Embodied Curriculum Inquiry: Moving into Physical and Visual Metaphors

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Abstract

As a faculty member and graduate students in dance education, we relate how metaphor is enacted throughout a course on embodied curriculum inquiry in the form of physical, artistic activities and concrete visual representations. We describe how artistic processes served as metaphors for aspects of curriculum and provided an entry point to further engagement with theory. We share projects in the form of visual metaphors for curriculum to illuminate how metaphor is crucial for embodied theory building and reflect on the importance of this work for graduate teacher education.

Keywords: curriculum inquiry, embodiment, metaphor, dance education, arts integration

Introduction

Intentionally-chosen complex metaphors provoke us to think deeply

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> and to see aspects of a phenomenon that might otherwise be overlooked. A visual metaphor for curriculum, informed by readings, discussions, and embodied experiences, conveys important values and reflects understandings of what curriculum, broadly conceived, is and can be. Thus, it can serve as a guide for thinking through and enacting any curriculum. (Marissa Nesbit, 2023, from *The Dancer's Body* course materials)

Like many academic endeavors, curriculum inquiry often unfolds through language as theorists debate key questions about the what, why, and how of learning through speaking and writing. For those of us who are drawn to meaning-making through movement, sound, and visual imagery, such dialogues can feel remote, separated from our practices and difficult to reconcile with the immediacy of our experiences making and teaching in the arts. At the same time, we find that digging in, questioning, and exploring curriculum in all its facets is a critical engagement for arts educators to have if we are truly to realize the potential for transformative teaching and learning in our disciplines.

Our collaborative group of faculty and graduate students came together in a summer graduate course for experienced dance educators. Led by Marissa Nesbit as guest faculty, graduate students Crystal Bain, Michelle Modrzejewski, and Hayley Runge, along with our colleagues enrolled in the Master of Arts in Dance Education program, spent an intensive week exploring curriculum inquiry informed by our professional and personal experiences as artists, educators, and humans. This article describes experiences in this course in Summer 2023, when Crystal and Hayley were enrolled, and Summer 2022 when Michelle was a student. We collaborated together to create this reflection and condensed experiences across both summers in this writing. In our professional work outside of this course, Marissa is a faculty member in Dance Education, preparing undergraduates in a licensure program in dance; Crystal is a fourth-grade classroom educator and director of a community-based dance company; Michelle is a teaching artist leading dance and professional development programs in school and community settings; and Hayley is a public middle school dance educator.

While reading, writing, and discussion certainly were a substantial part of the course, Marissa sought to center the physical and sensorial act of dancing as a site of knowledge creation in the process of curriculum inquiry. We engaged in artistic experiences that highlight our understanding that knowledge, and thus curriculum, is embodied. Across individual and collaborative experiences moving, creating, and witnessing dance, we considered questions of embodiment and experience, meaning making, relationships, and culture as they pertain to

the curriculum in and beyond dance. Following the conclusion of our time together in the course, we four reconvened to reflect on our experiences; sourcing our notes, class assignments, and readings, we offer this collaborative writing as a trace of our engagements with each other and the theory we explored.

In this article, we demonstrate how metaphor is enacted in a course on embodied curriculum inquiry. We also illuminate how metaphor is crucial for embodied theory building and how working across physical and visual metaphors can prompt exploration and reflection untethered to disciplinary expectations. We begin by unpacking what we mean by embodied curriculum inquiry and explaining how metaphor permeates such inquiry in our practice. We then give an overview of the course and describe three of our class experiences—"Evocative Words," "Sensory Walk," and "Bodyreading"—as examples of the layered engagements wherein artistic processes served as metaphors for aspects of curriculum and provided an entry point to further engagement with theory. In addition to describing the collective experiences, we include individual reflections to convey the personal understandings and meanings that these experiences generated. Following, we describe projects created by our group's graduate student authors in the form of visual metaphors for curriculum. The epigraph above comes from the assignment description. Finally, we discuss implications of this approach to coursework for practicing educators who seek to deepen their engagement with research and theory in ways that honor their and their students' lived experiences.

Embodied Curriculum Inquiry and Metaphor

Foundational to our work together is purposeful engagement in curriculum inquiry, the posing and responding to questions about the meanings we make in and through teaching and learning encounters. We further understand this to be an embodied process; by explicitly labeling it as such, we focus attention on the importance of teachers and students as fully embodied beings who create and engage with curriculum. Drawing from readings that were a part of our course (Brennan, 2022; Hwang, 2019; Macintyre Latta & Buck, 2008; Ohito & Nyachae, 2019; Snowber, 2012) and our histories as dance artists, we offer the following concepts as integral to embodied curriculum inquiry: it is active, collaborative, and relational; it asks of us to be fully present in the moment, sensing and feeling; and it depends on the ongoing integration of theory and practice alongside continual personal and collective reflection.

Brennan (2022) calls us "to identify and create spaces for curriculum inquiry as active knowledge practice that…builds collaborative engagement with students" (p. 86). As such, it is imperative that we all take a role in contributing, questioning, and refining the unfolding ideas in our shared space. Further, Macintyre Latta and Buck (2008) emphasize that "embodied teaching and learning is about building relationships between self, others, and subject matter; living in-between these entities" (p. 317). As curriculum is both our subject matter and the means of engagement with the subject, the in-between spaces created from these relationships are fruitful ground for our inquiry; we must attend to and nurture them throughout our engagements in teaching, research, and instructional design.

