

SALTING THE CURRICULUM

DANCE AS A LIVING *CURRERE* INTO IDENTITY, KNOWLEDGE, AND BELONGING

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The concept of “curriculum-as-lived” (Aoki, 1993, p. 257) has been a visceral reality for me from a young age. The inner landscape of my body has always been my lived curriculum. Pinar’s (1994; Pinar et al., 1995) conceptualization of *currere*, derived from the Latin word meaning to run the course, frames this relationship between our identities and our presents, pasts, and futures. *Currere* implies dynamic movement and relational movement. Rita Irwin (2006) suggests that *currere* is not a rushed endeavour but a deliberate “walking the course” (p. 77), a notion expanded upon by recent scholarship on walking as attunement to earthly curricula (Lyle et al., 2021). This dynamic and relational movement mirrors the body’s process of becoming—a site of inquiry where the curriculum is lived and felt.

My journey as a dancer and educator has underscored the body’s capacity to navigate the world as a compass and a GPS (Snowber, 2014). Dance, for me, is more than movement; it is a practice of orientation, connection, and self-discovery. Through phenomenological and somatic methodologies, I view the body as a repository of knowledge, an entity that “knows where our mind may not be able to lead us” (Snowber, 2007, p. 1452). This “felt sense” precedes linguistic articulation, embodying insights stored in the bones and organs.

In this article, I define what I mean by body, contextualize where I come from, and conclude with the notion of dance and the body as sites of living inquiries. Dance is the channel for learning about the world and me. I focus on my practice of centring and foregrounding dance as a way of knowing, reflecting, and listening. I use dance to inquire into the depths of my own lived and living experiences.

LIVING INQUIRY THROUGH DANCE

This paper is a moment of pause along my path toward coming to be and becoming whole. It is a moment of stillness in this nonlinear, perpetually evolving journey that is constantly changing. It is in the midst of this unfolding, ever-evolving journey that I keep returning to spirals. In its geometric form, a spiral is defined as a “shape or design, consisting of a continuous curved line that winds around a central point, with each curve further away from the center” (Oxford Learners Dictionary, n.d.). What I love the most about dance is feeling my body and gravity, falling and recuperating, the dizziness caused by spiralling and the quick-shifting of my weight. Turning and spiralling make my body tense as I must relinquish control. When I spiral, I feel the air in my hair and the ground supporting me. I love the spiralling, the feeling in my head as never-ending whorls and questions flutter in and out of my consciousness.

Dance affects my way of knowing and makes a difference in how I perceive, move, and live. Dancing is my way of being; dance makes me who I am. When I dance, I am open to the unknown, allowing its beauty to take over in a courageous act. When I dance, I experience a



moving understanding of the self and the whole being. This understanding, a “felt sense,” refers to the possibility of knowing through the body in motion as a process that precedes “the language-formulation process” (Williamson, 2018, p. 78). It is the deep sensation, a wordless awareness of how experiences resonate in our bones and organs.

How did I learn before I found dance? Dance taught me to get in touch with my body, and my body taught me who I am. My body knows more than I think. My body knows when a situation or something feels uneasy, such as when I need to take a break from writing, a meeting, or screens. My body knows when I should be more careful and when I can truly relax. My body gives me signals—perspiration and heart palpitations before a panic attack or light-headedness and body weakness before fainting. When I first fainted and had my first panic attack, I didn’t know that what I was feeling and sensing were signs. Through practice, although I wish I didn’t have to go through it, I’ve learned that these are all ways my body talks to me. This knowledge is one of the most important discoveries I’ve ever made. It allows me not to faint in public as often as I used to, and it allows me to slow the onset of a panic attack. Dance and the body are a site of inquiry and research.

DEFINING “BODY”

I reclaim the word “body” as a holistic representation of being. My experiences—from fainting and panic attacks to teaching dance—illustrate how the body signals, learns, and negotiates its way through the world. These autobiographical truths, stored in my tissues and reflected through my scholarship, underscore the body as a site of re-search and inquiry. As Snowber (2005) writes, “There is an art to listening to our lives. Research is not only an outward endeavour, but it travels in the realm of re-searching our own lives, knowledge, passions and practice” (p. 346).

