. She believes in the importance of revealing one's own subjectivity in one's work writing: "I want to share 'where I'm coming from': I want it to be clear that the ideas I present are not some sort of revealed truth, but are human creations—my own and others" (Stinson 1994, 3). She calls for more dance research of this type and acknowledges the difficult task of translating the art of movement into words.

Stinson states that scholarly research, like choreography, is personal to the individual and involves interpretation. The methodologies of both research and choreography generate more material than is ultimately used. Deciding what is worthwhile, what has the possibility to generate insights, figuring out what it means, and devising a way to construct a cohesive work communicating this process and insight to others is the most difficult task for the researcher and choreographer alike. Form and content arise together. Stinson elaborates, "We figure out what we want to say as we figure out how to say it...and we truly do not know one until we know the other" (Stinson 1994, 9). Stinson describes both processes (of research and choreography) as "acts of faith" and "messy" (Stinson 1994, 9).

She discusses how organizing research is like the process of choreography. The connection between theory and the sensory/kinesthetic knowledge is active thinking. She states, "we can think only with what we know 'in our bones'...attending to sensory awareness, followed by reflection, is as important in research as it is in teaching" (Stinson 1994, 13). Similarly, she views dance as a use of all senses including heightened consciousness. In accordance with Stinson's shared thoughts, making aesthetic

decisions, sensing possibilities, and negotiating answers parallels the process of editing in both research and choreography. The process is unique to each person.

Stinson concludes by encouraging researchers, choreographers, and teachers to speak in their “own voice” and to trust what they “know” in body, mind, and passion (Stinson 1994, 15). She validates choreography as a form of research because it comes from the person...from what only they can know. On documentation, Stinson advocates journal keeping as a means of connecting processes both inside and outside the studio. Paralleling Stinson’s voice, this research aimed to describe how processes evolve and actualize. In an attempt to trace process, journaling was personally utilized by the researcher-facilitator at all times and collectively practiced by the community of dancers occasionally during agreed meeting times and outside of project gatherings.

Susan W. Stinson’s presented a keynote address on October 23, 2004 at the National Dance Education Organization’s (NDEO) annual meeting. Her address was published in 2005 as an article entitled “Why Are We Doing This?” in the *Journal for Dance Education*. Stinson acknowledges that the language we use to describe what we do in dance and why we do it presents challenges. The challenges she illuminates relate to how we advocate for dance.

Providing context from her direct experiences as a Professor of Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Stinson identifies questions she asks students when they take their first class with her. The questions are: “Why are you doing this?” and “What drew you to dance and to dance education as a career?” (Stinson 2005, 82) and the responses from her students reflected commonalities. She states:

Almost all of the students in my dance education courses at UNCG [University of North Carolina at Greensboro] have told me that they keep dancing because of how they feel when they do it, and they want to teach so that others can share the joy and satisfaction they find in dance.” Addressing the National Dance Educational Organization audience, Stinson continues: “My guess is that these sentiments are shared by a large number of you. This is not, however, the language most of us use in trying to convince school administrators why they should offer dance. (Stinson 2005 82)

Stinson recognizes the diverse approaches dance educators and artists use to advocate for dance and she addresses the reality of pressures to tailor dance as a “product” in line with established educational and systematic models and demands.

For Stinson, advocacy for dance has been influenced by philosophies, trends, and varied practices in education. She acknowledges the viewpoint of Dr. Nel Noddings, Lee L. Jacks Professor of Education, Emeritus, at Stanford University and author of numerous texts, including *Caring* (1984), on the topic ethical care in education. Stinson quotes Nodding’s view on current educational foundations described by Noddings in her 2003 text *Happiness and Education*.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, educational discussion is dominated by talk of standards, and the reason for this emphasis is almost always economic. The underlying aims seem to be (1) to keep the United States strong economically and (2) to give every child an opportunity to do well financially. (Noddings 2003, 84)

In agreement with Noddings and finding support in her stance, Stinson articulates a suggestion of her own for the field of dance education.

Yet, as Nodding’s points out, schools give almost no assistance to students in learning what brings them joy, meaning, and satisfaction. Like Noddings, I suggest that we not limit our thinking to what schools are now, but consider what they might be, and that one major purpose of schooling might be, *should be*, learning how to live a meaningful, satisfying human life—what some people call happiness. (Stinson 2005, 83)

Stinson expounds on “happiness” by placing it in the context of scholarly research. Child and adolescent psychiatrist and author of the 2002 text *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness*, Edward Hallowell, as described by Stinson, offers “a critically-based theoretical framework that defines two sources of happiness: the ability to create and sustain joy, and the ability to overcome adversity” (Stinson 2005, 84). Connection, play, practice, mastery, and recognition are the five steps Hallowell identifies in the development of these abilities.

Placing her own work in scholarly context, Stinson draws from an extensive eight-year research project she has been engaged in with colleague Dr. Karen Bond. The project includes examination of data from over 700 young people “describing how they experience dance education, in a variety of school and community settings in this country, Canada, Australia, and others” (Stinson 2005, 83). Both Stinson and Bond were struck by the similarities between their research’s qualitative data and Hallowell’s theory. In their 2007 co-authored *Research in Dance Education* article, “‘It’s work, work, work, work’: Young people’s experiences of effort and engagement in dance,” Bond and Stinson reference Edward Hallowell, making this Stinson’s second reference to his 2002 text, *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness*, in support of her work. Bond and Stinson write:

He [Hallowell] identifies two primary sources of individual happiness: the ability to create and sustain joy, and the ability to overcome adversity. Hallowell describes five steps to developing these abilities that speak directly to our study of young people’s experiences of work in dance, as well as our larger study of engagement: 1) Connection (with parents and teachers, activities, the arts, and oneself); 2) Play (a requirement for ground-breaking in any field); 3) Practice (gives control to the environment and facilitates discipline); 4) Mastery (builds

confidence to persist through obstacles); and 5) Recognition (the feeling of being valued by others). (Bond and Stinson 2007, 176)

President of the American Psychological Association and Fox Leadership

Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, Martin Seligman has also researched the concept of “happiness.” His work is classified under the field of Positive Psychology, or the scientific study of positive emotion. Stinson includes a sampling of his work and theories throughout her address. In addition, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s “flow” theory and characteristics are mentioned in support of Stinson’s suggestion to view dance and education in a broader and conceptually changing context. These publishes resources outside the field of dance education appear to offer significant support for the salient points Stinson addresses in her research as well as in her collaborative research with Karen E. Bond. The written and descriptive language from these researchers and their work provides helpful context for experiential work in the dance field.

Talking with fellow dance educators, Stinson articulates that happiness is part of the dance experience. In conclusion, she states: “I hope each of us will be more mindful of the happiness we experience in dance, and savor it; and consider the ways in which learning and teaching this art have played a role in the meaningful lives we have created” (Stinson 2005, 88). She follows this with a call for action: “I hope we will have the courage to advocate in some part of our lives for the human right to discover such happiness, and for schools where this kind of discovery can occur.”

Inspired by Susan W. Stinson’s research and her consistent voice in the field of dance, particularly in dance education, I sought out an example of her recent work

following the culmination of my movement project research. My reflections and realizations compelled me to seek greater context. It is valuable to know what people in the dance field are interested in talking about and how people are articulating information for exchange. My research, with cultivated shared processes, yielded outcomes of happiness and meaningful connections. It is hopeful to know dance educators, like Stinson, validate inclusion of dance's more elusive outcomes in order to expand how we advocate for the field. The topic of advocacy in the field is discussed in further detail in Chapter Four "Conclusion."

Texas Women's University Dance Department faculty Jordan Fuchs and Sarah Gamblin write about shared experiences and inquiries as dance educators. "As dance faculty at TWU [Texas Women's University], we have both been grappling with the question of how to connect our daily training to our dancemaking, and our performing to our teaching" (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 44). Their 2009 *Contact Quarterly* article entitled, "Partnering, Permeability, and Sensation: Integrating Contact Improvisation into Technique Class," addresses the aesthetic and pedagogical challenges associated with integrating traditional and experimental perspectives in dance technique class. Fuchs and Gamblin identify "traditional perspectives" as "the ability to dance set solo combinations to prescribed musical structures" and "experimental perspectives" as "skills that can support spontaneous movement invention in solo, partnering, and ensemble relationships" (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 45). They ask the question: "How do we integrate the multiple perspectives called for in our dancemaking aesthetics within the confines of a 90-minute technique class?" (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 45). More

specifically, they examine how contact improvisation can be integrated into the technique classes they teach.

Fuchs and Gamblin pinpoint three organizing principles that have helped them to fuse multiple perspectives in a technique class: “(1) creating permeability between the solo dancing body and the partnering body; (2) exploring anatomical concepts through sensation; and (3) instilling the impulse to move from sensation” (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 45). Fuchs and Gamblin reflect on potential difficulties for students inside the classroom such as repeating movement combinations with precision and adapting to changing stimuli in improvisation. From their experience and observation, they share: “we find that it is easier to start a class with a somatic and partnering perspective and then shift to solo work than it is to shift from solo work to working somatically with a partner” (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 45). In relation to my research, this statement made me wonder what progression of movement components would flow best for the dancers participating in my Master of Fine Arts Movement Project.

In line with the second organizing principle, “exploring anatomical concepts through sensation,” Fuchs and Gamblin view sensation as a creative support for learning and understanding. They advocate for integration of contact improvisation practices into the technique class as a means to clarify technical ideas. Fuchs and Gamblin outline specific examples of movement partnering activities that promote sensory and somatic exchange. Sourcing contact as a contextual reference in dance technique class can help students “deepen intellectual knowing by connecting thought to sensation and experience” (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 46). Fuchs and Gamblin’s third organizing

principle, “instilling the impulse to move from sensation,” encourages deeper attention to “touch-derived sensory feedback” as a means to “amplify and clarify dancer’s understanding and sense of their bodies” (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 46). They note that it takes time to build rapport with a partner.

Fuchs and Gamblin notice “a significant shift taking place in the integrated technique class” (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 47). Articulating aspects of the shift they reference, they write: “For dancers used to the traditional technique class paradigm, the added awareness of the sensorial bases of movement, attention to choice-making in the moment, and relationship with a partner can make the class much more challenging” (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 47). They acknowledge that navigation of added concerns in an integrated class can create a “more ambiguous experience than a traditional technique class” (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 47). To support the contrast between an integrated technique class, one that incorporates contact improvisation practices, Fuchs and Gamblin state: “As the performer is called upon to take more responsibility for movement invention, real-time decision-making, and partnering relationships, traditional notions of right and wrong, authority and authorship, are reconfigured” (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 47). Fuchs and Gamblin acknowledged the ambiguity within the integrated technique class as well as the resulting increase in personal responsibility partnered with a reconfiguration of traditional practices. Their realistic description and insightful awareness was refreshing to me as a researcher who had also explored an integrated trial in my Master of Fine Arts Movement Project.

To conclude, Fuchs and Gamblin collectively identify the benefits of an integrated technique class.