Our presence, with ourselves and each other, is similarly crucial to an embodied approach to curriculum inquiry. Macintyre Latta and Buck (2008) remind us that "embodied teaching/learning demands being in the moment, at the juncture between self and other" (p. 317). This demand is not an easy one to meet as a teacher, student, or colleague, as it asks of us to attend fully to all that may happen within and around us, living with awareness of the historical, cultural, and other life experiences that brought us there but also open and responding to the current situation. Ohito and Nyachae (2019) further call our attention, and intention, toward sensation, asking "what information do we gather through our senses and our bodies while enmeshed in curriculum encounters?" (p. 193). They affirm how "attending to sensation and affect in curriculum work allows for exploring and gaining a deeper awareness of how we move and act in the world, and why we do so in particular ways" (p. 195). Such awareness of ourselves and how we interpret and react to curriculum—physically, emotionally, culturally, and intellectually—provides valuable information about curriculum that is not always readily apparent from other types of educational data.

However, awareness alone is not sufficient for advancing our understanding and capacity for further action; we also couple this with reflection. Hwang (2019) describes integrating reflection activities for herself and her students into the end of her language lessons; in her practice of curriculum inquiry such moments serve as more than simply opportunities for recall but, because of the value she places on her own and her students' embodied experiences, become crucial components of her ongoing investigations. She explains, "the reflection activity functioned as an intersection of my students' and my own learning and helped all of us actively reconstruct both the future directions of our learning and the meanings of our past experiences" (p. 519). Such reflective processes are at the heart of embodied curriculum inquiry,

where "the body as the ground of sense-making must trust the simultaneous interplay of theory and practice" (Macintyre Latta & Buck, 2008, p. 325). Embodied curriculum inquiry calls us to continually move between theory and practice as we explore how ideas unfold through our physical, sensorial, interpersonal, and intellectual engagement with them and the world.

Further, because of our disciplinary focus in dance, we engage in movement improvisation, composition, and performance, as well as viewing and responding, as key processes in our inquiry, heightening physical action as both illustration and investigation of curricular ideas. Snowber (2012) describes a similar dance focus in her work: "As a class, we dance our questions together, allowing the problematizing of the curriculum to be enveloped and expressed through the body. And here a new place opens" (p. 120). This new place is one we likely could not reach through traditional dialogue alone. She elaborates,

> It is within the process of finding movement, improvising, and choreographing that dance can become a site for embodied inquiry. Here the mover literally thinks with the body allowing the improvisational process to be a discovery of what we do not know. The body knows where our mind may not be able to lead us. (p. 120)

So, while embodied curriculum inquiry does not require that one dance, we do find that engaging this artistic and physical capacity is extraordinarily meaningful, particularly when the curriculum we focus on is in Dance, as an art form.

Embodied curriculum inquiry allows us to interrogate how evolving theories of curriculum design account for and build on bodily knowing. Conducted through experiences that center physical movement, sensation, and interpersonal connections, this work is open, flexible, and sometimes messy, a process of thinking, moving, and sensing that explores overlapping questions about what to teach and how to teach it. Our individual and collective journeys and engagements produce multiple understandings. We inquire through our whole selves, building on lifetimes spent in dance studios and on stages, but also across hiking trails, gyms, oceans, and playgrounds, in living rooms, kitchens, front porches, and gardens. We read and write, dance, talk, perform, watch, reflect, laugh, and cry. We follow Snowber (2012), who reminds us that "dance provides an entrance to humanity—essentially the lived curriculum. Whether one is questioning and inquiring, lamenting or exalting, asking and receiving, stomping and stopping, or contracting and releasing dance is a container to express the depths" (p. 119). We come to understand that curriculum is a lived experience, which teach-

ers can influence through a myriad of choices that go beyond content selection.

As dance artists, we also traffic in metaphor—literal gestures are abstracted in choreography, bodies are arranged in space to convey relationships, and movement qualities are deployed to portray emotions. In our daily practices as educators, we weave among symbol systems and forms of representation as we give verbal explanations and demonstrations, relate to musical cues, shape visual images in choreography, and use touch or proximity to convey information to students and colleagues. We sometimes deliberately craft metaphors, such as when generating imagery to describe a technical skill, choosing music to juxtapose against a movement idea, identifying KWLs—things we know, wonder, and learn—with students, or deciding on a title for a new dance. Just as with all humans, however, we primarily use metaphors in our language without conscious awareness (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

Therefore, working through metaphor is a key component of our practice of embodied curriculum inquiry as explored in our course. Building on the understanding that our human conceptual systems are rooted in our physical experiences as fully embodied beings and that our language—full of metaphor—is, in turn, shaped by our embodiment, our inquiry into the questions of curriculum also deliberately centers metaphor to fully engage with the potential of embodied knowing. By working with and through metaphor—creating metaphors in our artmaking, examining the metaphors we create and embody when teaching, and allowing meanings to evolve as we work across forms of representation—we create a lively and rich environment for our inquiry. Through our use of metaphor in embodied curriculum inquiry, we take a step back from the immediate questions of "what should I do for this lesson/unit/course/program?" and examine larger ideas surrounding how we make choices about teaching and learning.

We also find the limitations of metaphor, those places where extensions of a metaphor fail to adequately convey the details or subtlety of a concept or experience, or where considering a potential metaphor alerts us to areas of our pedagogy that need attention. For example, many common metaphors for teaching invoke power relationships—think of teacher as banker (Freire, 1970), policeman, or boss—that are at odds with a pedagogy rooted in community and reciprocity. Such limitations or conflicts, rather than showing metaphor as an imperfect tool for inquiry, instead invite us to acknowledge the challenges of theorizing complex experiences of teaching and learning and to search for new language—often framed in metaphor—and other representations through which to "do curriculum" (Nesbit, Church, and Gray, 2023, p. 1).

