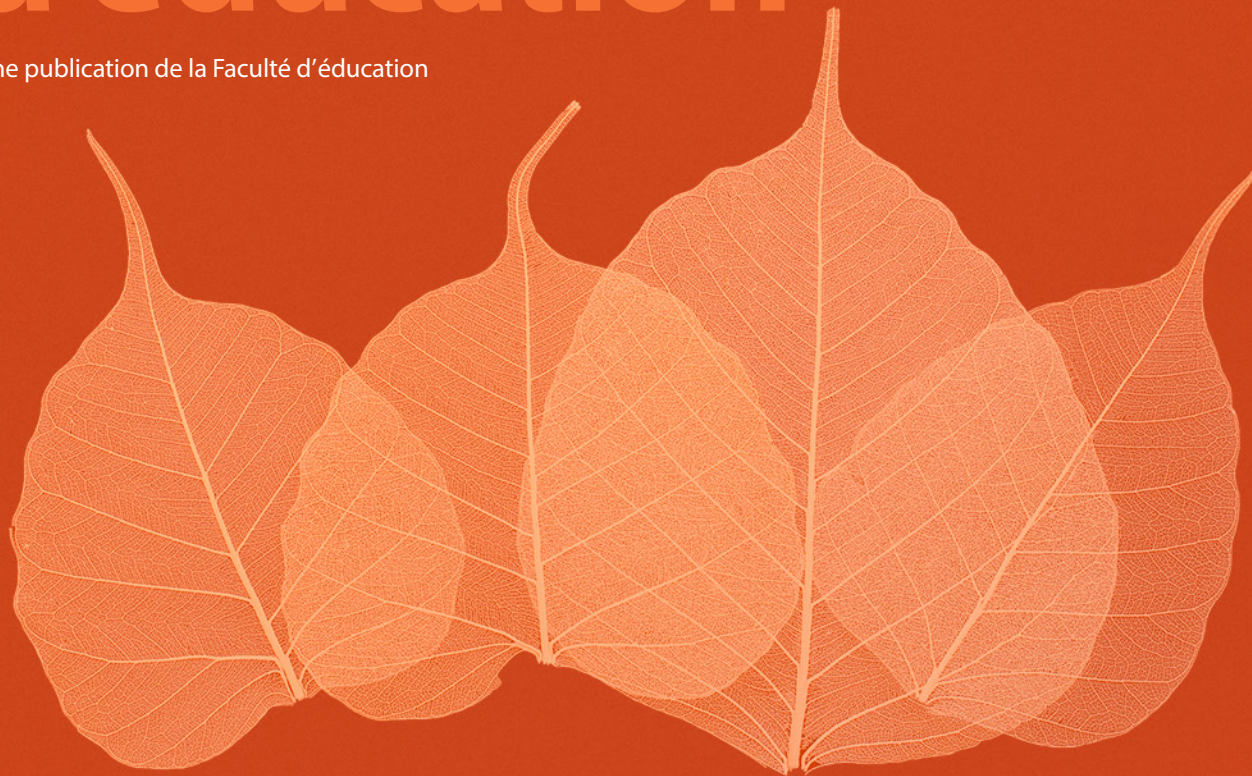


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PANDEMIC PHENOMENOLOGY

SPECIAL ISSUE

Editorial



REBECCA J. LLOYD
**Professor, Co-Director
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CAROLINA BERGONZONI
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This special “*Pandemic Phenomenology*” issue of the Education Review features lived experiences of transformation, loss, loneliness, longing, hope, joy, and finding peace in one’s pandemic existence. Such papers emerged over the course of four months, when a group of graduate students gathered within the context of a selected topics class, to share and reflect on their pandemic experiences. Inspired by readings on the methodology of phenomenology, a series of guest speakers including Celeste Snowber, Stephen Smith, Scott Churchill, and Steen Halling, and the collaborative support of co-editor Carolina Bergonzoni and the course instructor Rebecca Lloyd, each contributor to this special issue engaged in the phenomenological process of making sense of their everyday life, an existence that had indeed become strange.

While the selection of topics are diverse, from walking one’s dog during curfew, to singing in an online choir, to dancing, to parenting a toddler while juggling doctoral studies at the same time, to experiencing life in a foreign country, each inquiry shares a common thread in that they all delve beyond the practicalities of what was experienced to the inherent meaning that was there to be held. I am grateful for the devotion each contributor dedi-

cated to this project, as well as the above and beyond support offered by our guest co-editor Carolina Bergonzoni. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Stephen Smith, who offered peer-review support to both Carolina and myself as we also wished to share our lived experiences.

I know that as I continue on my path forward in life beyond this pandemic, I will look back on the lived experiences that constitute this special issue with a sense of profound gratefulness and appreciation. In sharing these experiences, it is my hope that they will ignite further conversations in terms of how each of us experienced this pandemic and offer opportunities to heal and feel not so alone.

With sincerity, health, and hope,

Rebecca J. Lloyd (she/her), Ph.D., Professor, Co-Director of Graduate Programs (Anglophone Sector)
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I, co-editor Carolina Bergonzoni, also feel grateful for the dedication of each contributor to this special issue of the Education Review. Having had the experience of participating in the editing process and the opportunity to support this incredibly engaged group of students has been nourishing me. This special issue is not only a testament of ‘pandemic life,’ but also the culmination of four months of sharing, gathering, and building community.

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PHÉNOMÉNOLOGIE DE LA PANDÉMIE

NUMÉRO SPÉCIAL

Un mot des corédactrices



REBECCA J. LLOYD

**Professeure titulaire, Codirectrice
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Université d'Ottawa



CAROLINA BERGONZONI

**Candidate au doctorat –
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Phénoménologie de la pandémie, ce numéro spécial de la Revue d'éducation, présente des expériences vécues de transformation, de perte, de solitude, de nostalgie, d'espoir, de joie et de recherche de la paix en temps de pandémie. Ces articles ont été rédigés sur une période de quatre mois, alors qu'un groupe d'étudiants diplômés s'est réuni dans le cadre d'un cours à thèmes choisis, pour partager leurs expériences en temps de pandémie et en faire une réflexion. Inspirés par des lectures sur la méthodologie de la phénoménologie, par une série de conférenciers invités, dont Celeste Snowber, Stephen Smith, Scott Churchill et Steen Halling, et par l'appui de la co-rédactrice Carolina Bergonzoni et de la professeure Rebecca Lloyd, chacun des participants à ce numéro spécial s'est engagé dans le processus phénoménologique visant à donner un sens à sa vie quotidienne, une existence qui était devenue bien étrange.

Bien que les sujets abordés soient variés, qu'il s'agisse d'une promenade avec son chien pendant le couvre-feu, du chant dans une chorale en ligne, de la danse, de l'éducation d'un enfant en bas âge pendant des études doctorales ou encore de l'expérience de la vie dans un pays étranger, tous les articles ont un point commun : ils vont au-delà des aspects pratiques de l'expérience et s'intéressent au sens inhérent de celle-ci. Je suis reconnaissante envers

chacun des participants pour le dévouement dont ils ont fait preuve pour ce projet. Je tiens aussi à remercier notre corédactrice invitée, Carolina Bergonzoni, pour son soutien exceptionnel. J'aimerais également souligner la contribution de Stephen Smith, qui a participé à l'évaluation par les pairs puisque Carolina et moi-même souhaitons nous aussi partager nos expériences.

Je sais qu'en poursuivant mon chemin dans la vie postpandémie, je me remémorerai avec un sentiment de profonde gratitude et d'appréciation les expériences contenues dans ce numéro spécial. J'ai espoir que ce partage suscitera d'autres conversations sur la façon dont chacun d'entre nous a vécu cette pandémie et qu'il offrira aux lecteurs des occasions de guérir et de se sentir moins seuls.

Avec sincérité, santé et espoir,

Rebecca J. Lloyd, (elle), PhD, Professeure titulaire, Codirectrice des programmes de 2^e et 3^e cycles (secteur anglophone)

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Moi, Carolina Bergonzoni, co-rédactrice, suis également reconnaissante pour le dévouement de chaque contributeur à ce numéro spécial de la Revue d'éducation. Ma participation au processus d'édition et mon expérience avec ce groupe d'étudiants incroyablement engagés ont été très gratifiantes. Ce numéro spécial n'est pas seulement un témoignage de « vie en temps de pandémie », mais aussi l'aboutissement de quatre mois de partage, de rassemblement et de construction d'une communauté.

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Pirahashini Thayanithy is a Masters of Education Graduate, concentrating on Studies in Teaching and Learning. She recently completed her Bachelor of Arts and Sciences with specializations

in music and neuroscience, and seeks to understand her world through interdisciplinary perspectives. As an avid chorister of over fifteen years, Pirahashini has contributed to several vocal ensembles, and plans to continue finding ways to sing with others for decades to come.

Pirahashini Thayanithy

Distance and Dissonance: Exploring the Lived Experience of Being in an Online Choir During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Abstract

During a global pandemic, what it means to sing with, to breathe with, and most importantly to *be with* others has changed drastically. Even the most close-knit communities have become fragmented, finding it necessary to adapt to unprecedented circumstances in order to remain connected. Times have been incredibly uncertain as the world contends with new changes and challenges, while trying to maintain the most fulfilling aspects of everyday life whenever possible. This paper explores these ideas through the experiences of a chorister, interpreting this past year as a series of passages within sheet music. It is a reflection of how one choir community has worked to overcome their barriers, learning new ways to rehearse and perform with one another, opening more avenues for their work as musicians. It aims to take the reader through five distinct stages of pandemic life so far and create a sense of wonder about what might come next. Through narratives, descriptions, and theoretical analysis, *Distance and Dissonance* takes a phenomenological look into the experience of being in a virtual choir, relating it to concepts of lived time, space, body, and human connection.

Keywords

Choir, sing, breath, community, harmony, diminuendo, caesura, staccato, poco a poco, fermata

Résumé

Durant une pandémie globale, ce que signifie « chanter avec »,

« respirer avec » et surtout « être avec » les autres a radicalement changé. Même les communautés fortement soudées se trouvent maintenant fragmentées et à la recherche de façons de s'adapter à des circonstances sans précédent afin de conserver leurs rapports. Les temps sont devenus de plus en plus incertains alors que le monde lutte avec de multiples changements et de nouveaux défis. Cet article explore ces concepts par les expériences d'une choriste interprétant cette dernière année comme une feuille de musique. Ceci représente une réflexion sur les méthodes dont une communauté de choristes qui a travaillé pour surmonter les obstacles en apprenant de nouvelles méthodes de pratiquer et chanter ensemble malgré l'impossibilité de se voir en personne. Ceci a ouvert la porte à de nouvelles occasions de continuer et de performer en tant que musiciens. Cet article a pour but d'emmener le lecteur à travers cinq étapes distinctes de la vie durant cette pandémie et de créer un sentiment d'émerveillement sur ce qui pourrait ensuite devenir. Par l'entremise de récits, de descriptions et d'analyses théoriques, *Distance et dissonance* jette un regard phénoménologique sur l'expérience d'être dans une chorale virtuelle en la reliant aux concepts du temps vécu, de l'espace, du corps physique, et des rapports humains.

Mot-clés

Chorale, chanter, respirer, communauté, harmonie, diminuendo, césure, saccadé, poco a poco, point d'orgue

Sing, Be, Live, See ...
This dark stormy hour,
The wind, it stirs
The scorched earth
Cries out in vain:

O war and power,
You blind and blur.
The torn heart
Cries out in pain.

But music and singing
Have been my refuge.
And music and singing shall be my light.

A light of song
Shining strong: Alleluia!
Through darkness and pain and strife, I'll
Sing, Be, Live, See ...

Peace.

– Frank Ticheli

I look out past the edge of the stage and imagine the rows of people in the seats I can just barely see beyond the bright lights. I hear my heartbeat in my ears, mingling with the sounds of my friends around me on stage. I turn my focus back to our choir director as she opens the sheet music on her stand and looks at each one of us, readying us for the coming performance. I can see her set the mood with her eyes, and we all collectively synchronize our breathing with hers. As a hush falls over the audience, she lifts her arms and smoothly brings down the baton, and each of us sings the note we've rehearsed hundreds of times before in perfect harmony.

Harmony

'har mə ni

Agreement; accord; harmonious relations
(dictionary.com, n.d., definition 4)

These are the moments I could live in forever. When every chorister comes together to create music that transcends the individual notes we sing, and our tones ring out pure and clear. When I am calm and steady as I hear my voice rise with the others, supporting each other and coming together as one. When every other thought falls away, and time ceases to exist as our sound surrounds me. When there is nothing but our choir and the stage. I know no other moment could fulfill me quite this way, “for performance evokes a condition that affects the most fundamental aspects of experience: the perception of time and space, of the body, of sensation, and of personal and social experience” (Berleant, 1999, p.74).

When we sing, I know that “the space of performance is energized ... [as we] necessarily come at the music from within”

(Berleant, 1999, p.75). I feel warm. I feel free. I feel like a part of something bigger. I feel important. I feel proud of everything that brought us here. I feel connected. Over the years, I have learned to play five or six instruments, all of which were some extension of my body. Singing is different. It involves only my body, and notes are brought to life through only my breath. It is said that “to breathe is to pull external air into ourselves and rhythmically to release outward something of ourselves” (Morley 2001, p.76). When each member of the choir contributes their voice this way, our music becomes more than a sum of its parts. As our melodies soar, I feel carried not just by the air from my lungs, but also by theirs.

Together, we exist in harmony just as our voices do. We resonate. We create together, learn together, struggle together, perform together, and grow together. “When a musical experience is constructed, a symmetrical and reciprocal trust [is] formed with each other-focused instance of giving, receiving, and asking for help, in the interest of fostering musical agency and meeting shared musical goals” (Hogle, 2018, pp.17-18). We not only have unique insights into what it is like to be a member of our ensemble, but also who each of us is as a musician and as a person. I am a part of this community, like each choir I have learned from over the past decade and a half. I can't imagine what it would be like to have that taken away.

And all of a sudden, I have to. Not just imagine it, but live it. The circumstances brought on by a global pandemic demand that we rethink the choir experience, and until the situation changes, we will be keeping our community alive through exclusively virtual means. In this new reality, I will have to find different ways to harmonize with others, and to exist in harmony. I wonder how I will adjust. To what extent will I still feel connected to those around me when they are out of sight and out of reach? What will it mean to sing with my choir? To be with them?

Diminuendo

dɪ mɪn ju 'ɛn doʊ

Gradually reducing in force or loudness
(dictionary.com, n.d., definition 2)

It is mid-March 2020, and the norms of my life are starting to shift. News of COVID-19 is spreading even more quickly than the virus itself, but I don't yet know what that means for my life. The world changes in ways I've never seen before, and as the chaos surrounding the mounting pandemic heightens, I feel my force as a person starts to ebb away. I am small and getting smaller still as the silence around me grows larger, enveloping me and constantly extending its reach.

As I wait to receive news about which events celebrating the final weeks of my undergraduate degree are being postponed or cancelled outright, I glance at the choral music propped on my piano and wonder what will happen to the choir I had just joined in the fall. As my fellow choristers and I know, “music helps build a unique community, through which one is uplifted and transported and which is unlike anything else” (Szyzkowska, 2018, p.153). But as chances of holding our final performances diminish by the day, so too do our contributions to our commun-

ity, and mine to the ensemble. I wonder just how long this can go on before there is nothing left of our plans. I know that we will maintain the relationships we have created within our group, but it is hard to tell what else we might be able to count on.

Caesura

sr'zəər ə,

A break, especially a sense pause, usually near the middle of a verse (dictionary.com, n.d., definition 1)

It is hardly a week later, and everything seems to have come to a standstill. The world really is shutting down. I didn't know that was possible. As someone whose energy comes from participating, interacting, and achieving together with others, it feels like an essential part of who I am is shutting down too.

This pandemic causes an intersection of “social, cultural, and familial influences, as well as emotional traumas, [so] we learn to hold and constrict our breath” (Rudolph, 1993, p.60). To become more protected, we start being extra careful to sanitize our surroundings, keep a six-foot distance from other people, and wear masks to help keep our breaths contained.

The world beyond me feels vast and empty, reflecting the state of my previously overfilled schedule. I am sure there are people nearby, but I might no longer notice the difference if they left. With so much new time on my hands, I think about spending some of it making music. As I run my fingers over black and white keys and then the frets on my guitar, I think again about maybe going over the choir songs just for practice, and then try to figure out if there is a point.

I can see my suitcase in the corner and push away thoughts of having to leave the university town I called home for four years. My heart longs for a chance to have known which moments with friends would be farewells before they began. I tell myself not to dwell on what should have been, but there is little else for me to ponder now.

Staccato

stə'ku təʊ

Characterized by performance in which the notes are abruptly disconnected; disjointed (dictionary.com, n.d., definition 6)

It is finally summertime. I keep trying to get back into making music for my own enjoyment, but I am hard-pressed to find the same spark or even comfort in it that I once did. I know I don't need to find that by myself though, because I am still able to continue working on projects with my choir, and “when an experience is collective, the awareness we have that this feeling is shared has itself a phenomenal dimension and involves a feeling of its own—something akin to a sense of belonging” (Janković, 2017, p.170). We decided early on that we would bridge physical distances by connecting virtually, and I am thankful for the possibility, especially since I would not have been able to continue rehearsing with the choir in-person after graduating anyway.

Many of us have needed to return to our hometowns, and “the opportunity to participate regardless of where [we] live is the biggest advantage” (Grushka et al., 2021, p.5). However, I know this realm that is entirely new to us will bring challenges for our now fragmented community.

The initial months are full of trial and error as we make efforts towards creating the farewell song for those leaving the university. Our first attempt involves digitally putting together individually recorded parts, but we quickly realize this leaves too much room for discrepancies. Personal interpretation is an essential part of performing music, and internalizing it enhances performances, but only when we can experience it together. Next, we try to re-record while watching a video of our director conducting the piece. Although we are all highly trained musicians, visual cues are very important for performing, as “motor synchrony and mimicry have been shown ... to support the sharing of specific states, such as emotions or intentions” (Janković, 2017, p.167). Unfortunately, this method for virtual performance still only marginally helps our collective efforts to bring this sentimental song together. “Technical issues were ever present in [these] early stages of the choir's adventures online and singing had certainly lost much of the aesthetic and performing pleasure” (Grushka et al., 2021, p.12) it once had. Additionally, much of the software could be “quite limiting as there was no opportunity to work on the sound of the choir” (Grushka et al., 2021, p.11). Eventually, we try to create our individual components by watching the conducting video while listening to another member sing our part. When working together in person, the addition of these auditory cues allows us to closely listen to and mirror the voices of those we share the space with. This time, I can sense how “the breath supports the person, allowing that person's true nature, authentic self, to be uncovered” (Rudolph, 1993, p.67). It makes me think that maybe my attempts to express the way each song makes me feel through my voice alone will be worthwhile for our future listeners. It is true that “listening is meant as a way of interpreting an experience, which is telling and yet completely enclosed in itself, meaningful and yet so secretive that it is almost mute” (Szyzkowska, 2018, p.154). Perhaps the third time's the charm as they say, or just that we have exhausted all of our ideas for now, but the graduation track finally comes together.

Technological capabilities have come a long way, and making music with an ensemble still gives me a sense of purpose. However, it is hard to get over the way we sound like a group of soloists instead of the entity that emerges from a choir unit when we sing together. When I listen to the track, although it sounds better than we could have hoped for at the start, I can tell that we are not singing together. It sounds like my voice plus theirs, not my voice with theirs; my breath with theirs.

Poco a Poco

'pəʊ kəʊ ə 'pəʊ kəʊ

Gradually; little by little.

