ADOLESCENT MALE DANCERS’ EMBODIED REALITIES

by

Zihao Li

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Toronto

Abstract

This dissertation looks at adolescent male dance students who challenge the dominant perceptions of masculinity by participating in dance, an art form which has been subjected to feminine and homosexual stereotypes.

With a multi-methodological approach—qualitative, arts-informed, autobiography, interviews, videotape, and performance—this research investigates and explores the largely unknown realities regarding adolescent male dance students; why they decide to take dance; what makes them continue or stop dancing; how their perceptions of dance are transformed over time; how they feel when they are dancing; the realities they embody in studio and on stage; their message to the public about who they were, who they are, and what they want to be in and through dance.

The researcher challenges the socially constructed epistemology that dance is merely an entertainment while exploring the relationship between mind and body; gender, race, and identity; literature and literacy; physical education and dance; the professional and the novice; the hows and the whys; female and male dance educators; dance pedagogy (theory) and curriculum delivering (practice); and the association of homosexuality and heterosexuality in the context of dance and its effect on adolescent male students’ willingness to dance.
This study shows that families, friends, teachers, school administrators, dance class environment, media (So You Think You Can Dance), and technology (internet) have all created various levels of impact on adolescent males’ decision to participate in dance at a high school. Data and implication from this research can serve as a catalyst for future studies on adolescent male dance students. Findings can also be applied to dance programs at all levels, curriculum development, and teacher education. This electronic dissertation encompasses graphs, photos, audio and video clips, webpage links, and even a full-length documentary movie to enhance the research finding and maximize the power of a multimodal design (Jewitt & Kress, 2003).
Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the realization of a dream. Its completion is the culmination and celebration of passion, desire, contemplation, perseverance, and solitude. Whenever I work on this dissertation I am struck by the many people who have touched my life. Some appear on this page while others are kept in my heart. Although these acknowledgements recognize specific people, they are by no means comprehensive. There are many others who have given me their friendship and support. Please remember that you are always in my heart and I gratefully recognize your contribution to my journey.

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In addition, I would like to thank all of the adolescent male dance students who took part in this study. Thank you for your time, for sharing your thoughts, opinions, stories, and recommendations which raise the much needed academic and practical
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Maisie, my wife and best friend, who provided me with the support and love I needed while juggling 4 fulltime positions—husband, father, teacher, and student. I can never repay everything you did for me in helping me realize my dream and your acceptance of the extended responsibilities are forever etched in my memory.

To Isaac, my son who will be 15 months by the time I finish this study, no words can express how happy I feel when I see your big welcoming smile on your face when I come home.

To my parents, thank you for not giving up on me and not allowing me to give up.
CHAPTER ONE: I AM A DANCER, A MALE DANCER

I think the reason dance has held such an ageless magic for the world is that it has been the symbol of the performance of living. Many times I hear the phrase…the dance of life. It is close to me for a very simple and understandable reason. The instrument through which dance speaks is also the instrument through which life is lived…the human body. It is the instrument by which all the primaries of experience are made manifest. It holds in its memory all matters of life and death and love.

Martha Graham

I am a male dancer, teacher, and a researcher thriving in a profession that is dominated by mostly girls. I have grown up with girls, many girls—dancing, rehearsing, performing, putting on make-up…. I must admit that even now I have more acquaintances who are women than men in my life because of my profession. As a result, I have often heard comments like “you are so lucky that you dance with girls or you must love dancing dearly.” I smile each time when I hear them but seldom respond because I know that my answer may not make any sense to them. In fact, becoming a male dancer was one of the toughest decisions that I have ever made in my life.

Male dancers face many challenges and obstacles, mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally in dance. Although it seems that I am an accomplished dancer, I have to admit that, like many male dancers, my journey has not been smooth.

This study will begin with my autobiography as a male dancer and then go on to explore high school male dance students who are currently participating in dance, an art form which has been subjected to feminine and homosexual stereotypes. This research investigates why males take dance and what makes them continue to dance. I sincerely
hope that educators will be able to use the research findings to more deeply understand the issues for male dancers and to find ways to inspire males to study dance and to continue to dance.

A glimpse into the autobiography of one male dancer

I did not want to dance. I hated being one of the only boys dancing with more than forty girls. I did not know why but I felt embarrassed, uncomfortable, and sometimes even a humiliated during dance class. As a young boy, I did not even know that there was such a profession for males. I thought dance was for girls and weaker people, those who always cried, even though back then, I did cry just as much.

Born into a typical family with no one involved in the arts, my family had never thought that I would become a dancer, a professional male dancer. My father was a policeman while my mother worked in a school kitchen. My birth place, Harbin, is a small city in the Northeast of China with a population of ten million people. With that population in mind, the majority of people do not have the luxury to even think about what they want to do in life. Competition is so severe that having a job, any job, is considered fortunate.

At the age of five, my father enrolled me in dance without even asking me. It was an odd choice but he believed that multiple talents would generate more options for a hardworking individual. He wanted me to be secure and successful in the viciously competitive job market in China. However, like many boys, I did not like dancing.

I had a secret. My parents claimed that I started dancing at age five. Although I never disagreed with them, I knew that it was not true. At the time, I had absolutely no knowledge in dance at all. However, I was keen on physical activities. While there might be boys who enjoyed dance because there were so many girls in dance, I, on the other
hand, just loved to move rather than sitting still. I enjoyed the exhilarating jumps and skips that boys get to do in dance. They got to jump higher and skip further than the girls. Even the accompanist (usually a pianist) plays a slower tempo to suit our grand movements.

One memorable experience stemmed from the shocking ratio between boys and girls. I remember there were approximately forty dance students in the class and I was one of two boys. Being a minority in class, boys often had to learn girls’ dances. We found it objectionable and yet, there was nothing we could do. The dance teacher was too busy with the girls and he rarely even had time to notice that there were boys in his class. There was no relevant curriculum designed for boys in dance training at the time. At a young age (seven), I had already made up my mind that one day I would create a dance class that made boys want to dance and let them feel proud of themselves while dancing.

The other experience was fun but I kept it as a childhood secret. I had to confess that between the age of five and seven, I was not in dance class most of the time. I played the Chinese version of the “catch me if you can” game with my parents for two years until my aunt discovered my secret. Like many Chinese boys, I admired people in uniforms and then, I discovered that the courtyard of the dance studio, my playground, was a yard shared by the fire station. On Monday and Wednesday nights, my parents dropped me off at the dance studio and they went back to their daily activities. Around 7 o’clock, they came by and picked me up. When I went to the first dance class, I noticed that the firefighters were washing their fire trucks. Then, during the second class when the teacher was busy with the girls, I sneaked out. I approached one of the firefighters and asked if I could help them with washing. He gave me permission to do so and it was his permission which kept me from dancing for almost two full years.

I soon became a star among the firefighters. Being a 5 year-old-boy, I was active and full of energy. I ran, jumped, turned, skipped, and fell around the fire trucks and the

---

1 Compared with other big cities such as Beijing with 30 million people, Harbin is a mid to small scale city in China. China has 1.3 billion in population.
firefighters. My innocent expressions and clumsy movements would often cheer up those firefighters who had just finished their shift. Soon, they treated me as if I were one of them. They gave me candy, food, and even took me on some of their firefighting duties. All these good “memories” ceased when my aunt spotted me in a fire truck close to her neighborhood. Then, my real dance training began. That year, I was seven years old.

Then

In my teenage years, I doubted whether or not I should continue dancing even though I was on scholarship attending a prestigious dance academy. From time to time during those years, I thought that males, including myself, should not be in dance but they should pursue careers that seemed to be more “macho or manly.” My self-doubt in dance lingered even after dancing professionally for years and completing a BFA degree in dance with honors on full scholarship. The American Dance Festival scholarship was so lucrative that it covered everything including my tuition, accommodation, meals, and even bus fare throughout my university stay in Hong Kong, one of the most expensive cities in the world. I did prove myself in dance as my dance images were featured on posters all over Hong Kong for the Millennium Arts celebration. Nonetheless, there were still many challenges for me to stay in dance and even my parents thought at times that dance was probably not the best choice for me. On numerous occasions, I found myself asking “Who am I” and “What am I doing?” I continued in this profession in spite of the queries I had about my own identity and self worth in dance. I discovered that when I performed on stage, this feeling of bewilderment would disappear.

Plié
Turn out
Stand up
Breath

Don’t give up

Stretch your knees!
Chin up
Head up
Back straight

Don’t give up
Stretch
Stretch further! Harder!
Stretch till it almost breaks
Stretch!!!

Don’t give up

I breathe
I pirouette
I stumble
I fall, I get up and I try it again

Don’t give up

It’s painful
It’s tiring
It’s hard
It makes me feel good

I am not giving up

While I dance
I am myself
I am on fire
I know that I am fully in charge

I am not giving up

In dance
My mind and body merged
My imagination explodes
My expression expands
I will never give up

I am a dancer – a male dancer

(Unpublished poem, Zihao Li, November, 2008
Presented at the Dean’s Conference at the
OISE, University of Toronto)
Now

Time went by quickly. After 25 years of dancing, military training, performing, choreographing, studying, teaching, and now, researching and teaching, I have learned much about myself through dance. When dancing, I know that I am truly myself. I am in control by being completely involved in the interaction with spectators through physical movements and meaning making (meanings and messages embodied within those movements). I feel capable of conquering any barriers. While dancing, time seems to be suspended and I know that what I am doing is meaningful, powerful, and worthwhile. It is described as “Optimal Flow, a state of total absorption in a task (dancing) hence creates a state of consciousness where optimal levels of functioning occur” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000). It is intrinsically rewarding (Jackson & Eklund, 2004) and it brings a sense of jubilation that makes me want to dance. I call it a “moment of self realization,” which is the essential element that keeps me in dance. I become alive when I dance and I believe that others witness my sense of jubilation while dancing, as shown by the following comments on my performance.

“After ferocious competition, Zihao is the finalist to receive the prestigious scholarship from the American Dance Festival to study at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.” Zhao, Guangzhou Daily.

“Zihao Li is a rising star in dance community…” Ou, Beijing Youth Daily.

“His dance touches every single audience’s heart, etc… Li Zihao is, undoubtedly, the millennium dancer of the year.” Hua, Singtao Daily.

“Zihao’s dancing moved the people of Prague, Czech Republic….” Yue, Da Gong Daily.

“Zihao is on the wall of fame at this year’s international dance festival,” Citron, The Globe and Mail.
“Zihao is a sensational dancer with superb ballet technique.”

Citron, The Globe and Mail

(Newspaper articles/reviews about me as a dancer from 1995 to 2006)

Dance has played a critical yet transformative role in my life. Dance reminds me of what I have done in the past, why I have what I have today and it encourages me to work hard toward my goal for the future. Dance heals my pain and releases my stress, crafts me as a survivor, and transforms me from an average teenage boy into a professional male dancer, dance teacher, and now a dance researcher.

As a dancer, I have gone through many life experiences and have accomplished more than I could ever imagine. Nonetheless, I have more than once contemplated quitting dance in the last 25 years. The fact is that there are many explicit and implicit obstacles that could keep males from participating in dance. It is an undeniable phenomenon that most males (young and old) do not dance. Some take dance at a preschool age but quit soon after the “thought” of dance being for girls. I have stayed in dance because of the “Optimal Flow” – the moment in which I discover my own identity.

I realized as I became a teacher that I had to rethink my role, not as a dancer or as an artist, but as a teacher/artist - a dance teacher. This caused me to consider how adolescent male dance students think and feel about dance, especially from within the dance experience; what makes them want to dance; what I can do to enrich their experience in dance. As a dance teacher, I'm responsible not only for teaching the curriculum, but I also need to consider what is meaningful and relevant to these students. I have to start from where they are when they enter the dance studio - their body awareness, their abilities, their attitudes, their self-confidence, their goals.

As well, I had to revision my persona as a teacher of dance with young people, and as a teacher of dance with professionals. Each student group requires a specific strategic way of working. For example, when I teach adolescent male dance students who have little or no experience in dance, I start with basic movements or steps to help them
feel comfortable and to develop a sense of accomplishment in dance before introducing more difficult steps. I want them to be "in the dance", to sense themselves as dancers. With them, I am absolutely a dance teacher.

When I work with university dance students, I see myself mainly as a facilitator to broaden their knowledge in and out of dance, to push them out of their comfort zone by challenging them with intricate dance sequences, and more importantly, I teach them how to survive and thrive in dance by sharing my own experiences in dance. With them, I am a dancer and I am a teacher.

This study strives to locate the “Optimal Flow” through researching adolescent males in dance as I believe that there must be forms of engagement that attract and retain males in dance. Hopefully, this research will shine a light for other male dancers who are struggling with their identity, facing peer pressures, or wrestling with family members’ approval to participate in dance. Meanwhile, I will examine the current curriculum to interpret it in such a way that other dance educators may be able to apply the research when teaching adolescent male dancers.

Rationale

Few adolescent males seriously participate in dance (Rose, 2005 & 2006). A recent study shows that the ratio of girls vs. boys who choose dance as an extracurricular activity is 31 to 1.7 (Cameron & Bartel, 2008, p. 37). American researcher Benoit (2000) went even further by suggesting that in most cases, male dance students represent less than one percent of all dance classes (p. 1). At the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts where I received my Bachelor degree of Fine Arts, ballet instructors constantly faced dilemmas when teaching partnering class due to the lack of male ballet dancers and the oversized female population. It became such a problem that ballet instructors encouraged all male dance students to take the partnering class, although they were in Modern or Chinese dance studies. When I taught at the Toronto District School Board, I was the only full-time male dance teacher in the entire school board, which employs over 16000 teachers in nearly 600 schools (TDSB, 2009). Currently in my first year teaching ballet
and modern dance classes at York University, there are sixty-eight dance students, only four males, one of them is an exchange student from England. From my personal experience and what I have seen in dance, I understand that there is a great deal of challenging work to be done to attract more males to participate in dance and I see this research as one of the first steps.

In the academic field, research of this kind has been scarce while the existing studies are mostly, if not all, on professional male dancers. Desmond (1993) describes: “dance remains a greatly undervalued and under theorized arena of bodily discourse” (p. 35). Dance, unlike music and visual art, has been difficult to reconstruct and analyze due to the lack of documentation. She further suspects that it might be because it has been represented by mostly females and expressed by bodily work (Desmond, 1991, p. 45). In short, most mainstream researchers, with less expertise in dance have not done enough to signify the importance and value of this research.

Scholarly databases such as ERIC, Scholars Portal, JSTORE, Proquest, just to name a few, show extremely limited results, most of which are irrelevant to the topic. A few existing studies either examine male dancers from the physical education perspective (Gard & Meyenn, 2000; Gard, 2003 & 2006 & 2008) or from the perspective of established male dancers (Burt, 1995; Desmond, 2001; Daltry, 2000; Gard, 2001, 2006 & 2008; Keyworth, 2001). I consider this research as one of the first in-depth scholarly studies specifically targeting the adolescent age group, which I believe in many cases to be the age from which professional dancers take form. Reich (2005) reiterates in his book about reputable male dancers including José Limón, Paul Taylor, and Alvin Ailey (who started dancing in their late adolescent years and all became hugely successful figures in American modern dance (Ailey, 1995; Taylor, 1987). They are possible role

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2 José Limón (1908-1972) is considered one of the pioneers in modern dance and choreography of the twentieth century. His works have influenced many audiences, and are still performed today by his company and others.

3 Paul Taylor is one of the modern dance pioneers in the United States. He performed in the companies of Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, and George Balanchine, and founded his own company, the Paul Taylor Dance Company in 1954.

4 Alvin Ailey (1931-1989) was one of the most influential modern dance choreographers in the world. He founded the first black-dancer only dance company, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in the United States.
models for young boys to follow and yet, few adolescent males can be found in regular
dance classes.

**Research question**

What is it like to be an adolescent male dance student in today’s school?

Movie trailer on adolescent male dance students ~ click on the image or here to watch

The one-minute trailer allows readers to have a quick overview of this research. It presents the highlights of the movie by flashing through still images and short video and audio clips.

This study focuses on the few adolescent males who are currently taking dance and the realities of being male dance students during their high school years. In order to understand the principal question of what it is like to be an adolescent male dancer, I have decided to investigate several areas: why adolescent males take dance; how they feel when dancing; their opinions on dance over time; the influence of other factors
Research benefit

Research on adolescent males in dance could benefit teachers, dance instructors, curriculum theorists, professors, and even professional dancers and choreographers in terms of understanding young male dancers—their needs, fears, attitudes, and their expectations. It will also help me understand my own personal journey from an average boy, then to a dance student, to a professional dancer and now a dancer, dance teacher, and a researcher. There is no doubt that getting boys to join in a dance class is not an easy task. Such resistance to dance will continue unless there is a breakthrough in the “discriminatory views” surfaced by this research towards male dancers or male dance students. In part, this research investigates whether such bias exists within male dance students themselves or is held by others around them. I consider this research as a step forward in understanding such bias in greater depth. I sincerely hope that we, as educators, will be able to use the research findings to promote dance among adolescent males and to find strategies to keep them in dance.

Thesis map

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one starts with my short autobiography as a young boy twenty-five years ago and my personal journey in dance. It introduces the research question and explains the importance of this study. Chapter two is a summary of research literature on the social construction of dance, gender, and identity. It addresses issues in the curriculum as it relates to boys in dance. It also looks at established male dancers and their contribution to the “legitimization of males in dance.” Chapter three outlines the methodology and research design. Chapter four discusses the research findings from several areas of investigation: why adolescent males dance; what is the influence of families and friends, what are the thoughts of these boys regarding dance over the year—their challenges and joys which are partly revealed by their
assignments; what is their advice to other males; and what is the current effect of popular media programs (*So You Think You Can Dance*) and technology (internet, and YouTube)? Chapter five is a video documenting the journey of these adolescent male dancers during the school year. It is available as a full length movie (60 minutes) and a short version (10 minutes). Chapter six summarizes the research and discusses the implications for practice, concluding with a list of recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING DANCE

Despite the positive and encouraging research studies showing clear advantages for males to be in dance when it comes to job opportunity and promotion (Benoit, 2000; Berger, 2003; Burt, 1995 & 1998; Grillo, 1995; Milner, 2002; Rose, 2005; Tarasove, 1985; Williams, 1995), most males deliberately choose not to dance. The question of why males don’t dance seems to be an easy question to pose but I doubt that it will lead to meaningful answers that can remediate the current situation. There indeed can be many excuses for quitting or staying away from dance and it becomes problematic when males quitting dance is perceived as normal. In order to have a better understanding of males in dance, it is important to understand the complexities of dance itself.

Dance

Definition of dance

Aristotle perceived dance as a “form of imitation” (Halliwell, 1998). Noverre, a leading eighteenth century choreographer and theorist further explained such theory as “a faithful likeness of beautiful nature” (Chapman, 1979). Copeland and Cohen (1983) defined dance as patterned, rhythmic movements in space and time. Hanna (1987) identified dance as “nonverbal communication.” There are many other scholars who see dance as a form of expression. It arises in the emotions of the artist, emotions which are then directly illustrated in the work of art. Langer (1950 & 1957) sees gestures, transitions, and movements demonstrated by dancers as expressing feelings, some of which are logically and symbolically expressive and not necessarily expressions of self.

Dance, also known as bodily movements, is shaped, defined, redefined, and inscribed by political, social, and cultural discourses (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003). While performing, audiences, dancers, and choreographers investigate the world around and within as subject matter (Watrin, 1999). As a professional dancer and educator, I see dance as encompassing all of the above descriptions since its functions and appearance change under a variety of rationales, artistic approaches, situations, and environments. For instance, a dancer or a choreographer could define dance at one time
to be a series of movement patterns in space, which are organic and authentic, but on another occasion, it is a way for communication and expression. In yet another situation, its main purpose is to be a means to negotiate, shape, and reshape what the artists know and what they do not know.

**Dance and its relevance to life**

Dance is important in life. As human beings, we know that movement provides a means by which we can communicate. Movement links us to the outer world and it expresses our thoughts, feelings, imagination, and spirit (i.e., body language). Fowler (1996) stated that “we can never adequately convey the range of human experience through written and spoken words alone” (p. 61). Movement, often a key element in dance, functions as an important component in this research. If this study were based on text only, it would not completely represent a holistic approach.

Dance nurtures social self and it develops team working skills. It shares decision-making as we work (dance) together towards an artistic goal. Pursuing that goal is like working on any other projects in life; we have to envision, set up goals, figure out, evaluate, revise, continue to imagine and solve problems during the entire process of creation (p. 11).

Dance demonstrates physical strength, determination, endurance, and precision—perfect coordination of mind, body, and spirit to compose meaning. As an artist, I find that choreographing a dance piece is similar to accomplishing any other goals in life which need constant modification to achieve the best outcome.

Dance allows us to express and hence understand deeply held beliefs and feelings. We further understand ourselves, others around us, and the world in which we live to build the “foundations for peace” in creating and reflecting with others through bodily language (Fowler, p. 13). Martha Graham, for instance, created numerous master dance pieces reflecting her views on feminism, primitivism, and social-politics in the mid-20th century. As a contemporary dancer and a choreographer, she developed her own
technique—the Graham technique—which is still practiced in many countries. In her seventy years of dancing and choreographing, she was the first dancer to perform at the White House; acted as a cultural ambassador for the government of the United States, and became the first dancer to receive the highest civilian award, the Medal of Freedom (Freedman, 1998). Graham created a huge impact on the way people think about contemporary dance and the importance of dance in general. Prior to that, many people including dancers, saw contemporary dance as merely organic movement sequences or an artistic expression. Movement (kinesthetic) alongside with interpersonal, intrapersonal, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, and linguistic intelligences facilitate us to create the “foundations for peace” and to enable us to experience it both physically and intellectually (Gardner, 1993). During the process of creating a dance, artists conceptualize and materialize our ideas and imagination in a choreographed physical manner so that they can be shared with others and become “records and revelations of the human spirit” (Fowler, 1996). Fowler’s theory represents the majority of choreographers who transform conceptual ideas into concrete and tangible movements. There are still choreographers who challenge the traditions of structured concepts and ideas by presenting different approaches to movement and music, an example being Merce Cunningham, whose choreography used non-traditional music (mostly composed by John Cage)—sounds of a baby crying, telephone ringing, etc. Cunningham was one of the first contemporary choreographers trying to incorporate technology into dance performance (Cunningham, 2009).

**Dance, movements, and meanings**

Dance is a series of actions, which function as meaningful texts (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). While some scholars see dance as a chain of organic gestures and shapes, I would argue that dance is as meaningful as texts, but it is simply a different literacy. There are scholars who tend to ignore its importance due to its non-traditional principles that make it challenging to evaluate (Eisner, 1991). I look at dance as a powerful and transformative means to construct meaning and to deliver a message. For instance, through dance, I see the morals and values of Christianity through Alvin Ailey’s dance production *Revelations* (Eliot, 2006); I see the desire for freedom and democracy via
Xing Lang’s solo *I want to fly* (Xing, 1998); I can also compare the current and past political struggles in Burma and Pakistan with the *Argentina Tango* (Savigliano, 1995).

The misinterpretation that dance is merely a form of entertainment often emerges, which makes dance seem irrelevant and pointless. Young people, especially adolescent males find dance less attractive because it seemingly lacks clear values and purposes in education and life. On the other hand, others see dance as meaningful, purposeful, complex, and evocative. Dance constructs a variety of meanings based on each individual’s educational, social, and cultural values. For instance, the complexity of dance is reflected in chaos theory: When life appears to be the most complicated, a simple order may be just around the corner. And when things seem to be simple, we should be on the look out for the hidden nuance or subtlety (Briggs, 1990). When a contemporary dancer performs on the stage, his bodily language may deliver a particular choreographer’s message. Spectators watching the dance construct their own meanings based on their own life experience. Thus, a simpler gesture or movement does not mean it contains linear messages. Art lives within an experience and it is represented by bodily work received or influenced by previous experience (Dewey, 1938). A subtle flipping hand movement in Chinese dance could be translated as merely a gesture, which could subsequently deem to be almost meaningless to many Westerners. In fact, it represents masculinity and pride that males use to portray themselves through artistically and socially constructed bodily language (Zhang, 1997). Having looked at the definition of dance and its complex nature, I feel that artists need to express more explicitly the complexity of dance to spectators.

Watrin (1999) states that artists, including dancers and choreographers, have unique individual perceptions which are carried in and throughout their artworks. Dewey reveals dance as a form in the arts that “provides the fusion of ideals and habitual meanings” through creative movements (Alexander, 1987). Sklar (1994) argues that movement presents a strong message because it embodies socially-constructed cultural knowledge in which corporeality, emotion, and abstraction intertwine.
**Dance is a literacy**

The Oxford English Dictionary explains literacy as “the ability to read and write.”

Booth (2001) describes reading as “a process of interpretation and negotiation from the locus of our lived and vicarious experiences at a moment in time” (p.14). Dance also involves a process of interpretation and negotiation of meaning on the part of the choreographer, the dancer, and the audience. It composes and communicates meaning. Dance tells stories; provokes discussions; poses and answers questions. Just as reading is more than saying the words, dance is more than executing movement.

This study challenges the socially-constructed epistemology that dance is purely entertainment and a performance-based product, which implies that it does not have any learning values in the curriculum. I would argue otherwise by emphasizing that dance is a moving form of literacy itself. Copeland and Cohen (1983) define dance as “a means of communication, which cannot be expressed in reasoned terms or reduced to a mere statement of art” (p. 24). Dance is described as one of the oldest art forms and it is also a type of physically oriented expression that employs bodily movements that are rhythmic and patterned (p. 158). Dance exists in every culture and it has its own history, styles, and differences among cultures and regions just as literacy does.

As a form of literacy, dance not only constructs meaning, but it is also an expression of culture. Dance defines and represents a country, a culture, or even a person’s identity. Butoh, for example is a contemporary theater art form while Ausdruckstanz is considered as a dance of expression in European countries such as Germany and France. The former one showcases Japanese modern dance, narrating its cultural values and the latter one represents a 20th century dance movement, frequently referred to as German Expressionism (Delacoma, 1989). They both moved from marginal theater to center stage around the world. Butoh and Ausdruckstanz artists consider their art form as “bridging cultures” (Banes, 1987, p. 2) by fostering a greater understanding of their cultural identities and values through a non-verbal form of literacy.

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Dance is a language, which has its “complexities, nuances and power” (Paraskevas, 2009, p. 28). It provides choreographers, dancers, mimes, and dance students with a unique voice, a “physical voice” (Cornell, 2001, p. 10). Similar to any form of language, movement and dance have vocabularies, grammar, syntax, and punctuation. To fully understand and speak the language of movement, students need to learn the fundamental elements of movement and dance (Expert Panel on the Arts, 1998). Dance is one of the many means that human beings use to know, to learn, and to reflect (Hanna, 1987). We were all once upon a time a dancer in our life no matter during childhood or later on.

On a larger scale, dance or bodily language is a sign system that is used in many other areas. Harste suggests that movements in a sign system assist others to gain perspectives and to explore meanings (Harste & Leland, 1998). Martha Graham emphasized that “movement is the most powerful and dangerous art medium known. Movement (dance) never lies” (Freedman, 1998). Graham further claimed that “movement is the speech of the basic instrument, the body, which is an instinctive, intuitive, inevitable mirror revealing man as he is” (Cohen, 1992). As a dancer and a researcher, I consider dance truthful and organic because it is what it is without any superficial disguise.

Dance is a language which is basic and vital in human lives. Kariamu (1996) asserts that “dance is a multi-communication channel, transmitting information… dance kinetically conveys verbal information.” (p. 186). Snipe (1996) states that “dancing is an expression of a physical, psychological and spiritual state of being that enables people to give meaning and context to their greatest joys, hopes, frustrations, fears or sorrows” (p. 63). People dance to celebrate victory, marriage, death, birth, and ritual ceremonies (Snipe, 1996; Willis, 1999). In the Gui Zhou province of China, men and women still maintain their century-old tradition to seek their companions through dance competition. During the whole process, men and women are not allowed to talk but to communicate through physical forms of language only. Local people believe that when compared to verbal communication, bodily expression is an untainted means to discover the true
human being (Wei, 1999). Jeyasingh (1998) stated that all dance pieces are representatives of their makers’ life and concerns. Dance is their language to communicate with audiences because these people believe that movements are more subtle but embedded with deeper meanings and implications than verbal communication allows for.

**Dance and self**

Schwartz (1977) claims that meaningful movements come only after basic technique skills have been mastered, which could take years. Having been trained in the field of dance for more than twenty years, I have learned that dance is the best way for me to fully understand myself and to communicate with others. When dancing, I can hear my inner voice and with that I can express my emotions, deliver messages, and transfer substance to others. In this research, I will investigate what dance can do to and for adolescent male dance students. I want readers and viewers to become more aware of how they think, feel, and what they say to other adolescent males who might be interested in participating in dance. Dewey (1934) recognizes that art (dance) has the power to integrate parts of ourselves that are not in harmony by simultaneously immersing ourselves in creativity and emotion. Young (1994) asserts that “emotional and meaningful issues from one body can be transformed and enter into other bodies; they have directions or can be directed and they affect bodily tissues.” Dance scholar Sheets-Johnstone (1999) also pointed out that “thinking in movement is foundational to being a body.” Furthermore, Eisner (1991) stated that a researcher interprets and utilizes the self as a place of discovery for judging what is important in the data.

**Embodiment**

**Mind and body**

Grosz (1995) claimed that “the body is what it is capable of doing, and what any body is capable of doing is well beyond the tolerance of any given culture” (p. 214). Movements, represented by bodies, are meaningful. The combination of mind and body would generate the most provoking work thereby forming a new site of knowledge.
represents the cognitive form while body symbolizes kinesthetic means. I have chosen to integrate dance as part of the research process with the recognition that bodily movement stands as an important part in developing knowledge (Abram, 1996; Friedman & Moon, 1997; Griffin, 1995; Sheets-Johnstone, 1992).

Similar to the academic research process, dancers and choreographers have long known that the choreographic process is also one of “sorting, sifting, editing, forming, making, and remaking. It is essentially an act of discovery and rediscovery conceived by bodily knowledge” (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003). From looking at the work of various scholars (Leder, 1990; Griffin, 1995; Irigaray, 1992; Kristeva, 1980), I have come to understand that separating mind from body or vice versa is not possible. For example, Leder notes that “it is through the bodily surface that [we] first engage the world” (p.11). Kristeva writes that “words come to mind” and elicit responses in our body (p.163). As a dancer, choreographer, and researcher, I consider this study as an embodiment of the mental processes that are occurring through movement; these movements become a form of inquiry as I look for the answers to the research questions. To optimize this research study, I plan to engage both the mind (data analysis, documentation, and interviews) and the body (creative dance, technical skill, dance training, rehearsal practice, and performance on stage) through traditional (text-based) and non-traditional (multimedia) means.

**Embodied realities**

Webster’s New World College Dictionary defines embodiment as “the concrete expression of some ideas, quality, etc.” Smith (1996) investigates embodiment as a “paradigm and model for studying American contemporary concert dance” (p. 1). She applies the embodiment of contemporary dance movement in the early 20th century as a methodological instrument to understand the symbolism of American culture: “individualism, freedom, and diversity (p. 11).” Likewise, I consider embodiment as an organic and authentic means, which can unveil the realities that adolescent male dance
students experience in high school. Dance embodies those realities while engaging these students’ spirit and body.