Dancers are able to shift between solo body, partnering, and ensemble bodies with ease and finesse; engage in real time decision-making and movement creation; integrate the depth and inspiration of the sensing body; and accurately locate, present and re-present the visual body in time and space, whatever the sound, visual, spatial, or conceptual structure. (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 47)

Based on their independent experience and collective pedagogical inquiry, Fuchs and Gamblin believe the skills they call upon in their own dancemaking and performing, as identified above, are the skills they have to “offer the next generation of performers and dancemakers” (Fuchs and Gamblin 2009, 47). These skills are shared and cultivated through the teaching experience. The declarative tone in their common language, language from their shared experience, is apparent. They are able to succinctly identify potential changes that can occur as a result of their collaborative investigation and practice.

As I reflect on the experiences and processes shared in my research, I am curious about the collaborative pedagogical inquiry and investigative practices of Jordan Fuchs and Sarah Gamblin. They are actively seeking integration between their own learning and artistic experiences and the potential learning experiences, particularly for students, inside the dance technique classroom. In regard to the research journey outlined by Fuchs and Gamblin, I align the skill training and art making fusion and examination in my research with a similar quest for integration and exploration. I appreciate the specific movement exercise details Fuchs and Gamblin outline because they provide a framework that can be implemented and applied in practical contexts. Their observations and

reflections give great insight into the exchange they are experiencing as educators, artists, and colleagues. Because they share their process, they give more dimensionality to the work, to the multiplicity of potential experiences, and to the human connectivity created through dance. Fuchs and Gamblin describe intersections in dance pedagogy and personal artistic practice and they offer their written descriptions as collaborative perspective in the field of dance.

Collaborative/Dialogic Dance Company Models

The Urban Bush Women company model celebrates community and the processes inherent within a working community. Florida State University doctoral candidate Ama Oforiwaa Konado Aduonum recognized the contributions of the Urban Bush Women in her 1999 dissertation, “Urban Bush Women: Building Community and Empowering the Disempowered Through a Holistic Performing Arts Medium.” The dissertation explored:

- 1) How the troupe employs the notion of collective individualism as a model for group organizing and as a philosophy for choreography and music composition,
 - 2) How Urban Bush Women uses dance-based performances to build community by promoting acceptance, appreciation and celebration of difference, and 3) How, in doing so, they endeavor to empower the traditionally disempowered.
- (Aduonum 1999, xv)

The dissertation is both an ethnographic study of the Urban Bush Women and an in-depth study of two of the company’s major works: “Batty Moves” and “Shelter” (Aduonum 1999, xv). “Urban Bush Women: Building Community and Empowering the Disempowered Through a Holistic Performing Arts Medium” described two important processes: the artistic processes of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar’s Urban Bush Women and the personal research processes of dissertation candidate Ama Oforiwaa Konadu Aduonum.

Both processes provided insights that informed the structural basis for my research. It was beneficial for me to reference Ama Oforiwaa Konado Aduonum's research methodology and her reflexive application. Her work provided a lens into Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's choreographic processes from inception to reflection. For me, access to these illuminated processes helped to contextualize a traceable journey, to promote understanding of a progression. Describing process is a challenge; however the benefits are immense. The perspective I gained from Ama Oforiwaa Konado Aduonum's dissertation is enriched by her presence and parallel journey inside the research itself. Aduonum's reflexive work ethic and her illumination of processes, for me, strengthened the translation of her work. The narrative elements, the threading of multiple processes and perspectives, brought me closer to the work and its context for application. The language she captured, in written text, welcomed me into her experience. Her vivid descriptions of experiences and interpreted meanings made an impression on me as a reader.

The 2005 text *Dialogue in Artistic Practice: Case Studies From Animating Democracy*, edited by Pam Korza and Barbara Schaffer Bacon, illuminates the dance company models of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's Company, Urban Bush Women (UBW) and Liz Lerman's Company, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. Both companies employ collaborative creative frameworks that celebrate the community and the process of engagement. Caron Atlas, in written collaboration with Zollar, Urban Bush Women, and additional community partners, authors the first chapter in *Dialogue in Artistic Practice:*

Case Studies From Animating Democracy entitled, “Urban Bush Women: Hair Parties Project.”

Urban Bush Women’s belief about dance is that it is “a celebration, a solution, and a necessity” and that “art is a catalyst for social change” (Atlas 2005, 1). Putting this into practice, Urban Bush Women Company activities include: “the creation and performance of works for the stage; artist training in dance and community engagement; and public projects that encourage cultural activity as an inherent part of community life” (Atlas 2005, 2). Atlas and collaborators define and describe Urban Bush Women’s (UBW) community engagement residencies:

Community engagement residencies are designed to respond to specific issues that are important to the host community. ...During these residencies, UBW company members partner with local artists and residents through dance classes, workshops, trust-building exercises, and a creation process that culminates in a communitywide performance. (Atlas 2005, 2)

Some of the basic concepts and assumptions that inform Urban Bush Women’s community engagement work include:

Each community is unique and has the answers it seeks to uncover.
The community engagement process that UBW uses must help people gain a sense of their own power.
In order to move powerfully into the future, a community must “own” its history, for better or for worse.
All change starts within.
Accountability is key to working with communities. (Atlas 2005, 3)

The company’s organizing principles elaborate on these assumptions, articulated as: “validating the individual, serving as a catalyst for social change, embracing a process driven practice, entering community and co-creating stories, and celebrating the movement and culture of the African Diaspora” (Atlas 2005, 13). Community structure

and foundational organization is vibrantly alive in practice in Zollar's Urban Bush Women.

Upon celebrating their 20th anniversary in 2004, Urban Bush Women engaged in a period of rebirth and renewal that clarified how they wanted to share their vision in practice. Atlas writes:

As dialogue became an opportunity to build new relationships in Brooklyn [Urban Bush Women home community], it also became a means of learning and meaning-making inside the company. The company began to codify what it had been doing intuitively and became more deliberate about transferring knowledge. UBW [Urban Bush Women] affirmed itself as a process-oriented learning organization and has quickly incorporated the lessons learned from this project into its subsequent work. (Atlas 2005, 2)

The implementation of dialogic learning practices was pivotal to the codification and facilitation of company work from a foundational level. "UBW's organizational structure changed to reflect company transformations" (Atlas 2005, 19). Atlas continues:

UBW is working to integrate dialogue into the internal decision-making process, a challenge made more difficult by the logistical fact that the company is often on the road and away from the office. Yet Zollar has become convinced that 'you have to go slow to go fast.' UBW administrative staff is taking the time to set goals with more clarity, acknowledge assumptions, and hold regular debriefings. (Atlas 2005, 19)

Communication, dialogic exchange, throughout the entire UBW community is an important facet of their foundation and practice.

Researching Zollar and Urban Bush Women's assumptions, organizing principles, and community building processes via this case study helped inform the initial parameters for my research. Identifying a framework for my research and honing in on the values and points of focus were crucial to building shared foundation in the new collaborative dance environment. The language used by Zollar and Urban Bush Women

inside the company's operational foundation and inside community engagement residencies has been conscientiously crafted via collective practice.

Artistic Director Liz Lerman and her company's work is discussed in chapter three of the 2005 text *Dialogue in Artistic Practice: Case Studies From Animating Democracy*, edited by Pam Korza and Barbara Schaffer Bacon. The chapter, entitled "Liz Lerman Dance Exchange: An Aesthetic of Inquiry, An Ethos of Dialogue," is written by John Borstel, Humanities Director for Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. Borstel writes:

Who gets to dance? Where is it happening? What is it about? Why does it matter? These four questions are the DNA of Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. Like all DNA they supply the internal coding for much of the work we do, informing innumerable small moments as well as the full sweep of our largest projects. And like DNA, they constitute both the origins and the density of the Dance Exchange. (Borstel 2005, 57)

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange is a multi-generational company with collective interests in dialogue, creative inquiry, and community engagement. With clarified goals and room for variation, the company pursues their mission with artistic clarity, compassion, and dedication to discovery.

The language used to describe their beliefs and practices is relatable and clear to me as a researcher. Describing what Liz Lerman Dance Exchange values and recognizes, Borstel states:

The Dance Exchange often gathers people of diverse bodies, brains, and perspectives to collaborate, listen and make something together—a process of understanding and problem-solving in which clear and constructive communication is essential. The dance is never exactly the same in any two places; as artists and participants move gradually into unfamiliar territory, they are constantly challenged to collaborate in order to adapt. The artists and their community collaborators engage in topics that are current, vital, curious,

unexpected, and always sparking dialogues within and beyond the work. Artists, participants, and audiences are consistently engaged at a level where values are at stake, and where human integrity is on the line. (Borstel 2005, 58)

Borstel addresses specific Liz Lerman Dance Exchange project work, particularly their 1998 *Shipyards Project* and their 1999 work *Hallelujah*. Borstel examines the works through a company audit on their own practices. The reflexive nature of this audit process provides context through which to study the success of the dialogic practices the company utilizes. “Achieving civic dialogue” is something Liz Lerman Dance Exchange tracks and analyzes as it corresponds with their work (Borstel 2005, 60).

Pivotal to the working framework of Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, is the art of the question. “Because inquiry is a core value of the Dance Exchange, and because the question is a basic unit of dialogue and an important tool used by dialogue practitioners, we spent some time in the audit discussing what makes an effective question for advancing an artist/community engagement process” (Borstel 2005, 64). Borstel provides an example of the language crafted by Liz Lerman Dance Exchange.

(We often use the word ‘prompt’ instead of ‘question,’ as it encompasses methods for eliciting content from participants that go beyond the grammatically defined form of a question—for example, write a series of sentences, each starting with the words ‘I come from...’ or ‘talk about a time when you gave shelter to someone.’). (Borstel 2005, 64)

According to Borstel, “the evolution of *Hallelujah* can be tracked in the evolution of the questions we posed to our community collaborators” (Borstel 2005, 64). He associates the questions asked with a process of distillation in the project. Through questions, Borstel shared a list of questions posed by the Dance Exchange in their work, *Hallelujah*, which include:

What are you in praise of?
 What is a little Hallelujah in your life?
 What do you miss and what do you wish for?
 When did you cross a boundary and who did you bring with you?
 When was a time when you met your beloved?
 When have you found beauty and disorder in the same moment?
 What do you remember about birth, death, or first love?
 What is paradise to you?
 What reminds you that you're human? (Borstel 2005, 64)

These questions elicited reflexive responses that impacted the overall work. “Throughout *Hallelujah* the ongoing dialogue in response to the questions had a reflexive effect on the questioning process itself, and the questions evolved in response to what we learned from the answers” (Borstel 205, 65).

