

## "I Feel Like I'm Going to Take Off!": Young People's Experiences of the Superordinary in Dance

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### **Article:**

Work by children in every art form has been both romanticized and criticized by adults. Child art has been emulated as "natural" by artists seeking to free themselves from social and historical conventions (Lowenfeld and Brittain 1987; Read 1957, 1973) and to reconnect with qualities of purity and simplicity (Coleman 1998). Such values have been challenged by those seeking a rationale for instructional programs in the arts (Clark, Day, and Greer 1987). It often seems that educators view children as incomplete adults, in need of education and training to make them mature as well as civilized (Torgovnick 1990). This may be why the ideas and opinions of children are rarely found in research literature, even in education.

Similarly, books about how to teach young people rarely include the perspective of the student. Except in child-centered programs for young children, teachers and educational administrators generally decide what children should learn and then, at least sometimes, assess to see if it has been learned. Very little is known about how young students experience the educational activities designed by adults or construct meaning from them.

As dance educators and researchers, we have felt a compelling need to understand how young people experience dance and what it means to them. When we met at a conference of Dance and the Child: International (daCi) in New Zealand in 1985, we recognized that we were each pursuing such questions in our individual research. We found ourselves intrigued by similarities in our data, despite the fact that our studies had been conducted on opposite sides of the globe. Sue Stinson had long ago rejected ideas of "universalism" in dance, and recognized that all dance is situated in a cultural context. On the other hand, Karen Bond's research with deaf-blind children whose access to culture was minimal but who showed a penchant for dancing had led her to ethology and bioaesthetic theories of dance (Bond 1991, 1994a). We both wondered whether there might be any common experiences and meanings among child dancers that cross over demographic and other differences. A phenomenological interest in essences of the dance experience was the impulse for the study that follows. Our study, however, goes beyond description to our own interpretation of such essences.

### **Methodology and Procedures**

We faced two daunting challenges in pursuing our questions: How does one study what is basically an internal experience, and how can one collect data from all the diverse groups of young people studying dance? As in all research, our methodological choices reflect attempts and reveal limitations.

One of the basic premises of those who study experience and meaning is that research findings are never complete and are always subject to considerable interpretation (Locke 1989; Ellis and Flaherty 1992; Janesick 1998; Green and Stinson 1999). Because no technology has been invented that can view the workings of a person's mind, we are always limited to evidence that is external and observable. Film and video can capture what people do, but not necessarily how they feel about doing it. In everyday life we make assumptions based on expressive behavior, but we often misinterpret. For example, we may think an individual likes a certain activity because she or he continues to engage in it and "looks interested," only to find later that we have been

mistaken. We sometimes may learn more about an internal state by asking the individual to describe it, but internal states are not fixed. Rather, they change from one day or situation to the next. The stories of our lives—how we experience the world and what these experiences mean to us—continue to evolve each time we tell them. The commonly reported tendency for both young people and adults to try to please the interviewer, through embellishment or masking, may be a further complication where conventional notions of research validity are a concern (Garbarino and Stott 1990; Rubin and Rubin 1995). In any case, there is no guarantee that what people tell us from memory is what they actually did or felt (Minichiello et al. 1990).

While interviews are a time-honored way of collecting descriptions of experiences and meanings, we also know that words cannot always express them, even by those with large vocabularies and a desire to talk. Multimodal approaches incorporating different forms of data can provide a range of perspectives on the same phenomenon or event. In this way, congruences between language and behavior may be illuminated. Particularly with young people, it is important to seek information that maximizes their opportunity to disclose their competence in communication and authentic meanings (Garbarino and Stott 1990).

In this study we were looking for any kind of evidence we could find about the nature and meaning of young people's experiences in dance, despite our recognition of its inevitable incompleteness. We began with our own prior research, conducted in Australia, Saipan, and the United States, returning to the original data. Bond's research in Australia and Saipan has been multimodal, including videotaped classes, notes from on-site observations, conversations with children, and children's drawings about dance with captions spoken to their teachers. This material was culled from forty children in an early childhood setting (three to five years), twenty-six elementary school age children with special needs (five to twelve years), and fifty middle school children (thirteen to fourteen years). Stinson's data existed in the form of interview transcripts with close to one hundred ten- to eighteen-year-olds.

We recognized the impossibility of replicating our own research around the world. We thus invited contributions from others who had original material from young people describing the nature and/or meaning of their dance experiences. We are indebted to these colleagues who provided data: Ann Kipling Brown, Susan Koff, and Joan Krohn. In addition, we located descriptions in several published and unpublished papers and theses (BrooksSchmitz 1990; Brown and Wernikowski 1991; Current 1988; Lazaroff 1998; Martin 1998; Slowinski 1995; Valiance 1991; Vlassopoulos 1995; Waegerle 1997). Typical for interpretive methodology, none of the studies used a randomly drawn sample. Comments written by young people who attended the 1991 and 2000 conferences of dance and the Child: International were also included in the pool of material for analysis.

We ultimately collected material from approximately 600 young people between the ages of three and eighteen from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Saipan, and several states in the United States. It is clear that there are vast portions of the world left out. We were not able to include material from non-English speakers because of our own linguistic limitations; certainly, an extension of the study to children speaking other languages would be valuable.

We did not have full demographic information on all participants, but we know that we had diversity in gender, race, and ethnicity in addition to developmental level and country of origin. The dance experience of the participants was also diverse, ranging from a couple of workshops to many years. Some had taken classes in public or private schools, some in studio settings, and still others in special education centers or community arts projects. Some programs were designed for preprofessional training, while others had more general educational, recreational, or therapeutic goals. A majority of the settings emphasized creative dance and/or other Western dance forms, which is still another limitation to this study. (See the Appendix for a description of the demographic characteristics for each data source.)

Admittedly, an approach such as ours, reexamining data originally gathered for a variety of projects with their own goals, is unconventional. Meta-analysis is commonly used by scientific researchers who examine the

results of many similar studies, looking for patterns that reveal more than any individual study can do. In our case, however, we were looking for original material consisting of the words and images of young people, rather than the findings of other studies. We sifted through the material gathered for other purposes, such as project evaluations, seeking that which could illuminate our understanding.

The study is unconventional in other ways as well. Most interpretive studies, recognizing that one can never capture the "whole truth" of experience or meaning, do not attempt to examine such a massive amount of material. Having a large amount of data from a relatively diverse population means that we may have a fuller picture than a small study, but we make no claims to having discovered the "whole truth" which might then be generalized to every young dancer.

We also have blended a number of different ways of presenting and responding to our data. These include phenomenologically-based "essence descriptions," which Bond has created from the words of many young people. This process seeks to synthesize dancers' perceptions of body, energy, space, time, matter, relationships, and causality to illuminate the "lived experience" of dance (Moustakis 1994; van Manen 1990). Like Glesne, Bond sees these pieces as approximations of poetry, "shaped by the researcher to give pleasure and truth . . . the 'small t' truth of description" (1997, 213). She began this work through an interest in representing the voices of young children in dance (Bond and Deans 1997). The collective meanings that emerge through poetic synthesis can convey a dynamism and depth of perception that may not be reflected in the often sparse language expressed by an individual child or in a single instance. While poetic representations of data have been appearing in qualitative research literature for some years (Richardson 1992, 1998, 1999; Bond and Deans 1997; Glesne 1997), they are still infrequent; we think they are, nevertheless, an effective way to illuminate the lived experience of dance.

We also find critical social theory to be invaluable in revealing issues and questions about dance experience that we might not otherwise recognize. We believe there is much to gain in a blend of description and interpretation, essence and analysis, poetry and critical reflection. Bringing these different perspectives together gives a fuller picture of the multiple realities in which we all live and the multiple capacities we can use to make sense of the world. As Elliot Eisner noted, "methodological pluralism rather than methodological monism is the ideal to which artistic approaches to research subscribe . . . looking through one eye never did provide much depth of field" (1981, 9).

More conventionally for an interpretive study, we acknowledge ourselves as interpreters. We are responsible for selecting and ordering the material. We can never know if the young people whose words and images we have examined would agree with our interpretations. We acknowledge that, even when young people used the same words, they may not mean the same thing. We also acknowledge that ours is not the only interpretation of this material; it is ultimately the reader who must judge whether our interpretations are believable, that is, supported by the content we present (Locke 1989).