Stubley (1995) looks at this embodiment through a musical point of view. She states “performer and instrument are experienced as one, with the valves, strings, keys, or bow seemingly organically fused to the fingers or body parts that control them” (p. 59). That is to say the performance itself is not a mere technical act in which one shapes or executes the music, or dance movement in this case; rather it involves living in and through the action. In other words, the musician or dancer is no longer simply performing a piece, but lives in the piece and breathe the piece; the piece becomes an embodiment of the artist. She further adds “The performer, like the reader, brings to the score a body of technical and musical know-how derived from personal musical and life experiences” (p. 60). The performance embodies life, or the performer’s realities, which are continually being shaped and re-shaped as the performance progresses. During the process, dance integrates thought and action, blurring the boundary between the roles of body and mind in executing movement phrases. While dancing, dancers are so deeply immersed in their body – their instrument which employs movements to define their total sense of being. Stubley later asserts “the performer not only sees and hears the music referred to by the notes in the score; he or she also attends to the quality of the personal experience through which it is being constructed…” (p.61). In this case, to perform is “to experience the self as an identity in the process of making” (p. 60). I believe that dancers become drawn to this experience of self during performances. In the course of making and experiencing dance on stage or in studios, dancers create a dialectic process of interaction between the outside and the inside. Bowman and Powell (2006) elaborate on the centrality of embodiment to performing in which they suggest that constructing, reinforcing, and reconstructing of realities and identities that constitute embodiment encompass broader social and cultural identities. Nonetheless, they note that throughout history, “Engagement [body movement] in musical action [while performing] is acceptable and even desirable, but only in modest amounts… (p. 1088).
From an ontological point of view, many males consider males being in dance as an illusion (Earl, 1998). The majority of men accept the existence of dance, but see dance as an art form which is not realistic or tangible. The argument of whether dance is a legitimate and acceptable career for males presents itself as a challenge and has since become a barrier for male dancers (Burt, 1995; 1998). This argument and the associated misperceptions have also prevented many males from entering into dance (Garafola, 1985). While this mentality exists in the minds of many males, they may dance in reality only insofar as dance is deemed not serious and with no association to femininity. Consequently, males choose not to dance, at least not under formal education. Smith (2004) states that "knowledge exists in the minds of human subjects" (p. 2). He argues that people's conceptual knowledge is constantly formed and reformed by a person's reality. These two parts (knowledge and reality) are inseparable and interdependent. However, the conceptual knowledge of dance as an inappropriate activity for males is often isolated from any real experience (reality) of dance. My research investigates males in dance and unveils their realities in and through dance from the past, to the present, and possibly to the future.

Gender

Definition of gender

Over the years, there has been substantial research and theorizing on gender-related topics. Gender has been identified as a presentation (Butler, 1999), a social organization (Fuss, 1991; Weeks, 1991), and an ideology (Lorber, 1994; Smith, 1996). Gender is referred to as a socially-defined set of differences between males and females, which have transformed into varying social institutions and subsequently reinforced in all social interactions (Messner, 2000; Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, & Messner, 1997). In this study, gender is seen in embodied realities, which define and challenge the notions of femininity and masculinity.

Cooley (1902) describes our perceptions of ourselves as “looking-glass self,” which is the way “we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance,
manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it” (p. 184). In other words a person’s sense of self is influenced by the perceptions of others. Kendall (2010) further suggests that gender identity is a process of developing an identity that we would like so that others will accept who we are. As human beings, we often act according to those around us and we formulate a self-concept of gender identity by interpreting others’ reactions (Henslin, 1993). According to Cooley and Goffman, we, as individuals in the society, are coached to adjust and modify our own behaviors, relying upon the socially constructed perceptions, with which we are familiar (Poloma, 1979). Individuals’ views on gender identity are shaped and reshaped by those around them. Their perspectives of identity are modified continuously through interaction with others.

Gender in dance

Mac An Ghaill (1994) notes “during the last decade, masculinity has gained increasing popular and academic interest (p. 3). Nonetheless, he points out that until recently, within the topic of gender and dance, masculinity has tended to be absent from mainstream educational research and it has been assumed to be unproblematic. There is considerable literature concerned with notions of “gender and dance.” However, gender research and theorizing on dance, especially adolescent male dancers, has been extremely insufficient and problematic.

Within these limited research studies, the majority has focused on mature male dancers at a professional level (Burt, 1995 & 1998; Daly, 1994; Hanna, 1988b; Gard, 2000). For example, Burt examined the representation of masculinity in dance during the twentieth century by studying famous ballet and modern dancers including Vaslav Nijinsky, Ted Shawn, José Limón and Alvin Ailey. While other theorists considered gender and sexuality as not relevant in dance, Burt argued the opposite and stated that prejudices against male dancers are socially constructed which are rooted in our ideas about the “ideal” male body (muscular) and male behavior (heterosexual). Hanna, on the other hand, explored the relationship between dance, sex, and gender through cultural and geographical lenses by looking at Louis XIV, George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, and other established dancers.
Some studies have given attention to the dilemma and discrimination that homosexual male dancers endure (Burt, 1998; Franklin, 1999; Grady, 2002; Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997). Bailey and Oberschneider, for instance, did a study of 136 professional dancers (males and females) examining the prevalence of homosexuality among dancers, the dancers’ own sexual development, and relationships between dancers of different sexual orientations. Of the eighty-six male dancers interviewed, forty-eight were gay men and forty-two were heterosexual men. Bailey and Oberschneider discovered that “heterosexual male dancers struggle with their sexuality more than heterosexual men in other professions, and a high proportion of heterosexual male dancers, 71%, had sometimes felt that gay men had tried to influence their sexual orientation or ‘recruit’ them into homosexuality” (p. 439).

The rest of the studies have attempted to suggest strategies or “tricks” to entice or to keep young boys (age 3 to preschool) in dance (Crawford, 1994; Meglin, 1994; Rimer, 1985; Tarasov, 1985). Crawford, for example, suggested that teaching boys dance “requires a multicultural view of dance as athletic, demanding, communal, and competitive, not just graceful and aristocratic—attributes associated with European and American heritage” (p. 43). He suggested that “boys can be challenged to jump higher, shift weight faster, move bigger, and balance longer” in dance. As well, dance educators should use props, images, comic books, or even compose a scene of combat or struggle as a choreographic study. Crawford further noted that “dance students must be provided with role models of both sexes and students should watch both male and female performers and learn from both male and female instructors” (p. 44).

**Gender imbalance in dance**

Everyone can dance…. It is a seemingly unchallenged gross generalization especially when popular TV programs such as *Dance with the Stars, So You Think You Can Dance, Billy Elliot,* and *Save the Last Dance* warm up the entire globe. The question is where are the boys, especially adolescent males in regular dance classes such as ballet or modern? That is a common question, which puzzles many dance educators who are
currently facing extreme ratio imbalance between male and female dance students. Researchers from the University of Newcastle in Australia have found that dance is presented as a feminine domain and boys are turned off by the dance experiences they have had early in life, mainly primary school (Bev, 2001). Lipscomb (1986) suggests that “boys struggle from their initial dance experiences, if any, which mostly focus on creative and improvisatory approaches” (p. 65). In such cases, boys were usually told to make tableaux to be trees or express their feeling though shapes. Berger (2003) argues that the lack of respect given to the position of male dancers, which requires a substantial amount of strength and skill, has created such “gender impositions” in dance. Williams (1995) further suggests that “all males recognize one characteristic in common: the imperative of being different from and superior to femininity, which is not to do something (dance) that females do” (p. 291). Gard (2003) states “contradictory relationships between love and hate, pleasure and displeasure, and sexual labels which in many ways effectively stop males from dancing” (p. 109).

Homosexuality (dance?) and heterosexuality (sport?)

Gard (2003) asserts that public displays of men participating in dance are seen as “unambiguously (homo)sexual and therefore immoral” (p. 215). Adler (2002) reiterates that boys who are not considered to be successful athletes are, unfortunately, labeled as “gay” in high school (p. 202). He further ranks school subjects—sports and academic courses. Music is one of the subjects that is least valued by school administrators (p. 200). This finding is somehow not surprising. Why do males always value sports more than other art subjects? Part of the answer may be found in Griffin’s study (1995) that shows “sports prowess” is a means for males to show others and themselves that they are heterosexual.

Shawn (1960) states that in the early 1900s, sports were constructed as a completely (hetero)sexualized practice. As masculinity researchers try to comprehend the past, Shawn reminds us that sport and dance remain both discursive as well as material. Sport and dance construct and occupy significant if evolving places within the project of gender identity construction, particularly for boys and men, and the perpetuation of
heterosexual male power. Many males choose sports as one of the means through which they can justify their identity for being heterosexual and claim their masculinity (Connell, 1995; Kidd, 1987; Parker, 1996; Martino, 1999; Messner, 1999). The widespread poster images and television programs such as the American Super bowl and Canadian Hockey games certainly promote such “man + sports = muscular/heterosexual” attitude.

Studies (Lever, 1978; Scraton, 1986) also suggest that boys prefer sports and girls are in favor of dance is partially due to the conflicts of “values” that are socially, culturally, and individually constructed, which in turn contribute an inadequate aesthetic experience in physical education programs. The process of feminization through dance (Brennan, 1996) and masculinization through sports (Connell, 1989) are deeply rooted in our society. Askew and Ross (1989) found that boys usually behave badly when it comes to activities that require them to work together or share emotional feelings. Flintoff (1991) went further by suggesting that boys often purposely distance themselves from any feminine activities (dance) and opt for activities, which can define their masculinity (sports). Although it seems that not all people are against dance but the implication of dance as a feminine or a homosexual-preferred activity indeed influences them (boys) in viewing, thinking, and participating in dance or related activities (Loadman, 1992). That might partially explain why there are so few males in dance.

Male dancers

Ted Shawn/established male dancers

Among sensational male dancers/choreographers such as George Balanchine, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Gene Kelly, and Lester Horton, Ted Shawn stands out as an exceptional role model for male dancers. Not only was he characterized as one of the modern dance pioneers but he also set up the first contemporary dance school – Denishawn School of Dancing and Related Arts in North America in 1915. Some of the most accomplished students who studied in the school and greatly influenced the development of modern dance include Martha Graham, Charles Weidman, Merce
Cunningham, Alvin Ailey, and Doris Humphrey. Shawn’s contribution to dance (all-male dance performances) deeply challenged the public views on male dancers at the time. He “revolutionized dance performance, both in his effort of raising male dancers’ status in society and in the promotion of dance as an official art form in the society” (Shearer, 2008). Shawn was referred to as the “father of American dance” (Cohen, 1966; Terry, 1976; Joseph, 2002).

After successfully (both in financial and critical reviews) running the Denishawn Dance Company, which hired both males and female dancers, Shawn established the first all-male dance company in North America in 1931. It was then that the U. S. was in the midst of depression but Shawn felt it was the right time to define his philosophy of male masculinity in and through dance. Shawn (1960) believed that by presenting dance through muscular male dancers with athletic and rigorous choreographies, prejudice against male dancers would disappear and eventually male dancers would be respected as compared to other professions (p. 240-241).

During World War II, the U. S. Army drafted most of Shawn’s male dancers. He led the rest of the male dancers and moved to a 200-acre farm in the Berkshire Hills, Western Massachusetts where Shawn established a “university of the dance” in which males and females studied a variety of dance forms (Cecil, 1947). The dance program developed successfully and eventually grew into today’s Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival (Fanger, 1997; Baff, 2009), the longest and one of the most successful running dance festivals in North America.

Despite the fact that Ted Shawn spent almost his lifetime making male dancers more acceptable in America, dance was still viewed as “an immoral and unthinkable occupation for men” (Gard, 2003). Male dancers were considered to be “effeminate, trivial, and deviant” (p. 211). Dance as a profession was treated as “an unworthy

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occupation for “the strapping and well-muscled men” (p. 213). Socially constructed stereotyping perceptions of male dancers caused great controversy about Shawn’s all male-dance company. During its short existence (1933 - 1940), the company faced both financial insecurity and even worse, angry audiences who completely disliked males dancing on the stage, even though all the choreographies were purposely made “ultra-macho and ultra-athletic” (Gard, 2003 p. 214). There are many reasons (mostly due to the war and government funding) that led to the disappearance of the company; however, Shawn’s role in promoting males in the dance profession can never be underestimated.

**Research on other male dancers**

Gerzen (2000) describes the socially-constructed agreement among all American people regardless of their age and class—he finds that males are more likely to be in aggressive and dominant activities (sports) while females enjoy “emotional and excitable doings (dance).” In other words, dance is labeled as a fit or suitable activity for females. Other scholars suggest that the low number of male dance teachers as role models have directly caused the sparse enrollment of male dance participants (Crawford, 1994; Gard, 2001; Gilbert, 2003; Grillo, 1995; Hanna, 1988a; MacKenzie-Bourne, Aug 29, 1996; Rose, 2006). British scholar Burt (2007) concludes that “professional dance during approximately the last one hundred and fifty years has not been considered as an appropriate activity for white men to engage in” (p. 1). However, Burt also suggests that although fewer males are in dance, they usually represent the power in the profession. In his book, Burt indicates that in Western countries, fewer men are trained to be professional dancers than women but many of them have carried responsibilities in dance. These few male dancers/choreographers eventually occupy most of the important artistic and administrative positions in this field.

Burt’s claim of such super-male-power is clearly shown in the Toronto dance community – Michael Trent,¹ James Kuldelka,² Christopher House,³ Danny Grossman.⁴

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¹ Artistic director of Dancemaker Dance Company  
² Former artistic director of the National Ballet of Canada  
³ Artistic director of the Toronto Dance Theatre  
⁴ Artistic director of the Danny Grossman Dance Company
just to name a few (Grossman, 2007; House, 2008; Michael, 2008; Trent, 2008). It is important to acknowledge that many of these dance companies are founded by female dancers but then controlled by males (personal communication with Warner, 2010). On a larger scale, Hanna (1998b) talks about Erick Hawkins, husband of Martha Graham put a cross-cultural perspective with musicians and visual artists on the development of dance. Hawkins studied Greek civilization at Harvard University before dancing professionally. Different from other contemporary dance choreographers at the time, Hawkins redefined dance technique according to principles of kinesiology. The title of his book, *The Body is a Clear Place* (1992), is an expression of his views of dance as an experience of the present moment and that dance movement in and of itself is significant. He invited musicians to play live for his dance performances on stage. With different approaches to dance technique and choreographies, Hawkins created a big impact on how people see and think about males in dance. Dance celebrities such as Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire, Vaslav Nijinsky, Alvin Ailey and many others were all involved in the dance boom in studios, films, television, as well as on stage. Then, it was the Russian ballet superstar Mikhail Baryshnikov who “left” the Kirov to show off his glamorous athleticism to North American audiences. That dramatic and political incident certainly put Toronto onto the world map as a “haven” for superstar dancers to escape from “undemocratic countries” (Knight, 1974). Baryshnikov soon moved to the United States and eventually became the artistic director of the American Ballet Theatre.

In the year 2000, the movie *Billy Elliot* created a sensational wave, which led to a “temporary and unexpected explosion” in terms of boys auditioning at the Royal Ballet School in London and other dance schools in western countries. Furthermore, we can never disregard the popularity and positive impact that hit TV shows such as *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dancing with the Stars* have on how males see dance these days. Other popular movies that had similar impact include *White Nights, You Got Served, Step Up I & II, Mad Hot Ballroom, Take the Lead*, and *Center Stage*. 
Male dancers’ identity

One would wonder why males still opt to stay away from dance despite the positive attention that has been shown they can receive. Research studies suggest that men who enter female dominated professions are often identified as “failures or sexual deviants” even though they tend to elevate to higher managerial positions and higher pay despite intense female competition and are favored as role models with more chances to climb various job ladders (Acker, 1994; Gard, 2008; Grumet, 1988; William, 1995). William, for instance, points out that “men are effectively being ‘kicked upstairs’ in the process. Those specialties [jobs] considered more legitimate practice areas for men also tend to be the most prestigious, and better-paying specialties as well” (p. 86). He argues that “many of the men employed in these occupations [nursing, librarianship, social work, and elementary school teaching] are expected to demonstrate traditionally masculine characteristics—as administrators, technical specialists, and even disciplinarians of young children” (p. 114). An example he asserts is that “men in nursing are overrepresented in critical care and psychiatric specialties, which tend to be higher paying than the others” (p. 87). Nonetheless, it could take years to be “kicked upstairs” as William acknowledges. In reality, stereotypes still exist and to some degree, just the thought of men in dance could be impediments for males to choose dance in the first place.

Adolescent males formulate their gender identity on social interactions with others (especially with similar age group peers). Curriculum theorist Dewey (1938) describes the creation of an individual’s sense of belonging in his book—*Experience and Education*:

The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity (p. 83).

A similar argument is presented by Lorber (1994) in which she asserts:
Most people, however, voluntarily go along with their society’s prescriptions for those of their gender status because the norms and expectations get built into their sense of worth and identity as a certain kind of human being and because they believe their society’s way is the natural way (p. 129).

In these contexts, it is easy to understand why the only boy in his first dance class wants to quit after dancing with thirty five girls. He simply could not refer his action (dancing) and portray himself (a male dance student) as a norm to the majority of boys who are not involved in dance. It is difficult for him to legitimize and justify his own action under such circumstances. Gard and Meyenn (2000) did a research study on a group of junior high school boys (11 to 14) on their preferences for different physical activities as a way to identify themselves. Not surprisingly, dance was rated the lowest or close to the lowest among all. What was interesting was that “when two or three boys were interviewed together, their responses/comments toward dance turned increasingly negative as if they were trying to define their masculinity as men or declare sexuality as being not a gay” (p. 216). Gard and Meyenn’s research implied that boys were simply attempting to establish their identity within a “heavily gendered social hierarchy in which dance is associated with homosexuality and where homosexuality is considered abnormal and inferior to heterosexuality” (p. 217). This study investigates the correlations between self-identity (male dance students) and their public-identity (the way male dance students see themselves through the public lens) and how the interplay affects students’ involvement in dance training at high school.

**Research on adolescent male dance students**

At the risk of understatement, this research is not a novel endeavor since there is a significant amount of research on adult males and professional male dancers in dance through academic and popular culture lenses (Burt, 1995; Desmond, 2001; Daltry, 2000; Gard, 2001; Keyworth, 2001; Gard, 2006; Gard 2008). Those studies often focus on established male dancers – what they have achieved and accomplished in and around dance. Nonetheless, research on males (regardless of their age and who they are) about why they dance and how they think and feel when they dance are extremely understudied
My study focuses on how males think and feel when they dance, which I anticipate could provoke more discussions and reveal undiscovered stories about male dancers. Overall, the absence of in-depth research between post-primary school-age boys and pre-professional level dancers (age 13 to 18) creates a void. This research is designed to address this issue and to fill the gap while exploring new pedagogical approaches. It will focus on adolescent male dance students (non-professional dancers in any form) who take dance classes in a regular high school setting. The data that I collect in this research will explore their current experience in dance (in class and on stage) as a way to understand and analyze it from past to present as “interaction” or what Dewey describes as “the situational influences” (Dewey, 1986). Furthermore, I want to explore how their thinking about dance in the past has impacted on their involvement in dance at present and how their involvement in dance has impacted their thinking.

As a dance teacher and researcher, I see adolescent male dancers as unique human beings who could provide great insight into ways to resist the pressures of gender stereotyping in dance. Therefore, attracting and keeping them in dance has a vital impact on dance education and gender study. Berger (2003) asserts that male dancers “require extreme amounts of strength and skill and are capable of pursuing a dream that goes against society’s guidelines in relation to gender and gender roles” (p. 4). They represent a different kind of masculinity. Male dancers are unlike those in other subjects or fields that choose to change its descriptions or definitions (Pringle, 1995), form alliances with others or gain friendship opportunities (Aalten, 1997), or even create an argument which could defend their motives (Tewksbury, 1993). Adolescent male dance students challenge the dominant resistance and demonstrate their exceptional strength and determination by deliberately pursuing dance in high school.

**Dance education**

**Dance in schools**

Schools (especially public schools) are important places for the “regulation and normalization of student bodies and subjectivities,” which inevitably “promote, demote, or legitimate” certain ways of doing or thinking (Bordieu & Passerson, 1977; Connell,
1993; Kirk, 1993, 1998a). Overall in public schools, dance is not seen or considered as an important part of school life (Gard, 2008).

The Toronto District School Board, the largest school board in Canada, has few schools, which consistently provide students with regular dance courses (TDSB, 2009). Nonetheless, this school board is considered to be one of the “Arts Enriched” school boards that is envied by many other smaller school boards in the province. Some school boards in Ontario do not have even one fine arts school (personal communication with Martin at CODE conference, 2007). It is justifiable and comprehensible that different subject areas have their own ‘communities of practice’ within schools. Some critical educational researchers who are aware of multiple disciplines indicate that the whole process of regulation, normalization, promotion or legitimization of certain courses has been and continues to produce and reproduce unjust educational and social experiences and leads to inequitable outcomes (Apple, 1985; McLaren, 1999; Willis, 1981; Acker, 1994; Hooks, 1994).

**Dance curriculum**

In the Ontario curriculum—*The Arts: grades 11 and 12, 2000*, dance is identified as one of the four subject areas (along with music, drama, and visual arts). Dance curriculum emphasizes that artistic activities are closely connected to play and human interaction.

Students experience a sense of wonder and joy when engaged in the arts, which can motivate them to participate more fully in cultural life and in other educational opportunities. Dance education goes beyond studying a repertoire of movements to offering an understanding of the principles and concepts that govern and define the arts (The Arts: The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12, 2000).

Dance is an important component in the curriculum because it gives students an opportunity to gain control of their body and mind through “creative accomplishment.”

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12 Downsview Secondary School, Etobicoke School for the Arts, Earl Haig School for the Arts, Rosedale Heights School for the Arts, Danforth C & TI, Woburn CI, and Wexford School for the Arts.
Stinson (1991) investigates why students dance and discovers that many students choose to take dance because in dance classes they gain “the sense of power and control over themselves, the transcendence or high” (p. 24) Dance as a curriculum subject, promotes feelings of competence, and inspires excitement, interest in school and higher achievement goals (Hanna, 1989; Weissberg, Caplan, & Harwood, 1991). Studies on New York public schools with a dance program show an increased sense of specialness, capability, confidence and empowerment among elementary school students. Schmitz (1990) states “the engagement in dance activities provides a meaningful way for students to develop motor control, basic body concepts, verbal and kinesthetic understandings, spatial relationships, and inter-and intro-personal relationships” (p. 61). Her study also confirms that students’ attitude toward school, attendance, sense of responsibility, behavior, work ethic, and academic achievement improved while participating in dance. Dance as part of the curriculum in schools creates positive outcomes for students.

Based on a true story, the popular movie Mad Hot Ballroom further reinforces Schmitz’s argument. It showcases a group of impoverished elementary school students being transformed, from reluctant dance participants to determined ballroom dance competitors, from “tough and challenging” inner-city kids to well mannered "ladies and gentlemen" (Marilyn, 2005). Another film Take the Lead also reveals how a strong-minded dance instructor uses dance to save some “troubled” teenagers. This movie is based on a real story about a ballroom dance teacher who believes in the potential of a group of problem kids in an inner city school. These misbehaving or troubled students often get detentions and they have to stay in the school basement to learn dance as a form of “punishment.” It turns out that after a period of struggling, students not only successfully survive the course of “punishment,” but also gradually regain their confidence and self worth through dancing.

Margolin’s (2008) research study was completed in the school context under the guidelines of the Ontario curriculum document. In her research, she led a series of creative movement workshops for inner-city high school female students in Toronto. She found that creative dance plays an important role in helping these girls access important
bodily knowledge, which led to deepened self-understanding, self-worth, and relationship with their peers and family members. These dance workshops offered a space for girls to use their bodies to explore their imaginations, which “can disclose the ordinarily unseen or unexpected within them” (Greene, 1995, p. 28). The emphasis of creative movement is on physical activity, individual expression, and creativity to gain an awareness of self and others, which are also addressed in the Ontario dance curriculum document (Laban, 1963; Mertz, 2002; The Arts: The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12, 2000). Dance curriculum and dance programs are needed in schools because they enable students to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their peers, the art form, and raise the level of commitment that is required, which they could apply to other subject areas both in and out of schools.

**Dance and physical education**

Over the years, there have been frequent arguments about whether or not dance should be included in physical education programs (Flores, 1995; Sallis, 1997; Foregger and Miller, 1975; Deluzio, 1998). In the province of Ontario, dance is separated from physical education and health but the separation did not come easily. In 1998 when the former ruling Conservative government tried to push through the educational reform policies (Bill 160), dance was intended to be part of the physical education program. However, under fierce public pressure and non-stop phone calls from parents, artists, teachers, school trustees and administrators, the government reversed its decision to scrap dance as an independent subject in the arts curriculum just days before the policy was launched (Deluzio, 2009).

In many Ontario secondary schools where dance is not offered, school and school board administrators have suggested that physical education teachers deliver a dance “component” as part of the physical education course. They have presented previous studies to argue their view on the combination of dance and physical education programs. Stevens (1992) advocates that the inclusion of dance in physical education would provide overall benefits to participants (students). Glaister (1987) adds that dance in physical education “teaches a child to dance instead of teaching him/her a dance.” Dance inserts
an aesthetic and artistic element to physical education, which is considered a new approach to educate “the whole child” (Roundell, 2002).

Based on the above theoretical framework, dance seems to be an excellent add-on to the physical education program. Nevertheless, the problem emerges when physical education teachers see dance as one of the many components, which they have to teach. There is then the danger of dance becoming just a technique or a kind of skill acquisition, which can be taught the same way that baseball, soccer, or basketball is taught. Teaching dance involves much more than just learning a dance piece so that specific curriculum expectations are fulfilled. Teaching dance is about enabling students to explore a different culture and to learn a region/country’s value, history, geography, aesthetic, social and economic issues.

Bleakley & Brennan (2006) assert that in physical education classes that have to include dance, the aesthetic and artistic approach in dance is often not valued or appreciated by the physical education teachers (regardless of gender). Most of them, if not all, choose not to include dance in their physical education program. Lloyd and West (1988) believe that it is due to physical education teachers’ own inadequate knowledge and experience in dance. As a result, negative consequences arise. Gard (2000) claims that boys need rhythmical and physical training and they will respond to dance as long as it is not decreed as a “sissy” activity, or as long as they are not asked to dance effeminate movements. As an educator, I suspect that dance would face extreme challenges to survive in a regular physical education course because it would be constantly ignored no matter how much theorists and administrators argued for it.

**Dance is beyond physical education**

Numerous studies have shown that increased physical activity has resulted in decreased cardiovascular disease (Powell, 1987). Increased physical activity also contributes to better weight control and a healthy body (Kelder, Perry, & Klepp, 1993; Baranowski, 1992). Despite the positive outcomes from physical activities, some studies suggest that physical education classes actually offer a limited amount of physical
activity. (DeMarco, 1989). Children in general spend less than 10 percent of their physical education time in moderate to vigorous activity, amounting on average to less than 10 minutes per week (Simons, 1990; Simons, Taylor, Snider, & Huang, 1993).

Dance engages students to coordinate their body and mind to function together while executing physically demanding exercises. Most high school dance classes provide an enjoyable school-based aerobic exercise program for adolescents. According to a survey I did in 2007, dance students who also took physical education at the same time confirmed that dance had a significant positive impact on their aerobic capacity, enhanced their cardiovascular strength, maintained or decreased their weight, or improved their attitudes toward physical activity and physical fitness (Li, 2007). Many students stated that they were less likely to feel fatigue while moving with music and traveling in space with challenging and stimulating sequences, compared to common physical education activities.

**Gender imbalance in dance education**

Studies show that teaching in general has been a preferred profession among females especially when males purposely choose not to do it (O’Donnell, 1984; Blount, 2000). Gender imbalance is exceptionally worse in dance education and there is a great need for skilled male dance teachers in order to attract and keep young male dancers engaged (Berger, 2003; Grady, 2002; Benoit, 2000; Crawford, 1994; Day, 2001). Talbot (1993) states that in order to address equity issues in dance education, we must consider factors such as gender and teaching methods. Without any argument, female dance teachers overshadow their male counterparts in large numbers for a variety of reasons. Scholars including Foulkes (2001), Keyworth (2001), Mirault (2000), and Marques (1998) have suggested that it is crucial to have male dance educators teaching dance. Male dance instructors who lead high energy and well rounded dance classes could contribute to a quality experience that in return, would successfully expand adolescent boys’ narrow perceptions of masculinity (Brennan, 1996). Having male dance teachers could also break down stereotypes that males should not dance.
While the lack of male dance instructors seems to be a problem, the method in which dance is actually “presented and delivered” is much more crucial in its acceptance among adolescent boys (p. 495). Lipscomb (1986) notes, a regular dance class warm up which usually emphasizes flexibility and coordination is often the reason why boys have rejected participating in dance. Brennan (1996) states that “female PE [physical education] has centered on educating the child through the physical while male PE [physical education] is more concerned with performance and success… women specialists who take on the task of teaching dance to mixed classes now have to re-evaluate their teaching materials, resources, and models in order to compensate for differences in experience and level of competence” (p. 496).\textsuperscript{13} She further suggests that all dance instructors including males and females should reassess their teaching methodologies and pay extra attention to what adolescent male dance students really need or enjoy. Similar arguments and pedagogical approaches to dance education are also shared among other scholars (Bond, 1994; Marques, 1998; Gard, 2001). For instance, a front split\textsuperscript{14} during the stretching section or twisting upper body movements in a jazz warm up should probably be modified to calm down male students’ nervousness. Instead, a different teaching strategy should be applied to cater to adolescent male dance students’ need in order to attract and keep them in dance. For instance, an intense section of sit-ups and push-ups would fulfill the same warm up purpose; peer stretching would work better than asking boys to do a split.

Can male dance educators or teaching strategies really change the tide so that more males will participate in or continue to take dance? Changing the gender of teacher or teaching strategies may increase boys’ participation or it may have no effect. If the whole teaching structure in dance were torn down just to cater to boys’ needs, it could generate new problems.

Firstly, we may be at risk of supporting homophobia. In order to make dance more muscular, we purposely exaggerate or add “extra strength” to certain moves or

\textsuperscript{13} Dance in the Northern Ireland Physical Education Curriculum.
gestures to avoid a commonly perceived “feminized” look. Although our intention might be to teach dance in a “muscular” way, male dance students may perceive this way of training as the “manly” and other male students who are not trained this way as “feminine or homosexual.” Secondly, we may wrongfully accuse female dance teachers of not being able to teach male dance students, which is absolutely not true. Scholars (Berger, 2003; Grady, 2002; Benoit, 2000; Crawford, 1994; Day, 2001) suggest that having a male dance teachers helps keep males in dance, yet many well-established professional male dancers are taught by both females and male dance teachers. Regardless of the gender of the teacher, these males stayed and succeeded in the profession. Thirdly, we may indirectly promote certain dance style/s, and hence create imbalanced dance training and generate a “phobia” attitude to other dance forms. For instance, teaching Hip Hop and Break Dance is an excellent way to attract males and keep males in dance. At the same time, are we saying that males cannot do ballet or lyrical jazz? I consider that teaching dance to males is a delicate process, which involves more than just the gender of the teacher and movements that are “toughened up.”

How and why

Gard (2008) debates intensively on HOW and WHY questions through pedagogical approaches to dance education. He suggests that “dance educators should seriously consider HOW students, especially males experience, think, and feel about dance rather than WHY they should dance” (p. 181). Over the years, many researchers have presented numerous studies on benefits and positive outcomes that dance could bring to human beings (Anderson, 1999; Benoit, 2000; Grillo, 1995; Hanna, 1988; Jeff, 1998; Veronique, 1996; Roenigk, 2003; Rose, 2001; Flores, 1995; Temin, 1997; Smith-Autard, 1994). For instance, Veronique (1996) lists bonus points for taking dance as increased “self-confidence, good co-ordination, proper posture and some rhythm” (p. 29). Anderson (1999) talks about the creation of an all-boys dance class that effectively attracts more preadolescents to dance. Dance scholars Bond and Stinson (2001) have collected data from approximately 600 students (age 3 to 18) from Australia, Canada, 14 Usually when the one leg is held in front of the body, and the other leg is behind, that dancer is
Spain, and the United States with an emphasis on young people’s feelings while dancing. Their study finds that many dance students experience “inner self” or a “transformed self” while dancing (p. 61). Bond and Stinson state “many young people reported feelings of heightened self, rising above limitations and boundaries… (p. 76). While acknowledging the benefits of these studies, I, on the other hand, agree with Gard that dance researchers should focus their inquiry on HOW questions rather than still rephrasing the research of WHYs. This study on male dance students could be one of the first initiatives to investigate and explore that perspective.

In dance, students learn “principles of controlling and organizing movement in space and time” (d’Amboise, & Seham, 1994, p. 2). They also explore the concept of shape and energy through different movements. These habits and skills enable students to achieve excellence in dance and other areas.