(dictionary.com, n.d., definition 5)

As the leaves turn from green to red and float between my

window and the house next door, I sit at my piano and thumb through the new booklets of music that came in the mail the other week to remind myself of what I am supposed to be singing tonight. I skim the notes on the pages to recall my part of the songs, trying to hear the other voices in my head, and realize I am struggling because it has been so long since I got to sing some of the pieces with other people, if I ever got the chance at all. I wonder briefly how it will feel to be united again. To sing in unison.

As I watch the minutes before rehearsal tick by on my clock, I remind myself to relax my body. I unclench my jaw and massage each side with the tips of my fingers. I let my shoulders settle downwards and backwards, and adjust my posture to allow my spine and airway to be aligned when I sit. I flex my fingers and toes, use the feeling of the cold floor beneath my bare feet to ground myself, and take a few deep breaths. As I stand to pull my chair back over to my desk, I think about how much softer it is than the seats in our old rehearsal space, but know I would give up this comfort to have back the warmth my friends brought to that room. I think about how practicing here means I don't have to worry about bumping into anyone or looking silly, but "in music performance of the sort that involves interkinesthetic affectivity, one's body schema or peripersonal space extends" (Salice *et al.*, 2019, p.205), and I miss having others to share that with. It occurs to me that this is the longest I have not been on a stage since I was six years old.

I nearly click on tonight's Zoom link before I remember that things run more smoothly when I restart my laptop just before rehearsal, so I hold down the power button and wait. I don't think anyone will pay that much attention to me, but I adjust my surroundings a bit, taking a minute as I do every week to set up the only window to my life nicely anyway. When I finally hear the chime of my laptop coming back to life, I become more hopeful, and feel like new possibilities are opened with every rehearsal.

That feeling fades as I start to feel enclosed both by the four walls of my room and the four sides of my little Zoom box. I am reminded again of how different interacting here is to rehearsals in person, despite the way we strive to recreate those possibilities in an unfamiliar domain. In this setting, we miss out on the multiple hushed conversations that fill a room before a rehearsal starts. Instead, we begin with a quick greeting, which usually just involves quietly waving to no one in particular. In our virtual meetings, we face every other person attending, but there is no eye contact because no one knows where anyone else is looking. It takes away the chance for me to address someone or be addressed by someone solely through body language. For the duration of our time on Zoom, I fluctuate between feeling like I am connecting with everyone or no one without the possibility for something in between.

Once everyone is present, we exercise our bodies. When I do this properly, I feel ready to take on the hour we plan to spend together. After all, "the body is the medium for experience" (Wilkins, 2016, p.119). With this in mind, I breathe in long and slow, tracing the air that enters each time right to my core. I feel my personal sense of space expand along with my lungs, and "as my breath awareness grows to include more of my body, I feel there is more room to move in my body and out into the world,

as if my inside has expanded and is more substantial, and so am I" (Rudolph, 1993, p. 28). As I exhale, I let myself feel the stresses and tensions of my day expel as well. I carefully stretch my neck to the front and side to side. I hold each arm across my chest with the other, then stand and steady each leg behind me as I try to centre my balance. I reach down to touch my toes and roll up to a standing position, which is made harder by not being able to see and follow along with my conductor on my screen.

When we finally move to vocal warm-ups, I try to maintain the openness I have just achieved with my body, but often feel the weight of pandemic life closing me off, starting in my chest. Since we are on Zoom where audio synchronicity is nearly impossible, our conductor is the only one with a mic on. She instructs us about how to complete each warm-up before playing accompaniment on her piano for us to sing along to by ourselves. I know I should give each one a full effort, but I sometimes can't help but quietly sing along instead, wishing I could hear the others warm up with me. When I can hear them, I can feel them, because "in addition to the straightforward emotional meaning, it also literally means that [I] feels the vibrations of the others" (Salice *et al.*, 2019, p.204). Although we are having scheduled rehearsals again, for all I know, my fellow singers could be mouthing along and looking as if they are following without actually making a sound. For all they know, so could I. It feels wrong not to be surrounded by the other voices as mine now mingles with nothing but stale air in the one corner of my room that I occupy for the majority of my waking hours, amplifying my loneliness.

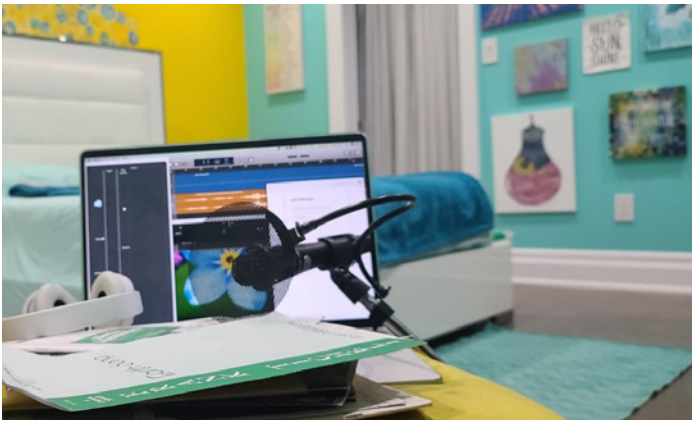
Most weeks, we transition from Zoom to a program called Jamulus, which is meant for synchronous activity. Unfortunately, it has the opposite limitation of Zoom because it lacks a visual component. I am signed on, but I am struggling to connect. Learning to use it is a lot of work, and some days, logging onto the server presents enough issues that rehearsal ends before I can participate. Other times, I can join fine, but have issues hearing others or with having them hear me. Being disconnected through the technology makes me feel profoundly detached from our shared space and time in a way that I never thought would happen in a choir. When singing live, it is sometimes necessary for choristers sharing a melodic line to employ a technique known as stagger breathing, individually timing their entrances and fading off in a way that allows them to maintain notes for a much longer time than one singer could do alone. When singing these types of passages, the breaths and voices of those around me allow my sound to go beyond my own capabilities, becoming one with the others instead. But now, singing at a distance, our notes are staggered and scattered and in contrast instead of in concert. The variation in everyone's equipment makes it so that what I can hear of others is sometimes muffled, staticky, and distorted. On occasion, I can hear only my own voice echoing back, which I have mostly experienced in deep, cavernous, often dark spaces that stand in stark contrast to the brightly lit work area that is my bedroom. Other times, all I hear is silence. In all my years of performing, "the experience is one of shaping auditory space, of the silences as well as the sounds that are indicated in the score" (Berleant, 1999, p.76). But now, I am the only listener, and the

lack of sound is hardly intentional.

It is a relief when we can go a few minutes without most of these issues, but synchronicity with a group of our size is still challenging. I can usually sing with one other person and hear my voice in my room mix with theirs through my headphones, but in a choir, it is important to be able to “hear more than one part at a time ... [now] significantly more complicated from an operational perspective” (Grushka *et al.*, 2021, p.11). When a few more people are added, the differences in delay make us fall out of sync quickly. When we try to incorporate different melodic lines, the voices that I know work beautifully together quickly dissolve into cacophony.

Some days, it feels like we take a few steps forward and then several steps back. Over the weeks, though, we find our footing slowly but surely, and I gather a little more motivation each time we come close to expressing a song in the way I believe it is meant to be.

Figure 1: A Representation of my Virtual Choir Set-Up



Note: This image features some equipment used for virtual choir rehearsals (a laptop for the software, a microphone, headphones, etc.) as well as a stack of sheet music to potentially run through, against the backdrop of the author's brightly-coloured room.

This track is of Frank Ticheli's [Earth Song](#) as sung by the University of Guelph Chamber Choir, live and in person near the end of 2019. I recently recorded my alto part while listening to sing along and layered it over the original audio of my voice alongside my fellow choristers, demonstrating the separation in singing, breathing, and being with them during this pandemic.

Fermata

fər' mɑ tə;

The sustaining of a note, chord, or rest for a duration longer than the indicated time value
(dictionary.com, n.d., definition 3)

It has been a year and I am still holding my note. It is steady for now, but I know a time will come that I will run out of breath. I feel as if I am waiting for an indication from my conductor to move forward that seemingly never comes.

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Harrani Rajasegar is a Masters of Education student at the University of Ottawa, with a concentration in Leadership, Curriculum and Policy. She recently completed her Bachelor of Arts at the University of Toronto, focusing on Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity and Political Science. She takes an

interdisciplinary approach to critique existing pedagogies and power dynamics within education. She explores the way race, gender and identities frame narratives, and strives to create anti-racist, decolonial, and inclusive pedagogical practices. Harrani spends her down time exploring the city, trying new food, and pursuing fashion trends.

Harrani Rajasegar

Pandemic Rollercoaster: Survival Mode On

Abstract

The meaning of “survival” has changed during the unprecedented conditions created by the pandemic, which has also created an overwhelming rollercoaster of emotions. From the peak of the pandemic to now, I have felt lost and disconnected to my emotional connection with the outside world and have questioned what survival means to me. My exploration weaves together a series of prose and analysis, holding space for poetry and lived experiences as important parts of learning. The pandemic has magnified our inner thoughts and emotions, swaying the way we navigate our everyday lives. Simply crying can feel like a thunderstorm, while a small smile can feel like rainbows full of glee. In this paper, I explore these overwhelming emotions, including heartbreak, fear, and disconnection through Leggo’s writings on the phenomenology of grace. Leggo explores the unique understandings between the body, mind and embodiment through poetry. By delving into the different dimensions of survival I have experienced during the pandemic, I find myself asking: *how much longer will this last?* My heightened emotions have changed the way I experience my everyday, and through my writing I’ve been able to ground and navigate the outside world. Now, I invite you to experience my rollercoaster and open your hearts and mind to understand what these unexpected times of survival are like.

Keywords

Pandemic, survival, emotions, phenomenology, embodiment

Résumé

La définition du mot « survie » a été transformée à travers les événements sans précédent découlant de la pandémie, qui créent également une montagne russe d’émotions. Depuis le début de la pandémie, je me suis sentie perdue et détachée émotionnellement du monde extérieur, ce qui m’a amenée à me questionner sur la signification de la survie. Au fil de mes recherches, j’ai découvert une série de proses et d’analyses qui placent la poésie et les expériences vécues au cœur du processus d’apprentissage. La pandémie a amplifié nos pensées et nos émotions, et a chamboulé notre quotidien. De simples larmes peuvent s’apparenter à des orages alors qu’un petit sourire peut rayonner comme un arc-en-ciel. Par l’entremise de cet article, j’explore ces vastes émotions, soit le chagrin, la peur et l’isolement, en me référant à la philosophie de Leggo sur la phénoménologie de la grâce. Leggo explore les concepts du corps, de l’esprit et de l’incarnation de ce dernier à travers la poésie. En analysant plusieurs aspects de la survie auxquels j’ai fait face au courant de la pandémie, je me retrouve à me questionner, à savoir : combien de temps cela durera-t-il ? Mes émotions amplifiées ont changé la manière dont je vis mon quotidien. Par mes écrits, j’ai pu explorer le monde extérieur et reprendre le contrôle de mon univers. Maintenant, je vous invite à monter dans ma montagne russe et à ouvrir vos cœurs et esprits afin de comprendre à quel point ces temps exceptionnels de survie peuvent être difficiles.

Mots-clés

Pandémie, survie, émotions, phénoménologie, incarnation

“The goal of phenomenological study is neither to understand a particular individual’s experience per se, nor to generalize a universal meaning structure that can “suit” or “explain” everyone’s experience. Rather, phenomenology aims to explore and understand a ‘possible’ human experience, phenomenon, or event” (van Manen, 2014, p. 256).

WARNING #1

The radio announcer exclaims that I am living in a red zone. Case counts are increasing at alarming rates. A #stayathome order is in effect.

WARNING #2

My poetic prose takes on an informal format by dismissing the use of capitalization with the intention to remove hierarchical components letters carry through idiom. Influenced by the work of Cummings [who] would frequently use the decapitalization of the proper noun “I” and instead use “i” (Kelly, 2009), I share the vision that the size of letters should not strip the importance of what is being said. My use of lowercase letters in my forthcoming poems displays a free-flow use of text with less structure and focus on grammatic or punctuation ideologies.

WARNING #3

Expect a disruptive ride ahead. There will be moments where you will experience a sense of flow. There will be other moments where there will be a purposeful bump in the writing. Such flowing and disruptive moments are inspired by the words of the late Carl Leggo (2020) who writes: “In order to allow the mute to speak, we need embodied intuition; fine tuning between heart and mind: flow. Flow is the key condition to bend life into aliveness, syntagma into poetry and, of course, grace into gracefulness. Nonetheless, books are products of language, traditions and minds. Flow works in time, across time, with disruption” (Leggo, 2020, p.1).

WARNING #4:

Fasten your seat belts and prepare for the ride ahead.

Survival

When thinking about survival, Charles Darwin’s theory of survival of the fittest is what first comes to my mind. “Organisms with genes better suited to the environment are selected for survival and pass them to the next generation. Thus, when a new infection that the world has never seen before erupts, the process of natural selection starts all over again” (Nagarkatti & Nagarkatti, 2020). As I think about survival in relation to this pandemic, I am starting to wonder who is the fittest? Will I overcome the virus? Will I survive? Will I pass my genes on?

Yet, I wonder. Could survival extend beyond Darwin’s concept? I look further into the struggles I have experienced, and I question what it means to survive on an emotional level. I am experiencing a heightened number of emotions - *terror, panic, agitation, sorrow, misery, desolation*. I am also hyper aware of my enclosed surroundings, the four walls of my bedroom, making it difficult to get through another day. I am aching for a good night’s

sleep, the touch and caress of a loved one, and a feeling of belonging in the midst of this situation. What I took for granted — sleep, human contact, and spending time with others – my means for everyday survival are starting to crumble.

In order to make phenomenological sense (Leggo, 2020; Snowber, 2006) of what it means to survive in this global pandemic, I weave together poetry and personal reflection. “The poetic voice which is also embedded in the physical and passionate, emerges from an erotic encounter with the world and other. This is not just for the professional artists, but for humankind to be nourished in; it is the invitation to live in a poetic way” (Snowber, 2006, p. 86). Poetry bridges the gaps in our lives and provides a deeper understanding of our emotional connections with a sense of grace. Leggo (2020) invites us into what it might be like to experience phenomenologies of grace in times of challenge. He writes, “phenomenologies of grace offer us fractal experiences that respond to encounters with sets of variables within the Whole that both incorporate and transcend our abilities to describe them. This ‘new experience’ ... is a feeling of existence as a unique being that is part of greater things that flow together, experimenting with new identities and challenging old habits” (Leggo, 2020, p. 3).

Adapting

Community gathering and spending time in close proximity is no longer an option. The way we occupy space has changed. We stand in lines and maintain a 6 ft distance. We wear masks, purple, white, or medical grade in styles unique to each of us, but at the same time uniform in that our collective mode of interaction has changed. As Chapman et al. (2020) articulates, such points of intersection display our “interconnectedness, our shared humanity, and our shared suffering” (Chapman et al., 2020, p.1).

one last shot

we finally pick up the Jackson Triggs bottle of rose for a night out with the girls. my mom is talking about the foreign virus spreading around the city and to be cautious, but after a stressful week of midterms I deserve to go out with my friends. we were planning to make this March 14, 2020 an amazing night. we had tickets to a club event, but weirdly enough at 4:30 pm a mass email was sent cancelling and refunding our tickets. the night has yet to begin, and other places seem to be open. so we meet to do our makeup, exchange clothes, and start our drinking. one face brush, three faces. flawless and glowing, we are ready for the night of our lives.

we crack open the Jackson Triggs and manage to finish the bottle in under 30 minutes. as we are blasting music and singing along, I decide it is time to go to the club. so we order the uber and hop in to travel across Scarborough to Pickering. Cocktail House the neon sign reads, there is no line, no people, barely any cars even. just me and my 3 friends. the security guard checks our IDs and lets us in immediately. we enter the club, only to realize that along with us 4, there is one bartender and another trio of friends in this massive space. the music is loud and the emptiness in the room echoes it even louder and harder. the lights bounce

off the walls from the lack of bodies to shine on. the lack of sweaty bodies and spilling drinks are missing. for once I actually see the floor of the club and i'm able to move around freely for once. but all this emptiness doesn't stop us or concern us, we are determined to make something out this night. we take our dance moves to the floor. time passes by, we order shots, we keep the night alive. I take one last shot and the next thing I remember is being in an uber home. just like that our **entire** lives change, and this is the night we have left to remember our old life by. it was our **one last shot** at life.

how are you?

i'm good ... i'm surviving. i'm just simply existing to make it through another day.

what does it mean to survive? what are we surviving? how are we surviving? why are we surviving? is that what is exhausting us?

Every time I'm overwhelmed, which happens quite frequently considering the number of tasks and responsibilities I take upon myself, my friends and family urge me to slow down, unplug from technology, and take time to relax. Rarely do I listen to their advice as I continue to bombard myself with tasks on top of tasks. As a kid, my mother trained me to find fulfilment in everything I did throughout my life whether it was school, extracurricular, or community service. Yet while analyzing my life through a phenomenological lens now, these past few months have weighed down my existence, as the cloud of survival hovers over me. The constant shadow of survival has skewed the way I live now - unable to appreciate the moment or find joy in the activity I'm doing.

Leggo (2020) introduces the phenomenology of grace with radical praxis that involves "stepping out of the collective category of being/experiencing that phenomenology addresses and into our individual skins" (Leggo, 2020, p.1). The essence of holding space for your own voice and "collective domain of Being unique insights and practices that can inform our responses to the perceived gracelessness of our given realities" (Leggo, 2020, p.1). These realities stem from a deeper poetic voice. It is that 'I, I long and hold space for in this writing. "*We do not need a new religion or a new bible. We need a new experience—a feeling of what it is to be I*" (Watts, 1989, p. 14). Thus, grace is understood to endure and confront, producing these moments and endless possibilities of interpreting survival in a pandemic. Therefore, I pose what could the disconnect within the phenomenology of grace embody? What are the experiences of disconnect?

disconnect

as the weeks progress, I slowly lose connection with my body and start deeply concentrating on what my *mind* has to offer me. the loss of rational thinking and making sense of why things are happening slowly fade. it's a moment of fight, a fight to survive, a fight to make it through. yet this process only pushes me further and further away from the realities of life. every news channel is predicting the dates and duration of isolation, but no one is telling us what it is going to be like, or what it might feel like.

overthinking

it always starts with a what if ... what if life was normal? what if i spent that extra minute with you? what if i didn't cry about that? would i have something extra to be happy about? what if i didn't spend so much time thinking about it? what if.. what if ... what if? my mind is flooded, swamped and overflowed. i can't concentrate, i can't snap out of it.

this is when I disconnect from reality and delve into my imagination

let it go

my nails grip the edge on my bed covers as i plunge my heavy head into the cold pillow. I SCREEEEEEAM. i sob, i cry. i huff and puff. my chest gets heavy, my fingers go numb. i don't feel my toes. my lungs fill up, my nose is stuffed, my throat is cracking, and my voice barely makes it out. the sides of my head start throbbing, a long pause and a mute sound goes off in my head. i can only hear myself unable to catch my next breath and let the water from my eyes flood my face. i'm starting to drift away from whatever this moment is and into a numbness, tasteless, faraway place. a place i cannot feel anything but scream and cry.

insomnia

To be awake, to be asleep, or be awake while sleeping or sleep while being awake.