The quantity of data we had collected presented a particular challenge. We began analysis with multiple readings and viewings in order to identify major categories of student experience. We tentatively titled these categories:

- *Competence* (having to do with student learning and motivation toward achievement or mastery)
- *Environment* (having to do with relationships with peers, teachers, or family, or aspects of the physical and learning environment)
- *Arousal* (having to do with awareness of the body, energy, and affective states)
- *Self* (including issues of freedom and choice as well as creativity, self-expression, and aesthetic values)
- *"The Unnamed"* (experiences that go beyond the ordinary and everyday)

Our initial difficulty in naming the last category reflected the ineffability of these kinds of experiences for the young people, or instances when we as researchers found it difficult to interpret young people's meanings. Eventually called "The Superordinary," it is the focus of this article. We must note at the outset that the article excludes vast quantities of data sorted into the other categories. We selected it to develop first because we found it especially intriguing, but look forward to continuing our analysis of the other categories.

Through repeated cycles of analysis of the data (working separately and together for more than a year), we continued to clarify the category. Ultimately we identified a range of qualities and experiences that appear to be a source of deep meaning and satisfaction to young people. Selected material was clustered into subcategories, which, even after extensive culling, had far too much data to include here. This essay offers examples that we found to be vivid and persuasive, yet speak to the variety we discovered.

In all of this material we find young people referring to states of being that are in some way significantly different from the everyday. What made an experience other than ordinary is indicated by the subcategory under which we present it. Again, readers may not always agree with our classifications—and indeed they continued to shift with each cycle of analysis. Like all qualitative material, ours is open to multiple, emerging, and conflicting interpretations. Even beyond the issue of categorizing, we had many conversations about what makes something superordinary, recognizing that in dance, and in the lives of young children, such states may be quite ordinary.

We next present the young people's experiences in their own words and images (and, in a few cases, the words of observers, written in third person) by the categories in which we have placed them, with our own brief commentary in between.<sup>1</sup> Each category is introduced by an essence description, several of which are also included in the text. This section concludes with a summary of the metaphors employed by young people to describe what we have called the superordinary in dance.

Following the process of most interpretive researchers, we allowed our findings to direct us to appropriate literature. For that reason, our discussion of literature comes after the analysis of data. In this section, we relate aspects of superordinary experiences described by young people to those described by adult theorists who have addressed this realm. Finally, we reflect individually on some of the meanings this work has had for us.

## **Young People Speak**

### *Bodily Resonance*

Energy!  
Each little muscle.  
Each little nerve.  
Tingling.  
My lip goes "vvvvvv"  
Chill bumps.  
It's something I *want*.  
A natural high.  
I'd rather dance than eat.

As conveyed in the above essence description distilled from high school interview data,<sup>2</sup> young people in all settings described or exhibited superordinary states in which bodily feeling is heightened with a corresponding emotional and cognitive awareness or transformation. Bodily resonance occurs in a range from high intensity excitement to feelings of relaxation and tranquillity. Such states may be reached through performing, in classroom settings, and while observing dance. We begin with examples from the excitement end of the continuum.<sup>3</sup>

Here is a description of a four-year-old boy from on-site observation:

He was standing up tall, arms stretched high. He looked up at his hands. He smiled when the teacher said "beautiful" and watched his arms moving slowly up and down. He jumped down and ran in circles, smiling. He stopped when the music stopped. But he didn't want to stop; he added just one more flap!

This is from on-site observation of a group of four-year-olds:

"Fire," they sang all together, laughing, bouncing, and bumping in and out of the circle. They jumped and turned, stamping their feet. They couldn't stop laughing. They couldn't pay attention, they were so excited. J said, "We're losing the plot! . . . Fire !!!"

The following is quoted from a classroom conversation with a three-year-old:

I like dancing around and . . . prancing around . . . and . . . getting dizzy [words accentuated with nods of the head]. (Martin 1998)

Next is a composite of drawing captions from children in an elementary special education setting:

Very big, very fast!  
I like up, I like marching.  
I like it when we wiggle.  
We hop around. . . . I am good! I love this dancing! (plate 1)

Here are some anecdotes from interviews:

When dancing [I feel] very hot and sweaty. And my feet are like really motivated and they're in motion . . . . My legs, my thighs, my knees are kind of motivated, like excited. (Elementary) (Lazaroff 1998, 91-92)

It felt like tingles all in my body. (Elementary) (Waegerle 1997) (plate 2)

When we do stuff that I like, I do get a little excited, you know. I like fast dance, when you're moving fast and get sharp movements you get, you know, excited and you get pumped up . . . like going fast on a motorcycle. (Middle school)

Some people get off on drugs, I get off on the feeling. It's exciting. . . . Like, all of a sudden, this bunch of energy. (High school)

. . . you have to give it out to the audience. Like I'm trying to reach out and almost physically touch them but that's impossible . . . but I try anyway to send myself up there. (High school)



Plate 1. Very big, very fast.

I + felt + like tingles  
all in my body.



Plate 2. Tingles.

Here is a high school student's response to watching a performance of Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*:

I thought I would die. When Donna Wood comes out to do her solo I wanted to laugh, I wanted to cry. I wanted to jump up there. It makes you want to dance yourself but at the same time I wouldn't dare start moving cause I might tremor what's going on up there.

In addition to the extensive references to excitement, many individuals, particularly older children, referred to a state of relaxation which seemed equally different from the everyday. Here are some examples:

Warmup gets us in a slower state. (Elementary) (Waegerle 1997, 15)

When I'm really dancing, I guess I feel relaxed. . . . I feel like I'm at peace with everything else.  
(Middle school)

When you dance you feel real loose and it's like you send all of the demons out of your body every time. Everything is just gone and your body, it feels, like, tranquil. It's like a natural high. (High school)

### *I Just Have to Dance*

I want to stay out here dancing.  
Another go . . . please? I don't want to stop!  
I've got one more dance, lots of dances.  
I'm desperate.  
Me, too!

Closely related to bodily resonance, some young people experienced dancing as so powerful that they couldn't stop it from happening:

Flow is if you do something you go with it and it just busts out. When you flow you just got to let it out. (Elementary) (Waegerle 1997, 15)

A lot of times when I get mad, I'll go up to my room and turn on music and dance, and that gets it out. It's your feelings in action. It's like I have to dance. (Elementary) (Current 1988, 22)

He vowed to "dance till death." (Middle school) (BrooksSchmitz 1990, 100)

### *Freedom*

Dance is freedom.  
All big, like my house.  
I can let go.  
No constraints . . .  
And that's beautiful.

Even though they expressed a compulsion to dance, some of the young people, paradoxically, also experienced a sense of freedom, our third category of description. Some, particularly in early childhood, associated freedom with flying:

### *Flying Free*

I feel like I'm going to take off.  
I'm just about to fly. I AM flying!  
I am flying and flapping and doing something very good.  
I fly and swoop over and over again.  
I am free!  
Shall we go for another fly?  
Yes !  
(plate 3)

Older students were slightly less literal but equally passionate about freedom:

Dance was freedom. It was all big and you could move around. It was a home away from home you could say, to me, cause I felt real good when I was there—like it was my house—put it like that.  
(Elementary) (Current 1988, 14)

I really feel I can let go of all my worries, all my inhibitions. It is very exhilarating to just move where the music takes me. I get a sense of freedom, I'm not constrained in any way, and that's beautiful.  
(High school)

I don't have any limitations even though I do physically, in my mind I have no limitations . . . . I mean if you dance with a girl . . . and you touch each other you don't have all those restrictions that the outside world has .. I feel a lot more free and open. (High school)

*Being Who I Really Am (or Might Become)*

Dance is part of me.  
A place where I can know myself.  
I can do what I feel, and  
my feelings expand.  
A different side of me is expressed.  
For 47 minutes I get to be myself.  
My own right way.  
I . . . am . . . creative.