Dance students are rewarded by teachers, their peers, and others who watch the class for their “good” performances, which constitutes a great effort. Dance students are especially “supportive, applauding, cheering,” and they shout out encouragement when others are dancing or performing (Seham, 1997, p. 9). This is crucial as students’ “self-esteem and the concept of self depend on reflected appraisal” from others (Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rusman & Schumer, 1967, p. 221). In general, dance students build strong self-assurance because they are supported, encouraged, and committed to do better. At the risk of overstatement, I have to emphasize the fact that all the male dance students in this research are attending an arts school and many are taking dance not for professional purposes. They take dance because it is a recognized high school credit course and because they know there are many other boys who are currently taking dance.

Seham (1997) concludes in her study that students who participated in dance classes showed improvement in: academic performance, behavior in classroom, attitude towards school, and physical capability (endurance, flexibility and strength). She selected performing a front split.
some of the New York City public school students’ responses on dance classes in her dissertation:

We are on firm ground, confident, standing tall. We are able to face the world (our audience) with this proud and jubilant posture because we are full of life and certain of our identity. We are dancers and we derive strength from each other and together, we made a loud noise and an impressive impact. We are energized, happy, and purposeful (p. 13).

Through this research, I would like to “unearth the voices” of these young males who usually do not speak in public about their experience in dance. As a researcher, I believe that it is imperative to commence research of this kind to investigate and learn from these unique students in order to comprehend how they see, understand, define, and redefine their identity in and through dance. Gard (2003) suggests that as educators, we have to explore different approaches to knowledge, pedagogies, teaching practices, and curriculum design in regard to modifying the way we teach dance to adolescent males in general.

I had been a regular school-kid, a male dance student, who for years doubted my own existence in dance…. I am now a male dancer, a male dance teacher, and a male dance researcher. My journey in and through dance certainly maximizes my individual satisfaction and self-worth. I will use my personal insight and experience to draw connections and implications between gender and dance. I hope this study will not only unveil realities about male dancers but also reassure other males who might be confused about their identity in dance for various reasons.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Burt (1995 & 1998) noted that Western males have not considered dance as a legitimate career option over the last 150 years. This trend is reflected nowadays in the extreme ratio gap between male and female dance participants. The situation is particularly worse in secondary schools where the majority of males choose something else other than dance as an elective course. Equal access in education becomes questionable when there seems to be an invisible barrier that stops males from taking dance. It is a serious problem when many people think that there is nothing wrong with the lack of males in dance.

While it is less meaningful to assume why adolescent boys do not take dance, this research focuses on those who are active members in dance—high school male dance students. Through an examination of interviews, field observations, anecdotal notes, and reflective assignments, I investigate the experience of adolescent male dance students who are taking dance in high school. The findings of this research study on adolescent male dance students is intended to be practical, tangible, and more importantly, beneficial to teachers, dance instructors, curriculum theorists, and university professors. In order to achieve this goal, the study applies qualitative research methods to investigate male dancers at a high school.

Qualitative research

Keohane (2000) states that qualitative research covers a wide range of approaches which focus on one or a small number of cases by utilizing intensive interviews or in-depth data analysis. Although this method often uses a few cases, qualitative researchers generally unearth enormous amounts of information from their studies (King, Keohane, & Verba, 2000). Qualitative research methods allow me to explore the ways through which a ‘self’ (males) and its ‘world’ (dance) are constituted, intertwined, and coordinated (Schostak, 2002). The data in study takes the form of words or visual images, which include transcripts, field notes, photos, and personal documents rather than
numbers. This research emphasizes the process that adolescent male dance students go through rather than outcomes.

The real world we live in is a complicated set of interactions, languages, symbols, and meanings, which individuals assign to their experiences (Berg, 2001). Qualitative method serves as a “filing” system by drawing information from assorted interviews as the basis for research (Weis, 1998). In-depth interviews permit me to refer to the experts, adolescent male dance students -- to gain insight into their views on dance, gender, choreography, performance, and their construction and practice in society. In other words, qualitative analysis is an interpretive work, which shows the perspectives and voices of the people (adolescent male dancers) we study (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

“All data are representations of knowledge which are both internal and external” (Bartel, 2006, p. 350). The represented “knowledge” of dancers includes gesture, kinesthetic sensation, kinesthetic analogues of music, inter-personal reactions, and linguistic concepts of movement and interpretation. Consequently, potential sources of data in this research include students’ dancing, students’ assignments, students’ talk in semi-structured interviews, a focus-group, students’ parents, and the curriculum materials that orient the dance course instruction. Utilizing multiple information sources and carefully examining document data will provide rigor and integrity to the qualitative research process (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Kim, 2008). To enrich this research, I have applied several approaches to deepen understanding of research findings.

**Ethnography**

There is a variety of qualitative methods today and many share the main means of data acquisition: interview, observation, artefact and document analysis. What differentiates methods to some extent is the purpose or focus. In this study my intent is to describe boys’ dance experience in high school or more generally boys’ dance culture.

Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture (Fetteman, 1998). It is considered as “both a product of research and a research process” (LeCompte
& Shensul, 1999 citing LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The product (the ethnography) is generated by the researcher through “interpretive story, reconstruction, or narrative” about a specific community or a culture (p. 4). As a process, ethnography examines in detail the narratives, beliefs, values, identities, and practices of a group. In this research the narratives, beliefs, values, identities, and practices of adolescent male dancers are studied in detail.

Fetteman (1998) suggests that the ethnographer should be immersed in the community where the research takes place for “at least six month to a year to internalize the basic beliefs, fears, hopes and expectations of the people under study” (p. 35). He sees this immersing process as an essential part to effective fieldwork. Although I had been a teacher of adolescent boys for some time, during the course of this research I realized that the role of “researcher” caused me to see my students differently. I noticed that some of my presumptions about adolescent male dancers changed because of my involvement in the community and the participant observation for almost a full school year. I was able to go into greater detail in my fieldwork because I was fully engaged with my participants as part of the community.

Ethnographic researchers should have an open mind to “explore rich and untapped sources of data and they should be interested in understanding and describing a social and cultural scene from an insider’s perspective (p. 2). Fetteman further states that “the closer the reader of an ethnography comes to understanding the native’s point of view, the better the story” (p. 3). With great interest, I strove to unearth the authentic voice of today’s adolescent male dance students and their realities.

“Ethnography is a form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about” (Denzin, 1997, p. xi). In this study, the “writer” is the researcher or the ethnographer and “those written about” are adolescent male students who take dance in a high school. The “ways of life” are the experiences of male dancers. “The tools of ethnography are designed for discovery” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). LeCompte and Schensul consider that the
primary instruments for ethnographic researchers to collect data are their eyes and ears. In this study, I changed my eyes and ears from being the teacher to also being the researcher—entering dance classes to see and hear my students’ culture in a new way.

**Teacher research**

In the academic research setting, knowledge and findings are usually generated, owned, and used by researchers who largely belong to post-secondary institutions. Classroom teachers and students, who are the main subjects during the research process, see little effect after the study is completed. There is too often a “theory-practice gap, which separates the real world of practice from the ivory tower of the university” (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 9). The “gap” perhaps partially explains why males are still reluctant to participate in dance even though some relevant studies have addressed the issue. The distance between university and dance classes creates obstacles between theory and practice and therefore, hinders the real progress in promoting dance to males in general. One of the solutions to fix or eliminate such a problem is to have the teacher as researcher.

Although at one time denigrated as biased, teacher research or teacher-conducted research is now acknowledged as a means of accessing the crucially valuable and relevant experiences and observations of teachers and students as part of research and recognizes both parties as a crucial component of the teaching-learning context (Adler, 2002, citing Gallagher, 1996). Adler further states that “the quality of the data is dependent on the quality of the relationships the researcher (teacher) builds with the people (students) being interviewed” (p. 65). “The presence of students as active agents in teacher-induced classroom inquiries is essential if the findings or benefits of that research are to make a difference in students’ and teachers’ experiences of school” (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 152).
**Teacher as researcher**

Teacher research is fundamentally and professionally ethical (Cole & Knowles, 2000). First and foremost, teacher (researcher) and students (research participants) have already established mutual trust in a classroom. It is natural and professional for a teacher to carry out research with care and support about those who are observed. In this study, students may disclose their unpleasant or even humiliating dance memories in the past; the teacher (researcher) may quickly acknowledge students’ (participants) concerns and offer help. Secondly, it has legitimate educational value, where participants share their experience in dance. Within the context of teaching and learning, the research process is educational and beneficial to all participants who can see immediate progress or improvement. Thirdly, teacher research sometimes is the only solution. This study, for instance, involves all boys dance classes that can only be found at the Rosedale Heights School of the Arts, which requires me as their teacher to be a participant and researcher within my own teaching context. To address any ethical issues, I generated a list of guiding principles for this study:

My thesis advisory committee and ethics review committees at the University of Toronto and the Toronto District School Board approved this research study before it was executed.

The principal and a vice-principal at Rosedale Heights were involved in this research from the start. One of them agreed to oversee the grades and ensure that there were no “unjustified” marks for any participant/s during the process.

All participants (including girls in mixed-gender dance classes) received a letter informing them about the research. All male dance students received an invitation letter to participate in this study. Parents were aware of the study and signed the consent form before the study took place.

The selection process for the small study group was lottery-based to ensure equity, and validity. Participants did not know who was or was not involved because all
interviews took place during lunchtime and after-school settings outside the dance studios.

Videotaping had already been used for marking and choreographing in my dance class; so, it could naturally function as a data acquisition technique for this research. During the research process, audio and video files, hard copies of interview transcripts, observation notes, field notes, and assignment samples were locked in a filing cabinet in my home office.

Each small group participant was assigned a pseudonym during the research process to protect their privacy and confidentiality. When finalizing data, only pseudonyms appeared on the transcripts and in the final dissertation. All participants were informed at the beginning of the research that he could withdraw at anytime without negative consequences.

All participants were informed that they will be able to access the final dissertation (when it is completed) in its electronic form from the University of Toronto Library as well as the Proquest database through the Toronto District School Board’s E-library network system. A summary of the research findings will be sent to each participant, upon request. The Toronto District School Board, Arts department, and the Rosedale Heights School will receive an electronic dissertation at the end of the study.

**Autobiography and self-reflection**

Although autobiography and self-reflection assignments were used in this study as a means of data gathering from the participants, this approach warrants brief mention as a methodology in a more general sense, partially because my own self-reflection played a strong role in the interpretive dimension of this study. “Writing autobiography creates explorations of improvised and unpredictable human experiences where wonder and mystery, surprise and emotion, regeneration and transformation abound” (Leggo, 2004). After 25 years of dancing, performing, studying, teaching, and now researching, I am still at times bewildered by why I began to dance in the first place. I sometimes have this
question in my mind: was I the one who chose dance or was I chosen for dance? In trying to uncover the unknowns, I have applied autobiographic writing and since then, I gradually discovered that my experiences in dance have actually provided me with the opportunity to enhance and extend an understanding of myself – “the accumulated understanding of human affairs which resides in our hearts, heads, and actions” (Hunt, 1992).

Looking back, I know that my past is not only a memory, but also a word, a thought, a story, that feels like just seconds away from where I am today. Griffin (1995) writes, “we live in the present time, where the past and future are tangled and intertwined lines composing and creating who we are today” (p.149). To fully know who I am today and why I do what I do, I have to reflect on those moments in which I was completely engaged in dance in my spirit, my heart, my inner life, my imagination, my emotions, my movement, and of course, my body and my mind. My reflection is done while considering adolescent male dance students who might share similar backgrounds, thoughts, fears, and joys. I use my experience as a starting point to compare, analyze, and search for new understandings and insights.

Autobiography and self-reflection are important data acquisition components in this research. Winterson (1995) notes that combining autobiography and self-reflection is a way to understand ourselves as narratives, on a larger scale to know who we are and what we can become. Within autobiography, there are many stories. Stories, however valuable, may be puzzling as well as engaging…. Fulford (1999) states that stories ostensibly begin in order to explain something, or to make it even more clear. In this case the purpose would be to understand why these adolescent males decide to take dance in high school—their motives; their strengths; their feelings when they dance and are seen by others (girls and boys); what they want to say to others about their experience in dance; what makes them continue to take dance. All these questions were addressed through the Autobiography assignment (Appendix A-1), interviews, and self-reflections.
The arts dimension in research

This study seeks to answer the question, *what is it like to be an adolescent male dance student in today’s school?* As has been explained, much of the methodological focus is on interview and observation of classroom activity, which includes dance. Nonetheless, just because the class activity studied is “artistic” does not automatically translate that the methodology is therefore “arts-based.” The research question could have been answered merely on the basis of the verbal interview data and the research observation of regular dance classes. However, this study is “arts-based” in two specific ways: (1) it intentionally uses artistic activity to evoke data; and (2) it represents the knowledge generated within the study in artistic ways – within the documentary as knowledge-expressive dance, and within the documentary as expressive literature.

Eisner (2002) asserts, “methodological pluralism rather than methodological monism is the ideal to which artistic approaches to research subscribe…looking through one eye never did provide much depth of field” (p. 74). The artistic dimension of data evocation and knowledge representation functions as the other eye to this research.

Themes, actions, movements, and rehearsals that emerge in dance classes make up the information for my inquiry process. Such process is informed by investigating creative activities such as dancing, improvising, and choreographing. This form of investigation in turn allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the message as communicated by movements, which would otherwise be not as readily available through traditional text-based forms (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Grant, 2003; Mullen & Diamond, 1999). In this milieu, arts-based research is a realistic and tangible approach and it works both as a process and as a representational form of research rather than creating an art work for the sake of arts.

Rather than emphasizing printed textual forms, (Geertz, 1983) arts-based knowledge representation gives the text a kinesthetic interpretation and in return, it embodies the experiences and voices of the participants off the written text (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002). During the research, students had to complete a multimedia/visual
component for their Dancer & Me assignment (see Appendix A-2). One student created and performed a rap and other students either drew a picture or carved a sculpture. Students used their artistic creation as a means to express their views on dance. Their artwork further informed my understanding of the realities of adolescent male dancers. I used my understanding from the arts-based data evocation process as one of the ways to choreograph their year-end dance piece, which not only provides a live, visual, simultaneous, emotional, and physical re-creation and representation of the written text, but can also add meaning to the text itself.

**Performance**

The performance, the year-end dance piece titled *I am a male and I can dance*, was choreographed specifically to communicate the meaning of this research. It could be referred to as a culmination of all the data into a message from adolescent male dance students as well as from the researcher. During the three months rehearsal period, I studied if their perception on dance changed, how it changed, how they viewed themselves before, during rehearsal, and after the performance.

Performance inquiry is a fusion of imagination and embodiment of an individual’s identity, which is represented in and through dancing. I apply this inquiry to highlight adolescent male dancers’ self-realization, a state of “Optimal Flow” (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000), which I believe can occur during their dance performance on stage. Other theorists describe this self-realization by using the metaphor of a bridge that connects the world of the conscious (known) to the world of imagination (unknown) (Phelan, 1993). During the course of performance, adolescent male dancers explored, defined and redefined their identities by using their embodied movements between the two worlds.

To these adolescent male dance students, performing on stage in front of a large audience was an extraordinary experience, which most young males do not have. After months of rehearsing in dance classes and after school practice, students have the opportunity to perform their journeys in dance and through dance on stage: their journey
from having no experience in dance to performing, from feeling embarrassed to bravely expressing themselves through movements, from disliking dance to being a dance enthusiast, from looking down on male dancers to becoming advocates for dance to other male students. This particular experience allows young males to express themselves on stage. While performing, they reveal their inner ideas and feelings about dance, self-identity, and issues that concern them the most.

While dancing on stage, these young males’ mind and body are both actively engaged. The body is an instrument and the movements are the vocabulary for them to generate meaning and to communicate with spectators. During the creating, rehearsing and performing process, adolescent male dance students access their knowledge of the body by living in it and engaging in bodily movements (Grosz, 1994). As a researcher and a dance teacher, I consider performance an authentic, visible, and therefore, powerful means to not only keep them in dance but also to entice other adolescent male students to participate in dance. Performance in this case stands alone as a compelling way/instrument to communicate with audiences and readers.

**The Video Documentary**

Potentially created and perceived as an interpretive artistic work in itself, the video documentary in this study is employed as a utilitarian means of letting the participants speak in their own voice and allowing the “reader” to grasp the complexity of the multi-modal knowledge addressed in this study. Bartel (2006) observes that, “the documentary form offers a rich, multifaceted context, controlled to a great extent by the researcher/documentary maker.” Although the participants are allowed to speak for themselves, I as the researcher have crafted the material in an interpretive manner.

Video documentation has been widely applied in different research studies. Grierson (1971) claims that it has to meet the requirement of creativity and dramatization and that the treatment in a documentary “must be of actuality,” which means to use the original actors (adolescent male dancers) and the original scene (all-boys dance classes) to interpret the modern world (adolescent males in dance). Nicholas and Allen (1977)
point out that documentary is a type of film, which makes an argument rather than entertains or to diverts. Wolverton (1983) describes documentary as a great way to reveal and reshape reality in a universal language that compels attention and involvement regardless of one’s interests in the subject of the documentary. Renov (1993) sees video documentary as a means “to record, reveal, or preserve, to persuade or to promote and to express one’s idea.” I am more inclined toward Willard’s view; he states that video documentary intends to bring about change in the audience; change in their understanding, their attitude, and possibly their thinking toward male dancers (Sands, Lewis, & Willard, 1990).

Video documentary in this research has immeasurable power. “Images can resonate, and images can stay” (Neilsen & Hamilton, 2004). With video, I can create something with what people are telling me not only verbally but also through their embodied movements. In the end, these young males will be able to see it, respond to it and to interpret it themselves because they are the research subjects as well as the audience. Others including teachers, researchers, curriculum theorists, professors will see it, too. Video documentary in this study is to record change, monitor progress, witness transformation, collect evidence, and encourage people to rethink their ideas about males in dance. Video documentary not only works as raw data but also for analysis, reflection and dissemination purposes.

I consider video documentation a crucial component in this research. I sincerely hope that my research will inspire other educators to rethink their teaching concerning adolescent males in dance and to challenge the socially-constructed notion that dance is only for entertainment. Videotaping provides the evidence about the process of teaching young males to dance in a high school situation. It also allows for post reflection for me as a dance educator and for the students.
Research design

The purpose of this study is to locate those few adolescent males who are currently taking dance and to unveil the realities of being male dance students and focus on their dance experience in their high school years; the time when most of them are exposed to dance for the first time in their life. With that rationale, I generated a set of questions with which to investigate adolescent male students dance experiences in high school. The principal question is: **What is it like to be an adolescent male dance student in today’s school?**

To help answer the research question, I investigated and explored questions like why adolescent males take dance; how they feel when dancing; what they think (before, in, and after dance); and why they decide to take dance in the first place. Other areas I explored relate to what factors affect their choices of opting for dance; what influence comes from family members, friends, and teachers; what are their views about dance before (in elementary and junior high) and now (in high school); what are their thoughts about an all-boys dance class compared to a mixed-gender dance class; whether the gender of the dance teacher has an effect; how they have been influenced by multi-media (internet, YouTube), TV shows (e.g., *So You Think You Can Dance*, *Dancing with Stars*), and the star/idol effect (e.g., Alvin Ailey, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Gene Kelly).

Answers for these questions were obtained through interviews. The research process was an inductive, grounded, and exploratory format. I see this study as going beyond seeking adolescent males’ views on dance to looking at their views on the dance curriculum and the subsequent implications for reform in dance pedagogy. In this way, we learn about the educational values held by these adolescent males, which provide practical and reliable indicators for dance class instruction, curriculum theorizing, and teacher development.

School selection - Rosedale Heights School of the Arts

Rosedale Heights School of the Arts (Gr. 9 to 12) is located in downtown Toronto surrounded by vibrant neighborhoods such as Rosedale, St. James Town, and...
Cabbagetown. The school provides students with regular high school academic programs with an emphasis on the performing arts subjects – dance, drama, music, and visual arts (TDSB, 2009). The following chart displays the enrollment numbers from 2005 to 2010.\textsuperscript{15}

![Bar Chart: Rosedale Heights School of the Arts Enrollment 2005-2010](chart.png)

**Figure 1. Rosedale Heights School of the Arts Enrollment 2005-2010**

Figure one shows that the number of students attending Rosedale Heights has been steadily growing. This is in contrast to the majority of schools in the Toronto District School Board, which have been seeing the consistent decline in student enrollment over the last couple of years (Matlow, 2009). Despite the fact that there are many more females than males attending the school, the growth of males has outpaced females almost three fold in dance course enrollment. The following chart shows the number of females and males in dance over the last 5 years.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Numbers are provided by the principal at the Rosedale Heights School of the Arts.

\textsuperscript{16} Numbers are provided by the principal at the Rosedale Heights School of the Arts.
There are several reasons for selecting this school. First of all, Rosedale Heights School of the Arts is one of the 550 schools under the management of the Toronto District School Board, the largest school board in Canada. The school offers and encourages all students to have equal opportunity to study and thrive in all the arts and academic areas regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. Dance at this school is offered as a high school credit course. It was rated by MacLean’s magazine as one of Canada's top 10 high schools in 2005 (Bergman, Brian, MacQueen, Ken and Marley, Karin, 2005).

Secondly, Rosedale Heights School of the Arts has a large dance program. In the 2008–2009 school year, 355 students were enrolled in dance, 19% of those were males. It is interesting to note that the ratio between boys and girls who take dance is 5 to 1, which is much higher than the ratios suggested by research studies, which range from 20-100 to 1.

Thirdly, unlike traditional arts schools, Rosedale Heights School of the Arts does not require an entrance audition for students. The school policy respects students for who they are and what they want to be. It stands out in this way because teachers and administrators believe that all students should have equal access to the arts. Dance,
alongside with Music, Visual Arts, and Drama, are treated with the same value when compared to other academic subjects such as Math and English.

Finally, Rosedale Heights School of the Arts is the only public high school in Canada that offers an all-boys dance class; it has been running successfully for the last six years. The all-boys dance class started as an experiment six years ago with only a few participants. The number of boy dance students has surpassed forty and the school subsequently had to open a second all-boys dance class in 2008. In addition, there are over twenty boys taking dance in mixed-gender dance classes. According to my research, Rosedale Heights has the most male dance students compared to other jurisdictions (elementary to university level) in North America.

The large number of males in dance at Rosedale Heights contradicts the studies, which claim that few males in the West dance. Burt (1995 & 1998) suggests that in general, male dancers in the West start their training late as compared to dancers from Asia and East European countries. In fact, most of the professional male dancers with whom I have been acquainted in Canada and the United States indicate that their first dance experience occurred in their adolescent years.

**Class selection – choosing male dance students**

Due to the nature of this research, only male dance students were recruited. Selecting research subjects was not an easy task. Since most of the male dance students wanted to participate in this study, an elimination strategy had to be applied. Otherwise, the project would become much less rigorous and comprehensive up to fifty-five male dance students. For instance, with twelve participants, I was able to focus my camera on each one of them for a longer period of time during the study and videotape their subtle progress in dance classes. By devoting time and energy to a small group of participants, I believed that I would be able to investigate gender issues in dance in greater depth.

Two all-boys dance classes had the largest number of male dance students. Using the whole class for observing and videotaping purposes and then, randomly selecting nine
students for in-depth interviews seemed to be the right choice. This research also included three male dance students from the mixed-gender dance classes at different grade levels.

**Subject selection – criteria**

The selection process has to be fair and transparent. Some criteria were set to eliminate bias such as not selecting students based on technical skills. Selected candidates were chosen randomly in the hopes that they would represent general adolescent views. Since the all-boys dance classes are made up of students from grades 9 to 12, choosing students only from one grade level may create internal bias among the boys themselves. Thus students were chosen from different grade levels. This also eliminated peer pressure. Many studies have shown that peer pressure plays a major role among adolescents (Cotterell, 2007; Fine, 1991; Schneider, 2000).

Three senior grade male dance students were also selected in this research study. Like most of the boys taking dance at the school, they have never had any dance training prior to high school. Having trained at a high school level for a number of years, they have gained a substantial amount of technical skills in dance. By examining, comparing, and analyzing adolescent male dance students from different grade levels and classes, meaningful and authentic data would be gathered to show the progression and achievement that the boys have accomplished over the years.

**Process**

After the ethical review application was approved by both the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board and the Toronto District School Board’s Ethics Review Committee, I immediately contacted the principals at the Rosedale Heights School of the Arts. All three principals (1 principal and 2 vice-principals) were apprised of the purpose of this study and agreed not to reveal the aspect of the research that involved adolescent male dance students. Meanwhile, other dance teachers in the school were also notified and written agreements were signed for videotaping their classes and interviewing their students.
Permission

Permission letters and Consent forms were sent home to all male dance students for parents/guardians’ approval of their child’s participation in the study. The purpose of involving the whole dance class was for the cameraman to capture the authentic experience in the dance class. I asked all male dance students in the permission letter to volunteer in a focus group study where interviews and close data analysis were to take place.

The letter and consent forms highlighted that participation in this research was completely voluntary and non-participants would not have any negative consequences. Parents and students could then decide whether or not they would like to participate. I informed all male dance students that I would not share information about who volunteered or who did not. This would ensure students’ privacy and prevent anyone from feeling pressured to participate in the research. I also reassured the students that their participation or non-participation would not have any negative consequences on their academics nor should any students feel pressured to be in this study. In addition, I reiterated and highlighted that all participation was on a voluntary basis and students could withdraw from the study at any time during the research study.

After making several attempts to encourage return of these permission forms, fifty-four out of fifty-five boys gave permission to participate in this study. Among dance students who wished to participate in a small group study, I selected nine students from the all-boys dance classes by lottery. This group included five boys (also selected by lottery) who had taken dance for more than two years and four other boys who had just begun to take dance. Three boys, from grade 10 to 12 in the mixed-gender dance classes were also invited to participate in this research. Including students with different dance levels helped me understand their motives for taking dance and for continuing in dance.
At first, I had intended to have only ten boys in the study but later invited twelve students in case one or two students dropped out. It turned out that everyone stayed till the end.

**Data collection methods**

As a researcher, I see a strong correlation between gender imbalance and how existing male dance students see themselves in dance and how they feel when they dance. I applied several empirical strategies to acquire this data. Interviews were conducted as an essential component of this research because it provides male dance students with an opportunity to express themselves, which is authentic, powerful, and meaningful. The videotaping technique was employed because it captures the energy and the flow of the dance class, performance, and interaction between students and dance teachers. Selected assignments were collected and analyzed to comprehend the understanding of adolescent males toward dance. Furthermore, relevant literature and curriculum materials were used to ensure that this research is pedagogical and the findings beneficial.

**One-on-one interviews with students**

The one-on-one interviews were on separate occasions using a semi-structured interview guide. The first interviews took place before classroom observations began. This is the time when new students (Grade 9) begin dance and older students resume dance training. More interview questions were raised when the first semester was drawing to an end. The last interviews were conducted in June after they had just completed their year-end dance performance and were working towards their culminating activity. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes, and all took place on school premises during after-school hours or at the convenience of those being interviewed. Participants were guaranteed to have the choice not to respond to any questions asked by the researcher. The interviews were recorded on a digital audio and video recorder and transcribed. In addition, field notes were taken after each interview and were crosschecked with the audio and video file. All students were required to sign a consent form before they were permitted to participate. Meanwhile, an invitation letter was sent
to all participants’ parents informing them about the research and asking their permission to allow the researcher to commence the study.

I consider this narrative inquiry through interviews a crucial process for this study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narrative inquiry functions as a way to understand experiences. These interviews permitted me to refer to the experts, in this case, adolescent male dance students themselves in order to gain insight into their views on dance, gender, choreography, and performance and how these elements function in society.

In addition, I considered the stories embedded in male dance students’ mind, body and movements as essential and authentic ways to inform others who are bewildered by the phenomenon of gender imbalance in dance. Through these interviews, I gradually became clear about why these adolescent males took dance and what made them enjoy dancing.

**One-on-one interview with parents**

Kendall (2005) claims that “family is the most crucial element of socialization in all societies. Interviews with parents were intended to find out whether there was a correlation between their son’s preference and the final decision to take dance at high school. As well, the interviews looked into whether the parents’ thoughts on their son’s involvement in dance had ever changed. Furthermore, these interviews attempted to find out and to document their son’s comments and feelings on their dance experience at high school. A semi-structured interview guide was used and it took place during parent-teacher interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 10 minutes. Parents were informed to not respond to any questions, which they might feel uncomfortable answering. All interviews were recorded on a digital audio and video recorder and transcribed.
**Videotaping – ensuring the rights of participants**

Videotaping facilitates and makes this research alive. It captures the energy and authenticity of the dance class in action, which cannot be fully addressed by interviews and field notes. Although there are many benefits of videotaping dance classes, I am also fully aware of the responsibility to protect the rights of participants (adolescent male dance students). One of the advantages is that videotaping is a normal practice in dance class for evaluation and assessment purposes. Therefore, students are accustomed to being videotaped. I visited and videotaped both the all-boys dance class and the mixed gender dance classes, which had participants in the small group study. If some of the students did not wish to be videotaped, they would not be included. Students were clearly informed concerning the way this video data would be used. Dance combinations (e.g., dividing the class into 2 or more small groups) were used to accommodate those students who did not want to participate in the videotaping. During the research, no participant objected to videotaping. Of all the video clips (more than 50 hours), I used only those containing the focus study participants for my research. In the case where there was only one boy in a mixed-gender dance class, I made sure that the rest of the class received an information letter regarding my research and parents clearly understood that they have the option of declining their child’s inclusion in any of the videotaping sessions (Appendix F). Videotaping was limited to once a week until the data collection process finished at the end of the 2008-09 school year. Teachers involved were aware of the observation time period in an information letter (Appendix D). In the invitation letter to the parents and students (Appendix E), I highlighted that all participation was on a voluntary basis and students could withdraw from the study at any time during the research study. They understood that there would be no adverse consequences to their academic performance in the dance class.

**Assignments**

Student assignments were seen as artifacts to understand how students applied their physical embodiment (dance) into their analytical, reflective and critical thinking in theoretical ways (mind). Assignments were created with the guidelines of the Ontario curriculum, *The Arts* with a specific focus on male dancers. All assignments were
distributed throughout the school year but only selected ones were documented and analyzed. Examining assignments was a way to understand adolescent males’ analytical and reflective understanding toward dance in general. Some assignments (e.g., dancer & me and journals) were more relevant to this research projects than others (e.g., dance history and movement vocabularies).

Dancer and me assignment

Dancer and me assignment required students to create a piece of visual work as well as a short written essay about their journey in dance. For the visual component, students were allowed to create paintings, videos, pictures, websites, and any other art works that they could use to represent themselves as dancers. I considered it as a hands-on and student-driven assignment and at the same time, it assisted me in finding out where the students were in dance and what they thought about dance. The written section asked students to explain their motives for creating the visual component or explore their journey in dance and any other discoveries. The written component permitted me to gain a better understanding of each adolescent male dance student’s views on dance.

The web-blog

In this research, the use of digital data (the internet) is a prominent way of collecting adolescent male dance students’ response. The web-blog assignment was an in-class activity which required students to post responses to dance clips online. All of the students in the all-boys dance classes were required to participate. This student-to-student online interaction took place in a school computer lab. To start, I posted questions or topics for discussion. Many of the questions were taken from the autobiography assignment (Appendix A-1) and the semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B). For instance, during one of the blogging sections, I posted the question: Why did you choose to take dance in high school? I noticed that without knowing each others’ identity, students were more enthusiastic to reveal their stories in dance. Many students shared intriguing stories but only those belonging to the small group participants were used in this research. On another occasion, I posted a YouTube dance clip of a Toronto Dance Theater’s performance and an episode of So You Think You Can Dance and then, students
were invited to critique the dance. Students were allowed to complete this assignment either during the class or after school at their own convenience. I designed it this way because some students needed more time to write out their thoughts on dance while others simply preferred to work at home. Students who chose to submit their response at their own convenience would jot down notes while watching the clips during the class.

I included this assignment for two reasons. One was to get an overall response regarding their involvement in dance; it allowed me to do a crosscheck of the data I gathered from the small group interviews. Another reason was to engage them in dance reviewing activities. Over the years, I noticed that it was challenging to convince boys to purchase tickets to see a live dance performance and then, to write a dance review. I adopted this technology of letting students watch dance clips online to promote interest in watching dance and writing about dance.