"The experience of insomnia as a distinct experience cannot be compared with other life experiences. [The] mind is working and [it] cannot stop it. It is only processing past experiences, especially bad experiences" (Rezaie, Khazaie, & Yadani, 2016, p. 181).

tossing. twisting. i just can't seem to get the right spot. i stick one foot out, thinking maybe the cold air will help. nope, too cold. i check my phone, it reads 3:43 am. it's too early to wake up. i open tiktok. the bright light on my phone immediately causes my eyes to ache. i lock my phone. i run my fingers over the rubber case, it reminds me of the case that holds my mini hand sanitizer, that hangs from my black leather backpack. i flip onto my tummy, bury my head into my pillow. too hot. i flip my pillow. hmm, nice. i concentrate on nothing, but plain, black space.

i keep having this dream. this dream of you. this dream where ...

this dream where you run up to me *sosososo* fast and grab me and spin me. i grasp your body with my fingers, my heart jumps, the blood rushes. the adrenaline is so fast, it aligns with the speed of your turns. i smell you, i feel you, i am with you. my skin feels alive again, my pale, withering, grey skin against yours feels the colour and liveliness of your bright, brown, honey like skin. my rough, dead skin touches your powder soft skin, and it's like when you rub milkweed satin silk together between your fingers. the soft, slow, touch between the two is that moment of feeling grounding in ourselves, of care and affection.

i finally rub my eyes and read that only 7 minutes passed and how easily those 7 minutes felt like heaven ...

3:50 am

it's been 3 weeks since i've touched you. since i've smelled you. since i've held you. if i knew that was going to be the last time, i would have hugged you a little harder, held your hand a little tighter, and appreciated that moment a little longer. as the days pass i'm starting to feel so far from you. you start to feel less like you're home and more like you're distant. a faint memory, a passing thought, someone i used to know.

Living with constant insomnia is an extremely painful experience. My continually disrupted sleep, negative emotions and stressful conditions create an unwelcome lifestyle and an unwanted routine that overtakes my everyday existence. As described, "impaired daily living may produce negative thoughts about lack of control regarding insomnia, and having to tolerate it" (Rezaie, Khazaie, Yadani, 2016, p. 183). This lack of control, especially during a time of survival damages the desire to make it through another day. The thoughts and emotions pile on top of each other making it impossible to make it through another day without dark thoughts. When my mind is preoccupied with disturbing and troubling experiences, insomnia damages the entirety of **me**. So I wonder, how will another sleepless night threaten my survival?

electric love

it's the moment I fall asleep that I can remember this. it's all the little things you do to show me you care. it's the way you look at me and make my heart drop to the floor even when we're in a room full of people. it's the *way* you ask me how i'm feeling and how i'm doing. it's the way you make me feel like we're in this entire thing together. you make me feel unstoppable. you make me feel like me, i matter, i'm *actually* someone to you when i'm with you, amongst this entire sphere we call the world

I turn to Smith (2013) to ground myself in this experience. "The caress feels the presence of another in tracing the curve of an arm, the contour of a cheek. It recognizes, in bringing to the surface of our contact, to the light contact of hand and skin, another's deep emotions" (Smith, 2013, p. 68). I take this physical description to make sense of the emotional feeling I feel, this moment of electric love and fulfilment.

"The caress is a loving gesture. It is sensual, tingled with the erotic, yet it remains a gesture of connecting with another person in his or her bodily differences" (Smith, 2013, p. 68). Smith describes the importance of touch and this caressing gesture as an indication of love. During this time of aching love, the physical impossibilities of the virus make it even more difficult. In contrast, when experiencing this feeling, it can be so electric: "as soon as we sense another's vulnerability the caress becomes much more than a sensual act" (Smith, 2013, p. 69). The caress enables our survival, gives us the purpose, and allows us to explore survival together.

before the tear

my eyes start to sting, i gather the leftover saliva in my mouth and push it down my throat while i clench my teeth. i blink again, my eyes feel heavier, brighter. you know when you accidentally

get soap in your eyes, the pain of stinging and pricking until you rub it all out. i imagine this is what it feels like to pour alcohol into your bare body and let it sting your pain away. thoughts flood my mind, i can't seem to push them out. i force my eyeballs to stare into the light. maybe this will help. i close my eyes, the muscles around my face, neck, and jaw tighten, and i feel the round, wet tear drop roll down my dry, cracked cheek. all because i remember what that electric love felt like.

zoom/netflix - what to do when you're in a fence

i've nearly watched every top 10 movie and tv show in Canada that rotates biweekly. i probably would've never watched half these shows if it weren't for being cooped up at home. the only excitement i feel these days is when i finally find a tv show and actually enjoy more than 10 minutes of it. Once i am wrapped up in the show, i'm finally able to stick to it and get through it. some days i feel the **need** to stay up until 5 am and power through 6 episodes back-to-back to escape a sleepless night. other days i have to rewatch an episode because i'm consumed by thinking about a world outside, unable to get over the floods of thoughts taking over my mind again. that's when the screen turns to *are you still watching* *i mean, i guess i am?* at least to escape the ongoing thoughts that overwhelm me everyday ...

safe haven

i think the difference between place and space is that a place is a geographical location. It's that place we remember when we think back to where we ate that one time, or where we live, or where we meet our friends.

space carries an emotional attachment. a *real* feeling, moment, a sense of urgency to feel as though you belong to your surrounding. it is the **space** you go to for comfort. where you find yourself understanding, navigating and discussing your own thoughts ...

... the water stings my eyes as i stare directly into it while it rushes to fall onto my body. i tilt my head down as the water pours into my ears and then over my shoulders and down to the white ceramic tub. when the water fills my ears, it mutes the world outside and lets me hear my own voice for once. it's the one space i do not share with anyone. no matter how intimate or close they are to my proximity, it is the one space that is mine. maybe that's why i love it so much, because of all the places in the world, this is the one place that is **my** space.

i feel safe. i feel peace. i feel like me in this space that is mine.

hope

and now i long for the days we can use one face brush on three faces. the night we don't have to think twice before getting into ubers. and hugging freely and intensely every person i see. i hope better days will come ... but who knows how long this will take? how long can i go without sleep? how long can my heart take this? how much longer do I need to keep my survival mode *on*?

This rollercoaster ride continues to go on and on and I just cannot seem to figure out when it will end.

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Seasons of Hope: A Visiting Brazilian Doctoral Student's Experience of the Pandemic in Canada

Abstract

With an anticipatory sense of hope, I prepare to study and complete the final stages of my dissertation in Canada as a visiting student researcher at the University of Ottawa. I am joined by my husband and two school-aged sons. We arrived in February 2020. The weather was cold but the feeling of welcome was warm. There was news of a pandemic as we began to settle into our new lives, but we thought it would just last a few weeks ... Over 16 months have now passed, and the pandemic continues to rage. This reflection looks back on the various seasons of experiencing life in Canada as a visiting scholar with a particular focus on the phenomenon of hope as it is experienced over time. Inspired by phenomenology, I inquire into what it might be like to experience hope as if it were a verb, a living entity that builds, fades, and strengthens over time as I sense the tension in both gaining and losing this vital presence.

Keywords

Doctorate, hope, phenomenology, education, pandemic

Résumé

Plaine d'espoir, je me prépare à terminer les dernières étapes de ma thèse au Canada en tant qu'étudiante-chercheuse invitée à l'Université d'Ottawa. Je suis accompagnée de mon mari et de mes deux fils d'âge scolaire. Nous sommes arrivés en février 2020. Le temps était froid, mais l'accueil chaleureux. Nous avons entendu parler d'une pandémie alors que nous commençons à nous installer dans notre nouvelle vie, mais nous pensions que cela ne durerait que quelques

semaines... Plus de 16 mois se sont écoulés et la pandémie continue de faire rage. Cette réflexion porte sur les différentes saisons de l'expérience de la vie au Canada en tant que chercheuse invitée, en mettant l'accent sur le phénomène de l'espoir tel qu'il est vécu au fil du temps. M'inspirant de la phénoménologie, je m'interroge sur ce que pourrait être l'expérience de l'espoir s'il s'agissait d'un verbe, d'une entité vivante qui se construit, s'estompe et se renforce au fil du temps, alors que je ressens à la fois la tension de gagner et de perdre cette présence vitale.

Mots-clés

Doctorat, espoir, phénoménologie, éducation, pandémie

É preciso ter esperança, mas ter esperança do verbo esperar; porque tem gente que tem esperança do verbo esperar. E esperança do verbo esperar não é esperança, é espera. Esperançar é se levantar, esperar é ir atrás, esperançar é construir, esperar é não desistir! Esperançar é levar adiante, esperançar é juntar-se com outros para fazer de outro modo...

We need hope but hope from the verb to hope; because there are people who have hope from the verb to wait. And hope from the verb to wait is not hope; it is waiting. To hope is to get up, to hope is to go after, to hope is to build, to hope is not to give up! To hope is to carry on, to hope is to join with others to do it another way ...

Paulo Freire!

1 Freire, P.(1997). Pedagogia da esperança: um encontro com a pedagogia do oprimido [Pedagogy of hope: an encounter with the pedagogy of the oppressed]. Paz e Terra.

Hoping for a Marvellous Time in Canada

How magical the snow is! Plenty of plans swirl in my mind, and when I open my eyes between naps as I have been experiencing more than 20 hours of travelling from my home in Brasilia. I can see how beautiful the snow is as it falls from the sky on the road. I do not know how to be outside yet in such cold weather, as I am new to this climate, but those tiny white falling flakes evoke feelings of peace and new hope for life here in Canada.

Why am I in Canada? As a component of the research group Comparative Studies in Education, my goals are to compare my Physical Education (PE) experiences in Brasilia and Ontario and gain a deep understanding of phenomenological approaches to research. I study the curriculum, not only as a lived experience (Aoki, 1993, 2004; van Manen, 2015) but also as a living-experience (Lloyd, 2018) for PE teachers in my doctorate at the University of Brasilia (UnB), in the Federal Capital of Brazil. Additionally, I am curious to learn from other cultures and provide international experiences for my family. Thus, in 2019 I applied for the visiting student researcher program² at the University of Ottawa (uOttawa) under the supervision of Dr. Rebecca Lloyd, a Full Professor at the Faculty of Education who agreed to be my host.

Within a few months, I was accepted into the program, and it was time to pack. February in Canada is very different from February in Brazil. In contrast to Canada, the seasons in Brazil (specifically in Brasilia) are not strongly visible, and even in the winter, we have sunny and warm days. Besides gathering warm jackets and clothes, I also packed a box of face masks given to me by my father-in-law. We had heard the news about a new virus, but at that time, the idea of needing to wear one was far from my reality. I made room for the masks in my luggage but I only did that to be polite.

Within a few days of my arrival, I go the University of Ottawa to meet Rebecca Lloyd. She introduces me to her graduate students and some of her colleagues and shows me around campus. My sons attend a nearby local school, and a feeling of normalcy emerges as we all begin our studies. When my sons go to school, I go to the university every day. Within a week of being there, I am invited to attend a faculty conference that is organized and run by graduate students to feature graduate student work, the Jean-Paul Dionne Symposium, and it is incredible. When we gather around the dinner table in our new Canadian home, I am as just excited as my boys to share our recent experiences. Hope has manifested into joy!

Suddenly the Pandemic: Halting Hope

After the March break, a lockdown starts in Ontario due to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, and there are implications for all professions, including educators around all the world (Arriola, 2020; Domokos et al., 2020; Godoi et al., 2020; Machado

et al., 2020; Vargo et al., 2020). And the news in Brazil? It was almost the same; just essential services are opened. Now the use of masks is mandatory at the grocery store where strict measures of capacity and social distance are followed.

I tell myself to be calm. This is just a brief moment. It will pass ... I sample various online resources like Skype, Zoom, and the new Google Meet to speak with my guest supervisor Rebecca and my family back home. This is going to be ok. Soon everything will turn to normal. But normal never happened. What emerged was never anticipated ... feelings of isolation, predicament, and the shock of death as close family members and friends contracted COVID-19 in Brazil.

Thompson (2007) says, “No matter how prepared we might have felt a moment ago, when we find ourselves in a predicament, we realize that we are, in fact, facing something unexpected and unique (p. 101).” I would say that the pandemic is a predicament, but I did not realize it until I found myself in the situation of my close friends and family starting to die. What could I do? I could not go home to offer support. I was stuck. My hope for a better life has come to a halt. Never in my worst nightmares did I visualize this COVID-19 situation we are now facing, a predicament that continues to get worse instead of better. When the pandemic first started, I did what I was told. I followed the rules without knowing exactly how to proceed. Squirt hand sanitizer. Wear a mask. Keep 2 m of social distance. Do not travel anywhere unless it is necessary. I go along with these rules, thinking it will pass quickly ...

Living in Hope

In the spring, the trees that seemed to be dead are coming back to life until they flourish entirely in the summer. The sense of rebirth is encouraging. Although we live in an isolated manner, we are encouraged to go outside to the parks or trails. I meet Rebeca for the first time since February, and we go for a socially distanced bike ride close to the uOttawa campus and along the Ottawa River.

It has been more than a month that we are living in the new online world. My sons in grades six and eight have regular online meetings for their classes. I also have implemented some strategies to keep connected with my household, such as our family reading night. I have weekly meetings with Rebecca Lloyd, and we share our perspectives on our respective PE curriculum documents as part of my comparative inquiry. Furthermore, Rebecca extends an invitation to attend weekly zoom meetings organized by Ellen Long, the Lead Engagement & Knowledge Mobilization officer for PHE Canada,³ where professors and teachers across Canada exchange ideas, pedagogical strategies, worries, and difficulties regarding the pandemic and the teaching PE online.

We are learning how to deal with all this online world, but one advantage is the possibility of keeping in touch with my colleagues in Brazil, doing some research projects together, and

2 <https://research.uottawa.ca/centre-research-opportunities/vsr> from February 2020 until December 2021.

3 Established in 1933, PHE Canada is a national charitable association and Canada's recognized leader in physical and health education (<https://phecanada.ca/about>).

attending regular meetings with them. Also, I am in a 'WhatsApp' group where PE professors and teachers from Brasilia exchange ideas for teaching online. I have no time to feel sad. I talk with Rebecca about some ideas and suggestions for the online classes, and I start to think about the design of Brightspace, the uOttawa platform for the students' courses, as she has hired me to be her teaching assistant. At the same time, my supervisor in Brazil, Ingrid Wiggers, starts to think about her course at the UnB, and we share some ideas as well. We have more questions than answers at first, but it is an opportunity to explore resources available for our online classes.

Am I talking to my computer? How can I see the students' faces? How can I share my presentation? Can they understand properly? How can I meaningfully and authentically connect to the students in front of their computer screens? I am teaching the undergraduate students at the UnB how to access a program called Pixton⁴, a web resource that we are using to make comics and avatars. At the same time, I am sharing my experience here in Canada, and they ask some questions about the COVID-19, the schools, and the university. It is good to feel that we are all in a similar situation, supporting each other.

In the fall, the schools reopen in Ontario for the families that feel comfortable sending their children, with options to learn online. Some local facilities, like the community recreational centers, reopen as well. The children going to school, the noise, the families walking, and the traffic with the cars dropping them at school make me feel good. Even though everyone is wearing a mask, leaving the house to go to school or venture to a nearby community center gives a sense of "normality." I feel hope again.

As teachers, we can experience pedagogical hope in many ways. "Having hope is not equal to interpreting reality naively, or denying concrete facts." (Carabajo, 2012, p. 139). To have hope is to understand that sometimes reality is hard, we do not know what to do, we can fail. However, to experience hope is to try other paths with the intention of making a difference in our students (and other people) lives.

I recall my PE classes in Brazil: "*Wuuuuuu! We are going outside!*". The sun is shining, the weather is delightful, and their happiness when I appear at the door cheering is loud. They run to hug me, knowing that I will respond with positivity. Their enthusiasm impacts me profoundly. van Manen (1991) describes such responsiveness as pedagogical tact, "an expression of the responsibility with which we are charged in protecting, educating, and helping children grow" (p. 128). This means that we see children as whole and unique human beings, and this sensibility to connect to the children informs our pedagogical relationship with them (van Manen, 2017). Remembering such moments of happiness reminds me that "the task of good teaching is to enact and sense fully the lasting value of those good moments that make up a good life for and with others" (Smith, 2012, p. 80). Thus, these close, kinesthetic relationships between teachers and children provide meaningful moments for me to ponder. But now, how

can we continue to feel close to our students?

As a research assistant in the Interactive4life⁵ (IA4L) project, I am invited to experience and promote relational movement in virtual space. I start creating advertisements for social media platforms to invite university colleagues and other friends to participate in a series of weekly mini zoom parties that allow teachers in Brazil and Ontario to engage in fun interactive balancing, dodging, and dancing challenges. The goal of this project is to promote positive feelings of relational connection in and through movement. Even though we are experiencing more agency to live in this restrictive situation, it is still hard for all of us. We are meeting online, sharing screens and resources, seeing each other in small boxes. Although we never meet in person, we feel that we are getting to know each other very well.

We are still not completely comfortable living in an online world, but we are learning how to use the resources, and it is now possible to think about new creative possibilities. At this point, we feel that we can do this! We can do this together, and now we recognize that we can do more things than we could imagine.

Fading Hope

I like to have my life planned, thinking about all the steps ahead of me. Even when I face a challenge, I always try to focus on the solution, not on the problem. However, I feel my mind blank in a predicament, and I cannot see a way out. Death is always a predicament for me. As a Christian, I believe that it is not the end, but the sense of foreverness is harsh when I think that I will never see the person again in my lifetime. Frequently I have news from Brazil about someone that passes away or is seriously sick at the hospital, mainly due to the COVID-19 virus. Several people within my family have died with many unrealized dreams, untold words. I have never said "my condolences" so many times ...

In these moments, the experience of hope fades for a time, and I stand in grief. "To be a friend is to be there and share the pain" (Lingis, 2000, p. 110). I cannot hug my father when his sister passes away, and I cannot be beside my friend when her husband suddenly dies. This sense of pain and vulnerability reminds me that life can go in the snap of a finger, and we need to enjoy each day that we can breathe. Many loved ones are suffering, and I cannot do anything beyond saying that I profoundly sorry for their pain.

Moving Forward in Hope

"If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward."

Martin Luther King Jr.

After living this year in Canada, I can see the good in each season and as well as aspects that I do not like. But it is the same in our lives; we are not always happy and cheerful. Therefore, we need to push ourselves to look to the best side of life, even in the

4 <https://edu.pixton.com/educators/>

5 <https://function2flow.ca/the-interactive-for-life-project/>

terrible situation we face now. Understandably, we have some waves of emotions, we are not constantly feeling good, and some news makes us worry about what will happen in the future. Still, we must take solace that we are no longer pandemic newborns, and we are gathering more agency in daily life. As Martin Luther King's words inspire us, we must find a way to move forward and not stop.

As Snowber (2006) says, "we cannot edit life with precision anymore than we can edit a living curriculum" (p. 81). The prescribed or planned curriculum is at odds with what we may understand a living curriculum or reality to be. Similarly, like the seasons, we live in a moment that we cannot control; we can only focus on finding the strength to experience and welcome what emerges. The more I continue to live out this pandemic in Canada and share my experiences with my host supervisor and graduate students at uOttawa, who have become a supportive group of peers, I realize that I am not alone. Together, we can find ways to move forward, and I hope that we will be better people at the end of this storm. I live in hope that together, we can keep going.

Figure 1: *All Four Seasons in Canada*



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Yeti Mallavi

YETI MALLAVI

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Yeti Mallavi is an Masters of Education student in the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Education. Yeti attained her B.A in early childhood & elementary education at the Concordia University in Montreal in 2015 and has taught ESL in primary and

secondary schools in Quebec and Japan. Her research interests include children's popular culture and pedagogy, and informal learning spaces. On her days off, she enjoys playing video games, photography, making yogurt, and of course, going on walks with her dog.