While dance can invite and encourage us to work metaphorically, typical dance class activities in technique, improvisation, or composition alone are not likely to prompt thinking about curriculum. For our work, intentional movement prompts, tied to the course readings and framed with reflective discussion, provided the bridge between art-making, metaphor, and theory. As Marissa explains,

> After selecting the readings, I thought, *What could we do to engage this information? How could I get at these ideas through dancing? More importantly, how can I guide others to get at these ideas and extend upon them?* I leaned into my experience teaching dance improvisation to sketch out prompts, but it was only through observing and responding to the students' movement and discussions that I was able to refine the structures of these experiences and fully engage the metaphoric possibilities of our dances. Thus, the entire teaching/learning process was highly collaborative, responsive, and in-the-moment.

As the faculty member and lead author, Marissa aimed to build a collaborative relationship with the graduate students during the course and particularly in the writing of this account, to both honor the labor and creative scholarship of the graduate students and also to encourage them toward presentation and publication of their work. However, the limitations of time and geography necessitated that each author have different contributions according to her interests and resources. Marissa began by sourcing ideas across the course assignments from the graduate student authors and inviting them to contribute additional reflections and comments in a shared document, from which the writing of this article took shape. The graduate students commented on subsequent drafts, offering extensions and clarifications of ideas when needed and consenting to edits made to condense and add commentary to their writing. Though we were all influenced by our colleagues in the course whose ideas and participation deeply shaped our experiences, this account draws only on the written work from the three student co-authors through an analytical process initiated by the faculty member. As such, it remains partial and incomplete, an artifact of situated reflection that strives to capture and communicate our thoughts for others engaged in arts teacher education. With this frame in mind, we now turn to a discussion of some of our course experiences and how they supported our engagement with embodied curriculum inquiry.

Metaphors in Action: Course Activities

Course Overview

Much of our week-long course was designed and experienced through metaphor. While the reading list and essential questions (see Table 1) gave formal structure to the overlapping concepts and topics

Table 1
Course Topics, Essential Questions, and Readings

	Course Overview
What is embodied curriculum inquiry?	Snowber, C. (2012). "Dancing a Curriculum of Hope: Cultivating Passion as an Embodied Inquiry" Brennan, M. (2022). "Teachers And Students as Researchers: Rebuilding Curriculum Inquiry for the Future"
	Day 1: Embodied Teaching and Learning
How is embodied teaching and learning part of the curricula we have experienced, created, and will create?	Macintyre Latta, M. & Buck, G. (2008). "Enfleshing Embodiment: 'Falling Into Trust' ith the Body's Role in Teaching and Learning"
	Day 2: Curriculum as Lived Experience
How can experience and relationships form the basis for a curriculum?	Koopman, O. & Koopman, K. (2018). "A Curriculum of Inclusivity: Towards a 'Lived-Body' and 'Lived-Experience' Curriculum in South Africa" Hwang, S.Y. (2019). "Seeking Rhythmic Attunement: Teaching to Dance; Dancing to Teach"
	Day 3: Bodyreading - Self, Text, and Journeys
How do we make meaning with texts?	Grumet, M. R. (1988). "Bodyreading"
	Day 4: Metaphor
How does metaphor shape the way we think about teaching, learning, and curriculum?	Waldman, K. (2014) "Metaphorically Speaking" Kliebard, Herbert M. (1982). "Curriculum Theory as Metaphor"
	Day 5: Sensation and Story in Curriculum Inquiry
How do our autobiographical experiences shape how we create and critique curriculum?	Ohito, E.O. and Nyachae, T.M. (2019). "Conceptualizing and Enacting Sensational Currere: Attuning to the Embodied Essence in Autobiographical Curriculum Inquiry" hooks, b. (1994). "Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process."

of the course, it was through our interactive activities that the concepts came to life. Marissa planned each session following the maxim "experience before information" (adapted from Booth's (2021) idea of "engagement before information"), guiding an artmaking experience that would prompt discovery, encourage collaboration, and reflect key ideas from the day's readings before any formal discussion of theory. Facilitation of these activities required significant trust as the graduate students were asked to engage fully in a sequence of prompts without knowing the end goal. Embodied inquiry often calls us to resist the urge to think ahead; by staying in the moment, we encourage sensation and introspection, attune to the movements and ideas of others, and allow ourselves to come to some surprise discoveries. Among these are the ways in which both works of art and artistic experiences serve as metaphors for curriculum.

Here, we describe three of the artistic processes that were part of our course and discuss how they served to connect movement with the theory we read and spark thinking about metaphors for curriculum.

Evocative Words: Dance Compositions as Metaphors for Educational Experiences

In one of our first sessions, the exercise "Evocative Words" began with movement improvisation based on single word verbal prompts. Unbeknownst to the students, the word list was sourced from phrases in the reading: Macintyre Latta and Buck's (2008) "Enfleshing Embodiment: 'Falling into Trust' with the Body's Role in Teaching and Learning" (see Table 2).

