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Spring 2019

## Enforced Sitting and Authoritarianism in Schools: The Myth of the Body-Mind Divide

Greta Belina Keller Grisez

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### Recommended Citation

Grisez, Greta Belina Keller, "Enforced Sitting and Authoritarianism in Schools: The Myth of the Body-Mind Divide" (2019). *Senior Projects Spring 2019*. 198.

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Enforced Sitting and Authoritarianism in Schools:  
The Myth of the Body-Mind Divide

by  
Greta Grisez

Senior Project  
Submitted to the Division of Social Studies  
and the Arts Division of Bard College

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2019

# Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to complete this project without the support of my incredible family, friends, and community.

Thank you firstly to my wonderful loving parents who have supported and encouraged me every single step of the way, to my dad for teaching me to always ask questions if I wanted to learn anything, to my mom for being there for me in any and every capacity. I cannot thank you enough for the love and guidance you have given me. I would not be here doing this if it wasn't for you.

I would also like to thank my grandparents Jerry and Barbara Keller for always believing in me (see, I didn't end up in Juvie!) and making it possible for me to attend this college in the first place. I can only hope to grow up to have your penchant for hard work, resilience, and generosity.

A big thank you to my Aunty Kelly who never fails to make me laugh and smile even in the roughest of times

My sincere, ever-growing gratitude to my dear friends for all the dancing, late nights (more like really early morning), laughs, cries, snacks, and solidarity. Thank you for always pushing me to be better, for showing love when love was much needed, for constantly inspiring me in so many ways.

A special thank you to my darlin' Iris Engel for being the best friend a girl could ask for. I so appreciate your wisdom and honesty and cherish our great conversations (both those with lots of giggles and those without). Thanks for always checking in (even though you do try to mom me).

Another special thank you goes to Antonio Nichols without whom I would have fallen apart ages ago. Thank you for always believing in me and my abilities when I couldn't see a way forward and supporting me through thick and thin. I am constantly in awe of your capacity for care, empathy, love, and strength.

Lastly, I would like to thank my advisors Jean Churchill and Thomas Keenan for your guidance and reassurance. I appreciate your willingness to back an undertaking as crazy as this and want to thank you for helping me get to the core of this project

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## **Introduction**

The first couple years of my existence began with quick transitions between squirming and stillness, tenseness and complete relaxation, small but momentous movements that garnered applause and celebration from my first audience, my parents. They looked on in awe as I rolled over, lifted my head, pushed up my chest with chubby little arms, and began to try and locomote across our tiny kitchen floor in the upstairs of the duplex where I grew up. I was lucky to have a mom and dad that encouraged me to move, who supported my tumbling and my running, my kicking, climbing, and bouncing, my spinning and dancing and ability to stay in the ocean for hours, locked in a loving battle with the Southern California waves. I took full advantage of their acceptance so as a young child, you could often find me playing soccer or practicing my gymnastics in the grass at the park, throwing roundoff back-handsprings and flipping out of the swings as other kids slid down the slide or built castles in the sand. I was extra extra extra with my bare feet and green “Queen Bee” shirt on. I must’ve thought to myself, “why walk if you can run, why just jump if you can flip and fly and spin?”

My endless exuberance was not only supported by my parents but also fueled by the vibrancy of my environment. Echo Park, my neighborhood in central/east Los Angeles, made up of mountains and valleys dissected by Sunset Blvd., with scattered taco trucks and elote stands stationed next to murals covered with graffiti covered with paint covered with more murals. My own giant playground full of different characters, personalities, histories, and places to explore, sunsets galore, friends around the corner. The energy of the area intensified my inability to sit still for longer than 5 minutes at a time so I ran around observing everything with the whole hearted curiosity of a young girl in a late 90’s/early 2000’s world.

Unfortunately my occasional overly eager inquisitiveness and love of any and all types of movement were not accepted as valid for long once I went from my neighborhood/free ranging wild-child preschool to our local public school for kindergarten. It wasn't really until I reached 2nd grade that I realized, aside from my parents, most of the adults around me had become become less and less excited about how much I liked to move and more and more intent on having me be as still and silent as possible.

Despite the fact that I was a good student, I was constantly getting in trouble for fidgeting too much, sitting in my chair incorrectly, asking too many questions, and running around or trying to play on the jungle gym at recess and during after school program (to this day I wonder why have a jungle gym if we are not allowed to use it!?). Let's just say that me and the time out bench that sat in the darkest corner of the playground (in the shadow of one of the biggest school buildings) were not friends. Throughout my 6 years at Betty Plasencia Elementary School I watched from the bench as physical education and art programs were cut, as my friends got in trouble for drawing, as classroom sizes grew too big for overworked teachers to take the time to learn about their students and their needs, as creative projects were replaced with worksheets/standardized test prep and collaborative projects were done solo. I saw and felt many of my classmates lose interest in learning because they had lost interest in school. Slumped shoulders, heads resting on hands resting on desks, no forward movement and little to no motion for the majority of the day except recess when we would explode out of the building and play as hard as we could for our allotted 15 minutes of freedom. Body language read transition from caged to temporary liberation. Dragging our converse-sneakered feet on the asphalt as we lined up to go back to class.

## **Taking a Stand #1      *Movement Restriction and Tracking***

It was no coincidence that my one homeschooled friend would ask “how was prison” when he wanted to hear about my school day (as an 8 year old he recognized the connection between the two spaces- restrictions on movement and expression a form of punishment used in both). He recognized the reality of limited movement, limited choice, limited freedom.

It was no coincidence that the tracking system used in most public schools ended up streamlining some of my B and C track friends into high schools with high violence/dropout rates and eventually (for some of them) into juvenile detention centers. Where their autonomy was stripped, where movement is either completely restricted or driven solely by the decisions of those in power, out of their hands.

No coincidence that these were the same kids who were overlooked and undervalued in school, given the least trained/experienced teachers and shoved like sardines 35-50 kids to a classroom, constantly told to shut up and sit still, to take up less space, given no elective or art classes, treated like their best possible life potential would be working at the local Subway.

No coincidence that these kids were often darker and poorer than those in A track or the magnet/“gifted” programs. Many of them first generation children with parents who immigrated from Mexico or El Salvador, many who were learning English as a second language, expected to catch up or be left behind.



No coincidence that I, once an A track/magnet kid (and one of the few white students in my elementary/middle school) am able to reflect on and question our public education system from a systematically predetermined distance as I prepare to graduate from a liberal arts college with a human rights and dance degree.

While I have worked pretty hard throughout my school career, over the years I have come to recognize that it wasn't just luck or smarts that got me to this privileged place of higher education. Though as a young student I wasn't always aware of what was happening around me or why, I have since learned about the long standing systems of oppression built on a heavy foundation of racism and classism that created a clear upward path for me while sending others with just as much potential into flat lines or varying downward spirals. But how did this happen? How does a teacher look at a kindergarten student and attempt to judge their future potential, deciding to place them on a certain life track before the child can even read? How can you teach them to trust external authorities without addressing how important it is to learn how to trust themselves? How does a system of education, on paper meant to support and guide us, to engage us and teach us about the world and our roles in it diminish or entirely stifle the potential of so many kids who were once so curious, who once moved through the world with questions and enthusiasm, who just want to be physically and mentally free?

## Chapter One

# American Dream Damage: What is Included in our Right to Education?

*“Any situation in which some men prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence; ... to alienate humans from their own decision making is to change them into objects ... ..Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information.”*  
— Paulo Freire

*“The evils which we suffer in education, in religion, in the materialism of business, in the aloofness of “intellectuals” from life, in the whole separation between knowledge and practice, all testify to the necessity of seeing mind-body as an integral whole” -John Dewey*

### **Taking a Stand #2 — Land of the Free?**

FOREWARNING: When I am at most angry, I think about the problems of the world in a totalizing way. The words you are about to read come from this place of frustration but do not let the following moment of outrage discourage you or allow you to feel powerless to make change. Though the statements below do unfortunately reflect certain realities of our history and current world, the indignation that flowers in me when thinking about these realities is what prompted me to tackle these problems through this particular project in the first place. I believe that it is only in looking at the whole house (the big picture) that we are able to find the door (that can take us elsewhere). Do not lose hope.

The shift from encouraging movement to having it become a punishable event and eventually fully taken away as a final punitive measure is a process that is not disconnected from the ideals or the very formation of our society and its

systems. It is intrinsic to the way we as individuals and communities understand our access to freedom, our rights, the expectations and the realities that we navigate on a daily basis. It is built into our ideologies/practices and impacts the way we view our own potential and the potential of others, our lots in life, our ability to move through spaces. We are trained to follow these authoritarian sets of rules but they pick favorites and don't play fair.

That being said, I didn't need to be in the privileged position of being able to pursue higher education to recognize this process of movement restriction, to recognize that we are not treated as free or equal in this country let alone in our classrooms. Look around. The proof is in almost every spoonful of this messy American pudding. Take one glance at our violent history and it becomes glaringly obvious that we have in no way earned the title "land of the free." To make that claim at all there should've been a disclaimer "Land of the free[ish]" \*if you are a wasp, preferably male, preferably rich, preferably the right kind of religious, preferably greedy and willing to conquer and claim things that aren't yours to take, preferably ready and able to cover your tracks, preferably willing to do anything to maintain your power. The lack of such a disclaimer exemplifies the classic American clash between theory and practice.

What I wasn't taught in my history classes (of course, because history is written by the "winners," the ones with all the power) but definitely taught outside of school, is that we Americans are a hypocritical lot. We claim a "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" mentality while conveniently ignoring the fact that

the majority of people in this country don't even have access to boots while others begin their lives with several pairs already pulled up for them. Throughout history we have tried to cover the fact that from the very beginning, these lucky few boot-wearers have used their movement access to conquer, control, and claim, consistently utilizing their footwear to try and stomp out any and everyone who didn't/doesn't look like or agree with them.

As these first Americans trampled over other people, communities, and lands, they simultaneously planted the poisonous seed of the American Dream in our foundational soil and in our minds. Paulo Freire spoke to this process when he emphasized, "manipulation, like the conquest whose objectives it serves, attempts to anesthetize the people so they will not think. For if the people join to their presence in the historical process critical thinking about that process, the threat of their emergence materializes in revolution... One of the methods of manipulation is to inoculate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for personal success" (149). In an effort (both conscious and unconscious) to solidify this mentality/practice of solitary advancement without acknowledgement of the driving underlying external factors that propel some people forward while holding others back, we often hear throughout our lives "It's your fault you didn't succeed. You had *choices*. You went to school didn't you? You must not have worked hard enough."

The American dream seed, watered with racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, misogyny, competition, authoritarianism and a large dollop of fear

grew branches that divided communities, destroyed cultures, infiltrated our bodies, minds, societies on every level and impacted the formation and maintenance of our systems. It sought to make us unconscious, to strip our autonomy and self awareness, to instigate competition instead of collaboration, and to separate ourselves from our communities. It sought to make us “fearful of freedom” as we were trained to “internalize the image of the oppressor and adopt his guidelines” (Freire 47). It is ingrained so deeply into our everyday lives that we don’t see it for what it is or what it does. And yet it is always there doing its sneaky business. It can be seen in our thoughts and actions, in the way we sit in our classrooms and offices, in the way our hearts race as a cop drives by, in the way our bodies shrink in the presence of our bosses. It was there in the shift we experienced as our movement and curiosity went from being encouraged to restricted. This manipulative way of thinking, built into our bodies and minds, along with the rippling effects/actions that follow continue to preserve and perpetuate corrupt power structures, tracking and shaping our movements, keeping the same people at the bottom for generations regardless of how hard they work.

## ***The School's Role in Perpetuating Authoritarianism/Fear of Freedom***

One place that unfortunately participates in this process of tracking, manipulation, and division while also playing a role in sustaining systemic inequality and authoritarianism by perpetuating our lack of freedom/autonomy and limiting our ability to build communities is (by law) experienced by over 55 million children 5 days a week for the majority of their childhoods (“Back to School Statistics” from the National Center for Education Statistics). In school we spend 7 hours a day sitting in an assigned seat, often unable to speak or get up without permission, unable to wiggle or stretch or ask too many questions, unable to tune in to the needs of our bodies, unable to liberate/unleash our minds.

In this “land of the free” is this what we pictured when we declared our right to education? Did we imagine it would involve completely “standardizing bodily behavior” and “numbing instinctual urges” therefore creating students (and later adults) who have been “educated from infancy to distrust their sensibilities” (Johnson 36, 40). Did we imagine it would include marking some students as gifted and fast tracking them to a higher standard of living while sending others on journeys of drop outs and low paying jobs? Did we imagine the appearance of uniformed guards on school campuses, a presence that both reflects and perpetuates racist and authoritarian ideologies and policies, resulting in the hyper criminalization of students (especially students of color) (Graham 159, Rios). Did we imagine what this would do to our students, teachers, and schools, how it decreases the philosophical and functional divide between places of education and places of punishment (ideas influenced by Foucault’s

*Discipline and Punishment*)? Did we imagine external and internalized oppression and undervaluation?

Though some educationalists/education historians claim that “public schools in the United States were established as much for moral and social reasons as for academic instruction,” we seem to have forgotten about the morality/humanity part as the focus of schooling shifted from assimilation to access to our present era of “achievement,” or perhaps the focus was never fully there in the first place (Nodding 4, themes from Graham’s *Schooling America*). We have sacrificed a lot in the name of achievement, success, competition, capitalism, and standardization and our bodies, minds, and communities are suffering for it. I know this sounds accusatory and that’s because it is. I want us to think about what is really included in this right, *our* right to education. I want us to think about our needs and the needs of our children and of all people who go through or are impacted by this system.

With this in mind, it is important to consider if the “aims of education are tied to the nature and ideals of [our] particular society” then what does it tell us about ourselves and our values when education for all often means the bare minimum for most (Noddings 4). What does it say about us when many of our schools are “primarily designed to train docile citizens and workers,” preparing us in the “bodily patterns” required for a 9-5 workday but not encouraging our curiosity, individualism, and ability to collaborate and think/act outside the box (Johnson 37). How can we instead strive for “teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries...a movement which makes education the practice of freedom.” (Bell Hooks 12)

## **PAUSE**

\*idea for “pauses” taken from Don Johnson’s book *BODY*\*

Regardless of whether you agree with what has been said thus far, I’d like us both to pause for a moment and take a look into our own histories in an effort to recognize some of the “molds that have produced [our] current behavior” (Johnson 71). Let’s think about our experiences in school.