In addition to recognizing how the formulation and presentation of questions informs Dance Exchange practices, Borstel provides in-depth descriptions of the Dance Exchange’s audit processes and methodologies. He notes the advantages and disadvantages of oral and written traditions in creative practice and concludes by stating:

The audit deepened our thinking about the ways that we teach and pass on the methods of the Dance Exchange within the company. Up until now, the Dance Exchange—typical of much of the dance world—advanced and imparted its methodology through what is basically an oral tradition of teaching, sharing information, maintaining repertory, and passing on stories about what we did and how we did it. Part of the goal of the dialogue audit was to move us more toward a written tradition in which our methods are written down, disseminated in definitive versions, and backed up with documentary evidence. For our purposes, the oral tradition has meant that the methodology is malleable, nonproscriptive, adaptable to myriad situations, and able to be owned and advanced by many people acting communally. But oral tradition has had its disadvantages: newcomers required long periods of initiation; Dance Exchange techniques, when practiced by artists from beyond the company, could be implemented poorly but still credited to us; and people were largely reliant on firsthand encounters to get the benefits of our work, which limited our ability to extend and sustain impact. Written tradition has its attendant set of advantages and disadvantages: it threatens to codify our approach; to freeze the evolution of our methods; and inhibit artists into practicing the methods as if there were only one right way. One

of the revelations of the dialogue audit so far has been that the solution to advancing our work and its dialogue components lies not in forsaking the oral tradition for a written tradition, but in finding a way to act and advance in both traditions, taking what is beneficial from both. (Borstel 2005, 90-91)

The deep inquiry and reflective analysis practiced by Liz Lerman and Liz Lerman Dance Exchange is a model for accountability in the dance field and in community-based fields. The crafting of the language and the way Dance Exchange artists facilitate collaborative exchange guided my research design. The fusion of dance, dialogue, and civic engagement is a constant practice, and Liz Lerman and her company, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, seize opportunities to learn in the community lab. As a collective, they are astute in organizing their findings in a way that respects their values, honors the multiple perspectives in dialogue, and encourages further inquiry within the field.

Artistic Director Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and her company, Urban Bush Women, are featured in the March 2009 issue of *Dance Teacher Magazine*. The article, “Phenomenal Women: Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Urban Bush Women Celebrate 25 Years of Creating Art as a Catalyst for Social Change,” written by Michelle Vellucci looks at “this multifaceted company and its many contributions, onstage and off” (Vellucci 2009, 28). On company design Vellucci writes, “Zollar knew she wanted to create a company that could wed artistic expression with social activism. She cites as influences Pearl Primus, Anna Halprin and [Diane] McIntyre, who helped shape her vision of how a dance company should look and the role its dancers should play” (Vellucci 2009, 28). Elaborating on the role of a dancer, Vellucci quotes Zollar who states that “[McIntyre] did not want cookie-cutter dancers who looked or danced a certain

way...She wanted them to have their own sense of style and figure out how that would merge into the group's style, like the way jazz music is structured" (Vellucci 2009, 28).

Zollar views Urban Bush Women company members as "collaborators and co-creators of the work" (Vellucci 2009, 28). Again Vellucci quotes Zollar, who states: "Dancers are still trained to duplicate steps, and being in a collaborative, investigative process is for the most part a new experience for many of them...particularly if they come from a classical background" (Vellucci 2009, 28). Urban Bush Women members describe Zollar's choreographic process as "very research-oriented" encompassing both academic and experiential processes (Vellucci 2009, 28). "Listening and being open" are noted facets inside Zollar's creative process (Vellucci 2009, 30).

In addition to problem-solving practices in the choreographic process, Zollar and Urban Bush Women are invested in collaborative problem-solving practices. "The company's two primary programs are community engagement residencies and the Summer Institute" (Vellucci 2009 30). The language Urban Bush Women use to describe their collaborative practices is specific. "The dancers insist that what they do is engagement—not outreach. Outreach, they say, implies that the recipient is helpless on its own. Engagement is about putting power in the hands of the community itself" (Vellucci 2009, 32).

Urban Bush Women's annual 10-day Summer Institute conceptually mirrors the guiding principles of the company's community engagement residencies. Vellucci provides context about the 2008 Institute agenda.

Last year, 57 people from 18 U.S. states, as well as Kenya, Brazil, Canada, Venezuela and the UK, came to Brooklyn to take part in the Institute. In addition

to daily dance and conditioning classes, they attended workshops in asset mapping, creating public dialogues, principles of effective community organizing, undoing racism and generating choreography, text, and music. Some company members teach movement classes, while others like [Paloma] McGregor and Marian Bauman, lead workshops on facilitating dialogue. (Vellucci 2009, 32)

Urban Bush Women company member Paloma McGregor speaks about the Summer Institute in her own words.

‘The Institute takes legislative, social and justice issues and finds artistic ways to address them from a lot of vantage points, and those vantage points come from the people who are in the room. ... Seeing how the Institute opens people’s eyes to the ways in which they can use artistic tools to draw more out of their communities is really amazing. Even though I know how it works, and I’ve done it for the past four years, it’s still magical every time.’ (Vellucci 2009, 32)

Vellucci notes that the 2009 Urban Bush Women Summer Institute would take place in New Orleans, LA.

Vellucci concludes her article with a survey of Urban Bush Women’s upcoming performance calendar and a list of their 25th anniversary events. She quotes Zollar as she speaks on the subject of dance and community. Vellucci writes, “‘Dance is by nature a communal form,’ says Zollar, ‘And dance is part of community building. It’s part of keeping the cultures of communities connected’” (Vellucci 2009, 34).

This article on the Urban Bush Women compelled me to apply for the 2009 Summer Leadership Institute in New Orleans, LA. It was an honor to attend. Being a part of the 10-day Summer Institute community enriched my life and fueled my interest in exploring collaborative practices in dance. Experiencing the collaborative processes inside the Urban Bush Women’s 2009 Summer Leadership Institute invaluable prepared me, as researcher-facilitator, for project implementation. Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Urban Bush Women’s principles and practical knowledge developed from their vast

community engagement experience partnered with the Summer Institute community's powerful cultivation guided me, as researcher-facilitator, and the community of dancers as we began, lived, and reflected on our shared journey. The significance of my experience as a 2009 Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute participant informed and supported all phases of my research. A copy of this article was given to each community member early on in the project gatherings in order to provide additional context. Sharing resources was an important part of the research practice.

Urban Bush Women company member Paloma McGregor's 2009 *Dance Magazine* article entitled "From the Heart: Why I Dance" discusses her personal artistic journey as a dancer. McGregor, originally from the U.S. Virgin Islands, has been a dancer with Urban Bush Women since 2005. She boldly asks and answers her own question:

Why I dance changes constantly. On my best days, dancing—pushing myself to my physical and emotional limits—lets me express my deepest truths. Sometimes I dance to be the center of attention. And on those increasingly rare occasions when I make it to a club, I dance because they're playing my jam.

Through it all, I dance for moments like the one I had recently at a university. I met an undergraduate student who recognized me as a dancer with Urban Bush Women. 'That's what I really want to do,' she said, 'but...'

I don't recall how she finished the sentence, perhaps because my mind drifted back to a time when I was much like her—before I learned to value my voice and live without regrets. (McGregor 2009, 114)

Her narrative contextualizes her path as both a dancer and a writer. She identifies dance as her first love and talks about the intimidation and discouragement she felt as a young dancer. As a result, McGregor writes, "I replaced dance with my second love: writing. Both satisfied my deep desire to tell stories" (McGregor 2009, 114). Although she studied journalism, wrote for a newspaper, and was interested in becoming a reporter,

McGregor was dissatisfied. “But writing for a daily newspaper didn’t match the spiritual experience of dance, of embodying the ecstasy of sunset or the hardship of sharecropping. I watched performances squirming in my chair, leaving feeling dejected. I longed to be onstage” (McGregor 2009, 114).

Acknowledging her life decisions in empathy to the story of the college student she had recently connected with, McGregor divulges her determination at age 25, with little formal training, to pursue dance through graduate school. After rejection letters and work as founding member of Cleveland Contemporary Dance Theatre, McGregor pursued an MFA in dance from Case Western Reserve University at age 27. Her university dance studies fostered personal revelations. “I discovered my skill not only for embodying, but envisioning dance. I realized, through sweat-soaked hours alone in the studio, that there were stories only I could tell. As a choreographer, I learned to combine my two great loves: writing and dance” (McGregor 2009, 114).

At 30, McGregor moved to New York and a year later she competed with over one hundred women in the Urban Bush Women audition. She earned the only open spot in the company. Reflecting on her journey, she writes:

I have become what I have always been, and more than I could have imagined. And now I dance for that student, for what she could become and for the reflection of myself in her.

So I told her my story, because when I was her age I could have used reassurance that my passion was not lunacy. I would have loved to know what I know now: Your greatest love will never let you go. (McGregor 2009, 114)

Paloma McGregor is a dancer, no doubt about it.

As a participant in the 2009 Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute, I had the honor of learning from and with Paloma McGregor. She, along with Urban Bush

Women Catherine Denecy and Marjani Forte, led the movement classes I attended during the Institute. Reinforcing the Urban Bush Women concept of “journey over arrival,” McGregor shared a movement phrase that challenged dancers to find their own impetus, to create their own phrasing, and to travel across the space honoring the journey. Her dynamic presence, the way she danced and talked about movement with boundless passion, made an impression on me.

I found her article on the Urban Bush Women company website, www.urbanbushwomen.org, after attending the Summer Leadership Institute. I decided to incorporate it into the early gatherings for my research so each dancer in the project community received a copy. After giving each dancer time to read the article during a project gathering, I taught the movement phrase I learned from McGregor during the Summer Leadership Institute. Inside the active investigation research phase, McGregor’s movement phrase became a part of our regular community practice, as it related to both skill training and art making. For me, it was important to present the context and to give credit to the source in words, actions, and with direct access to the resource itself.

Paloma McGregor’s narrative article connected with me on a human level. She writes about dance in a way that describes how she feels about dance. McGregor articulates some of dance’s intangible presence, she shares what dance means to her, and she offers a lens that is accessible. Sharing her words and the movement she presented at the 2009 Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute with the dancers in my research project community was special. After the research culmination and reflection, I continue to share both McGregor’s article and the movement I learned from and with her

in my dance teaching practices. The common language, in words and in movement, crafted through personal experience and shared experience promotes relatability and supports diverse application.

Dance Language Practice

With dedication to discovery and a desire to share artistic resources, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange operates an interactive website, <http://www.danceexchange.org/toolbox>, with free access to Liz Lerman's "Toolbox." Lerman describes the intent of this unique resource authored by Lerman and John Borstel:

This Online Toolbox is an ongoing, expanding effort to share the body of knowledge developed by Liz Lerman Dance Exchange since its beginnings in 1976. It includes practice (how to do things), theory (why they work and what they mean) and history (where they came from and what happened when we did them). (Liz Lerman Dance Exchange 2004, <http://www.danceexchange.org/toolbox/>)

The Liz Lerman Dance Exchange online "Toolbox" website provides three guided pathways to information exchange. The first pathway, "Browse," connects directly to Liz Lerman Dance Exchange "tools, foundations, and essays" (Liz Lerman Dance Exchange 2004, <http://www.danceexchange.org/toolbox/>). The second, "If/Try," guides users to tools designed to directly match their needs. The third pathway, "Tools in Action," takes the user directly to experiential examples of Liz Lerman Dance Exchange tools and principles discussed from shared practice. The "Toolbox" also includes an extensive glossary of terms.