The major difference with web blogging was that it allowed student-to-student interactions. With the help of blogging online, male dance students unveiled some matters that they otherwise would not discuss in public. For example, their dance experiences in childhood that affected their decision to take dance in high school; what they wanted to achieve in dance; how they felt when they dance; what made them continue/discontinue dance; what they wanted to tell others about males in dance; how they understood and used movements to convey a meaningful message; the difference in their view on an all-boys-dance class compared to a mixed-gender dance class or vice versa; and what dance meant to them as young male dancers. Web blogging strengthens the authenticity of this research by allowing male dance students to speak openly and frankly. The movie *Freedom Writers* is a good example of the power of allowing students to freely express their life experiences in journals, which were read only by the classroom teacher in a tough inner city school in New York. Those journal stories were later transformed into an award winning movie (LaGravenese, 2007).

Using digital data is different from traditional research on dance which emphasizes text-based surveys and interview transcripts. I chose to use digital data in
addition to other methods because I believe that it has a prominent place in our society. Firstly, technology has changed the world (including dance) in the last three decades. Olander (2007) claims that in the classroom, computers and computer-related technology are leading the way for both students and new approaches to learning, with schools lagging behind. Adolescents are familiar with today’s technological trends such as the use of blogging on the internet. Carroll claims that the goal for change (technology advancement) should not be to build communities of individual students, but to connect learning communities in which students learn from their peers in collaborative and cooperative relationships rather than in the “traditional transmissive, teacher-centered, fixed curriculum mode” (Carroll, 2000; Crystal, 2006).

Secondly, technology is greatly valued by today’s students. Dewey (1966) talks about students being motivated to act for purposes of inherent value to them. The web-blog is one of the more current forms of multimedia for social interactions that has the potential to serve a complete range of technical and instructional goals. Olander (2007) adds that blogs allow for writing of any length and permit connected interaction between readers and writers. Digital data (e.g., the internet) functions as an excellent data acquisition instrument to facilitate this research. Given the comfort of many teenagers with technology, students were indeed more motivated to express themselves through technology than through traditional ways.

Thirdly, technology adds another layer of protection to the research participants. For instance, students used their “nickname” rather than their real name for online contributions. Before this research started, they had chosen their own nickname and emailed their online identity to the researcher. While blogging online, male dance students could not recognize each other when discussing a topic or critiquing on a particular dance piece. Students had the opportunity to post their responses online without exposing their real name and therefore, it effectively eliminates embarrassment or even bullying when it comes to sharing their authentic dance experiences in high school. I, on the other hand, knew the identity of each web blogger and I was able to organize their responses electronically by categories.
Guideline

Throughout the research, I applied the Ontario curriculum document The Arts as my teaching guideline. This particular document is a standard document among all secondary school teachers in Ontario, which lists all expectations that students at different grade levels should meet. As a curriculum document, it is not as perfect as I would like it to be. There are concerns about the complexity of the language that the current curriculum employs.

In November of 2006, the Ontario government began to review its arts curriculum in the hopes of releasing the new curriculum in 2009. For the dance/drama division, twenty-four dance specialists were selected across the province and I was one of the representatives from the city of Toronto. It was an opportunity to meet and consult with dance representatives from all regions in Ontario. During the curriculum revision process, everyone on the committee agreed that it was almost impossible for generalist classroom teachers (grade 1 to 8) to teach dance while covering other “core” subjects such as English, Math, History and Geography, etc…. “Very few classroom teachers,” as one consultant noted, “particularly male teachers even knew what it means to plié,17 tendu,18 and grand jeté.19 We should not assume that every teacher has had dance experience in their life.”

I was more concerned but not surprised to see the extreme imbalanced gender presentation on the curriculum revision committee, twenty-three females and one male. In the past, I had frequently been the lone-male participant in occasions such as dance conferences, seminars, and workshops on equity in dance. During this particular curriculum review, numerous recommendations were put forward to simplify the curriculum document and eliminate some of the unfamiliar terminologies, but I did not see any progress in promoting males’ participation in dance.

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17 A ballet term means to bend.
18 A ballet term means to stretch.
This research is significant and beneficial in that it is a landmark approach on such a topic. It would be the first systematically orchestrated scholarly research study targeting adolescent male dance students. This research not only provides readers with greater understanding of adolescent males in dance, but it also engages the participants and helps them to understand their past, facilitates their construction of who they are today, and impacts on who they want to be in the future. With a written report and a multimedia documentation on young male dancers in a public school, I am convinced that this research will not only promote adolescent males to join dance but it will also have considerable influence on dance curriculum development and the way we theorize and construct dance pedagogy.

A ballet term means a split jump in the air.
CHAPTER FOUR: VIDEO DOCUMENTARY ON ADOLESCENT MALE DANCE STUDENTS

Video documentary on adolescent male dance students—short version (10 minutes)
~ click here to play

Video documentary on adolescent male dance students—full version (60 minutes)
~ click here to play

Along with this written report, there is an interpretative documentary film to enhance the authenticity, accessibility, visibility, and comprehensibility of this research. I called it an interpretative documentary film because I added my interpretation by selecting, sequencing, and organizing these raw data into this documentary film, which I believed could best portray who the boys were and therefore, to fulfill the research question: What is it like to be an adolescent male dance student in today’s school? It comes with three versions (one minute, ten minutes, and sixty minutes) to meet different needs.

The one-minute trailer is situated in the first chapter of this dissertation after the research question. It has a hyperlinked image of an all-boys ballet class taken in November, 2008. The one-minute trailer allows readers to have a glimpse of this research. As well, it promotes the full-length documentary film (sixty minutes) and shows the highlights of the movie by flashing through still images and short video and audio clips. The purpose of creating a ten-minute short version is three-fold—oral defense, conference presentation, and a brief summary. During the oral defense section, I plan to show this ten-minute film to all the examiners and observers. This version summarizes the research findings and gives a more detailed view of the study. In the future, I will incorporate this short film with my research findings while presenting at scholarly conferences.
The full length documentary serves many purposes. It is a condensed version of all the data, which includes videotaping, audiotaping, field notes, detailed interviews, classes, rehearsals, and performances. During the research, Margaret (camera grip) and I gathered a substantial amount of video material (over fifty hours) including jazz, modern, and ballet classes, rehearsals, studio warm ups, putting on make up, auditions, different performances both inside and outside the school. The scenes were sorted and condensed to provide viewers with a comprehensive coverage of the study. Since videotaping took place over the entire school year, it documented the changing attitudes that adolescent male dance students had toward dance at different periods of time. In the full-length version, viewers can also see the technical advancement that these adolescent males made in dance over time. Furthermore, I am working on re-editing some of the sections and I am planning to consult with film editors to see the possibilities of broadcasting this film to the public through television stations such as TVO.20 Prior to that, I will seek further permissions from research participants as well as the Toronto District School Board.

With the permission of the Toronto District School Board, principals, teachers, and male dance students as well as their parents at the Rosedale Heights School of the Arts, I was able to video document the whole research process. The raw data enabled me to look at this research in a more profound way and it also helped me synthesize any scattered concepts in my field notes. By examining all the videotapes, I am able to deepen my understanding of adolescent male dance students and what they go through while taking dance in today’s schools.

Video recording was a meaningful and powerful instrument to gain a better understanding of the classroom situation, the relationship between students and teacher, the learning environment, progression of the boys’ technique, their attitude toward dance over time, and interactions among the boys themselves. As a dance teacher, I knew that solely depending on interviews, classroom observations, and field notes was far from sufficient in capturing the energy and authenticity of the all-boys dance class. Due to the

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20 TVO is a public educational media organization in Ontario that has its own broadcasting station based in Toronto.
nature of the research topic (dance) and its fast pace, it is more accurate to include visual data (videotaping) in addition to textual data. Video data gives adolescent male dance students a voice and lets them speak for themselves and be themselves. To me as a researcher, it adds more power and meaning than quoting their statements in textual forms. Videotaping strengthens and makes field notes more intriguing to work with. It presents concrete and detailed evidence to not only support but also enliven my research findings.
CHAPTER FIVE: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data collection took place at the Rosedale Heights School of the Arts in downtown Toronto, Ontario, Canada. There were fifty-five male dance students in the 2008-2009 school year; in 2009-2010, that number went up to sixty-two. From all of them, twelve adolescent male dance students were randomly selected to be included in a small study group for this research. Due to the nature and focus of the study, only male dance students were recruited. Among participants, eleven were born in Canada, one was born in Costa Rica, but came to Canada when he was an infant. Most of the boys were born in Toronto, one in British Columbia, and two in Edmonton. Please refer to figure three for a summary of the background information about the participants in the small group. In order to address the research question: **What is it like to be an adolescent male dance student in today’s school?** I have explored all possible entities (e.g., ethnicity, family, friends, assignments, performance, and many more).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Dance experience prior to high school</th>
<th>Dance experience in high school</th>
<th>Take extra dance training outside the high school</th>
<th>Dance class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All-boys dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>African-Canadian</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All-boys dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>multi-racial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All-boys dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All-boys dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All-boys dance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 All names of participants have been changed to protect their identity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Dance Experience</th>
<th>Dance Gender</th>
<th>Dance Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All-boys dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>multi-racial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mixed-gender dance class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All-boys dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All-boys dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Mixed-gender dance class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Six months</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Mixed-gender dance class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>multi-racial</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>All-boys dance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Description of the research participants

**Ethnicity**

Having experienced growing up in another culture, I believe that ethnic background can play a role in a person’s choice of career. I want to see if there was a correlation between the ethnic background of the participants and their decision to take dance in high school. Out of twelve participants, seven participants considered themselves as Caucasian, three multi-racial, one Chinese, and one African Canadian. It was interesting to note that among all the boys who took dance at Rosedale, the majority were Caucasians while others extended their ethnic roots to countries all over the world. Coincidentally, this randomly chosen group almost perfectly mirrors the ethnic representations of the male dance community at Rosedale Heights School of the Arts.

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Robert takes an extra year to stay in high school for more dance training.
Family

For the most part, family structures were almost the same with minor differences. All participants were still living with their parents at the time of the research. Most of them had two parents and some siblings at home. Data showed that more than half of the participants came from well-educated or so-called middle or upper class families. Seven were raised in a family that had at least one teacher or a college professor. Two male dance students came from families whose parents were doctors or lawyers. Two indicated that their parents were in some form of social work with an international humanitarian organization. Among all participants, only one participant identified his family as Arts based (father was a creative director in a film production company). The following chart outlines family structures.
Figure 5. Family Structures

Family ties to the arts

The study revealed that many participants’ parents had deliberately sent their son to attend Rosedale Heights School of the Arts. Although many parents were not employed in arts or its related careers, they were somewhat involved in arts-related activities prior to their current profession. Data also shows that all participants recognized their parents as being interested in the arts or at least not against them. Seven out of twelve participants revealed that they had one or more members in their family who had an experience in theatre, dance, music, or visual arts at different stages of their life. The rest of the four boys did not talk about their family’s involvement in the arts.

Friends’ ties to the arts

Dewey (1996) stated that friendship is crucial to the creation of an individual’s sense of belonging. Adolescent male dance students are presumably affected by friendships. However, data shows that only a few participants in this research indicated their decision to take dance was influenced by their friends. Some admitted that their siblings’ participation in dance got them interested in trying out dance. Others said that they were influenced by older friends who took dance at Rosedale. Usually, they are students who went to the same junior high school with a year or two in difference.
Interacting with other peers in the school seemed to be another main reason for adolescent males to opt for dance. These dance-related conversations usually took place during lunchtime and after school. Two participants in the focus group acknowledged that casual talks among friends swayed their original thoughts on course selection. They chose dance over other subjects that they thought they would take in the first place. Lorber’s (1994) theory was strengthened as more than half of the participants admitted that their primary conception of male dancers had been fundamentally changed due to interacting with friends. As a result, they too decided to participate in dance as it no longer was associated with abnormal or female-only activity.

**Thoughts on dance**

In this study, participants painted different pictures on viewing dance. They shared some similarities, though. All participants spoke about dance as a fun and joyful activity, which reconfirmed the survey result that came out a few years ago (Li, 2007). They labeled dance as an excellent but rigorous physically demanding activity. “It is an artistic way to stay fit and healthy,” as one participant stated.

In agreement with Meglin (1994) and Yapondjian (2005) the majority of participants, eight, thought dance to be a form of expression. Their description of dance as non-verbal communication, which choreographed and arranged in space and time was mentioned in several scholarly studies (Copeland & Cohen, 1983; Hanna, 1987).

It was no surprise that two participants believed that dance was a confidence and self-esteem booster, which was confirmed by Seham’s (1997) study on an inner city school in New York. Seham’s study found that students gained better self-image and grew more positive attitudes towards school as the result of participating in dance. One participant expressed that participating in dance made him feel special.

“It is both artistic and self-rewarding. I think that dance is not only unique but rather has an interesting place in society. I mean that because people see me as a male dancer.”
Another two adolescent male dance students described dance as a beneficial subject which helped their study in music. Researchers have presented similar reports over the years (Anderson, 1999; Benoit, 2000; Crawford, 1994; Grillo, 1995; Hanna, 1988; Jeff, 1998; Veronique, 1996; Roenigk, 2003; Rose, 2001; Flores, 1995; Temin, 1997; Smith-Autard, 1994). During the parent-interview at Rosedale, many students and their parents expressed positive thoughts or changes that dance had created for their children, which were illustrated by the following chart.

Figure 6. Male Dance Students’ Thoughts on Dance

Why dancing?

This study showed that adolescent male dance students took dance at Rosedale for different reasons. Among twelve participants, seven chose dance to avoid taking gym. Some of them originally took gym at the beginning of the school year but switched to dance shortly after. Four took dance as an experimental adventure. One boy in the group confessed that the reason he took dance was because he thought dance would make him a popular person among girls. Interviews revealed that all participants had interesting rationales when it came to their decision to take dance at high school.
Figure 7. Reasons to Take Dance at High School

DeMarco, (1989) suggested that only depending on physical education to gain adequate physical activity was far from enough. Seven participants out of twelve participants or more than half of the group said that they took dance instead of gym. The original purpose for doing that varies from person to person. Some of them simply did not like sports in general while others expressed that they were tired of taking gym over the years. After taking dance for a month, they, seven participants, confessed that dance was actually more physically demanding than gym. Nevertheless, none of the participants gave up dance and switched back to gym. That was not a coincidence as several physical education theorists also voiced their concerns over how little exercise students actually receive through taking regular gym classes (Simons, 1990; Simons, Taylor, Snider, & Huang, 1993).

Two boys who originally took gym for three weeks at the beginning of the school year altered their course selection to take dance instead. They revealed their disappointment in the limited amount of physical activity required in the physical education program. David noted:\textsuperscript{23}

I first took gym class to do exercise but I did not get any because it was just sports and games. I preferred dance because it offered me more physical activities and I could work on specific muscles….

\textsuperscript{23} All names of participants have been changed to protect their identity.
Jim also stated:

I switched to take dance because I did not feel like taking gym. I felt that if I took dance, I would accomplish more workouts….

Participants were more than willing to express their overjoyed excitement in taking dance. They were eager to share their workout results, usually better posture and alignment after taking dance for a while. Meanwhile, parents also spoke out about their son’s positive experience in dance on various occasions, such as parent-teacher interviews, parents’ committee and arts council meetings.

Tom shared his exhilaration when he performed on the stage with the Hip Hop club at Rosedale, which affected his decision to sign up for dance again at high school. He described:

…African Heritage Assembly with the Hip Hop club was the turning point for me when I decided that dance was one of the things I wanted to focus on in high school.

His performing experience on stage reinforced a positive attitude toward dance which subsequently affected his course selection for high school. Originally, he came to Rosedale for music and drama. While still interested in music, dance gradually became his favorite subject. He admitted that he experienced “wonder and joy” in dance. Such positive outcome was exactly what the Ontario Ministry of Education had aimed for through its Arts curriculum (*The Arts: The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12, 2000*).

Three boys who took dance in the previous year decided to take dance again at the grade 10 level indicated that the feeling of being a big brother to junior male dance students made them want to dance. George noted:

We have some grade 9 students in the same class and it is really cool to help them out with difficult steps and movements. I took dance last year and I feel like a role model to coach them on dance moves that I knew.
Adolescents experience many changes both physically and mentally. During this difficult time, they constantly search for role models to seek approval for their own action (Dewey, 1996). Coaching others, who have never danced before, simple dance steps made these beginner dancers (2nd year in dance) feel empowered and hence, gain a sense of accomplishment. Marian (2006) and Vallance (2004) confirmed the role modeling in dance classes created a positive impact on dance students.

Few boys indicated that they took dance totally by accident. Liam shared his first break dance incidence:

I first started taking dance when my friends kind of forced me to do a hip hop class. It was not serious until I danced for a while. I was more into it when I moved up to a higher level….

Liam was not alone as many well known dancers started their dance training also by accident. Alvin Ailey, creator of the first American all-black dance company – Alvin Ailey Dance Company, majored in visual arts at university before he started dance training (Ailey, 1995). Merce Cunningham, the greatest “chance” inventor whom the New York Times claimed “altered the audience's very perception of what constitutes a dance performance” began to dance for the purpose of helping his dramatic skills (Anderson, 2009). Having never become an actor, Cunningham became a soloist in the Martha Graham Company. He later established his own dance company in New York–Merce Cunningham Dance Company, which promoted “formless but organic dance structure” (Anderson, 2009; Cunningham, 2009). He created “chance” concept in modern choreography, which challenged traditional ways of seeing and choreographing dance.

As mentioned above, Western male dancers start their training late (Burt, 1998 & 1995). Reich reiterates in his book that many reputable male dancers including José Limón, Paul Taylor, and Alvin Ailey all started dancing in their late adolescent years (Ailey, 1995; Bailey, 1997; Reich, 2005; Taylor, 1987).
Three boys acknowledged that previous physical related activities made them think that dance would be easy for them. David stated:

I used to be a figure skater for years which meant I kind of had a background for dance. I had the flexibility and jumping skills from figure skating training and I found it really helpful in dance class.

George thought that dance was not a difficult subject because he already had a substantial amount of flexibility, coordination, and strength through his figure skating training. While recognizing the role of his previous training in helping him to dance, George admitted that dance used different combinations of muscles and the requirement for flexibility was beyond his belief.

Two boys expressed that their pre-school training in tap dance made them think that they were good dancers. They wanted to become professional dancers at that time. Nevertheless, as soon as they hit school age of six, they stopped dancing. Similar to each other, both had seemingly legitimate excuse for not continuing to dance. Wilson said:

I previously took one year of tap dancing outside school and I thought it was pretty fun. I stopped taking tap because I guess I have a busier schedule with homework and [other family related] stuff.

Robert claimed:

…I stopped because there were only four guys in the tap dance company with more than sixty girls.

Their excuses to stop dance were similar to other boys who took dance at pre-school ages. Part of the reason was that they were overloaded with school work (Bartel & Cameron, 2008). I would suggest that the major reason is the change in perception of dance from a joyful and fun activity to a girly and “abnormal” one. Similar study also confirmed this attitude “switch” in choir participation among adolescent males (Adler, 2002).

In a North American setting, when boys reach school age, they realize that dance is probably not a “manly” activity since most of their peers are involved in hockey and
baseball. Although they have had positive dance experiences, boys at this age usually make the “switch” to avoid being discriminated against or even harassed (Acker, 1994; Gard, 2008; Grumet, 1988; William, 1995). They want to pursue activities (sports), which are deemed acceptable by those around them to build or maintain their social networks (Aalten, 1997; Connell, 1989; Gard & Meyenn, 2000).

**Source of influence for boys to take dance**

Data show that there are three key groups of people who affect adolescent male students’ decision to take dance in high school – individual, school staff, and family or friends. Eight out of twelve participants who took dance for a second year or more responded that apart from their own preference to continue dancing, teachers and principals were the sources of influence. They further added that performing on stage, in which they experienced a state of optimal enjoyment (Jackson & Eklund, 2004) or flow, a state of complete absorption in dancing (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000), was also a key factor. The following chart reveals the source of influence for boys to take dance.

![Figure 8: Source of Influence for Boys to Take Dance](chart.png)

**Figure 8. Source of Influence for Boys to Take Dance**

**Individual**

Three boys pointed out that it was their own decision to take dance at high school. Alan described:
…taking dance seems to be a norm at this school [Rosedale Heights School of the Arts].

To him, it was safe to participate in dance in an arts school because few or nobody would criticize his preference for liking an activity which was dominated by females. Unlike Alan, Tom recalled his action for taking dance by saying:

…nobody, I was a grade 8 student at the Cosborn Middle School when I got the course selection form for high school. I looked at it and noticed that dance was on the sheet. I decided right there to change things a little bit to get a different flavor in my life.

Both students knew that they were going to take dance in an arts school. To Tom and Alan, an arts school somehow created a warm environment and hence, a safe place for them to pursue something they would not normally do if it were at a regular school (Coe, 2002; Elliott, 1990; Strachan, 2004). It is worth mentioning that on the course selection sheet, there was an option for boys to either take an all-boys (all boys without girls) or mixed-gender (girls without or with a few boys) dance classes. The result might be different if there was only mixed-gender dance classes offered on the sheet. In this study, both boys chose to take dance in an all-boys dance class. As a researcher, I would like to explore whether or not the course availability in the school had any impact on the students’ decision to take dance at high school.

**School staff**

Three boys stated that school staff, teachers and principals were a factor in deciding to take dance. All of them implied that gender played a major role when they consulted with school staff about making the final decision. Jim articulated:

I would say that teachers have affected my decision to take dance. It is great to have a teacher [male] whom you could relate to and has sense of humor… [In the end] it is me who wants to do it [again] and [because of] the inspiration I got from the dance teacher.

Studies indicated that in order to attract males to dance and to keep them in it, more male dance teachers had to be recruited in the field (Berger, 2003; Grady, 2002;
Benoit, 2000; Crawford, 1994; Day, 2001). Skilled male dance teachers could create a positive experience and hence, encourage more males to participate in dance (Bleakley, & Brennan, 2006). Rosedale Heights, for example, successfully increased its male dance students’ population partially due to the fact that it had an experienced male dance teacher.

Carter was taking a grade 11 dance major course when this study took place. In a dance major program, he was required to take both ballet and modern technique on a daily basis. He loved the challenges in dance and the encouragement from others around him.

*Carter:* I tried it [dance] in grade 10 and I enjoyed it a great deal. My teachers and friends challenged me to take the dance major course and I am really excited to see my progress in dance….

Robert who was taking dance at the school for the fifth year used this opportunity to thank teachers and principals for all their support in his dance training. As a beginner dance student when he first came to Rosedale, Robert had never thought that he would choose dance. In dance, he accomplished more than many people ever expected that he could possibly do. After four years of training in dance both in and outside school, he set his mind to become a professional dancer in the future. Recently, he performed with Opera Atelier, a well-known Canadian performing arts company specializing in Baroque opera and dance.

*Robert:* …I did get a lot of encouragement from teachers at Rosedale to take dance classes outside the school and get involved in as many things as possible, which turned out to be hugely beneficial to me. The principal [Rosedale Heights School of the Arts] is really supportive. He is always enthusiastic and excited to hear about something that I am doing. For instance, along with another girl, I was a poster boy for Opera Atelier’s 2008 production *Abduction from the Seraglio* [photo credit: Bruce Zinger, 2008]. My images are seen on all the pamphlets and programs. He (principal) took quite a few copies from me and distributed to other teachers and his friends….
Both Rose, (2006) and Hanna (1998) suggested that people of authority (teachers and principal in this case) could effectively influence boys’ decision in dancing. Carter was promoted from a dance minor (dance twice a week) to a dance major program (dance daily) and Robert had an opportunity to dance with a well-known Opera company in Toronto. It was not easy as Robert and Carter still faced many challenges in dance training but instead of giving up, they worked harder. Scholars suggested that boys would be more engaged in dance when others recognized their potential (Crawford, 1994; MacKenzie-Bourne, 1996; Grillo, 1995). While witnessing their improved dance skills being recognized by others (teachers and principals), adolescent male dance students gradually changed their mentality from seeing dance as a joke to a serious subject area.

Family and friends

Five boys expressed that family and friends influenced their decision to take dance. David talked about his parents’ previous arts-related experience as a main factor, which affected his decision to take dance. Before course selection, his parents reminded him that he had taken gym for all his previous school years. They suggested that it might be time to try something new.

*David:* My parents had the biggest influence on me. They thought it would be great to take dance. Both of my parents were every involved in the arts until they were in their late 20s. My mother likes dancing and stuff like that….

Interestingly, he was the only one in this interview who talked about the influences from other male dancers whom he watched on TV shows. He described those male dancers as role models in his life.

*David:* Media created a lot of influence on me as well. *So You Think You Can Dance* Canada put on all types of dance and many males are in it. I was always eager and excited to watch that show. Sometimes I would try something they did on my own.

Two boys in this group claimed that their parents were liberal in terms of giving them freedom to choose their courses in high school. They were not sure whether to take gym or dance. Parents indirectly suggested dance. They advised that dance was not
something you could take in every high school. Participants also admitted that their friends who took dance also became influential for them to take dance. Liam shared a story about how his mom’s involvement in persuading him to take dance seriously:

> My mother is being too supportive that she even takes class at the place where I used to dance. She is not a dancer as she used to be a figure skater when she was little. I think that she tries to convince me that if she can do it, so can I….

Data show that while most of the parents were not involved in the arts at the time of the research, their previous experience in the arts or dance directly or indirectly affected their son’s choice in taking dance at high school. Needless to say, these parents were arts advocates since they signed the admission letter to allow their son to go to an arts school.

**Family views on dance**

Almost all the participants in this study confirmed that their families support their decision to take dance at high school. Some indicated more while others claimed less. Out of all the participants, only one boy indicated that he had trouble explaining his rationale for taking dance to some of his family members.

Being the only African-Canadian in the study, Jim complained about mixed views that he received from his family members:

> Some [family members] are against my decision to take dance. They suggest that I might as well take gym. Others in my family actually supported my decision to take dance. It was like half-half and I was confused about their willingness of whether or not they supported me to take dance in high school.

Kyle did not expect to take dance at high school. However, he assumed that his parents supported him because his mom signed him up for dance without his consent. Meanwhile he indicated that his mother promised him that he could drop the course if he did not like it. His story coincided with mine, in which my parents ordered me to take
dance. The difference was his parents allowed him to drop if he did not like it whereas I did not have the choice but to continue dancing.

Participants in this research listed different kinds of supports that they received from family. Alan, a Ukrainian and Southeast Asian Indian multi-racial male dance student boldly guessed that it was his father’s inability to dance that made him support his son to dance in high school. Alan joked:

My father probably has two left feet and he is not even musical. He had a hard time chasing my mom, a Ukrainian girl, who was good at folk dance.

Being a Southeast Asian Indian, it was assumed that his father would know how to dance. His lack of knowledge in dance possibly resulted in recommending their son to take dance in high school.

Two boys who took dance for the second year admitted that their family’s involvement in the school productions made them look at dance seriously. They told that their parents were so stunned and impressed by the year-end dance performance that they came to volunteer for this year’s dance production. One parent worked backstage ironing and assisting with make-up while the other one spent a few nights at the school building props for the dance show.

Parents showed their support in different ways. Tom’s parents would push away the furniture in the living room for him to practice dance movements. While seeing their son’s dance routines, both of his parents agreed that dance was much more physically demanding than they had expected.

It was intriguing to see how a professional dancer within a family affected another family member’s thinking on dance. Carter talked about his mom who used to be a ballerina, which changed his father’s mind for financing him to take dance lessons outside of school. It is proven that a person who has strong interests in a certain subject can easily sway another person’s mind (Fine, 1991). Dewey (1996) suggested that one’s
past could greatly affect his/her present. In this case, Carter’s mother support of her son to take dance was influenced by her previous experience in dance.

Two boys shared similar scenarios in which their mothers acted as cheerleaders for dance in the house. These mothers watched *So You Think You Can Dance* and *Dancing with Stars* on TV and they took dance classes as a hobby. “My mom loves dancing so much and she would show me what she learned from the dance studio. That was a bit too much,” Liam raised his eyebrows when he said that. “The whole family came to see my performance, though, which was really nice” he added. David’s parents suggested that taking dance might open new doors for him. His dad was a popular high school student who was really good at all sports when he was attending a high school in Mississauga, Ontario. He told David:

…the whole of sports is great, but it would be even better if you open to new ideas such as dance and other forms of arts. You don’t know what will end up being useful.

While it was difficult to compare dance and sports, many agreed that the number of males participating in dance had increased in recent years (Bev, 2001; Mirault, 2000; Milner, 2002; Grillo, 2005). From Ted Shawn’s first all-male dance company (Ron, 1989) to Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival (Carman, 2002) to *Billy Elliot* (Daltry, 2000), and to the popular TV program *So You Think You Can Dance*, it became harder for anyone to ignore the visual appearance of male dancers. Some parents considered dance as a way to become an instant celebrity while others looked at dance more realistically and logically.

Wilson and Robert admitted that they had all their parents’ support for taking dance but they ended up with different results. Wilson took advantage of his parents’ support by convincing his mom to buy a Wii-Fit game for him to increase his flexibility and strength in dance although he spent most of the time on *Mario* games. “It really worked,” he whispered.

Robert reluctantly explained his mixed feelings toward his mother’s support. He assumed that his mother did not fully understand what it took to be a professional dancer.
He was curious to know if his mother would still support him if she knew how much it really took to become a professional dancer.

*Robert:* She [my mom] does not fully understand how much work it takes and how tiring it can be. After school and dance training, I came home really late at night. She asks me to do more things when the only thing I could do is to go to bed. …I find it really hard to make my own parents understand what it takes to be a professional dancer.

Willis (1981) discussed in his book how working class kids get working class jobs. Many parents would want to see their children pursuing the same or similar careers that they do, partially because of familiarity, or their own fear of experimenting with something “unsafe.” For example, Liam claimed that his mom tried to convince him to do figure skating since she did it when she was a kid. It did not work. While conflicts can exist between parents and adolescent male dance students, a respectful and meaningful communication is recommended by some researchers (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Montemayor, 1983). In Robert’s case, his mother would understand better if Robert took her to observe one of his ballet classes and explained to her the rigorous physical training and the time consuming process to become a professional dancer.

**Friends’ views on dance**

Participants received mixed responses from friends who expressed some support or acceptance to their involvement in dance. Still, data showed that there were misunderstandings and bias among their non-dance friends. They could be organized into four groups – partial acceptance, full acceptance, self-acceptance, and beyond acceptance – role models.
Partial acceptance

Three boys were in the partial acceptance group. All three expressed that they were all supported by their friends at Rosedale where they took dance and other academic subjects. However, when they talked about their dance experience to friends outside school, they received less positive remarks. Jim mentioned his friends laughing at his preference to take dance at high school. They were surprised to hear that Jim did not take gym but dance. “Don’t you have physical education?” They asked. Jim would defend himself by saying “dance is my physical education.”

David and Liam shared similar experiences in which they were deemed by their outside school friends as un-macho and unfit men because they took dance. Liam felt so insecure that he would tell his friends that he was only in the Hip-Hop club. He argued that “it (Hip-Hop) is extremely popular among teenagers and there is nothing bad about that.” Gard (2000, 2001, & 2002) presented similar findings on males’ attitude toward sports and popular dance forms. David shared his friends’ unpleasant but somehow stereotypical comment on dance which might represent the majority of people’s view on males in dance.

David: …my old friends from my former school (catholic school) respond very differently. They think that only girls should dance. They accept
skating because they can relate it to hockey, which is a man thing. They would say to me like: “Wow, dance, that’s weird.”

Full acceptance

Five boys admitted that their friends fully accepted their involvement in dance at high school. It was noticeable that their remarks on this topic tended to be short and succinct. Usually it was described as “that’s cool,” “that’s neat,” or “it’s fascinating that you take dance in high school.” All of them had friends both inside and outside the school who were actively involved in dance or in other art subjects. These students thrived in a comfortable environment in which they were supported and accepted and dance seemed to be a norm to them and those around them. Carter considered himself fortunate to be one of the treasures in this profession.

*Carter:* …none of my friends [males] has done anything like that [dance] before. They think it is really neat to know how to dance. They know that not many boys are in dance and I am one of the few. They are happy that they have a male dancer friend.

Their participation in dance was not only accepted but also celebrated. While dancing, they established a sense of belonging and identity and they felt comfortable among others in a high school (Kendall, 2005). They were confident not necessarily because they were good dancers but they valued what they did in class and they enjoyed the time while dancing.