I’d like us to consider what our ideal classrooms would really look like. I know this is not something we are often told to actually do as adults (probably because we have been trained to shut off that part of ourselves) but let’s use our imaginations for a moment! What would the teacher be like and what subjects would be offered? How would the classroom be arranged and how long would classes last? Would there be desks in rows, assigned seating, metal or plastic chairs, bean bags in a circle, books and paint and clay, music instruments and hands on projects or half finished science experiments ready and waiting to be worked on the next day? Would there be worksheets? Would there be dancing and games? Would there be pictures and posters on the walls? Would there be walls at all? Would there be uniforms or free dress? Would there be food? Field trips? Family involvement? Think of your best and worst moments in school and what put them in either category. Think about how you were taught and what you actually learned. Can you remember specific moments or experiences where you felt supported and fulfilled or diminished and discouraged? What was your body doing in those moments? What is your body doing now as you think about your past, your younger self in school? What are you still carrying with you?

Feel free to draw/write it out (space provided on the following page)



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### **Little Greta Tackles/Navigates Public School**

I don't know if this resonates with you but for me...though I did learn a lot in school growing up, I can say with complete honesty that many of the lessons that have most stuck with me and that continue to impact my life to this day were not taught to me in a classroom and certainly were not part of Los Angeles Unified School District common core curriculum. While there is no doubt that I am definitely a better person having gone to school, long division has not helped me mediate fights or support someone through manic depression or speak up or express myself through choreographing a dance piece or consider who I am and what I want to contribute to the world. I learned some of the most valuable, long lasting skills/lessons on the playground and after school as I walked around my neighborhood.

I am highlighting the differences between what I learned in the classroom versus what I absorbed outside/beyond to distinguish not only the content that was inculcated but also the ways that I was taught. I felt that I could acquire or engage with new information in a very different way depending on what environment or space I occupied. In retrospect, I have realized that while my academic classes have definitely contributed in some way or another to my general knowledge and respective understanding of happenings in the world, I often did not feel as supported or captivated in the classroom as I did after school. I feel that this lack of active engagement had/has to do with the fact that throughout my schooling I have consistently experienced the "reduction of the mind/body's capacities to the specific range required by habitual work" (Johnson 79). This can be seen in cyclical teaching and testing methods that rely on rote memorization, which for me meant sitting down for long periods of time and shoving

content into my brain (often called “cramming”), regurgitating it to prove that I had “learned,” and then purging or forgetting most if not all of it in order to “make room” for the next onslaught of material.

Though this educational binging and purging practice did often leave me with adequate test scores, I definitely believe that it also “correspondingly diminish[ed] the scope of [my] perceptions” and limited my abilities to explore, understand, express/communicate, and actively listen throughout the learning process because I wasn’t fully or earnestly engaging with the material (Johnson 79). This might have something to do with the fact that the way I had learned the information made it seem as though it wasn’t important or integral to my survival or life outside of the classroom and instead could really only be utilized to answer questions during the one hour we had to take the test.

Outside the classroom, however, I was able to fully engage and explore using all my faculties and instincts and therefore learned how to trust my body and brain as they together “transmit[ted] data and organiz[ed] meaning” (Johnson 50). Learning in a hands-on, immediate, tangible, sometimes high stakes environment allowed me to expand my perceptions and use my experiential/instinctual knowledge while creating mental/physical patterns of self and group awareness. Through exploration, actual physical/verbal interactions, and plenty of trial and error, I gained an understanding of not only how to truly communicate with and see the strength in others but also how to communicate and see the power I had within myself. I learned how to break up an argument, how to read people and how to approach different types of learners, how to look beyond the surface (especially when interacting with kids that the teachers had often

deemed “stupid” or “lost causes”), how to seek the full story and not settle for the basic information that was handed to me.

Without being able to place myself in situations where I could ask questions freely, act on my curiosity, trust my instincts, seek and explore, I would still have no idea how to recognize and respect people’s boundaries, how to respond to grief and hardship, how to appreciate my own struggles in relation to other people’s, how to negotiate and collaborate and show affection or stand my ground. I would have no idea how to reflect on and actually listen to the valid information my body was telling me at any/every given moment. In looking back at my past experiences as I learned about myself and the world around me, I am reminded of a theme that can be found throughout Paulo Freire’s books and essays which emphasizes the importance of self experience/awareness and knowledge of where you are/how you are seen in the world. I concur with Freire that there can only be a struggle against oppression if we work from a sense of our own identities) (Pedagogy of the Oppressed).

### **Turning Students Into Machines**

Unfortunately, in our public classrooms today there is not enough space, energy, time, resources, or attention to cultivate this vital type of self-aware and engaged learning. Though this is not true for all classrooms, in many there is a lack of acknowledgement of the fact that kids in school are searching for their own identities and trying to discover the different ways they

can move through the world. Instead of encouraging self-discovery, students are trained to be “rigid and stereotyped in [their] responses to life,” becoming little machines “programmed to act in set ways even though [their] ideas may have changed” in order to maintain the “status quo” (Johnson 34, 35). This process of turning students into machines (or as Freire and Marx would potentially say, “objects”) by alienating them from their own abilities to make decisions not only limits a student’s full ability to engage with learning processes but also creates individuals and communities that are unwilling to think or act without external guidance from an authority.

Sadly, there is little time within many of our current classrooms for moments of self exploration, real human interaction, and engaged inquiry when public schools are forced to use all their resources and energy in the struggle to stick to set curriculums and get good enough standardized test scores. They do not have much choice or many opportunities to deviate from these enforced values and practices when test results often dictate whether a school can keep its teachers, continue to get funding, or in many cases remain open (“How Standardized Tests Shape and Limit Student Learning” 1-2). However, this time and space needs to be created and then systematically included for the sake of our students, teachers, families, communities, and current/future existence as a race. We must try to create classrooms that function with the knowledge that our experiences in school (the explicit and implicit lessons we are taught/the work we do) definitely shape both our bodies and perceptions, therefore having long term effects on us and the people around us (Marx cited by Johnson 78).

## *Educating the Whole Child*

It is often overlooked that our experiences in school are built into our bodies, minds, thoughts and habits. Therefore, students must be viewed and understood as “whole persons—not mere collections of attributes, some to be addressed in one place and others to be addressed elsewhere” (Noddings 5). The concept of educating the whole child can be seen over the years in countless research based texts and studies, both theoretical and hands on. Whether the focus is on promoting happiness, freedom, self awareness, or building true democracy, John Dewey, Bell Hooks, Nel Noddings, and many other educational theorists and practitioners, consistently agree that “schools must be concerned with the total development of children” (Noddings 5).

More recent texts on this subject highlight the importance of integrating and exploring art, movement, and hands on learning in classrooms in order to actually practice whole child education (*Making the Case for Educating the Whole Child*, ASCD 4, 12). This emphasizes an awareness/type of active engagement that can be implemented when teachers and schools choose to stop compartmentalizing subjects, skills, and types of people and instead embrace/enhance the natural interdisciplinary nature of teaching and learning. Advocates of this educational approach claim that it will help to create classes and curriculums that encourage students to develop their morals, healthy sociality, self awareness and expression, communication skills and creativity *as they learn their core subjects*.

Similar to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development’s belief that “a strong foundation in reading, writing, math, and other core subjects is still as important as ever, yet by itself is insufficient for lifelong success,” I am not saying that we should stop teaching the

base subjects (3). In fact, I believe they are important and valuable to the process of creating knowledgeable, well rounded students/people. I am saying however, that the way these core subjects are taught along with school value systems need to be adjusted if we want to actually fully engage our students and prepare them to be conscious “active citizens in a democratic society,” capable of individual thought, empathy, active community engagement, and happiness (Nodding 7). This means that educators must understand that their role “goes beyond teaching academic content” and includes being aware of their students’ other needs (more information on this topic in Chapter 3). In terms of what this looks like in a classroom, it could result in educators teaching life skills such as “anger management, decision making, conflict resolution, behavioral management, health and wellbeing” through creative projects, hands-on movement based activities, and class cohesion or group work practices, as emphasized by Traci Lengel and Mike Kuczala in their book *Kinesthetic Classrooms* (Lengel and Kuczala 2).

Nel Nodding seconds this mentality, saying “although reading and math are important, we need to promote competence in these subjects while also promoting our other aims. Students can develop reading, writing, speaking, and mathematical skills as they plan and stage dramatic performances, design classroom murals, compose a school paper, and participate in establishing classroom rules” (Nodding 7). Though there are many ways to facilitate this vital, inclusive, interdisciplinary, consciousness building type of learning, I am going to focus specifically on integrating movement into the classroom as a way to encourage the development of the whole child.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Myth of the Body-Mind Divide: CHALLENGING ENFORCED SITTING

*“Authoritarian structures are supported by populations of suppressed geniuses, people who have been educated from infancy to distrust their sensibility” - Don Hanlon Johnson (40)*

*“After the family, school is one of the most influential institutions in children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. Schools are also a place where students are physically inactive, with up to potentially 6 hr a day of sedentary behavior” Joseph E. Donnelly and Kate Lambourne (112)*

*“Movement is key to learning, but people today spend hours simply sitting” -Anne Green Gilbert 6*

### *Tuning In (Dance Class)*

9 year old me leaps across the room, spinning and kicking and sliding across the floor as the rest of my dance class sits in a big circle watching me move. We are doing our classic end of class improvisation circle in my teachers former living room that she converted into a dance studio before I was born. Wooden floors and walls, big windows, no mirrors, speakers connected to one of those cd players that has space for up to 12 cds at a time (it was before the time of the iphone and the aux cord). It’s Wednesday which means I get out of school and go



straight to this dance class I've been attending since I tried baby ballet with my mom when I was 2. As I enter the studio with my two best friends who live walking distance from me and have also been coming to this class for as long as we can remember, I can feel my shoulders relaxing, the tension in my back and face releasing, my spine becoming less hunched and rigid. I hug my teacher and smile as I begin to move.

Dance class is definitely no walk in the park but as my muscles start to stretch and release I am able to let go of some of the stresses of third grade- my struggles with fractions and decimals, wondering about why that one girl likes to pick on me at recess, worrying about my overworked teacher who is struggling to prepare us for our state standardized testing. I leave most of my classroom worries behind as I do big leaps across the floor.

Though a good portion of class consists of learning exercises and dance sequences from my teacher and then practicing them, I usually feel excited about the process, ready and willing to engage with the work. Aside from the moments of guided improvisation (which we experience at the end/throughout every session), much of the class is structured around learning and bettering certain techniques/skills, similar to how a school classroom traditionally functions. However, my body and brain respond differently to the physical freedom I have been given in this makeshift studio and often I feel invested in the learning process and proud of myself and my efforts in a way that I have difficulty accessing within my school building. I stand up straighter in dance class, I smile bigger and more often. I am engaged and focused on the work, shaking off the stupor from sitting silent and still in a hard metal classroom chair as I reconnect my brain to my body so they can function as one.

Alongside my body and brain's response to the rush of serotonin that I feel when I dance (versus the immobility I feel as I sit in a classroom), I believe that the difference in my responses to these two learning environments also lies in the fact that my dance teacher encourages us to ask questions, to take up space, to communicate, to try, to explore, to reflect. That is not to say that I am not frustrated at times in the studio or that I don't struggle with certain movement material or deal with feelings of comparison or competition or deficiency. Those feelings are definitely present at times during dance class but for the most part, I feel as though I can actually address them in the space rather than viewing them as prohibiting my efficiency or productivity and brushing them under the rug so that I can complete the tasks in front of me. This is partly because the studio feels like it belongs to all of us equally, a space we have created and maintained together where our effort is recognized, our sensory awareness is appreciated/utilized, and our wonderings are welcome. In it I feel challenged but also powerful, strong, focused, and free.

Looking back I recognize that in my once-a-week after school dance class I was unlearning many of the often diminishing physical/mental habits I developed in school/throughout my life while navigating authoritarian systems. Through movement I was able to take responsibility for myself, to claim my thoughts and actions, to communicate them with others and feel the release that followed this type of expression in a way that I didn't feel was entirely possible in my classrooms at school. For one hour a week in that tiny room I learned how to connect with and absorb information from my teacher and dance classmates while also gaining an understanding of how to "refuse to let others do [my] thinking, talking, and naming for [me]" (Rich's "Claiming an Education" speech 610). This was not always an easy

process as I definitely had to learn how to navigate my own needs, wants, and challenges while being aware of the needs, wants, and challenges of my classmates and dance teacher. That being said, learning in a space that encouraged both mental and physical creativity and expression allowed me to explore how to use my brain and instincts together and shifted the way I viewed my potential and the possibilities around me. It also demonstrated to me the power and validity of this type of brain/body, experience based knowledge.

Though not without occasional bouts of frustration, for the most part I remember feeling willing to take in new information or challenge physical/mental habits and ideas in dance class because I didn't feel that my reaction within the learning process had to necessarily be prescribed or follow a restrictive set of rules. Learning kinesthetically in a less physically confining space also allowed me to be more open to new subject matter which definitely came in handy within the interdisciplinary studio/classroom that my dance teacher had cultivated. I realize in reflection that she included explorations of anatomy, physics and spatial awareness, math, vocabulary, politics, history, music and also introduced my classmates and I to other countries, continents, cultures, and languages throughout the many years we took class with her.

I believe that my dance teacher (Jackie Planeix) had succeeded in "creating an environment" that truly sought to "educate [us] as whole children" because she seemed to recognize that we were both capable of and craving interdisciplinary understanding and engaged movement based learning (Lengel and Kuzcala xi). In that tiny-living room-converted-to-tiny-dance-studio I learned skills beyond dance technique often without being "explicitly" instructed, coerced, or punished. While still working with the rigor and focus that is often required when learning movement or specific dance skills, I felt that I was able to absorb

content without being forced into a fixed mold. This sense of freedom and choice within a classroom (studio) setting was also probably sourced from me feeling able to question the authority in the room (in this case my dance teacher). I didn't feel pressured to seek absolute complacency within this existing power structure and felt comfortable enough in the space to challenge myself, to dive in and try new things even if they didn't necessarily turn out the way I had initially planned.

Ultimately, in "learning by doing" (what Lengel and Kuczala would potentially classify as "implicit learning") within a supportive, engaging environment, I discovered how to access/create my own power and found that I was mightiest when there was no disconnect between my mind and body. In dance class I was able to view my body-mind (a connected entity) as a valid source of knowledge and therefore could "actively engage in the learning process" in a different way than I usually experienced in my public school classrooms (Lengel and Kuczala 4). These various factors allowed me to fully physically *and* mentally tune in.

### **Checking Out**

\*why I was often able to access my inner power, strength, empathy, and curiosity in a dance classroom/community but not always in my classroom at school\*

*Is it possible to fully free our minds in spaces where our bodies are held in some sort of captivity (like in schools and prisons)? How can we make it so we feel less like objects in the classroom, not cogs in a machine that churns out students who have been predetermined to take different tracks but individual people who have autonomy and power to choose what path to pursue. How do we create space for people to trust themselves and those around them enough to try new things, make mistakes, reflect, return, retry, or take a new path. How do we make*

*students feel like their voices are heard in the classroom and that their words and actions matter/have the power to change how their schools function (building off of Deborah Meiers idea about students doing better in school when they feel more responsible for their spaces)?*

Though there is some wonderful learning done in schools, it is no secret that we are often taught to control and quiet our bodies in order to access our minds (idea inspired by themes throughout Don Hanlon Johnson's book *BODY*). This is a common practice that extends from a line of thinking which has weaved its way throughout human history, across cultures and religions and has wrapped itself around the world. John Dewey even pointed out that the division is so "deep seated that it has affected even our language" as "we have no word by which to name mind-body in a unified wholeness of operation" (Bresler quoting Dewey 8).