The students were prompted to hold the given word in their body-mind and express it through whatever movement came up, allowing for abstraction. In other words, although a prompt like "intertwine" could be expressed literally by crossing one's arms and interlacing fingers, as dancers physically contemplated the term they might explore

Table 2
Word prompts inspired by Macintyre Latta and Buck (2008)

incite	glimpse	fragile	ground	fall
alongside	power	springboard	estranged	trust
platform	thicken	immersion	struggle	eradicate
touch	found	lost	vortex	impact
build	intertwine	concrete	inquire	relate

intertwining of different body parts with imaginary objects, the intertwining of spatial pathways, or even their feelings about the ways their life might be intertwined with another.

As the exercise developed, dancers were each given the word list printed on a set of 25 small cue cards. Working in pairs, dancers first took turns drawing words and improvising while their partner witnessed their actions. They then moved on to expressing chosen words in a solo composition task using any approach and any dance form, and were guided to journal about this composition from an internal perspective:

> *What does it feel like to dance this composition?*
> *How can you attend to or emphasize these feelings in performance?*
> *What changes is your dance asking for?*

Such prompts draw attention to the physical experience of creating and dancing, mining the internal sensations and first-person vantage point of the dancer as valuable sources of knowledge in the creative process as a dialogue with emerging work; in this way we center the values of embodied curriculum inquiry through our art-making. Dancers shared their compositions with a partner who was asked to serve as a witness to the evolving dance and offer feedback about the experience.

Finally, the dancers were prompted to layer a metaphor into their experience of the choreography they had created. As dancers shared each dance individually they were asked, as both viewers and performers, to engage with the question "*What if* this dance depicts an aspect of someone's journey through an educational system?" We considered how the movements served as metaphors and how the added framing of the dances being 'about' education invited performers and viewers to read movements in different ways.

This iterative process unfolded over two hours before we turned our attention specifically to the article that inspired it, in which Macintyre Latta and Buck (2008) detail the centrality of embodiment in an inquiry process. Although the scenario they describe takes place in a science education classroom—a setting far removed from most of our class—key lessons about embodiment resonated with us. When we read, "...knowing is inseparable from action: Knowing is doing, and always bears the body's imprint" (Bowman, 2004, p. 46 as cited in Macintyre Latta & Buck, 2008, p. 323) we feel seen and understood as dancers and teachers who prioritize 'doing' in our work, whether that be creating curriculum, planning a performance, or guiding students to understand a new concept. Crystal observes how this plays out in her classroom:

> As adults everything that we do as an action is knowing. Requiring students to know things without doing makes it so the students do not understand. When I have seen students get up and actually do the thing that we have learned it stays with them longer. Watching students being fed concepts without being engaged in both mind and body makes for forgetfulness. Students should be up and moving to learn.

We also recognize the demands that truly teaching for embodied inquiry places on educators, even those such as ourselves who value bodily knowing. Macintyre Latta and Buck (2008) underscore how "...embodied understandings of inquiry need to be nurtured in teachers' practices in order to cultivate the necessary mindfulness to teach for inquiry" (p. 320). Michelle further reflects on the somatic nature of engagement with students:

> You can't just "turn on" embodiment; it is a holistic approach that requires release and openness. This is not something that happens in a weekend workshop. Embodiment is cultivated in the small everyday moments with our students and ourselves. It requires a spirit of curiosity and grace as you check in with yourself and your students.

After discussing our initial responses to the article, we returned our attention to the 25 terms used in our dance composition process, this time considering those words more directly as they related to embodied teaching and learning and our own curriculums. Working individually, in pairs, and small groups, we considered how these terms—each often signifying multiple and even conflicting ideas—show up in our own lived curriculum as students and in the curriculum we teach, and which we might like to purposefully engage more in our future work. These experiences took us toward crafting individual and collective definitions of embodied teaching and learning. For us, it means that we are in the present when teaching and learning, excited for what we are doing, and finding the 'flow' to it all. We are living in and trusting the process—creating space to respond and engage with our own experiences and the experiences of students. Inquiry is at the forefront: as teachers we should always be learning, and sometimes that means getting back down to the question, "why do I want to teach?"

Sensory Walk: Partner Explorations as a Metaphor for Teacher-Learner Relationships

Another powerful artistic experience we engaged in was the sensory walk. Many of us have experienced variations of this activity in dance improvisation and team-building workshops. For the purposes of our class, the sensory walk was intended to serve as an entry into our

discussions of attunement, "an embodied knowing of self that is formed and reformed through and, concomitantly, informs the relationships and contexts in which education takes place" (Hwang, 2019, p. 508). We were inspired by Hwang's (2019) "Seeking Rhythmic Attunement: Teaching to Dance, Dancing to Teach" in which she relates her experiences learning and performing Lindy Hop, a partnered social dance, to her experience understanding, relating to, and dialoguing with a student in her English classroom. While Hwang acknowledges that the literature focuses on the auditory dimensions of attunement, she takes a more holistic approach, "delving into the underexplored possibility of understanding attunement as felt through a moving/movable body" (p. 508). Attunement in curriculum calls us to use our fully embodied being not only to explore and understand for our own selves, but to engage that understanding to support another person's learning and exploration. It is this concept that the sensory walk engaged.

We worked in pairs with a blindfolded walker led by a sighted guide who was tasked with helping the walker experience a range of interesting sensations in the environment outside of the dance building. Guides focused on using gentle touch, physical support, and clear but minimal language to take their walkers safely to different locations and encourage them to attend to surfaces, textures, sounds, and unexpected or overlooked aspects of the campus environment. Returning to our indoor space, everyone was encouraged to journal about their experiences and reactions before switching roles and repeating the exercise and journaling again from the other perspective. Finally, everyone returned outdoors for a third walk, this time individually with eyes open and carrying their journal, charged with recreating their walk to the best of their abilities and capturing drawings or written descriptions of the places they had previously visited.