Self-acceptance

Two senior dance students who took dance two years or more expressed their confidence in dance. Both took dance seriously and both rejected the stereotypical views that males should not dance. Robert explained that being a senior dance student (5th year in dance) in the school, friends saw him as a principal dancer.

*Robert:* My friends look at me as more of a dancer rather than a regular high school kid because I am so involved in dance performances both inside and outside the school.
Nonetheless, he gave credit to the fact that he was in an arts school in which everyone was enthusiastic about others doing arts. “If I were in a different school, I don’t think it would be the same,” he concluded. Tom who took dance for the second year was confident about his choice for taking dance. He confidently stated:

I don’t like people who disrespect my decision to take dance or any other subjects I take at the school. I decide not to be around those people. I like dance and music in general. I see no point to include those people who don’t enjoy what I like in my life.

Research shows that adolescents reject easily those who disagree with them and form their own theory to justify and legitimize what they do (Palen, 2008; Martino, 1999; Pleck, 1993). In this case, adolescent male dance students justify their taking dance as enjoyment, having witnessed and experienced positive outcomes both physically and mentally. Similar arguments have been presented by numerous theorists (Anderson, 1999; Benoit, 2000; Crawford, 1994; Grillo, 1995; Hanna, 1988; Jeff, 1998; Veronique, 1996; Roenigk, 2003; Marian, 2006; Flores, 1995; Temin, 1997; Smith-Autard, 1994). Henslin (1993) and Poloma’s (1979) argument concerning how individuals regularly modify their behaviors in order to be accepted by others is not the case we see here. These students deliberately choose to take dance again not to form alliance with whom they are comfortable and familiar (Aalten, 1997). They simply want to experience again what they enjoy the most both on stage and in studio.

**Beyond acceptance – role model**

Two boys expressed that they went beyond acceptance. They considered themselves as role models in high school. Both boys were popular in the high school and both were fully supported by their family and friends for taking dance. They loved the physical challenge and artistic approach in and through dance and were eager to share their positive experience in dance with others. In return, they both inspired a couple of other male students who were not sure about dance to sign up and take dance in high school.
David suspected that misunderstanding existed due to the low interest among males. He assumed that if more males participated in dance, it would become pointless to call anyone names such as gay or girly man. David further unfolded his personal saga to other male students:

…everyone [at Rosedale] around me thinks it is a cool idea to take dance. They are really supportive and saw me as big brothers in dance. …one of my friends, Ken, did not take dance at the beginning but saw the amount of work I put into dance. He switched to dance and since then, have enjoyed it quite a bit. There is no downside if everyone does it [dance]. But if only one person does it, he can be singled out.

Gender identity is well established here as dance is a normal activity to a large number of male participants. They see movements as organic and foundational to represent the whole body and mind (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999). Dance as a subject is subsequently reinforced in all social interactions, in which male dance students encourage other males to participate in dance (Messner, 2000; Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, & Messner, 1997). There is no gender discrimination against male dancers in any form, instead, dance is celebrated and promoted among adolescent male students. Students in this safe and comfortable environment can freely enjoy taking dance with little or no social repercussions.

**Social repercussion**

Two out of twelve participants indicated that they experienced certain forms of social repercussions. The majority of students either said not at all or their friends simply accepted the fact that they took dance at high school. Students also pointed out that their friends’ responses varied; some of their friends expressed less welcoming comments while others thought it (taking dance) was an interesting adventure.

In total, eight students stated that they had never experienced any social repercussion. Four students or half of this group were students who took dance for the first year. Due to the fact that this interview took place early in the school year, many of them did not have a chance to inform others about their involvement in dance.
For those who took dance for a year or more, they replied with similar responses such as “not really. Nobody has ever criticized or judged my decision to take dance. None of my friends or family members thinks it is abnormal for me to take dance as they are quite open to it.” Three students did not pay too much attention to how others felt towards their involvement in dance. Jim stated “… it is really just that they accept it. It is a course and they cannot do anything about it.” Carter assumed that it could have been a different case if he were in a non-arts based school, but so far nobody had ever looked down on him because he took dance.”

Alan and David had a slightly different experience. They both expressed that their friends (outside Rosedale) thought dance was an unfit subject for them to take in high school. “If you take dance, you are strange,” one of David’s friends said. However, “it did not happen a lot as most of my friends supported me for taking dance,” he added. Alan reiterated his friends’ comments:

Wow, that’s amazing or that is fascinating. Some would giggle when they comment. I don’t think that they were shocked. I think that they were more surprised because I am a clumsy person. I don’t look like someone whom they think would normally take dance.

He laughed when he said that.

Robert and Liam were the only two students who revealed that they experienced some form of social repercussions.

Liam: …when I told my old friends outside of the school that I am taking ballet, they were saying what the fxxx. They started to laugh at me.

Coming from a sports oriented school, Liam was the only one from that school who came to Rosedale for the arts. Most of his friends went on to high schools that focused on physical education and other competitive activities. On many occasions, he almost had to argue with his former friends about how much dance required both physically and mentally. He further stated:

I really liked ballet. I did not feel there is anything wrong with it. I did not let their comments/attitudes get to me. I personally enjoyed it dearly and to me that matters the most. All my male friends are playing sports. They
quickly stopped when they noticed that I was not bothered at all. I actually told them that ballet is one of the hardest dance styles ever.

Stevens (1992) and Glaister (1987) both advocate that dance should be under the physical education curriculum. To many people, physical education teachers are supposed to deliver such experience, too. In reality, that is not the case. Liam spent three years in a junior high school that focuses on sports. One would assume that he must have had a certain form of dance or movement-based training, or at least, students in that school would not look down on people who take dance. It might be due to their physical education teachers’ lack of experience in dance (Lloyd and West, 1988). Bleakley and Brennan (2006) state that dance is generally not valued in the school and students rarely have any opportunity to learn dance. Consequently, male students assume that only girls dance and dance, therefore, is inevitably deemed as a “sissy or taboo” activity to males (Gard, 2000).

Robert brought up the gender imbalance issues in dance where girls greatly outnumber boys. He admitted that while juggling his busy ballet training schedule both in and outside school, he felt lonely sometimes. He delivered his message in a calm but gloomy tone:

The main one [issue] would be that dance is about 97% girls. I have some guy friends but I don’t have any strong base guy friends. I find that [is] frustrating. That means I am always hanging around with girls most of the time, which is nice at times. I have a really hard time making good friends who are both in ballet and whom I want to hang out with. Another thing is that I devote most of my personal time to train myself in ballet. That means I have little time to enjoy other teenagers activities [party, club, movie, etc.].

Nonetheless, Robert emphasized that he fully understood that it was his choice to stay in dance. He knew that he was considered to be a late starter. Robert began to take ballet classes seriously when he was about sixteen years old with little dance background compared to many others who started dance when they were six “I got a lot to catch up on,” Jack smiled and shrugged his shoulder when he said that.
Jim’s comment on the number of males and females in dance was never a surprise. Both scholarly studies and reality show the evidence of few males in dance (Burt, 1995 & 1998; Bartel & Cameron, 2008). While males enter dance with different purposes (Pringle, 1995; Aalten, 1997; Tewksbury, 1993), it is no doubt that it takes a lot of determination and perseverance for any males to stay in dance.

**Dancer & Me**

I chose the *Dancer & Me* (See Appendix A-2) assignment because it was more relevant to this research compared to other practical knowledge based assignments (e.g., dance essay, history and vocabulary). This assignment is distributed to grade nine and grade ten students at the beginning of the school year. Boys dance classes have been doing this assignment for the last three years. The *Dancer & Me* assignment was for me, as a researcher, an informal data acquisition technique in order to gain a better understanding of adolescent males’ analytical and reflective understanding toward dance in general. To me, it was a hands-on and student-driven assignment to find out where the students were in dance and what they thought about dance. It presented a real challenge for them to explore and define their identity in dance.

The *Dancer & Me* assignment was distributed to male dance students in November, after two months of dance training. In this assignment, students were asked to apply a variety of means to interpret their current state in dance and to describe how they saw dance as male dance students. This assignment consisted of two components: visual and written. Visual was an open-ended multi-disciplinary piece of art work (painting, video, pictures, website, and more) that students applied to represent themselves as dancers. The other component was a written section in which students explained their motives for creating the visual component or explored their journey in dance and lingering discoveries.

The *Dancer & Me* assignment was well received by many male dance students, including those who were not in the focus group. Many saw this assignment as a safe platform for them to express themselves as a male dancer. One of the students
commented that it (*Dancer & Me*) was the only place for him to truly voice himself without any other distractions. All eight focus group participants, who were required to complete this assignment, handed in the assignments. Overall in the all-boys dance classes, the turn-in rate for this assignment was higher than those of other dance assignments (essay writing and vocabulary review).

Studies (Hanna, 1989; Weissberg, Caplan, & Harwood, 1991) show that dance promotes feelings of competence and excitement. However, it is rarely seen that adolescent males share their personal experience in dance verbally or publicly. It might be due to the fact that they are afraid of being labeled as “abnormal or gay,” a critical theory on gender and sexuality argued by Gard (Gard & Meyenn, 2000, p. 216). I, on the other hand, believe that males have profound experiences that come from their involvement in dance. Male dance students would be more likely to share if we provide them with the right circumstances.

The *Dancer & Me* assignment indicates that students could apply multi-disciplinary methods to express their thoughts on dance, which in many ways recognizes those students who learn and communicate differently (Gardner, 1993). Researchers argue that traditional text-based forms offer limited choices (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Grant, 2003; Mullen & Diamond, 1999). This assignment invites students to reflect on their own experience in dance and to create something that is non-traditional, but meaningful, truthful, and exciting to all (Carroll, 2000; Crystal, 2006). These student-centered assignments reveal many interesting stories about boys in dance without disappointment.

Submitted *Dancer & Me* assignments shared some similarities and differences. Notably, many first year participants used this assignment to talk about their “bumpy ride” toward taking dance when they first started. The turning point seemed to come after two months of dance as most of them started to get used to this physically demanding activity. For those who were taking dance for the 2nd year, their assignments usually focused on the positive experience in dance; for example, the change of attitude towards
males in dance, benefits from taking dance for a year, and of course the year-end dance performance.

The written component was not easy. Boys expressed that it was difficult to dance physically and it was even more challenging to write about their experience in dance. They had a hard time organizing their thoughts about dance into words. Each boy had a distinct story to tell or a message to the public in the end. For the visual component, some participants chose to create a sculpture or compose a rap while others applied the traditional pencil and paper strategy to layout their thoughts. No matter what form they utilized, the results were fascinating.

Bruce – 2007

Bruce was a typical male student who would normally stay away from dance if he were in other schools. Unlike other boys who applied multimedia art form to make their visual component look fancy, he chose to simply use pencil and paper to sketch out an authentic and, to me, the most creative and self-explanatory picture. To me, his artwork could reflect the image that many males might have in regards to dance. In his text-based component when he was a grade 9 dance student, he confessed his struggles in making the decision to dance:

I am not going to lie. I am not a dancer, I never have been and I never will be. I have never actually been interested in dance in particular, until I had to choose between dance and gym. Before high school, I’ve never had to dance and I certainly didn’t want to. Choosing dance was a difficult decision because I did not want to be mocked in school, and nicknamed….

As a student who was deeply interested in the arts, Bruce wanted to become either an actor or a painter. He found that selecting Rosedale as his high school was an easy choice but making a decision to take either gym or dance was a hard one for him. He wrote:

What was I going to do? Look all fruity and girly in a tutu and prance around with girls? I knew I’d be the only guy, and I’d get ridiculed, or even bullied. Was that worth not having to throw a ball eighty thousand yards, just to get some damn respect? Well, in the end it all came down to the pool. If there was anything that I hated as much as sports, it was the
swim class! So ultimately, I would rather be made fun of in girly stuff. I chose dance!

Bruce was not alone. Quite a few boys chose dance for the same purpose – to avoid taking gym. One might suspect that they abandoned physical education because it was seen as a heterosexual activity as Shawn (1960) suggested, and they were homosexual. On the contrary, this research found that many boys in dance at Rosedale were not in any way homosexual. They certainly did not have to or want to defend their masculinity or an ideal manhood by taking gym (Connell, 1995; Kidd, 1987; Parker, 1996; Martino, 1999; Messner, 1999). For many, they just wanted to have a protective experience or in Bruce’s case, something not as bad as gym.

Bruce also talked about his first dance experience in his life – a dance placement class in grade 9. According to his description, it was a traumatic and unforgettable experience that he claimed that he would remember for the rest of his life. His early struggles in dance were, in many ways, similar or identical to many other male dance students’ first dance experience. He described:

I was extremely intimidated. I found myself surrounded by about forty girls in complete dance attire. I was wearing a T-shirt and some pajama bottoms. I felt and probably looked like a complete idiot. I was sweating and shaking while standing there and thinking about what dance class would be like later on. I would be the only boy taking dance with all girls. Stomping stupidly and tried to catch up with difficult dance routines. Just the thought of it almost made me pee in my pants. I was so scared by this that I was seriously considering switching to regular gym where I would have to suffer just one more year…
In grade 9, Bruce’s Dancer and Me assignment looked gloomy and disappointing. However, as time went by, Bruce found an increased interest in dance. Instead of giving up dance, Bruce excelled in dance. In 2008, Bruce took the grade 10 dance again in an all-boys dance class. He gained a grade over 80% in dance by working hard. His
progress was so remarkable that the dance teacher chose him to dance a lead role for the year-end dance performance. Even more encouraging is that, according to a guidance councilor in the school, Bruce had already signed up for grade 11 dance.

After taking dance for a while, Bruce’s conceptual knowledge of seeing and thinking about dance had changed completely compared to when he first started. His opinion towards males in dance had been reformed by the reality (physically dancing instead of talking about dance); a theory confirmed by Smith (2004). His active involvement in dance physically and mentally was definitely a major contributor to his positive attitude change. Dance to him was not limited to a “form of imitation” (Halliwell, 1998) or “a faithful likeness of beautiful nature” (Chapman, 1979). Dance to him meant traveling through time and space on the stage and in the studio (Copeland and Cohen, 1983). It was “nonverbal communication” for him to make himself known to the others (Hanna, 1987). In the 2008 Dancer and Me assignment, he showed a much different attitude towards dance. He wrote:

… These days my outlook on dance is extremely different from how it began. I am much more physically competent in dancing and I look at dance as more than just an emotional art for girls or even just an alternative to gym class. Dancing with boys makes me stronger. I feel that I am more manly than ever when dancing. I have learned a lot about myself through dance. I don’t feel as self conscious and flimsy as I did before. I am gaining greater self-esteem and confidence. It helps me get anger and fear out by taking my mind off the affecting factors outside of the dance studio. Although I have a very long way to go in terms of skills and technique in dance but I do believe in my ability to become a better dancer!
Michael had quite a different approach to dance according to his Dancer in Me assignment. Having dreamed of becoming the Canadian David Beckham, Michael worked extremely hard before and after school playing soccer with his neighbors, friends, and teachers since he was a child. Before coming to Rosedale, he heard that dance could benefit his skills in soccer, which became a major reason that he chose to take dance.

*Michael:* I chose dance to help with my future career - soccer. I heard that dance helps the way people play soccer and football. I noticed that I
moved more graceful and handle the ball sharply since I took dance. I take it because I want to be a professional soccer player when I grow up.

Research (Messner, 2000; Saillis, 1997; Kidd, 1987) confirmed that dance produced a better quality of training for people involved in sports. Dance, especially ballet, was recognized and adopted among many American football teams for their players to gain a higher level of balance, strength, and flexibility (Cooke, 2008). In 1984, the Cleveland Browns football team hired Roni Mahler, a ballet teacher, for twelve weeks to train players taking ballet technique classes to reduce groin injuries (Howard, 2004). The result was encouraging as players reported that ballet, especially with its turnout method, helped them better control their body and consequently, decreased the chance of injuries.

Like other male dance students, flexibility to Michael was the most challenging part in dance. In general, the majority of boys in dance showed their resentment to stretch routines, especially when they had to be stretched by their peers. It was called peer-stretching, a routine where two students faced each other sitting, legs open sideways, while pulling each other with their hands. Despite the painful experience, all boys in the class recognized that limited flexibility slowed their progress in dance. In regards to flexibility, Michael wrote:

…I think one of the things I have learned in dance is [that] I am not very flexible! As soon as he [dance teacher] says anything to do with stretch, I freak out. I always want to yell and swear when we do peer-stretching. When stretching, I feel that my little “brother” is going be exploded. It is awful but I know that is something I definitely have to work on.

Michael was placed in an all-boys dance class but stated that he did not mind being in a mixed-gender dance class. He was one of the few boys who saw almost no difference between an all-boys dance class and a mixed-gender dance class. In fact, he liked to impress girls with his dance skills.

*Michael*: Having an all boys dance class doesn’t really change my way of seeing dance because I never found dance to be very feminine. Ballet leans a little over to the feminine side. But after taking a month of ballet, I don’t think so at all. It doesn’t matter to me dancing with an all-boys
dance class. I know that being in a girls dance class [mixed-gender dance class] wouldn’t be bad, if you know what I mean.…

Boys chose dance for various reasons. Some took dance for fun and others chose dance because their friends did it and enjoyed it. While nobody was as serious as people in Southern China who used dance as a way to look for companions (Wei, 1999), most boys in this research stated that meeting girls was not their reason to participate in dance.

Similar to Bruce and other male dance students, Michael talked about his transformation from a potential soccer player looking for supplemental training without any seriousness about dance to an engaged and dedicated male dance student.

*Michael:* After dancing for a while, I start to like it. No, I begin to love it. My feelings toward dance are positive and I fall in love with dance. I am not that great at it but I still love to move with music just like I have the ball in a soccer field.

Michael’s visual component showed a young boy who worked hard in hope of becoming a strong, flexible and, according to his word, an attractive male dancer.
David

As a first year dance student, David expressed his preference for dance. Born in Costa Rica, his families and friends were quite involved in the arts when he was a little boy. In his written component, he poetically expressed:

I have always enjoyed the look of dance. Whether it was Michael Jackson doing the moon walk, Mikhail Baryshnikov leaping to great heights or the body isolation performed by mimes, the look of dance has always appealed to me.
I think it is fascinating how dance can be a way of expressing emotion through movement, such as Elvis Presley’s anger and sexuality, Fred Astaire’s sense of romance and Rudolph Nureyev’s passion for life.

After a few months of dance training at Rosedale, David used this assignment to unveil other factors which made him want to take dance seriously. His thoughts on the influence of multimedia on dance were commonly shared among other male dance students, he wrote:

…I enjoy watching the T.V. show *So You Think You Can Dance Canada* with my family. I love to recognize some of the moves that they do on stage and [I do] in my dance class at Rosedale. Dance is a growing business and may be part of my future career. I have found that dancing offers me the opportunity to be original and a unique young man. Dance challenges me but I love the process which I grow in and through dance.

In David’s visual component, he drew a male dancer leaping into the air. He explained that he drew that dancer wearing a mask because to him, it shows that “a dancer can be whoever he wants to be when he dances.” He further added that the purpose of his artwork is to emphasize his belief in male dancers’ strength and masculinity.

While recognizing his explanation of the masking, I suspect that he might still doubt his own involvement in dance. As a starting dance student in class, David often wore a big hat or purposely kept his long hair in front of his face. He could be insecure about his personal image, but I believe that it was mostly due to his lack of confidence in dance; during interviews, he repeatedly made the comment that he would never become a good dancer. He had low self-esteem and a poor concept of himself as a male dancer and thrived when he received praise and recognition from others. Scholars (Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rusman & Schumer, 1967, p. 221) suggest that such encouragement plays a critical role in boosting adolescents’ self-esteem. As David received more training in dance, he showed stronger personality in dance later on.24

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24 The lower half of figure 12 is deleted because David identified several male dance students’ names.
Jim

Jim was the only African-Canadian student in the class taking dance for the 2nd year. When friends asked him about his class, they would start with “how is your Hip Hop class?” He answered that he actually took modern, ballet, and jazz at Rosedale and there was no Hip Hop unit whatsoever. Even worse, the person would ask him the same question again and again. He was often frustrated by the assumption of his family and friends that he was inept at dance, especially ballet and modern. In his Dancer and Me assignment, he wrote the lyrics and created a rap to represent his ways of seeing dance at present. “Music gets my heart as dance is in my soul….”

Figure 13: David’s visual image: I can fly

Figure 14: Jim’s rapping performance: Heart and soul
Jim rapping performance: *Heart and soul*

Video clip ~ Click here to play

George

George created a sculpture for the *Dancer and me* assignment. He chose that representation (a sculpture) because he liked the idea of making an abstract sculpture to symbolize his different feelings towards dance. Each branch on the sculpture represented different meanings to him. The wind chimes on one of the branches depicted rhythm and musicality. The strings of beads draped over the branches symbolized creativity and movement. The wooden hoops and the hands on the sculpture portrayed flexibility and strength. The abstract face on the sculpture was a metaphor of expressive emotion through dancing. In his written component, he talked about his initial thoughts on dance:

…this sculpture represents my mixed feeling towards taking dance. At the beginning of the year, the only reason that I decided to do dance is because I didn’t want to do boring gym like everybody else does. Even though I didn’t want to do gym I still thought dance would be boring, girly, and stupid….
Figure 15: George’s visual component: Versatility

George’s visual component: **Versatility**—*Dance & Me* assignment video clip ~ Click [here](#) to play

**Tom**

Nobody in Tom’s family ever thought that he would take dance and actually become interested in dancing. Both of his parents were artists (acting and music) prior to their current careers (construction and teaching). As a child, he knew the hardships and challenges that an artist life could bring. Being the youngest in the family, his brother influenced him substantially when he grew up.

*Tom:* My brother and I got along since I was born. For example, the music I listened to, the activities I got involved with, or the people I hung out with. We both love to attend hardcore and metal concerts. We enjoy being aggressive and loud….

However, between his brother and Tom, dance became a point of difference. His brother who attended the same arts school and majored in music went on to pursue a music-related career. Tom chose to take dance and music at the same time at Rosedale.

*Tom:* Dance is one of the first things I have done that he (my brother) is not interested in. Until today, my brother still doesn’t quite understand why I took dance in the first place and why I did it again and wanted to take it for the 3rd year consecutively.

Tom’s older brother might not know that his younger brother who shared the same interest in music gradually developed his “physical voice” in addition to musical talent (Cornell, 2001). While still playing drums, dance became an alternative way for Tom to communicate and express himself (Copeland & Cohen, 1983). Tom noticed the improvement in his body control and balance after just a year of training in dance. Seham (d’Amboise & Seham, 1994) confirmed that novice dance students usually gain body control and balance first. Tom further stated that he enjoyed the encouragement that he received in dance class, a peer-appraisal theory presented by Seham (1997). He mentioned that he is thrilled when other students clapped hands when he did a movement sequence well.
While disagreeing with his brother, Tom did mention his parents’ support.

*Tom:* I have gotten full support from my parents. They have always encouraged me to do well with whatever subject that I am interested in. Dance is not common in my family but all my family members came to see me dancing at the year-end performance….

In Tom’s visual component, he gathered a cluster of pictures to represent his “outside the box” way of thinking about dance. One was a family picture showing the harmony and love he enjoyed at home. Several photos were on a dance move that he learned from an all-boys’ dance class. A childhood dance picture was also included. It was taken when he attended a dance camp at Pegasus Dance Studio 11 years ago at age 3. The zoomed in one of himself was right beside his parents’ photo and the unedited one was at the end. He presented this photo series in a flip book. When a reader flips through the pages quickly, you can actually see him dancing through.

*Tom:* …my mother had enrolled me in a creative movement camp just to have fun. On the last day of the program we did our “Bumblebee” performance with our parents and I remembered having a big smile on my face the whole time. We basically did creative dance and mocked the moves that the teacher did in front of us. I would always make my parents laugh. Once I even got the teacher laughing….
When asked why Tom gave up dance despite the fact that he was good at it, he explained that although he enjoyed making his parents laugh, he found that after a while, he was tired of constantly imaging being “trees,” or moving like “water” in dance classes. Lipscomb (1986) had a similar finding that the lack of technical challenge made boys quit dance at early stages. Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, & van Dyke (1990) did an intensive study on elementary to junior high school students in the United States and discovered that current dance classes offered few choices of dance styles for boys to continue dancing. Some dance teachers assumed that boys could not handle more challenging moves and as a result, boys were asked to create dance on their own. When there is no
fundamental technique in dance, which is based on rigorous dance training, boys cannot create any meaningful dances (Schwartz, 1977). When boys realized what they did was not valued or recognized, they would probably not continue to dance. That might partially explain the lack of male presence in dance.

**Alan**

Alan’s written component was short, less than a half page. During the interview, he unfolded his first dance occurrence. It was not him dancing but rather his parents dancing at the Toronto Beaches Jazz Festival about 10 years ago. Although they were non-professional dancers, Alan was amazed to see his parents twisting, moving, swinging, smiling, and best of all, his father throwing Alan’s mom over his shoulder. At the time, he was really jealous and wished that he could dance like that. He expressed in his writing:

…it was at that moment [watching parents dancing on stage], I wanted to learn how to dance. I wanted to be like my dad, a cool dancer who looked so strong and confident while dancing.

Alan’s visual component was simply a photo in which his father (front left) and mother (front right) were dancing in a school gym at the festival. He expressed in his writing that this photo taught him that dance could be a way for people to show emotion, carry on social interaction, perform for an occasion, and of course, a great way to get in shape.
Dryler (1998) stated that parents are extremely important in terms of influencing their children’s choice of type of education (p. 378). Many children’s first goal was to do what their parents did. Parents became role models in this sense. Alan’s first impression on dance was memorable when he saw his father, a grown up man, dancing with his mother. That incident generated a positive attitude towards his thinking and looking at dance from a young male perspective.

**Kyle**

Kyle is the only Chinese-Canadian in the focus study group. His visual component was a sculpture made of wood. He saw it as a perfect representation of his feeling in dance. He described:

As a male dance student, it just seems that I can’t really see myself as looking graceful. When I dance in ballet, no matter how hard I try to do it correctly, when I look into the mirror it doesn’t really look good or like in movies I have seen. I created this wood sculpture to show me as a rigid and ungraceful figure in dance….
In Kyle’s written component, he also admitted that like other students in the class, his first dance experience was positive but short. He talked about the first time he saw a dance performance when he was a grade four student. His school received some free tickets to watch the National Ballet of Canada perform *Nutcracker* at the Hummingbird Center for the Performing Arts (now the Sony Center for the Performing Arts). He remembered vividly how those dancers moved on the stage. He wrote:

…the stage was set up beautifully and I found it quite amazing how high many dancers could jump…. Sometimes it seemed like they were gliding or flying on the stage.

Figure 18: Kyle’s visual component: Balance

Jeyasingh (1998) suggested that all dance pieces represent their makers’ life and concerns. Likewise, Kyle’s sculpture functions in the same way. His visual work spoke
about his personal feeling in dance and it also signified many adolescent males’ concern about their self-image in dance.

**First dance experience**

Participants’ first dance experience varied from individual to individual. There were some commonalities among the boys’ first dance experience either being developed at school or at home. Two distinctive time frames occurred as students indicated that their first dance experience took place either at a young age (pre-school age) or later on when they reached the adolescent stage – high school (age thirteen and up). The following two charts outline the environment and time that their first dance experience took place.

![Figure 19. First Dance Experience–Environment](image-url)
Elementary

Seven participants indicated that their first dance experience occurred in schools. Among them, four attended a dance workshop during elementary school and three began dancing at high school. For four students who experienced dance in elementary school, three expressed fairly positive comments. The last one, Liam claimed that he never thought about dance until one of his bossy friends dragged him to take a dance class when he was a grade five student.

It was disappointing to discover that all participants recall their first dance experience as an after-school activity even though the Ontario government clearly includes dance as part of the requirement for students to learn in both elementary and high schools (The Arts: The Ontario Curriculum, 1998 & 2000). Data also showed that their first dance experience, except for a few instances, was mostly short, inconsistent and somewhat unpleasant. Alan stated:

My first dance experience was when I was in elementary school [extracurricular]. Two teachers, one used to be a dancer, rented a dance studio outside. There were thirty-five of us cranked into a small room. It was pretty basic that we just followed steps to a song. I could not even describe the style of the dance. The school wanted to give us a taste of real dance class. I enjoyed it quite a bit even though it was short.
David had his first dance experience in grade three when a volunteer came to his class and taught dance workshops after school. That dancer did not ask for money but did it just for the love of teaching. David was especially interested in the “moonwalk”:

I was quite impressed with his “moonwalk.” Honestly, my class did not like it that much but I enjoyed it quite a bit. I really liked the moonwalk look and I thought it was really cool….

Secondary

George and Carter both had their first dance experience at Rosedale in grade 9 and grade 10, respectively. They arrived at the experience through different paths. George took gymnastics and drama when he was young but never tried dance. He mentioned that he used to watch the Cirque du Soleil shows on CBC every Saturday night with his parents. He started to take dance at Rosedale but counted those Saturday nights as his first acquaintance with dance although he did not do it physically.

Carter described his first dance experience, which occurred when he took the grade 10 dance open course. Born to a professional dancer, he never thought that he would actually take dance so seriously. He originally came to Rosedale to study drama as he dreamed of becoming a movie star one day. His mother, a former ballerina, was surprised to hear that Carter took up the challenge to do the grade 11 dance major after just one year of dance training. He described his first dance experience as not “easy:”

_Carter:_ I remember that I did every possible thing wrong. Everyone was moving one way and I was moving the other. It [dance] was really hard. I did not know why but somehow I fell in love with dancing. I still vividly remember that chassé\(^{25}\) was really hard. I practiced that traveling movement over and over again in my room until late night. I wanted to get it done perfectly. To me, it was really difficult at that time….

Michael had a painful and unforgettable experience when he took dance for the first time. Never having danced in his life, he thought dance would be really easy and that

\(^{25}\) Chassé means to chase or step together step. It is usually done in Ballet (ABT).
a dance credit in high school could be a “free ride.” His lack of respect towards dance changed as he quickly realized how “muscular” dance actually was (Berger, 2003).

*Michael:* I had no idea what to expect and I did not think dance was hard. It was a Friday afternoon during the first week of my high school. Teachers were cruising through outlines and course expectations. I thought dance was the same. It was not at all. The warm up alone was so intense and after class, I felt like jelly. My whole body was in so much pain. Thank God it was a Friday because I could not even walk for the next 2 days. I spent most of the time recovering on the bed that weekend. When I went to the washroom, I had to walk really slowly because all my muscles are in pain. It was so bad that I could not even make a bowel movement…. My parents laughed at me and commented that it was long overdue.

**Family**

Five participants said that their first time dance experience was family related. Some danced during family vacations or gatherings while others participated in dance camps or creative movement workshops. Robert and Tom shared similar stories. Their parents took them to see dance performances (*Stomp, Tap Dog, and Nutcracker*) and both got interested in dance. They took a couple of dance classes after watching the performance but quit shortly after. Robert confessed that dancing with many girls made him feel bored and that he had a hard time legitimizing his own action of continuing to dance. His feeling of being marginalized because he was enjoying a subject participated in by mostly females, is reflected in Williams’ theory (1995, p. 291). Although Robert did much more than creative dance, which Lipscomb (1986) argued is a major reason boys quit dancing due to lack of structure at the initial stage, he still chose to quit after a while. From what Robert shared, he might have struggled with his own identity and self-worth in dance, a theory argued by Gard (2003), or he might have felt alone and insecure because he was the only boy in the class.

Wilson and Alan on the other hand, had their first dance experience while their families were on vacation. This tended to be a classic story shared by many children around the world. Wilson recalls:

My first dance experience took place when I was a little boy on a travel trip with my parents to Tom’s Spring Village in Jamaica. I was about six years old. There was a little dance club in town that me and my family
went there together after dinner. It was really fun and that was my first
time dancing in a club. I had some pictures on that but I could not
remember what types of dance I did. Maybe I was just moving my body
crazily.

Pre-elementary

Jim had a different first dance experience from everyone else in the group. Instead
of watching dance on TV or on stage, or inspired by a skillful dancer, he was put into
dance by his parents as a form of therapy to help control his temper. He was only 5 years
old when it happened.

Jim: I used to fight a lot and was best described as an angry boy. My
parents put me into a dance program to see if I could channel my anger to
some other things to better use my anger. My first dance experience had
nothing to do with any specific form of technique. Someone simply turned
on the music and we just danced to it. …With a lot of freedom, it worked
as I danced my hardest to burn out most of my angry feelings. In the end, I
was happy. I considered that was my first dance experience.