Language reveals the reality that we *are* bodies. We commonly say, “I am tired,” rather than “I have a tired body,” yet we often do not fully honour and acknowledge that we are bodies. I pursue phenomenological and somatic scholarship grounded in arts-based methodologies to understand the body and ourselves. Living, writing, dancing, and researching phenomenologically and somatically means to bring the body, my body, which is who I am, into everything I do and to show who I am fully. To be somatically present to my scholarship means giving the space needed to look at the research from within and from a distance to find threads and connections. It is about learning patience and allowing time for reflection on processes. The process of yielding and sensing words moving through the body and resonating, as if the body were a speaker, requires time. To refuse to operate within the time framework of our society is a pedagogical and political act of self-love. The same is valid for reclaiming the joy of dancing and the importance of moving for pleasure.

We must recognize that we, as the body, are the researchers and the research subjects. I use the word “body” to refer to the wholeness of human beings. I do not intend to stress the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body nor to use the separation of *Körper* and *Leib* introduced by early phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1952/1989). The understanding of the body I offer moves beyond the distinction between the body as an object (*Körper*) and the body as a subject or the lived body (*Leib*). I reclaim the word “body” as the totality of my identity. I do not believe we need a new word and concept: the origin of being a body is in the body itself. When I introduce myself and say, “I am Carolina,” I use a shortcut to say that I am the body in front of you.

I am the physicality, the presence, the breath of what we call the body. However, the definition of the body and who I am can become interchangeable. Think about the clothes we wear daily and how different they are depending on the task we are about to do. Most people wear business casual clothing when they go to work; their identity becomes that of the worker. I wore formal clothes when I needed to be the academic and pink tights and a unitard to be the dancer. I have changed, or wanted to change, my body to “fit” better within specific identities. I lost weight because I wanted to be “the dancer.” I wanted to have prescription glasses in grade 4 because that would make me “the smart kid.” We must acknowledge that the physical appearance of this body, who we are, is always charged with political, social, economic, and other issues.

Our bodies are porous, with spaces for knowledge, memories, learning, breathing, and dancing to pass through. Our bodies are places for knowledge to be uncovered, created, and re-created. My body re-members through the membranes of tissues and cells. Listening to my body also means reflecting and revealing the autobiographical truths stored in my bones, organs, and tissues. Carl Leggo (2004/2019) writes, “Autobiographical writing is motivated by epistemological curiosity, the desire to know and be known, and know how we know and are known” (p. 144). Through autobiographical writing, I realized that, before starting my doctoral research, I tried to hide and move away from who I truly am, following an ideal of “objectivity.”

My scholarship exists in the spaces between disciplines, dissolving boundaries to embrace transdisciplinarity. Drawing from curriculum studies, phenomenology, dance, and somatics, I engage dialogically with diverse methodologies and epistemologies. This approach aligns with Sara Ahmed’s (2006) critique of disciplinary lines that restrict possibilities for inquiry. By inhabiting these interstitial spaces, I create room for *both/and* perspectives, honouring the complexities of embodied knowledge.

WHEN I GROW UP, I WANT TO BE A TEACHER

My inquiry is my story, the story of my body. I employ autobiographical writing to learn to read my life (Leggo, 2004/2019, p. 144). I carry teachers in my bones, flesh, and blood. With my grandma, aunty, and mom all involved with education, it was inevitable that I wanted to be a teacher since I was a child. My mom, Miriam, is an educator and has taught for as long as I can remember. My paternal aunt, Andreina, was a teacher; she stopped teaching in a public school to specialize in research on pedagogy and train future teachers. My paternal grandma, Nina, was an elementary teacher. In talking with my family about memories of my relationship with teaching, my parents recalled how much of a law-abiding child I was. They laughed, remembering that at 6 years old, I would give myself a timeout when I thought something I did was wrong. I have been reflecting on how my law-abiding nature might have shaped my formative years as a dancer and a scholar. The studies in philosophy and dance that I was first exposed to required rigour and discipline. Perhaps the struggle I first encountered when I began improvising and approached philosophy and dance as ways of being, learning, and living, not just disciplines, had to do with my serious nature and my ethic around work and rules.

My family talked about my love for desks. Everyone I spoke to remembered how I would transform any desk into a teacher’s desk (see Ahmed, 2006 on the philosopher’s desk). A tactile, visual, and sensorial component to the desk appealed to me from a very young age. At my grandma’s house, there was a desk that both my cousin and I used to practice dictation, mathematics, and reading. One day, my grandma gifted me a school textbook, and I began teaching

to a group of pillows. I would set up my classroom with the pillow students facing a blackboard, and according to my aunt, I would transform the student's desk into a teacher's desk. My lesson was delivered with chalk, and I handed out assignments for the students to complete. I am an only child, so I had to be creative in this process. I would complete the assignments and then code-switch to be a teacher again to mark them.