While this divide and the role it plays in the "organization and maintenance of power" has been discussed/highlighted by many great theorists, sociologists, philosophers, doctors, educators, writers etc. (to name just few- Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, William Reich, Paulo Freire, Maria Lugones, Patricia Hill Collins, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldua etc. etc.) it continues to have a huge impact in our everyday lives (Johnson 67). It was and still is solidly built into the foundation of our systems of belief and our institutions, therefore "shaping our flesh" and our thoughts from a young age without us being consciously aware of its power (Johnson 67).

It was there with me in kindergarten as I sat in my square of our classroom rug, the grey one with black lines that created a grid marking out 15-20 small squares, one for each child. I remember wanting nothing more than to scramble out and away from my assigned square and go

to the playground outside where I could shake off the criss cross applesauce position and stretch my legs. This longing for outside, for space and freedom to move has continued to follow me through elementary, middle, high school, and even now in college. Though Bard classrooms are rarely set up with desks in rows and assigned seats like those in the schools of my childhood, tweenage, and early teenage years, I still find myself looking out the window sometimes during class, waiting for the moment when I can stand up and stretch without being rude to the professor. My body definitely still craves movement and you will often see me in class shifting in my chair every couple of minutes, jiggling my leg, tapping my foot, drumming my fingers on my desk, rolling my shoulders, or stretching my arms, reaching my hands out and up towards the ceiling. I've noticed that even in classes where I and the majority of other students are mentally stimulated by the information or content being discussed, these physical adjustments are still highly present and prevalent throughout the student (and teacher) population, across all academic subjects. I and many others seem to require these moments of addressing or responding to our body's needs in order to stay engaged in class/refocus but if these physical shifts are so essential and commonly used to enhance concentration in the classroom then why are they not built into pedagogical practices?

### ***Schools as Prisons: Tracking, Restriction, and Containment***

Well, as someone who has taught large groups of children for long periods of time, I see why restricting students to specific spaces makes them easier to manage. I understand that this

common practice of designating space for enforced sitting in school is used mainly for purposes of classroom control and that many teachers feel that this form of containment is necessary in order to actually get through all the required subject matter in a timely manner. That being said, it is important to keep in mind that confining people in space and limiting their choice of motion or enforcing specific movement patterns are also tactics that are used as some of the ultimate forms of punishment in our society as juvenile detention centers and prisons use the same practices of restricting space and movement.

In considering the similarities between the two systems (education and criminal justice), I cannot help but think of Foucault's panopticism and how the process of "arrest[ing] or regulat[ing] movements" plays out in schools (Foucault 219). Though definitely not the case in every single classroom, in many if not most of them students move in a controlled manner through a contained or "enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point," being surveilled and often judged by teachers (who are themselves being surveilled and judged), consistently in fear of being punished or making a bad impression or getting a bad grade (Foucault 197). After being trained that this is normal from the time we are wee ones, we begin to internalize this surveillance and start to conduct ourselves within certain rules and standards which I would argue doesn't fully allow us to grow as whole people (inspired by Foucault's thoughts on pages 201-202).

Though some modern thinkers may claim or entertain the school as prison theory (as discussed by Gray, Noguera, Darling-Hammond, Meiner, Conrad, Mauer and Chesney-Lind) and while I definitely see how one reflects and connects to the other (and vice versa), I want to emphasize that I do believe that the two institutions are fundamentally different in terms of

function and purpose. While prisons exist to punish individuals for crimes and remove them from society, schools are meant to provide opportunities for education, growth, and often indoctrination into our society.

However, the fundamental, theoretical, and practical differences between these two institutions and the systems they function within should not stop us from considering how we are tracked (physically and mentally) throughout our school experiences or stop us from questioning if the practice of restricting movement coupled with constant “surveillance and containment” (which are definitely present in both institutions) is actually creating environments that are conducive to learning (Meiners 4). With current interest and increasing research being done on both the links between schools and prisons and how the body-mind divide manifests in classrooms and impacts much more than just the learning abilities of students, we are coming closer to finding some answers. Hopefully these explorations will help us to understand, negotiate, and engage with the existing education systems/structures in order to change and even enhance people’s experiences in (and outside/beyond) school.

### ***A Condensed History of the Body-Mind Divide***

Before diving into some practices that can be implemented in classrooms in order to hopefully decrease the similarities between schools and prisons (through a “whole-child” educational approach), it is important to explore the history of the body-mind divide and the actual mental/physical effects it has on us. Though the source of the divide can be traced



differently in various places, cultures, and communities, in this section I am going to begin by focusing on European ideologies and philosophies because they had a large impact on the formation of American beliefs and dogmas.

With that in mind, traditionally enlightenment and even many post enlightenment thinkers focused solely on the mind as the source of knowledge and power while the body was viewed as a separate entity. Not only was a separation designated but a hierarchy was applied as well because while the potential power of the mind was valued, the body was seen as the unreliable and even dangerous “culprit,” responsible for sensory knowledge that led to sin, illusions, greed, error and a multitude of “human vagrancies” (Johnson 19). Later, with the advance of “rational truth” and “empirical science” leading the way, thinkers/theorists began to strip the body of even “dangerous” sensory knowledge and instead viewed it as simply a “collection of moving particles” that couldn’t possibly be the source of either “intellectual or moral authority” (Johnson 22- working from the ideas of Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant). Over time, this clear divide between the assumed purpose and potential usage of the mind versus the body became “encrusted in the major institutions of society” and can to this day be found in all the driving systems that function within our present world (seen in institutions such as schools, prisons, offices, hospitals etc.) (Johnson 23).

Though philosophers, sociologists, and theorists such as Karl Marx and Georg Hegel did draw attention to this divide in terms of how people experience self consciousness, alienation, and authoritarianism (what happens when “my body becomes a stranger to myself, something not truly mine,” or when workers bodies are seen as controllable “quantifiable material units”), and how this can impact the way society functions, it wasn’t really until the mid 1900’s that

thinkers began to explore the true impacts and effects of this separation on individuals and communities (Johnson 24, 27). This newer line of thought emphasized/emphasizes the connection between mind and body, and without disputing the incredible power of the mind, makes the claim that we can't actually use our brains to their full potential (reaching a form of "enlightenment" as some might call it) if we leave our physical beings behind.

A clear example of this belief can be seen in Adrienne Rich's brilliant statement, "when we allow our bodies to be treated as objects, our minds are in mortal danger" (Rich's "Claiming an Education" speech 610). Rich's experiential/theoretical statement is echoed by many other writers, thinkers, academics, and activists. One such person is somatic focused philosopher, educator, and practitioner Don Hanlon Johnson who takes this idea one step further. He states in his book *BODY*

"The body that is the object of so much attention is only a partial body; it is not the body as a source of intelligent decision making. The many sensory and emotional resources we possess for finding our way together through a sensual world are impoverished by the way our physical selves are molded in the culture. The successful products of the various shaping agencies of our society are adults....who feel ignorant in the face of the supposedly complex knowledge they need to make the most significant decisions about their lives, and helpless in altering national policy. The outcome of our socialization is a citizenry that becomes flaccid when standing in front of authorities" (8).

Johnson, who was influenced by Karl Marx, later emphasizes that while this form of creating a submissive society works for those who are at the top of the power hierarchy (those who benefit from being able to sway or exploit docile and disengaged people who have been

trained to sit still, silence themselves, and allow the authorities to make the important decisions), it certainly does not benefit the general population (78-81). Nel Nodding speaks to this same issue as she comments on the state of our current education system, claiming that the compartmentalizing of people and their abilities (often influenced by race and class) by teachers and administrator doesn't support our claim that we live in a democratic society (Noddings 7). She and Johnson both seem to agree that "all students deserve rich educational experiences-- experiences that will enable them to become active citizens" and that this can be achieved through a more interdisciplinary, conscious, hands on and engaged focus in the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom (Noddings 7).

Unfortunately, with body-mind divide philosophies built into our systems and the constant steady embedding of industrial capitalism and authoritarianism in our culture, it makes sense that the majority of us are, from a young age, viewed and treated as cogs in a massive machine. With that reality in mind, Johnson argues that if we are to move forward as people and as a society we have to learn how to "heal fractures in our personal and social bodies that cripple our ability to take firm stands and move freely" (Johnson 1). To this end, classrooms and other identity-shaping spaces cannot perpetuate the common practice of actively "disconnect[ing] our philosophies, politics, and spirituality from our bodies" because this creates a "state of alienation" in which we lack a sense of our "own resources for making judgements and decisions." If this disconnect is fostered then instead of relying on ourselves/our experiential knowledge to tackle issues both large and small, we learn to rely solely on external authorities who may not have our best interests at heart (Johnson 1).

## ***Putting Theory into Practice: A Look Inside Our Working Minds***

Working with the knowledge that the enforced divisions between the body and mind cause a lack of self (and group) awareness, potential for objectification, and inability to stand up to authorities, let's now look beyond the theories based on lived and studied experiences and into recent neurological research that explores the negative effects that the practice of this imposed separation actually has on our brains and the way they develop. To set the stage we turn to dancer/choreographer/writer/educator Anne Green Gilbert who promotes the recognition of the mind-body connection throughout her writing, continually emphasizing the fact that “movement activates the neural wiring throughout the brain, making the whole body the instrument of learning” (Gilbert 4). She and several other thinkers, educators, and practitioners highlight the necessity of bringing the knowledge/awareness of this and the following information into schools and classrooms.

Gilbert begins to tackle the body-mind divide by addressing the importance of implementing kinesthetic pedagogical practices in educational settings. She states in her book *Brain Compatible Dance Education* that “all areas of the brain must work in an integrated way for the brain and body to fully function” and “a strong lower brain and midbrain, which develop primarily through sensory and motor activities, are vitally important for overall brain function” (Gilbert 6). To take a deeper look into what our (movement developed) lower-mid brains actually do for us in terms of how we function as humans in the world and why we should be concerned about lack of development there, it is important to recognize the essential role that the lower brain plays in “regulating self-preservation to ensure survival” (which supports Adrienne Rich's earlier stated idea that in viewing the body as an object you are actually putting the mind

in “mortal danger”) (Gilbert 7). Echoing the ideas of Johnson and Noddings, Gilbert indicates that this lack of focus on developing the whole brain (which can be seen in enforced sitting practices that stunt lower brain development) manifests from “the separation of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual faculties in our culture” which she claims is a “direct reflection of our bypassing the need to survive on an automatic physical level” (7).

In the above section, Gilbert speaks to the negative, dangerous impact of these traditional enlightenment/post-enlightenment era body-mind divide ideologies and practices that promote separating ourselves into various parts with different purposes. Educator/philosopher Nel Noddings speaks to the continued effect of this separation when she writes “in the pursuit of efficiency, we have remade ourselves into a collection of discrete attributes and needs” which often leaves us struggling to hold ourselves together (8) We witness and participate in this reality every day as we grapple with being efficient and productive in class or at work despite the mental, physical, and emotional experiences we may be having. I often catch myself and others in classrooms or places of work only using certain faculties in certain places, compartmentalizing ourselves often to a detrimental affect and prioritizing the needs of the institutions or systems we function within rather than our own very real very present needs.

Educators and researchers Traci Lengel and Mike Kuczala expand on this theory of the unfortunate de-prioritization of surviving on an “automatic physical level” as they implore us to “consider how the brain prioritizes information” in the classroom (8). With the knowledge that the lower brain is the part that regulates self preservation, they note that “the information most crucial to the brain is related to survival” and that “if a student’s survival needs are not met, the brain is not in a position to work at optimal levels” (Lengel and Kuczala 9). The authors also

state that the “second most important information to the brain is that which generates emotions” and emphasize that the “parts of the brain that use higher level thinking strategies and critical thinking skills shut down when an individual’s emotional state is compromised” (9). These are just two of many reasons why developing the lower brain is so highly important. It needs to be able to function properly in order to deal with the vital information that is at the top of our brains’ priority lists.

That being said, it is important to keep in mind that it is not only our lower-mid brains but our entire physical beings that thrive when our survival needs are met. In an effort to promote the possibility of creating brain-body connected/supported environments, the following section focuses on what these needs are and how to meet them in our classrooms. It is crucial to note that some of these survival needs (aside from the basic food, water, shelter, oxygen etc. which should not be taken for granted in terms of accessibility to all students) include students feeling as though they are in a “safe and comfortable learning environment” where they are mentally and physically engaged and stimulated (Lengel and Kuczala x).

Through much research it has become clear that students’ basic needs (survival needs and “emotional climate” needs) must be taken into consideration when planning how a classroom is run and what is taught because fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of these requirements does have a huge impact on a person’s actual “ability to learn something new” (Lengel and Kuczala 9). If we prioritize our “automatic physical survival” needs on both a mental development and environmental level, then our brains and bodies will be able to function as one connected, engaged entity (ready to learn) rather than disparate distracted parts.

Considering the history of the body-mind divide, it is clear that the facts above challenge the foundational ideas of enlightenment and post enlightenment thinkers who either viewed the body and its capacity for sensory knowledge as dangerous/responsible for deviance or later as simply a vessel or object that had no knowledge or authority. Instead, it can be seen that neurological research seems to align/support the body-mind connection focused ideas of thinkers/practitioners such as Nel Noddings, John Dewey, Adrienne Rich, bell hooks, Anne Green Gilbert, and Don Hanlon Johnson. This brain based research confirms that in order to truly value and support the development of a powerful mind, you must value and support the power of the body and work, teach, and learn with the understanding that they are not separate entities but actually intrinsically connected.

### **To Recapitulate**

Ultimately, we cannot ignore the body-mind connection. When we participate in education systems that do not acknowledge this relationship/interdependence (mind-body and environment) and therefore do not seek to develop the brain in its entirety, we are not only missing out on huge learning/teaching opportunities (as “movement is the number one manager of student learning states”) but actually putting both our bodies and our minds in what Adrienne Rich would classify as “mortal danger” (Lengel and Kuczala quoting Jensen 9, Rich). We are also creating a situation in which students are trained to feel alienated from their sensory

knowledge and ability to make informed decisions, leaving them vulnerable to manipulation by external authorities.

That being said, with all this new powerful information we need to stop once again and really consider what we are taking away from our students when we restrict their movement, when we view their bodies as simply the small flower pots that carry the growing flowers that are our minds. It is clear that if we only tend to the flowers, hoping they'll grow and blossom without gaining an understanding that the flower pot must grow as well, then we will kill the flowers no matter how much water or sunlight they receive. We cannot ignore the body mind connection, cannot highlight the power of one while diminishing/disregarding the power of the other because they are inherently linked. Our bodies cannot be viewed or treated as simply the vessels that contain our minds because "a fully functioning body" actually "creates a fully functioning brain" (Gilbert 9). Both flower and pot must be understood as valuable because being able to work together is inherent to their survival and ability to flourish.