In reflecting on the experience, Crystal shares how, as the guide, she focused on the experience she wanted her partner to have:

> We ventured to a tree where I had them reach for a branch overhead. I wanted them to feel the absence of space between the branches, the difference in shape between the pinecones and pine needles, and I had them jerk on it to feel the fresh raindrops still clinging to the branch. Along the way I found myself trying to find the things that contrast each other, opposites in everything. Just as I want my fourth graders to experience the richness of life, I found I wanted my partner to feel so many possibilities.

Observing and adjusting to her partner, Michelle reveals how the guide's own body was necessary to create the experience for the walker:

> I found myself changing my language to be more descriptive. I found a clarity of vocabulary that considered how my partner may need to shift their weight or adjust their stance to better navigate the terrain around them. I also found that empathizing with them informed the way I was able to more successfully communicate and guide them. Slowing down my own plans, whether physical or directive, allowed my partner to find success and trust in the process and exploration.

Hayley relates a journey from anxiety to reassurance, highlighting the relationship between attunement and building trust:

> As the walker, I was hesitant and nervous because I felt like I was going to be led off the curb or into the street. I knew that my partner would keep me safe and over time, I was able to relax and trust came easily. It is amazing how all your senses are heightened when one is taken away. Everything I touched felt like a first time experience. It really opened my eyes to how some of our students may find it hard to trust, especially in a dance class.

Returning to the studio, dancers used the sensory walk as a point of inspiration for a new solo dance study reflecting their experiences. They were prompted to recall elements such as shape, texture, motion, patterns, qualities, thoughts, and feelings from the sensory walk, and to allow these recollections to inform their emerging dance. Once the dances reached a shareable point, dancers rotated through a series of partners, performing and witnessing one another's solo dances and allowing the ideas witnessed to inform the next iteration of their own dance. This idea of witnessing proved powerful, as it shifted the role of the viewer from audience, consumer, or judge to collaborator and supporter. Michelle elaborates on the significance of witnessing as an act of attunement:

> The roles of witnessing and being witnessed call the dancer to slow down and take in. This engagement is an intentional one; the witness is intentionally soaking in and interpreting what their partner is sharing, while their partner is intentionally choosing to share what feels essential for them in that moment. The relationship of witnessing and being witnessed reminds us that we do not exist in this world on our own. Our interconnectedness as human beings creates an ecosystem that becomes endangered when we forget that self-understanding and awareness is near impossible without the gift of reflection.

Such witnessing calls upon us to see our partners and students, not as we think they will be, but as they show us they are becoming; our curriculum, therefore, must also be responsive and evolve with our classroom community.

Bodyreading: Choreographic process as a metaphor for reading through the body

The act of witnessing was crucial to our engagement with each other and texts. Following our reading of Madeline Grumet's (1988) "Bodyreading," we engaged in a choreographic process inspired by engagement with written text, which became our most richly layered experience of overlapping metaphors. Grumet offers the idea of bodyreading as a holistic, embodied, and enacted notion of making meaning with texts, and she calls to us with a compelling invitation:

> Language can lead us somewhere else, to the place where we live, to the world, and to the world as it might be, and bodyreading need not be seen as a nostalgic fantasy, but as a practical necessity, the exploration of a world where we can live. (p. 177)

While many of us have previously done choreographic projects inspired by poetry or prose and accompanied by readings of text, this particular exercise prioritized the experiences we have of reading—engaging fully with texts—and used these experiences as the foundation for our choreographic work. Dancers each brought in a favorite book, with choices including children's books, treasured classics, poetry, and novels. Working individually, they spent time re-reading part of their chosen book and were asked to flag a particularly meaningful passage.

Provoked by Grumet's (1988) statement that "[j]ust as the capacity to have a world is mediated by other people for the body subject, the capacity to read a world is mediated by other people for the bodyreader" (p. 183), dancers then met with a partner and were asked to have a conversation about their chosen texts. Significantly, they were asked, when speaking about their book, not to focus on re-telling the plot, but instead to tell the story of their own encounters with the book: *How did this book come into your life? What does it mean to you? Who have you shared this book with? When have you continued to read it?* As she listened, Crystal attended to the physical cues that Hayley gave, illustrating the importance of these interpersonal engagements to our capacity for making meaning with texts:

> Besides noting what my partner talked about, I had to pay attention to how she was saying it, what her body moved like when sharing. I observed that Hayley got tense when she would be talking about her everyday tasks but then relaxed when talking about the moments of reading a book. She shared that reading was her happy place when she was young and now, which showed in her movement, a warmth came over her. When she read aloud a passage from the book, I could tell she liked it because she sat forward, used volume and tone when

> reading, and found the pause in the reading to make it dramatic. It made me want to listen.

Following the conversations, dancers then created a new composition based on the notes they took about their partner's retelling of the reading experience.When we gathered to share these dances, Marissa surprised the class by asking the partner of the performer to read out loud for the viewers the passage they selected earlier. The resulting juxtaposition—the reading of a book passage accompanying a dancer performing a composition focused on their experience of the reader speaking about the book—invoked layers of meaning for viewers. These unrehearsed collaborations contained many serendipitous moments where a gesture complemented a word or a phrase appeared perfectly timed to the actions. Crystal illustrates how her dance constructed a metaphor literally and figuratively around her partner:

> It was a big juxtaposition for our performance. Hayley's passage was very dark and mysterious, but my movements were about the warmth of growing up reading. When I performed, I invited her to sit in the middle of the room so that I could envelope her in my warm movements.