Yeti Mallavi

Reflections at Night: Experiences of Walking my Dog During Curfew

Abstract

On January 9th, 2021, the Quebec Government implemented a curfew from 8 pm to 5 am, requesting that people do not leave their homes or premises except to work, care for someone in need, or walk a dog. As someone who owns a dog during these times, I explore the experience of walking a dog during curfew and being fully present rather than tuning out. Using a phenomenological approach, I pose the following questions: Are these walks more than just a means for my dog to relieve herself and get exercise, or is there something more? Using Eppert's (2020) approach to forest immersion, I try to immerse myself in the solitude and natural world of these walks, while reflecting on themes such a grief, companionship, walking, and girlhood. I pose more questions the more that I reflect on these walks. What does it mean to have a dog during these times? What is animal companionship according to Guenther (2007)? What does it mean to walk? I also think about my relationship with Luna, my foster dog, and how things have changed since she first came into my care. I look at articles, specifically Epimova's (2019) thoughts on decompression walks and what happens when you give your dog more freedom on walks. After exploring these themes and questions, I reflect what is gained, but also what is lost during this curfew and what lessons I can bring forward when we return to a time where these restrictions are no longer in place.

Keywords

Phenomenology; pandemic; Quebec; curfew; pets ; dogs; companionship

Résumé

Le 9 janvier 2021, le gouvernement du Québec a mis en place un

couvre-feu de 20 h à 5 h du matin, empêchant les gens de quitter leur domicile ou leurs locaux sauf pour aller travailler, pour s'occuper d'une personne dans le besoin ou pour promener un chien. En tant que propriétaire d'un chien pendant cette période, j'explore l'expérience de promener un chien pendant le couvre-feu et d'être pleinement présente plutôt que déconnectée. En utilisant une approche phénoménologique, je pose les questions suivantes : ces promenades sont-elles plus qu'un moyen pour mon chien de se soulager et de faire de l'exercice, ou y a-t-il quelque chose de plus ? En utilisant l'approche de l'immersion en forêt d'Eppert (2020), j'essaie de m'immerger dans la solitude et le monde naturel de ces promenades, tout en réfléchissant à des thèmes tels que le deuil, la camaraderie, la marche et la jeunesse féminine. Plus je réfléchis à ces promenades, plus je me pose des questions. Qu'est-ce que cela signifie d'avoir un chien pendant cette période ? Qu'est-ce que la compagnie animale selon Guenther (2007) ? Qu'est-ce que cela signifie de marcher ? Je pense également à ma relation avec Luna, pour qui je suis famille d'accueil, et à la façon dont les choses ont changé depuis qu'elle m'a été confiée. Je regarde des articles, en particulier les réflexions d'Epimova (2019) sur les promenades de décompression et sur ce qui se passe lorsque vous donnez plus de liberté à votre chien lors des promenades. Après avoir exploré ces thèmes et ces questions, je réfléchis à ce qui est gagné, mais aussi à ce qui est perdu pendant ce couvre-feu, ainsi qu'aux leçons que j'aurai tirées lorsque nous retournerons à un monde où ces restrictions ne sont plus en place.

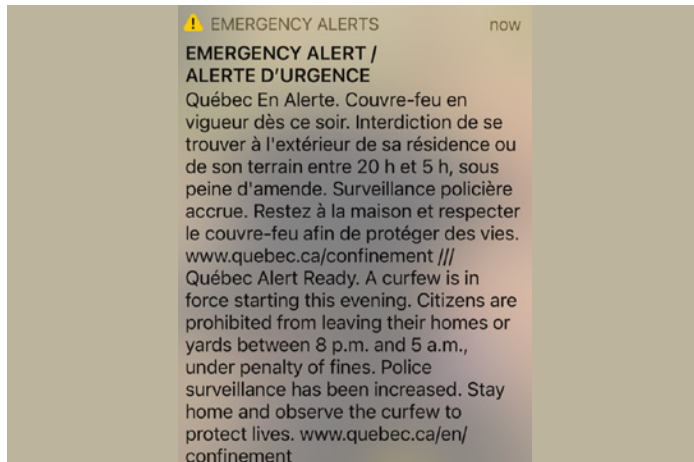
Mots-clés

Phénoménologie ; pandémie ; Québec ; couvre-feu ; animaux de compagnie ; chiens ; camaraderie

The Curfew

It is January 9th, 2021. The Quebec Government has implemented a curfew from 8 pm to 5 am. We are only allowed to leave our homes or premises under very minimal circumstances, such as for work, caring for someone in need, or walking our dogs within a one-kilometer radius of our homes.

Figure 1: *Emergency Alert*



Note: This picture was taken from a screenshot of an emergency alert with Rebecca Lloyd's iPhone and shared with me with permission.

One of my neighbours sees me leaving our apartment building with Luna, the dog I am fostering, and exclaims, “*Oh you have a dog? Lucky, you get to go out after curfew.*” He was the first of many to share this sentiment with me.

Lucky? Who, me? The only reason I am going out at all is to pick up dog poop. It wasn't as though dog owners were heading out to rave parties or congregating in groups. No, there isn't anything particularly glamorous about going out after curfew. But the more that I think about our walks, could they be more than just a time for my dog to relieve herself?

My Companion

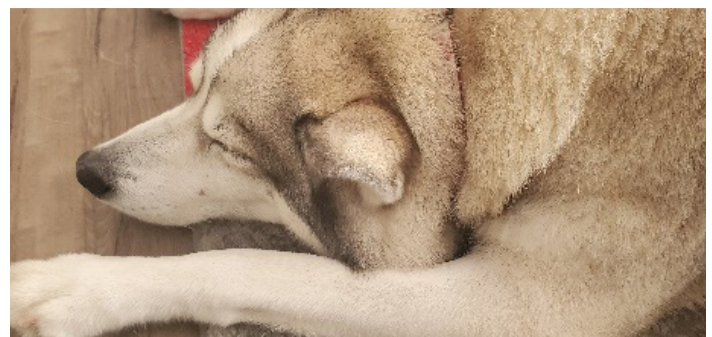
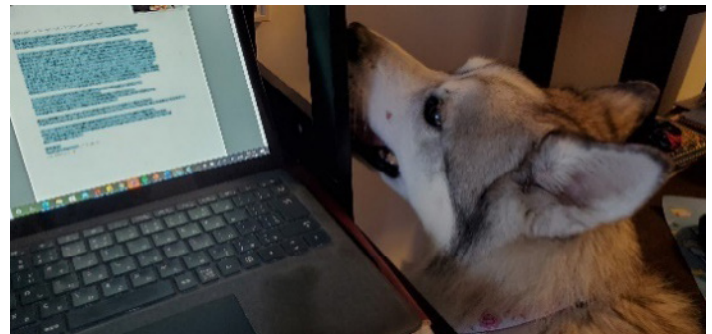
Guenther (2007) describes friendship as the relationship with someone whose company they enjoy and like to spend time with. I have always thought of friends as being of the human kind, people with whom I share joy as well as countless other emotions such as sadness. Sometimes there is a balance. Sometimes one takes on the suffering of another as if it were their own. Guenther (2007) poses the question, “Can we experience this type of companionship with animals?” (p. 217).

“*Heeeennnwooooo.*” I hear as I try to listen to my professor explain this week's readings on Zoom. “*Heeee~arrroooOOOO.*”

“*Shhh ...*” I put my mic on mute and turn to pat her head and scratch her back, leaning away from my computer's camera. She pauses for a bit before making the same sound, continually increasing in volume. I pet her again. The professor asks the class a question. I stop petting her and take myself off mute.

“*AwooOOOOOOO.*”

Figure 2: *Luna the Dog.*



Note: Personal archive.

Luna is a 10-year-old, female husky-mix. I have been fostering her since October through Rocky Road Rescue, an Ottawa-based, volunteer-run organization. I decided to take up fostering when I first moved to the area last July. I live alone and my apartment allows pets, so I figured it would be a good way for me to help others during this time, but also have a companion in return. Luna has a very loving personality. She is always eager to greet people on the street and walks up to them if they make eye-contact with her. She can also be a bit of a handful at times. Despite this, we still make quite the pair. She keeps me on a healthy schedule, making sure I get time outdoors instead of just staring at a computer screen all day. She also gets restless if I work too late into the evening which encourages me to fall asleep at a reasonable time.

And So Comes the Night

🔊) [Walking at Night](#)

Note: Personal archive.

There is an absence of sound when we leave the apartment building, other than the footsteps of both me and Luna that

is. I adjust my mask over my nose and cheeks, appreciating its protection against the cool winter air. As I do this, Luna waddles hurriedly across the street, seemingly already knowing where she wants to go tonight. I don't stop her or slow her down. I already know there aren't going to be any cars speeding down our street, and to be quite honest, I am a faster walker than her even at her highest speeds.

Once we cross the street, Luna hops onto the icy sidewalk. It's not long before she pauses as her head tilts up and her nose twitches slightly.

Sniff-sniff-sniff.

What could be in the air tonight? I decide to do the same.

Sniff-sniff-sniff.

... Just cold air for me. That's a little disappointing. But then I look up to the sky; A large bright green circle darts across the sky and disappears almost instantly.

"A UFO! Just like when I was a kid!", I jokingly say aloud. This is the second time I have seen an unidentified object. "Ugh. No one else will believe me. Why do these things always happen when I'm all alone?"

I then look down to Luna, who has stopped sniffing and looking across to the nearby park. "Well, I guess not technically alone. But who are you going to tell?"

We continue on.

The more that I walk during these deserted nights, I feel as though I am experiencing the phenomenon of being drawn into this outside world. Eppert describes a practice known as "forest immersion" (Eppert, 2020); taking time away from urban settings to walk in a forest to reflect on yourself, your childhood and the world around you. I am hesitant to call what Luna and I do as forest immersion as we are still in a suburb, walking on sidewalks past several houses. Despite this, I can't think of another term for what we are doing.

During curfew, Luna can explore smells and sounds at her pace. We are not limited by time restrictions imposed on others. Less people outdoors means less stress for her. For myself, in the absence of fellow passersby I begin to observe the sights and sounds of my usual daytime routes in a different way compared to how I usually do. I start to see the space around me and different signs of life. I wonder, "have I seen everything that is meant to be seen?"

This phenomenological act of seeing with fresh eyes can also be seen as becoming more like my dog (Lloyd, 2011). While humans can often turn 'off' their senses and live life in disconnected ways, dogs live life in the streaming present. I sense an invitation to depart from my usual preference to live inside my own head and experience this walk more fully.

Out of Sync

Walking may take on many purposes. It may take us from one point to another. It may also be done with the goal of seeking health benefits (Lim & Rhodes, 2016) or time reflecting and connecting with ourselves (Eppert, 2020). Learning how to walk is also often one of the earliest and biggest milestones in people's lives, and then becomes so natural to most of us, we hardly think about the process of walking ever again (Smith, 2007). But what if we took a moment to just marvel in the experience of putting one foot or paw in front of another and the different sounds a step might make?

🔊) [Snow](#)

Note: Personal archive.

Luna and I make our way through a snowy mound and back onto the sidewalk. It is then that I notice a sound.

Click-clock, click-clock.

What would the snow sound like if I shuffle and drag my feet instead of lifting them? Swish-swish, swish-swish. What if I take large steps? Bock ... bock ... bock ... bock ...

We come across a part of the sidewalk that still hasn't been properly cleared after a blizzard from last night. What does the snow sound like?

🔊) [After the Blizzard](#)

Note: Personal archive.

Cri-crick, cri-crick. Cri-crick, cri-crick.

Hmm. Interesting. I look behind me. What does Luna sound like?

Luna shuffles slowly behind me, lifting her paws up, but not very high. Her pace has slowed down considerably since the start of our walk. While I can hear the jingle of her collar, her steps are almost silent. She stops near a patch of snow under one of the large pine trees by the new looking quadruplex. Sometimes I forget her age and her ailments.

I can see that I don't walk like she does. The more I attend to her walk, the more I attune to the pain she is experiencing.

Today is supposed to be the day that Luna goes to her forever family; a nice couple in Kanata with a male husky who is around the same age as her. She just needs to go to the vet to get spayed and they would pick her up from there.

I get a Facebook message from Alycia, the foster coordinator. She writes that she has some not-so-great news for Luna and asks if it is okay if she calls me when I'm free. I feel a tightness in my chest and a lump in my throat, but I write back telling her she can call right away.

Kshhh.

“It is most likely cancer,” she tells me, and explains how the vet found several different tumors while operating. The lump in my throat becomes too painful to keep holding back. I let out large sobs and let the tears flow down my cheeks. This was not how I wanted today to go.

“I ... I know. I am so sorry. The vets say that we can put her down tomorrow or Friday if you'd like. Or we can wait for you to come,”

“C-can we wait until Saturday? I-I-I don't want her to be alone with strangers when it happens,”

“Sure, no problem. We can wait until then. We'll have someone bring her back to you tonight. We think it's better if she stays with someone she knows rather than change her environment. And Yeti ... I'm really sorry”

We can desperately want someone, suffering from a grave injury or disease, to live. Because she has not yet lived enough. We want time for her to flourish, knowing that her life is a radiance shed on others, on us. We can desperately want someone to live because we have not yet shown our love for her enough, not yet loved her enough. (Lingis, 2000, p. 111)

Girlhood ... Puppyhood

Grief. That's what I feel when walking. Is that what walking at night is? Being reminded that Luna's death is inevitable? Bathroom breaks and sadness under the dark sky?

No wait, the night sky isn't always dark. I saw a light earlier. I've seen other colours too, usually in the form of the northern lights, back when I was still living in Kuujjuaq as a child.

“Oh you can see the northern lights right now” my Mom tells me. I quickly throw on my coat and boots and run out the front door to get a good look as swirls of green tinted with pink and blue would dance in the sky. I whistle, as the Inuit folklore of the northern lights tells us that it makes them dance and come closer. But you don't want them to come too close, for the spirits in the lights may try to steal your head to use for a game of soccer. So, I then bring my nails together to make a scratching sound to make sure that they don't get too close. I don't believe in magic and spirits. Or maybe I do. At the very least, the northern lights make me want to.

When I moved Montreal for school, I stopped seeing the northern lights. For a very long time, I assumed that you could not really experience different colours and stars at night in Gatineau.

The sky is still clear and there is a full moon. I get off the sidewalk path, walk down a snow path that leads to a small valley behind some townhouses. This is one of Luna's favorite places to sniff around; there are layers of leaves, mud and dirt underneath all the snow, which makes it a prime

place for different scents that only animals can smell. I am surprised by how well lit up the area is, and it makes me less worried about tripping or encountering another animal. More importantly, I am mesmerized by the colours I do see.

Figure 3: Winter Nights Dark



Note: Personal archive.

Dark blue, white, black, orange, and yellow. I pull out my phone and snap some photos. I'm annoyed that the photos do not do the nightscape justice, but the contrast behind the shadows and the highlights are so vivid in a way that I didn't think it was possible in the suburbs.

I decide to return another night. It is cloudy this time, but everything is still visible.

Figure 4: Winter Nights Orange



Note: Personal archive..

Everything has an orange-grey hue to it. The sky matches the colour of the snow and there are few shadows to be found. This orange glow feels very familiar to me as I think about when I lived in Montreal, where every night looked this way due to light pollution.

I go a third night.

I barely see anything. It is too dark to wander too much, so I keep to the trail that has been stomped out by other walkers before me. Luna, however, wanders a bit further off the trail, further in front of me, her nose pressed against the snow, guiding her. She looks like a young puppy as she explores the world of the ground. Looking at her, I am reminded by how she is still in such good spirits. Slower, but ready to explore at everything and anything. Does she find wonder the same way I do when I see colours in the night?

My mother once told me that for dogs, smelling is like reading a book for humans. It is how they gather so much of their knowledge and information about the world and allows for them to keep their senses sharp. When I lived up North, we almost never tied our dogs when we were going on our walks. They had a chance to explore things at their leisure and smell whatever they wanted. In hindsight, I realize what we were doing was allowing for what Efimova (2019) describes as decompression walks, a chance for a dog to be a dog. Because we are now in a residential neighbourhood, I can't quite let Luna loose as much as I would like to. However, the one thing I can offer her is a chance to sniff to her heart's content on a long leash with nothing to disturb her. That is the least I can do given her circumstances.

Maybe it's wonder instead of grief that connects us on our walks? Or maybe it's both?

The End of Our Walks?

"So, the vet decided that since she is not showing any intense pain and is still full of energy, we agreed that it might be a good idea to push back her appointment farther." It's Alycia again.

"Okay ... that's good. Until when?" I am in the hallway right outside my apartment door, looking for my housekeys while I juggle both the phone and my laundry basket.

"Until she shows signs that it is getting bad for her. Which is why I have called,"

I unlock my door and I see Luna, lying down on her big white pillow. She is curled up, but her eyes are staring up at me.

"We were wondering if you would like to keep her until then. She has already been with you for a few months, and it would cause her more stress for her to adjust to a new home. Plus, she knows you."

I kneel down and scratch Luna behind the ears. She is drowsy

but doesn't turn away from it. I can feel my eyes starting to sting, but in a good way. The whole point of fostering is to make sure that dogs are shown love and training so that they can get second chances with their forever family. But sometimes we get something called, "foster failures." Instead of a foster preparing a dog for another home, foster families end up adopting them and becoming their forever family. It is not one of the worst things to fail at I might add. To fail at fostering means that I get to see her through to the end.

"I think I can do that."

During these curfew walks, in addition to reconnecting with the world around me, I have a chance to explore my sense of self and my relationship with Luna. We are not just walking for her exercise or a bathroom break. I am understanding what it means to be a companion and to have a companion in a space and time that, in some ways, allows for more freedom. This freedom of being just with my dog reconnects me with my sense of curiosity and girlhood, as well as with grief and sadness (Ebbett, 2020) as well as my own mental wellbeing. It has also allowed for Luna to explore the world in her own way.

With curfew rules shifting and vaccinations finally underway, I do feel a sense of relief from being able to be around others again. However, I also wonder if I will be able to keep this sense of exploration and reflection that I have had the past couple of months. While there is a sense of guilt that I am finding moments of reflection during the curfew, in that others are not permitted this reflexive time, it has also made me realize what I value and hope to carry on with me when the world can wander freely again. These walks aren't just for Luna or for me.

They're for the both of us.

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Mariana Domínguez González is a PhD Candidate in the

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Mariana Domínguez González

My Pandemic Path: A Walk in AcadeMom Shoes

Abstract

As an acadeMom, a term I coined that refers to me mothering a young child while at the same time pursuing doctoral studies, my main challenge during the first year of the pandemic is to juggle the demands of these two contrasting worlds. At first, I wonder if I will muster up the resilience I need to cope with the responsibilities of acadeMomhood. Will I arrive at an acadeMom resolution for experiencing a sense of sanity in these pandemic times and beyond? Drawing inspiration from phenomenology, I explore my lived experiences as mother of a toddler and doctoral student, walking on a continuum that goes from constant interruptions and insufficient time or space to complete any task, to the experience of connecting with my son's rhythm and energy. The more I attend to my child's world, I experience an invitation to be present in the moment, to give myself permission to stop and wonder, and to notice and relate to my surroundings. I acknowledge that there is no map or set of guidelines to lead one down a successful acadeMom path, but the more one opens themselves up to all that there is to sense beneath one's feet in what Ingold (2011) refers to as a barefoot consciousness, there exists a possibility to experience a sense of peace within a different sort of pace.

Keywords

Mother, doctoral student, walking, pace, path, wonder.