### **Taking a Stand Among Friends: My Reality**

Unfortunately, in my experiences throughout my school career, I've seen a massive amount of wilting (students slumped at their desks) as we attempt to stretch our roots and find our way blocked and pigeonholed at every turn. As you may recall from section one, some of my very first memories in school are of being punished for trying to move or use my body. In many of our cases, we are taught not only to sit still and shut up but to entirely disregard our physical and experiential



knowledge, to view it as useless in the classroom even though “a majority of school age students are predominately kinesthetic processors” and actually “crave movement to understand concepts” (Lengel and Kuczala viii). I wish my teachers had been aware of the fact that “the way we think, learn, and remember can be directly influenced by the physical movements in which we participate” or that movement actually “heightens cognitive ability” by “improving neural connections” (making it so that “neurons [brain cells] can communicate more effectively”) (Lengel and Kuczala 5).

I believe that schools have so much potentially positive power in shaping the way we view ourselves and our abilities from a young age so instead of getting an education that seeks to enlarge our minds while shrinking our bodies (which as we know by now doesn't actually work), we should be taught how to care for our bodies and to view/use them as “source[s] of significant knowledge,” alongside our minds (Johnson 6). This may or may not resonate with you but I know I certainly don't want to be viewed as a robot that can be broken down into disparate parts but rather as a living, thinking, acting, whole, conscious human with a knowledgeable body-mind. I want to learn in spaces that view and value me as such and are actively trying to create a climate in which change/growth is possible. I believe that it is the responsibility of schools to do their part in untying the “ropes knotted in our flesh by centuries of corporeal training” and work to educate and support the “whole child” so that we can use our bodies/experiences as valuable knowledge sources and therefore fully access/development/free our minds (Johnson 13, Nodding 3).

## CHAPTER THREE

# Putting Theories and Research into Practice: Creating Kinesthetic Classrooms

*“The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.” - bell hooks (207)*

*“Without the opportunity to learn through the hands, the world remains abstract and distant, and the passions for learning will not be engaged” -Matthew B. Crawford (11)*

*“The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.”*

*— Paulo Freire and Myles Horton (We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change 181)*

### **Sensory Knowledge and Identity Formation**

From the time we are born to when we die, our entire lives consist of us navigating our responsibility to ourselves and our obligations to others. For the better and for the worse, we consistently compromise our own ideas, needs, wants, and instincts to fit what other people think we should be doing or feeling. From what I can see, this first primarily takes place within our families and communities and then our schools (and later workplaces and relationships) which

are some of the places that have the biggest impact on our identity formation. If we are not taught to value ourselves and our sensory knowledge/awareness in these spaces then how do we come to learn how to "respect [our] own brains and instincts" and experiences later on in life after being taught that this isn't the main priority throughout our education? How do we unlearn habits of self doubt and self deprecation, silence, stillness, and docility, comparison, competition, and submission when they are so heavily sewn into the fabric of our everyday lives (and often encouraged by those we look up to from a young age)

Working with the two ideas that limiting movement actually limits the full development of our brains and that "authoritarian structures are supported by populations of suppressed geniuses," how do we fight this cycle of control/restriction and allow our most exceptionally intellectual, creative, innovative, naturally capable selves to be active participants in the world (Johnson 40)? Well, let's begin by pausing and asking ourselves some important practical questions.

### **PAUSE (#2)**

-How would our education system have to be adjusted/restructured in order to support growing students who are grappling with gaining a sense of self confidence, responsibility, strength, and assurance in themselves and their own thoughts and actions (as all students are)?

-How does challenging the body-mind divide and encouraging students to trust their own experiences and sensory knowledge serve to break down the shackles of external authority and what happens after unlearning this dependency? How can this be used to challenge practices of tracking, constraint, and restriction?

-How can encouraging students to connect their minds to their bodies help them to connect with other people?

-How can we facilitate the creation of this type of awareness without pushing a certain agenda or life track and without assuming that all students will take this path in the same time or in the same way?

-Ultimately, how can classrooms and curriculums be reconfigured/redesigned to support the growth/development of the whole child?

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## ***Introduction to Integrating Movement Into the Classroom***

With the support of some of the neurological information we explored earlier, many social researchers and scientists claim that integrating movement and expressive, action based activities into the classroom is one way to work within the current school structure in order to positively impact how students experience their curriculums and classes. Using kinesthetic pedagogical practices not only supports the development of the entire brain but also encourages pupils to actively engage in learning processes which will help them to discover how to value their own thoughts and experiences.

In helping to expand a child's capacity for “sensation and movement” instead of teaching them to disconnect their minds from their bodies, we are supporting the formation of strong, independent, empathetic thinkers and action takers who are willing to take responsibility for themselves and “grapple with hard work” without relying on others to make all the decisions for them (Johnson 13, Rich 610). Incorporating movement into classrooms also benefits teachers because not only does it make it easier to reach students who are not solely visual or auditory learners (most students are actually kinesthetic processors) but also “allows students to refocus and strengthens their ability to pay attention” (a problem that every teacher comes across at some point or another) (Lengel and Kuczala 3). This way of teaching and learning also encourages better brain retention and accessible storage of information as “physical experiences are often much easier to recall than those that only engage the semantic memory (books and words) lane” which is a plus for both students and teachers (Lengel and Kuczala 20).

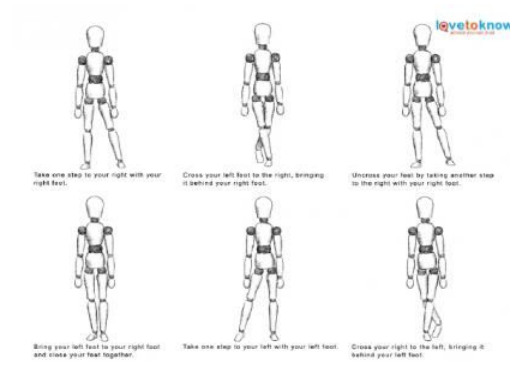
I was inspired by the case studies and evidence that point to movement as a “teaching tool that cannot be ignored” because it is a proven experiential and neurologically researched fact

that being forced to be sedentary is not conducive to learning (Lengel and Kuczala 14). While I have personally noticed the difference both in myself as a student and in the children I have taught when this kinesthetic based way of teaching/learning is implemented in the classroom, it was incredible to read the scientific research clearly stating that “children who are raised in stimulating, active environments produce more neural connections in the brain” and that “when the body is inactive for 20 minutes or longer there is a decline in neural communication” (Lengel and Kuczala 3). I have experienced the differences between classrooms that utilized a “learning by doing,” action and expression based approach versus a stationary, desk-bound, lecture based approach and can say with complete honesty that I felt more happy, challenged, and fulfilled after leaving a classroom that integrated movement into the lessons.

I understand that this adjustment can seem daunting for teachers who feel pressured to get through a standardized curriculum or who are working under “teach to the test” policies but there are many ways to develop a kinesthetic classroom that will actually enhance and not detract from a student’s ability to learn and retain information (making the teachers job much easier!). For example, did you know that simply leading students through cross lateral movements (“moving your arms and/or legs across the midline of your body”) can “help students prepare for learning by forcing the two hemispheres [of the brain] to work together, assisting in energy and blood flow, decreasing muscle tension, and stimulating and focusing the brain to improve concentration” (Lengel and Kuczala 5).

Fascinatingly, doing movement that encourages the connection of the hemispheres helps children learn to read and write by strengthening their visual tracking ability as well (reading and writing being one of the aspects of school that many children struggle with) (5). Implementing

this practice in the classroom can be as simple as leading a 2 minute activity! This could look like your class getting up from their seats, making a big circle, and dancing the grapevine in a circle (going first in one direction and then the other by crossing your right foot over your left and then stepping out with your left and repeating this motion with the right foot moving behind the left and then in front again, alternating feet as you locomote in a circular pattern)



An even simpler exercise could be having your students start the day with a couple windmills (standing up with feet spread apart and then bending over as you reach your right hand to your left ankle, straightening up and then repeating with the alternate left hand reaching for right ankle) (Lengel and Kuczala 44, 46).

Before going into more examples of easy ways to implement movement into everyday classrooms, I would like to reiterate the importance of recognizing/acting on the fact that “students who feel safe and comfortable in a learning environment are more capable of optimal learning” (as this is emphasized throughout all the research I have done (Lengel and Kuczala X). To this end, it is necessary to plan for/be willing to try to engage students with all different types of learning styles and build classrooms with the students’ physical and emotional states in mind. So now that we know all this incredible new information and have seen a sample of a couple simple activities, how do we employ kinesthetic pedagogy in our classrooms?



## **Building a Kinesthetic Classroom**

Putting the philosophy/theory of “educating the child as a whole” into practice includes working with the knowledge (proven) that movement encourages learning processes and helps us to both understand concepts and retain information while supplying our brains with much needed “novelty” (Lengel and Kuczala 2). According to Traci Lengel and Mike Kuczala’s *The Kinesthetic Classroom: Teaching and Learning through Movement*, there are many different ways to implement/incorporate movement into the classroom everyday in different capacities, depending on both teacher and student comfortability. Some of these “movement with a purpose” based “brain friendly” teaching tools include brain breaks, fitness and stretching based exercises, class cohesion building activities, and activities used to both teach and review academic content (106-119). In implementing any/all of these various activities/exercises, movement should be viewed as an integral part of the classroom experience (and definitely should not be viewed as a punishment!!!- I say this thinking about my fifth grade teacher who forced me and my classmates to walk around the outside quad in a single file line whenever he got angry with us as a class). Please see the appendix for several simple yet brilliant activities adapted from *Kinesthetic Classrooms* that have been developed with the knowledge that “the brain and body’s movement and learning systems are interdependent and interactive” (Lengel and Kuczala 20)

## CHAPTER 4

### **Exploring Embodied Practices of Consciousness**

*“Authoritarian ideologies capitalize on the control of bodily impulses.....We can’t loosen [body-mind dualism ideologies] grip on our muscles simply by rational analysis, a true transformation requires practical strategies that help us to recover a sense of our own authority”*

*-Don Hanlon Johnson (working with ideas of Freud and his pupil Wilhelm Reich, pg 59, 153)*

*"Responsibility to yourself means refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you; it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; hence, grappling with hard work. It means that you do not treat your body as a commodity with which to purchase superficial intimacy or economic security; for our bodies to be treated as objects, our minds are in mortal danger." -Adrienne Rich ("Claiming an Education" Speech, 610)*

*“Your whole body transmits data and organizes meaning.....discover your own unique sources of wisdom and gain some power over the barriers that keep you from acknowledging that wisdom”*  
*-Don Hanlon Johnson (50, 40)*

#### **Introduction: Physical Memory, Sensory Awareness, and the Greater Impact**

Now that we know how to hone this awareness and facilitate the practice of this type of learning/engagement in the classroom, how do we recognize and unlearn some of our own restrictive or diminishing habits? In the following two chapters (4 and 5) I will be exploring how

we can bring the knowledge of the body-mind connection beyond the classroom and into our own bodies (and hopefully into the world). I will be providing some examples of how I have practiced/promoted this type of awareness in my life as well.

### *Physical Memory*

It is clear that our brains do not function separately from our bodies so it therefore follows that our bodies, like our brains, hold physical memories. We are a conglomeration of our experiences and they live on in our soft tissue, in our long term memory banks, in our everyday movements. Trauma and pain, fear and joy, passion and anxiety and disappointment move through our veins alongside white blood cells and oxygen. They are there as you decide not to raise your hand in class, as you cross your arms and legs on the subway when a man sits next to you, as you dance looking at the floor.

With this capacity for physical memory in mind, it is clear that restrictions placed on our movement and creativity/curiosity as children (in school) definitely does impact the way we live our lives and move through the world. In terms of addressing this issue (seen throughout the previous chapters), it is obvious that our current education system could definitely use some adjustments. Though the thought of tackling this structure in its entirety may seem daunting, these modifications can begin on a smaller scale, in individual classrooms and schools with just a couple teachers or administrators. This modest beginning has the potential to then put in motion a ripple effect that can impact school districts and ideally (eventually) even our education system as a whole.

I understand that this may sound idealistic but I truly do believe that we have the power (and tools) as individuals and communities to re-connect our minds to our bodies, to become more aware of the ways we are shaped and driven by external forces/authorities, and to combat the restrictive systems and expectations placed on us by others (or by ourselves) who may assume but not truly know what we're actually capable of.

Driven by my own experiences, I believe (and have witnessed) that in order to impact our schools, communities, neighborhoods etc., we must first cultivate this type of awareness within ourselves. We must become conscious of how our experiences navigating power structures and systems live in our bodies by recognizing the physical, emotional and mental habits that have developed through lessons we have been taught and the constraints, controls, and checks that have been instilled within us. If we can recognize their impact and use this awareness to change the way we view ourselves and how we function in the world then we can potentially help others do the same as well.

Following are some examples of how I have navigated both practicing myself and facilitating for others this process of embodied consciousness.

### ***“I Didn’t Know I Could Do This”: Dance in Juvenile Detention***

\*I worked in various juvenile detention centers from the years 2016-2019. In the following section I am focusing mainly on my experiences in just one of them.\*

When I was working in juvenile detention centers, teaching dance and facilitating art workshops, one of the occurrences that struck me the most is when one of the teenagers would

turn to me and say (and this happened many times) “I didn’t know I could do this.” It took a long time working with the students to break through the mental, physical, emotional, heavily experienced “I can’t do this” barrier built from concrete blocks of self doubt held together by externally enforced movement/thought patterns, but working consistently within a kinesthetic focused pedagogy, the majority of them really could and did do it. Despite some initial (and for some, continual) resistance, I watched so many of these kids step outside of their comfort zones and let go of some of their habits and as they worked through a new salsa step or as they danced across the room to a song of their choice. The baggy grey/blue clothes and chunky black shoes with velcro straps that they were required to wear and the restrictions placed on their choices/actions outside the room we danced in ceased to be the one and only reality that mattered. The prison food, rules, guards, probation officers, court dates and decisions, anxiety, fear, and anger for once were not the only main issues occupying their minds. Being able to really move, travel, take up and claim space, ask questions, experience and try something new, work with a partner, talk about rhythm and connection and music seemed to disrupt and in some cases diminish the constant focus on the many ways they were restricted every day.