Importantly, though this experience our understanding of intertextuality was broadened, and through the metaphor of the creation and performances of these dances, we experienced very directly Grumet's (1988) reminder that the word *read* is "lodged in the very guts of the word *ruminate*, which means to think things over" (p. 177). We think over, through, and around texts through our conversations and performances. We find how curriculum can widen the scope of our inquiry across dances and texts: "It not only brings purpose to the reading process by providing a ground for intentionality, it also provides another stage where the possible worlds that the text points to can be identified and experienced as good places for grazing" (Grumet, 1988, p. 191).

Visual Metaphors: A Summative Project

While our experiences together in class engaged layered explorations of process-focused physical metaphors that encouraged wide-ranging discussion of curricular implications, they also felt unwieldy at times; across all the movement and dialogue, it can be difficult to pin down one idea long enough to explore it from all sides and write about it. Since many of the metaphor activities we worked with had an image component, we were used to simultaneously seeing, feeling, and responding to visual ideas. For our final project, we (temporarily) fixed the moving constellation of ideas into a tangible visual

format through the creation of visual metaphors. Doing so allowed the dancers to work independently after our week together, freed from the time-bound and physically enmeshed challenges of dance (it is hard to be in a dance and look at it at the same time, and video provides only an approximation of live performance) and released from internalized expectations of technical skill in an artistic medium. Visual metaphors can serve as a tangible record of our work and invite analysis through labeling concrete parts and theorizing their relationship to the whole.

The summative project for our course asked students to generate a metaphor for curriculum, create a visual representation of that metaphor, and then compose a written reflection. Students used a variety of media, including paint, three dimensional craft materials, natural materials, and digital tools for photo, video, and games. As with all of the activities in our course, the process of creation was emphasized: crafting the metaphors visually offered an opportunity to dialogue with materials and consider the various extensions of the metaphor in a way that simply stating and writing about it would not. Two members of our class involved their children in their process, further engaging the idea of curriculum as relational and deeply enmeshed with our individual lives and communities.

It was our dialogue about these projects that inspired us to craft this article. Looking back, we see that the curriculum metaphors our class created generally fell in three broad categories which are also reflected in the choices of these authors: nature, illustrated by Crystal's depiction of the water cycle, artistic constructions like Hayley's painting, and journeys such as that found Michelle's board game. Although the visual aspects were emphasized, each of the metaphors and accompanying discussions also invoked the physical and sensorial aspects of our embodied work together: a sense of action, relationship, and presence is evoked in the image, while the accompanying reflections illustrate the interplay of theory and practice. Here, we share detailed descriptions of the student projects, revealing how metaphor challenges us to both describe curriculum as we understand it and create a vision for what our future curriculum can be.

Nature Metaphors

Curriculum metaphors related to the natural world conveyed an understanding of curriculum through plants and gardens, water, and the solar system, invoking the lived, cyclical, and ever-present aspects of curriculum. Themes of growth, nurturing, renewal, motion, observation, and discovery were common, emphasizing sensitivity to relation-

ships and understanding that learning is ever-present. Through the metaphor of the water cycle (see Figure 1), Crystal exemplifies these ideas through a topic she also teaches to her elementary students; by relating both the transitions water moves through, as well as features of the physical landscape to teachers, students, and learning, she offers an emphasis on the evolving process in a community of learners as central to curriculum.

Reflecting the centrality of life, the on-goingness of curriculum as a process is a key idea across many nature metaphors. In her written discussion accompanying the diagram, Crystal suggests the embeddedness of cycles within students' and teachers' experiences of learning:

> The water cycle is never-ending. Our education is never ending, even when we leave the confines of the school building. The cycle…happens throughout a student's day. Every time they change subjects, classes, or thought processes their minds and bodies start a new cycle.

Crystal also addresses some of the challenges and possibilities when working with metaphors in that they can become vague and unwieldy, so open to interpretation that a creator's initial idea may become lost.

Figure 1

Curriculum is the Water Cycle (Crystal Bain)

To bring clarity into this process, Crystal provides deliberate labels in both her visual project and her writing, naming the mental states that students may move through as tangible geographic forms. To convey the transition from the "Mountain of Knowledge" to the "Ocean of Understanding," she evokes the physical sensation of moving through turbulent waters:

> Then the rapids start. As we take all the knowledge and experiences we have gained we come to the main point of what we are learning, where we have turbulence, rapids. The rapid is where new information is coming in and we are grappling with it. Rapids are made with a sudden drop in elevation and rock build-up.

The emphasis Crystal places on classroom community is reflected in her choice to understand the students as the water: central to the metaphor, always connected, always influencing one another's movement:

> They start their journey as individual raindrops, malleable as they fall. They take shape to whatever is around and pick up extra things on the way, which could be others' thoughts, experiences, or judgments. As the creeks come together becoming streams, the students are sharing and learning from each other…When a teacher finds the flow with their students, this cycle becomes second nature, and students know that their teacher is attuned to what they need, able to make adjustments and keep the cycle flowing.

As a balanced and holistic system in nature, the equilibrium Crystal evokes in her image is not static, but is rather achieved through continual motion, signifying the responsiveness of a teacher deeply present with herself and her students.