Résumé

En tant qu'*acadeMom*, un terme que j'ai inventé pour désigner le fait que je suis mère d'un jeune enfant tout en poursuivant des études doctorales, mon plus gros défi au cours de la première année de la pandémie est de jongler avec les exigences de ces deux mondes contrastés. Au début, je me demande si j'arriverai à trouver la résilience nécessaire pour faire face aux responsabi-

lités de l'*acadeMomhood*. Arriverai-je à trouver une résolution *acadeMom* qui me permette de garder la raison en cette période de pandémie et au-delà ? En m'inspirant de la phénoménologie, j'explore mes expériences vécues en tant que mère d'un tout-petit et étudiante au doctorat évoluant sur un continuum qui va des interruptions constantes et du manque de temps ou d'espace pour accomplir une tâche, à l'expérience de la connexion avec le rythme et l'énergie de mon fils. Plus je suis attentive au monde de mon enfant, plus je suis invitée à profiter de l'instant présent, à me donner la permission de m'arrêter et de m'émerveiller, à remarquer ce qui m'entoure et à m'y intéresser. Je reconnais qu'il n'y a pas de carte ou de lignes directrices pour nous guider sur la voie de l'*acadeMom*, mais plus on s'ouvre à tout ce qu'il y a à sentir sous nos pieds, dans ce qu'Ingold (2011) appelle une conscience pieds nus, plus il est possible d'éprouver un sentiment de paix à un rythme différent.

Mots-clés

Mère, doctorant, marche, rythme, chemin, émerveillement

Pace (n.)

late 13c., "a step in walking," also "rate of motion; the space traveled by the foot in one completed movement in walking," from Old French *pas* "a step, pace, trace," and directly from Latin *passus, passum* "a step, pace, stride," noun use of past participle of *pandere* "to stretch (the leg), spread out," probably from PIE **pat-no-*, nasalized variant form of root **pete-* "to spread."

I am an acadeMom, a term I coined that refers to me mothering a young child while at the same time pursuing doctoral studies. I live in and with constant interruption. No wonder

I identify with Senior (2020) when she reflected that “...the demands of the kids, the house, the job (if we’re fortunate enough to still have one) collide with one another, subdividing our days into staccato pulses of two-minute activities before we switch to something else. It’s all disruption all the time” ... except, of course, for the time when my child is sleeping. Instead of taking much needed rest, it’s in such moments when time slows down enough for me to concentrate on my ideas, research, and writing. Another option to get silence and potentially non-interrupted periods is to exchange it for debatable and regretful screen time. “Finding the time and mental space for that [academic] work with two young children at home proved to be an impossibility” wrote Mandavilli (2021) recently. I could not agree more.

Keeping Pace

Figure 1: *On Top of the Couch*



Note: A photographed sketch of my son standing on top of the couch.

It’s April 20th, 2020, at 10 am. I am having a telephone meeting with my doctoral supervisor. We are in a generalized lockdown. Everyone has to #StayHome. I am holding my cell phone, standing in front of the living room table next to the couch where two-and-a-half-year-old Samuel is playing. Samuel is on top of the couch. More specifically, he is on top of the top of the couch, walking back-and-forth, back-and-forth. He is holding himself by the railing of the stairs ... he is so happy! You can tell he is having fun! He has what I call his “morning energy” - the liveliest and most active energy of the day. I have my morning energy too; this is the time of day when my brain functions at its most creative and productive levels.

I know I am not the only acadeMom out there. I know there are many women juggling the responsibilities of motherhood and academia (Sander & Grauer, 2020). Yet I’m feeling isolated. It doesn’t matter if you have one child, or two, or more ... acadeMomhood is so demanding that it’s easy to feel overwhelmed.

I discuss with my supervisor the issues related to my field work, to my research proposal, to my committee members’ feedback and availability. Different tasks on different fronts. I’m doing my best to remain polite and pay attention to the voice at the other end of the line, but as he starts to give me advice, my eyes

dart to the area between the table and the couch. My son is about to fall. I see the Children’s Hospital in my mind as I run to grab him and prevent a collision with the nearby table.

¡ No, no, no, no, no! [No, no, no, no, no!]

¡ Bájate! [Get down!]

Despacio. [Slowly]

¡ Agárrate! [Hold yourself!]

¡ Cuidado! [Careful!]

I apologize on the phone for talking to Samuel. *I should have plugged him into his show. Where is my coffee?* Yes, the fieldwork? Oh, yes, I will talk to that professor. Oh, yes, I will read those articles. Write some more? Oh, yes.

Tattooed in the back of my head is my supervisor’s comment about how students normally submit their research proposal a few weeks after defending their comprehensive exams. It’s been ... what? Two years? Falling behind, however, now has an amplified meaning (Flaherty, 2020)

What is he doing now!?!? Samuel is jumping or sliding or throwing himself from the top of the couch onto the seat.

¡ No, no, no, no, no! [No, no, no, no, no!]

¡ Bájate! [Get down!]

Despacio. [Slowly]

¡ Agárrate! [Hold yourself!]

¡ Cuidado! [Careful!]

I apologize again to my supervisor. I tell him that I hope I manage to get two solid hours of work per day. But to be honest, these past nights, I finish my day as exhausted as if I had gone up and down all the pyramids of Chichén Itzá for a whole day. All this moving around is making me truly hungry! I don’t know how many back-and-forth(s) I do between my son and my supervisor while I’m on this call but then it’s over.

For me, the main challenge during the first pandemic year is to take care of a young child while also pursuing a doctoral program. Nonetheless, Snowber (2006) reminds us that “the beginning of bringing desire to living and being is to notice and attend to the places of struggle and pain, or even the places we may conceive as limits.” (p. 81). The minute the new virus makes daycares close, I spend the rest of the year juggling the responsibilities of my son and my doctorate at home, in my heart and on my mind. It is as if I had to choose between these two mighty forces, both energy and time consuming. It is tiring to live feeling divided between two worlds that seem not only to exclude each other but to actually collide against each other. I seem to not be able to keep pace with either one, which is also counterproductive for both. This rhythm is not sustainable, and it is not healthy.

“This inquiry aims to pay attention to the sense of possibility, tension, stability, and fluidity that gradually enters, surges, and emerges in one’s limbs, torso, hips, knees, and feet as one finds a new footing in life.” (Lloyd, 2015, p. 30) Personally, such new footing means acknowledging the need to create a new pace that allows my daily mosaic of acadeMom experiences to harmoniously co-exist. In what ways does resilience to cope with the merged

responsibilities of acadeMomhood manifest? How do I arrive to an acadeMom sanity resolution for pandemic times and beyond?

Stroller Walk

August 2020, at noon. Samuel and I finally head downstairs to the entrance level. I am partially relieved, but I am still feeling anxious. At this time of day, I need to physically leave the house and get some fresh air. At this time of day my son needs his stroller nap. As playful as I can be, I start with the red, the yellow, the blue, and the black hot wheels: McQueen, Cruz, Sally, and Doc Hudson Hornet are coming with us. To the best of my abilities, I use a flight attendant's tone and welcome all the passengers to this wonderful ride! I ask and receive their tickets as Samuel -schuk! schuk! shuk! shuk!- taps each car against my fist, and then places it on the stroller tray table. Once the cars are buckled up, Samuel agrees to take his seat and provides his own ticket. The minute I buckle his lap belt I feel I can now let go a little bit more of my mom efforts.

Once I maneuver the stroller out the door, I make sure I have what I need for today in the basket under the seat. My notebook, my pen, and the printed article are on top of tissues, hand sanitizer, insect repellent, more cars, an umbrella, and snacks. I put my hat on, I lower the canopy, I take off the breaks, and we go down the driveway onto the street. He falls asleep after one minute.

Walking with the stroller while my son naps allows me to deal with my things for a brief period:

Samuel naps and the stroller receives my tears. I cannot stop crying. My aunt has just passed away ...

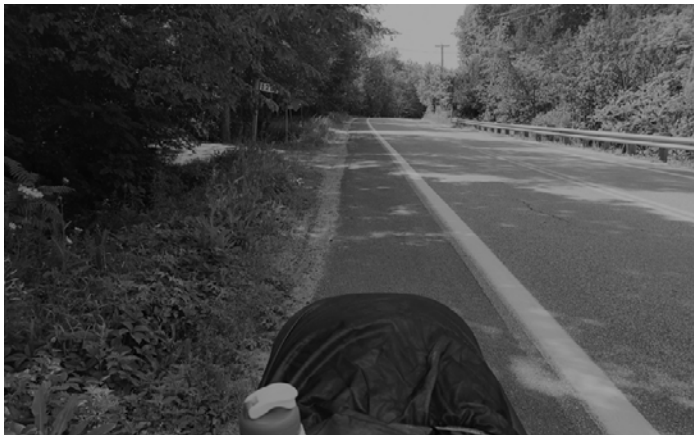
Samuel naps and the stroller becomes an office where I read articles and write ideas down.

Samuel naps and the stroller witnesses the creation of voice notes destined to dear friends and family members.

Samuel naps and the stroller listens along to my parenting audiobooks.

Samuel naps and I keep pushing the stroller, letting the walk suction my stress, letting the walk reassure me: I am getting through this pandemic, one step at a time.

Figure 2: *New Shoes*



Note: Picture taken with my personal phone as I walk on Hwy 105.

One day, my walking shoes wear out. Simultaneously, my

son's feet grow, and he needs a new pair of sneakers. The day the new shoes arrive I take them out of the box, and I try mine on. I follow standard procedure: I put them on while sitting. I stand up. I take a step forward. And another one. And another one. I walk slooooooowly and I focus: I try to visualize the border between my foot and the shoe while I move. Is there enough space left? Are my toes being crushed? Is this comfortable? How do they look on me? Is my back going to hurt when I walk? Should I get some insoles?

Then I witness Samuel interact with his new shoes ... He puts them on. (I actually help a little). And he stands up, decided. He barely walks: He runs around the kitchen island! He jumps around! And then he dances!!! He moves, moves, moves his feet as if daring the sneakers to keep up with his pace. He holds on to the top of the dishwasher, music playing in his mind. Can you do it, shoes? Are you up for the challenge? Are you strong enough? One foot is up in the air, held by his leg. Then the other one, kicking some space. Yep. The shoes pass the test!

"Movement is, for children and adults, a primary consciousness. It is a fundamental animation of behaviour, feeling, and thought that discloses essential connectedness to one another and to the world in which we live." (Smith, 2007, p. 49) But when did I become so cautious!? As Snowber (2011) points out, "the deeper truth is that you were all born with the knowledge that you are bodies, not that you have bodies. This is the birthright of being human, but it is knowledge that is visceral, tactile, visual, audible, and deeply kinesthetic." (p. 191) It is then that I come up with an intuitive sanity resolution: I decide to approach these pandemic days with and from my son's perspective.

Walking with New Shoes

March 2021, at noon. Samuel and I are walking on the side of a road that has no sidewalk. It is a sunny Saturday morning. All of a sudden, Samuel stops. This feels familiar. He shows me two garbage cans on the side of the street. We talk about how this trash was under the recently melted snow. This is why we couldn't see it! We continue walking. Then he stops again. We basically stop every time we see something that evidently belongs in the trash bin. We also walk-and-stop to look at the four jumbo jets that fly by, and the trace they leave in the sky. We walk-and-stop to look down and contemplate the dandelions. We walk-and-stop to listen and find a familiar biplane hidden in the clouds. We walk-and-stop to look at a rock standing in the middle of our path. We walk-and-stop to kneel and observe the leaves floating on a water puddle. We acknowledge the sounds of cars, trucks, and motorcycles. At times we have to move and let bicycles pass us. We go forward, we pause, we go forward, we pause ...

I remember Smith (2007) saying that "offering little resistance to the power of the landscape, the child is situated gesturally amidst the flesh of the world through movements that reciprocate the appeals of the landscapes, the seascapes, the aircapes and firescapes." (p. 59) Moving and being with Samuel enables me to trace paths between his toddler perspective and my adult one. By letting his circular rhythm and his energy take over my

linear pace, I (re) learn from him to be present in the present; I (re) learn from him to give myself permission to stop and wonder, and I (re) learn from him to relate to my surroundings. “Cuando estamos con él (un niño), conectamos con una parte muy especial de nosotros mismos: el niño perdido al que necesitamos encontrar en tantos momentos de nuestra vida y que es, probablemente, la mejor parte de cada uno de nosotros.” (Bilbao, 2015) [When we are with him (a child), we connect with a very special part of ourselves: the lost child whom we need to find in so many moments of our life and who is, most likely, the best part in each one of us.]

Figure 3: *Walking*



Note: Picture of my son and me walking on the beach and shared with permission.

There has to be a way to feel like I am gliding a little bit more smoothly through my acadeMom days so that I may enjoy playing monster trucks and writing articles; so that I live with less mortification about inevitable screen time and unachievable PhD time frames, and with more conviction about my own capacity; so that I embrace linear walking and figure-eight exploring as complementary paces of my acadeMom rhythm and inner landscape. There has to be a way to acknowledge that organic, life processes are equally important to the doings of academic institutions. There has to be a way to include a joy of/for living framework in my research proposal.

Instead of thinking that I must find a way to wear two pairs of shoes, perhaps it is time to stop worrying about how they fit or when I must put on one pair in lieu of not wearing the other. Ingold (2011) writes that “to understand the evolution of walking, likewise, we must imagine a world without footwear. For our earliest ancestors did not stride out upon the land with heavy boots, but made their way within it lightly, dexterously, and mostly barefoot.” (p. 50). As we set foot on our second pandemic year, I have come to believe that the key to finding my acadeMom p (e) ace, regardless of whether the road is rocky or clear, straight or steep, is to take off my shoes: I have to stop processing and validating my academic success only from a rational, analytical and external perspective. Inspired by phenomenology, I am beginning to acknowledge that sensations and emotions are part of my thinking, and that it is time to (re) connect fully to myself and

my surroundings from the feet up, like a baby learning to stand before she takes her first steps. I must trust my footing. That is where my acadeMom creativity and productivity reside. After all, as Parra (1963) wrote:

*“El pensamiento no nace de la boca
Nace en el corazón del corazón.”
[Thought is not born in the mouth.
It is born in the heart of the heart.]*

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Pearline Barrett-Fraser is a Masters of Education student at the University of Ottawa in the concentration of Teaching and Learning. She is a teacher and a dance educator who promotes

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Pearline Barrett-Fraser

Desires to Connect Within and Beyond the Pandemic

Abstract

In what ways can we form meaningful connections with others during a pandemic? Imagine an elementary school classroom with masks, face shields and guidelines that require us to maintain a two-metre distance at all times. Despite these potential barriers, opportunities emerge for connecting with students in unanticipated ways. This inquiry invites us to consider what it is like to experience the pandemic as an occasional teacher. Through various descriptions of day-to-day experiences in the classroom, we are invited to consider what it is like to experience connection not only in the here-and-now, but also in painful memories from the past. Inspired by Carl Leggo and his poetic approach to life writing, rhythmic and evocative poetic verse is set aside in text-boxes that resemble metaphoric windows into moments where connection is experientially lived.

Keywords

Connection, Classroom, Pandemic

Résumé

Comment pouvons-nous tisser des liens significatifs avec les autres pendant une pandémie ? Imaginez une salle de classe dans une école élémentaire avec des masques, des visières de sécurité, et des directives qui nous obligent à garder une distance de deux mètres en tout temps. Malgré ces barrières potentielles, des occasions inattendues de nouer des liens avec nos élèves existent. Cette enquête nous invite à considérer les expériences d'une enseignante suppléante pendant une pandémie. Parmi les diverses descriptions d'expériences quotidiennes dans la salle de classe, nous sommes invités à nouer des liens non seulement dans le présent, mais aussi avec les souvenirs douloureux du

passé. Inspiré par Carl Leggo et son approche poétique, cette enquête imite son style en utilisant des boîtes de textes qui ressemblent à des fenêtres métaphoriques dans les moments où les liens sont noués.

Mots-clés

Relation, lien, salle de classe, pandémie

Five minutes before the bell and I still don't know what I am doing. Am I teaching grade five? Am I supporting the kindergarten classroom? Am I even teaching in this school today? My heart pounds as I wait for a message from my Vice Principal who decides where I will start my day. I tap my pen on the desk, and the speed increases as the seconds pass. Bing! My fingers glide across my phone screen to unlock the message.

VP: Good Morning Pearl, can you cover Grade 3 Math this morning? Duty at 11:10 on the back field.

There it is. I grab my mask, stretch it open to cover my nose and mouth, and loop the straps around my ears.

Pearl: Sure!

I grab my shield, clipboard, and keys before heading down the hall. I wonder what connections I will make today? Will I be able to hear my masked students when they answer a question? Will they understand me through the double barrier of my mask and face shield? Will I remember to scan the QR code posted on the classroom door and sign into the classroom to ensure accurate contact tracing if there is a positive case? Will I remember to keep my two-metre distance from the students?

DING, DING, DING! There goes the bell, I walk faster down the hallway following the arrows taped on the ground to direct hallway traffic. I pass dozens of posters on the walls reminding us all about COVID-19 protocol: the right way to wash your hands, how to use sanitizer, the need to maintain a distance, and how masks must be worn. Information overload! Important protocols that have been added to my job description this year, a quickly curated list to help keep my students safe.

“Mask up please!”
“Don’t forget, above the nose.”
“The loops go around your ears, not your hands.”
“Keep your distance.”
“Try pinching the nose.”
“Your mask belongs on your mouth not your eyes.”
“Social distancing kids, you’ve got this, social distancing!”
“Mask back on please, snack time is all done.”
“Keep your distance please.”

I wonder how many times I will say these things today. I take attendance, look over the plans for the day, prepare materials for activities, and grab some extra pencils for those who won’t be able to find any in their desks. So much to think about, so little room to breathe. COVID-19 - one thing I never learned about in my teacher education program. We did not have a course on global pandemics ...

Connecting in the Classroom?

I arrive at the classroom and squeeze my head into face shield that is secured like a suction cup with the help of an adjustable rubber band. It feels a little stiff today. I can already feel the indents and tension lines that will be the cause of a headache that comes on halfway through my day. I hear the students coming down the hall. I quickly pullout my phone and click the camera application. I scan the classroom QR code and a sign in link pops up on the top of the screen. I sign my full name as the little footsteps draw near.

“Good morning beautiful people! How are you doing today?”

I say this with a big smile as I greet the students while they walk in the classroom. Instantly, a student sharply turns his head and looks at me with a puzzling expression.

“What did you say?”

I chuckle, *“GooOOD MOooRnnnInnnG”*.

I notice myself leaning in and exaggerating my body movements with my clipboard and phone still in hand. We share a moment of laughter and giggle as we enter the room. *“Don’t forget to pump!”*, I remind the students. Each student must sanitize their hands as they enter and exit the classroom, and wash hands before and after they eat. Each student must keep a 2-metre distance between themselves and their classmates.

Figure 1: A Classroom Snapshot During the COVID-19 Pandemic



Note: This image was taken by myself during after-school hours to depict the classroom setting during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Remember to stay in your bubble, it’s the best way to keep you safe!”

These protocols prove to be difficult for those who have been deprived from social interaction for over 6 months now. Over-time, students have been forced to observe the world through the windows of their homes and the screens of their televisions, computers and phones. During this COVID-19 pandemic, my window has taken me on a journey of realization and continues to invite a new sense of awareness. Take a moment to understand what my window reveals.