Through movement based activities, my co-teacher/facilitator and I tried to give them another language in which to speak and listen, an outlet for expression in which their voices and actions mattered, a space where they could explore how to reconnect their minds and bodies and work with the understanding that that connection is special and vital. Throughout this process we did our best to respect their needs and boundaries and express our appreciation for their participation and commitment. Though at first many of them seemed confused by our interest, appreciation, attention and were wary of our questions and compliments, through partner dancing

and discussion we were eventually able to build a more trustful relationship with each other. It did take awhile to break through many layers of distrust, self doubt, and suspicion which we could see not only in their words and energy levels but in their body language as well (seen in slumped shoulders, heads down with eyes lowered, arms crossed, standing or sitting at the edges of the room, hands in pockets etc.) but as they got more comfortable with us, many of them opened up and talked to us about their lives and their experiences in other learning environments. They spoke about how they had been treated by other teachers in school who made assumptions about them and their abilities, many who choose not to see their potential, who highlighted/targeted their weaknesses rather than their strengths, who forced them to sit and shut up, who sent them to detention for asking questions, who didn't let them go outside, who called them stupid because of the way they dressed and talked, who didn't give them a chance to speak, who didn't even try to listen.

Through building a "learning by doing" based environment, it felt as though we were all equally responsible for creating and maintaining a supportive, productive space where we could learn and grow together. To that end we did our best to create a zone in which we all could view our own and each other's experiences as valid by speaking honestly and encouraging them to access their thoughts, feelings, and memories as they moved. It was incredible to dance with our students as they began to place more trust in us, each other, themselves and the space we had built together. They knew we expected honest effort from them and that is what they gave us. Holding each other accountable as a community was extremely important as we used movement practices to work towards a common goal (a performance at the end of the session) and throughout the process they were more respectful, insightful, and hard working than many if not

most of the people I encounter on a daily basis at Bard (many who have been pretty supported/privileged in some way or another throughout their lives).

While it is something I think about often, this experience truly made me consider how we are categorized and tracked in different ways throughout our lives, how our identities are formed by our experiences and how the mental/physical impacts of these experiences are transformed into habits that live inside our bodies and can be seen in our everyday movements and the way we maneuver throughout our lives. Though I had witnessed firsthand and then later researched the school to prison pipeline and the many racist, classist, sexist, homophobic, and overarchingly authoritarian systems that contribute to mass incarceration of mostly people of color, being in these juvenile detention centers forced me to really recognize up close how deeply the inequalities within tracking and training practices impact our lives (some of us more than others). I realized that some of those teens were imprisoned for things I had done and not gotten caught for (probably because of my societal/social position as a white, middle class, straight passing, average looking, “small” woman). I was compelled to recognize how I was/am able to move through society in certain ways not only because of the identities others project onto me but because of the patterns my mind and body have been trained in whereas their mind-body training had led them straight into the criminal “justice” system.

The conversations I had with my students aligned with the research I had done that pointed to imprisonment often solely because of situational or environmental assumptions and expectations of behavior, factors such as the high school the teens went to or the neighborhood they lived in or their relationship to a gang member, or assumptions of violence and crime, or their skin color, or their unwillingness to submit to an authority figure, or their inability to pay a

fine. Many of them have family members in prison and grew up expecting to be imprisoned at some point in their lives, waiting to be moved down the pipeline.

From what I could tell from conversations and observations, though they obviously weren't happy about being imprisoned, there was an air of inevitability when they discussed being locked up, as if their future potential or placement in the world had been decided for them without their choice or permission. They seemed almost resigned to that experience or position which points to the reality that we grow up with certain expectations built into the patterns that shape our minds and bodies. Unfortunately this training has the power to drive many of our decisions, actions, and the way we view our potential in the world, whether consciously or subconsciously (ideas inspired in part by Victor Rios' theory about the "youth control complex" in his book *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*). I believe that this is why many of them initially struggled with dancing and even stretching, not because the movement was hard but because it caused them to physically (and mentally because the brain and body are connected remember?) question the way they had been taught to conduct their bodies in space (especially in a space as authoritarian and prohibitive as a detention center).

In terms of how art/movement had been implemented in their lives before our sessions began, I was struck but not necessarily surprised by how few of them had ever danced before (and I wasn't surprised at all when they said they definitely hadn't danced in a class at school). Many of them probably didn't know they were capable of dancing because their movement was constantly being restricted (as many of ours was/is in school) through enforced sitting and other physical/mental punishment tactics. Many of them had never been given the space, time, and/or trust to try, to explore, to create, to freely move.



Though not all of them loved dancing and I didn't go into the detention centers expecting all of them to, even for the students who were uncomfortable they still tried it, put themselves out there and challenged the physical/mental training they had received previously. It was fascinating to watch some of their postural and physical transformations from the time they would walk into the room to the time they would leave. I watched them throughout the process as many of them began to stand taller, hold their heads up, walk with purpose, define and direct their movements with intention (as this began to happen their questions and comments became more direct and focused as well!), work with different partners, help each other figure out the steps, get frustrated and then find encouragement or strength in often unexpected places or people, and ultimately work together in a large group to create/perform an amazing salsa partner dance.

As someone who has spent the past couple years trying to unlearn many of the diminishing physical/mental habits that have developed throughout my years of schooling (and within other authoritarian systems, structures, and institutions), it was incredible to watch these teens move so thoughtfully and purposefully, actively using both their minds and bodies in a dance practice within a space that was already extremely charged (not to mention designed to be prohibitive, restrictive, and punishing). I believe that for the most part we succeeded in our goal, working hard together to create a safe space within such a limited, regulatory place so we could have room to recognize our experiences and the way they live in our bodies. Some of our students even told us in the end that they would really miss us and the sessions because we had facilitated the creation of a jumping off place where they felt comfortable enough to explore their

emotions/memories and could potentially begin to heal from past/current trauma. I was honored to work with them and hope that the work we did together left some sort of lasting impact.

Though my students and I did plan, rehearse, and perform in several culmination shows that took place in their various detention facilities, I wish I could have brought all my dancers from their respective juvenile detention centers with me to Bard so we could further our movement practice and build a piece together that could be performed on a real real stage. While this collaboration was unfortunately impossible (as of then/now at least), I want to acknowledge all the incredible work they did and how much we grew together as dancers, teachers, researchers, learners, and ultimately just as people who were able to form a conscious, tuned in community.

Exploring a kinesthetic pedagogy with them completely reinforced my interest in trying to understand and challenge not only the individual impact that movement restrictions (and the divide that has been created between mind and body) have on the way we live our lives but also to combat the larger socio-political, economic, and systematic aspects of tracking, authoritarianism and oppression (both physical and mental) in schools and our society as a whole. Though many of their stories were/are still at the forefront of my mind, I did not feel comfortable bringing their words into the Bard dance studios because it was/is neither my place to tell them nor could I ever (as someone who has not been caught in the criminal justice system) pretend to have experienced what they have/maybe still are experiencing. That being said, going through the process together of building a (mostly) trusting and aware community through dance inspired me to want to continue that type of work. Teaching/collaborating with those teens definitely encouraged me to build on the practices/processes that go into creating an inclusive

space in which everyone involved feels comfortable enough to examine how our past experiences have shaped us and shaped the way we move. I believe that building this type of consciousness not only makes us into stronger and more aware individuals but also has the potential to create engaged communities that are cognizant of and ready to resist authoritarian/oppressive practices.

## *Moving Forward: “Pipeline Memories” (Dance Senior Project Pt. 1)*

\*In fulfillment of the dance department’s requirements, I choreographed (and performed in) one dance piece per semester in my senior year at Bard. To combine my interest in human rights with my love for dance, I decided to use this year long process as a way to continue to explore the issues that have been addressed throughout this project using more embodied, hands on, tangible methods. While I do believe in the value of the type of research that involves sitting at a desk and reading about various theories and studies that have been done on these topics, I really wanted to do more direct experience and sensory knowledge based research as well in an effort to combat the body-mind divide (and the theory vs practice hierarchy) in my own life and practices.\*

One of the ways I continued to facilitate and practice an embodied and aware exploration of movement restriction and its impact on our minds, bodies, and memories was through creating a group dance piece in my first semester of senior year (Fall 2018). I worked with three other dancers of varying experience, technique, and ability levels who were all from different places. I purposefully chose people who went to different types of schools and had very individual movement/expression styles. From a human rights standpoint, I knew I wanted to focus on education so to start the process of collaboratively building the piece, my dancers and I began by discussing our backgrounds and experiences in school, what we had realized about them and ourselves within them since coming to Bard. We reflected on tracking systems, funding, accessibility to materials and resources, the inclusion of (or lack of) electives and art classes that were offered, requirements, if we thought our teachers were good or bad, what the systems of punishment or rewards were and more, all with a focus on what we were taught

(formally or informally) and what we actually learned. We talked about how we think our experiences in school have shaped us and how the various ways we have been trained to act/react continue to impact us throughout our lives.

After these personal conversations about our experiences in school, I led us through a more focused discussion about education as a human right and my interest in exploring what is actually included or excluded in that right. I pointed out how access to art and movement (hands on, physically engaged learning practices) are often left out of the priority picture in educational settings, especially within the public school system. This led to us talking about the inclusive/exclusive, subjective/objective nature of this right to education and how schooling is a requirement meant to give us a foundation to build from, meant to support and guide us through our adolescence and young adulthood but in reality/in practice it doesn't always work out that way. We discussed how the type of education we receive varies depending on so many factors: geographic location, class, race, sexual orientation, immigration status, etc. Some of the guiding questions we worked with when exploring this topic are as follows:

- What forms of education are actually included in our right to education?
- Who has access to what types of education and why?
- Why is being creative or using imagination sometimes a punishable offense in the classroom and how does school often fail to encourage our curiosity?
- In what ways do the public school system and the prison system resemble or relate to each other and how does the constant presence of potential punishment shape our identities?
- How do the theories of education differ from the practice of education?
- How have our schools either supported or failed us?

I remember asking those questions while working from a sense of frustration with human rights work that is often written or practiced with a single focus on the global/big view, technical, theoretical rather than taking a more local, small view, personal, hands-on, eye to eye approach. That is why I felt it was so incredibly important to not only research the history of our education system, the links between the public school system and the prison system, and theories on punishment, movement restriction, identity formation etc. (all definitely informative and important work, no doubt) but to actually work with real people who have had different experiences within these systems. I felt it was necessary to facilitate the understanding that their/my sensory experiences were (are) valid and then actively engage, directly observe, and discuss the impact that these educational theories, ideas, processes, and practices have had on our minds and bodies. While this process did include a lot of talking, in order to fully explore how the lessons we had learned and the various shaping mechanisms that we experienced found their way into our minds/bodies, we decided to return to our rawest material (ourselves) and created a movement practice that allowed us to dive deep into our mental/physical memories.

After only 2 or three rehearsals I had come to realize how much the piece would really rely on the thoughts, experiences, and physical embodiments of each individual mover as well as us as a community/group (breathing life into my theory that in connecting our minds to our bodies as individuals we can connect to other people). This became clear as we began to structure and build the dance after zooming in to focus on the processes of guidance/support and tracking and how they have impacted our relationship to three different support systems: family, school, and community (this was reflected in the final product because during the show, each

side of the audience represented one of those “support” sources to my dancers, even though the audience didn’t necessarily know that). Throughout the rehearsal process we discussed what those three support systems meant/mean to us and how to best access the memories of lessons and emotions that we took away from them in order to enrich/shape our movement.

One way that we examined our relationships to these three systems was an ongoing exercise that consisted of written and danced phrases. First I asked them to make three panels on a piece of paper and label them family, school, and community. For each section we wrote many small phrases with the prompt being moments of fulfillment and un-fulfillment that you have experienced within the three different spaces. For example, under family I wrote “dad playing piano” and “slamming door, flopping on bed” and for school “scared to raise my hand” and “doodling” among many others. I then asked them to pick one from just the family (or school or community) section and we wrote all four phrases (one from each of us) down in a list format. We then began a process where I would read one aloud and everyone would interpret the phrase through movement without thinking too much about it, just the first thing that came to mind/body. After we got the first movement into our bodies we did the same with the other phrases (for example, “hooked on phonics...tapping my foot to house music...apple picking...teachers pet” etc.) and added/stringed them together. We took turns doing these mini dances in different pairings and then spoke about what we noticed, focusing on each individual but also people’s movement in relation to each other. We then played with spacing and proximity and stated observations about how this changed our experience as a viewer and brought new details into focus.

This process brought up a lot of questions about how our unique styles of dancing/embodying words and memories can tell different stories even if we are using the same source material. It was fascinating to see what lessons or moments have really stuck with us and to explore how we could bring those moments of training (where we had a formative moment or where we were taught to react in a certain way) into focus. We talked a lot about how those small moments that are often buried so deep can sometimes have huge roles in the formation of how we view ourselves and each other and our potential in the world. It was a beautiful and sometimes uncomfortable process to physically try and access these memories that we often view as being stored in our heads (classic body-mind divide), bringing them from within to the outside, allowing them to physically move us (as they have really been doing all along).

In watching, discussing, and participating in that practice, exploring how to expose some of our more internal layers by bringing our memories back into our bodies, it really hit home that all our experiences truly do accumulate to make us who we are and that tiny moments that may seem insignificant actually have a hand in shaping our movements, patterns, habits, and expectations. Embodying these moments and memories definitely allowed us to access/understand them in a different way and challenged us to think about if we could trace the way we moved in the studio to the ways we had been taught and trained to move in the “outside world.”

Building material this way also forced us to really witness ourselves and each other as we revisited our adolescent experiences and verbally/physically acknowledged moments/continuous instances of failure and success within these guiding systems/structures (family, school, community). This acknowledgement, unearthing, and releasing of physical memory didn't only



lead us to consider/reflect on who we are/were, how we functioned (or didn't function) within those systems, or how we can potentially move forward in our lives with more awareness, it also made it possible for us to create a closer community. In connecting our bodies to our minds and memories we were able to connect to each other in a new way. Personally, it also forced me to recognize fully how inherently valuable the body and not just the mind is to this, and I'd argue any, process, whether it be building a dance or starting a community center or teaching a class full of 8 year olds. Acknowledging sensory/experiential knowledge is necessary.

### **Looking Back with Newfound Knowledge**

In light of the research I have done in the semester following the practice and performance of that piece (which I titled *Pipeline Memories*), it is interesting to reflect not only on both the process of creating the piece (explored in the section above) but also the various aspects of performing it. Some background knowledge is necessary before diving into the reflection.

#### **Stage Setup and Lighting**

In terms of setting the stage, basically I arranged it so that each side of the stage represented one support system (the stage was structured as a square where the audience surrounded us sitting on all sides "in the round"). Using rectangles of different colored light I was able to indicate different environments/tones per side of stage (first was family- warm yellow light, second was school- a sterile kind of green tinted light, third was community- bright magenta, and fourth was when you were left alone with no systems of guidance or support- white

light with no color or tint). There was also a small square of white light in the center where we all ended up after moving in order/“completing” all the sides (this was meant to represent a space devoid of outside or external support).