When I went over to my aunt's house in the afternoon after school, there were always notebooks of different colours and patterns and assignments that needed to be marked. I would look at them with fascination, and with great interest, I followed my aunt's hands as they browsed through the pages, marking them with blue and red pens. Naturally, I also wanted to mark it with different colours, pens, and codes. At that point, Andreina would provide me with pencils and papers; with great determination, I would fill the papers with scribbles.



Photo of the cover of a book

Photo Courtesy of Andreina Bergonzoni, author of the book.

Da grande voglio fare la maestra (*When I Grow Up, I Want to be a Teacher*) is a book curated by my aunt and published in 2001. She left her teaching job to work at the Istituto Regionale di Ricerca Educativa (IRRE), the regional institute for educational research in Bologna, Italy. She had the opportunity to curate a book on teachers' professional identities. After choosing the title, she thought that I—her little niece—would be perfect to illustrate that concept. She chose a photo of me for the cover: a blurry black and white photo shot when I had transformed my cousin's desk into a teacher's desk to practice how to be a teacher.

FINDING DANCE

I have always been in dance school, but I didn't always love dance. I clearly remember being quite unhappy about dance during my first class. However, dedication and commitment to activities are a significant value in my family, so I finished the year. My parents asked if I wanted to continue, and I said yes; this pattern continued for about five years. I didn't want to go, but my friends were going, so why not? By the time I was 11, I realized I enjoyed being in the dance studio, and I began going 3-4 times a week, attending workshops during the weekends, and enrolling in summer sessions.

When I was 16, my dance teacher, Simonetta, asked if I wanted to become her assistant. I was excited to start a mentorship with my teacher, but I also felt very unprepared and full of questions about her choices. I would spend most of the class time asking questions that were not fully answered, so I started looking for possible answers elsewhere. I am sure this is when I consciously became curious about pedagogy and teaching practices. My mom believes that I realized I wanted to be a teacher when I started teaching dance. She believes it has to do with the possibility of seeing how the transmission of knowledge affects others. After all, I had real people before me, not pillows. I was teaching in an embodied way, through the body. We were learning by doing, by being, by moving.

My curiosity and desire to better understand dance pedagogies have guided me since then. In 2011, when I attended my first formal training in dance pedagogies, I realized that dance was a way of being and expressing and that everyone could be taught to attune to their body. However, I must admit that this perspective shift was not easy. I didn't know how to talk about dance in a way that wasn't "technical," the way I was taught; I didn't know how to appreciate or critique choreographic work that wasn't based on a ballet aesthetic or on technical moves. Even though I didn't have the terminology then, I understood curriculum as dynamic and improvisational, learning to focus on "the process of a person coming to form, not content" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 593).

Throughout my adult life, I have danced my way in and out of institutions. I've engaged my whole being with research by writing the dance and dancing the writing at the crest of the in-betweens. I approach research, teaching, and learning as living inquiry. I perceive myself as a "somatic conductor," a doula of encounters and experiences. I desire to bring the body into everything I do, including my pedagogy. I bring our *being* and not just our *doing* into scholarship. I hope readers and audiences connect with their own bodily stories as I share insights from my body—insights I discover and rediscover in my bones, skin, breath, brain, organs, and membranes. To attune to the body through practice and training provides us with forms of knowledge that cannot be fully articulated through linguistic means. Phenomenology, somatics, and dance improvisation are all experimental practices: a way of doing research and, most importantly, a way of being. Manning and Massumi (2014) describe the act of thinking as doing and define dance as "a thinking in movement" (p. vii). According to them, the task of philosophy is to create new concepts that unfold beyond the limit of the thinkable. In my research, I employ etymology as a strategy to unearth latent and hidden meanings of words and go beyond the limit of the thinkable. Etymology can cultivate and provide insights on "how certain words came into existence and how some words may have lost some of the original meaning that still echo in the present meanings of these words" (van Manen, 2014, p. 325) and of the phenomenon I study. Etymology becomes a way to rediscover vibrancy and reverberations in words to better describe my body's relationship with the endless possibilities of feeling, sensing and moving simultaneously.



I explore a written language that comes from the experience of these possibilities. As a dancer and phenomenologist, I write with my whole body. I improvise in movement, then *write from the body* (Snowber, 2016, 2018), letting the words come through me. When I write from my dancing body (Bergonzoni, 2024), I allow the words to arrive, and I let the dance(s) bring me to a liminal space, a space that is unknown. Writing becomes a transformational practice in which what the body has learned and continues to learn cannot be separated from the body itself.