🔊 *Cycling, Spiraling, Communicating, Surviving*

*Places, spaces and new ways of seeing faces.
 No longer connecting as we once were
 But now forced to search for avenues of understanding.
 Stepping, sliding, moving with a swerve,
 The social communicative movement we experience in
 elevators, classrooms and grocery stores.
 Where everyone keeps their distance from you and yours.
 Disconnection.
 So much given between bodies, eyes and minds.
 Forever longing to connect, feeling socially blind.
 Left to live, and learn through a screen,
 be it your computer, your phone or TV.
 Cycling.
 Through the channels, hoping you will see,
 What life once was before the limitations.
 A community as a body stands still as we work through
 recalibrations.
 Our social communicative nature has been cycling through
 rehabilitations.
 Spiraling.
 In and out of recovery.
 Yearning and then feeling the connective intensity.*

From me to we,
 They and them.
 Not me and my,
 But eye to eye.
 Shifting from fist bumps and high fives,
 To comforting elbow bumps when a student cries,
 Because hugs are no longer an option.
 Teaching has become a different job.
 To not only cover curriculum but to ...
 Navigate,
 Investigate,
 Over Exaggerate and
 Orchestrate new ways to
 Communicate.
 While trying not to hyperventilate!
 Pause.
 :
 :
 Take a moment to breathe.
 :
 :
 Feel the heat under the mask.
 Pushing upwards to your eyes.
 The heat building in the shield.
 The foginess collects as you wonder why.

Cycling.
 As you wonder how?
 As you ask why now?
 Spiraling.
 But still you smile, your shoulders lean in,
 And you ask your students,
 "How has your day been?"
 Repeating you question
 Over,
 And
 Over,
 And
 Over again.
 Building the bridge between teacher and friend.
 Connecting to your students on a different level.
 Keep reaching, keep pushing, and never settle,
 For less than a smile.
 Because these masks, I'm afraid, will be staying a while.
 When the only safe space to breathe freely is a home,
 Being in the classroom with masks brings me out of my
 comfort zone.
 But provides a new place, a new space and a new way of
 seeing your face.
 Connecting the best we can,
 With style and grace.
 Spiralling.
 Cycling.
 Communicating.
 Surviving.

When rhythmical verses emerge from the centre of my being, I am taken into a deeper place of contemplation, a spiral into my core thoughts, beliefs and questions. What is this I am living? The series of events cycling and spiraling out of my control. I am constantly finding new ways of communicating and doing my best to survive in a world of uncertainty and fear. Quickly, things change. My experiences have shifted from filled schedules of interactive learning and competitive games in gym class to taking socially distanced walks and eliminating group projects and partnerships. Constantly cycling through the list of protocols, concerns begin to spiral and take over my mind, inhibiting the way I communicate each emotion as I try my best to survive.

Inspired by Carl Leggo, I begin to "immerse myself in language as an artful way to understand my relationships with others" (Leggo, 2020, p. 221). Writing poetically has provided a way for me to follow my intuition and expressing my true being through words of wonder and candidness. Leggo's poetic text, *In defence of the quotidian: Poetry and life writing*, has moved me to open a window of curiosity. I am no longer inhibited by my self doubt but now driven by my concern and peculiarity of what is on the other side. I am finding confidence and comfort with pouring my experience onto paper in a metrical way that follows the beat of my heart to through the paths of my soul. Poetry is my way of inviting you to my world and a window into my experiences. What are my desires to connect within and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic? Can we poetically inquire into at our current teaching context and find openings or windows into moments where connection is experienced? What might that be like?

I begin my lesson after taking attendance and sending it down to the office. I draw a series of alternative pictures on the board: star, star, square, star, star. "Who can tell me what comes next?" I turn around and see all the large screen shields dividing each individual student from each other. Desks are lined up one metre apart and little green baskets hang from the side of the desk. This was their new place for storing their supplies. To each their own. Each screen now slightly translucent, due to the series of cleaners over the last couple of weeks, that have transformed them from clear to a cloudy, streak-stained window into the world of my students. Hands shoot up and I can barely see the fingertips over the white cardboard-framed windows. My finger jolts to the left, and a student yells "star!". The rustling in the classroom stops and the students' attention focuses on the board. "Oh wait actually ..." I can see the wheels turning. "...square".

Connecting Through the Eyes?

As the class continues to work on the questions on the board, I circulate the room to check in on the students' understanding, and to be available and more accessible. As I weave through the rows of the classroom, I walk past a student who seems to be having a hard time focusing. I readjust my face shield and squat down to my knees to meet the student at eye level. "How's it going there Thomas? You okay?" His eyes shift to mine, and with a tilt of the head, he says: "Well, Miss Pearl, she looks unsure ..." I shift my eyes to a student across the room and see that she does in fact look unsure, lost in a daze. At that moment, she turns her head,

and our eyes connect. We share a wave, and she returns back to her work. I turn to Thomas. What was really puzzling is the uncertainty both Thomas and I shared in that moment, unclear of what her expression conveyed. My call to curiosity formed anew, experiencing a moment of wonder as I take a look into the window of my experience.

🔊) [Connecting Through the Eyes](#)

*Be it the eyes of the innocent and a heart that is pure,
A child's understanding is as complex as a COVID-19 cure.
Unknown, undiscovered, and unaware,
The shifting in the trust we have in our shared air.
The air that was so greatly disregarded, misunderstood.
And so quickly we parted.
The distance between each colleague, family, and friend,
Never really knowing when it will all end.
But fully understanding that this is for the best, we wear our
masks, keep our distance and strain to hear instead.
The shift in the trust in our relationships, understanding, and
mind,
Is the shift that was created in so little comprehensible time.
But through the eyes of the innocent and the heart that is pure,
Is the future that we fear to endure.
A child growing up in the world so different from our own,
But learning to adapt, and be comfortable is in fact our task
because it is all they have ever known.
Already struggling to understand theory of mind, through the
eyes, the nose, and the smile behind ...
The mask
Closing off one third of the face, limiting the understanding of
the emotion, the thought process, and the pace.
In our conversations and embrace ...
"We cannot hug, high five, or stand too close, because these are
the things that will protect us the most."
But along with these limitations, a new literacy is formed,
A new COVID understanding that is far different from the
norm.
The eyes are an outlet for the emotions within,
Now understood with the eyebrows, and the wrinkling of the
skin.
Happy eyes, sad eyes, focused, and upset.
All common emotions and yet ...
Shown as clear as day in a brand-new way.
From those who have a hard time expressing what they have
to say.
With each blink, or tilt of the head, the shift of the shoulders,
arms and hips.
Spreading the language from eyes to the rest of the body,
Through this deeper form of understanding, which is, in fact ...
not new for everybody.
But new to those who are pure at heart,
with the eyes of innocents in their world of art.*

What are the experiences of learning to read gesture, cues and expressions through the eyes of the individuals and students

in front of you? My student across the room held a neutral look in her eyes, which made it difficult for us to identify her emotions and what she was thinking. For someone like Thomas, who was diagnosed with autism at a young age and has continued to struggle with identifying social cues, reading people's emotions through a mask proves to be an extremely challenging task. For years he had depended on seeing and interacting with the whole face to fully understand social situations. In that moment I realize this pandemic has not only been difficult for me but for him as well. I then turned to Thomas and explained, "Well you know, you can tell how someone is feeling through their eyes."

🔊) [The Windows](#)

*Happy eyes.
Sad eyes.
Angry eyes.
Focused eyes.
Can you see how much power...
We have in the eyes?
Isn't this a surprise?*

"Are you feeling surprised, Miss Pearl?" I notice my eyes were open significantly wider than usual, I nod and chuckle, "You got it!" My theatrics have done their job and I have proven my point. "Teaching depends on a fragile interplay in the encounter between the teacher and the student" (Bredmar, 2020, p. 58). As I "lean into" this life experience and Thomas's focused eyes lock on mine, I instantly began to sink into my thoughts and grab hold of my emotions. Moments of concern and enlightenment transforming into reflective understanding. Suddenly I question, as we both nod in agreement, is the mask really a barrier? Or has it provided a new opportunity to connect?

Lloyd and Smith describe motion-sensing phenomenology as embracing a "present moment consciousness ... [researching] lived experience [in a way that] exudes a sense of life" (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 3). I wonder how I might reframe what I initially thought of as a roadblock as a potential opening for discovery, to develop understanding and experience reconnection. Each curve of the lip, lift of the brow, and wrinkle in the nose can help us communicate with one another. In this scenario, Thomas and I were able to cultivate a sense of understanding through the common language of the body - specifically, the eyes - providing a link within the space.

Connecting through Gestures?

Twenty minutes have passed and I can sense the irritability in the room. I circle the room and check the clock again. The math block in this classroom seems a little longer than usual today. "When's recess?" "I'm hungry." "Can I use the washroom?" I check the schedule:

10:45am-11:00 am/DPA

Play a Just Dance Video from YouTube and project it onto the smartboard. Remember to switch the audio input to Computer 1. (I labelled it with a green sticky tab).

Instantly my excitement begins to build. Perfect! This is what I was born to do! I have a passion for movement, and dance has always provided as an outlet for happiness and connectivity. Daily Physical Activity (DPA) is the best way to integrate 15 minutes of movement into the classroom. I lift my chin and say “Alright one more minute to work on your math and then we have some DPA time!” From the corner of my eye, I see a student eagerly swinging her hand in the air. I turn my head and our eyes connect. “Miss Pearl, what are we doing for DPA today?” I couldn’t help myself. “We are having ... A DANCE PARTY!” Instantly, a wave of excitement rushes through the crowd. “YAY!” An exhilarating energy and is now filling the entire room. Students scramble as they put away their math tools and stand behind their chairs.

I log onto the computer and pick the first video. The classroom energy is high, and each student is ready to go. What a shift from 5 minutes ago! I can feel the beat through the floor, and feel bad for the classroom next door, but the joy that has spread in me is invigorating and contagious. In fact, Bredmar (2020) states: “joy associated with a feeling of harmony in the classroom makes the situation appear open and full of potential.” This makes me wonder about the connective harmony that is being created in this moment. Bredmar (2020) encourages teachers to “look for moments of joy and reflect over these moments to understand them professionally”. I begin dancing along and become an active participant in this classroom experience. With a twirl and a glide, I stop and take a pause.

As I look over the classroom, students are collectively jumping in the air, and moving their bodies to the beat, mirroring the dance moves of the brightly coloured bodies on the screen. They giggle, wiggle and share just a momentary gaze between one another as they sing the lyrics of their favourite songs blasting through the speakers. Quoting Husserl in *The Body Subject: Being True to the Truths of Experience*, Sheets-Johnstone writes: “the Body is, as Body, filled with the soul through and through,” that “[e]ach movement of the Body is full of soul, the coming and going, the standing and sitting, the walking and dancing, etc.” (Husserl 1989, as cited in Sheets-Johnstone, 2002, p.11). While watching my students dance in this moment, I am reminded of why I love hip-hop and why I have a passion for dance. Suddenly, a new window opens.

🔊) [My Light](#)

*At a young age I was moving to the beat;
Grooving and hopping, shaking, and popping;
Connecting my body to the music in whatever way felt right.
It is my light.
This is where I shine.
This is where I get to share this passion of mine.
My last dance performance for 2004,
Little did I know that I would want to dance anymore.*

As I scan the room of groovin’ grade 3s, I am taken back to a memory of being in the third grade. I was preparing to dance at my yearly hip-hop recital. I had picked out my best favourite red shirt and acid wash jeans and hung them in my closet. I was

a week early, but I liked to be prepared! After all, this was the performance of a lifetime. I had been practicing the moves day in and day out. My mother was my number one supporter. She even burned the songs onto a CD so that I could practice while listening through my sister’s walkman: a smooth round silver CD player connected to headphones with soft spongy cushions to maximize comfort. They were perfect because I could really hear the music, and with each little accent or drop in the beat I was able to bounce and pop my chest, keeping the groove in every step. I loved these headphones. But today, these are the headphones I am wearing to the hospital instead of in my room.

Connecting to my Truth?

I’m visiting my mom again and I am afraid. These headphones and this music seem to be the only things that make sense. I do not understand why my mother is still in the hospital - she has been in and out before, but never for this length of time. After spending some time in the waiting room with my cousins and my sister, my aunt approaches me and holds out her hand. I look up, our eyes connect and I push my headphones off the side of my ear so they settle around my neck.

“Come with me.”

My aunt’s eyes are tired but hopeful as she smiles.

“Your mother will like to see you.”

I take her hand, push myself off the seat, take off my headphones and walk down the hall. Again, a window, but one that before now, before this inquiry into moments of connection, I was not ready to open.

🔊) [Hand, Hand, Hand](#)

*My mother is in the hospital.
My family and I, all reaching over her body, praying for healing
and, from what I understood, praying for peace. As the cancer
spread through her body, from her breast to her kidneys, and
liver, the blood in her body began to poison the major organs
and create unbearable thoughts of death and despair.
I am too young to understand what was really going on, but I
can sense the mood in the room.
Sadness, uncertainty, confusion, hopelessness.
As the somber faces of my family droop like melting wax statues,
I become stiff, paralyzed in the moment moving slowly around
me.
I don’t like this activity. But I allow my body to move.
As the hospital light shines brightly over my mother’s body, our
eyes connect. She covers up the pain in her eyes with a slight
smile as she notices the tear falling from my eye. Quickly looking
away, I now understand that she could barely stand the sight
of my tears. As she swallows, I can see the struggling in her
throat. I look up and scan the room above me, the salty tear now
entering the sides of my mouth.
With palms faced down, inches above her.
Hand, hand, hand, a man holding a bible, reading scriptures of
the Lord’s word.*

Who knew words could heal?
 I had hope to see her again, for her to come to my dance performance on Friday, for her to cheer me on and be the loudest black mother in the room.
 For her to run backstage to give tight hugs that exuded pride and joy.
 For her to maybe give me my favourite sour candies to feed into my already vibrant energy, and for us to walk home together hand in hand as she wore the purple earrings and necklace I made her in my after-school art class.
 But alas, a hand, a hand a hand and a man holding a bible, are all that I see looking up from my short stature.
 Today is Monday. I am 9 years old, and not sure of what was to come next,
 As I look at my mom, looking at the hands. She's wearing the purple earring and the purple necklace I made for her in my after-school art class, a hospital gown, and thin white blanket. Soft, warm, and the only thing I can reach, as I look up to a hand, a hand, a hand, and a man holding a bible.
 Is it this the yearning for connection? Desperately reaching for the hands, unsure of why?
 Or is it the light I am reaching for? The warmth? The welcoming energy? The sense of belonging, the sharing of joy and happiness or the unifying energy of togetherness and home?
 As we all stand together to pray for my mother, I wonder:
 Where the love has gone?
 Where has the voice of the divine gone?
 Where is the power promised by those who heal us?
 To unify us?
 To connect us?

As I reach out my hands to connect through physical touch, the yearning of belonging and a sense of connection in community is at the heart of being a part of a circle of love, a circle of love that raised me and protected me in the darkest hours.

Is this how I connect beyond the beat? Perhaps it is connected to and through the beating of the heart. I constantly wonder how far and how strong this intensity can grow. At times, I believe I am at a stage where I can be comfortable, I can be free, but still be missing something. A lingering presence. A presence that is always watching and always looking over my shoulder. It is a light that helps guide me at times of confusion and doubt but isn't always there when I cry out for it. I now pay closer attention to my emotional responses, for denying them "can lead to premature conclusions, assumptions, and prejudice as well as contribute to [my] lack of insight" (Bredmar, 2020, p. 63). So, I continue to question ... what is it? This intensity? This warmth? Is it the light that shines as I see the hands of my past? Or is it the connective reach of hands for a high five, and handshake, or a hug? A realization of a desire to connect manifests in a way that goes beyond connecting through physical touch, connecting through the beat, connecting to people, and connecting to our lived histories is what brings vitality to my moments of flow, moments when everything seems to momentarily come together in existential oneness (Lloyd, 2015a; 2015b; 2016; 2020).

Connecting through the Pandemic?

These moments where students connect in the classroom, living life, loving moving, interacting through the eyes and gesture help to bring meaning to my connective experiences and in reconnecting with my truth. Through each experience of teaching, I have learned "alternative ways of seeing, hearing, being, becoming and loving" (Leggo, 2020, p. 224), we develop new ways of connecting. Despite the protective screens, masks and shield, the students find ways to move, they are not halted from the pulse of life that is there for them to live. As the DPA time winds down, and the last song is played, the students continue to exude joy that is visible in the sweat on their brows and jitteriness in their bodies.

"ONE MORE SONG!" They yell.

I am instantly reminded of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2020) as she describes movements of body that are "full of soul". While the body can be seen as the functioning body, we may also describe the body "as livingly present both in and to the ongoing and changing felt dynamics of life itself" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2020, p. 11). Through the COVID-19 pandemic I have found new ways of connecting with my students through subtle movements of my subjective body and the felt dynamics expressed. I play the music and continue to dance with the students. I then yell ...

"Freestyle!"

Students start moving around their desk, and all different directions. I instantaneously soak up the "dynamic feelings of vitality" (Stern, 2010, p. 91). The students shift their bodies to form shapes with zest and spunk. The laughter grows and I can sense the smiles through the masks. I am filled with happiness and joy, watching the future leaders of our world. No matter how "animated we might be, we do not come into the world dancing and chattering. We come into the world simply moving" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2020, p. 12).

As this inquiry draws to a close, I wonder how I may continue to live through moments of predicament caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and experience moments of connection. Will I continue to experience moments of connection beyond the mask? Will I continue to experience connective sensations of flow and joy that will trickle into my outlook on life? The collective beat ignited by the rhythms of dance but connected through the ways in which my heart beats is what connects me to my truth, reminds me of my values, and viewpoints on relationships. Although we are experiencing moments that feel like barriers or disconnect, I am curious to continue to lean into and better understand the various ways we may experience the phenomenon of connection through distance and space throughout this pandemic.

As I close my eyes and reflect on my day-to-day experiences, I fall deep into my thoughts about the COVID-19 pandemic. Instantly, like scissors to the ribbon of a helium balloon, I am lifted. Cut away from memories, the grief, the worry, and the pain, but my body and heart still remain. Here, I am able to watch the world from afar. I feel myself floating, higher, and farther wondering if connection is something as natural as the air that lifts me.



Amanda Hall

AMANDA HALL
University of Ottawa

Amanda is a Masters of Education student at the University of Ottawa in the concentration of Teaching and Learning. She is a dance educator with an extensive experience in health and

fitness. Amanda's passion for movement makes her classes stand out from the rest by infusing meaningful connections and fostering positivity among her students. Amanda plans to continue to share her love for dance and its benefits for years to come by making an impact on the dance community.

Amanda Hall

The Pandemic Pivot: Experiencing the Transition from Rivalry to Community in Competitive Dance

Abstract

As the COVID-19 pandemic hits the province of Ontario, the dance competition community had to pivot the way they function in order to continue. Influenced by Husserlian influenced dance phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, the meaning of the word compete is etymologically explored throughout this inquiry in terms of its ancestral detonation of striving together. Looking inwards into her own lived experiences as a result of the pandemic, Amanda shares her journey of what it was like when a familiar moment became strange.

Keywords

Phenomenology; pandemic; dance; competition; compete; community

Résumé

Alors que la pandémie de COVID-19 frappe la province de l'Ontario, les danseurs compétitifs ont dû changer leurs façons de faire pour que cette industrie continue. À l'aide d'une lentille phénoménologique husserlienne influencée par la phénoménologue de la danse Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, l'auteure examine le sens et l'étymologie du mot *compétition* en le comparant à sa détonation ancestrale de la lutte ensemble. En se basant sur ses propres expériences vécues à la suite de la pandémie, l'auteure partage son parcours : une activité familière devenue étrange.