Gerzen (2000) argued that males preferred aggressive activity such as sports
while females enjoy emotional doings like dance. In this case, Jim’s parents purposely
put him into a dance class to let him reduce his level of frustration. Clearly, they did not
see dance as a way to express feelings only as Langer (1950 & 1957) argued. Instead,
they went a step further and looked at dance as a form of therapeutic treatment for their
son to better manage his feelings.

What makes boys continue dancing or stop taking dance

Among twelve participants, nine decided to take dance again at Rosedale while
two decided not to. One student was in his graduating year. For those who chose to dance
again, they were in grade 9 or 10 and would be taking dance again at the grade 10 or 11
level in the 2009-2010 school year. Robert was a fifth year student who chose to stay
behind in the fifth year for extra dance training. He auditioned for the professional dance
training program at the National Ballet School of Canada.
Nine students decided to continue to take dance for a second or a third time. Six signed up for the all-boys dance class and three opted for mixed-gender dance classes at the grade 11 level. Reasons for them to continue dancing were quite similar with personal enjoyment and positive change on their body. In general, they could be placed in two groups physical and mental.

**Physical**

Six boys were impressed by how much they had accomplished in dance physically in such a short time (range from 1 to 2 years). They felt that taking dance was a self-fulfilling and tangible experience in which they could see progress and improvement on a daily basis. Alan mentioned:

> When I first took dance, I was a one-step and two-step person…. Just in one year, I certainly see me growing as a dancer. I have to maintain the same level of training, flexibility, coordination, and strength….

Jim also enjoyed the same excitement in the physical aspect. He added:

> I’d do it again because I found it was a good workout. I enjoy meeting physical challenges in dance as well as learning new steps and moves. …I am amazed to find out that after a short while, I don’t have to pay attention
to my body parts as they kind of channel themselves automatically and smoothly…. As time goes on, my awkward feeling slowly disappears.

Michael’s comments were similar to several others in the all-boys dance class who had a positive experience in dance but could not elaborate as eloquently. He had a hard time explaining his rationale for continue taking dance at high school.

*Michael:* Honestly, I did not know why I took dance again in grade 10. I was really bad at it first but, there was something…. It was like reborn when I did it…. It [dance] made me feel so good. I did not know how to describe it. I just saw dance was not something I would give up….

Researchers agree on the benefit of physical activities to a healthy body (Kelder, Perry, & Klepp, 1993; Baranowski, 1992; Powell, 1987). Dance at Rosedale is not only supplemental training to better physical well being but has become a choice of subject in and of itself. Students would purposely choose to take and continue in dance as a subject because they liked the rigorous training and challenges both in theory and in practice. Research and popular culture (Schmitz, 1990; Marilyn, 2005; Friedlander, 2006) showed positive changes that dance programs contributed to students at New York public schools. At Rosedale, students reached a similar level of accomplishment. While taking dance, as many boys expressed, they became more confident and capable human beings.

**Mental**

Schneider (2000) discussed the importance of childhood peer relations and Lorber (1994) presented *Paradoxes of gender* in which she centered on identity and self-worth. Two boys who chose to continue taking dance were influenced by their friends. Both were surrounded by friends who were actively involved in dance. Both were encouraged to take dance again because friends saw they had potential in dance. Dance became a way for them to build their identity (Kendall (2005). Liam stated:

A senior student in Rosedale who was in grade 11 at the time and going into grade 12 dance major came to me and said: “I really want you to be in one of my choreographic workshop dance pieces because I like the way you dance and express yourself.” He was a friend of my older brother since they went through the same middle school together. He came to my dance concert and saw me dancing and complimented me on that. Just the
thought that I would actually be needed to do something at the school
played the big part in my decision to continue to dance this year.

Although Liam recognized himself now as a potential dancer or was seen as one
by his friends, it was a different story compared to his initial decision to come to
Rosedale. As a grade 8 student, he did not see himself as a dancer at all. He had two
paths: attending a school with all his old friends or coming to an arts school. He picked
the second choice and became the only student from his old junior school to attend an arts
school. It might be because of the compliments of his brother’s friend, mentioned above,
who attended Rosedale and saw Liam’s performance at a local dance studio when Liam
was in grade 8. It could also be his mother who had been championing his involvement in
dance and arts in general. Either way, he found himself in dance and continuing in dance.

Not to dance

It would be interesting and beneficial to know why boys decided not to dance or
quit dance half way through. This study unveiled only partial causes as most students
chose to continue dancing. Two students who decided not to take dance next year
claimed that limited course selection was to blame.

Both stated that if they were to take dance again, they wanted to be in an all-boys
dance class. However, the all-boys dance classes were offered only at the grade 9 and 10
level and they did not want to take it as noncredit. They were both grade 10 students
when this study took place and they were supposed to be going into grade 11.

According to a guidance counselor, if students were to take the all-boys dance
class again after Grade 10, they would not get any high school credit. This certainly
turned students away as in the past, quite a few students expressed their desire to take the
all-boys dance class but could not do it because it was deemed as noncredit. The
classroom teacher was in the process of consulting with principals at the school in the
hopes of opening an all-boys dance class with a senior grade credit, which would
encourage high school senior boys to continue dancing and in return make the whole course selection process more equitable and accessible.

**Evolution in dance**

All participants experienced positive changes during the time they took dance. Some expressed that they were surprised that they survived in dance. They never thought dance would be challenging until they actually tried it. As research unfolded, two different attitudes toward change emerged. The first attitude was an eagerness to learn. Data showed that the higher grade the students (grade 11 and up), the more they realized that they had more to learn in dance. In contrast, most junior students (grade 9 and 10) had a cause-and-effect attitude, focusing on the positive changes on their physicality and capability in dance.

**Eager to learn**

Senior students expressed that dance was much more challenging when they took it again at the grade 11 and 12 level. Three students were in the dance major class and they had to take ballet, jazz, and modern on a daily basis, as opposed to the dance minor track, which required only taking dance two or three times a week. They confessed that their original fun experience was quickly replaced by constant sweat, hard work, and high expectations to get better and stronger as dance students. Nonetheless, nobody gave up and all were determined to work hard and enjoy the journey.

*Robert:* I really feel that I am part of it [dance] now. The first 3 years at Rosedale, I felt that I had been trying to dance. I constantly felt that I needed more technique, training, time to practice, etc; it wasn’t until last year or even this year (5\textsuperscript{th} year at Rosedale) that I start to feel that I am actually dancing, which is really miraculous. It is indescribable.

Liam also noticed that the more he learned dance the more he felt he needed to work on becoming a stronger dancer. Dancing at Rosedale for two years made him eager to study harder not only the technical skills but also the theory knowledge behind dance. He constantly looked for opportunities to attend dance classes and workshops in and outside of school. In the summer of 2008, he signed up for an intensive summer school
program at Opera Atelier Ballet School to advance his skill and knowledge in ballet. With that experience, Liam stated:

At the Opera Atelier, I learned a huge part of dance all of a sudden. …after attending the intensive dance training, I understood why ballet was the root of every form of dance. There, I did ballet 3 hours a day and 5 times a week, which was really intense. It completely strengthened my technique and helped my whole understanding in dance. …I felt myself more and more into dance. It was incredible and I felt that I was myself whenever I danced….

**Cause and effect**

Junior students (taking dance 1-2 years) tended to concentrate on the positive changes that dance had effected in their bodies or on their ability to move or think. All of them were more than satisfied to see the encouraging development of body structures, usually stronger muscles—abdominal, pectorals, quadriceps, and lower legs. Some were glad to see themselves grow as a more confident person. Michael expressed:

…I was extremely self-conscious when I first took dance in grade 9. I was so concerned about how others looked at me. I hid at the back almost all the time. Now, I am different. I am up at the front [first line] in dance class. I know that this is me and I am in charge. I don’t know how but I am glad that things turned out to be like that.

Jim shared a similar comment:

Since I have started it [dance], I am much more confident and I am not scared of dancing in front of an audience anymore.

Both Tom and David thought dance would be an easy credit in high school. They described the evolution of their dance experience as a new but exciting discovery during their high school years. Initially, they were not serious about dance at all. After a few classes, they both admitted that dance was not what they thought it would be (effortless). Their embodied dance experience, involving both physical and mental aspects, altered their attitude toward seeing themselves and other males in dance (Bowman & Powell, 2006). Dance was no longer an “abnormal” activity but something they would like to explore more. David added:
…I never watched dance shows before but I started to watch contemporary dance on TV ever since I took dance. I even began to take ballet, which was something I would never do in my life if I did not take dance at Rosedale.

**Dance class**

When asking participants to describe their dance class, their responses were positive for the most part. Few had minor concerns not regarding dance but regarding the facility where they danced. All male dance students were in one of the three types of dance classes: mixed-gender dance class (usually at grade 11 and 12 level) and two separate all-boys dance classes with the first one taking place in a regular dance studio and the second one in the gym.

Data showed that participants took pleasure in dancing with peers and watching each others’ progress regardless of which dance class they were in. They particularly enjoyed the feeling in which their physical body temperature changed from cold to warm as the class proceeded to more active and larger movements. Live accompanist in ballet with a pianist and modern with a drummer made them feel more energized and engaged.

A few boys in the all-boys dance classes that took place in the big dance studio complained about the smell of the class. For those who danced in the gym, they did not talk about the smell but grumbled about the condition of the floor. More than 800 students used that gym every day for their physical education course. In modern dance class, students had to dance bare feet on the same floor that was shared with students who wore all types of shoes while playing floor hockey or others sport-oriented games.

**Mixed-gender dance classes**

Three out of twelve participants took dance in mixed-gender dance classes. One in grade 10, another one in grade 11, and the third one in grade 12. Study showed that the longer they danced at Rosedale or at dance studios outside of school, the more comfortable they felt in dance. Liam, who is in grade 10 dance major mixed-gender class,
had the least dance training compared with the other two senior students. He talked about his initial challenge in taking dance at Rosedale.

*Liam:* When I first came to this dance major class, the biggest deal was being the only guy. Many people told me that you are in a class full of girls and that must be great. Actually, it’s not. It’s embarrassing most of the time. Being the only boy makes me feel really … really small. Being the only guy kind of make others and I think “Am I weird because I take dance, which is so different from other guys? I wonder if I tell others that I take dance, would they think that I am a gay….

Liam’s notion of marginalization and alienation in dance was widely shared among professional male dancers when they first started taking dance. Numerous scholars in recent years theorized on this issue (Burt, 1998; Franklin, 1999; Grady, 2002; J. Michael, 1997); however, little has changed. I encountered a similar discomfort when I initially began training in dance. It took me almost 15 years to fully gain confidence in dance and to identify myself with dance. For some, this painful but self-identifying process is of a shorter duration than for others.

This study shows that adolescent male dance students who interacted with other males—students, dance teachers, or professional dancers—appeared to break that mental barrier easier. With male role models or friends around, these young males soon realized that dance was an acceptable option for them. It is certain that more studies need to be conducted on novice male dance students in order to create strategies to attract them and keep them in dance instead of spotlighting research on professional ones, an area which has already been abundantly and fruitfully researched (Burt, 1995& 1998; Daly, 1994; Hanna, 1988b; Gard, 2000). In this case, Liam was one that quickly gained his confidence in dance. He stated:

… I grow older and I get more mature, I start to realize that it really does not matter about how others think about me but how I enjoy what I love to do. I slowly get over that discomfort feeling by going to dance class more often and meeting other male dancers and teachers who were confident about what they did. I start to realize that it does not really matter if you are the only guy in the class. I have to convince myself that I am no different than others. I begin to see that being a male in the dance major class is a privilege.
Both Carter, grade 11, and Robert, grade 12, stated that they were quite comfortable when dancing with girls in dance major classes, each of which has approximately 25 female dance students and 1 male. They also attended extra dance classes outside Rosedale. Robert started his intense ballet training at the Opera Atelier, with which he performed periodically. Carter began his African and modern dance training with COBA – The Collective of Black Artists. They shared similar views on dance.

*Carter:* I am so focused that I don’t really pay too much attention when I take dance. Partially it is [in]tense and I have to concentrate to get the movement right….

*Robert:* I would say that the ballet classes need a lot more intense focus. At the same time, I feel so relaxed that I forget about anything else. It becomes only ballet at that moment and I am part of it.

**All-boys dance class – dance studio**

For boys who took dance in the all-boys dance class in the dance studio, their views on dance were noticeably positive; warm, a sense of community, brotherhood, fun and joyful, were frequent words that they used to talk about the class. Alan stated:

*Alan:* …everyone seems to be really warm and interested in dancing. Nobody is there for only the credit. It’s joyful and it is great for fitness. There is definitely no negativity whatsoever.

*Tom:* …I like our class because it is not judgmental in anyway. You are free to do whatever you want as long as you try and have a good attitude towards what you doing.

Jim described the class as a family with a sense of inclusiveness. He expressed:

Everyone laughs at each other [in a good way], works together, plays together and of course, dances together. There is no hard feeling or tension but a giant group of males doing what they want to do. It makes me feel good, actually great. I see this class as a place [where] I can go to and

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26 COBA is a Toronto based organization that presents traditional West African dance, music and folklore, etc…. It also creates contemporary works developed from an Africanist movement aesthetic that reflects African social realities in a global context. Credit to [http://www.cobainc.com/aboutus.php](http://www.cobainc.com/aboutus.php)
leave all my problems at the door and enjoy myself completely in dance.

Few boys in this class expressed that they focused so much on dance steps that they could not notice anything else happening in the class. George and David admitted that a lot of things in dance were physically strenuous. In addition, they could barely process those detailed instructions that were given during the dance class. They both found it unique because they usually could not focus that long in regular classrooms (e.g., French, Math, English, etc).

Gardner (1993) and Fowler (1996) had long argued about various approaches to knowledge and different learning styles and multiple intelligences. Students were engaged in dance because to them, learning through moving was an effective method to acquire knowledge. George and David were surprised but encouraged to see the progress they made in dance over the last couple of months. Both expressed that it was beyond their imagination that they could actually dance. Grosz (1995) discussed about how people’s perception of body capability restrict them from reaching their fullest potential. These adolescent male dance students’ involvement in dance was just an example of how bodies could exceed their “superficially labeled” limits.

All-boys dance class - gym

Wilson, Kyle, and Michael were among twenty adolescent males taking dance in the gym when the study took place. With an increasing number of students signing up for dance, the school ran out of studio space for the growing dance classes. In early September of 2008, the school administrators designated the gym as an alternative space for the 2nd all-boys dance class. Unlike regular dance studios, the gym, in many ways created an unpleasant environment for a dance class. For example, it was not equipped with a sprung floor but a regular hardwood floor with numerous splinters and gum leftovers. There were no windows and no sound system. In the ballet unit, students had to

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27 According to O’mara Sprungfloor Company, sprung floor is suspended above an existing hard surface, such as concrete, hardwood or tile glued to concrete, using material designed to absorb shock.
use hockey nets as barres for balancing. Numerous times, classes were cut short because of sport games...and the list goes on.

Nonetheless, participants in this group still presented positive comments when they described their dance class. Other than discussing about what they experienced in dance, participants focused on their physical and mental transformations toward taking dance. Wilson described that dancing in the gym was like pursuing freedom. “It was not easy. “It hurts and it even burns my skin when I first started,” he recalled. The gym was the coldest place in the school because of its size and barren, with only a basketball hoop on each side. In the modern dance unit, students had to take off their shoes and socks and dance on the freezing floor. Although the dance teacher made some adjustment, wearing socks at the beginning of the class, it still could not prevent students from getting splinters. Students were still happy as class unfolded. Michael expressed:

At the start of the class, I felt cold, lazy, and depressing. I did not even want to move. During the class, I began to sweat and I started to feel pumped. By the end of the class, I was the happiest person on earth! The music was loud and I really enjoyed it. It could smell bad when some guys in the class did not wear deodorant. Yet, it was relatively ok compared to last year [he took all-boys dance class in a large dance studio] because we danced in a gigantic gym.

*The smell*

While enjoying dancing together, many boys spoke about the all-boys dance class being “overly muscular” in term of its smell. It was not an issue in the gym because of its gigantic space. However, it was suffocating in a dance studio soon after warm up. As Jim described that the studio quickly became unbearable even for the most tolerant person.

**Figure 22: Jim’s comments on smell**

Jim’s comments on smell in dance studio: Audio clip ~ Click [here](#) to play

It was noted that male students in an all-boys dance classes tended not to use deodorant. Even worse, many of them had no knowledge of what it was. No matter how repeatedly the teacher encouraged them to use deodorant, only a few cooperated. On the
other hand, adolescent male dance students in mixed-gender dance classes quickly learned the “trick” to make themselves smell good (using deodorant) without the dance teacher saying a word.

**Challenge in dance**

All participants revealed a long list of challenges that they faced while taking dance. Some of them went into details about their social and emotional difficulties while others spoke about their physical soreness from dance training. Based on the collected data, two groups emerged: internal challenge and external challenge. Five participants faced internal challenges in which they expressed psychological discomfort from themselves. The rest of the participants, six, expressed that they encountered external challenge—constant physical fatigue from dancing. Three students were selected to represent each group.

**Internal challenge**

Michael struggled between his thoughts about dance and his act of taking dance. His feeling of discomfort towards taking dance came from a self-generated mentality – the way he thought about himself in and through dance. Psychologically and socially, he considered it “difficult” for a male to take dance at high school. Meanwhile, he really enjoyed dancing. While fighting between these two sides and deciding whether or not to dance, Michael often suspected that others were talking about or judging his ability, or, according to him, his “inability” to dance.

*Michael:* …I scare myself a lot by holding it back. I am still a bit self-conscious when dancing in front of people. I know [that] it is just a little worm inside my body that bugs me. It is not because I am a boy and I take dance. I believe that I am born to be a dancer although I am not one, just yet. I am working on it….

George was so traumatized when he first started taking dance at Rosedale that he did not think that he would survive. As a male dance student who had gymnastic training at a young age, he thought that dance would be much easier for him. It was not, at all.
George: My biggest challenge was making the decision to stay or go. I really did not want to take gym at that time but I was having such a tough time that I wanted to quit dance. I found it was hard to keep up with others in the class.…

Robert being the oldest student in the group had the most dance training at Rosedale. He showed quite a high level of maturity when articulating his challenges in dance. Unlike Michael and George, who expressed personal struggles towards dancing, Robert confessed that the lack of social interactions in dance took a much heavier toll on him than expected.

Robert: … I look around, everyone else in high school can go out to wherever and whenever they want and do fun stuff. All my evenings and weekends are devoted to ballet classes. For me, going out is hardly an option. It is difficult for me because friends around me are happy to be lured to go out to do average “teenagers’ stuff.” However, I am doing something that I know is beneficial to me and others in the society. I know that dance requires dedication, focus, and hard working.…

External challenge

Six participants expressed that they faced external challenges, ranging from the intellectual approach to dance such as choreography to subject such as ballet. Ballet was a major issue that almost every boy complained about it. They did not mind how ballet looked, which seemed to be easy and elegant. Their first impression of ballet quickly crumbled when they executed their first plié. Both Carter and Tom talked about the complexity and precision that ballet technique class required.

Carter: … getting in details and I am not a detail oriented person. Ballet is hard as there are so many little precise things that I have to remember when dancing. For example, you have to think 10 things at once even when you make a simple ballet pose [back straight, posture, turn out, alignment, etc].

Liam and Alan thought learning choreography was the most challenging part in dance. They both found it hard to be correct in alignment and posture alone. Applying all

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28 Plié: a ballet term meaning to bent, or an action bending. Plié is an exercise to render the joints and muscles soft and pliable and the tendons flexible and elastic, and to develop a sense of balance. Credit to American Ballet Theatre’s online ballet term dictionary. [http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html](http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html)
the details and instructions was even harder. Remembering movements and steps in
choreography while attempting to fix all the requirements was the hardest. Furthermore,
switching from one style to the other, jazz to ballet for instance, was like relearning
everything all together.

*Liam:* …choreography, I thought I had it because I know that I can
learn/pick up and memorize movements pretty quickly. However, from
jazz going into another genre [ballet or modern] is a totally different
experience. Although it looks like the same, it is not. To me, it is
relearning everything, from step to step and move to move….

Flexibility seemed to be an unreachable goal to some of the participants.
Interestingly, some participants used gender at the beginning to shield or excuse their
inability to obtain flexibility. They would argue that boys were naturally less flexible than
girls and hence, should not bother stretching. Nevertheless, as time went by, they realized
how important flexibility meant to the progression of their dance skills. Their more
matured thinking can be partially credited to a field trip to the National Ballet of Canada
when they saw professional male dancers warm up and dance. Watching dance clips on
the web, TV, as well as reading dance materials also helped them understand that they,
too, could gain flexibility by working hard. Jim expressed:

…ouch, flexibility! I could do the movement, follow the steps, dance
somewhat smoothly, and feel the music but I am not flexible. I wish I were
more flexible so that I could actually dance better than I am doing right
now.

George used his grandmother as an inspirational figure:

My grandmother is 86 years old and she still dances. She does stretch the
way that many younger ones would not believe…. She can definitely do
more things than I do. Being alone for a number of years, she has not had
any problems [physically]. She does line dancing and tap….

**Dance and future**

When asking participants if taking dance would or would not help them in the
future, all replies were on the positive side. All responses fell into logical theories
including benefiting health, keeping it as a hobby, and strengthening body posture.
Health

Three participants expressed that dance was a great way to stay fit and healthy. They talked about the positive physical consequences that they experienced from dancing. Some mentioned that dancing made them a stronger person while others expressed increased awareness of their food intake. In one of the subject units, students had to study healthy body and food selection. After taking dance for a while, most students indicated that they tended to eat less junk food but to consume more nutritious and high fiber foods.

David suggested:

…many people in our society are getting really unfit and they kind of loose everything. Dance is a great way to deal with that problem. …Dance definitely makes me a stronger, healthier, and more disciplined person.

Hobby

Three participants, taking dance for the 2nd year, admitted that dance had become a new hobby for them. They were fascinated to explore this new physical activity with great interest. It even took away the class differentiation as Tom mentioned that dance set him free from the average working class background. While dancing, he felt that he could do anything he wanted. He forgot about where he came from and who he was but could enjoy the moment being in dance, an emotional state shared by students with more dance experience, usually a year or more.

Michael: …I see dance as a hobby. I love dancing. Of course, when I grow older, I could look more than cool and funny by doing a ballet turn. I think people would be jealous….

In terms of jealousy, Liam added on:

…whenever I go out to a club, I find that knowing how to dance is pretty useful. A sense of movement and being able to dance makes me socially popular. It makes me look more impressive. People, especially girls, respect me a lot more when they see me dancing….
It was noted that the longer students took dance, the more positive factors they witnessed and experienced from dancing. All participants acknowledged that dance was not only a hobby or a way to stay healthy. Dance became part of their life although they did not begin dance training until high school.

Scientifically dancing pumps more blood to a person’s brain and supplies more oxygen… in return it [dance] makes that person’s brain to work more efficiently.

**Posture**

Some participants in this group focused on how dance changed their way of behaving and interacting with others on a daily basis. Most expressed that they were more aware of their posture and alignment while walking and running. They realized that they too, could become graceful and poised people, although they are not professional dancers. Two students mentioned that they started to pay attention to the way they move and act in drama classes. Both noted that dance was a great way to “tone up” their body and it could be an extra credit to add on their resumes for future careers. Almost all the participants emphasized that dance made them a more confident person, a theory presented by Schmitz (1990) and other scholars. Jim noted:

Right now, I just love doing it [dancing]… I love the fact that I can express my thinking thorough movements. I think it is a personal growth that taking dance brings along with confidence, self-esteem, and a positive self-image….

Carter and Michael shared similar comments:

In dance, I have to hold myself really well and appear confident. Sometimes I don’t know exactly what to do in dance class but I keep trying and trying…. I feel great when I finally learn the movement sequence and dance confidently. I guess that people do that in life, too.

**Dance as a profession**

Almost all the participants, except Robert, were to some extent certain that dance would not be included among their career options. Some said it in a convincing tone while others were more confused about what to do with it. Nonetheless, data showed that
the more dance training students received, the more likely they were interested in taking further dance classes. On the other hand, the less training they had in dance, the less likely they would be serious about taking further dance training and as a result, the less likely they would consider becoming a dancer in the future.

**Dance as a career option**

Robert wanted to be a dancer. With 5 years of dance training both inside and outside of high school, he was the only one seeing dance as his future profession. To be better equipped, Robert also took drama and music in the school. He stated:

I definitely consider dancing as a profession for me. It is already part of me at present. … For that goal, I am willing to dance in musical theatre, work as a choreographer and director and to do other things in order to survive in the field. To scale back, my immediate goal is to become a dancer at the moment.

Meanwhile Robert admitted that he was aware of the fact that a dance career could be short compared to other options. Moreover, that was exactly the reason he wanted to be a professional dancer now, or hopefully, soon. As a young adult who turned 18 in March, he did not want to have regrets in his life because he did not try. He wanted to do it now instead of postponing it to another time, which meant it might never happen.

**Dance not as a career option**

Two distinct responses, perplexed and denial were found among other participants who do not wish to include dance as their career option.

*Perplexed*

Three students, Michael, Carter, and Liam were confused about what to do with dance in the future. All three students had taken dance at Rosedale consecutively for 3 years. Michael took dance at Rosedale only while Carter and Liam also did extra dance classes outside Rosedale. With less dance training, Michael was uncertain about the option.
*Michael:* I have thought about it. I have to admit that I don’t see myself as a dancer, yet. It depends on what is going on. I don’t know... I know that I am not quite good enough for that just yet. I might be and I could be but I don’t know how I could get there at this point.

Both Carter and Liam were somewhat inclined to opt for dance as a career but they, too, saw dance as a “risky” profession. Carter, whose mother used to be a professional dancer, was taken aback by seeing her mother suffering from post-dance-career consequences.

*Carter:* I thought about it. However, it is really hard to do it as a profession because it is really a short career. I know that my mom really enjoyed it when she did it. Now, she sort of regrets it because the injuries that she ends up with after quitting dance. Now she has foot and back problems from her dancing career.

Regardless, Carter believed that training in dance would help him in succeeding in any field that he might do later on in his life. On that note, Liam juggles two potential careers that he might be interested in – music and dance.

*Liam:* …I see 2 paths in my life. I could continue with my music and dance just as a hobby and get a regular job [music + dance + regular job]. …I could become a versatile dancer who could dance for commercials and could just go and may enter a tournament for break dance if I ever got good at that. Or, I may choose to do ballet, which is something I like less than break dance. It is still dancing and I believe that I would probably be happy to do something I really like.

**Denial**

Seven participants, all having taken dance for two years or less denied dance as a career option in the future. Students who just began dancing at Rosedale (4 months at this point) were reluctant to even talk about dance as an option. David, a first year dance student suggested that taking dance would benefit his acting career, which was similar to what Merce Cunningham encountered back in 1928 (Anderson, 2009). Others including David expressed that they would continue dancing but not necessarily to become a professional dancer. Jim noted:

For me, dance will not be my profession because I want to be a computer programmer. I see dance as a hobby. I love dancing. I would take dance
workshops or attend dance shows in the future when I grow older…. Right now, I just love doing it [dance].

Alan added similar comments:

In the future, I will continue to dance, maybe not as a profession. I am not too clear at this point. I know I am heading to university but surely not for mathematics. I am eliminating options instead of finding one thing…. 

Tom and George attempted to figure out their potential career paths which were all considered to be “not reliable.”

Tom: …being in any form of arts I know is not a reliable career. I see some reality shows [Dancing with Stars and So You Think You Can Dance] talking about how dancers have a fantastic time partying in Los Angeles and New York. While seeing they are living in it, I know that it is not common in real life. I don’t really see it as a career at this point but a fantasy. I have always wanted to take music as a career but there again not very reliable. At this point, I don’t really know what I want to do yet.

Public

This interview section attempted to bridge the connection between adolescent male dancers and the public about their journey in dance. The interviews took place in June after the year-end dance performance and before the summer break. At this point, all adolescent male dance students had completed their high school dance training for at least 1 year.

To dance or not to dance in public

The question explored whether or not participants were willing to reveal the fact that they took dance in high school to the general public. If they did, to what extent did they do so? Some participants in the group were quite frank to “others” about their involvement in dance. These “others” are those who are not familiar with the participants. They could be someone the participants have just met on the street.

Data showed an interesting trend; juniors in dance for less than one year seemed to be less willing to reveal their participation in dance to others. In contrast, seniors,
taking dance 2 years or more, were fine when talking about their involvement in dance. They shared some commonalities, though. All of them would first tell others that they were in an arts school before letting them know their dance experience in high school. They would purposely emphasize the fact that they also took general high school courses such as Math and English.

**Junior dance students**

For those who took dance less than 1 year, they preferred not to disclose any art courses that they were taking until they got to know more about their “new” friends. Until then, they would rather talk about something else. When they knew each other more, they would quickly tell them that they were in an arts high school and that they were taking boys dance as well as other subjects. They would purposely emphasize “all boys” dance, seeming to aim at forming some level of mutual understanding or alliances (Aalten, 1997). They hoped that others would not look at them as abnormal because they danced (Gard & Meyenn 2000, p. 217). David stated:

I am going to an arts school and I am taking dance – all-boys dance, drama and visual arts. I say boys dance because they [other people] are always curious about it and most definitely they would ask questions around it…. I say it first so that they might not ask further questions….

Kyle who was in his first year of taking dance also shared similar comments. He also talked about the uniqueness of all-boys dance class.

*Kyle:* …drama, dance, and vocal, I will not mention about other academic courses because everyone does that. I like dance a lot because it’s all guys. It is a really comfortable environment. I feel that it [all-boys dance class] is created for males’ need and I learn a lot of muscular moves….

**Senior dance students**

In contrast, Carter who took dance for more than two years was much more comfortable and confident when discussing his course selections with any new friends in public.

*Carter:* I would answer that I am going to an arts school with a focus on dance. On top of that, I am taking all the regular high school courses…. I
am doing a dance major course that requires me to take ballet and modern on a daily basis.

Robert who took dance for more than 4 years further responded:

I would respond that I take the academic courses such as math and science…. I would really emphasize the fact that I am taking multiple artistic courses such as musical theatre and dance. Meanwhile, I also do extra training in ballet outside school….

**Views on dance from the public**

When discussing the views on dance from the general Canadian public, participants’ responses varied. Many considered Canada as a multicultural country and therefore, Canadians were more likely to accept dance as part of their culture and were willing to see all kinds of dances. However, participants pointed out that many Canadians had only superficial understandings about dance. The participants could tell by the way others talked about dance. As one participant noted, expressions like artsy, fun, childish, cool, or mesmerizing. They thought that dance was easy and people on the stage were just having fun…. Carter expressed:

I think that most Canadians don’t understand dance…. When they see their kids dancing, they are excited. They don’t usually get the meaning or implication of the dance on stage….

Some participants complained that Canadians in general failed to recognize the importance of dance and its role in developing knowledge, a theory strengthened by numerous scholars (Abram, 1996; Cancienne & Snowber, 2003; Friedman & Moon, 1997; Gard, 2008; Griffin, 1995; Sheets-Johnstone, 1992). That might explain, as one of the participants pointed out, why nobody thought that Canada had any important contributions to the dance world. David mentioned:

People from Russia are born to do ballet and dancers [some] in the US are celebrities…. Chinese, Indians, and Greeks are good at keeping their heritage [traditional and ethnic dance]. There are a lot of famous dance stars who are not Canadians. Few dancers were famous in Canada and when they [Canadian dancers] perform in other places, they are usually nobody….
A few students including Robert and Alan responded from a different perspective. They did not consider themselves as able to represent the general Canadian public view on dance because they have only lived in Toronto and are only high school students. They could only say that Toronto had a bigger focus on the arts than other smaller cities in Canada. Robert assumed that people in the remote areas of Canada might have different views or even worse, no attitude towards dance. He summarized that it could be really scary when people have no attitude towards dance, not even a bad attitude; they simply don’t care.