### Costumes

Another aspect of this piece that I feel is important to mention is the use of costumes. I wanted all of us to begin by wearing clothes that really showed each of our individual personalities (Micah wore a yellow ruffled shirt and ripped blue jeans, Ant wore his classic sweatpant, sweatshirt, and head bandana combo, Shira wore her maroon dance pants and everyday black sweater, and I wore my checkered chef pants and red *Goodnight Moon* shirt). We went around the square in order (family, then school, then community, then alone, then center) and after we completed a side we would take off one article of our individual personality clothing (we had a base layer of clothes underneath, don't worry). When we reached the third corner after completing family, school, and community, we each individually took off whatever was left of our personality clothes to reveal a base layer of grey bike shorts and a white A-tank and then changed into matching all white outfits (a uniform of sorts). This “uniform” consisted of shapeless white t-shirts and joggers. I chose white because the marley floor was white and I wanted us to blend in (which we did) but I realize now that this color could be interpreted many different ways (insanasilem vibes, purity and virginity, marriage, etc.).

### Reflection and Comments

Looking back, I realize that in choosing this process of building material (building from written then embodied memory phrases), restricting our potential space on the stage to just one side of a square at a time (so if you were doing your “school” section you had to stay in the

rectangle of light that dictated that particular place), and visually transforming onstage through costume shifts, we were exploring how to embody our memories within movement and space parameters which represented a sort of power structure that already exists in our everyday lives. Because of this, the finished product was both full, charged, and slightly disgruntling as my dancers and I were forced to move in a regimented traveling pattern, shedding layers of ourselves (represented by the taking off of an item of clothing) after looking for support from each side of the audience and often not receiving any. I recognize that we also didn't really receive much support from each other throughout the piece either because aside from glances and certain shared movements we did not directly physically interact with each other until the very end of the dance when we sat on the floor back to back in the small square of white light and linked arms to support/pull each other up.

That being said, with this piece I wanted to bring awareness to how we as people, students, educators, learners etc. are tracked throughout our lives with and without our permission and how our relationships with various support systems inhibit or advance this process. Though it was inherently difficult to address external versus internal influence and focus when performing for an audience (because there is often a sort of unspoken agreement in the theater between performer and spectator), the comments I received about my dance actually spoke volumes about what was achieved on that front. Though everyone said the actual dancing and individual movement quality of all the dancers was strong, they posited that we seemed to travel around the stage as if we were "resigned" to completing the pattern, making the dance slightly uncomfortable or slightly un-enjoyable to watch (for some). I am glad that the audience picked up on the resigned nature of the movement and travel pattern because I was actively

trying to highlight the fact that resignation and lack of choice/autonomy are often built into the way we navigate external systems that are meant to support and guide us.

We built the piece with the knowledge that whether we choose it or not, society has often predetermined where we should be tracked to, if we can or can't find support, if we will have the freedom, time, space, resources, and guidance to build ourselves up or try to change our own paths. Navigating this physical training and these expectations placed on us from a young age is constant and sometimes not so pretty to behold as we are moved through various pipelines either with or against our wills. We are often taught to trust external authorities rather than our own sensory, experiential, physical experiences/knowledge. That is why my dancers and I tried to engage directly with each side of the audience because in them we were looking for extrinsic support and guidance. I found it interesting that though several audience members reacted by smiling or laughing or shaking their heads, the majority of the audience just sat there and stared or looked away as we either thrived or struggled in front of them.

Unfortunately, I feel as though this type of silent/stoic/sedentary response that is often present in the culture of the theater reflects what often happens in our society as well because most people are aware or at least semi-conscious of the physical/mental effects caused by unequal systems, skewed expectations, preferential (biased) treatment, and lack of or excess of support and guidance that impact us in the various arenas of our lives and yet many do not reach in and try to help or change these systems that disempower so many. It is no secret that for many people, (depending on class, race, sex, etc.), the cards are stacked in their favor while others are often left unsupported, even within systems and institutions that are literally created to guide us all and give all of us the skills needed to succeed in life (such as school). It is no

wonder so many kids act out, can't sit still, go silent, give up, ditch school, run away, disappear behind their screens, are prescribed anxiety or depression medication before they can even read, end up behind bars, etc., etc., etc. So many of them (us) looked for support and guidance and couldn't find it (either externally or within themselves) so they (we) were simply moved down the pipeline, tracked in terms of appearance, socioeconomic status, outwardly determined potential without being given the chance to say "screw this path I'm gonna make my own." This reality was central to many of the conversations that my dancers and I had as we built the piece together. Our experiences navigating this mess and how it has impacted the formation of our identities/how we move through the world was strongly built into our movement, and whether it was clearly visible or not, it seemed as though the audience felt it through the tone and energy that we brought into the space.

Thought the finished product was definitely important, my dancers and I recognized that what we showed on the stage couldn't possibly fully reflect the movement generation practice or process of creating the trusting little community that we built together for weeks and weeks offstage. Because of that reality, the complexity of the piece, the subject matter, and the way it was shown on the stage, we didn't expect watching our work to be a walk in the park or necessarily easy/enjoyable for an audience. We wanted the watchers to leave the theater with questions. We wanted them to ask themselves why they were uncomfortable (if they were), why they looked away when we looked at them as we were dancing. We wanted them to leave thinking, processing, and reflecting on what they saw and what was being asked from them as bystanders/spectators. We wanted the audience to question their role in witnessing/perpetuating pipelines and where they fit within the tracking process. We wanted them to ask themselves "are

your choices your own? Who/what helped you be where you are now? What systems have allowed you to move through the world with ease or, on the other end, made you feel like you were trudging uphill neck deep in split pea soup? Have you challenged your own path or the paths of others? Do you feel as though you have a choice?"

## **Moving Forward: Dance Senior Project Pt. 2**

\*I am still in the process of doing my second dance piece and have not performed it yet so the following section is written based on the rehearsal process/what has been done so far\*

This semester I've taken a similar idea of exploring tracking and movement restriction in terms of how it impacts identity formation and how we move through the world but I decided to focus on school and the classroom/playground as the main sites of interest. Me and my dancer, Liv, started the process of building the piece in a similar way to how I began last semester, by getting some background information on each other and discussing our experiences in school. We examined moments of fulfillment and unfulfillment, support/guidance or lack thereof and what prompted instances of engagement or disengagement, all the while focusing on what our bodies were doing in particular standout moments.

### **Stage Setup**

After much storytelling we discovered that though we both attended public schools and definitely shared some similar experiences, the different geographic locations and neighborhoods

where we grew up had a huge impact on how our schools functioned and how we functioned within them. This did not necessarily come as a surprise to us as we knew that different class and elective options/offerings and access to resources in public schools vary greatly depending on the area, zoning districts, neighborhood wealth and property tax (which affects funding and who gets to attend what public school) among many other factors and that this hugely impacts the way classrooms operate and how students experience school. The concrete examples of this reality that I found in our stories prompted me to design the piece by dividing the stage in two halves (using a row of books down the center to dictate a physical divide) with a single desk on each side placed downstage. I decided within this setup that I wanted to tell two different stories depicting two different paths one could take in school (and arguably in life), one for me on one side of the divide and one for Liv on the other.

### Costumes

For costumes, I will be wearing navy blue pants and a white collared shirt (the uniform I had to wear in middle school) and Liv will be wearing a kindergarteners dream outfit: lots of layers and patterns and colors with funky socks and butterfly clips in her hair.

### Choreographic Process: Character and Movement Building

After setting the divide as the spatial arrangement of the piece, we began to examine defining rules and attitudes which have since been built into our dancing and have become driving aspects of our characters. The main rule is that for the majority of the piece, Liv can cross the centerline/divide (shown by the row of books) while I cannot. This rift is a central

feature of the work and reflects our exploration of the varying access to freedom of movement and exploration that exists for different students in different classrooms and schools (in this case based off of our own memories and experiences as younger students). The divide is emphasized in many moments when I try to follow Liv to her side of the stage and find my way blocked by an invisible but very real barrier.

We have also stressed this spatial separation in terms of how it impacts us as characters by working with specific words that help us create distinct tones of movement. Some words we have used to describe my character (who experiences many of my worst moments in school) as the piece progresses are “trapped, contained, wanting to burst free, restricted, bored, tired, disengaged, unfulfilled and full of longing” while the distinctive words that drive Liv’s character are “free, curious, innovative, focused, engaged, playful, spunky, and maybe sometimes a little oblivious (but definitely caring).” To me, she represents the student whose teachers have focused on educating the child as a whole, who have encouraged curiosity and exploration rather than regurgitation, regulation, standardization, and competition. She is the child who has not been trained to create a body-mind divide for herself and therefore has full usage of her physical and mental capabilities (able to access her sensory knowledge and understand it as valuable). She has been allowed the space to explore and track herself where she wants to go with guidance and support from external people/systems rather than external authorities solely tracking her to where they think she would be the most useful or productive. She is not bored or complacent or spending her time at school longing to go outside. She feels powerful and free. She is who I and my character believe we could’ve been had we not been trained to sit still and shut up. She is who we aspire to be.



In terms of the actual dancing/choreographing, where this process differs from last semester's (aside from working with one person rather than 3) is instead of using fragmented often disjointed phrases (written and then danced) pulled from memories to build the dance, Liv and I have been creating movement material by choreographing to full written (and spoken) stories as remembered from our past experiences in school. We started by thinking through our very first memories of being in a classroom during preschool and elementary school and then tried to move chronologically, working our way through middle and high school as well.

After sifting through our memories, I decided that within the imaginary world of our piece, I really wanted to work with the idea that we all begin our careers as student with the same potential for learning and growth (obviously everything isn't this black and white in the "real" world) and that what happens in school has a lot of power in shaping who we become/what we believe we are capable/deserving of in our lives (this part however, is entirely true). This shaping process from start to finish is shown as Liv and I "grow up" together on stage, beginning with our "first day of school" section in which we do mostly synchronized playful movement. After that section however, our movement becomes less childlike and playful (though Liv maintains a playful/childlike energy which shows in her movement throughout) and a divide forms between us. Liv is given more freedom, takes up more space, and is able to explore different types of movement expression while mine becomes more and more restricted until all I can do is watch from my side as she twirls and plays and rolls around on the floor. The physical, spacial, and I would add mental/emotional distance between us definitely grows as the piece goes on. This can be seen in the classroom section as we interact with our desks. I sit with my head propped on one hand, right foot tapping anxiously as my body slumps over the desk while Liv barely sits at

her desk at all. Instead she dances around it and changes its orientation, standing on it and spinning, knocking it over with her knee, moving through and around the chair legs with various limbs and a fast paced, energetic, exciting tone of movement. This reflects who we become as the piece goes on, as we grow apart and my dancing become more jerky, anxious, sad, sometimes bored, definitely longing while she is full of spark and spunk and curiosity.

Eventually after I have made my final attempt to break down the wall that divides us, I lay defeated on the ground on my side of the stage and then Liv realizes I am there and lays in the same position on her side. We do some mirroring movements and then she helps me up and pulls me over to her side (a big moment as it is the first time I cross the line). We end the piece dancing together to Gwen Stefani's "Hollaback Girl" and then joyously kicking the books, disrupting/destroying the line as the lights fade to black. I am extremely excited to be able to perform and then reflect on this piece and am interested in how having an audience will shift our awareness of each other and the world we have created.

## Chapter 5

# Activities for Body-Mind Awareness: Recovering Our Own Authority

*“I am playing with my Self, I am playing with the world's soul, I am the dialogue between my Self and el espíritu del mundo. I change myself, I change the world.”*

*-Gloria E. Anzaldúa*

*“Every layer of the character structure is a piece of the person’s life history, preserved and active in the present in a different form”*

*-Don Hanlon Johnson (working with ideas of Freud and his pupil Wilhelm Reich, pg 58)*

*“Developing a clear awareness of how we relate to various molds is the key to recovering our authority”*

*-Don Hanlon Johnson (67)*

*“Your whole body transmits data and organizes meaning....discover your own unique sources of wisdom and gain some power over the barriers that keep you from acknowledging that wisdom”*

*-Don Hanlon Johnson (50, 40)*

### **Introductions and Influences**

Though there have been several activities already included in this piece (see the appendix) that are based on implementing movement into classrooms/other learning environments in order to support the development/education of whole people whose minds and

bodies are conscious and connected, who are able to view and use their sensory experiences as valid sources of knowledge, who can take responsibility for their actions and are not complacent “docile bodies” in front of authority, and are therefore able to recognize and tackle unjust power systems, I am curious about how we can foster this type of awareness within ourselves? To this end, below I have included several activities that I invented, planned, practiced, participated in, and ultimately facilitated for other individuals and groups of people.

The inspiration for these activities/practices was found in reading the works of Gloria Anzaldua (*Haciendo Caras*), Patricia Hill Collins (*Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* and *Another Kind of Public Education: Race, Schools, the Media and Democratic Possibilities*), John Dewey (*The School and Society* (1900), *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902), *Democracy and Education* (1916), and *Experience and Education* (1938).), Bell Hooks (*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* and *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*), and Don Hanlon Johnson (*Body: Recovering our Sensual Wisdom*). While I was and continue to be incredibly inspired by the works of the authors listed above (among many others), all of the activities I have created are definitely influenced not only by other people’s writing but truly driven by my own experiences and observations as well.

That being said, participating in the practices I am about to share with you has been extremely enlightening for me and helped me learn about how the lessons I have been taught (both explicitly and implicitly), the environments I have been in, the ways I have been tracked, and the expectations placed on me have impacted the way I view myself and my potential in the world. I have become more aware of my physical habits and their sources, the disconnect that

has been created between my body and my mind, the various ways I communicate with others (and myself), and the limits I have placed on myself (some for the better but many for the worse). I know this sounds dramatic but several of these activities have dramatically changed my point of view/how I live my life. Though this may or may not be the case for you, it is 100% worth a try.

### **Activity #1 and #2: Body Maps + Power Stance**

\*Both activities 1 and 2 are good to do in a group or preferably with at least one partner (so you can have someone to help you trace your body). Activity number two can be done either in a group or done solo. To demonstrate these two activities I will describe a real situation in which I facilitated a workshop for a group of girls at Kingston middle school.\*

#### **Part 1 (Check in):**

Always start with a check in. This can be a simple question that brings everyone into the space and allows them to center themselves and for you to acknowledge where everyone's at in the room. It can be something as simple as going around in a circle and answering the question "what color do you feel like right now" or "say one word that describes how you're doing right now" or "point at something in the room that represents how you're doing right now." It could also be a more physical check in like "make a movement or sound or both that represent how you're doing in this moment." This can also be adjusted depending how many people there are. In this particular workshop I knew that some of the activities we were going to be doing were kind of heavy and not necessarily fun or easy to think or talk about so I tried to keep the check in light and positive.