Mots-clés

Phénoménologie ; pandémie ; danse ; compétition ; rivaliser ; communauté

"I dance because there's no greater feeling in the world than moving to a piece of music and letting the rest of the world disappear." ~ Author Unknown

Dance for me is more than a hobby, it is a way of life, a way of being. It provides me with a sense of purpose. As Celeste Snowber (2012) said, "Dance is our birthright. Movement is knitted into the fabric of our beings, and the very first dance begins in the womb" (p. 53). From walking on my tippy toes in my early years to finding myself in aesthetically stretched out positions as I reach for something on the top shelf, dance defines me. I spend my evenings at the studio with my students. Rarely do I stand in one place. I transport myself around the room flowing up and down, following the movements of my dancers, becoming breathless at times as we prepare for our upcoming dance competition. Our muscles are weakened from the constant back-and-forth, repeating the same sequences over and over again until our bodies cannot move anymore. Yet, we find that inner strength that lies deep within to lengthen our arms a little longer, point our feet a little deeper and lift our legs a little higher. As I ponder over each and every little detail, from fixing nuanced arm positions to head tilts, tension seems to be building in my body as a looming fear creeps into my consciousness. I worry about who we will be competing against in the weeks to come. We take it from the top again, endlessly striving for *perfection*, or what my students have coined it, "Amanda perfect". I am not alone in experiencing such pressure. Schupp (2020) points out that dance competitions have evolved exponentially as we are now being held up to standards

that parallel televised events such as *So You Think You Can Dance*. I hear myself telling my students to feeeel the music, be *BOLDER* and *BIGGER* in their movements. My mind is always racing, thinking ten steps ahead on what my next cues are to deliver to reach this unattainable sense of perfection.

In this pre-pandemic moment, my understanding of competition is aligned with its etymological roots, that it is “a test of superiority derived from the Latin term *competitionem*” (Online Etymological Definition, 2021). I envision other participants as rivals, hence it is common for me to wonder who we are up against or which team or school we have to beat or conquer. Judgement is omnipresent when we gather to compete, as is the sense of pressure. I am so focused on how well my routines are executed on stage that when I watch my students perform, nothing else matters. I am completely consumed and lost within the trance of dance. I am fixated on the execution of a faultless performance.

Everything is going according to plan. Our showcase is scheduled for the week after March break, our final opportunity to refine our choreographies before competition day.... or so I thought. BAAM! And just like that. Our aspirations come crashing down. The COVID-19 pandemic consumes the Province of Ontario. All businesses are ordered to shutdown. Lockdown!

Lockdown? Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999; 2020), a dance phenomenologist, talks about moments when the familiar, our taken for granted lives, become strange when we engage in the process of performing Husserlian phenomenology. But in this case, this is not a methodological strategy. My dance world, everything that is familiar to me has been become strange.

*“Well you only need the light when it’s burning low
Only miss the sun when it starts to snow
Only know you love her when you let her go”
~ Let her go by Passenger*

The One Where it all Started (March 12, 2020)

*“Dance is a passion,
an addiction,
a lifestyle,
a discipline,
an art.
It is more than a hobby.”
~ Author Unknown*

I am sitting at a family gathering as we celebrate my cousin’s gender reveal and I get a call. It is my boss from the dance studio I teach at, Eileen. I gracefully slip away from the table and hear the news. The dance competition showcase has to be postponed. The more she talks, the warmer I get. I feel as if the temperature in this restaurant has been dialed to extreme heat. A sense of heaviness fills my body, weighing deeply into my chest. My feet return me to the table, yet part of me remains in that conversation. I cannot seem to focus on the moment I am living right now. I sit back down in my chair excited to continue to eat, yet my focus bounces back-and-forth between the two dialogues – the one about the gender reveal and the other in my mind. My to-do list takes over. Instead of consuming my caesar salad wrap, thoughts about my choreography and what sections need fixing surface. I reflect on the timing and

counts that my dancers need to be more synchronous with, and the musical mastery that needs to be perfected in order for us to win an overall award, and dare I say it, a choreography award for me. To say I am feeling stressed is an understatement.

The One Where we Realized that this was Going to be Longer than 3 Weeks

*“It’s not about being the best,
It’s about being better than I was yesterday.”
~ Author Unknown*

I hear a soft melodic tone out in the distance. The tone starts to build in volume, gradually getting louder and louder. Ahhh, my alarm. I slowly open my eyes and I grab my phone to turn it off. I look down to see three missed calls and a bunch of text messages from Eileen and Rhea – the owners of the two dance studios where I teach. In a panicky motion, I hastily scan through the text messages, not really digesting the words until I see:

Eileen: “We are closed until April 5th – at the earliest!”

Rhea: “We have to remain closed until April 5th.”

My mind begins to flood with questions. *April 5th? What does this mean? That is competition weekend. How is that going to work?? Are we going to be able to practice our dances, or will we just go straight into competition when things go back to normal? My body starts to feel cold and weak as I flop back into bed. I feel lost. What do I do now?*

The One Where a Community Started to Build

*“Inside every dancer is a beginner that fell in love.”
~ Author Unknown*

Over the past week the couch has been drawing me in to the point where the imprint of my body has created a comfy nook. Every day it seems as if the couch is calling my name, summoning me to fall into its secure pleasures. Slumping into my new existence, watching Netflix and countless other movies with my family, has become my new normal. Every day that passes is another day that we are not in the studio and we are not dancing. I am no longer needed. My role of dance instructor has become obsolete. Thompson (2007) proclaims that a predicament is a moment when an experience beyond our control unfolds, leaving us to feel helpless in not knowing how to move forward. My couch is swallowing me. I cannot move. I no longer follow my daily routine. *What am I supposed to do today?* As the movie finishes, my family immediately disperses, rushing into their own quarters in the house. I feel sluggish, limited in energy with no motivation to actually get up and do something. I should do something. *Do what though?* I can smell the lingering scent of banana bread in the kitchen that my daughter is currently baking in the oven, but it doesn’t call to me. I am not hungry. I stay plonked on the couch and jadedly pick up my phone. Aimlessly on my Instagram I see a post from a friend that sparks my interest. All of a sudden, I jump up and excitedly I break free from the hold that the couch has on me.

“FREE COMMUNITY DANCE CLASSES!” offered by CLI Studios.

As I re-read these words again for the second time, my muscles begin to tighten. A surge of excitement returns. A smile perks up on my face. I click on the link that takes me to the CLI Studio page to read the details. Instantly, I share the post on my own Instagram feed, tagging both of the studios that I teach for, with the hashtag #keepdancing.

The One Where the Dance Community Started to Change

“Great dancers are not great because of their technique; they are great because of their passion.”

~Martha Graham

*“Only know you’ve been high when you’re feeling low
Only hate the road when you’re missin’ home
Only know you love her when you let her go
And you let her go”*

~ Let her go by Passenger

I have started a new routine. Every morning I eagerly wake up and zealously look through my Instagram feed to see what companies, studios, and organizations are offering free dance classes that I can then share with my own dance community. I receive a message from a student thanking me for these daily posts. This brightens my heart. I am glowing. Having this ability to connect from afar, bonding over sharing a passion for what we both love, dance, has provided that sense of purpose that was lacking in my life. I have transformed my predicament into an opportunity to explore and discover a new sense of who I am in this dance community. In essence, I am learning a new way of how to become myself (Thompson, 2007).

A new sense of kindness is permeating our dance community ironically during a time when we are usually at the peak of competition season, a time steeped in what Schupp (2020) describes as division, contention, and rivalry. Dance studios are sharing Instagram posts from other studios, showing signs of support in this time of crisis. Instead of battling against each other, we battle together in order to gain government support and resources needed to continue. Forging together, the formation of Dance Safe Ontario was created. A new kind of competition takes hold, one that aligns with its Latin etymological lineage. To compete can be more than an experience of rivalry. It can be understood as an act of striving together as *competere* means “to seek together, from Latin *com-* + *petere*, to come together, agree, to go to.” (Online Etymological Definition, 2021). *Could this be what competition is really all about?*

The One Where we can Finally Get Back into the Studio

“Gratitude turns what we have into enough.”

~ Author Unknown

The government has lifted its restrictions. We are allowed back into the space that we once called our second home. The formation of a collaborative and supportive dance community has allowed studios to share their resources, knowledge, and staff

with one another, eliminating the division that was once there. Haslam (2020), explores this concept in more detail, explaining that the societal ties that exist within like-minded people define a culture thus formulating a community. This social force produces a communicative “infrastructure that makes identity, solidarity and memory sharable” (Hamera, 2011, p.5) within our dance community.

As I pull open the doors once familiar, but now somewhat strange, I feel rush of excitement as I take my first steps into the front lobby. The smell of cleaning products and latex are prominent within my nostrils, chills run through my body as the sensation of goose bumps trickle across my skin. I quickly remove my shoes. I feel the floor and glide across the hallway in a vibrant jeté leap. My excitement continues as I chassé toward the studio entrance. I’m finally home. I don’t care about competition being around the corner. Gone is the focus on perfection. I can’t wait to move with my students.

The song, *Let Her Go* by Passenger alludes to this idea that you don’t know what you have until its gone. I believe this pandemic has most definitely taught me to appreciate the moments I once took for granted. Never did I imagine that the studio space would be taken away from me, but now that I am here, I will no longer take it for granted.

My dancers begin to enter the studio yet their entrance is different than mine. An orderly single filed line is required of them as they head towards their designated dance squares taped on the floor, 6-feet apart. Space might be dividing us, masks might be covering our mouths, but I can tell that they are beaming from head to toe. A surge of pleasure washes over me. Tears creep into my eyes. I want to hug them. These are happy tears. I am elated to dance once again with them. Gratitude is omnipresent, as is a rediscovery of the true purpose of why we dance—we dance because we love it.

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Source: Photo by k.ho

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Carolina Bergonzoni (she/her) is a dance artist, educator, and PhD candidate in Arts Education at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. Originally from Italy, she has been living as a settler on unceded Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Skwxwú7mesh (Tsleil- Waututh), and xʷməθkwəyəm (Musqueam) territories since 2014. She is a SSHRC fellow recipient, as well as the recipient of the Dean's Entrance Graduate Scholarship and a Graduate Fellowship. Carolina holds a BA and MA in Philosophy (University of Bologna), and an MA in Comparative Media Arts. She has been working towards building community of movers and thinkers with people from 0 to 99+ years old her entire life.

Carolina Bergonzoni

An Expansion into Small Spaces

Abstract

What does it mean to re-orient a dance practice? What does it mean to no longer be able to go to a dance studio and to share a practice with others? Over the course of the past year, my dance practice has deeply changed and the material conditions in which I dance needed to shift from a spacious studio to a small apartment. Through this phenomenological inquiry, I explore my journey, from sorrow to joy, in discovering pleasure in dancing in small spaces, re-orienting my body, and feeling an expansion of joy taking over my dancing body.

Keywords

Dance, pandemic, phenomenology, somatic, emergent practices

Résumé

Que signifie réorienter une pratique de la danse ? Que signifie ne plus pouvoir aller dans un studio de danse et partager une pratique avec d'autres ? Au cours de la dernière année, ma pratique de la danse a profondément changé, alors que l'espace dans lequel je dansais est passé d'un studio spacieux à un petit appartement. Par l'entremise de cette enquête phénoménologique, j'explore mon cheminement, du chagrin à la joie, jusqu'à la découverte du plaisir de danser dans de petits espaces. J'apprends à me réorienter, jusqu'à en ressentir une expansion de joie s'emparer de mon corps dansant.

Mots-clés

Danser, pandémie, phénoménologie ; somatique, pratiques émergentes

I am rehearsing for a big dance production. I am wearing make-up, a nice costume I have never seen before and I am dancing on stage, spiraling across a diagonal from upstage to downstage. My arms and legs are moving freely and widely, devouring the space. My bare feet are savouring the floor, gently landing after a big leap.

Suddenly, I am awake. I have a strong desire to dance spaciouly, a desire I haven't felt in quite some time. I leave my bedroom and I take a look at my Vancouver-sized apartment. I end up sitting on the couch. One more day without dancing.

Growing up, I was always able to feel energy changing in a room, to read body cues, and to feel the presence of others even when I couldn't see them. I thought it was a superpower until I realized that, as a dancer, I trained my entire life to attune my awareness to spaces and the other bodies within them. We sense and establish space by grasping it with our body (Morris, 2004). When I dance spaciouly, my body becomes sensitive to the space and I can taste it through my skin, but to articulate the experience of my body through words seems like an impossible task. As Mata (2016) puts it:

Describing the kind of fulfilling experiences of space [...] has never been an easy task. I have certainly had such experiences since I was a very young [...] And yet, all my life I have struggled to put them into words; words that somehow always managed to escape the point that, ultimately, seemed to hold the key (p. 26).

For me the challenge is doubled. How do I put into words the experience of space AND the experience of dancing? How can I find words to describe my lived experience of dancing in space, when words seem to never fully capture what I am feeling?

Throughout the past year, since restrictions to contain the spread of COVID-19 were put in place, I have been struggling to find a way to dance spaciouly. The new restrictions drastically changed the way we teach, learn, navigate the environment, interact with others, and dance. Personally, I have been deeply affected by these changes in a mix of grief, sadness, and excitement for new opportunities.

We are living in a state of emergency, we must focus on emergent practices. adrienne maree brown, borrowing from Nick Obolensky, defines emergence as “the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions”, as “a way of speaking about the connective tissue of all that exists”, and a situation that emphasizes “listening with all the senses of the body and the mind” (2017, p. 3). Over the past year, I have experienced an increase of tightness. Tightness in my body, in my chest, and in my movement. Tightness in the spatiality of my apartment, in my shoulders, and in my neck. This tightness hasn’t stopped me from keep going back to my dance practice but has forced me to reconsider what this practice looks like. Afterall, dance taught me to get in touch with my body, and my body taught me who I am. What better way to learn about these new, emergent, practices and my new relationship with space than through dance itself?

As a dancer, the material conditions in which I move to are coming to the foreground. I have never thought of the importance of ‘the dance studio’ as a container for my practice; I’ve always taken it for granted. As I find myself unable to go to a studio, and to share with others, I am forced to rethink my dance and teaching practice. At first, I tried to replicate what I knew, teaching the same way through a screen instead of in person. It didn’t work. Eventually, I let go of the known and let the unknown guide me: I have found new emergent practices that take into account the different spatiality of the outdoors and those of tight and familiar spaces, such as my Vancouver-sized apartment.

Figure 1: *Studio Shot from All Bodies Dance Project*



Note: A group of dancers in a studio. Each dancer is in a shape, most of them with their arm extended in different directions.

I left behind a daily routine of going to a dance studio, hug people I love, work towards sensing my dancing body, feel sensations, and then, after a good morning class, get ready for my day. I am missing the shared sweat, breath, and heat exchanged from the presence of bodies in the same room. The impossibility of going to the dance studio, made it clear that my practice is/was very much in relationship with the physical space that I identify as “the space for dance”. Even when I go to the studio for my solo practice, I can feel the presence of the dances that have been danced before me, the smell and humidity of sweating bodies. Now (when provincial regulation allow), when I rent a studio for my solo practice, all I can smell through my two masks is the alcohol of the disinfectant.

Re-orienting

At the beginning of the pandemic, dancing in my apartment, I was constantly aware of the limitations of my living room, the sound coming from outside, my dog wanting to play. I am used to navigating constraints in my artistic practice, but these feel like distractions, rather than creative avenues. This dance is like an old friend that I haven’t seen in years: I almost didn’t recognize them, but as soon as we started moving all the memories came back.

My dance training began with ballet, a dance form that emphasizes verticality and narrowness through the use of the barre and point shoes, not to mention the fact that most exercises occur in an imaginary square. As with many other dancers I know, at some point in my relationship with dance, I rejected the ballet form: I no longer wanted to be vertical, narrow, small, suspended. I began reclaiming space by widening my body and becoming spacious in my dance. I started dancing outside of the prescribed box.

When I first let go of verticality, I felt disoriented, dizzy, almost lost. The vertical stance is related to our gaze and the only possible way to challenge it is to get use to falling. It took me years to find pleasure, joy, and excitement in these moments of “different orientations” (Ahmed, 2006). Now that I am forced to dance in my apartment, verticality is what disorients me. Verticality - my old friend - feels unknown, confusing, unstable. The political, aesthetical, and ethical implications I associate with verticality in dance are difficult to reconcile with, but this emergent practice is asking me to re-establish a relationship with the past.

How can I find pleasure, joy and ease in what I so strongly rejected because it felt too aligned, too tidy, too controlled, too imposed? My practice these days is a mix of warm-up exercises, some stretches, breathing exercises. Every time I am ready to dance, something pulls me in a different direction, and I always end up in stillness.

Dance is a relational practice: I am in relation with space, time, weight, gravity, the room I am in, and the audience. In my apartment, my body is in relation with distractions: I notice is that the floor could be vacuumed, the sound coming from outside, my husband working next to me while I dance, the couch being too close to my legs.

Finding Small Spaces

It wasn't until the Summer of 2020 that I was able to shift my perspective. I no longer focused on the *lack of*, but rather on the *abundance* of possibilities that these times have provided me with. I discovered an emergent practice of small dances. This emergent practice is not site-specific since the intention is not to develop a work in relationship to the space, but rather to explore how the body can morph and adapt to fit in with the landscape.

I show up to my small dance practice and work through it. However, there is a piece that is always missing: spaciousness. I miss dancing in proximity to people and I miss being physically spacious in my dancing, I miss the feeling of devouring space with my body. Not only I miss the spaciousness of a dance studio; I also miss the unique experience of spaciousness that is sharing space with other bodies. I can still find space in my joints: my hips, my shoulders, my fingers articulating movement and thoughts, and I can find micro-dances that are mostly invisible from the outside and yet, they profoundly transform and shape my body. But this is not enough. I crave the opportunities for spiraling in and out of the floor, for feeling tridimensional in my body and the relationship with space and others. I miss the communal sense of belonging, the strong sense of being together as a swarm, a shoal, a murmuration in which "each creature is shifting direction, speed, and proximity based on the information of the other creatures' bodies" (brown 2017, p. 71). I miss being with and witnessing other in the flesh: I feel more connected to myself when I am with others and I lose myself online.

I am living, learning, and dancing in a whole new way. I am navigating my surroundings with an invisible bubble, with a 2-meter diameter, around me. The new social choreography of moving to the side, giving space, asking for space, being almost fearful of others coming too close, while also feeling so distant, makes me feel very narrow. I am reminded of adrienne maree brown definition of strategy: "a plan of action towards a goal," and "a practice of narrowing down, identifying one path forward, one strategy" (brown, 2017, p. 155). My body must have figured out this strategy before I did; my body navigates public space such as public transit or sidewalks, by negotiating the adjustments that become necessary to find a place to fit in, while taking up as little space as possible.

My emergent practice, which include the emerging of a new pedagogy, is bringing the invisible space that is the space of dance to the forefront more and more. On the one hand, I am going inward, dancing in smaller ways. I dance while lying on the floor, listening to my organs, my breath, and the changing shapes of my rib cage. I am dancing now, while I type these words, feeling the strong sensation of stiffness in my shoulders, my heartbeat racing somewhere between my chest and my throat because of the anxiety of these uncertain times, my fingers flowing on the keyboard.

On the other hand, this emergent practice is heavily influenced by the presence of a screen and a camera. I share my practice now much more often than I ever had. It almost feels as if recording and sharing my dance on social media is what makes the dance 'real' and, at the same time, I am struggling with my image being on screen constantly. I feel pressured to show the

world that I am still doing the work, that I am still dancing although I am not sharing the studio with other dancers. adrienne maree brown's keeps resonating in my head:

*Small is good, small is all. (The large is a reflection of the small).
Change is constant. (Be like water).*

There is always enough time for the right work.