Constructed and Artistic Metaphors

Metaphors based on artistic and constructed objects engage ideas of curriculum as something that is designed, built, or created by teachers and students working collaboratively. Themes of choice-making, originality, individuality, assemblage, and culture permeated metaphors of curriculum as mosaic, painting, scrapbook, puzzle, clothing, and sculptures. These works also drew our attention to the aesthetic dimensions of curriculum and the creative practice that teachers engage in wherein outcomes cannot be predetermined and multiple meanings are possible. In many of these metaphors, traces of the physical action of their construction are visible in brush strokes, dye splatters, and frayed edges, reminders that human creation is always embodied. Hayley's abstract painting (see Figure 2) invites the viewer to engage with myriad possibilities as our attention shifts across the image; she

also centers the experiences of students in both how she explains the metaphor as well as her intention to bring the finished painting to her classroom for students to discuss.

For Hayley, the idea of layering is central to creating curriculum, both in the layering of learning experiences that teachers craft for students and in the layering of choices that teachers make as they focus on community, diversity, personal experience, attunement, and embodied knowledge. Hayley's explanation that what any learner or teacher enacts and perceives within a curriculum is influenced by their positionality is reflected in the image as well, where the physical placement of a viewer in relation to the painting will impact the shapes, colors, details, and relationships among elements that they perceive. Hayley does not intend for our engagement with her painting to be a solo endeavor, but instead, an invitation to dialogue among learners:

> I see curriculum through the eyes of an artist, a poet, and an educator all in one. The curriculum is about discussion and discovery, creating a conversation that allows for connection and observation.

Figure 2

Curriculum is an Abstract Painting (Hayley Runge)

The tangible act of layering paint on the canvas, with the resulting image being intertwined with the actions that made it, is mirrored in Hayley's assertion that we as teachers should take our embodied knowledge and use it to create a lived curriculum.

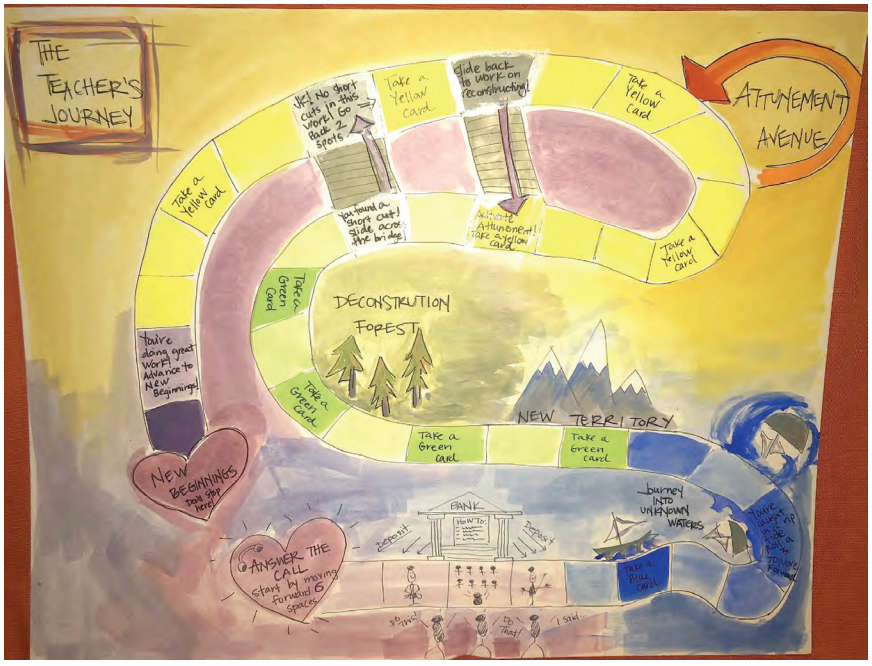
Journey Metaphors

Invoking the etymology of 'curriculum'—from the Latin for running a course—journey metaphors emphasize process, discovery, transformation, and growth. Conceived of as a passage, a road trip, pathway, and board game, the journey metaphors were simultaneously playful yet serious, centering the ongoing, embodied nature of knowledge construction as one encounters obstacles, makes choices, and moves through space and time. Michelle's visual metaphor (Fig. 3) highlights the teacher's own embodied practice as essential for curriculum and takes the form of an interactive game with a board and accompanying action cards.

Similar to Crystal, Michelle clarifies her metaphor through labels in both her visual artifact and her discussion, invoking aspects of the

Figure 3

The Teacher's Journey Board Game (Michelle Modrzejewski)



mythological hero's journey and emphasizing the role of the self in an ongoing, transformative endeavor:

> The teacher's journey is at the same time individual and collective: the work is rarely done in isolation, and yet to do it well and sustainably, we must reach down into the recesses of our whole selves; body, mind, heart, and soul. Cultivating our inner being as educators requires a cycle of reflecting, uprooting, replanting.

During our time together, Michelle made frequent references to questioning her past practices and desiring to incorporate new learning into her work as a teacher and curriculum designer. Approaching new ideas with a spirit of curiosity and openness, she frequently acknowledged how difficult it can be to truly and deeply reconsider the curricular and pedagogical approaches we have inherited, and how tempting it is to find quick and easy solutions. Reflecting this, the upper section of her game includes a "shortcut" that then sends the player back:

> While the process of deconstruction can be painful, it is essential for making a way for new growth. Much like the hero/heroine experiences a death and rebirth, we too as educators can get rid of what no longer serves us to make room for the new. At some point during the deconstruction process, the illusion of a short cut may come your way, but don't be fooled! The beauty and challenge of this self-work is that it must be revisited again and again.