The strongly developed, cohesive framework and resources of Liz Lerman's Liz Lerman Dance Exchange makes them an excellent model for my research. Their user-

friendly and articulate online “Toolbox” is a revolutionary resource. It promotes accessibility and supports active investigation in the field of dance. In scope, the “Toolbox” is a global invitation for feedback exchange in dance. The tools themselves are concisely described. As a researcher, I am impressed with the depth of Liz Lerman’s practices and her willingness to share. The “Toolbox” is a resource with vast practical applications. The information is palatable and open for customization. It is clearly a testament to Liz Lerman and Liz Lerman Dance Exchange trials, practices, and reflections. It is also an example of their evolving vision and continued progression. I found great comfort in finding this resource during my research inception and design phase.

Liz Lerman and John Borstel co-authored the 2003 text *Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process: A Method for Getting Useful Feedback on Anything you Make, From Dance to Dessert*. Motivation for the text came from Liz Lerman’s experiences as artist, educator, and community participant. Her investigation into the development of a system of peer response began around 1990. Lerman’s Critical Response Process is intended for diverse applications. Lerman and Borstel write:

The Critical Response Process enables a group of people to uncover their various aesthetic and performance values and, by being patient, apply them to a creative work-in-progress in a way that pushes the artist’s thinking forward. The Critical Response Process can be applied to almost any kind of creative product: new works or interpretations of existing works in dance, theater, and other performing disciplines, not to mention writing, visual art, design, planning, public speaking, curriculum development, teaching processes, almost anything a person makes...even dessert. (Lerman and Borstel 2003, 11)

The three roles identified in the Critical Response Process are the artist, the facilitator, and the group of responders. In addition to these roles, Lerman and Borstel outline the four core steps with context on the inner working progression:

- Step One Statements of meaning: Responders state what was exciting, compelling, meaningful, memorable, evocative.
- Step Two Artist as Questioner: The artist poses questions. Responders answer.
- Step Three Neutral questions from Responders: Responders ask questions, phrased neutrally. Artist responds.
- Step Four Responders ask permission of artist to express opinions about their work. If artist accepts, responders state opinions. (Lerman and Borstel 2003, 41)

Preparations between Process steps and specific to roles of artist, facilitator, and responder are also outlined in the text.

Lerman's Critical Response Process addresses its own limitations and encourages active learning trials.

This publication is intended to offer a detailed (but by no means exhaustive) introduction to the Critical Response Process. We present it with an awareness of limitations of the written word to impart a process as elastic and nuanced as this one often is. Since the Process is dialogic and experiential in nature, it is perhaps best learned by doing, so we urge people interested in applying Critical Response to take advantage of the opportunities that the Dance Exchange offer for training in the Process. (Lerman and Borstel 2003, 11)

As a result, particular attention is given to the facilitator role in the text. Lerman and Borstel wrap up with a survey of the practical variations to which the Process has been applied. Sample dialogue sessions with navigational tips are also included at the end of the text. The conclusion, written explicitly by John Borstel, reinforces three of Lerman's ideas. Sourcing from his experiences, Borstel writes:

Those of us who've had a chance to learn the Critical Response Process directly from Liz Lerman have had the benefit of her remarkable insight into art and human nature. From all the coaching and reflection she has offered, I can think of no better final words for this primer than three simple but profound ideas that she

often states and constantly puts into action. Remember: Nothing is too small to notice. When defensiveness starts, learning stops. Turn discomfort into inquiry. (Lerman and Borstel 2003, 55)

Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process: A Method for Getting Useful Feedback on Anything you Make, From Dance to Dessert revolutionized my perspective on feedback and dialogic exchange. How Lerman and company implement this Process and its invaluable design, including succinct charts, informed the design phase of my research as well as the active practices inside the project community choreographic processes. During the project, the community worked in duos or trios to craft movement incorporating contact, physical sharing of weight and/or support. Time was given inside the gatherings for collaborative generation; however, the duos and trios also worked independently. The time spent practicing Liz Lerman's Critical Response Method reunited the community of dancers during these working processes. We all participated in the dialogic exchange and it was fascinating to practice forming and asking questions, to engage fellow artists about their work, and to observe the feedback responses.

The working framework this text provided guides discussion that celebrates the multiplicity of voices. The facilitator's role is particularly important and the text lends extra support and practical considerations specific to the navigation of this role inside the Critical Response Process. *Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process: A Method for Getting Useful Feedback on Anything you Make, From Dance to Dessert* provides a supportive framework, based on many lived processes, that guides multiple voices and perspectives; however, it remains fluid enough to encourage new discoveries. The

thoughtful language and the process-based design of this text makes it an applicable asset in any artistic and community related field.

Cynthia J. Williams' 2002 *Journal of Dance Education* article entitled, "Beyond Criticism: Lerman's 'Critical Response Process' in the Dance Composition Classroom," advocates for the use of Lerman's text in dance pedagogy and art making. Based on her own experience as a dance educator at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York and information gained directly from Lerman Dance Exchange Humanities Director John Borstel and company member Peter DiMuro, Williams specifically addresses the challenge of facilitating feedback as mutual exchange in dance composition classes. "I have sought methods to make the giving and receiving of critical feedback an educational and inspiring process rather than one that demoralizes, and have looked for ways to encourage my students to participate more fully in the process using their intellectual, aesthetic, and technical knowledge" (Williams 2002, 93).

In reference to Lerman's Critical Response Process Williams states, "I have found a method that addresses these concerns while providing an elegantly simple model that is easily adapted to the college or university dance composition classroom" (Williams 2002, 93).

Williams discusses the four core steps in the Critical Response Process, offering insights from her own experiences in practicing Lerman's Process. She states:

One of my main goals as a composition teacher is to help the student find choreographic realization for her intentions, which often take a very different aesthetic form than my own choreography would. Only by recognizing my own artistic preferences and consciously setting them aside can I truly help the students realize their own. Neutral questions [a facet of Lerman's Critical Response Process] facilitate this process and encourage a spirit of equal

participation from all present. In this regard, I 'model' this process for the students so they too learn to distinguish their aesthetic preferences from their perception of the choreography presented. (Williams 2002, 96)

In addition to the four core steps, Williams also mentions the additional steps outlined by Lerman in her text.

Williams addresses potential downsides and positive outcomes from using Lerman's Critical Response Process. The major downside acknowledged is the "amount of time that each step can take if all class member are involved in each facet of the discussion" (Williams 2002, 97). This could be a concern in a larger class context. Williams also suggests it may be helpful, if personnel can support the task, to have an outside person act as facilitator inside the classroom versus the teacher in order to provide neutral context. Williams describes a positive outcome from her experience with Lerman's Process. "The use of the Critical Response Process in the dance composition classroom fosters an environment of respect and engages the students in critical thinking and creative problem solving" (Williams 2002, 97).

Williams concludes by advocating for the text, specifically recognizing the importance of increased dialogue exchange and practice in dance composition classrooms and beyond. Her testimonial, as scholarly support for the resource, also focuses on community impact. Williams writes:

Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process creates a valuable dialogue between artist and audience and offers guidelines intended to keep that dialogue constructive and informative. I have found it to be exceptionally well suited to dance composition and theory courses in academe, but its applications extend far beyond to create bridges between artist and audience, student and teacher, individual and community across many disciplines. The Critical Response Process engages and energizes the community in interactive dialogue. Its mediated use of language

opens multiple levels of creative and critical discourse, which in turn inform and enhance the community's conversation. (Williams 2002, 99)

I discovered Williams' article following the conclusion of my research project community gatherings. I was interested in knowing how this resource impacted another practitioner in the dance field. Her insights align with my lived experiences as researcher-facilitator inside my own work. It is refreshing and encouraging that this resource is highlighted, not only for dance educators, but in a more universal sense for people who work together. Community conversation, dialogue that gives space for multiple voices and respects diverse perspectives, is imperative to our collective success as artists, educators, and members of communities. Communication is a practice.

Nancy Stark Smith's 2008 article for *Contact Quarterly* entitled "Interview with Liz Lerman: On the Critical Response Process" gives voice to Lerman's more recent thoughts about her own work. Smith's interview with Lerman took place at the Bates Dance Festival in Lewiston, Maine on July 24, 2007. Smith addresses Lerman: "Let's talk about your Critical Response Process—historically, and what is happenings to the Process as you understand it right now" (Smith 2008, 21). Lerman responds:

Something that continues to disturb me is the question of being understood or misunderstood.

And it still surprises me that some people equate honesty with negativity—that you are most honest when you are really being brutal. If you are getting 'good' feedback, by which I mean compliments, it can't possibly be true. It doesn't feel like feedback unless I am passionately telling you everything I think or feel about the work. The Critical Response Process is set up so that by the time you may be giving someone an opinion, that opinion may have been affected by the conversation. It may still be negative, but now it has a context, and it might not be delivered in such a passionate voice. That makes it able to be heard by the artist because of where you have gotten in the discussion. (Smith 2008, 21)

Lerman shares with Smith that as the process continues to develop in practice, she and fellow Lerman Dance Exchange artists “see the value in each step—that there is something very powerful within each of the four steps and that the sequence is very useful” (Smith 2008, 21).

Nancy Stark Smith inquires about variations or adaptations in the sequence of Lerman’s Process. Lerman shares a shortcut variation she calls “mutual coaching,” a variation she formulated prior to formulating the Critical Response from her experiences teaching dance technique. “I was very frustrated that there were so many good eyes in the room but everyone was depending on mine. We dance next to people for months: we all know this stuff about each other” (Smith 2008, 21). Lerman articulates the step-by-step process of “mutual coaching” to Nancy Stark Smith.

Let’s say you and I were partners—I would do the phrase, you would watch, and then you would essentially do step one from Critical Response—you would tell me something that you saw me do that you thought was cool or interesting. Just a little thing. Before I did it again I would tell you one thing I was going to work on in the phrase—it could be technical, or about the quality or focus. You watch, and when I’m done, you tell me all about that, using your best eyes, bringing your full intelligence to the problem. In the third step, I do it again, but this time you would add something that you wanted me to work on. And then we’d reverse roles. (Smith 2008, 21)

Smith wraps up her interview with Lerman with a focus on exchange and application.

Lerman describes the duality of awareness the Process promotes, specifically from the facilitator’s point of view. Lerman states, “...you’re aware of the content of the exchange but also aware of the framing of what you have to say. ...You really have this hyperstructure in your mind as you are navigating the conversation” (Smith 2008, 23).

The practice is ongoing. Smith asks: “Is the Process still fresh and useful to you” (Smith

2008, 24)? Lerman responds: “As with all good processes, you deepen your relationship to it. I am really happy that many people teach it and use it. John Borstel at the Dance Exchange does most of the education about the Process” (Smith 2008, 24).