Like the quotes on freedom, the material we analyzed was filled with references to the self and self-expression. The clarity of self-perception often expressed by young children in dance was striking, as in the following chorus of four-year-old voices:

*I Want, I Can*

No! I'll show you how coyote moves.  
I've got a plan.  
I want drum and music.  
I want another turn!  
What about me?  
We could do that right now if we wanted to.  
I am a very good dancer.  
I'm dancing by myself.  
I can go backwards.  
My part in dance is doing the twirl.  
I like balancing.  
I like rhythms.  
I want red!  
I want blue!  
Like this. . . !  
I'm going, too.  
I've got a good idea.  
Free dance!  
That doesn't look as good as me.  
This is my whole self dancing. (plate 4)

Going beyond such innocent statements of self, we found considerable indication that both young and older students often experienced what they referred to as a real self—as though the person they usually were was not the authentic self. This was an "inner self" or a "transformed self," one not always shown to others and often not previously known to themselves. Sometimes, they reported, dance was where they actually discovered a real self or selves. We next illustrate this category with an example of the power of metaphoric self-representation in the very young, followed by statements from middle and high school students:

This is when I was very still ... like a gum tree. I was very still even when the others ran around and around me in circles. (Preschool)

I loved it more than anything else. I felt like I could really be what I could be, because dancing is a gigantic part of me. (Middle school)

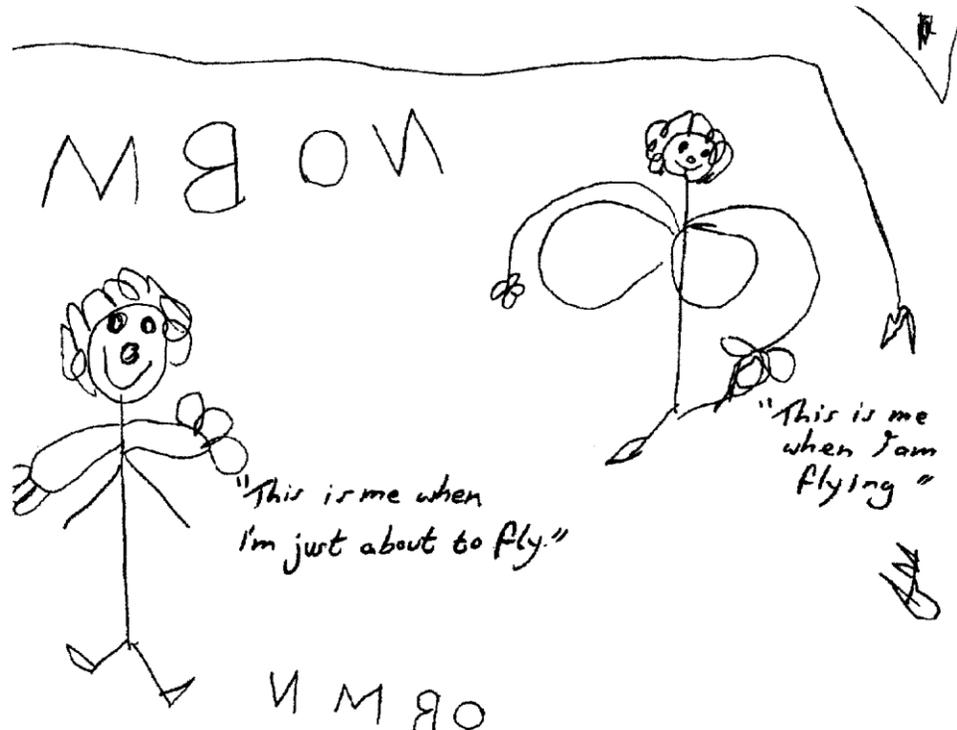


Plate 3. This is me when I'm just about to fly.

When you feel centered . . . you can really feel as if you're alone but you aren't really alone. You can really get somewhere when you're centered because you can sort of drift off and become what you really are. . . . (Middle school)

Everybody needs an escape . . . to help them find stuff in themselves that they never knew would come up. And in dance you can find that. (High school)

In this class you get to show everybody what kind of a person you are . . . when I'm in my other classes I feel like I'm dead. (High school)



Plate 4. My part in dance is doing the twirl.

We found language about "inner self" mainly among middle and high school students:

Dance really lets me explore my inner self, what I'm really like, who I really am. (Middle school)

I think lots of people get worried about showing something that nobody's ever seen inside them come out into a dance . . . and I think bringing this out toward other people is something you need to learn in your life. (Middle school)

I feel like I can express myself when I dance . . . and that it's something that is me—it's part of me, it's coming from inside of me. (High school)

While the above quotes focus on the experience of personal authority, the following link dance with survival of self:

If I couldn't dance I think I would feel like there was a part of me that [was] just totally dead, not alive. (High school)

I can't imagine life without it. (High school)

I think dance is—is necessary for me. . . . It's just as important as sleeping. . . . It's important—cause it's in me. (High school)

I could just burst, cause I really love it, it really means a whole lot. I just feel lost without it. (High school)

The following examples relate specifically to young people's experiences of self-transformation:

When her personal affinity for verticality and weight quality was affirmed, she was able to release tension and achieve some harmony with the environment. The elegant dance initiated by Madeleine, reminiscent of a courtly pavane, gave a glimpse of her potential for self-transformation through dance. (six-year-old nonverbal deaf-blind)

It's fun to have a really strong character role. You get into it and you can just dance. You don't really have to think about your dancing. You know you are that person . . . you become the person. (Elementary) (Vallance 1991, 294)

I feel good. I feel full of joy. (Elementary)

When the people are looking at you it gives you a great feeling inside. . . . I'm dancing for all these people and I'm making them happy. You feel so good about yourself, you feel so proud of knowing all these people are watching you and they think you're wonderful. (Middle school) (Brown and Wernikowski 1991, 154)

When I'm not dancing, it's just, I'm me and I'm a plain old me. And if I get into dance, I discover this whole new part of me that I get to know . . . it's such an inner self thing. (Middle school)

You find a different person that you didn't know about yourself before. (Middle school)

Everybody needs an escape . . . to help them find stuff in themselves that they never knew would come up. And in dance you can find that. (High school)

You leave your everyday inhibitions aside when you are dancing. I mean if you are the dancer you are not exactly you as an everyday person. (High school)

While older students often referred to finding an authentic self in dance, young children—and an occasional older one—often described becoming someone or something else, frequently without external provocation. Some of these "emergent selves" showed such a high degree of kinesthetic identification that the line between authentic self and fantasy self seemed blurred, as for this four-year-old: "Hey, you know what? We need a bear in here. I'm gonna be a bear. I'm gonna be a bear. I'm a bear!"

The magnitude of very young children's propensities to take on multiple selves in creative dance is depicted in the following poem composed from drawing captions and conversations:

*I'm a Transformer!*

I was a snail dancing. My snail turned into a lizard.  
I was a frilled neck lizard before I put my wings on.  
That's me, the eagle. That's me, a bat.  
A flying wolf with one horn.  
A dragon. A monster. A tiger.  
A birdie. A monkey. A bear.  
A raptor. A cheetah. A lion.  
A tortoise. A snail.  
A mouse. A crocodile.  
A baby seal.

I was a cobra, up and slithering.  
I back away and I squiggle around when I popped up.  
I smile through my snake face.

That's me when I was a bird and I was transforming into an eagle.  
I'm not an eagle, I'm a chicken!  
Here is my wing. Here are my big teeth.  
We're eagles turning into cats.

I was a space ship, putting fire on the dragon.  
I liked being a fairy.  
I was being all things in dance.

*I Forget about Everything Else but Dancing*  
Whoa, what happened?  
The world could have crashed around me.  
I was in the actual moment,  
the zone where everything seems to dance.

Along with perceptions of heightened and transformed self, many young people related that loss of awareness, sometimes of self and often of the outside world, occurred while dancing. We begin with an on-site observation of a six-year-old nonverbal deaf-blind child, and continue with statements from older children.