Jim was a charismatic young male student who had many friends at Rosedale and other schools. Born to a large family, he heard more than enough comments about how others saw dance. Research showed that to some extent, Jim’s response could somehow represent the majority of the general public’s view, at least in schools, concerning males in dance. Jim described:

> When I tell people that I dance, they would look at me [as if I were] weird. They would go crazy and wild when I tell them I do Hip-Hop. A totally different story if I let them know that I am doing ballet. There is only good [Hip-Hop] and bad [ballet]. They assume you do one way [Hip-Hop–normal] or the other [ballet–abnormal]. If you say that you are doing ballet, they suspect that you can only do ballet and you are strange. On the same token, when you say that you dance Hip-Hop, they would think that you have no dance training but just play with Hip-Hop tricks.

His response echoes Gard’s (2003) research findings that show males in dance are perceived as being “immoral.” Dance, at least to some people, is not a publicly accepted activity for males.

**Stereotypes**

Dance may be interpreted differently to the public; however, the participants in this research are united when talking about existing stereotypes or bias against males in dance. They reported that egoistic, self-centered, homosexual, weird, and feminine were common nicknames they heard when others were speaking about males in dance.
Stereotypes of male dancers in public

Five participants experienced name-calling personally or at least heard about it. They spoke about the numerous misconceptions and misunderstandings that others had towards males in dance. Tom figured that stereotypes came from twisted American culture, which deemed certain fields as “single gender preferred profession” (O’Donnell, 1984; Blount, 2000). Still participants were surprised and puzzled to hear that people would call boys in dance “gay” although they were dancing in a room full of girls. “It doesn’t really make any sense,” as Tom commented:

Guys in dance are seen as homosexuals or they are just metrosexual. These people don’t act as “manly” as other normal folks. I think this stereotype comes from the way dance is looked upon. It is so gentle and delicate…. I think that Americans influence Canadians a lot in terms of stereotyping homosexuality on male dancers.

There was nothing new or unconventional with people labeling males in dance homosexual (Gard, 2003; Loadman, 1992), particularly in a North American setting where sports are valued and preferred by the majority of males (Connell, 1989). Participating in or watching sports became a way for them to defend their masculinity. Dance, on the other hand, was portrayed as an emotional expression (Acocella, 1985; Meglin, 1994) that many males choose not to do (Flintoff, 1991). Moving from gender to race, Jim suggested that racial identity was the main cause.
…I am a guy – a black guy, people will have more chances of guessing that I am doing Hip-Hop or something that is more macho. It seems that my skin culture does not match certain dance forms….

Wilson suggested sexism as a source:
I feel it is kind of sex stereotyping in dance. I figure that if I were a girl, they would assume that I am doing ballet and it is normal for a girl to do ballet, not a man.

**Stereotypes of male dancers are dissolving**

Seven students admitted that they knew about stereotypes in dance. However, they considered them to be gradually dissolving due to various reasons. Liam put forward immigration as a factor:
…people in general would think that male dancers are more girly. That stereotype is kind of disappearing. I think that immigration does play a role in the changing process. In some European countries, ballet plays a much more important role in the society. Canada gets people from all over the world and it helps break the stereotypes.

Robert speculated that the increasing number of male participants in dance effectively eliminated stereotypical views:
There are many more boys in dance compared to before. Rosedale, for example has more than fifty boys…. It's like they are everywhere at this school…. With that number, it gets hard for that stereotype to stick….

Kyle suggested political factors:
…kings in old times danced first [Louis XIV]. After they died, other nobles were not allowed to dance. Instead, they told women to dance as a form of entertainment and that is the culture we inherited. I think males can be beautiful and masculine while dancing on the stage. We just need another king, or an important politician in today’s sense to change the tide.

**Attitude transformation**

Some participants, Carter for example, began to consider it quite special to be a male dance student. He felt great when dancing with many girls. Admitting the differences he had when compared with female dance students on flexibility and body
structure, he pointed out the strength and explosive energy he released while executing certain jumps. “That makes me myself...,” he asserted.

*Idol power*

Several participants expressed that watching many superb male dancers performing (online or on TV) gradually changed their original attitude towards males in dance. David even suggested that males were finally making a come back in dance.

*David:* For the last 4 years, the winner of the American popular TV show, *So You Think You Can Dance*, had been all males. We are regaining grounds.

With TV cameras moving through the crowd and hundreds of spectators, it was not difficult to notice that females dominated the audience. If most viewers and callers who directly affected the result of the dance competition were females, it might explain why males claimed all the top prizes in recent years. Nonetheless, we have to recognize the increasing popularity of male dancers and the unarguably growing numbers among males who have an interest in dance (Milner, 2002). Of course, one could never ignore the influence of the media and the advancement of technology such as the internet, YouTube, and blogs.

*Advantage*

All participants recognized the advantage that males have in dance. Most of them heard about the shortage of male dancers and they see potential advantage in the career prospects. Few went into detail and articulated that physical capability and strength in jumps and turns were real advantages for male dancers when compared to female counterparts.

Data showed that the more training students received in dance, the more they were inclined to consider themselves as male dancers. They regarded more training in dance as an advantage in career competition. On the other hand, the less training participants had in dance, the less likely they would think of themselves as male dancers but they only recognized the physical benefit from dancing.
Seven participants expressed that the shortage of male dancers actually awarded them with better opportunities in this competitive profession. Liam stated:

... not as many men in the dance world. Male dancers are a hot commodity. Men are needed to play lead roles, like female can’t take all the parts. In some cases, men are required. It is almost like the rareness that it is really good to have males who can really dance in this profession.

Tom also agreed with Liam by describing male dancers as “rare species” in the profession. He speculated that males would find it much easier to get a call for a ballet or an opera audition. Kyle further added that due to the rare number of male dancers, “there were more open windows and doors in terms of getting a job.”

Robert not only talked about the advantages, but also expressed his excitement and pride for being a male dance student. He became a more confident person when receiving compliments from his Opera Atelier dance teacher who believed in him although he started his dance training late. To him, his male dance teacher who had gone through many auditions became an inspirational figure in his life.

*Robert:* When there is less resource, demand goes up…. I hope that one day I could be able to follow my dance master to go to New York to watch performances and take classes there. My dance teacher at the Opera Atelier tells me” you may not think that you are in a fully professional program but the fact that you are a male, you will stand out. There might be people around who have not seen you before who would look or assess you when you dance for their choreographies. They may hire you right there.” For me, just hearing it makes me excited….

While agreeing that male dancers had an advantage in prospective careers, Carter and Jim considered that as a double-edge sword. Since there are often very few males in auditions, they tend to stand out and so, it becomes difficult to hide any mistakes. In fact, it could leave him vulnerable to a certain extent. Carter expressed:

Yes, you will get a lot of special treatment…. You are being noticed more because there are not many of us [male dancers] on stage. It is a double-edged sword to me because you can be really good and standing out while dancing with many girls and it could be really awful when you make
mistakes. We are just more noticeable, I think. It is more challenge to be male dancers because it requires us to do much more than girls.

Four students considered male dancers as having better physical strength. They witnessed that some males being bigger and stronger could jump higher and lift other dancers with less difficulty. One participant, Wilson, suggested that just being a male dance student made him look stronger when compared with other males who did not take dance. As a result, he found himself more popular among girls. Michael, on the other hand, looked at the advantage from the point of view of the male body.

*Michael:* …men are more biologically designed to do dance. For example, ballet is a lot about upper body strengthened dance form and boys are really good at that. Men are also good at lifting and supporting others in modern and jazz.

**Media and technology**

All participants unanimously agreed upon the fact that media and technology have affected people’s view on male dancers greatly, especially in recent years. Some participants claimed that the internet was the greatest invention since telephones were invented. Instead of communicating with each other by phone, people could not only exchange voice messages about what they want but also show what they have.

“There were many celebrated choreographies online for people to see,” one of the participants claimed. Internet kept students engaged (Olander, 2007) and motivated (Dewey, 1966) in learning. Sometimes, the internet became the only place for people to watch and share ideas in dance. Among twelve participants, four different views emerged on the impact of media and technology on male dancers. Three views—expansion, normalization and promotion—were on the positive side and the last one, creation of more biases, represented a different point of view.
Expansion

Media and technology challenged the traditional perspective that people used to have about male dancers. Media also opened new windows and doors for cross cultural and regional experiences. Jim mentioned his memory of seeing a YouTube video clip about a dance troupe based in Denmark. He also talked about the increasing popularity of the hit show *So You Think You Can Dance*.

*Jim:* I was shocked to see the way these guys [male dancers] dancing. Their movements were strong and precise that they looked like robots. It was amazing. If it were not for the internet, I would not be able to know that. Internet greatly affected my way of seeing male dancers in Denmark. Shows like *So You Think You Can Dance* get millions of hits outside its birth place, the United States. People from Australia, New Zealand, and China click their mouse to find out who is the best dancer….

Participants also spoke about a group of black male dancers called “Signature” in the British hit show “*British Got Talents.*” They admitted that if it were not for YouTube, fewer people would get to see or know this group because the show was located in London, England. Technology, especially the creation of internet has greatly expanded the way information is passed around.
Participants expressed that it became increasingly difficult to be able to enjoy a live theatre experience knowing the cost of the ticket. Meanwhile, technology came into the spotlight. It is cheap, affordable, and accessible no matter whether you are in school or at home and anyone can watch the best male dancer performing right in front of their eyes. Carter stated:

Most families have at least a computer or a TV at home and they can watch these shows. I believe that many people have “one-on-one” dance experience because the wide spreading of the technology. It changes people’s view on male dancers. People would see male dancers as more of human beings rather than just a “stuck-up” [arrogant or snobbish] people on stage.

Normalization

Two senior dance students, Robert and Liam discussed how media and technology effectively normalized male dancers as ordinary folks in pubic and on the stage. They both thought that technology did a superb job in terms of exposing and publicizing male dancers to those in remote areas who might not have access to regular venues (large dance theaters). Media and technology also educated viewers about different styles of dance and different types of male dancers as some were muscular and others were not so. They showed that some male dancers might look more feminine but also made a point that not all male dancers looked feminine. Liam further stated:

…theses shows have a huge impact on how people see males in dance. For example, So You Think You Can Dance features many different kinds of male dancers. Audiences get to know them as normal people. I think that the vast majority of male dancers on So You Think You Can Dance are not in anyway to be described as feminine or gay. The show breaks down the stereotypes right there.

Promotion

Almost half of the participants considered the media and technology as major contributors in promoting a better image of male dancers in our society. Participants communicated that the show So You Think You Can Dance featured many great male dancers on the stage in part to challenge people’s old thinking that men were not capable of dancing. Promoted by media, gradually more and more people seemed to have
accepted the fact that males could dance and some of them can do just as well as females, if not better. The spread of technology effectively reduced biases that once existed in our society.

*Alan:* These media shows [So You Think You Can Dance and Dancing with the Stars] definitely help get the message out that males can dance. Without media publicity, I don’t think we would have gone this far in terms of our perceptions on male dancers…. Usually, when we talk about male dancers, people would only remember those superstars such as Gene Kelly and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Now, they would be more tempted to accept the fact that other regular males [like me] can dance, too.

Wilson talked about his first YouTube dance experience a couple of years ago on a video clip titled *Revolution of Dance.* 134,301,018 people viewed that short clip over the last 3 years. It’s viewership is 4 times larger than the whole Canadian population.

*Wilson:* It [Revolution of Dance] shows a guy doing dances from the 50s to the present. Millions and millions [of] people [have] watch[ed] this dance over the internet. It is really funny especially he is a regular white bald man in his forties. Someone that you don’t think can dance. It really makes me want to move at the same time.

**Creation of stronger bias**

It was intriguing to discover that two participants saw the unjust side of media impact upon male dancers. Michael pointed out that media “flipped around” the images and stereotypes about male dancers in order to make them look more controversial so that viewing rate would be boosted. David further pointed out that most of the people who watched the show were already in dance (although that could be highly debatable) and they had biased opinions towards female dancers as being better than males. Again, this represented his personal perspective as this research proved that gender was not a factor in deciding which one (female or male) danced better. I did agree with him that media, at times, would purposely make some males look weaker or less manly on the show. David said:

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29 Credit to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) or YouTube, LLC.
…some dancers [males and females] claim that “if I don’t dance, I will die.” I don’t think so. If I don’t dance, I will still do music or acting. They purposely choose men saying that to make them more emotional, girly, and naive.…

**Dance assignment**

Like any other high school courses, dance students had to complete a number of assignments throughout the year. Male dance students were not an exception. They had to finish different assignments according to their grade levels. Grade 9 and 10 focused more on the dance history, vocabulary, and exploration of their dance experience while grade 11 and 12 centered more on choreography and dance technique.

When asking about their favorite assignment of the year, answers varied. Most of the junior students (grade 9 and 10) opted for the culminating activity, which was performing on the stage while seniors (grade 11 and 12) chose the “Dancer and me” assignment. Senior students also enjoyed performing on the stage. However, it was the Choreographic Workshop that senior students valued the most during their high school years.

**Performance**

All participants agreed that performing on stage created a positive impact in their life. The whole process of rehearsing, putting on makeup, costuming, spacing, and warming up for the show was a memorable journey. To many, this was their first time ever dancing on stage in front of others (including family members). Junior participants admitted that they were surprised to see how much work it required prior to a dance performance.

Kyle: Year-end dance performance is definitely the highlight of this course. It is really great to get together with all your friends not to fool around but to dance on stage. I like the process for rehearsing months into the 3-nights performances in the end. It teaches me to be a patient person. I also enjoy the backstage warm up and supportive environment around. It was great to get pumped before we get onto the stage.…
Wilson also shared his contentment when performing on the stage.
It [year-end-performance] is so much joy to see everything comes together. It is great to work with the music and media to make our dance look good. I enjoy the end result but not necessarily the process as the rehearsal could be grueling at times. I am glad that I survived.

Compared with the choreographic workshop show\textsuperscript{30} which took place 3 months prior to the year-end-performance, Wilson described the former one as more nerve-racking.

\textit{Wilson:} I find it [choreographic workshop] more stressful because I have to dance with others who have years of dance training. I like the year-end dance performance because I am dancing with my friends [all boys] who share the similar dance level [novice] as I have….

When asked about whether the three months of grueling rehearsals were worthwhile for a 2-minute dance piece on stage, many said yes. They expressed that the whole journey really shaped the way they thought about dance. Of course, rehearsals made them look better and much more confident while performing on the stage.

\textit{Jim:} The more you look forward to the product, the greater end result is going to be. I do value the rehearsal periods as I know that the more we practice, the better it gets and more satisfied it is to do it. I know it is a fact but I forget at times.

\textbf{Dancer and Me}

Two junior students in the all-boys dance class chose the \textit{Dancer and Me} assignment as their favorite assignment. They were quite resentful at the beginning because it required self-reflection. However, they were proud of what they accomplished in the end. Both admitted that the process forced them to think more deeply about how they felt about dance and why they took it in the first place. The assignment also helped them reset their goals in dance and strategies to accomplish them. Wilson’s ballet shoe signified his deep thoughts on males in ballet.

\textit{Wilson:} I made a papier-mâché ballet shoe for this assignment. People don’t usually connect ballet shoes with male dancers and I want to make a

\textsuperscript{30} A dance show that was organized, choreographed, auditioned, and presented by grade 12 dance major students. All students, grade 9-12 can audition to be dancers in the show.
point that males can do ballet. As a male dance student, I really love doing ballet. It definitely takes a lot of strength for males to do ballet compared to other dance forms. In ballet, males do many lifts and jumps and I think that’s way more technical than jazz and modern.

**Choreography**

Three senior students (grade 11 and 12) opted for choreography. Admitting struggles during the choreographic and rehearsal process, they reached a sense of exhilaration and accomplishment in the end, a theory put forward by Stinson (1991). The whole journey was tough and it involved other aspects such as teamwork, communication, creativity, rehearsal, abstract and literal thinking, just to name a few. Carter shared his choreographic journey:

…my group chooses this neoimpressionist art that looks like a tree from far away. When you get closer, it becomes clear that this tree is actually made of different women. It is really cool to reinterpret that through a dance but it was not easy to do with moving body….

Robert recalled one of his grade 11 dance assignments in which he had to create a ballet solo on his own. He found that experience greatly challenged the way he thought about choreography. During the whole process, he had to constantly readjust his approach to music and to move his body the way he was not accustomed in order to test possibilities. He claimed that the assignment forced him to reconsider dance as the only career that he could do in the future.

*Robert:* It was a neat experience that I was surprised that I could possibly do that. That experience actually opens the possibilities for me to be a choreographer in the future. … I created Mario dance. I listened to the music and tried to make it as showy, fun, and goofy as possible…. It was a hit in the end and everybody loves the dance.

**Dancing on stage**

Gard (2008) challenged scholars to investigate the “how” questions as opposed to why people dance (p. 181). This study was an opportunity to address the issue and even more, to contribute to the few studies in masculinity that are presently within the field of education (Mac An Ghaill, 1994). Data showed three distinctive categories on how
participants felt and thought while dancing on the stage. For novice students who danced for the first time in their life on stage, they fell into the freshmen category. Students with 2 years of dance training or less were identified as connecting or bridging individuals. Students with 3 years of dance experience or more were labeled as self-actualized performers.

**Freshmen**

Participants in this group constantly used words such as nervous, embarrassing, exciting, and fun to describe their first time dance experience on stage. Data showed that they usually went through three stages—nervous, to excited, to contentment. For them, performing on stage seemed at first to be an unbearable and unattainable task. Many were really concerned about how they would look and what others would think about their performance on stage. A few minutes on the stage felt much longer. They felt shaky and extremely nerve-racked when they waited for their turn behind the wings prior to dancing on stage. After the first show, participants expressed that they felt a sense of contentment and even joy when they danced on stage. This feeling got reinforced each time they performed on the stage.

*David:* It is really embarrassing at first because everyone is staring at you…. The first show was definitely the nerve-racking experience. It was the first time I danced in front of that many people but the second one was a lot smoother…. It is great to dance like that. I really missed performing on the stage.

Wilson expressed “empowerment” while dancing:

I worry a lot when I wait in the wings before I get on the stage. When I get on the stage, everything changes. Everything blends together smoothly and perfectly. I feel almost like empowered to do better. There is definitely more positive energy in the theater coming from the audience, light, and the stage.

Kyle revealed his post-performing reaction, which left him almost speechless:

It’s like, Wahl! I can’t believe that I just did it. We did well and they [audience] liked it. It feels good. It makes me think that I can dance. All these works [sweat, rehearsal time, costume, makeup] have been paid off….
Connecting or bridging

With more dance training and performing experience, participants under this category expressed that they felt instant connection the moment they stepped onto the stage. With more dance training and performing experience, they tended to focus on movement. They were less intimidated by the stage. In fact, most stated that they enjoyed every single second while performing and connecting with the audience. Jim talked about his moment on the stage:

When I get on the stage, it is me and the audience with nothing else matters. In that moment, it is not a joyful feeling for me but a confident spirit electrifying throughout my entire body. I am happy to share this particular spirit and [I am sure that] audience could feel it, too. It is like give and takes. Audiences give me applause and I give them my spirit through dance, which is what I enjoy the most in that moment.

Michael enjoyed seeing audiences giving positive responses (applause) when they performed on the stage. He was in a 2-minute-dance piece called The Longest Time. To start, three girls were flirting on the stage while one fell in love with one of the nineteen boys. Shortly after they met, they had a dog, then a baby, then another two… It was a dance with a sense humor reminding people that life is short and they should enjoy it before it’s gone. Michael loved the story and the fact that boys used movements to deliver the message:

Before I got on stage, I felt shaky. It was definitely a big rush. It gives me goose bumps. It was adrenaline rush you get from performing in front of a large group of audience…. After our dance started, I felt so natural and relaxed. I liked our class piece [For the Longest Time, a funny dance piece] because we make people laugh. That makes me happy. When I see the audience response in that way, I know that I have achieved my goal.

Tom spoke about his experience of communicating with the audience through dance. As a second-year dance student, he was angry about how others in the public perceived male dancers. As a male dance student performing on the stage, he saw himself as a role model to reduce stereotypes.

Tom: It is always special when dancing in front of audiences. I think that’s what it breaks the stereotypes when people see me and other guys dancing
together on stage. None of us have comprehensive training in dance but we are dancing on stage anyway. When my friends see that, I don’t think they will think about the dance the way they would have thought before…. They know who I am and they see I am doing something completely different and that makes a different, I think. It’s kind of fun to throw people off like that.

**Self-actualized performers**

Self-actualized performers in this study describes those who acknowledged that they accomplished something worthwhile while performing on the stage. A feeling of intrinsic rewards is established by individuals themselves (Maslow, 1943, p. 389). Participants in this group had the most dance training and performance experience compared to others in the school. They were more accustomed to dancing in front of large audiences. They admitted that they only experienced nervousness occasionally at the beginning of the show. Once the show began, they were able to quickly adjust their mind and to focus on what laid ahead – dancing.

All participants expressed that when performing on the stage, it felt like they were in their own world. They were not thinking of the audience or others. They forgot who they were and became who they wanted to be while dancing on the stage. When they got off the stage after the show, they still felt jittery, but they also felt uplifted and energized, even to the extent that they wanted to do it again almost immediately. They found it really hard to sleep on the performing night because they were so “hyped-up.” Robert summarized:

*It is just me – dancing. I don’t have much things pounding on me during dance performances. I know that I am in control. My spirit, body, and mind all become one. Sometimes, it does become a blank as I don’t refer myself as who I am but who I am as a character on stage…. During the performance night, I see myself as part of the puzzle or picture. I feel relaxed and comfortable. I know that stage is the place where I belong to, where I live, where I thrive, and where I am alive.*

On stage, Robert lived in and through his action – dancing (Stubley, 1995). He became a character who explored the world within and around (Watrin, 1999) and without being aware of it himself, he creates a dialectic interaction between the outside
(audience) and the inside (himself). In the process, he transformed his emotional and meaningful issues from himself into other bodies (Young, 1994). His embodied movements revealed who he was or the character he attempted to portray (Cohen, 1992). At that moment, Robert knew that he reached his full potential and he enjoyed it tremendously.

**Message to others**

Participants were almost in unison when asked about their message to the majority of male students who had never taken dance. Their message was clear—“try it out yourself.” All of them recommended other males to take dance and to try it before making their judgment based on what they knew, which might not be right.

Some participants wanted others to know that taking dance was one of the best choices they have ever made. They became more encouraged when they saw many other boys in dance at the school. Furthermore, participants admitted that taking dance made them more popular among girls. Wilson suggested:

You should try it because it is really a fun experience to have. It helps you control your body more. Oh, yeah, girls like guys who can dance…. It makes me popular.

Data showed that junior students who had the least dance experience would often compare dance to gym. To many, physical education was the only choice since kindergarten. With comparison, they credited dance for strengthening more different muscles than gym would have done. Participants admitted that dance forced them to think more intensely when moving, something they had never done before. As a result, they became more aware of the way they walked on the street or how they were standing at a bus stop.

*Alan:* I have to constantly think about my alignment, posture, steps, and much more. While in gym, I feel like a machine repeating things over and over again….
More means less

Participants suggested that more boys in dance would effectively reduce stereotypes against male dancers. One junior dance student even recommended a male dance school with a focus on male dance curriculum. He argued that when it happens, everything will be fundamentally changed. “People walked into a male dance class, they would probably not let out comments such as ‘look at that weirdo’. Instead, people would look at him as a dancer with lots spectacular muscles as the evidence of rigorous dance training.”

All-male dance classes are common in China, Cuba, Soviet Union (formerly Russia) and some East European counties. National Ballet of Canada, for example had 4 male principal dancers with three born or trained in countries located in east Europe (Karen Kain, 2009). These countries are reputable for producing well trained professional dancers whose presence is found in almost all the top dance companies around the world.

Kyle did not take dance in grade 9 but he was fascinated by other males dancing on stage at Rosedale. He decided to take dance at grade 10, which he commented as being never too late to dance.

Kyle: I think [that] it is definitely a great thing to start to take dance. I see many other males starting to take dance at Rosedale and they are looking good on stage. It really inspired me on that note. I recommend other boys that never think that you are too late to dance. You can start even at my level, which is grade 10. Every male can be looking good in dance, of course if he works hard.

Admitting dance as an adventure in his life, Liam had these words for others: It is fun. You don’t have to be serious about dance to enjoy it. It is a great experience…. If there is something else that you are interested, go do that. If not, I recommend you to give dance a try.

His message was similar to what Michael recommended to other potential males who might be interested in taking dance.
Michael: Take it for a year and try it. If you love it, go for it. Just go for it! If you don’t like it, well, that is how you think. I took for a year as a tryout. I fell in love with dance. That’s how I got into dance. Just give it a try. There is nothing bad will happen, I guarantee. It got me into shape and made me a better human being.

Senior dance students cautioned potential male dance students not to be fooled by stereotypes. Their message seemed to carry a word of warning as they knew how much work was needed in order to get better in dance, often involving extra dance classes inside and outside of school. Nonetheless, they suggested others give it a try. They argued that if boys did not try, they would never know if they liked it. If they tried and did not like it, they could always do something else. Being late starters in dance, they admitted that taking dance was the most rewarding yet challenging decision they have ever made. “You got to work really hard if you are serious about it,” as Jim confessed. As a senior dance student, Carter also delivered a similar message:

I would definitely encourage them [other adolescent males] to try it [dance]. It is challenging and a lot more work than you expected. At the same time, it is extremely rewarding. Don’t base on the stereotype or your opinion you had before toward male dancers. You can never experience that exhilarating feeling until you give it a try. There are tons of classes around and you should give it a shot.

Robert who wanted to become a professional ballet dancer recommended other boys not to start with ballet. As a young boy, he did not set his heart on ballet until much later. He confessed that he was into break dance before falling in love with ballet. To him, taking ballet classes is like shopping for boots, both of which require money. However, taking ballet to him is more than possession or getting something he can hold on to; it is about providing a much more fulfilling or an enlightening experience, which has helped him to better understand others and himself. “It is a balance between body and mind.” Admitting that ballet might not be attractive to beginner boys, he advised other choices in dance.

Robert: Try it. It does not have to be ballet to start. Try something masculine like Hip Hop or Popping which are not feminine look at all. There is so much to do in dance and it is almost foolish not to try but to assume. It [dance] will definitely make you as a better person in general. It is worth it, I believe in it.
Male and female dance teachers

Research showed that most male dance students, ten in total, preferred males as their dance teachers. Almost all of them were junior dance students and only took dance at Rosedale. Two students, one in grade 11 and the other in grade 12, expressed that they did not think gender was an issue in dance teaching. They took extra dance classes outside the high school with both male and female dance teachers.

![Pie chart showing preference of male or female dance teachers](image)

Figure 25. Preference of Male or Female Dance Teacher

Male dance teachers—junior dance students

Ten participants strongly indicated that having a male dance teacher made them feel more comfortable in a dance class. According to them, male dance teachers tended to deliver choreographies that better suit males’ needs, a theory suggested by Brennan (1996). Instead of starting a dance class with stretching and complex coordination such as upper body isolation (Lipscomb, 1986), male dance teachers focused on strengthening exercises and jumps as one participant pointed out. Many others expressed that male dance teachers could relate to them more than female dance educators. Male dance students felt more accomplished and less self-conscious when having a male dance teacher leading the class.

Male dance students also spoke about female dance teachers. Acknowledging female dance teachers’ skills and knowledge in dance, students felt less comfortable
when learning choreography. Some students mentioned that in spite of the effort that female dance teachers put into modifying their movements to look more “muscular,” the movements still felt unnatural. Jim found it “weird and difficult” to continue dancing with a female dance teacher. He soon transferred from a mixed gender dance class to an all-boys dance class, which was led by a male dance teacher. Tom expressed similar comments:

A male dance teacher makes me feel strong and related. He is like a role model to me. If I were having a female teacher, I don’t think she would work me as hard. In terms of choreography, I think that female dance teacher would make our dance gentler and I would say girly.

Studies showed that the significance for having male dancer teachers was never disregarded (Foulkes, 2001; Keyworth, 2001; Mirault, 2000; Marques, 1998). Talbot (1993) stated that gender influence was important in attracting and keeping males in dance and other scholars (Berger, 2003; Grady, 2002; Benoit, 2000; Crawford, 1994; Day, 2001) argued that teaching methods was more critical. Brennan (1996), Bond (1994), Marques (1998), and Gard (2001) further suggested that these methods required frequent modifications to maximize success. In other words, dance educators constantly need to evaluate and reevaluate their teaching methods in the light of how male dance students learn.

**Male dance teachers—senior dance students**

Two senior dance students taking classes both inside and outside of school had different opinions. Both respected dance teachers as experts in the field with different approaches to help them become stronger dancers. At this stage, gender had less impact on their learning as a dancer. They have had numerous dance teachers, both female and males, in the past and at present.

*Robert:* They are both beneficial. They are good teachers as long as they know how to teach different genders and they know how they differ [from one to another]. Some teachers who really pushed me happen to be females. They kind of break me apart and put me back together. They make my legs wobble when I walk away from the class…. 
Carter, the other senior dance student also stated that there was little difference learning dance from either male or female teachers. However, he admitted that male teachers tended to focus on upper body training which let them feel more in control while dancing. It was worth mentioning that both senior students admitted that it was easier to connect with male dance teachers, especially when they just started to take dance. Jim added:

He [male dance teacher] becomes a direct role model and my personal goal. It’s like something I look up to and to use to motivate my own drive…. 
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

What I have learned

It took me almost two years to finalize the core research question: What is it like to be an adolescent male dance student in today’s school? Initially, I thought this research would focus on the experiences of adolescent male dance students—exploring the challenges they faced while taking dance. I had also hoped to investigate whether bias against male dancers originated externally (from other people) or internally (by male dancers themselves). As research unfolded, I realized that there is much more involved than their experiences and biases. Family influence, peer pressure, teachers’ and administrators’ involvement, self-esteem, and individual willingness to take the risk were some of the factors upon which they decided to dance. I felt that the best approach would be to immerse myself in the community (dance classes) and examine the realities that adolescent male dance students of today’s schools live in and through.

Through this study, I have come to a greater understanding of why adolescent males take dance and how they feel while dancing. This study provided the participating students with an invaluable opportunity to voice their concerns, give recommendations, and deliver messages to other males who might be perplexed about dance. Last but not least, the research offered first-hand insights for teachers, choreographers, psychologists, scholars, and others who are interested in further understanding male dancers.

Race

Data showed that race had little impact on the boys’ decision to take dance in high school. Participants came from different cultural and racial backgrounds and none expressed that their racial identity was an issue. Only one out of twelve participants had to justify to his friends that his taking dance did not mean Hip Hop only, but included other styles. As an African Canadian, he was frustrated to hear such a “narrow minded” comment on dance. However, he was glad that he was able to talk about his positive experience in dance to his friends.
Family, friends, and school

This research showed that family and school are pivotal in assuring adolescent male students’ involvement in dance. Parents are role models to their children, especially during their adolescent years (Dryler, 1998; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Kendall, 2005; Montemayor, 1983). Family has a huge impact at early stages as more than half of the participants said their first dance experience occurred at family related events.

This study revealed that friends’ opinions on dance had an impact on their decision to take dance. Some participants confessed that they took dance because their friends were in dance. Other students indicated that when their friends’ complimented their dance skills, it made them think that they were good at dance, and hence, they chose to take dance in high school. Nonetheless, the majority of adolescent male dance students in this study admitted that they were not as comfortable talking about their involvement in dance in public, especially to people whom they were not familiar with.

It is important to remember that all participants were attending an arts school and they were surrounded by a group of caring, supporting, and encouraging individuals who believed that art, dance in this case, was essential in life. All participants experienced dance in schools for various durations at different stages. Most of them participated in dance as an extracurricular activity with one boy’s main purpose being “anger management.” All twelve participants expressed that school teachers and principals created a positive impact on their decision to take dance or continue in dance. Ten out of twelve students confirmed that they had never experienced any social repercussion while the two others expressed minor concerns.

Three stages in dance

The perceptions of adolescent males on dance changed over time, usually in three stages: denial, enjoy, and excel. At the initial stage, denial, they did not like dancing. They found that taking dance was hard, much harder then they anticipated. They struggled, physically and mentally, in dance and wanted to quit. At the second stage, they started to enjoy dancing. This stage usually occurred after several months of dance
training. They began to realize that it was not abnormal to dance. They noticed that their body got stronger and they became more focused on other subjects. The Dancer in me assignment, for example, showed these transitional changes. At the last stage, “excel,” adolescent males experienced “Optimal Flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) on stage and in studio. They recognized the positive impact of dance on their confidence, health, self-esteem, maturity and other areas. They took dance seriously although some were still ambiguous about whether to continue dancing professionally. This usually took place after dancing for two years or more.