The accessibility and evolution of Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process is evident in her conversation with Nancy Stark Smith. The working methodology is still relevant and reflective of the values she and her company uphold and practice. Even in process, Lerman’s model acknowledges both reflexive and shared experience. Following the project culmination and reflective phase of my research, I wanted to know what Liz Lerman had to say about her own research. What conclusions or questions, new or restated, were significant to her at this moment in time? Lerman’s perspective, made accessible by Nancy Stark Smith in this interview, supports continued practice in feedback exchange. I believe her work continues to propel and inform how we individually and collectively practice this communication exchange. Lerman has significantly contributed to the generation of language and to the value of its practical use in the dance field and beyond.

Candace Feck, Assistant Professor of Dance at The Ohio State University, tackles language head on in her 2008 *Contact Quarterly* article, “Against ‘ON’: A Dance Writer Weighs in on Words.” Feck is concerned with the language being used by artists and practitioners in the dance field. She writes:

...in the jargon of dance among English speakers, a conspicuous habit of insider speech threatens to contradict the very notion of embodiment—of what is known, felt, and experienced in and through the body.

Words are important. ...Though language about dance often feels inadequate, it is one of the ways we communicate among each other and with those outside of the dance community. (Feck 2008, 42)

Interspersed in Feck's article are emboldened definitions of the prepositional word "on" from the 1994-95 edition of *The Worldbook Multimedia Encyclopedia*. Feck's question alerts readers to her concern: "Is it possible that those diminutive but ubiquitous prepositions may quietly gather the momentum to ambush our discipline from within" (Feck 2008, 42)? Stating examples, she writes:

Passing by the studio, I pause to listen to students in rehearsal discussing the new work a visiting choreographer has come to put 'on' the company. Reviewing a graduate research paper at my desk, I read that a venerated choreographer has decided to set her signature solo 'on' a younger performer. The afternoon concludes with a meeting, where a group of frustrated dancers has come to describe the difficulties of putting the artistic director's movement 'on' their bodies. At the same meeting, a colleague casually mentions that her students are busy searching for music to put 'on' their dances. (Feck 2008, 42)

To Feck the use of "on" in these contexts devalues the heart of the work and implies a level of superficiality. "When did movement become like clothing...something decorative but non-essential, easily slipped on and off" (Feck 2008, 42-43)? In addition to prepositional use in dance language, verb choice is examined in the same critical parallel. "Of course, it is the associative character of words and the relational properties of syntax that are essential to meaning-making in the first place: like dominoes, as the prepositions and then the verbs go, so goes the rest" (Feck 2008, 43).

Feck makes a case for dance, both in regard to language and movement. "Ultimately, to speak so speciously about the movement of dance as a thing dispensable, disposable, removable, could well be to prefigure its demise. I believe that as dance professionals, we must take a stand against 'on' and, in so doing, find words that are worthy of the living, breathing actions we choose to call dance" (Feck 2008, 43).

The integration of crafting in both respects, word choice and movement choice, is necessary to further growth in the field and to validate the work in meaningful context.

Feck's astute insight caught my attention as a new researcher in the field. I discovered her article after my research processes with the community culminated and at the onset of my independent writing process. Before reading Feck's article, I was not aware of this tendency in our field. However like Feck, I think it is imperative that language practices in dance are more conscientiously and artistically crafted. With increased language practice comes increased knowledge. Without heightened awareness and new knowledge, we will not be able to communicate in a way that best represents the value and meaning of the work *and* that celebrates the people in the dance field.

Stephanie Skura, Seattle-based dance artist and educator, describes a practice that simultaneously explores movement and text as it emerges via process. She developed the practice in conjunction with friends, poets, and interdisciplinary artists. Her article, "Distillation: A Moving/Writing Practice," appears in the 2010 *Contact Quarterly* annual. Skura mentions a compositional method she began experimenting with approximately 10 years ago. She calls it "flux." In more detail, she writes:

In flux, you follow your physical impulses without judgment. You don't stop or think about how to shift, you just tune into the body and follow another impulse. Sometimes it's an abrupt change, sometimes a melt or a dissolve. It's a continual going-off-on-tangents, thinking out loud with the body. I also call it 'kinetic stream-of-consciousness,' and liken it to the approach to writing taken by such twentieth-century innovators as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. (Skura 2010, 33).

For Skura, the moving/writing practice and is constantly evolving. She states,

I'm amazed at the myriad ways that moving and writing not only are related but can activate each other. I've heard 'consciousness' described by poets as

‘physical and athletic’ and have long sensed that dance is not so much about the physical body as about consciousness—with the body’s language as the medium through which consciousness is expressed. (Skura 2010, 34)

Building on her “flux” concept, Skura and Seattle-based interdisciplinary artist Vanessa DeWolf collaborated to refine a “moving/writing practice they call Distillation” (Skura 2010, 34). Skura adamantly clarifies that the practice of Distillation is not static or finite. In reference to her collaborative exploration of Distillation she writes, “As we find more depth and clarity, we continue to let it evolve into other forms” (Skura 2010, 34). Outlining the seven-steps in the Distillation process for partners identified by letters A and B, Skura writes:

- 1) **A** moves for about five minutes (and may speak while moving—whatever comes to mind). **B** writes *from* **A**’s moving—including descriptions, free associations, perceived subtexts in the moving, words that **A** might speak, and associations with those words.
- 2) **B** reads out loud what she just wrote, while **A** writes *from* that reading: quickly extracting from what she’s hearing, making it into a compact form, and taking liberties spontaneously. This is a quick process!
- 3) **A** reads her ‘extraction’ out loud.
- 4) **A** repeats her reading while **B** moves.
- 5) **A** repeats her reading again, while **B** does a moving extraction from what she remembers of her own movement. Rather than being a repetition, this is an extraction of essence and possibly a fleshing-out of that essence.
- 6) **A** repeats her reading one last time as **B** continues to distill and develop the essence of her movement.
- 7) **A** and **B** switch roles and repeat steps 1-6. (Skura 2010, 34)

Skura acknowledges the multiplicity of possible options that could follow the Distillation process exchange. Skura includes written examples of the Distillation process she and DeWolf refined. She concludes with a statement addressing improvisation and refinement in relationship to movement and words. Skura states, “One of the things that keeps me interested in this process is that it exercises my need to improvise rigorously

with both movement and words, as well as my need to refine improvised words and movement, all in a single session” (Skura 2010, 34).

In the midst of my research project’s active practices and directly following the culmination and reflection phase of my research, I continued to contemplate “distillation” practices, like Skura and DeWolf’s, which explore the action of paring down to some essence. Essence, in this instance, is the most concentrated representation of the lived experience in context. It brings me to ask this question: Can this joint practice, a form of distillation in words and in movement, help us as artists, educators, and audiences to communicate more clearly about our work and its value? From my experiences: before, during, and following my project research, I believe in the joint practice of moving and crafting language, whether writing or talking. Moving together and writing/talking together can bring forward common language and shared meaning. The simultaneous nature of distillation practices emphasizes the actual process as it evolves instead of after it comes to fruition, or yields a product. The spontaneous element that Skura mentions, may aid in capturing essence in a way that promotes decision-making and understanding in dance.

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION

One story, in particular, illuminates discoveries that became undeniably poignant in our shared experiences during the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project. As this story and discussion progress in tandem, I offer language examples as rolling landmarks describing our collective journey. The narrative moves through active processes of crafting, distilling, and articulating; therefore, I present these unfolding concepts in this processional order to give context to the work and to the people who contributed to the work.

Crafting

As researcher, one of my aims was to bring the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project dancing community forward in shared action. Crafting spoken, written, and danced language of shared experience via collaborative processes was foundational to the community's active progression. In regard to crafting and word choice, "skill training" and "art making" were identified as focus areas in place of "technique" and "choreography." The project community applied this language during the first four gatherings to discussions on traditional operational facets, assumptions/expectations, and personal experiences/preferences. The use of this intentional vocabulary heightened community awareness and presented opportunities to redefine parameters through shared

exploration. The project community's continual exchanges began to reveal fresh trajectories.

Moving through unknown processes, I knew I would need to identify some strategies both for myself and for the project community. As a personal language practice and in preparation for collaborative exchange, I crafted five guiding principles for this research journey. They were:

1. Address the way we are working.
2. Use individual and collective voice.
3. Move together.
4. Exchange dialogue and feedback.
5. Confer on decisions.

Even with these guiding principles, navigating my own learning inside the complexity of the community proved to be an active challenge. Moving through this project's processes, I anticipated the presence of learning curves, and I often navigated using instinct over knowledge. I strived to provide some balance in personal and collective ownership inside the project community, especially in regard to concept explorations in movement and words. More than a system of checks and balances, the guiding principles promoted a reflexive undertone with traceable links to personal accountability and group connectivity. These principles exemplify how language can support emergent work; they provide a baseline people can use and reference.

Referencing our early project gatherings, considerable time had been spent discussing, mapping (creating written charts and lists), and analyzing traditional dance technique class models and choreographic process models. The majority of time, at this point, had been spent talking, listening, and writing versus dancing or creating

movement. The agenda I planned for Day Five started with another conversational or discussion activity. Branching off the idea of “Asset Mapping” used by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and faculty at the Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute, I opened the floor to the group asking them to throw out responses based on two criteria: 1. Things you enjoy and practice (i.e. yoga, baking, gardening, etc.) and 2. Interests or concerns you have and want to investigate (i.e. subject of anatomy, languages, history of New Orleans, etc.).

The framework of the Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute “Asset Mapping” experience, a traceable language and experience-based reference point, inspired me to try something similar in my own research. My intention in generating lists of enjoyable practices and interests was to provide an explicit opportunity to learn about the individual and collective interests in our project community. In crafting, there is tremendous opportunity to generate information and to identify commonalities. It was important to me that I did not dictate the responses so I asked for a volunteer to notate the lists on our community notepad. I wanted the group to feel like they were reporting what came to them without filtering their response through me and I wanted to be present in witnessing the crafting exchange as it happened live.

In an attempt to maximize opportunity and possibility, each Master of Fine Arts Movement Project gathering progression was fresh, never repeated in the same sequence. Elaborating on language in the project context, the exact wording the project members and I used in each gathering is not recalled nor preserved with exactitude. Each person involved in the project community carries remnants of the discussions, investigations,

movements, and written reflections and I believe these remnants directly correlate to the things that were most provocative, meaningful, or useful to the person. As a collaborator, each community member crafted personal and collective language simultaneously. Similarly, each community member responded to language with both collaborative understanding and unique individual takes. It is important to note that common language, or language of shared experience, does not dismiss individuality for the sake of community. Instead, it is the sharing of varied personal perspectives that mutually informs and enriches the community's communicative exchange. In this sense, language can be a tool that is both crafted and strategically applied in dance environments.