There were times when Damien would abandon himself to a favored movement ritual of stamping his feet on the spot while shaking his hands and head, completely ignoring the outside world. (Six-year-old nonverbal deaf-blind)

I felt alone, because I concentrated on myself and didn't worry about anybody else. I didn't even see J mess up. (Elementary) (Waegerle 1997, 19)

I'll even find myself sometimes someone'll say, "What are you doing?" I'll say, "Oh! I guess I was just dancing in my mind." . . . Sometimes I wander off in my mind when I dance, then I go, "Oh that's amazing; I'm with those other guys." (Elementary) (Current 1988, 22)

I think you kind of forget that there is an audience there once you get into the dance. (Middle school)

The first time I did a performance I was so scared and then I started and forgot about it, and as soon as it ended, I was like, "Whoa, what happened," cause you don't really remember. (Middle school)

You can't really be thinking that much about anything, you know, just let your mind, you know, be bare—let it slow and stuff. (High school)

I'm so caught up with it that the world could crash around me. (High school)

When you're dancing and you're done you just forget about everything. (High school)

Sometimes the forgetfulness involves an experience of merging with dance and the moment of dancing, or a loss of separate identity:

I kind of just change and . . . You can just sort of try and be that dance. (Middle school)

I felt like I was in the actual moment, what we were doing. (Middle school)

My goal, every time, is just to get in that zone where everything around me just seems to dance and I can . . . just kind of let things go. (Middle school)

You just become one with it. (High school)

[Moving] to the rhythm of the drum . . . it didn't matter what kind of classes you were taking, it just mattered that you were here now. (High school)

I know I'm really dancing when I am not consciously thinking of what movement comes next or what I am supposed to do next, when one movement flows into another and it is coming by itself. There are points when I will stop and get mental blocks and not know what comes next, and this for me is what I call "stepping back to reality." (High school) (Vlassopoulos 1995,75)

When you dance you don't think nothing at all about all the violence that is out there. I'm telling you when you kick your leg up it's like you just threw something negative out of you. It just flew out of your toes. (High school)

### *Another Place/Time*

In dance I found a gap and hid under a mountain.

I saw something special. I jumped off the rock.

I was flying in the night sky. That's me, the shooting star.

Then I came back to earth.

In addition to loss of awareness of the outside world or of ordinary reality, sometimes young people described the experience of being in another place or time while dancing. We begin with four-year-olds, space travelers *par excellence*:

In dance I went to the boat park. (Preschool)

Balloons have horrible accidents. Hide!

Escape from the ferocious lions ... look out. JUMP! . . . through the trees, quietly, quietly. (Preschool) (Valiance 1991, 294)

Sometimes I just turn on my boom box I'll just start dancing and I like, I just, I'm swept away with it. I'm like *gone!* It feels like, it's like you're nowhere. You're not in your house, you're not with your dog, you're not on a bed, you're absolutely nowhere . . . you know what I mean? When you're in one place, you're always in another, and then when you're in that place you're always in another place. . . . You're just, you're dancing. And it doesn't matter where you are. (Elementary) (Lazaroff 1998, 105)

Teachers are the mountains and I like being part of the sky. (Middle school) (plate 5)

It's like a whole new world . . . after you go over both sides it's back into the normal. (Middle school)

When I'm dancing ... like, I'm the only person in that little world. I have my own little world I can go to. Then I come back to the earth. (High school)

It don't seem like you're at school, it seems like you're at home. Time goes by so fast when you're in dance. (High school)

It's like an escape place . . . it gives you a whole nother way of mind, a whole nother way of thinking. (High school)

Once you step into the auditorium, everything is kind of shattered and broken, and you can make it what you want it . . . it's almost like time has stood still outside of those doors. And once you come

back out, you kind of go back into the regular day basis. It's kind of like a time warp . . . for those fifty-five minutes. (High school)

I think I've seen something special; it's like going to another country, not one that's here on this planet. (High school)

### *Magical or Spiritual Dimensions*

Dance is earthy.

It just comes to you.

Above the normal plane of living.

In with the spirit.

I'm more of a soul.

We identified a further category, which contains expressions about the altered state using magical, mystical, or religious language, sometimes referring to special powers including, again, flying:

It felt like there was a god or a spirit inside of me. It was making me move. . . . From where I know I was flying. (Elementary) (Waegerle 1997, 19) (plate 6)

I asked my Mom about it, the flow, and she said, "It was God." (Elementary) (Waegerle 1997, 16)

It's like earthy and stuff—in with the spirit, is another thing about it I guess, that's all I can say. (Middle school)

It's there and it's live and the whole thought is something going to go wrong and if it doesn't it's such a triumph and no one knows what it feels like except you and no one can share it and it puts you above the normal plane of living. . . I think that dancers are above angels. (High school)

When I dance I'm more of a soul. (High school)

When I move my body to a beat, or let it flow and ripple, I become engrossed in a magic spell. Dancing is a spark that should be felt deep inside. (High school)

### *It's Hard to Classify*

A skip and a heartbeat.

A beam of joy.

My whole self dancing.

This category contains rich material that we found particularly hard to classify, like the following provocative analogy from a high school student:

It's like drugs, but it's a good drug. (High school)

Before dance you kind of look at everything the same. . . . But dance kind of puts in, like a skip and a heartbeat. (High school)

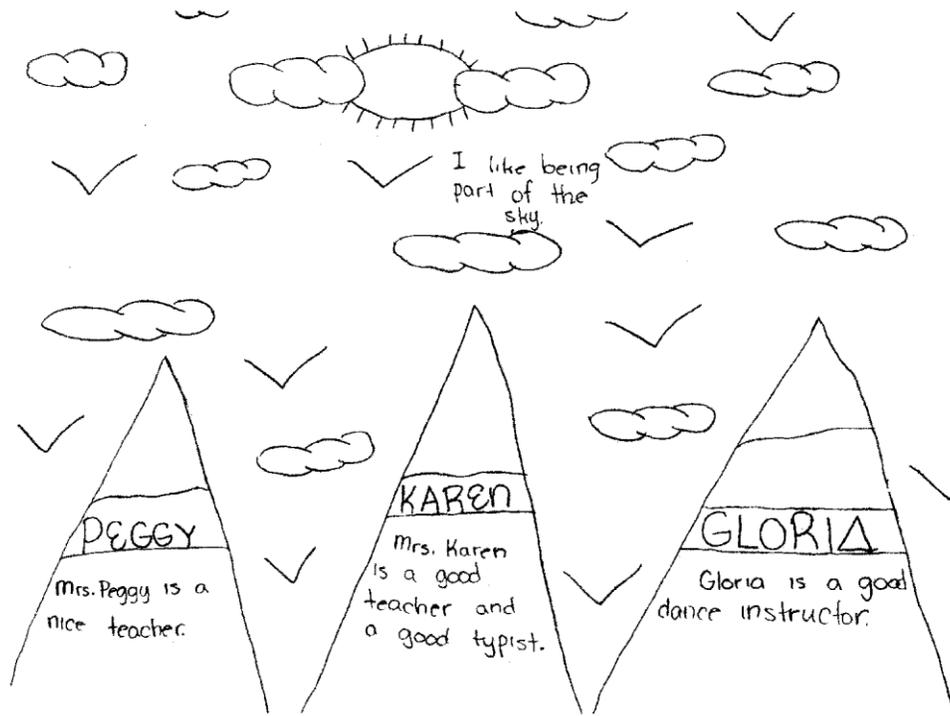


Plate 5. Teachers are the mountains, and I like being part of the sky.

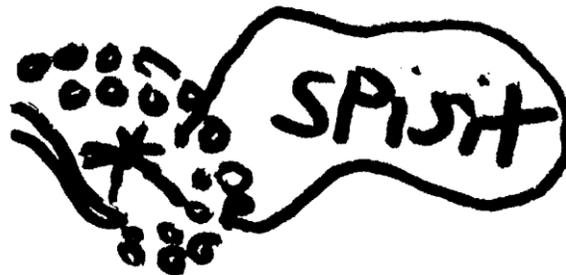


Plate 6. It felt like there was a god or a spirit inside me . . .

Some of these hard-to-classify descriptions convey a sense of personal synthesis—of body and mind, of emotions, of self and environment:

My neck, my shoulders, my body and the tape deck. Just me. . . . My shoulders, my hands, my toes . . . me. I have feathers on dancing, and the radio is on. I am flapping my wings, there is grass on the wall, and a tape deck. My whole self. (Preschool)

In dance Marc discovered a free-flowing energy that streamed out beyond his body boundaries, allowing flexibility and openness, a generosity of festive being. His enigmatic Mona Lisa smile became a beam of joyful responsiveness, portraying . . . such heightened affect and purpose that some

might have described it as a spiritual awakening. Marc became more and more enchanted with the world of dance. (Nine-year-old nonverbal deaf-blind)

[While dancing in a park] everybody was into the dance and there was like a little wind coming through and it was really neat to feel and the whole audience was like they felt exactly what we were feeling and I think that was like the time where I knew that we really came through, and it was really great. (High school)

I truly believe in dance now. I want to live it, experience it, and become a dancer. That is my dream. It will live forever. Dance is my domain and love, my song, my food and breath. . . . It promotes you, excels you, cares for you and teaches you all so simply yet so complex. This is the first time I have not felt alone . . . in believing. I am joined, holding hands we scream for recognition so we will be thought of not as prospects but as artists. These other children too want to live dance and feel the emotion, change the world around us by connecting our different worlds, languages and traditions to promote dance as a way of expressing ourselves. We are not alone as we teach the professors, teachers and experts what we hold inside and to love dance as we do so no one will be alone. (High School)

You stand

Patiently awaiting the music that will fill you,

And it does

So much so your body can't contain it any longer You explode into twists and spirals

In that moment of pure joy, You feel as if you are a flower That has finally shown itself to the world

Time zooms by

Unconscious of human limits

You leap

It's over

And you are left in the darkness of a world that rejects those who don't conform (High school)

*It's Hard to Say*

You want to say it.