Michelle further makes a connection between the educative and the spiritual, noting how attunement as a concept applies not only to others but to oneself and one's purpose:

> As you begin to reconstruct, you become more familiar with living from a spirit of grace—grace for yourself in the process and grace for others who you meet along the journey. New tools, both methodical and practical, usher in the opportunity for transformation as you find yourself becoming more attuned to yourself, your teaching practice, and your students. As you grow in attunement, you find yourself reflecting and revising—making new connections which allow deeper learning for yourself and your students.

The player who has completed the pathway is reminded,"don't stop here!," reflecting our understanding that curriculum inquiry is an ongoing endeavor.

Conclusion

We resonate with Snowber's (2012) acknowledgement that "there is so much information coming across our desks and lives, it is difficult

to listen to the rumblings within" (p. 120). The opportunity to engage in embodied curriculum inquiry in a focused, intensive format invites educators to reflect deeply on their histories, values, and cultural contexts and to innovate in ways that are deeply connected to their experiences of the discipline of dance and process of art making. As we step outside of the day-to-day hustle and bustle of planning and enacting curriculum, we take the time to consider what it means for us to create knowledge, broadly as humans and specifically as dance artists, and what qualities our teaching and learning experiences should have to foster that knowledge creation in our students.

As practicing educators, we are interested in curriculum inquiry not as an abstract theoretical construct, but as a way to deepen our individual and collective understanding of our work. During our explorations of embodied curriculum inquiry through metaphor, we center artistic processes as both content and ways of knowing. The visual metaphors serve as both a reflection of where we have been and a guide to where we may go as we create and re-create unique curriculums in our respective teaching contexts. We find experiences like the one detailed here to be valuable components of arts educator preparation and professional development. Further, the experience of reflecting and writing together as a faculty/graduate student team has extended our engagement with the material and each other, demonstrating the importance of collaboration within the teaching/learning context and recognizing the value that educators at differing points of their careers bring to their shared work.

We note that this work together requires significant trust. Within the experiential metaphor activities, Marissa facilitated them in a way that emphasized a sequential process, where the steps were revealed one at a time as the graduate students progressed. As experienced artists, they could have easily made dances about nature, books, or action words in an article, but this was not the entire point of the experience. There was a sense for all of us, in some moments, of being lost and unsure, waiting or searching; such feelings, of course, are also part of doing curriculum. To invest oneself, one's ideas and energy, into a collaborative endeavor without a clear vision of an end product requires confidence in one's collaborators and trust in the process. Just as Michelle's game illustrates, there is no shortcut. Marissa recalls,

> At some point I realized that what I was asking everyone to do really depended on them trusting me; they had to see that it would connect back by the end, and that the time and effort spent going through multiple prompts and surprises would be worth it. I found I needed to lean into the key elements of embodied curriculum inquiry and

> make these visible and voiced throughout: relationship, collaboration, active engagement, presence, sensing and feeling, theory/practice integration, and reflection. Doing this also made it easier for me to trust the students, knowing that even if I was still finding clarity around a connection or idea, someone in the group would be willing to voice an idea or show a movement.

Similarly, this trust and collaboration has extended here to our writing process. Marissa further notes the importance of engaging graduate students in curriculum scholarship:

> The voices of my co-authors here are crucial to the conversation, for it is very much a conversation. None of the experiences exist without folks actively moving and responding, and none of the ideas develop beyond my notes without embodied curriculum inquirers to collaborate with. Engaging them in the scholarly project of reflecting on our work deeply and choosing how to frame and share it with others via writing is vital for the ongoing development of arts teacher education.

Honoring the voices and perspectives of teachers is critical if we are to empower them to shape the complicated conversations of curriculum into the future.

For all of us, the embodied inquiry continues to shift our understandings of what curriculum is and can become. Entering the course, the graduate students mainly conceived of 'curriculum' as a static entity, dictated by policy and enshrined in materials created by others. Crystal describes how her experiences moving, creating, and dialoguing with peers through the lens of curriculum inquiry shifted her thinking:

> I want to take away the idea of what the curriculum is: Experienced and Lived. I always thought curriculum was the stuff: documents, textbooks, resources. Thinking in the terms of embodiment and attunement, this curriculum makes complete sense and is what I will try and strive for at home. I want my kids to walk away from my class feeling like they have ownership in their learning and are able to voice their part to anyone that asks.

Such an approach to both professional development and graduate teacher education is empowering; by framing curriculum not as an external mandate or expert decree, but as an active process of creation and reflection, arts educators are immersed in an academic context that centers the diverse ways of knowing and being that their personal and professional lives have been built upon. Marissa further notes that while this course was tailored to dance educators, engagement in these types of activities is meaningful for educators across content areas:

> Many of the prompts and activities in this course grew out of seminars I led for K12 educators who wanted to bring movement into their classrooms. When working with teachers new to dance I meet them where they are at and provide additional structures, vocabulary, and intermediate steps to enable them to feel confident and creative in their movement choices. This approach provides an entry point for them to discuss questions of curriculum while also supporting them with strategies for integrating movement and embodied perspectives into their own teaching.

In conclusion, we offer that working through metaphor in curriculum inquiry can invite all educators to center lived experiences and honor the diverse processes and ways of knowing that the arts engage. As our experiences demonstrate, such engagement creates deep, powerful learning that is essential for arts education to realize its full transformative potential.

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