After I had learned their names, I gave each of the girls a piece of paper and asked them to write something they appreciated about the person next to them (this acted as the check in activity). I was happy to see that they had no trouble doing this at all. Then I had them exchange these pieces of paper with the person they wrote about and gave the instruction that we would go around the room and read aloud what our neighbors had written for us using “I” statements (so instead of reading aloud “Kat is funny and super nice and caring,” Kat would say “I am funny and super nice and caring”). It was interesting to me that this was very very difficult for them. It seemed as though they were reluctant to take ownership of or accept recognition for these positive traits. Finally one person stepped up and did it... “I am smart and responsible and pretty.” After she went everyone else did too but the majority of them seemed embarrassed or uncomfortable while speaking. Difficulties aside, I could also tell they were happy that their peers thought these nice things about them. After everyone went the girls seemed to open up and become more confident and comfortable in the space so we moved on to the second activity.

Part 2: “Over my mask/is your mask of me” (Gloria Anzaldua, *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*)

I anticipated this part being more difficult for the girls but the outcome ended up surprising me. For this activity, I gave each girl a huge human sized piece of paper and had them pair up. I asked them to take turns laying down and tracing the shape of each other’s bodies using markers on the paper. When they were done with that I asked them think about all the comments throughout their lives that people had told them about their bodies, minds, or abilities or what they had told/continue to tell themselves about their bodies, minds, and abilities and then

label them on their paper body shape outline. An example would be a girl labelling her stomach “too fat” or her arms “too hairy” or her brain “dumb” or her eyes “reads too much” or her legs “too slow.”

I walked around while they were labelling and noticed that the majority of them began (quickly with no trouble at all) to write all the negative comments first. It was both fascinating and very telling to me that they had no trouble writing or taking ownership over “I’m ugly” or “chubby” or “weak” but that I had to prompt them to really think about the positive things about themselves (I started this prompt by telling them they could begin to think in a more positive direction by using the statements that their neighbors had written for them in the first check in). I told them that it was also ok to have both a positive and a negative label written for the same body part and gave them a personal example. I explained that I had always been told by dance teachers or p.e teachers or gymnastics coaches that my thighs were “too big” or “too thick and heavy” but I have come to view them simply as being super strong and stable, my muscle base that helps me run fast, jump high, and ensures that I can kick the shit out of anyone getting in my way, if need be. After that they hesitantly began to add some positive labels but it was slow going and there was a lot of “I can’t think of anythings.”

When the labelling was done I pointed out what I had noticed and asked them why it was so easy for them to write/claim the negative statements but not the positive ones. They had trouble pinpointing why but many of them agreed they were often told the negative comments far more frequently than the positive ones. I asked them who was making the comments and they said it comes or had come from their families, friends, and other kids/teachers at school (often the boys at their middle school). After they had told some stories about their experiences,

I told them to take a really good look at their drawing and the words they had written. I pointed out that their body outlines looked nothing like them, weren't their real or true selves, and ultimately didn't even resemble them in the slightest. I explained that the outline may be what other people have said or how other people have viewed you but it isn't really you. It doesn't reflect who you actually are or how you have to view yourself and I reminded them that the judgements that people make don't have to have any power over you unless you let them. I talked about how when I did this activity myself, I felt so much clarity afterwards because I hadn't realized how much weight (put on me by others and then internalized by myself) I was carrying, how many beliefs had been placed on me and how heavily they still weighed on me until I saw them written on an image that represented me. Seeing this visual representation of something that both was me but also completely wasn't gave me incentive to let go of some of those external opinions I had been carrying.

Participating in/witnessing this exercise a second time reminded me of Gloria Anzaldua's concept of "haciendo caras" or "making faces" which I believe can be applied to our bodies as well. I came to really realize the truth in her statements, that "we have different surfaces for each aspect of identity, each inscribed by a specific subculture.....we are written all over...carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience" (XV). Recognizing these faces I had been making/putting on and these physical actions and motions that had been engraved in my being, seeing what they were and understanding that they are clearly still there, remaining and sometimes even becoming more deeply inscribed over years and years, helped me to begin to think about how to address them and then move past them.



Part 3 (Activity #2: Power Stance): “Rebel[ling] against the engraving of our bodies,” “Printing our own words on the surfaces, the plates of our bodies” (Gloria Anzaldua, *Making Faces, Making Souls: Haciendo Caras XVI*)

In an effort to help give these young girls a practice they could take with them, something that could guide them when they are feeling the most oppressed/suppressed/disregarded, the last activity in this workshop brought us back into our bodies and connected the comments we had internalized about ourselves to the different ways we physically take up space. First I had them think about a time when they felt put down, stifled, repressed, disappointed, or discouraged and asked them to focus on remembering specifically what their bodies were doing in that moment. When we had all figured that out, we went around the room and showed our stance/motion to each other (after one person did theirs we would all mirror it back at them). Some of them commented after seeing another person’s stance/motion saying things like “wait, you stand like that all the time” or “oh is that why you cross your arms and legs like that sometimes?” etc.

After we had finished this first round I asked them to think about a time that they felt strong, powerful, or in control (also gave them the option to just do what they viewed as the opposite motion or stance of the one they had just done) and we went around the circle showing and mirroring those. I really wanted them to experience the powerful moment of a group of women together recognizing each others physical ways of processing experiences and also to acknowledge that what happens to us throughout our lives truly lives in our bodies not just our minds.

I told them how after doing this workshop myself, I became hyper aware of what my body was doing in certain situations and talked about one time when I decided to put this practice into reality while talking to a professor (older straight white male, what a shocker right?) at Bard. We were having a meeting, talking about his class and a draft of a paper I had written when I noticed that the way he was talking to me was making me feel stupid, small, and discouraged. I was questioning my intelligence and my ability, could physically feel my body shrinking, and realized both my arms and legs were crossed tightly in front of me, almost as if to protect myself from the barrage of negativity I was receiving. I recognized that he thought he indisputably had all the power and control in the situation and I realized that my body was clearly responding accordingly. While he was sitting legs open and knees pointed out, arms gesturing widely, speaking in a loud and condescending voice, my heart was beating fast, I was barely making a sound, and I was slowly folding into myself, disappearing into my seat. With the realization that in this moment, I was simply “adopting a face that would pass,” playing the role expected of me by an external authority, avoiding confrontation and letting this man intimidate me and have a hand in shaping my opinions about myself, I almost without thinking went from my diminutive stance to my power stance.

Now mind you my first stance was  
this



And my second stance was this

Needless to say,  
the professor was pretty  
shocked when I got up in  
the middle of his sentence



and uncrossed my arms and legs, planted my feet wider than hips width apart, and raised my arms in a V above my head. In that moment, we both recognized that he no longer had all the power. I had shifted the control center and now he was the one who looked visibly uncomfortable. Although I didn't hold that stance for the rest of the conversation, just doing it for that small moment (a couple seconds at most), it completely changed the way I existed in the space for the rest of the meeting. He didn't talk to me in the same condescending way and I felt confident enough to input my opinions and ask questions that I cared about.

After leaving his office and processing what I had just done , I realized that throughout my life, my mind/body had been trained to shrink or shut down in moments like that but by recognizing what was happening both physically and mentally during the discussion, I was able to make a choice about how I was going to claim some authority in myself and my abilities. In that moment I chose to refuse to sit there passively and let him

control the course or tone of the conversation. I refused to be steamrolled, refused to let the physical habits I had developed from years of navigating authoritarian structures rule the moment. The professor still treats me differently to this day.

Following this story, I told the girls that I obviously didn't expect them to do their power stances and actions (some of them were quite dramatic like dancing or high kicks or punches) in every instance when they felt down or diminished but I did ask them to try and be aware of what their bodies were doing in those moments and test to see if making subtle (or not so subtle) shifts in the way they stood or moved changed how they felt in the space or altered the power dynamic in the situation. They seemed willing and excited to test this out which gave me a lot of hope. I am sure that practicing this type of physical awareness will change the way they take up space and maybe help some of them to gain a bit of confidence or authority in situations where they feel they do not have power.

### ***Activity #3: Ask Yourself***

\* reflection and self answered questions + power stance vs oppressed stance\*

THE EXERCISE (if you would like to participate): With the workshop I discussed in the past section in mind, I created a set of questions that could be used to explore how we can recognize the power of our presencenses and how other people and their beliefs/rules shape our own physical states and therefore our mental states as well (working with the question “why do we view each other as materials to be molded and used for our own purposes?”) (Becker 11). The

aim of these questions is simply to spark consciousness and bring awareness back into our bodies.

In considering what has made you the person you are today, I invite you to take this moment to really wonder about yourself and reflect on your experiences. Go to a quiet place where you feel comfortable and able to think. If you feel willing, find a piece of paper and a pen/pencil/crayon/marker and take a seat (or stand or lay down, whatever makes you feel relaxed and open) and jot down some thoughts or answers that are prompted by these questions. Only answer what you feel comfortable answering. These can be vague or specific, it is entirely up to you.

1. **What did you learn/what were you told about your body from your parents and other family members as you were growing up?** Did they talk to you about genetics and health? Did they tell you to go outside and play and/or read you children's books about how your body functions (ex. *Parts* or *Everybody Poops*)? Did they sign you up for dance classes or recreational soccer or swimming lessons etc.? Did they dress you or let you dress yourself (did they make comments on what was appropriate)? Did they make you sit up straight at the dinner table and teach you to cover your mouth when you yawned, burped, and coughed? Did you copy certain stances, postures, or movements from a certain family member (can you see yourself in your dad's walk or your mom's talking-on-the-phone stance)?

\*Hint: If it is too hard to think about your body as a whole, try thinking about it one part at a time (Ex. begin with your stomach and then move on to your chest, hips, legs, head, etc.). This goes for all the questions.

2. **What about your teachers and friends (and frenemies or or just plain enemies)?**

**What did you learn about your body and its capabilities in school (both explicitly-directly being told, or implicitly- learned without directly being told or without your immediate awareness)?** Did your P.E teachers' expectations vary based on your gender? Did your friends make fun of you for being a late bloomer or for developing early? Did you race the boys/girls at recess or play marbles under the jungle gym? Did your friends make comments about your body or their own bodies (and did you take these comments to heart)? How did your body/brain feel when you spent long periods of time sitting in a chair or when the bell rang for recess? Were you put in time-out as a form of punishment?

3. **Does your religion or belief system place rules or expectations on your body and how has this shaped how you view your physical self?** Did you adhere to these rules? What happens/what are you told will happen if you don't? How have those rules affected your physical relationships with others? Do you believe that you own/have power over your own body?

4. **Do you feel that you dress in a way that expresses who you are?** Do you dress to cover, hide, or disguise yourself or to display and accentuate or exaggerate? Does the way you dress change with the trends (are you influenced by your friends)? Could what you wear be considered "functional?" Could you run if you had to? What age did you or

didn't you start wearing makeup or shaving or working out and what prompted that decision?

5. **What is your least favorite and most favorite body part and why?** Do you generally like your body? If not (and if so as well) write down a couple things that your body does for you that you truly appreciate (could be how it allows you to walk from your bed to the bathroom in the morning or how your tongue and taste buds make sense of all the different flavors that pass through your mouth etc).
6. **(\*This is another way of getting into Activity #2 Power Stance -stated on page 77\*)**  
**Think about your day or week. Can you remember a moment in which you felt weak or put down (low status, little authority) and what your body did in that moment? What about an instance where you felt strong and powerful (high status, lots of authority)?** Did you clasp your hands and lower your eyes when your teacher called you out in front of the class? Did you bite your nails when someone started critiquing your artwork? Did your shoulders tense up when you gave a presentation in front of your class? Did you smile and get wiggly after you finally ran a mile in under seven minutes in gym? Did your muscles react when your best friend gave you a hug or when your teacher smiled at you after you answered a question in class?
7. **Continued from Q. 6- Think about a counter movement or stance that you could employ in situations where you feel low and consider how the other person -if there is another person involved- would react to it. If you can, try testing this out in a real world situation when someone or something is getting you down! Reflect on the**

**results, paying close attention to if this alteration of physical stance adjusted your mood or mental state or the energy in the room as well.**

For example: When I am feeling belittled or uncomfortable I've noticed that I tend to cross my arms over my chest and stand with my right leg clasped over my left (seen in photo on page 78). The counter move I created was to extend all my limbs as far as they could go, standing in a wide stance and stretching my arms up and diagonally out with my head tilted up. I tried this out and in reflection realized that this was a pretty vulnerable motion as I was removing my protective shield, in this case my crossed arms and legs, and exposing my vital organs and other socially charged parts of my body to the very thing/person that was making me feel stifled and small (reminds me of Erving Goffman's ideas about the elaborate and complicated rules that we have created in order to protect our insides against social damage and deflation) but in this case I felt like I was literally and physically throwing off those rules and flinging them from my body (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*). Instead of making me feel uncomfortable or unsheltered as I stretched outwards, I felt connected to both the ground and the sky and had the sense that I was growing and drawing energy from both. It also helped that the person who was making me feel anxious and inadequate was quite shocked and confused when I performed my movement and this caused a huge shift in our statuses in that moment and for the rest of the conversation. That was just my way of doing this and I know it was quite a large movement. Yours definitely doesn't need to be that dramatic!

**8. Are there any distinctive movement patterns that you recognize within yourself/your life and can you trace their source/sources?**



### *Activity #4- Embodied Memories*

\*This activity involves dancing out/embodying written phrases with the prompt being moments of fulfillment and unfulfillment (good for people of any and all levels who are comfortable or even uncomfortable with movement- you don't need to be a self-proclaimed "dancer" to participate)\*

1. Give participants pieces of paper and something to write with
2. Provide the setting (in this case "school" but you can place them anywhere) and the prompt: "Write short phrases based on moments where you either felt fulfilled or unfulfilled in school." (For example, some of mine would potentially be "time out bench, no playing on the jungle gym, sore hands rubbed raw from handball, hot asphalt, peanut butter and jelly sandwich, paper (math worksheet to be specific) ripping from too much erasing" etc.).
3. Have everyone (including yourself as you should ideally be participating too) circle one phrase and then have each person read their phrase aloud one by one.
4. Pick or have someone volunteer to go first.
5. Explain that you are going to read their phrase out loud and when you do, all the participants are to do the first motion or movement that comes to their minds/bodies without thinking too much or too long about it, just the very first physical action that develops in the moment. Explain that their actions do not have to necessarily be clearly descriptive or representative of the words in the phrase (so if the phrase is "playing kick ball" you don't have to actually pretend to play kickball though you can if you want). The movement can be based off of how you/they feel when you/they hear those words, simply expressing in motion

the emotions or memories that the words evoke. The phrases do not have to be long but everyone does have to be able to remember and repeat them.

6. Give them and yourself several minutes to get the phrase into your/their bodies.

Tell them to stop moving when they feel like they have it down.

7. Watch everyone's movement interpretation or processing of the phrase and

\*optional 8th step\* go around and teach the person who's written phrase sparked the movement all of the ways that everyone has embodied their words/memories.

Those are just several of many activities that I have found to be fruitful in attempting to challenge body-mind divide training by bringing awareness back into the body. They have helped me learn how to view my sensory and experiential knowledge as valid and vital to my survival and my ability to make change. I hope they can serve a similar purpose for you.