You know it's there.

But you can't describe it.

Life!

Unlike the previous dancer, many young people found it difficult to talk about what engaged them in dance, including the large number across all contexts who used the single words "fun" and "happy" in relation to dance. For example, in a large sample of 192 upper elementary school children in an urban setting (BrooksSchmitz 1990), a majority used the words "fun" or "exciting" to describe dancing. On the other hand, a number of young children refused to talk about their dance experience, often expressed by an emphatic "no" of the head. Very few young people addressed verbally the difficulty of talking about their dance experience, but here are some notable examples, most involving resolution with a metaphor:

I know I learned something [in dance] but I just can't say what it is. It's not like it's bad or nothin', but I just don't know how to say it. . . . I can't describe it. It's like you want to say it, but you know you can't . . . you don't know how. It's not like you need help sayin' it, but it's just hard to say. I don't know, it won't come out, I can't get it out. . . . *Life*, just put it like that, that's the best as far as I can explain it, life . . . period. Boom. That's all. (Elementary) (Current 1988, 15)

It just comes and you know you're doing it right. I don't know—it's something like a ghost, I mean that's what it feels like. Seriously, it's not a ghost. I don't know what it is—it's just there. (Elementary) (Current 1988, 22)

When I dance, I get a strange feeling that makes me want to move which I can't explain but I know it's there. (Middle school) (Brooks-Schmitz 1990, 118)

When I really get into it, it's kind of a—I just kind of keep moving. Before I know it I'm just really hot because I've been dancing really hard and it surprises me. Everything's going on and it's hard to explain it; sometimes it just seems like some weird big dream or something. (Middle school)

How do I feel while dancing? I don't know myself to describe [it]. It is a feeling of exultancy, happiness. . . . I don't know how to describe by words (High school)

It's my heart. (High school)

In summary, here is a list of the metaphors and essences of dance we found in young people's descriptions of the superordinary:

Excitement	Bare mind
Fire	A rush
Laughing	It's like you just threw something negative out of your toes
Love	Being
A fast motorcycle	The actual moment
Tingles	A zone around me
Bunch of energy	Swept away, I'm like gone
Chill bumps	Nowhere
Death	Part of the sky
Crying	A world of imagination
Peace	A beautiful world
Tranquility	My own little world
Joy	Becoming "one"
Above angels	Escape place
Happiness	Everything is kind of shattered and broken
A natural high	A time warp
Relaxation	Another country . . . planet
Flow	Above the normal plane of living
A strange feeling	A god or spirit inside me
Freedom	A soul
Fun	A skip and a heartbeat
A home away from home	A magic spell
My house	A spark deep inside
Flying	A ghost
Earth	The other side
Spirit	My domain and love, my song, my food, and breath
My whole self	A flower showing itself for the first time
It's me	A good drug
An escape Inner self	I can't say what it is.
Wild	Life . . . period . . . Boom . . . that's all
Necessity	A weird big dream
I was being all things in dance Whoa, what happened?	It's my heart

## The Literature

From our earliest discussions together in 1985, we recognized that we were both finding accounts of superordinary experiences in dance in our research material as well as anecdotal experiences with our students, and we had both experienced such moments ourselves. Indeed, there is a striking plenitude of human description relating to the superordinary in life and dance. The literature crosses disciplinary boundaries from religious studies to ethnography to physiological examinations of Korean shamans during trance possession (Park 1993).

A variety of writers have given their own names to this phenomenon: John Dewey, "imaginative unification" (1934); Abraham Maslow, "peak experience" (1968); Charles Tart, "altered states of consciousness" (1972); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "flow" (1975, 1996, 1997); Victor Turner, "communitas" (1969, 1982); Elizabeth Hirschman, "aesthetic experience" (1983); and Earle Coleman, "super-rationalism" (1998). Similarly, dance scholars have used language such as "transcendental dance" (Hanna 1979); "endotelicity" (Sparshott 1988); "aesthetic community" (Bond 1991, 1994a); "wild disorientation" (Novack 1990); altered states of consciousness with and without content (Linton 1991); and the word used so often by children and adolescents, "fun" (Stinson 1997).

We are indebted to John Dewey, perhaps more than any other twentieth-century educational theorist, for his holistic conceptualization of the arts as integral to learning and life experience (Alexander 1987; Cuffaro 1995). In describing "imaginative unification," Dewey suggested that "we are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves" (1934, 195), and in doing so achieve a sense of wholeness that he likened to religious experience. Imaginative unification is a dynamic process, a "unity of ideal ends" that emerges from the "forward urge of living creatures" interacting with nature (1934, 42). In the present study, young people's perceptions of "self" in dance contained numerous references to reaching beyond to find a different, better, whole, natural, or spiritual self, even "above angels."

A pioneer of humanistic psychology, Abraham Maslow developed his concept of "peak experience" by asking individuals to "think of the most wonderful experience or experiences of your life. . . . And then try to tell me how you feel in such acute moments, how you feel differently from the way you feel at other times, how you are at the moment a different person in some ways" (1968, 71). The following characteristics of peak experience appear also in our study of dance experiences: the tendency for the experience to be seen as a whole; full attention to the experience; intrinsic value of the experience; disorientation in time and space; and an emotional reaction of wonder, awe, or surrender "as before something great" (1968, 88).

Csikszentmihalyi cites Maslow's work in his research on what he calls "flow" experiences. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow can occur only in activities that involve enough challenge to overcome boredom, but not so much challenge as to produce anxiety (1975, 1996, 1997). A number of elements that usually characterize flow experiences were present in young people's descriptions of dance, including merger of action and awareness (the mind is not "somewhere else"), exclusion of distractions from one's consciousness, disappearance of self-consciousness, an altered sense of time, and autotelicity (experiences are intrinsically rewarding) (1975, 38-50). Csikszentmihalyi noted that flow experiences are often reported by athletes, who refer to "being in the zone"; religious mystics, who describe them as ecstasy; and artists, who define them as "aesthetic rapture" (1997, 29).

Elizabeth Hirschman describes three kinds of experiences, which she refers to as "aesthetic," "escapist," and "agentic." Her definition of aesthetic experiences—"those that absorb one's full attention and arouse one's senses and emotions to a state of transcendence bid" (1983, 157)—fits those of many of the young people in this study.

Still other scholars have described such states arising out of experiences other than dance. Anthropologist Victor Turner coined the term "communitas" to describe a superordinary pattern of human experience found in certain festival, religious, and political movements (1982, 44). Characterized by a "liberation of human

capacities" from the social encumbrances of role, status, or reputation, *communitas* accommodates individual differences and, as in the present study, a high value is placed by participants on openness and personal authenticity. People in *communitas* experience a kind of flow, an unmediated absorption in a freely chosen event. There is a quality of celebration, a feeling of unbounded social euphoria. Turner notes, "Spontaneous *communitas* has something 'magical' about it. Subjectively there is in it the feeling of endless power" (1969, 139), reminiscent of the young child in our study who became "all things" in dance.

As in *communitas*, Coleman's notion of "super-rationalism" elevates intuition over reason (1998). In this state, reason is transcended through mystical experience or artistic inspiration, both of which he relates to an intrinsically aesthetic childlike consciousness. Coleman's generalization that "children's art invariably turns to animals and expresses affinities between humans and animals" (1998, 135) is confirmed by our study, in which many young children danced their identification with animals and other natural forms (see also Bond and Deans, 1997). According to Coleman, such bridging "is surely a step toward reducing the chasm between humans and the divine" (1998, 135).