Distilling

As crafting brings awareness to individual and collective responsibility and accountability in dance language practice, distilling acknowledges the challenges of describing dance processes in words. Distilling, a simultaneous movement and word-driven practice, strives to best represent the substance of dance experiences in context. Distilling the language of shared experiences in the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community proved to be a fruitful challenge. In most instances, the project community pressed beyond the familiar through the uncomfortable to arrive at new possibilities and considerations. As a result, the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project environment was charged with negotiations of various natures: personal, collective, grand, and small.

The story continues with a distilling practice example from the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community gathering on September 2, 2009 from 7:30-9:30 p.m.

at the University of Oregon Department of Dance in Gerlinger Annex Room 353. The language used to identify the items on our “agenda” is synthesized from my personal research journal. The agenda was written prior to each project gathering; however, the gathering on this day inspired shared experiences that presented themselves in the moment. As a result, the last two items noted in the agenda, identified by numbers five and six, were written after the original agenda. The description that follows is sourced from my recollection of the community’s shared experience. A copy of my journal entry for Day Five is included in Appendix A of this document.

- Day Five Agenda:
1. Schedule Business: Discuss Fall 2009 Meeting Times
 2. Vision Sharing and Skill/Asset Mapping- Working in scope from grand to focused, write two big lists in the community notepad generated by the group’s responses to these areas:
 - A. Skill Mapping, referred to as Enjoy/Practice in the listing process- something you enjoy and practice (i.e. Yoga, Baking, Gardening, etc.)
 - B. Interests/Concerns- something you want to investigate more (i.e. Anatomy, History of New Orleans, Jazz Funerals/Second Line, Languages, etc.)

Honing in further, pare big list ideas down and create subject headings based on the most prevalent/associated items in both the Skill Mapping (Enjoy/Practice) and Interests/Concerns lists. Transcribe headings on notecards, separating Skill Mapping headings from Interest/Concern headings.
 3. Share *Dance Magazine’s June 2009* article, “From the Heart: Why I Dance” by Paloma McGregor, Urban Bush Women Company Member. Give the community of dancers time to read this article while I set up the heading notecards on the floor in the studio.
 4. Heading Inspired Improvisation-Process of paring down, from words to movement. Each person draws one idea/concept from each side of the room (one side Enjoy/Practice and the other side Interests/Concerns), and spends the remaining 25 minutes investigating and creating movement inspired by their chosen combination of ideas.

In the moment agenda additions:

5. Directly following the creative workshop time, I asked each dancer to write down two words on a notecard describing their connection to the movement ideas they explored in relationship to their chosen Enjoy/Practice and Interests/Concerns headings.
6. Food for thought for next gathering: I asked everyone to think of one experience that impacted their life and to remember it for our next gathering.

In response to the two criteria, these lists were generated on our community notepad.

1. Things you enjoy and practice:

Dance Specific: Ballet, African, Jazz-Pop and Lyrical, Hip Hop, B-boy/B-girl (Breaking), Modern, Contact Improv, Club Danz, Hula, Tap, Congolese, Balinese, Salsa, Musical Theater, Ballroom, Tango, Rara, Ibo

Open: Organize music, Poems, Singing, Scat, Teaching, Organizing, Cello, Piano, Accordion, Djembe, Care Provider, Editing, Mentor, Bead Work, Language, Color guard, Cheerleading, Hiking, Cooking, Writing, Necklace creating, Yoga, Pilates, Body Mind Centering, Biking, Swimming, Cliff jumping, Martial arts, Interior design, Card/Scrapbook, Sewing-Knitting, Drawing, Painting, Coffee, Baking, Sleeping, Dreaming, Meditating, Photography, Feng Shui

2. Things you are interested in or concerned about:

Language, Cultural heritage and background, Religion, Food resources, Agriculture, Travel, Gymnastics/Arial work, Medicine, Healing, Nutrition, Western Philosophy, Music, Burlesque, Anthropology, People watching, Body language, Theatre, Acting, Research, Astrology, Astronomy, Human Physiology, Teaching, Graphology, Wilderness survival, Forensics, "Disabilities," Computers, Internet, Metaphysics, Folklore, Books, Racquetball, Sociology, Community Map, Urban vs. Rural Space, Politics, History, Photography, OUR WAR, Spirituality, Globalization, 2012, Spirals, Environmental consciousness, Sustainability, Health, Entertainment, Love, Architecture, Visual Art/Drawing, Film, Gardening, Mental re-patterning, Neuromuscular re-patterning, Earth, Disney, Aliens, Gender Roles, Human behavior, Perception, Sex, Reproduction, Family tree/History, Aging, Ritual healing, Joy

Honing in further, we pared down these big list ideas into subject headings based on the most prevalent and associated items from each list. For organizational purposes, the

Enjoy/Practice list headings were written on green notecards and the Interest/Concert list headings were written on graph notecards.

The Enjoy/Practice headings are as follows: Music, Design, Athletics, Science, Language & Composition, Centering, Social Relations, Arts & Crafts, and Food. The Interest/Concert headings included: Human Nature (which was debated by a few community members as the sole heading we needed to identify), Technology, Environment, Culture, Educational Growth, Abstract Study, History, Society, Human Body, Arts & Design, Science, Lifestyles, and Language & Communication. After reviewing the headings with the project community, I placed all the Enjoy/Practice heading notecards on one side of the room and all the Interest/Concern heading notecards on the opposite side of the room.

This process of distilling, examining generated information and identifying commonalities or points of intrigue, took the majority of our gathering time. I began to sense the need for a shift in the group dynamics, incorporating movement and non-verbal exploration into the mix. The verbal and written sharing we collaboratively invested in became an immediate source for movement development and improvisation. Working to distill our list, ideas, and shared vision from words to movement, the last 25 minutes of our gathering (refer to Day Five Agenda) were spent working improvisationally and individually. The task was to draw a concept from one heading on each side of the room and to create movement inspired by your chosen combination.

Directly following the creative workshop time and inspired by the way the community was working, I asked each dancer to anonymously write down two words on

a notecard describing their connection to the movement ideas they explored in relationship to their chosen headings. Here are their dual-word descriptions: momentum/structure, research/mirror-neurons, hunger/energy, struggle/moment, embrace/bellows, expectation/imbalance, sudden/grounded, pattern/freedom, love/line. I participated in the improvisation and generation with them witnessing their choices and navigations as I moved through my own. My dual-word description was imprint/privilege.

This gathering's progression represents a grand scale practice in distillation, paring down, both in language and in movement. We focused a plethora of wide-reaching practices, interests, and concerns via shared discussion and we generated specific movement via decisive exercise. The practice of distilling, using both language and movement to describe what is most important or resonant in the moment, is applicable in educational and artistic work. I believe it is an imperative practice both in skill training and in art making. Distilling zeros us in on what matters to us as a means to propel our actions, decisions, as well as how we communicate them.

As an isolated distilling practice, this series of events seemed to be collectively fruitful. Consequently, I can attest to the profound impact it had on my entire research project working processes moving forward from this point. Prior to our Day Five gathering, I had been extensively preparing and planning each agenda as an independent practice, writing the plans and reflections from each project gathering in my personal research journal. As a language practice, it was very prescribed and detailed; however, it failed to capture the processes unfolding during each gathering from a collaborative

perspective. After the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community participated in this particular distilling practice our working dynamic gained collective momentum.

At the end of our Day Five gathering, the last task I offered to the community was to think about one experience that impacted their life and to remember it for our next gathering. I was compelled to offer this task because I was in awe of how each community member distilled voiced concepts into embodied movement. The clarity of their movement vocabulary, how intent and expressive they were with their bodies, moved me to present another opportunity for exploration and sharing. Distilling, investigating information while translating personal and communal connections, can be a vividly energetic and creative process.

Our Day Six gathering took place the next day, on September 3, 2009 from 8-10 p.m. in the University of Oregon Department of Dance Building, Gerlinger Annex Room 353. As a result of the previous gathering, I chose not to prescribe the community agenda for Day Six in advance. The language in this entry is more descriptive and the form is more conversational, agenda items and reflections simultaneously take shape as the entry unfolds. Consequently, my personal research journal entry for Day Six is presented close to its original form with some language adjustments and translations added for increased clarity. I understand what my language means; however, it is important to me to communicate my language as a depiction of processes that are accessible beyond my own recollection and representative of shared experiences.

Day Six Agenda:

1. Snack Time in hall
2. Personal Warm Up Time in studio- Group Warm Up Time in studio for two-three songs

3. Taught my Choreographic Phrase to “Wanderlust” by Bjork. Descriptive words for the phrase include: hurricane, billows, tornado, reckless, momentum, core driven, resistance, tomahawk, frantic, thrashy, slice through own self-imposed barriers.

4. Task: 15 minutes. Individual. In movement, take the “experience that has impacted your life” and create material. Be able to pare down, distill down, synthesize into one “NUGGET” one (short) movement(s), gesture, etc. that captures/represents the essence of your experience and your feelings about it.

5. In circle, half the group (four or five people) shares their story through movement, each person moving/conversing one at a time. “NUGGET” Tableau-“Essence Captured Experience.” The observing group moves freely around the periphery of the sharing group’s circle, participating by watching. Switch groups and repeat the solo “essence” share.

Next, group one makes another circle and begins to share the “essence of their impactful experience” movement in simultaneous conversation, fitting together, listening, relating to, and reacting to each other in interactive tableaux-which actually evolved into moving vignettes.

The observing group moves or stands around the periphery witnessing. Switch groups and repeat the interactive group “talk” share.

The above itemization represents the Day Six Agenda, with a few expanded descriptions, outlined prior to the community’s shared experience. A copy of the agenda portion of the Day Six entry is included in Appendix B. My personal research journal includes more detailed observations following the original Day Six Agenda. One of these observations was that development does not always follow a linear process. Therefore, in the context of my personal research journal, writing the order that things happened followed by what resonated from the experience post captured reflection is not always linear. Similarly, the practice of distilling is not always linear or able to be prescribed. As ideas and plans flesh out in the moment, they have the potential to veer off in ways

that encourage us to trust our instincts. For me, in these exciting moments, doors may open and people may open their receptiveness and ownership inside the experience.

Honing in on the exciting moments from the community's Day Six gathering in my personal research journal, I noted how the first group "riffed off" of the tableau, moving and interacting more than I thought or anticipated. Instead of stationary tableaux, they created moving vignettes. I thought each group would cycle through their individual movement one time, giving each person one turn. Instead, they chose (non-verbally and collectively in the moment) to cycle through their personal movements repetitively and inventively. They shifted their responses and changed how they shared, responded to, and listened to each other's movement. They were "tuned in" to one another, to the language being communicated. I had to give a 10 second countdown to signify a "close" because I think they would have continued indefinitely. Without giving the cue to interact or collaborate, they instinctually, via movement, decided to move together, in support of each other.