**Dance and physical education**

This study revealed that seven out of twelve adolescent male students deliberately chose not to take gym in high school. Although sports in and around physical education are portrayed as an identity of “masculinity” (Connell, 1995; Kidd, 1987; Martino, 1999; Messner, 1999; Parker, 1996), these young males enjoyed the outcomes from taking dance. They especially liked their performing experience at the end of the year when they danced on the stage, despite the initial challenges in dance classes.

**Media impact**

All participants confirmed that watching other males dancing, online, on stage, on TV, and in class created a positive impact on their involvement in dancing. Male dancers became role models in some cases. It was also noted that media, for the most part, was an effective way to break the stereotypes, which many male dance students talked about during interviews.

**Three different types of dance classes**

The boys also talked about what they enjoyed the most in three different types of dance classes: all-boys, mixed gender junior and mixed-gender senior. Males taking the all-boys dance class expressed that they liked the communal atmosphere, through which a sense of “brotherhood” was created. Junior dance students in mixed-gender dance class, taking dance one year or more, noted that it was difficult to be the only boy only at the
initial stage. The awkward feeling of alienation disappeared later when training became intensified. They enjoyed the challenge from the perspective of physical technique. Senior male dance students were keen on the creative component in which they had to choreograph a dance piece that involves choosing music, designing costumes, and auditioning dancers. The whole process greatly challenged them physically and mentally, which ended up being the most memorable event to them. Regardless of the type of dance class, all male dance students enjoyed performing.

**Gender and dance pedagogy**

Through this study, we find that it is beneficial to have a male dance teacher in a male context at the start of dance training. However, this is not always the case. As mentioned before, I had a male dance teacher when I was a novice dance student, yet I could not draw the connection between me as a male dance student and him as the male dance teacher. Some senior male dance students in this research also confirmed that the gender of dance teachers had less of an impact on their growth as dancers, especially when they were at a higher level of dance training. Having analyzed all the data plus my experience as a male dance student, I concluded that while recognizing the value of male dance teachers, it was even more significant how dance was taught or delivered.

**Implications for practice**

Generalization of this study to the entire adolescent male dance student population is neither reasonable nor advisable. Rosedale has the largest male dance student population in North America and although the selection process is lottery-based, which helps to make the process more equitable and random, readers need to be aware of the fact that the group is made up of individuals with different perceptions, needs, and goals. Parents, teachers, choreographers, and critical researchers should consider the finding of this study as a guide with the understanding of individual needs.
Curriculum-focus interpretation and modification

Though I raised concerns to the twenty-three dance and drama specialists during the provincial curriculum revision process in 2006, gender issues in dance have still not been addressed in the updated *The Arts* curriculum. Perhaps it was due to the controversial nature of explicitly dealing with the gender issue in the curriculum. However, as an advocate in promoting males in dance, I suggest serious consideration of the inescapable reality that there is a dramatic ratio imbalance in dance. While encouraging female students to study math and business, the Ministry of Education and school boards could come up with innovative means to entice males to participate in dance. To that regard, I recommend:

**Visual images (male dancers)**

If possible, include posters that contain images of male dancers and distribute it to school boards and individual schools. The dance studios where this research took place are filled with posters and pictures featuring both male and female dancers from different racial and cultural backgrounds. The message is clear that everyone, females and males, are welcome to participate in dance.

**Curriculum development (workshops, conference)**

There should be periodic workshops on exchanging tips regarding how to coach male dance students. To that effect, Toronto District School Board is already doing a superb job in terms of creating a platform for art teachers to get together and discuss teaching strategies. Great teaching suggestions on “dos and don’ts” are often discussed. A focus on males in the discussions would prove to be beneficial.

**Resources (videotape, DVD, website)**

There are abundant resources on teaching dance to males. However, an individual has to search, compare, learn, and master them before introducing steps to male dance students. One of my future tasks is to create a website, which functions as a platform for teachers to directly get information regarding teaching male dancers. As well, I will create an online blog for teachers to share their expertise in teaching dance.
Recommendation

Parents

Parental influence is critical. The more they get involved in dance and gain a greater appreciation of it, the less likely that their son will consider that taking dance is an abnormal activity. This study unveiled that seven out of twelve parents are artists or used to be artists. Their passion for the arts directly and indirectly affected their son’s involvement in dance. Parents can also get involved in their son’s dance activities. This might include complimenting on their movement combinations, watching their rehearsals and performances, observing dance classes, or volunteering to be ushers or backstage personnel if needed.

Dance teachers and school administrators

Dance teachers and school administers should create an atmosphere of support and care for dance. Principals of the school where this study took place constantly attended performances by students both inside and outside of school. Dance teachers have to be aware of the different stages and the approximate timelines that male dance students go through when they take dance. They should use this as a guideline and create the necessary support at each stage. This understanding can help teachers anticipate and prepare for what they might see from male students and not give up or make false conclusions. For example, the denial stage that this study has shown is simply a stage and not an end. As well, dance teachers, if they have not done so already, should encourage parents to get involved and to become allies in keeping and motivating adolescent males in dance. Both dance teachers and administrators can find ways to involve parents in dance, either through volunteering opportunities or through events where parents become an active participant.

Male dance students

Communication and theory vs. practice

Male students should communicate with someone in the family or a close friend about their thoughts regarding dance. They might realize that it was their own perception
or somebody else’s opinions that have made them think that dance is not a right option for males. They should question the assumption and be prepared to try a dance class themselves. Jan L. A. van de Snepscheut famously cited “In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. But, in practice, there is.”

**Limitation and future research**

This study has several limitations, which provide directions for future research. Firstly, even with the best of intention and with a sophisticated selecting process, the twelve participants were all chosen from an arts focused high school. The homogeneity of the chosen population means that the conclusions drawn from the data could be generalized at least to the dance community at Rosedale if not to other schools and mainstream culture. To that regard, I would like to initiate research on adolescent males in dance attending non-arts focused high schools in the future. Having those students talk about why they dance, continue to dance, and perhaps excel in dance would certainly provide a different perspective in understanding adolescent male dance students.

Secondly, none of the twelve participants in this study quit during the course of the study. However, I have noticed that one boy, not in the focus group, refused to perform on stage for the year-end dance performance. Although he is the only one out of fifty-five male dance students, I would have liked to pay closer attention to him to see why he did not reach “Optimal Flow” that other boys enjoyed while dancing and what could be done to help him.

This research has contributed to the extremely limited number of studies that are focused on adolescent male dance students. I consider it as a beginning of exploring the experience and reality that is embodied in male dance students. Other areas of research with different approaches need to be explored in order to further understand who they are, how they feel, and what they want to accomplish in and through dance.
Conclusion

This study has unveiled both the challenges and the intrinsic feelings of reward—usually in the form of flow—that adolescent male students experience while taking dance at the Rosedale Heights School of the Arts. Adolescent males face tremendous social and developmental obstacles and they may have “millions” of seemingly legitimate excuses to drop out of dance at any given opportunity. These problems might be secretly hidden from parents, friends, peers, even dance teachers. Meanwhile, socially constructed attitude and knowledge regarding male dancers continue to sway their perspective and shake their determination to dance. Despite all the above problems and potentially many others, these adolescent male students deliberately choose to take dance in high school.

This research centers on adolescent male dance students, which differs from other studies focusing on established male dancers (Berger, 2003; Burt, 1995; Carman, 2002; Earl, 1988; Garafola, 1985; Gilbert, 2003; Grady, 2002; Laine, 1981; Michael, 1997; Ron, 1989; Shelton, 1981; Tarasov, 1985; Tewksbury, 1993; Wolofsky, 1990). Participants in this research are in far from being those who have had received professional dance training at the National Ballet School or at any other professional institutions. It was an invaluable experience to investigate their feelings, thoughts, concerns, and beliefs in dance, which provided crucial data to dance education and curriculum design.

To me, this research was a milestone celebration because it partially reflected my personal journey from then to now as a male dance student, male dancer, male dance teacher and a researcher. I strongly believe that dance, in this scenario, functions as a vehicle in which and through which adolescent male dance students express themselves and learn; become shaped and reshaped in their thinking; formed and reformed in their beliefs; discover who they are and what they want to be in the future. I am reminded of the words of Robert, one of the participants who began dance in high school and is now at the Canada’s National Ballet School:

Taking dance in high school gives me a balance between my body and my mind. It is a fact that most people tend to ignore in their lives. It is a great thinking back in old times of ballet when people see a “literal bond”
between these two. People believe that in order to balance your physical body, you have to maintain a clear mind. Taking ballet helps me think, react, and behave more logically and responsibly. It teaches me how to be in touch with myself as well as understand others through movements and how they interpret. Even more than that is the way I have to live in dance, the way I have to push myself, and the way I fight for my survival in dance. That makes my life unique and to me, meaningful….
References


Benoit, A. M. (2000, Nov 14). Boys have numbers down male dance pupils are scarce, but instructors hope a new film will persuade more of them to try. Chicago Tribune, pp. E1.


Booth, D. (2001). Reading and Writing in the Middle Years. Markham, ON: Pembroke Publisher


Carman, J. (2002). Dancer from the dance: Ted Shawn pioneered a homoerotic style of modern dance; A hunky all-male company, and the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, which turns 70 this summer. *The National Gay & Lesbian Newsmagazine*, 90(2).

Carroll, T. G. (2000). If we didn’t have the schools we have today, would we create the schools we have today? *Education*, 1(1), 117-140.


Toronto, ON.: Anansi.


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Zhao, C. (1997, August 29, 1997) After ferocious competition, Zihao is the finalist to receive the prestigious scholarship from the American dance festival to study at the Hong Kong academy for performing arts. *Guangzhou Daily*, pp. 15.

Appendices

Appendix A-1: Sample Assignment

An Autobiography

Please type your answers to the following questions on a separate sheet of paper. Your answers will help me to get to know you better and therefore make this program more interesting. If you do not want to hand in paper version, you can also send it to me through email: zihao.li@tel.tdsb.on.ca

Name: _______________________________________

Parent/Guardian: Name: _________________________

Phone (H) _____________________________________

1. What experience do you have in dance? How about skills like drama, gymnastics, skating, martial arts, and sports? (# of years and or lessons per week, your own creativity in area)
2. In your own words, what is dance?
3. What do you expect to learn from this dance course?
4. List 3 of your interests or hobbies.
5. What do you like most about school? Why?
6. What do you like least about school? Why?
7. Do you work/ If so where and how many days and hours per week?
8. What do you most want to accomplish this year? (short term goals)
9. What do you want to accomplish in your life time? (long term goals)
10. What kind of music do you listen to and can you suggest music for our class?
11. Tell me something about which you are proud of, or something that stands out in your mind. (an award, a favourite memory, a jog, a trip, etc).

12. Please complete the following statements:

    I hope that

    I wish that

    Someday

    A good teacher is someone who…
Appendix A-2: Sample Assignment

Dancer & Me

Student Name:
Due Date:

Find a picture or create a collage that represents your view of yourself as a dancer as you begin this course. You may choose to draw, paint, sculpt, photograph, cut out pictures from magazines/flyers, create a website, or design a digital flash show. You may also use a combination of all these to create a collage or mosaic.

You must give your assignment a title and write a 2 - 3 page reflection (typed). In your personal response try to answer the following questions:

Describe your first dance experience. (tell a story)
What makes you take dance in high school?
What do you think about dance? (before taking dance and now)
How do you see yourself in dance? (before taking dance and now)
What has been the biggest challenge since you have started taking dance?
Why you chose this particular representation?
What your immediate and future goals may be?
What have you learned about yourself as a dancer/dance student?

Choose images and express feelings that represent you as a dancer and/or your view of dance in our society.

Evaluation:

Visual Component – style, creativity, presentation

Written Component – title, style, personal insight
Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Guide (Students)

Interview

(Read to interviewee before the interview takes place)

Thank you for your participation in this study and agreeing to answer these questions. This interview will take about [TIME] minutes, but you may ask to stop at any time. The purpose of this conversation is to talk about your experiences as an adolescent male taking dance classes at Rosedale Heights School of the Arts. This interview is part of my research study on male dancers. As a researcher, I will guarantee anonymity.

I’d like to ask you for your permission to record our conversation. This will help me to give you my full attention now and return to our conversation later. I am the sole person to have the access to this recording. If you want me to stop at any time, just let me know. Would you mind if I start now?

First Interview (January)

Background Information

- Please state your name, age, class, and grade level.
- Were you born in Canada or elsewhere?
- How do you describe your ethnic background (Caucasian, African American, Asian, etc…)?

Family and Friends

- Can you describe your family background (parents, siblings, occupations)?
- Tell me some dance performances that you have seen and how do you think about them?
- Is there any dancer/dance student in your family and what do you think of her/him?
- What do you think about dance?
- Why do you take dance?
- Has any one of the following people affected your decision to take dance? (parents, siblings, teachers, principals, junior elementary friends) How did it happen?
- Do you feel supported by your family in your decision to take dance? HOW?
• What is your friends’ response toward your decision to participate in dance?
• Can you describe your first dance experience? TELL A STORY
• How did you make your decision to take dance at this school? TELL A STORY

Is there anything else that you’d like to tell me about your experiences in dance?
Do you have any questions concerning the interview?
I want to thank you for your time and I am looking forward to talking with you in June.

Second Interview (June)

High School

• Can you describe the evolution of your dance in terms of personal growth?
• Can you describe your dance class? (feel, see, sound, smell)

• What has been the biggest challenge you’ve faced in regard to your involvement in dance?
• How do you think taking dance in high school would help you in the future? (career, family, health, social network)
• Have you ever considered dancer’ as a profession? If yes, why? If not, why and what other career paths did you consider?

Public

• When you meet someone and they ask what subjects you take in your school, how do you respond?
• How would you describe the views of the general Canadian Public towards dance?
• In your opinion, is there any advantage for males to be in dance? Can you explain?
• How do you think technology and media (internet, YouTube, blogs, TV production: So You think You Can Dance and Dancing with Starts) affect people’s view on male dancers?
• Describe one assignment in this course that you enjoyed the most. Why
• How do you feel when dancing on the stage in front of large audience?
• Have your initial feelings towards taking dance ever changed from the beginning of the year to now? If yes, can you describe it?
• What do you want to say about dance to the majority of male students who have never taken dance before?

Conclusion:
Is there anything else that you’d like to tell me about your experiences in dance?
Is there anything you would like to ask me concerning the interview?
I want to thank you again for your time and your willingness to participate in this study.
Date:

Dear Mr. (name of the principal):

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. The title of my research study is *Gender Imbalance: Embodied Language through Male Dancers*. I am writing to inform you about my interest to conduct a research study which involves male dance students in your school.

Having already received permission from the University of Toronto and the Toronto District School Board, I am now contacting you to inquire whether you would be willing to allow me to conduct my research at your school. The goal of this research is to break the barrier and bias that others may have against adolescent male students who participate in dance. Research of this kind would benefit teachers, dance instructors, curriculum theorists, professors, and even professional dancers and choreographers in terms of understanding adolescent male dancers –their needs, fears, attitudes, and their expectations. It would also suggest ways to entice more adolescent males to participate in dance and strategies to keep males in dance.

I understand that many adolescent males would not take dance due to a variety of reasons. However, for those who participate in dance, I would focus on their change over the time and monitor their progress on self-discipline, academic performance, psychological development, and their changing views of seeing other males in dance. I would like to make this research project as a safe place for adolescent male dance students to have a voice and an opportunity to express themselves through dance.

Over the years, there has been a substantial amount of research and theorizing on gender-related topics. Nonetheless, gender research and theorizing on dance has remained scarce. Within these limited research studies, the majority of them have been focused on mature male dancers at a professional level (Burt, 1995; Burt, 1998; Daly, 1994; Hanna, 1988b). Some have given attention to the dilemmas and discriminations that homosexual male dancers endure (Burt, 1998; Franklin, 1999; Grady, 2002; J. Michael, 1997). The rest have attempted to suggest strategies or “tricks” to entice or to keep young boys (age 3 to preschool) to stay in dance (Crawford, 1994; Meglin, 1994; Rimer, 1985; Tarasov, 1985). My preliminary research has shown the absence of in-depth research study on the period between primary school-age boys and the professional level male dancers. This research
study seeks to fill in this gap by investigating adolescent males who dance or begin to
dance in high school years.

Your school is unique to be the only public high school in Canada that offers all-boys
dance class and it has been running successfully for the last 6 years. Hence, I am
selecting your school to commence this research study.

I will focus my research on 6 - 10 students who will be randomly selected from the all-
boys and mixed-gender dance classes. Interviews will be divided into 2 sections. The first
interview will take place when students start their second semester dance training in
January. The second interview will be in June after they finish their year-end dance
performance. Each interview will last about 20 minutes, and take place on the school
premises at the interviewee’s convenience (lunchtime or after school).

For this research, I consider using digital and video recording as meaningful and
powerful instruments to gain a better understanding of the dance class dynamic; the
relationship between students and teacher, the educational environment; the curriculum
connections; boys’ dance technique progression; their change of attitude toward dance
over time and interactions among boys themselves.

Throughout my research, it is in my best interest not to interfere in the everyday school
and classroom environment. If you permit me to conduct this study in your school, you
may rest assured that your privacy, as well as that of your school staff, your students,
and their families will be protected at all times.

The raw data gathered through this study will be kept strictly confidential, known only to
me and the members of my thesis committee. A summary of the thesis will also be made
available upon your request. Be also assured that the identity of the teacher, the students,
and their parents/legal guardians will be kept confidential in the thesis and in any
subsequent presentations or publications. Each participant’s name will be replaced by a
pseudonym. In addition, I will take great care to ensure that the identities of all
participants will not be revealed in any other fashion, such as through background
information. All audio and video files, hard copies of interview transcripts, observation
notes, field notes, and assignment samples will be locked in a filing cabinet in the
researcher’s home office. Only the researcher will have access to the filing cabinet.

With any participant who agrees to participate in this research study, I will send a letter
outlining the study. I will seek permission and consent from their parents/legal guardians
before any data collection takes place. All participants in this study have the option of
withdrawing at any time, without suffering any adverse affects or having to explain
their reasons for withdrawal.

I would be glad to discuss this research study with you in detail and answer any questions
that you might have. Should you need more information about the study, please contact
me in person, by telephone, or through e-mail. You may contact my thesis supervisor Dr.
Linda Cameron at lcameron@oise.utoronto.ca. Or, you may contact the University of
Toronto’s Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273 for further information.

Sincerely,

Zihao Li (Michael)
Ph.D Candidate
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
416-462-2878 or Email: zli@oise.utoronto.ca
Appendix C: Consent Form for Principals

(To be signed by School Principal)

Title of the Research: Gender Imbalance: Embodied Language through Male Dancers

Name of the Researcher: Zihao Li

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign, and return to the researcher.

Please check the box.

☐ I, ________________________________, permit Zihao Li to conduct the study: ‘Gender Imbalance: Embodied Language through Male Dancers’, at the Rosedale Heights School of the Art.

Principal’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: _______________________

Researcher’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: _______________________
Appendix D: Letter of Introduction to Dance Teachers of the Rosedale Heights School of the Arts

Date:

Dear (name of person):

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. The title of my research study is *Gender Imbalance: Embodied Language through Male Dancers*. I am writing to inform you about my interest to conduct a research study which involves male dance students in your dance class.

Having already received permission from the University of Toronto and the Toronto District School Board, I am now contacting you to inquire whether you would be willing to allow me to conduct my research in your dance class. The goal of this research is to break the barrier and bias that others may have against adolescent male students who participate in dance. Research of this kind would benefit teachers, dance instructors, curriculum theorists, professors, and even professional dancers and choreographers in terms of understanding adolescent male dancers – their needs, fears, attitudes, and their expectations. It would also suggest ways to entice more adolescent males to participate in dance and strategies to keep males in dance.

Rosedale Heights School of the Arts is unique for having a large number of adolescent males taking dance in both all-boys and mixed-gender dance classes (over 50 at present). I understand that many adolescent males would not take dance due to a variety of reasons. However, for those who participate in dance, I would focus on their change over the time and monitor their progress on self-discipline, academic performance, and their changing views of seeing other males in dance. I would like to make this research project as a safe place for adolescent male dance students to have a voice and an opportunity to express themselves through dance.

Over the years, there has been a substantial amount of research and theorizing on gender-related topics. Nonetheless, gender research and theorizing on dance has remained scarce. Within these limited research studies, the majority of them have been focused on mature male dancers at a professional level (Burt, 1995; Burt, 1998; Daly, 1994; Hanna, 1988b). Some have given attention to the dilemmas and discriminations that homosexual male dancers endure (Burt, 1998; Franklin, 1999; Grady, 2002; J. Michael, 1997). The rest have attempted to suggest strategies or “tricks” to entice or to keep young boys (age 3 to preschool) to stay in dance (Crawford, 1994; Meglin, 1994; Rimer, 1985; Tarasov, 1985).
My preliminary research has shown the absence of in-depth research study on the period between primary school-age boys and the professional level male dancers. This research study seeks to fill in this gap by investigating adolescent males who dance or begin to dance in high school years.

I will focus my research on 6 - 10 students who will be randomly selected from the all-boys and mixed-gender dance classes. Interviews will be divided into 2 sections. The first interview will take place when students start their second semester dance training in January. The second interview will be in June after they finish their year-end dance performance. Each interview will last about 20 minutes, and take place on the school premises at the interviewee’s convenience (lunchtime or after school).

This research also involves digital and video recording of your dance class to a maximum of once a week during the data collection period, which may require until the end of the 2008-09 school year. I consider them as meaningful and powerful instruments to gain a better understanding of the dance class dynamic; the relationship between students and teacher, the educational environment; the curriculum connections; boys’ dance technique progression; their change of attitude toward dance over time and interactions among boys themselves.

Throughout my research, it is in my best interest not to interfere in the everyday school and classroom environment. If you permit me to conduct this study in your dance class, you may rest assured that your privacy, as well as that of your students, and their families will be protected at all times.

The raw data gathered through this study will be kept strictly confidential, known only to me and the members of my thesis committee. A summary of the thesis will also be made available upon your request. Be also assured that the identity of the teacher, the students, and their parents/legal guardians will be kept confidential in the thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications. Each participant’s name will be replaced by a pseudonym. In addition, I will take great care to ensure that the identities of all participants will not be revealed in any other fashion, such as through background information. All audio and video files, hard copies of interview transcripts, observation notes, field notes, and assignment samples will be locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher’s home office. Only the researcher will have access to the filing cabinet.

With any participant who agrees to participate in this research study, I will send a letter outlining the study. I will seek permission and consent from their parents/legal guardians before any data collection takes place. All participants in this study have the option of withdrawing at any time, without suffering any adverse affects or having to explain their reasons for withdrawal.

I would be glad to discuss this research study with you in detail and answer any questions that you might have. Should you need more information about the study, please contact me in person, by telephone, or through e-mail. You may contact my thesis supervisor Dr. Linda Cameron at lcameron@oise.utoronto.ca. Or, you may contact the University of
Toronto's Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273 for further information.

Sincerely,

Zihao Li (Michael)
Ph.D Candidate
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
416-462-2878
Email: zli@oise.utoronto.ca
Appendix D: Consent Form for Teachers
(To be printed on OISE letterhead)

(To be signed by dance teacher)

Title of the Research: Gender Imbalance: Embodied Language through Male Dancers

Name of the Researcher: Zihao Li

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign, and return to the researcher.

Please check the box.

☐ I, _________________________________, permit Zihao Li to conduct the study: ‘Gender Imbalance: Embodied Language through Male Dancers’, in my dance classes.

Teacher’s Signature: ________________________ Date: ________________________

Researcher’s Signature: ________________________ Date: ________________________
Appendix E: Letter of Introduction and Consent to Students and Parents

Date:
Dear Student/Parent/Guardian:

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I would like to carry out a research study on adolescent males who dance or begin to take dance in high school years. The goal of this research is to break the barrier and bias that others have against adolescent male students who participate in dance. Ultimately, it aims to promote and encourage more boys to participate in dance, to share the excitement within dance, and to give them (boys) an opportunity to express themselves through dance.

Few adolescent males seriously participate in dance (Rose, 2006; Rose, 2005). A recent groundbreaking Canadian based homework research study orchestrated by Cameron and Bartel at the University of Toronto shows that the ratio of girls vs. boys who choose dance as an extracurricular activity is 31 to 1.7 (Cameron & Bartel, 2008, p. 37). American researcher Benoit (2000) went even further by suggesting that in most cases, male dance students represent less than 1 percent of all dance classes (p. 1). Both in academic and practical fields, many people are bewildered by the phenomenon of extreme gender imbalance in dance.

Rosedale Heights School of the Arts is an excellent place for me to embark on this research. It is a unique school as it has a large number of male dance students, over 50 at present: it is the largest dance program in public high schools for males in North America. It is also the only public high school in Canada that offers all-boys dance class and it has been running successfully for the last 6 years. In this research, I will conduct a focus study which includes 6 to 10 dance students in the all-boys and mixed gender dance classes for interviews and close data analysis. The rest of the boys in dance will also be included during the classroom activities and final year dance performance.

I have already been given permission from the Toronto District School Board, the principal Mr. Sketchley, and dance teachers of the school Ms. Marsh and Ms. Spykers; however, I would like to get your permission before I commence this research study.

My data collection will include the following:

- Classroom observation
  I will visit and watch the dance class that your child is in once a week on Wednesday until the end of the data collection period. Under special circumstances such as PD days or severe weather condition, an alternate observation day will be arranged. Students and teachers will be informed on such an occasion.
Classroom documentation

In dance class, I will take field notes to record students’ progress in dance over time. To better document students’ work, I would apply media technology, such as digital and video camera to facilitate my research study. Videotaping will capture more accurately and in greater detail dance movements, which will allow for better analysis of the meaning embedded in those movements. Videotaping captures not only the many elements in a dance class, but it will also document the progress of participating students. A clear understanding of the progress may help to deconstruct the stereotype that boys cannot dance. The video data will support my research findings and help me reflect on my own teaching strategies so that I will be better equipped to teach them in the future. Videotaping will be limited to once a week on Wednesdays until the data collection process is completed. Under special circumstances such as PD days or severe weather condition, an alternative videotaping day will be arranged. Students and teachers will be informed on such an occasion.

Student assignments

All assignments will be distributed throughout the school year but selected ones will be documented and analyzed. As a researcher, I see examining assignments as a way to understand boys’ analytical and reflective understanding toward dance in general. Only assignments which belong to the focus study participants will be used for this research. I will indicate my request in the permission letter to their parents/guardians.

One-on-one interviews with students (in the focus study)

I will be asking your child if he is willing to participate in a one-on-one interview in the month of January and June. Each interview will take approximately 20 minutes. If you agree that you/your child may participate in this interview, I will organize the interview to take place at lunchtime or after school in the school library. All interviews will be recorded on a digital audio recorder and transcribed. Students will be randomly selected (by lottery) with consideration of grade levels and cultural backgrounds.

My presence in the classroom will not interfere or disrupt your child’s learning. The information I collect and the results that are obtained for this study will not have any impact on your child’s grades in any way whatsoever. You/your child’s real name will not be used in this study. My thesis supervisor and I will be the only people who have access to the information. All the data from this study will be destroyed after 10 years. Ms. Marsh, Ms, Spykers, Mr. Sketchley, or any other teacher who works at this school, will not have any access to the data.

The results of this research might be used in the following ways: publications in professional and scholarly books, journals, magazines, and newsletters, presentations to professional schools and conferences and inclusion in future research topics undertaken by the researcher.

Should you agree to your child participating in this study, you/he will have the opportunity to withdraw at anytime, and choose not to continue to participate in this
study. I will not record any notes on you/your child until I have been granted permission from both you and your child.

I would be more than happy to discuss this research study with you in detail and answer any questions that you might have. Should you need more information about the study, please contact me in person, by telephone, or through e-mail. You may also contact my thesis supervisor Dr. Linda Cameron at lcameron@oise.utoronto.ca. Or, you may contact the University of Toronto’s Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273 for further information.

Sincerely,

Zihao Li (Michael)
Ph.D Candidate
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
416-393-1590 Ext:20060
Email: zli@oise.utoronto.ca
Consent Form
(To be signed by Student and Parent)

Title of the Research: Gender Imbalance: Embodied Language through Male Dancers

Name of the Researcher: Zihao Li

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign, and return to the researcher.

Parent/Guardian

I have read and understood the terms and condition of this study and I agree to allow my son to participate in this study in the following components:

Permission to participate in the research study:

The research study will include these data collection components:
• Group observation and video-taping of dance classes (Video clips will only be used for research purposes and that they will not be released to the public).
• Registration and participation in a researcher-directed web blog.

Please check:

€ I, ____________________________, have read and understood the terms and condition of this study and I agree to allow my son ____________________________ to participate in this study.

€ I, ____________________________, have read and understood the terms and condition of this study and I do not wish my son ____________________________ to participate in this study.
Permission to participate in the focus study:
The focus study will include these data collection components:

- One-on-one interviews on two occasions (Note: not all students will participate in this section. Only 6-10 students will be selected)
- Collection of selected work artifacts/assignments for research analysis.
- Registration and participation in a researcher-directed web blog.
- Collection of selected web blog comments for research analysis.
- Group observation and video-taping of dance classes (Video clips will only be used for research purposes and that they will not be released to the public).

Please check:

€ I, ___________________________, have read and understood the terms and condition of this study and I agree to allow my son ________________________ to participate in the focus study which involves interviews and close data analysis.

€ I, ___________________________, have read and understood the terms and condition of this study and I do not agree to allow my son ________________________ to participate in the focus study.

Name (please print): ____________________________  
Signature:_________________________________  Date: _________________________________  
I can be reached at the following phone numbers: (home) ________________________________  
or., I can be reached at the following email address (please print clearly)  ________________________________
Appendix F: Letter of Introduction and Consent to Students and Parents (female dance students in mixed-gender dance classes)

Date:

Dear Student/Parent/Guardian:

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I would like to carry out a research study on adolescent males who dance or begin to take dance in high school years. The goal of this research is to break the barrier and bias that others have against adolescent male students who participate in dance. Ultimately, it aims to promote and encourage more boys to participate in dance, to share the excitement within dance, and to give them (boys) an opportunity to express themselves through dance.

Rosedale Heights School of the Arts is an excellent place for me to embark on this research. It is a unique school as it has a large number of male dance students, over 50 at present: it is the largest dance program in public high schools for males in North America. It is also the only public high school in Canada that offers all-boys dance class and it has been running successfully for the last 6 years. As part of the data collection process for this research, I will need to videotape dance classes with male students.

My presence in the classroom will not interfere or disrupt your child’s learning. The information I collect and the results that are obtained for this study will not have any impact on your child’s grades in any way whatsoever. My thesis supervisor and I will be the only people who have access to the video documentation. All the data from this study will be destroyed after 10 years. Ms. Marsh, Ms, Spykers, Mr. Sketchley, or any other teacher who works at this school, will not have any access to the data.

I have already been given permission from the Toronto District School Board, the principal Mr. Sketchley, and dance teachers of the school Ms. Marsh and Ms. Spykers.

The results of this research might be used in the following ways: publications in professional and scholarly books, journals, magazines, and newsletters, presentations to professional schools and conferences and inclusion in future research topics undertaken by the researcher.

I would be more than happy to discuss this research study with you in detail and answer any questions that you might have. Should you need more information about the study, please contact me in person, by telephone, or through e-mail. You may also contact my thesis supervisor Dr. Linda Cameron at lcameron@oise.utoronto.ca. Or, you may contact the University of Toronto’s Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273 for further information.
If you would **not** like your child to participate in any of the videotaping sessions, please let me know by email or by completing and returning the following section.

Sincerely,

Zihao Li (Michael)
Ph.D Candidate
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
416-393-1590 Ext: 20060
Email: zli@oise.utoronto.ca
Title of the Research: Gender Imbalance: Embodied Language through Male Dancers

Name of the Researcher: Zihao Li

Institutional Affiliation: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Please complete, sign, and return to the researcher.

Parent/Guardian

I, ___________________________, have read and understood the terms and condition of this study and I do not wish my son/daughter ________________________ to participate in the group observation and video-taping of dance classes

Name (please print): ____________________________
Signature:_____________________________ Date: ________________________________