Early in the twentieth century, Piaget offered a different interpretation of young children's ability to inhabit alternate realities, citing this tendency as a "primitive consciousness" in which children perceive inanimate objects as creatures with consciousness, participate in nature, do not perceive separations between things, and may transform their identities (1929). Piaget's assumption that such a consciousness decreases as children develop "representational tools more adapted to the real world" (1929, 130-131) is compromised by the current findings that young people retain and value their connection to the superordinary. Stinson noted that artists may seek to return to such a consciousness for artistic inspiration (1985b) and that the ability to inhabit multiple realities may be an asset in the world in which today's children will eventually be living (1990).

Turning to the dance literature, Cynthia Novack described a unity between dance and nature in the form of contact improvisation, noting that this "oneness . . . connects with both calm peacefulness and wild disorientation," our continuum of bodily resonance (1990, 185). She suggests that in contact improvisation body and nature take over, allowing mind and culture to recede, bringing out "the best aspects of the person." Further, "since the responsive body is the person, allowing the responsive body to act is felt to reveal the individual in a profound way" (1990, 186). Such notions of best self, real self, and oneness with dance were widely represented in the present study.

One of the first dance scholars to link cross-cultural ethnographic evidence with an interdisciplinary literature base, Judith Hanna found evidence of superordinary functions of dance. She identified "common ideas appearing in the examples of symbolic action through dance as . . . self-extension, loss of self in being, transcendence . . . and asserting continuity in defiance of the threat of mortality" (1979, 126). Young people's metaphors for dance, as listed above, reveal a connection between dancing and existential reflection in words like love, death, freedom, soul, and necessity.

Philosopher Francis Sparshott illuminates the "I forget about everything else but dance" category, noting that "any activity that engages us completely changes us subjectively into the 'self-engaged-in-this-now'" (1988, 261). Particularly in dance, he suggests, we become a different kind of being. Many young people described or exhibited behavior in which the act of dancing precluded awareness of anything beyond the experience of dance itself. Sparshott refers to this superordinary state as "endotelicity," noting also that in dance, transformation is complete as it involves the "dancer's own body as a whole" (1988, 395).

In observations of children's dance, Patricia Linton (1991) described two basic categories of "altered states of consciousness," a term used by Charles Tart (1972) to denote the human capacity for psychic experiences, also referred to as extrasensory perception. Linton called these "states devoid of content" and "states which have content." In the former there is "no division between the doer and the actions. . . . [Children in this state felt as though] they were not doing the dance at all; it was somehow just happening" (1991, 193). States with content involve changes in self-concept, personal values, and spiritual orientation. Some children reported feeling close

to God, losing fears and anxieties, and feeling powerful and autonomous. Further, "children felt 'larger than life' and their ordinary lives seemed but a pale reflection of who they really were" (1991, 195). Linton also noted evidence of psychic activity: "Children reported seeing others as light. There were instances of telepathy, intense shared group experiences and . . . out of body experiences. . . . Space-time travel was also mentioned. Some children felt their consciousness could merge and penetrate animals and plants" (1991, 196).

Our own previous work has drawn upon that of many of these theorists. Sue Stinson, building on the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1997) and Hirschman (1983), explored what makes dance experience fully engaging to middle school students, when the boundaries of work and play break down. She noted the importance of choice, freedom, a sense of control, intrinsic motivation, and appropriate levels of challenge, if adolescents are to find such engagement. Karen Bond was a participant-observer in a superordinary development of group dance, which she called "aesthetic community" (1994a). Similar to Turner's *communitas* (1969, 1982), a group of nonverbal children with dual sensory impairments transcended their sensory, affective, and communicative limitations, as evidenced in whole body engagement in dancing (endotelicity), full attention to their adult partners, spontaneous singing, and movement synchrony within the social group. Bond has also studied children's perceptions of transformation in preschool (Bond and Deans 1997) and lower elementary (Bond 1994b) dance settings.

### **Summary**

Despite the existence of an extensive multidisciplinary literature base both within and outside of dance, this study is one of few attempting to bring the voices and images of young people into this discourse on the nature and function of the superordinary, and to shed light on how they experience such moments in dance and the meaning they make of them. What is compelling about the evidence found in our study, which did not set out to look for superordinary phenomena in dance education, is its consistent appearance across age groups, cultures, and gender within what are primarily educational settings.

A clear finding of the study is that superordinary experience is not one-dimensional. Paradox and complexity abound: excitement and tranquility, a compulsion to dance, and complete freedom. Many young people reported feelings of heightened self, rising above limitations and boundaries, several stating that they felt really alive or authentic only when dancing. This is a notable finding in light of postmodern controversy over the concept of an authentic self (Ashley and Peters 1994; Grodin and Lindlof 1996). At the same time, there were descriptions of self-forgetfulness and becoming someone or something else. Young people placed a high value on their experience of freedom in dance education—bodily, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual. Young children, particularly, revealed a transformative identification with nature and animals, and many older children said dance took them to another place or time. This study provides further evidence that such experiences are widespread among children and adolescents.

While we concurred on the findings and their importance, the different perspectives we each brought to this study revealed themselves most fully in the final stages of interpretation. We concluded that we were unable to end this paper speaking in one voice, and that there was no need to do so. Stinson's orientation toward critical theory gave her a mandate to problematize what was revealed in the study, to address what the participants did not identify as well as what they did. Bond's orientation to phenomenology gave her an equally strong mandate to stay close to the data at hand, allowing it to guide her to relevant theory and critical reflection. It also became apparent that our different cultural and political realities affected our perceptions. Honoring the postmodern concept of multiple perspectives, we agreed to write separate conclusions, and hope that readers will take advantage of this opportunity to identify their own responses with the words and images of the young people.

### **Reflections: Sue Stinson**

The kinds of experiences we have related seemed initially to be outside the boundaries of contemporary educational concerns. However, a recent issue of *Educational Leadership* devoted to the spiritual dimension of education (December 1998–January 1999) indicates that valuing superordinary experiences is not limited to arts educators. This journal, widely read by public school administrators in the United States, chooses for each issue

a topic that is currently popular among its readership. Charles Suhor noted that spirituality is "edging into the mainstream" (1998/99, 13) in education, and proposes admittedly "squiggly" (1998/99, 14) categories of such experiences, which seem largely compatible with ones that we have called "superordinary": aesthetic experience (which Suhor finds accessible mainly through arts activities); person-to-person contact (included in another section of our larger study); powerful inner experiences, in which one glimpses a "thrilling truth" or has "a sudden refreshing sense of spaciousness" (1998/99, 14); sensory experience, involving attention to the body; extrasensory experience; ceremony and ritual; and "other . . . experiences which are not well described by the categories discussed here so far" (1998/99, 15).

Other educational theorists, including Noddings (cited in Halford 1998/99) and Palmer (1998/99), agree that these kinds of experiences are both inevitable and important in education. In Palmer's words, they are "at the heart of every subject we teach" (1998/99, 8). A number of authors in the issue, however, acknowledge the powerful voices of critics on both the right and left. In my community and many others across the United States, fears of "secular humanism" in schools are particularly strong, threatening such seemingly "safe" educational activities as relaxation exercises and journal writing. Suhor states that critics are wrong in their perception of "experiences centering on spirituality, transcendence, and holism as just another way of introducing sectarian beliefs and prayers into the classroom" (1998/99, 13).

It sometimes seems appealing to simply dismiss as close-minded those who disagree with us. However, there are also well-reasoned arguments for avoiding or at least proceeding very cautiously when it comes to spiritual activity in schools (Baer and Carper 1998/99). While I am not in the same religious or political camp as these critics, I find it difficult to ignore any serious religious concerns in an age when I am looking for ways to affirm and appreciate cultural differences. Yet I wonder, how should one teach dance—or anything else with the capacity to deeply engage students—to the children of parents who believe experiences such as those reported in our study are appropriate only for religious settings?