Following the group sharing, I vocalized my amazement to the community regarding their tendencies to "riff off" of each other's movements in astute, supportive, and inventive ways. In response, one of the dancers proclaimed, "we had a lot to say." I remember pausing and treasuring the moment. Their responsiveness was a delightfully positive surprise. It signified that they were in the moment moving together because they wanted to, not because I wanted them to. The shared experiences were taking flight based on collective interests and cultivated trust.

In response, and trusting my instincts, I charged forward with an impromptu plan for the remainder of our Day Six gathering. I played a song that was new to the group and presented the community with the task of moving with the impact of the music. I expressed that it was okay to allow the reaction or impulse of the music to drive their movement investigation. While they were improvising, I noticed how engaged and easefully in tune with their bodies they all were. It was so exciting to see each stunning individual making their own movement choices and moving in relationship with one another.

Building on distilling practices, I created a “Meaningful Music” list on our community notepad, including the song I just shared with them. Following the music impact group improvisation, I asked each community member to add a song with special personal meaning to our community notepad. Similar to the final community practice on Day Five, each community member was asked to write two words on a notecard. Per my directives, the first word described the depth of their own distilled movement nugget shared earlier in the circle (in two groups). This movement was sourced from one impactful experience in their life. The second word related to an experience that had a meaningful musical connection in some way, perhaps a memory linked to a song. However, the word chosen did not need to be related to the song they had written on our community notepad.

After distilling both in movement and in written words, we gathered in a big circle to begin sharing with our voice. I started by sharing why I had played the previous song during the group improvisation. The song was personally meaningful and I wanted

them to know why I selected it in the moment. I wanted to share my narrative and my process with them. I continued by inviting anyone in the collective to share either their impactful life experience or their meaningful music experience. I stressed that this was a no pressure invitation. It was not a requirement to share. Each person shared something of personal meaning with the community.

After our collective sharing, I sprinkled the notecards with each person's selected words out on the floor for everyone to see. The community's notecards read: friendship/love, confrontation/flighty, humility/spirit, move/peaceful, auspicious/measure, freedom/rejoice, selflessness/mortality, broken/friends, and dream/fear. With 10 minutes left in our gathering time, I got out the community notepad and we brainstormed ideas about our vision for the culminating community sharing. The notepad header read: "What is important to you...to us?" The list read: authenticity, healing, translation-relating to self and audience, individual and group meaningful experience, common threads, talking-conversation, interconnected phases in movement and language, developing ideas, hair-braiding on stage, VIP invitation, and float construction (parade float).

Retracing the processes from these two rich community gatherings reinforces the need for increased movement and language exchange. In dance, so much transpires in the midst of shared experience; and, the people who participate in the experience indelibly impact the scope and trajectory of the experience. As I mentioned in response to Stephanie Skura's 2010 *Contact Quarterly* article entitled, "Distillation: A Moving/Writing Practice," moving, writing, and talking together can bring forward

common language and shared meaning. The simultaneous nature of distillation practices emphasizes the actual process as it evolves instead of after it comes to fruition, or yields a product. Similarly, the practice of working from grand to focused perspective with peoples' interests and input in mind presents a forum for collaborative opportunity rooted in shared vision.

Distilling propels investigations that describe the most meaningful and valuable component(s) of the lived dance experience both for an individual and for a community. If we continue to practice identifying and describing what is most present and meaningful in dance with our language, it has the potential to change how we advocate for our field and how value is translated in our field. I believe increasing language in dance through varied practice can positively impact communication and accessibility to broader understanding.

Articulating

Crafting and distilling language in dance through joint practices in movement and language exploration are important, however, articulating is the declarative element that grants accessibility to invaluable resources. The way the project community shared and listened during Day Five and Day Six set the course for the entirety of our experience. The vocabulary, both movement and words, began to relate to the people in the project community. As a result, I witnessed the project community's clear articulation of needs and desires inside the collective process. This shift in ownership partnered with development of trust paved the way for collaboration.

On Day Seven, I had crafted a plan but the project community expressed interest in building on the “impactful life experience” movement material. They asked to work with their original “vignette” groups from Day Six so they could teach each other their individual impact experience movement. After each group learned movement from every person in their group, two members of the community proposed combining groups and accumulating each person’s original impact experience movement into one unified movement phrase. The movement articulated by each individual, once shared, became the dance of the entire community. In that moment, things came full circle. The movement and the way they chose to communicate with one another became their work and their unique process. The project community was actualizing the principles I outlined during the early crafting of this shared experience. At this moment in our collective journey they were and we were:

1. Addressing the way we were working.
2. Using individual and collective voice.
3. Moving together.
4. Exchanging dialogue and feedback.
5. Conferring on decisions.

The chance to experience one moment of this magnitude within the 10-week project run is a gift. This moment stayed with all of us and it changed me. It prevented me from wanting to control the group based on my own ambitions and it inspired me to enjoy the trail we were blazing together. The ownership and responsiveness of the community is pivotal in collaboration.

As a result of this powerfully shared moment, the movement and related concepts in the unified impact experience phrase became an integral part of our cultivated work.

The phrase became known as the “Unison or Canon ‘I’ Phrase,” signifying how it honors the “I” or individual and the interconnection of the community. This movement material became both ritual and motif throughout our continued processes.

Experimenting with new communication intentions in the midst of our continued processes proved to be one aspect of the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project exploration that was met with resistance by some. For dancers, performance is primarily communicated through physical embodiment. Talking in more of an impromptu nature about our process, what we are doing, how we are doing it, and why we are doing it, was not a familiar practice for this project community. However, as a community, we explored different approaches and we began to understand the potential of language practices in dance.

One example of our impromptu or spontaneous language practices took place during Day Twelve (October 1, 2009), the five-week midpoint, of our project gatherings. I was interested in the community’s feedback in two areas. First, I was curious about the language each individual would choose to describe our collective processes thus far. Second, I wondered what each member of the community would like to do more of, or what they would like to focus on, during our upcoming gatherings. Each person wrote their response on notecards during our gathering. We briefly discussed these responses as a group at the front end of our one-hour gathering and I collected all the notecards. In regard to the first area of feedback inquiry, I asked the community this question: “How would you articulate our shared experience, to describe what we are doing?” Below are a few of the community member’s articulated responses as quoted from their notecards:

1. "Dance Extravaganza Time!"
2. "Dance performance art created by a group of artists guided by Marcie."
3. "Exploration of creative process in movement and choreography, performance: work."
4. "Brainstorming, riffing, open for experimentation, collaborative sharing individuals."
5. "A collaborative dance project, breaking down common perceptions of what dance class and creating art are. Through questioning why we do what we do, we created a presentation of art through un-conventional processes."

The following articulations are individual responses to my second area of inquiry.

The question I asked the community was: "What would you like to do more of or to focus on more in upcoming project gatherings?" The responses below correlate with the order of the first set of responses and are quoted from the same individual notecards.

1. "I like what we have, but I feel we haven't put together enough material yet. I want to dance more."
2. "I feel like I want to do more whole group building of things. That's probably my realization that we have only five weeks. But I also like working in the groups/partners but I don't know if our ideas are getting too big or not. Laugh party."
3. "I would like movement material that's cohesive, memorized: presentable, second line!"
4. "Not to forget laugh party idea. More movement exploration but also more talking."
5. "I want to make sure we get to clean and clarify the work we have."

Reviewing these responses almost eight months after the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project and culminating sharing took place, I appreciate that I asked these questions halfway through our shared processes instead of after the project conclusion. Similarly, I believe the community's willingness to share cultivated opinions and preferences informed the remainder of our working processes. I realized then as I do now that I was not able to give cues or to present tasks solely based on my wants and desires for the community. It really was a live navigation by the collective regarding a

multiplicity of wants and desires. Differences in perspective, if navigated with openness and respect, can propel language of shared experience toward discovery of commonalities and understanding of differences. Each person's voice, the language they choose to express, contributes to the collective experience. Inevitably, descriptions will be varied and unique to each person, however, communication cultivated through collaborative exchange does yield common language, language that articulates the salient value of the community's shared experiences.

Reflecting on the shared experiences inside my Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community and throughout the scope of my research, it is important to articulate that language practice in dance, like collaboration in dance, requires time. Similarly, language practice in dance and collaboration in dance are personalized by the people who share in the experience. In relation to time and practices in process description, conceptualizing performance in a way that simultaneously layers verbal description with physical action was a challenge for the Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community. More time was needed by all to investigate the use of conversational and written language in describing process. This realization provided the launching point for this research on language and associated meanings in dance practice and I hope it will spark continued investigation and meaningful communication.

The Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community participated in a diverse sampling of investigative trials. As an example of our collective trials, the culminating sharing was first described by the title "Trial Order" instead of "show" or "concert" order and we rearranged the order of the individual works as well as the transitions between

them throughout the process. Eventually, the list of shared movement works was articulated in our collectively crafted program as “Our Procession.” The term “procession” was inspired by jazz funeral and second line traditions in New Orleans, Louisiana. Interest in learning more about these traditions became a part of our shared experiences throughout the project. The collectively crafted program is a prime example of our collaboratively articulated language. As a generative exercise in descriptive and shared language, I asked each member of the project community to draft a potential “program” for our culminating sharing. More than imitating other program layouts, I was interested in presenting a collective opportunity to explore writing in ways that best reflected our shared experiences. Consequently, it was important that the multiplicity of voices were represented in the culminating sharing program.

Written excerpts from individual program drafts were assembled into a final draft that was approved by the entire Master of Fine Arts Movement Project community during one of our gatherings. A copy of the final program is included in Appendix C of this document. The program’s visual design was the idea of one project community member and the text was crafted with input from fellow project collaborators. The Master of Fine Arts Culminating Project was titled “We Are the One, I” based on one of the brass band song selections that anchored our project gatherings. A paragraph description followed the title and typical logistical information, and it read:

All nine of us, invited by Marcie Mamura to be a part of her MFA research, gathered together in mid August to begin our infamous journey of collaborating. Marcie posed many ideas and questions for us to explore through the lens of dance. We discussed and moved through them collectively. What is unique about classroom and creative processes in a dance environment? How are classes and choreographic settings structured? What are the traditions and why? Why do

we dance? What are our preferences? How do we build, translate, and communicate meaning? Why is sharing in the process important? The sky was the limit for us and only three weeks into our shared process, we were crafting responses to our investigations. Writing on note cards, in our journals, and on our big note pad were common practices in our process, which is why we decided to share this integral component of our work with you as well. We have threaded our journey together and we are honored to share it with you. Thank you for becoming a part of our community today!

The list of movement works under the heading of “Our Procession” followed this paragraph description. Another personalized addition in the collaborative program was the heading, “Community Knowledge: The Way We’re Working.” Under this heading were two numbered offerings, which read: “1. Share your voice and 2. Move inside the space and choose your perspective.” At the beginning of our culminating sharing I invited the new community of participants to feel free to move to a new place when someone in the community expressed this cue phrase: “It is now your turn to experience new possibilities.” A correlating note was written in the collaborative program. The idea of shared and active space was important to the project community. Therefore, the cue phrase and the entire spatial layout including a circular seating arrangement were elements specifically designed by the project community. All project community members, including myself, were listed by name under the “Artists/Collaborators” heading.