## CONCLUSION

While wearing my many hats (as a dancer, researcher, activist, practitioner, student, etc.), I have always tried to build, engage with, and promote trusting, inclusive communities where people feel safe enough to peel back some of their layers and reveal the curiosity, creativity, strength, individuality, and expression that lays beneath all our physical and mental training. The activities/exercises (among others) described in the section above have all been tried and tested on myself but have also been facilitated for various groups of people in different spaces (usually in a workshop format) with (almost always) positive results.

From personal experience, I understand that it is not easy work to question the ways we have been taught to think about ourselves/others, or to address the “body [and mind] shaping” methods that have trained us to “conform,” or to recognize the experiences that have sculpted our layers of identity (Johnson 58, 67). It is clear that understanding the body/mind connection is just the beginning. We must dig deeper and truly tune in to recognize how the process of “shaping the flesh” (which, as we know, has a large role in shaping the mind) is “crucially important in the organization of power” because with this knowledge we can combat the systems that selectively oppress, suppress, and diminish us. We can discover the “key to recovering our authority” by “developing a clear awareness of how we relate to various molds” (Johnson, 67). Then we can break the molds and form our own, developing and establishing ourselves as people who have individual autonomy but who remain connected, who move through the world with an awareness of their own power and the power of others.

I hope that someday little girls like the girl I once was, little boys, and gender neutral/non-conforming kids will not sit silent and still, slumped in their chairs at their desks, too disengaged or afraid to raise their hands in class at school. I hope to see the beginning of an end to enforced sitting. I hope to see concepts taught through movement and teachers working towards education of the whole child, fighting the body-mind divide ideologies that are so insidiously built into our systems. I hope to see students challenging authoritarian structures, biased/prejudiced tracking practices, and expectations based on assumptions through the process of “self-definition” (which Patricia Hill Collins defines as “the power to name one's own reality”) while tapping into their experiential, sensory knowledge (*Black Feminist Thought* 300). I hope to see children who have grown up in educational settings that promote and maintain engagement, autonomy, freedom, expression, happiness, creativity, collaboration, community and the development of a true love of learning as they tackle the status quo and teach others how to do so as well. I hope to keep growing, learning, and practicing this form of recognition, self awareness, and self definition while continuing to pass the practice on to others. I hope I have left you with not only something to think about but something to do. We have the tools. Let's use them.

## **APPENDIX**

\*Activities adapted or paraphrased from Traci Lengel and Mike Kuczala's book *Kinesthetic Classrooms: Teaching and Learning Through Movement*\*

These easily implementable classroom activities were created to reconnect the body and the mind (and enhance the intrinsic connection that already exists there), promote sensory awareness, and engage students in the learning process by stimulating their brains through kinesthetic, hands-on exercises.

1. **Preparing the Brain/Brain Breaks** (supports a stronger vestibular system and better visual tracking, also gives students a chance to refocus pg 6):

-First, remind your students (and yourself) to *breathe!* (“Approximately 90% of the oxygen in our body/brain is stale unless we take a deep breath, yawn, or get up and move. A lack of oxygen can result in confusion and concentration and memory problems”) (Blaydes Madigan, 1999) (Lengel and Kuczala 7)

-*Grapevine* : cross lateral movement in which you travel first in one direction and then the other by crossing your right foot over your left and then stepping out with your left and repeating this motion with the right foot moving behind the left and then in front again, alternating feet as you locomote in a circular pattern (diagram on page 44) (this exercise increases communication between the two brain hemispheres, increases heart rate and “blood/oxygen flow to the brain,” provides a body/brain break from sitting and allows the blood that “pool[s] in the buttocks and legs” to circulate)

-*Jumping Jack Spin* (doing jumping jacks while rotating in a circle prepares/supports a strong vestibular system which both “contributes to an individual’s sense of equilibrium and conveys information to the muscles and posture” while “controlling eye movements so images remain steady and in focus”) (Lengel and Kuczala 6).

- “*Three Shakes*”: “Instruct students to stand up, move around the room, and create three distinctive handshakes with three different people. Encourage students to use their hands, elbows, knees, and feet” (Lengel and Kuczala 58). Depending on student age, I would also probably challenge them to use different levels (staying close to the floor being low level and standing on your tippy toes with your arms up being high level), rhythms (how fast are they clapping, snapping etc.), and space (how are they traveling across the floor/taking up space). Three shakes encourages full body movement, social interactions/engagement, good communications skills, and creativity.

2. **Exercise and Fitness Based Activities** (sends a message to students that body and mental health are important, “energizes the body and refocuses the brain” while reducing stress (stimulates the release of serotonin and dopamine!), and generally “improves mental and emotional well being” (8):

-Exercises Targeting Cardio-Respiratory Endurance:

- *Jogging in place* (good for classrooms with limited space)

- *Criss Cross Jumps* (start standing with feet shoulder width apart, jump while overlapping feet/legs- right foot crosses in front of left, jump back to regular standing, then alternate jumping left in front of right)
- *Jump Tucks* (start standing and jump in the air bringing knees to the chest, as high as possible) (73-79)

-Exercises Targeting Muscular Strength and Muscular Endurance:

- *Squats* (\*tips- don't bend too low, top of leg should be parallel with the ground, keep back straight and look upward slightly)
- *Wall Seat* (have students find a wall and place their backs against it, have them bend their knees until their upper legs are parallel to the floor, keep feet planted on the ground, with knees bending at a right angle)
- *Plank/Elbow Bridge* (requires some floor space as students will have to begin by laying on the floor. They will then place their hands flat on the floor shoulder distance apart and push their bodies up as if they are doing a push up but instead of bending their arms they will keep them straight and try to keep their bodies parallel to the floor. They can also hold their bodies parallel to the floor while clasping their hands together and placing their elbows and forearms on the floor) (79-82)

-Exercises Targeting Flexibility:

- *Neck Stretch* (have students stand with arms “hanging loosely at their sides,” have them tilt their heads sideways to the right and left (bringing the right ear to the right shoulder and the left ear to left shoulder without lifting their shoulders at all or bending their bodies- remind them to breathe as they stretch!)

- *Hip and Front of Thigh Stretch* (have students stand, bend their right legs bringing the heels of their right feet slowly towards their buttocks and grasp their right feet with right hand- pull foot towards buttocks until they feel a stretch) (84-87)

-Fitness Game:

- “*Fitness Freeze*” (Just like freeze dance except when the music is on the students are doing an exercise/sequences of exercises and when the music stops they freeze) (92)

**3. Developing Class Cohesion** Activities which help students have positive social interactions through “creating a comfortable, interconnected environment.” This is extremely beneficial to the learning process as it “improves communication and listening skills” and helps students to “develop relationships and a sense of belonging” as they work together to create strategies or accomplish tasks (9). \*tip- the beginning of a new school year is a great time to introduce class cohesion activities as it will give both you and your students a chance to get to know each other.

- “*Hula Hoop Relay*”: Students stand in a big circle while holding hands or linking forearms. A hula hoop is placed around any two students arms that are linked. The goal is to get the Hula hoop all the way around the circle without breaking any links (students hands/arms should stay linked throughout the whole game)! This can be made into a “race against the clock game” as you can time students and see “how fast your class can work together to accomplish the task” (101). For an additional challenge you can add another hula hoop either travelling in the same or the opposite direction.



- “*Titanic*” (I play a variation called “*The Floor is Lava*”): Begin by clearing the floor (can be played outside as well) and placing 8-10 pieces of poster board or hula hoops in a large circle in the cleared space (they will represent life boats). Play music as the students walk or “perform other locomotor movements” (such as sliding, lunging etc.) around the pieces of paper (if you want to encourage imagination tell the students to imagine what movements they would be doing if they were on the deck of a ship!). When the music stops (“simulating the crash of the titanic) all students must quickly and safely get into a lifeboat (hula hoop or piece of poster paper). Stress that the goal of the game is for everyone to be in a lifeboat and encourage students to be creative and help their classmates! As a new round begins, remove a lifeboat. Repeat until there is only 1 lifeboat (game becomes a “problem solving activity” as there is limited lifeboats and limited space) (102)!

4. **Reviewing Content**: “Rehearsal, the repetitive act of processing information, is critical for transferring content from working memory to long term storage. Using movement to review content is a form of elaborative rehearsal which often engages higher-order thinking skills and/or greater sensory input” (Lengel and Kuczala quoting Sousa 106).

- “*Team Test*”: Clear the center of the room and place students in four even teams. Have each team sit in one of the four corners of the room then give each team a written test that has questions but no answers. Spread notecards out in the center of the room with the answers on them face down. When the teacher signals, each

team will send one member racing to the center of the circle to get one of the notecards and bring it back to their group (the runner may not look at the card until they have brought it back to their group! If a racer is caught peeking at the card prematurely there will be a time penalty on the group). As a team they will decide which question the answer belongs to and write it down. Then they will send a different team member to return the first notecard and pick up a new one (the student runner should be different each time). The fastest team with all the correct answers wins! (game paraphrased from “Kinesthetic Classrooms” pages 109-110).

- “*Dance/Lyric Creations*”: Place students in groups of four or five and give them academic content you would like them to review. Have the groups create dance and/or exercise workouts along with appropriate song lyrics that will help them remember and review the information. Remind students that everyone in the group must contribute and participate. Give students time to practice their creation and then give them the option to share them with the rest of the class (activity paraphrased from “Kinesthetic Classrooms” page 110).
- “*Vocabulary Charades*”: Place students in groups of four or five and ask each group to sit on the floor (if possible) in individual circles. Either ask for volunteers or choose one person from each group to be the charade leader to start and then give each leader a pile of vocabulary words and a ball (for later). Setting a two minute time limit, have charade leaders act out the first vocabulary word they choose and if their team guesses it correctly they can move on to the next

word (if the team does not get it they must stay on that word until it is guessed correctly). After two minutes the teacher will play music or blow a whistle or make a sound which alerts the team leader to begin passing the ball around the circle. When the music stops, the person holding the ball is the new charade leader. This cycle will continue until the students have gotten through the pile of vocabulary words (activity paraphrased from “Kinesthetic Classrooms” page 112).

**5. Teaching Content:** Using movement to teach content not only supports students who are “kinesthetic processors” (which is most people) but also aids in “retention of material...increase[s] learner motivation....provides opportunities for problem solving and higher level thinking...and stimulates the brain/body connection” for all students (11).

- “*Understanding a Comma*”:- “Students walk while saying a sentence and pause to represent the purpose of a comma” then keep walking to complete the sentence (11).
- “*The Descriptive Writing Hop*”: (helps to teach descriptive writing, sentence structure, and active use of vocabulary). Begin by separating your class into six teams (team 1 plays against team 2, team 3 plays against team 4, and team 5 plays against team 6). Make flip cards containing various topics such as vocabulary words (could be used for any school subject however) and place 10 paper plates per team in one long straight line (30 paper plates in all). Have team 1 line up on one side of the first paper plate and team 2 line up on the other side and then have

the first member of team 1 pick a flip card. She/he/they must then design a descriptive sentence about that topic and then hop alongside the paper plate line for each word of the sentence (1 word = 1 plate). All players listen carefully for sentence accuracy and if using vocab words, for proper use of the word in the sentence. When the player is finished the points are tallied up (1 point per plate) and then the first player from team 2 follows the same structure. Students will keep a running score and the team that has the most points in the end wins (123).

- *“Kinesthetic Character Analysis”*: This is one of my favorites!! Put students into pairs (or have them pick their own partners depending on your class) and have them face each other. Each student will have the job of describing a literary character through “kinesthetic analysis” which looks like..... “Pointing to their heads, students describe the characters most important thoughts. Pointing to their eyes, students describe the lens through which the characters sees the rest of the world. Pointing to their mouths, students describe the most critical elements of the characters personality (and I would add how they use their voices in the world). Pointing to their shoulders, students describe the burdens the character carries. Placing their hands over their hearts, students describe the characters love interests and any emotional traits (or states). Folding their arms, students describe any physical labors the character endures. Putting their hands over their stomachs, students describe any situations that make the character very nervous. Touching their legs, students describe the important travels of the character.

Bending down and touching their toes, students describe what philosophies and beliefs ground the character (124)

- *“Finding the Circumference and Diameter of a circle”*: Begin by clearing the center of the floor and create enough space for students to form a large circle. After the circle has been formed have one student walk “heel to toe” around the entire circle making sure to count his/her/their steps (or designate another student as step counter) and finish at the same spot where he/she/they started. Then have the same student (walking in the same way- heel to toe while counting steps) begin at the original starting point and turn into the circle, walking a straight line from one side of the circle to the other. That student has just marked both the circumference and diameter of the circle! You can use this to teach the relationship ( $\pi$ ) between the circumference and diameter of the circle though doing this kinesthetically will probably not produce an exact result (meaning the circumference may not be exactly 3.14 times bigger than the diameter) but it will be close enough to teach the concept (Activity paraphrased from “Kinesthetic Classrooms” pages 129-130).
- *“Becoming the Water Cycle-ordering of events”*: Divide students into two groups and explain that each group will demonstrate or “become” (physically embody) the process of the water cycle. To represent evaporation, first students will get on their knees and link hands to represent a body of water (I would give them a little more creative license here in how they would like to depict water through movement), then they will slowly stand to show how the water changes to steam

and vapor (I would ask the students to think about how this change from liquid to vapor could be shown in the tone of their movements). The group will decide how many students are needed to play this role as there also needs to be at least one student representing the sun during the transition to vapor stage.

Condensation can be demonstrated by students acting like clouds and then they can show precipitation by “dancing their fingers like rain” (or another movement that seems representative). Remind students that all team members must participate and that they should rotate until everyone has a chance to be each stage (Activity paraphrased from “Kinesthetic Classrooms page 132)

- “*Electoral College- state comparisons and multiple civic lessons*”: Begin by pointing out to students that the “number of electoral votes a state receives is also based on the number of congressional representatives it has in the house of representatives” (for example oregon has 7 total electoral college votes while Pennsylvania has 21). Based on the number of students in your classroom, any two states can be represented. “The physical size of a state and its relationship to the number of votes it receives can also be examined” by giving different groups of students (representing states) different spaces in the room. To demonstrate this using Montana (very large state with only 3 electoral college votes because of its small population size) compared with New York (small state with 31 electoral votes because it has much larger “population density”) as an example, try giving three students a very large part of the room and then put all the remaining students

in a much smaller area of the room. (Activity paraphrased from “Kinesthetic Classrooms” page 141)

These are just some of many different types of movement activities that can be used (and adjusted/expanded upon) to engage, refocus, and inspire your students, ideally helping them to develop a love for learning through truly activating both their bodies and brains. As Lengel and Kuczala say, “teaching and learning through movement is an inventive resource that is well worth the time it takes to develop and perfect” because “educating the whole child” does not just benefit individual students and classrooms but our society as whole (121, 146).

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