Another issue that has arisen for me in reflecting on this study is that powerful transformational experiences can seem problematic even to political liberals like me. Most of us can recall instances when, in a state of high emotional and physical arousal, we have done things that we would not otherwise have done. Social psychologists have written about the "expressive crowd," in which "the goal of the participant is often to really 'let go' and to experience new emotional or spiritual 'highs' . . . In such a context . . . inhibitions are lowered and the individual frequently engages in acts that, when reflected upon later, will cause feelings of embarrassment or even guilt" (Albrecht, Chadwick, and Jacobson 1987, 341). Maslow described a number of dangers in the kind of cognition he saw in peak experience even when not in a crowd; it may make us less responsible, he wrote, especially in helping other people, and can lead to indiscriminating acceptance or tolerance of things which should not be tolerated (1968). Hanna has noted that dance has been used to secure power over others or to ready individuals for war, and that "in this way the individual is able to commit violent acts which are usually forbidden" (1979, 187). And I find it difficult to ignore the role dance and movement ritual played in achieving the goals of Nazi Germany, by providing "distraction from everyday life" and creating a "communal heartbeat" (Howe 1996, 34).

I do not wish to imply that educational dance is likely to cause children to become violent or lose a sense of right and wrong. But thinking about these "extremes" reminds me not to become overly romantic about the kinds of "highs" that one may experience in dance. The incredible power of dance to take us to an altered state may become as seductive as a drug. One of the young people in this study indicated that dance experience was "like a drug, but it's a good drug." But like athletes who become obsessive about running in order to achieve a "runner's high," we may become so seduced by the power of dance that we respond only to its wonderful, joyous aspects and fail to recognize ways in which it may limit us or even harm us. Performers who keep dancing on injuries are only one obvious example. Less obvious is the way we seem to emphasize advocacy more than critical reflection in the field.

In raising these concerns, I also do not wish to diminish the value of the kinds of experiences children have reported in this study or the need for educators to take them seriously as we grapple with political issues in education. I am inspired by the words and images of these young people; I cherish my own superordinary experiences and actively attempt to facilitate such experiences for my students. My affinity for such moments makes critical reflection upon them even more important. I think we need both the rational and the superordinary, both caution and abandon, both critical reflection and powerful lived experience in dance education.

### **Reflections: Karen Bond**

My interpretation of this study of young people's meaning-making in dance education highlights different problems. I'm most concerned about the imbalances we condone in education by ignoring or trivializing the human desire for superordinary experiences. In theorizing life as a quest, Robert Torrance refers to "the goal incessantly pursued but never fully attained" (1994, 278). He calls this existential pursuit "dancing toward the unknown" (1994, 124), a metaphoric (or perhaps literal) acknowledgment of the expressive body as key agent. I am often struck by how many writers outside the field have cited dance as a metaphor for transformation. A recent example in my direct experience was futurist Robert Theobald (1998), who stated in a public lecture that a good way to create a sustainable future would be through "choreography."

Like many young people in this study, I experience dance as a way to explore who I am and might become, beyond the "continual impasse of the given" (Torrance 1994, 294); and as far as I can tell, there is nothing intrinsically dangerous about dancing. The ease with which any manner of sociocultural ideology is able to appropriate dance and other arts complicates the issue. Extending on the earlier example of Nazi Germany's misuse of dance, the SS also employed music to "drown out the screams of its victims" (Eagleton 1990, 42). Indeed, a plethora of scholarly analyses over the past seventy years have established firmly "the connection between the 'aestheticization of politics' and fascism" (Jay 1992, 42). Despite this indictment, Eagleton asserts, "The aesthetic project must not be abandoned," noting its important function in the demasculinization of reason and in "returning thought to the body" (1990, 43).

In terms of social politics, there was one clear example in our study of "the superordinary" being an arguably dangerous place in a dance education context, at least for five-year-old Charlie. An articulate child, Charlie was a regular initiator of curriculum ideas. In the dance class, Charlie stood out for his systematic approach to embodiment of a dragon theme. He became a privileged performer, often being asked to demonstrate movements and to do extended solos. Charlie was allowed to wear a special costume brought from home, and was praised frequently for "beautiful" dancing. Charlie was "a star" and began early on to defend this role aggressively, as a dragon, both inside the dance class and outside in the playground. Nevertheless, feedback from the environment continued to focus more on Charlie's artistry than on his antisocial behavior. Charlie's teachers were skilled performing arts practitioners committed to responsive, child-centered curriculum, but in indulging the artist at the expense of nonaesthetic and communitarian values, a "monster" was unleashed. My intention in telling Charlie's story is not just to provide a critique of dance pedagogy or fulfill the social scientist's responsibility to the negative case. A broader issue is that teachers are not being educated to facilitate children's navigation through embodied superordinary learning experiences, even though young people desire them, create them (overtly or covertly), and find them meaningful.

In the West, distrust of the superordinary may be traced back to at least the sixth century B.C. when a philosophical split divided reason from nature, debasing Homer's theory of "original participation" (Berman 1981). In Homer's world, humans apprehended reality through emotional identification, and key vehicles of understanding were poetry and theater. Dualism has flourished during the twentieth century, with major Western thinkers like Piaget and Freud positing hierarchies of human development in which children and artists are situated as beings of immature intelligence and large egos. Further, the superordinary has been set in opposition to the norm, as part of the "other," and anathematized as dangerous, unintelligible, pathological, or at best primitive, childlike, or saintly (Torgovnick 1990; Coleman 1998).

Art historian Marianna Torgovnick indicts modernity for a "primitivist discourse which is fundamental to the Western sense of self and other," suggesting that we liken "primitives" to both children and mystics (1990, 8). Children and primitives represent our untamed selves and both are "free," freedom being highly valued in this study of young people's engagement in dance. Torgovnick observes that children and primitives live whole, without fear of the body, which invokes fear in Western culture where "going primitive" is synonymous in many ways with "getting physical" (1990, 9). Primitives and children live at the lowest cultural levels of society, along with dancing, which according to Sparshott (1988) has been relegated by philosophers to the subhuman and pre-artistic.

In this study, however, a large and diverse sample of children and adolescents has articulated dance as an experience of high self; a place of enchantment, possibility, integration, and creative flight. A further stage of the research will look at young people's experiences of competence in dance, a substantial category of description. But can we trust young people's perceptions of what is important in education and life? Do they hold positions of authority on curriculum boards? Terry Eagleton observes that in their "wondering estrangement" from accepted practices, "children make the best theorists" (1990, 34; see also hooks 1994). Still, some readers may feel uncomfortable with the sensory-emotional content of young people's experiences conveyed in this article (Ellis and Flaherty 1992). Some may think the material presented here is too subjective to be taken seriously as theory that might influence educational policy. Others may find renewal, a "second naivete" in which to "reclaim the vitalities of myth on the far shore of critical suspicion" (Lane 1988, 153). Still others, like me, might remember those valued days at school when "for forty-seven minutes I [got] to be myself."

### Notes:

1. We have indicated the age group of the speakers because this was the only demographic characteristic that clearly correlated with differences in the data. There is some overlap between elementary and middle school ages reported, since some ten-to twelve-year-olds were in elementary school and some in middle school. We have also indicated when we thought the young person's disability was relevant. With the exception of the essence descriptions that introduce each category, we have consistently reported data from younger to older age groups.
2. To familiarize the reader with the different kinds of data and the forms of representation we use, we have indicated them in this category.
3. Citations are indicated only when our source of data was a paper by another author. In cases where we drew from raw data, we have not cited the source, even if the author used the same material in a publication.

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## Appendix: Data Sources

I. Raw data: Researchers shared interview transcripts from their own research and evaluation projects. The kind of material collected for each study was quite different, depending upon its purposes. Sometimes only one or two statements from a particular study were used in this paper. The information included here was reported by the researchers named.

### A. Researcher: Karen E. Bond

This study of six nonverbal deaf-blind children was focused on their engagement in dance including social-emotional, aesthetic, and cognitive aspects. Age range: 6-9 years

Gender: 4 boys, 2 girls

Race/ethnicity: Caucasian

Geographic location: Melbourne, Australia Dance setting: residential educational facility

Socioeconomic class: N/A

Publications resulting: multiple publications, including Bond, 1991, 1994a.

### B. Researcher: Karen E. Bond

"Octopus Project"-40 children, multiple data sources: video, drawings, audiotaped conversations, qualitative observations in a preschool setting. A particular interest was to illuminate meanings young children construct in dance.