The receptive and collaborative efforts of these driven artists deserve mention and tremendous credit. Because of their willingness and tenacity, I am certainly more willing to try things inside the dance environment and in broader community settings. I believe that continuing to invest in simultaneous dance and language practices: writing, doing, thinking, saying, processing, analyzing, and moving all at the same time, will positively

impact our ability to communicate about and validate our field. With increased language practice in dance comes increased knowledge about dance. Without heightened awareness and new knowledge, we will not be able to communicate in a way that best represents the value and meaning of the work *and* that celebrates the people who participate in and contribute to the dance field.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Language practices in dance, per my experience, are less likely to follow linear or predictable trajectories. Therefore, it seems fitting to begin this conclusion noting an epigraph that set the tone for Candace Feck's 2008 *Contact Quarterly* article, "Against 'ON': A Dance Writer Weighs in on Words." Feck quotes Valerie Preston-Dunlop, noted consultant and researcher at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in Greenwich, London, in the United Kingdom.

Movement described in words is awful. It is, after all, indescribable as the smell of a rose and the taste of a good wine. But there are things to be said which I know can empower the dance people, notwithstanding the hazards, and the problems, and the inevitable shortcomings. –Valerie Preston-Dunlop (Feck 2008, 42)

I can hypothesize about the comfort this statement would have brought me if I had come across it before or during my research journey. The fact that I found it after my research culminated, is both amusing and enlightening. From my recent shared experiences, I believe movement described in words is rarely awful. It can be frustrating and difficult, however, movement described in words has the potential to illuminate dance.

Evaluation

Crafting, distilling, and articulating language that can "empower the dance people" like Preston-Dunlop states, deserves continued investigation in the field. Sharing

in the experience is the first step to increasing awareness and propelling collective action. The collaborative practices investigated in this research illuminated a need to enter into dance communication practices with the same consciousness and artistry we invest in when we teach, choreograph, or perform.

After working in a community via process and toward common artistic vision, the most profound outcome I discovered was connecting with people in meaningful ways. The common language for us, for our project community, was dance; and, the common denominator was our shared connection as people: talking, moving, and learning together. Before conducting this research, I recognized how important these connections were in my life. However, after my research concluded, I understood how important it is to describe, preserve, and support these connections through preserved language. I strive to promote meaningful connections with people through my work as an artist and through my communication as an artist. In addition to promoting meaningful connections with people, I support increased accessibility to resources.

My research journey outcomes also confirm the need for increased published resources representative of the diverse language perspectives in dance. The field of community-based arts provides valuable knowledge, philosophies, methodologies, and personal stories, with insightful intersecting applications for the field of dance. *Local Acts*, the 2005 text by Jan Cohen-Cruz promotes the arts and celebrates their capacity to bring people together toward a common goal or for a common cause. Development and availability of increased resources modeling vocabulary that guides and describes practice, like Knight and Schwarzman's *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts*,

would benefit the field of dance. Both of these community-based arts texts navigate diverse contexts with a parallel focus on the multiplicity of perspectives, pathways, and outcomes specific to one community and their shared experiences.

It is equally important to champion resource materials (published articles, interviews, texts, web resources, media etc.) in the dance field that stand out due to their conscientious attention to practical applications, trial modifications, and experience-based suggestions. The life's work of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and her company, Urban Bush Women, and Liz Lerman and her company, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, is paramount in our field. The conscientious communication Zollar and Lerman offer applies to facets of dance pedagogy, dance choreography/composition, dance performance, dance company practice, and dance research. The models they offer are rooted in process-based practice and collaborative investigation. Their work, specifically the vocabulary they utilize to describe their work, is not static or stagnant. The work Zollar and Lerman are doing continues to evolve, to chase fresh inquiries, and to acknowledge collaborative community processes. As a result, they continue to provide invaluable resources for the dance field and beyond and people continue to respond to their work, writing, conversing, moving, and furthering the communication exchange.

I continue to utilize the 2003 Liz Lerman and John Borstel's text, *Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process: A Method for Getting Useful Feedback on Anything you Make, From Dance to Dessert*, in my own dance practices, both pedagogically and personally. Similarly, I continue to utilize resources on Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Urban Bush Women, including Urban Bush Women company member Paloma McGregor's

2009 *Dance Magazine* article, “From the Heart: Why I Dance.” These resources contribute to dialogic and feedback-based exchange in dance. In addition to these published resources, I continue to utilize movement from the experiences I shared in as a 2009 Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute participant. The movement, like the thoughtful vocabulary, left an indelible imprint on my experience. This imprint motivates continued exploration.

Practicing dance language is not only about describing what happens in the active movement lab, it is also about illuminating what we do before, during, and after the shared experience. The resources mentioned in Chapter Two “Review of Related Works” support dance as it unfolds in practice. Language that communicates specificity and understanding is desired within the field. How we describe the language of shared experience in dance directly impacts how we advocate for and communicate what we value in dance. I believe describing the informational and inter-personal exchange and examining how it integrates dance practices in diverse settings with a specific focus, is the crux of what collaborative processes can contribute to the field. A constant practice, shared experience needs to be communicated through shared language experience in dance.

Crafting, distilling, and articulating the language of shared experience reminds us to honor personal connections inside the communication exchange. The integration of these practices cultivates dance descriptions with the potential to capture what is intangible and vividly present in lived experiences, the depth of their application and meaning. Increasing movement, conversation, and written communication about specific

shared experiences in dance will activate growth and change in the field. The joy and support exchanged in communities that discuss, listen, write, and move together can permeate discomfort, uncertainty, and challenge. As a collaborative practice, crafting, distilling, and articulating community language, is both collective work and collective accomplishment. Dance is both collective work and collective accomplishment.

APPENDIX A

DAY FIVE AGENGA

DAY 5: 9.2.09 7:30-9:30pm First evening time together

④ Schedule Biz - Fall Meeting Times

NEXT WEEK TIME 9.8.09 & 9.10.09

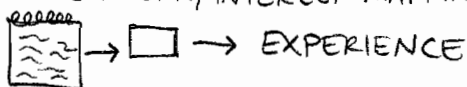
NEXT time 9.3.09

Oct 3 & 4 wkend - Bro's Wedding

☑ RECORD - VISION SHARING
ASSET MAPPING

- RESEARCH INVESTIGATION

↳ SKILL MAPPING / ASSETS
CONCERN/INTEREST MAPPING



Big list → focus in to topic Notecards encompassing broader ideas shared

BIG LISTS

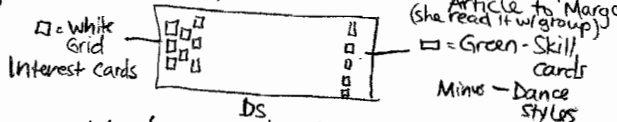
1. SKILL MAPPING - something you practice

2. INTEREST/CONCERNS
- something you want to investigate more

- ↳ Honed in on - pared down
to [] NOTECARD "HEADERS"

1. Skills - Green
2. Interests - White #Grid

→ Had everyone read Paloma's article in Dance Mag. while I set up Notecards



Drawing one idea/concept/skill from each side of the room (Green & White) - spend last 25 min Investigating, creating (movement, words, pictures) - inspired by this. (chosen skill & concept combo)

APPENDIX B

DAY SIX AGENDA

Note: @ END of Day 5, Group asked to think of an experience that impacted their life (anything) - Bring it to share next time
 - SNACK TIME IN HALL

DAY 6 - 9.3.09 8-10pm
 (on 9.3.09)

- PERSONAL TIME IN STUDIO - GROUP WARM-UP TIME IN STUDIO 2-3 songs

→ TAUGHT Bjork (Ratatat) Wanderlust PHRASE

Hurricane, Billows, Tornado, Reckless, Momentum, Core Driven, Resistance, Tomahawk, Frantic, Thrashy, Slice through - own self imposed barriers

TASK - 15 min - INDIVID - In Movement take "EXPERIENCE THAT HAS IMPACTED YOUR LIFE" and create material. Be able to pare down, distill down, synthesize into one "NUGGET" one (short) movement(s), gesture, etc that captures/represents the essence of your experience/feelings about it.

*In circle ↻ 1/2 group 4 people - each tell/move their story - CONVERSING SIMULTANEOUSLY
 5 people NUGGET TABLEAU "ESSENCE CAPTURED - EXPERIENCE"
 1: one at a time share
 2: fit together - react, be affected, relate
 - observing group move freely around moving group's circle on the periphery - participating by watching.
 ① - Group 1 = Ⓞ one at a time "essence share", repeat w/ Group 2
 ② - Group 1 = Ⓞ one person starts - feed in "talk" w/ each other - relate "in tableau" - touch - acknowledgement, "listening/sharing" - Repeat w/ Group 2

APPENDIX C

COLLABORATIVE MFA CULMINATING PROJECT PROGRAM



We Are The ONE, I

University of Oregon Department of Dance: MFA Culminating Project
 Sunday, November 1, 2009 2pm Gerlinger Annex Room 353/354

All nine of us, invited by Marcie Mamura to be a part of her MFA research, gathered together in mid August to begin our infamous journey of collaborating. Marcie posed many ideas and questions for us to explore through the lens of dance. We discussed and moved through them collectively. What is unique about classroom and creative processes in a dance environment? How are classes and choreographic settings structured? What are the traditions and why? Why do we dance? What are our preferences? How do we build, translate, and communicate meaning? Why is sharing in the process important? The sky was the limit for us and only three weeks into our shared process, we were crafting responses to our investigations. Writing on note cards, in our journals, and on our big note pad were common practices in our process, which is why we decided to share this integral component of our work with you as well. We have threaded our journey together and we are honored to share it with you. Thank you for becoming a part of our community today!

Our Procession

Dirge

Becka & Bekah

Liz, Shannon, & Kat

Group Material

Jason & Kellyn

Canon "I" Phrase

Rosanna & Anna

Unison "I" Phrase

Second Line

Program Design by: Rosanna Corona with input from fellow collaborators

Community Knowledge: The Way We're Working

1. Share your voice
 2. Move inside the space and choose your perspective
- *Note: To enrich and expand our community by opening space to witness all we have created, we invite you to move to a new place when someone says: "It is now your turn to experience new possibilities."

Artists/Collaborators

Rosanna Corona

Katherine Davenport

Liz Foster

Shannon Knight

Marcie Mamura

Jason Nicholas

Kellyn Rost

Rebecca Stiehl

Rebecca Swofford

Anna Waller

The project community sends a special thank you to Alonzo Moore for his contributions to our shared process.

Musical Inspiration

(In Order Played)

Magnificent Sevens

Jake Shimabukuro

Bjork (Ratatat Remix)

65daysofstatic

Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews & Orleans Avenue

Hot 8 Brass Band (Natural Self Remix)

Marcie Mamura would like to send a special thank you to her committee: Jenifer Craig (Chair), Steven Chatfield, and Margo Van Ummersen.



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