FINDING *HO.ME*

Moving across continents and disciplines, I grappled with questions of identity, community, and feeling at home. These reflections culminated in a phenomenological investigation of arriving and settling in new landscapes, embracing the tensions of dislocation and belonging. I have explored the relationship between home and the body for the last seven years through dance, poetry, and writing. My body, life, and personal experiences are the site of inquiry, not merely a topic or object of inquiry. As such, I am questioning the embodied curriculum of arriving in a new place, connecting with its water, rocks, and landscape. What does it mean to arrive in a community of humans and more than humans and try to reclaim a place and a space?

My research on home and how home feels in the body began in 2017 through a residency program at The Dance Centre in Vancouver (BC). I started the research phase of what then became *Ho.Me* (Bergonzoni, 2022). Five dancers, both disabled and non-disabled artists (Sarah Lapp, Peggy Leung, Harmanie Rose, Cheyenne D. Seary, and Adam G. Warren) from All Bodies Dance Project, joined me in exploring the idea of feeling at home in our bodies. We started the research by asking ourselves what was familiar and unfamiliar, and we worked with choreographic constraints to develop movement material. *Ho.Me* is a place of inquiry and the outcome of some of my thoughts on home, belonging, and dance aesthetics. The title, *Ho.Me*, plays on the Italian meaning of “ho me” which can be translated to “I own myself” or “I have myself.”

At that time, we took a break from rehearsal for a few months, and in that span of time, I became a Permanent Resident (PR) of Canada. On my way back from a trip to Italy, when I flew back to Vancouver - as a permanent resident for the first time - the officer at the border checked my PR card and said: “Welcome home!” I looked at them with a confused look—I was coming back from Italy; I was coming back from home. This moment of rupture made me question the familiarity of the notion of home, opening a phenomenological investigation into what it is like to feel at home. Until then, I didn’t realize I was living two lives, 10000 km apart. I began questioning what felt like home to me, and I felt lost, confused, and unable to answer. When I first moved to Vancouver, I was a young woman full of expectations, fears, and overconfidence all mixed. It took me eight years, six apartments, a heavy breakup, a marriage, endless hours in between consulates, lawyers and paperwork, becoming a permanent resident, becoming a citizen, and countless tears to even attempt to call this place home. It was then that I began a practice of poetically responding to the prompt “I come from...” or “I am from...” and then dancing this “poetic list.”

Seven years later, I question what it’s like to be home, find home, and belong. Physically, I have landed in this new place where I really want to make a home. I am in Sydney, on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, but I continue to feel disembodied, discombobulated, and out of my body. I am an Italian (legally) turned Canadian who had just moved from *all the way* out West to *all the way* out East—a peninsular girl trying to understand an island culture, a woman who is



constantly reminded that she is not from here. None knows my father, and none can wrap their head around my “Canadian-ness” that comes with a thick Italian accent.

It is ten years since I left Italy, 6 months since I left Vancouver. It is the first time I have lived without human company in seven years—just me and my dog, Avon Barksdale. No partners or roommates in the house. I am sitting on a couch that doesn’t feel like mine. I have not actually arrived, let alone settled.

BE AND LONGING: A CURRICULUM OF SALT

As I have shown through autobiographical and embodied inquiry, the body becomes a vessel for understanding identity, memory, and becoming through dance. I feel a longing for being, becoming, and belonging. While I am deeply aware that I cannot force this process, I am very much trying to rush through it.

When I left Italy in my 20s, I was in a state of rage, despair, hope, and temporality. After my first month in Vancouver, I knew I would never return. I never once thought this feeling would change until I relocated to Nova Scotia in the summer of 2024. It was the moment that I stepped into the Atlantic, when my lips felt the saltiness of the Ocean, that I was brought back home. After that, I visited Italy, and for the first time in 10 years, I missed everything about it.

I felt reconnected to the water and the land in ways I hadn’t experienced in the 10 years I lived in Vancouver. When I came back from my short visit, I rushed to get a tattoo of San Luca, the most iconic place in my hometown, Bologna, and the two sisters, the mountain landmark of Vancouver, in an attempt to grapple with what it is like to belong in multiple places.

The smell, taste, and experience of being in salt water grounded my quest for belonging, enlivening the living curriculum of my inner landscape—a salting curriculum. The salt embodies the essence of my living curriculum; salt stings on open wounds, but it also preserves, enhances, and transforms (Charlemagne, 2024). This curriculum of salt invites an attunement to the embodied memories and sensations that ground us in our humanity.

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