Age range: 3-5 years

Gender: 65% female

Race/ethnicity: primarily Caucasian; 2 Asian children

Geographic location: Melbourne, Australia Dance setting: early learning center Socioeconomic class: middle

Publications resulting: multiple publications including Bond and Deans, 1997; Bond, K.E. 2000. 'Let's dance!' How to Foster Lifelong Interest in Physical Activity." *Every Child* 6, no. 2: 8-9.

### C. Researcher: Karen E. Bond

Dance drawings with captions were collected from 26 children in an elementary special education center and 50 sixth-grade children involved in a monthlong community arts project (January 1997). Children made drawings about their experiences in dance/mask sessions conducted by Peggy Hunt, Gloria Probst, and Karen Bond.

Projector director: Nancy Flood.

Age range: 6-12 years

Gender: male and female balance Race/ethnicity: 80% Islanders, 20% Caucasian

Geographic location: Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands Socioeconomic class: lower middle Publications resulting:

Bond, K.E. 1999. "Perspectives on Dance Therapy: The Lived Experience of Children." In *Dance Therapy Collections II*. Edited by J. Guthrie, E. Loughlin and D. Albiston. Melbourne: Dance Therapy Association of Australia.

### D. Researcher: Ann Kipling Brown

Approximately 40 young people were interviewed, mostly in group settings. See also Brown and Wernikowski.

Age range: 10-15 years

Gender: 80% female

Race/ethnicity: primarily Caucasian; 10% First Nation children

Geographic location: Canada (small rural communities in Saskatchewan)

Dance setting: 12 students from public school dance project; rest from private studio

Socioeconomic class: Studio participants were middle; public school students were lower.

Publications resulting: a limited amount of this material was included in Brown and Wernikowski, 1991.

E. Researcher: Susan Koff

This study included interviews with six students as part of a larger study of an entire school. Interviews focused on how students made meaning of their experience at an arts charter school.

Age range: high school

Gender: 2 males, 4 females

Race/ethnicity: 3 African Americans, 2 Hispanics, one student of mixed African-American and Hispanic background Geographic location: USA (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Dance setting: public arts high school Socioeconomic class: low income Publications resulting:

Koff, S.R. 1995. "Meaning Making Through the Arts: Description of an Urban High School's Arts-Based Program." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University.

F. Researcher: Joan Krohn

Group interviews were conducted by the researcher following a fairly short-term program in dance that combined children with university students.

Age range: 5th and 6th grades

Gender: male and female

Race/ethnicity: multiple ethnic backgrounds

Geographic location: Canada (urban) Dance setting: public school project (very short-term)

Socioeconomic class: nonaffluent Publications resulting:

Krohn, J.M.E. 1995. "Exploring an Arts Education Partnership through Interpretive Inquiry." Unpublished master's thesis, University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

G. Researchers: Susan W. Stinson, Donald Blumenfeld-Jones, and Jan Van Dyke

This study attempted to understand how seven students were making meaning of their dance experiences.

Age range: 16-18

Gender: female

Race/ethnicity: Euro-American

Geographic location: USA (urban/suburban North Carolina)

Dance setting: all students had studied in private studios for many years and were quite skilled

Socioeconomic class: middle to upper middle

Publications resulting: multiple publications, including Stinson, S.W., D. Blumenfeld-Jones, and J. Van Dyke. 1990. "Voices of Young Women Dance Students: An Interpretive Study of Meaning in Dance." *Dance Research Journal* 22, no. 2 (fall):13-22.

H. Researcher: Susan W. Stinson

This study attempted to understand how students were making meaning of their dance experiences. The researcher conducted individual interviews with 36 students.

Age range: high school

Gender: 3 males, 33 females Race/ethnicity: 21 European Americans, 11 African Americans, four others

Geographic location: USA (urban/suburban North Carolina)

Dance setting: three public school dance classes (Dance I) taught by three teachers at two high schools

Socioeconomic class: wide range, from students who lived in public housing to upper middle class

Publications resulting: Multiple publications, including Stinson, S.W. 1993. "A Place Called Dance in School: Reflecting on What the Students Say." *Impulse: The International Journal of Dance Science, Medicine, & Education*. 1, no. 2: 90-114.

I. Researcher: Susan W. Stinson

This study attempted to understand how students were making meaning of their dance experiences. The researcher conducted individual interviews with 47 students and a group interview with four additional students.

Age range: middle school (5th-8th grades) Gender: 36 females, 16 males Race/ethnicity: 36 of the 52 students European American; most of the rest African American

Geographic location: USA (urban/suburban North Carolina)

Dance setting: four public school dance classes taught by two teachers at two middle schools; two private school dance classes taught by a third teacher Socioeconomic class: wide range, from students on public assistance to quite affluent

Publications resulting: multiple publications, including Stinson, 1997.

J. Researcher: Kathy Vlassopoulos

This study illuminated the experience of transformation in the learning and performance of classical Indian dance (Mohiniattam). Interviews were conducted with six members of Natya Sudha, a classical Indian dance company directed by Tara Rajkumar.

Age/gender of dancer cited: 17-year-old female

Race/ethnicity: South Indian

Geographic location: Melbourne, Australia Socioeconomic class: upper middle Publications resulting:

Vlassopoulos, K. 1995. "Perceptions of Transformation in Mohiniattam: An Educational Perspective." M.Ed. (Research) thesis, University of Melbourne, Australia.

K. Comments written by young people who attended the 1991 and 2000 conferences of Dance and the Child: International were also used. Demographic data, in general, was not available, but the several comments included in this study were written by high school students from the USA, Canada, and Slovakia.

## II. Data used from published or unpublished papers

A. BrooksSchmitz, 1990

This evaluative study was carried out with 25 graduates of the Young Talent program for third- through sixth-grade children and 192 children in the program at the time of the study.

Age range: The graduates were ages 13-20; the enrolled students were upper elementary aged.

Gender: approximately half male and half female

Race/ethnicity: multiple ethnic backgrounds, primarily non-Caucasian Geographic location: USA (New York City)

Dance setting: program for young people selected as talented in the arts; classes conducted in public school and professional studios

Socioeconomic class: low income

B. Brown and Wernikowski, 1991

This paper compiled contents and findings from three studies examining children's views and interests in dance. The first study, with six children ages 9-11, examined language used by the children in group discussions about a dance work.

The second study included seven girls, ages 10-13, who had participated in a dance performance group in a studio or community setting; it examined the students' perceptions of their performing experiences. The third study examined children's responses in creating dance; the participants were 10 children ages 13-16 with extensive experience in ballet and jazz dance. The statement used in our research was from the second study.

C. Current, 1988

This study of three students attempted to understand how students were making meaning of their dance experiences. Age range: 10-12

Gender: male

Race/ethnicity: at least one African-American child; others not clearly stated except that the population was described as diverse in physical appearance Geographic location: USA (urban/suburban North Carolina)

Dance setting: all three students had studied with the researcher in public school dance classes and gone on to study dance in other settings

Socioeconomic class: wide range, from very low-income to upper-middle

D. Lazaroff, 1988

This study of children's experiences in dance was designed to understand the nature of cognition and action in dance education.

Age range: Kindergarten-6th grade Gender: male and female

Race/ethnicity: primarily Latino Geographic location: Northern California Dance setting: after—school class in public school (magnet school for technology and performing arts)

Socioeconomic class: low income

E. Martin, 1998

In a graduate class paper based on the topic "Why do humans dance?," University of Melbourne, Australia, Ms. Martin cited one comment from a three-year-old female preschool student that was used in the present study.

F. Slowinski, 1995

This study of four students attempted to understand how students were making meaning of their dance experiences. Age range: 12-13

Gender: female

Race/ethnicity: European American Geographic location: USA (urban/suburban South Carolina)

Dance setting: all had been ballet students of the researcher in a private studio; at the time of the study, all took at least seven hours per week of ballet classes. Socioeconomic class: upper-middle

G. Valiance, 1991

No demographic data was given other than age groups (preschool and 10-12 years). The author is Canadian, and it is assumed that the children were Canadian.

H. Waegerle, 1997

This study attempted to understand how students were making meaning of their dance experiences. The researcher had been their dance teacher for two or more years.

Age range: one class of fourth grade, one class of fifth grade

Gender: male and female

Race/ethnicity: racially diverse, but predominantly African American Geographic location: USA (urban/suburban North Carolina)

Dance setting: public school with arts theme

Socioeconomic class: low income