There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.

Never a failure, always a lesson.

Trust the People. (If you trust the people they become trustworthy).

Move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass – build the resilience by building the relationship.

Less prep. More presence

What you pay attention to grows (brown, pp.41-42).

An Expansion into Joy

When I improvise, I witness the sensations, feelings, and movement of my body and I let the dance bring me to a place that is both known and unknown. I learn through my moving body, through the sensation in my hips, the tension in my shoulders and neck, the feelings in my stomach, and the dance of my organs – my inner landscape. I thought as an improviser and a person who loves spontaneity that living in "uncertain times" would be an easy challenge. Well, it has not been easy.

At first, I experienced sadness and grief for what I used to know, and I no longer fully understand. My body could not extend into space, I felt out of place, as if I didn't know my own body anymore. Eventually, I experienced joy for this emergent practice that I have discovered, rediscovered, reimagined, and reconnected with during this pandemic. This sense of joy is "an e-motional sensing of flow" (Lloyd & Smith, 2021, p. 11) that allows for an expansion of space. As Jean-Louis Chrétien beautifully writes:

Joy gives us space, room, and a new playing field. To be joyous is to be set at large, off the coast of the vast offering of the world, which is suddenly revealed to us in its free expanse (2019, p. 1).

I build on Chrétien's idea that the dilation of space, which is connected with joy, relays on the principles of breath, motion, and amplification. Over the past year, I reconnected with joy through new, emergent, dance practices. Through them, I was able to put myself back in motion, sensing my breath, moving my body, and experiencing an amplified perception of my living room space. Although I still move in a tight space, this "feeling more alive in a vaster space" (Chrétien, 2019, p.1) makes my body want to expand, to move, to take up and savour the small space of my living room.

I now experience the small spaces, in which I have been dancing throughout the pandemic, as spacious. The experience of joy that takes over my entire body when I dance makes me feel alive in movement. I am no longer stuck on the couch; I am dancing to redefine the contours of my body. Like water, I am constantly changing and shaping my relationship with space.

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Dr. Rebecca Lloyd, Full Professor, Co-Director of Graduate Studies, and SSHRC-funded researcher has developed the interdisciplinary Function2Flow (F2F) conceptual model and the methodology of Motion-Sensing Phenomenology (MSP)— approaches that provide pathways to research and teach toward the kinesthetic cultivation of flow that she has applied to a variety of contexts such as physical education, teacher education, dance, climbing, and hooping. Her current

InterActive for Life Project explores expert experiences of interactive flow in partnered practices—salsa dance, acroyoga, equestrian & martial arts—with the goal of mobilizing relational, motion-sensing knowledge to physical educators and inspiring social-emotional attuned changes in pedagogical practice. As a firm believer in “walking the talk”, Dr. Lloyd lives and breathes the process of becoming InterActive for Life on the Latin dance floor where she is known to medal. For a listing of her resources and publications see Function2Flow.ca and follow her on Twitter [@IA4Lproject](https://twitter.com/IA4Lproject).

Rebecca Lloyd

Dancing Salsa Solo: Somatic Shimmies and Sways of Awakenings in the Midst of Pandemic Death

Abstract

This motion-sensing phenomenological inquiry invites us to consider what feelings manifest when engaged in the practice of dancing salsa, a typically partnered dance, in a solo capacity. Similar to the way jazz musicians break free and deviate from the mainstream melody in a song by performing an impromptu solo, salsa dancers release their entwined embrace to fully respond to a call within a song—a musical interlude of guttural release in bodily sways, isolations, and footwork variations. A shine typically spans eight bars or 64 counts of music, which is approximately 20 seconds in clock time, yet given the imposed isolation from the COVID-19 stay at home orders, more than a year has passed.

While some might consider dance to be a means of distraction from the stress of COVID-19 constriction, this inquiry delves not only into the felt sense of being surrounded by pandemic death and the darkness and weight such moments bring, but also the experience of bodily salsa shaking as a possible pathway toward healing. The grips and fears of pandemic death need not lock us down and take an omnipresent hold. There are pathways, as the exemplar of salsa shakes and shimmies reveals, to sense life’s vital presence and in so doing, liberate ourselves to shine.

Keywords

Salsa Dance, Pandemic, Flow, Somatic, Phenomenology

Résumé

Cette enquête phénoménologique de « motion-sensing » nous invite à considérer les sentiments qui se manifestent lorsque nous sommes engagés dans un mouvement solo de la salsa, qui se danse habituellement en couple. De la même façon que les musiciens de jazz se libèrent et s'écartent de la mélodie traditionnelle d'une pièce musicale en exécutant un solo impromptu, les danseurs de salsa se libèrent de leur étreinte pour répondre pleinement à un appel lancé dans une chanson, un intermède musical de libération gutturale marqué de balancements corporels, d'isolation de mouvements et de variations de jeu de jambes. Un *shine* dure généralement huit mesures, soit 64 battements et environ 20 secondes ; mais compte tenu de l'ordre de rester à la maison causé par la COVID-19, plus d'un an s'est écoulé. Alors que certains pourraient considérer la danse comme un moyen de se distraire du stress des contraintes imposées par la COVID-19, cette enquête explore non seulement le sentiment ressenti lorsqu'on est entouré par la mort en temps de pandémie, l'obscurité et le poids que de tels moments apportent, mais aussi le rôle des mouvements du corps dans la salsa comme voie possible vers la guérison. La peur de la mort en temps de pandémie n'a pas à nous emprisonner et à exercer un contrôle omniprésent. Il existe des voies, comme le révèle l'exemple des *shakes* et *shimmies* de la salsa, qui permettent de ressentir la présence vitale de la vie et, ce faisant, de nous libérer pour mieux briller.

Mots-clés

Danse Salsa, Pandémie, Flow, Somatique, Phénoménologie

Never did I imagine putting on my false eyelashes, salsa dress, tights, heels, and crown for a dance performance that is to be filmed in my living room. As I affix the last part of my costume, a clear crystal teardrop gem to my forehead, I drink in the words to the song I've been replaying over and over again on Spotify, "Goddess" by SACHI, to help me get into to the mood. The lyrics: "Goddess, I'm looking for the Goddess," invite and beckon me to experience a new way of living my current pandemic reality, even if it is just for a moment. While I had no idea at the time, a search on Wikipedia (2021) informs me that Sachi, otherwise known as Shachi, is the Hindu queen of male divine beings known as devas, and associated with beauty, sensuality, and rage—attributes quite fitting for what is amplified in competitive salsa dance.

My pre-teen son knocks and opens my bedroom door to ask me a question about the internet and bounces back in surprise. There is a stranger standing there before him. His mother, who has worn sweat-shirts and track pants and hair scrunchies for the past 10 months, has disappeared. "What do you think?" I ask, as my inverted fingertips initiate a bust-to-hip sweeping gesture that draws attention to my purple lace and gem-sparkling costume (as depicted in Figure 1.). "You aren't wearing much!" my son exclaims. "Do you like it?" I inquire. His eye-roll, coupled with tilted head shakes from side-to-side, speak volumes ... I laugh off his reaction and joke that I bet his friends' moms don't look like this.

Figure 1: Rebecca Lloyd in the Starting Position of her Salsa Solo.



Note: Image was taken as a screen shot from a personally filmed salsa solo with a tripod. The video was submitted to the Liberty Dance Championship in November 2020 and resulted in a gold medal placement.

What Brings us to Life?

Gosetti-Ferencei (2020) speaks of how "existentialist thinking encourages living life as a work of art [and that] creativity may be required to become who we are, as Nietzsche wrote, or who we may want to be" (p.278). Dancing salsa solo with the help of online interaction with world-renowned coaches is what, as this motion-sensing phenomenological inquiry (Lloyd & Smith, 2020) will disclose, keeps me afloat during this time of pandemic death. My living room has not only become a practice floor, but the backdrop to several filmed solos that were submitted to over five international and local virtual salsa competitions and events as featured in a [local dance spotlight tribute](#) (Rahim's Salsa Friday, 2021). Looking back on this past year, despite the gold and top three outcomes I have accrued, what holds the most value for me has been the regular practice of having daily movement in my life. I am curious to more fully explore the ways in which this movement practice has helped me to rise from the grips of sadness and shake off the weight of omnipresent stress.

While I recognize that salsa is not for everyone, I begin this inquiry more broadly with a curiosity to question: What brings us to life? What moments wake us from the automaticity that takes hold when engaged in routine day-to-day activity? And what is the source of this awakening? Is it an inner impulse or something external to ourselves? What gives us that sense of a metaphorical tap on the shoulder that tells us to open our glazed-over eyes a little wider, expand our lungs to breathe a little deeper, and connect to the circulatory warmth of our blood moving a little faster? I ask these questions in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, a time when daily life and the routine in which we find ourselves has changed dramatically. What initially was thought of as a few weeks of stay-at-home isolation has morphed into a year of a new existence.

A Confined Existence: Memories of Moving with Others

Every other week when my two boys go to their father's house, I live alone with my cat. I don't socialize much to make sure I can be a support for my brother who has a compromised immune system, as well as, my dear friend Lesleigh who needs assistance getting to the hospital for her chemotherapy treatments. I follow the government-imposed rules of staying at home, washing my hands regularly, and wearing a mask if I need to go to the store to pick up essential items. I plan the occasional two-meter apart walk outside with a friend, but I don't hug anyone or hold anyone's hand during these alternate weeks.

I am not alone in living such an isolated and confined existence. The government-imposed lockdowns have left many of us in a situation where we work from home. Moments of everyday interaction have significantly decreased. No longer are we weaving in and out of traffic, randomly making eye contact and smiling at colleagues in hallways, nor casually engaging in "How are you?" conversations. And recreationally speaking, no longer are we engaged in team sports or group fitness activities for fear of spreading the deadly coronavirus and its mutated variants.

Prior to pandemic life, it was common for me to train with a professional salsa dance partner every other weekend, meet up with my competitive ladies styling team on weekly basis, and social dance at my local community center once or twice per week. It was these interactions, moments of moving with and in response to other dancers, that brought me to life. What started out as a hobby became a full-on fascination with the present-moment responsive consciousness that partner dance brings forth, a relational consciousness that became the focus of my phenomenological research for the past six years (Lloyd, 2015a, 2015b, 2017, 2020; Lloyd & Smith, 2020; Smith & Lloyd, 2019). In my past experience as a professionally trained ballerina, I learned to dance in a way that resonated with the individual progression of the "I move," "I do," "I can do" trilogy to which Sheets-Johnstone (2018, p. 19) refers when she is making sense of Husserl's intentionality. In contrast, partnered dance evokes a gut-level responsivity where one's thinking in and through movement comes from a deeper place of somatic knowing, a felt sense of the collective and omnipresent 'power to move' that radical phenomenologist Henry (2008) describes. The degree to which one gives themselves to the power to move, to the moment, to the dance, is tempered by the felt sense of interactive "inherent qualitative dynamics" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2018, p. 11), present within any movement (Stern, 2004, 2010; Sheets-Johnstone, 2011), and visible, in this case, in the angle of a partnered-directed postural lean (Lloyd, 2020).

After experiencing a year of physical isolation from my dance community, I marvel at the memory of us moving from partner to partner every three minutes at a salsa social. We would exchange brief hellos and pleasantries as a song started, but within seconds, words faded into the language of gesture and subtle angles of bodily pressure communicated through entwined palms. And when it felt really good, to the point when interactive flow emerged (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, 2008, 2014; Lloyd & Smith, 2006; Lloyd & Smith, 2020; Smith & Lloyd, 2019), our rhythmical movements merged with the musical signatures of the song at hand, melodic

and percussive moments as discernable as a bird listening to the call of her mate. Metaphorical feathers ruffled as shoulder blades shimmied, spinal columns undulated, and hips swished to the pops, whines, and syncopated accents layered over the foundational base beat created by one foot rhythmically transferring weight to the next. The longer this pandemic continues, I realize how much moving to music in the company of others was such an integral part of my joyful existence. And only in this absence, of living alone, am I called into questioning more deeply my new presence in terms of the ways I may continue to connect ... albeit in different ways ... but to connect nonetheless to the pulse of life in this time of looming death.

Is Joy Possible?

I wonder: Is it possible to do more than simply survive this pandemic experience? Is there a way to sense joy's expansiveness in a time of isolation, constriction, and chronic state of tension, what somatic practitioners refer to as embodied 'dis-ease' (e.g., Foster, 2012; Fraleigh, 2015; Kaparo, 2012, pp.11-12; Olsen, 2002)? Maybe a quick fix is possible, like the soothing lull of consciousness that takes over when one Netflix episode morphs into another, or the feeling of warmth that enters the body when a square of dark chocolate melts on one's tongue. But is this happiness? How long do such feelings of pleasure last? What do we do when it fades and the constriction of the #stayathome order becomes too much to bear? Watch more Netflix? Eat more chocolate? Consume more social media? While these questions might seem frivolous in nature, they have a very real weight given the current lockdown #stayathome order that many of us across the globe are experiencing and, with that, a "disconnection to the meaningful-world-with-others" (Biley & Galvin, 2007, p. 804), an all-consuming feeling of loneliness, a phenomenon that Van Den Berg (1972) attributes to the core of psychopathology and mental illness.

We are at a moment in our lives when many of us are figuring out what we can do to increase feelings of happiness with a sense of agency. Phenomenologist J. L. Chrétien (2019) describes the physical experience of spacious joy as a kind of dilation. He says that as soon as "joy wells up in us, everything expands. Our breathing becomes more ample, and our body suddenly stretches out of its self-confined corner and quivers with mobility" (p.1). As I read his words, I see Julie Andrews from the *Sound of Music* in my mind's eye twirling on grassy fields surrounded by glorious German Alps, mountain peaks crested with snow. I also think back to the time when my lover's touch created a tremor that resulted in a welling of spontaneous tears. Happy tears.... No. JOY DOES NOT LIVE HERE the shaking of my head confirms! Travel is not possible. Nor is it permissible to spend time with anyone outside of one's bubble. #Stayinside, #Stayalive.

Contracting COVID-19

Every morning is now comparable to the movie *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993), a never-ending loop where each day begins like any other. My coffee machine makes its usual noise, moments after I sooth the loud meows from my cat by presenting her with

a warm gravy-infused breakfast. I am not sure why I time this ritual to end just before the 7 a.m. news begins. I also don't know why I continue to listen to the 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. updates as if something miraculous is going to be announced from one hour to the next. It's the same story. Case counts are up. New variants are on the rise. Hospital bed availability is on the decline. It almost feels surreal, like a bad dream, until the day I hear the reporter mention my brother's name: "*Cancer patient who feared getting COVID-19 in Ottawa hospital has tested positive*," is the headline of the accompanying online new story which describes how Adrian Lloyd, a stage four pancreatic cancer patient, contracted COVID-19 from his hospital roommate (Glowacki, 2020).

Two days before his story broke, just hours before I was supposed to pick him up to drive to my elderly parents' house to recover, he texts me about a second test I had insisted upon: "My COVID-19 test came back positive." My heart sinks so much so that my legs cave and crumble into a sitting position at the base of my nearby stairs. My chest collapses over my thighs and I begin to rock back-and-forth. Tears stream down my face. I wonder what will happen next. "*You are a miracle*," I text him between gasping breaths, followed by a unicorn kiss emoji. He's beat all the odds so far with his six-year, stage four pancreatic cancer diagnosis and I assure him that: "*If anyone can handle this setback it's you*." I gradually make my way from the stairwell to my living room where my computer is set up as my monthly anti-racist online meeting is about to start. I am there, looking into my screen but I cannot pretend I haven't just heard news of my brother contracting COVID-19. There is a very present tension in my body. My brother has already been in the hospital for over a week and I know that I am not allowed to visit due to COVID-19 restrictions. Other than dropping off cards, foil balloons, and gifts at the front entrance of the hospital with his name and room number attached, there is nothing I can do. I feel powerless. My back aches. It hurts to take a deep breath. I want to curl up and cry, but it is time for me to stare into my webcam, nod my head, and offer the odd comment as I join another Teams meeting. "*How are you?*" I am asked by a colleague. I don't say much. The next time I am asked in a follow up meeting I post the link to his [CBC Radio interview](#) (Bresnahan, 2020) in the chat in case anyone wants to hear the full story.

I know that I need to release the stress that is manifesting in the stabilizing muscles of my left shoulder blade and distended abdomen. Fear is holding me frozen. I'm in so much pain I can't move. Fear, as I face not only the recent death of my dear friend Lesleigh, who no longer needs a drive to her chemotherapy appointments, but the nearing reality that my brother may also take his last breath, has a stronghold on my consciousness. Nothing has prepared me for these moments. I do not want to "freeze and hunker down like small animals in the dark, trying to make ourselves invisible," as Callanan (2008, p.5) describes that many of us do when the looming death of a loved one draws near thinking "that if we do, death will pass us by" (p.5). No. I want to have the energy to be there for my brother and my parents who are looking after him now that he has been released from his month-long stay in the hospital. I want to have the strength to be a support when

he welcomes my weekend visits. I want to be able to acknowledge his foreign appearance, his stick legs and thin face with open eyes, courage, and acceptance. He is not only suffering from prolonged exhaustion associated with the long-haul symptoms of COVID-19, he is also experiencing complications associated with his pancreatic cancer that make it difficult for him to keep food down and eat. I don't feel an impulse to dance but I know it is the only way that I can tap into a source of abundance, energy that is there to experience with cosmic bounds (Conrad, 2007).

Dance, My First Love

Dance has always been something that made me happy. I danced before I could walk. Feet kicking at lightning speed are captured in old movies of me lying belly down on my baby blanket sporting a grin from ear-to-ear. I always felt something magical when I moved. Maybe that's why I often wore the white ballet tutu with the addition of fairy wings, cardboard cut outs that my father covered with tinfoil and attached together with string. I spent hours skipping, prancing, and floating around my house and back garden. One day, my mother stopped me moments before I jumped from the second-floor landing. My brother found a small rope that we secured to my waist. He was holding one end while I was attached to the other. In our minds it was just an extra precaution. We both believed I could fly.

When I was old enough to go to elementary school, which was age four in England, I self-registered a dance performance in the school talent show. The song I selected was quite apropos, a Ragtime piece entitled *The Entertainer*. It was shortly after this point in my life that my mother decided to enrol me in formal ballet lessons. I never looked back. Despite moving countries, my love for dance stayed with me. By the time I was 15 years old, I left home to train in the professional program at the *School of Dance* in Ottawa and by 17, I danced with the school associated with *Les Grands Ballet Canadiens* in Montreal.

When I turned my attention to becoming an academic, I said goodbye to dance, my first love, and stayed active through other means such as group fitness, weightlifting, and yoga. It was only when I entered a new phase of my life following my divorce, a rebirth of sorts, that dance crept back in. Timid at first, as salsa had a different relationship to the ground compared to ballet and a new vibrant energy force visible in the rippling bodily response to each step, I gradually opened myself up to becoming a dancer once more. And while this dance form is preferably experienced in partnership, there are moments in every song when each dancer releases their hands to engage in what is known as a 'shine'.

Time to Shine

Similar to the way jazz musicians break free and deviate from the mainstream melody in a song by performing an impromptu solo, salsa dancers release their entwined embrace to fully respond to a call within a song, a musical interlude when "all the ingredients [a]re cookin' just right ... [to the point where] Latinos would say, 'It ha[s] Salsa y Sabor' (sauce and taste)" (Renta, 2014, p. 119).

Usually a shine, a guttural release of accents and rhythms picked up in bodily sways, isolations, and footwork variations, lasts for approximately sixty-four counts of music, which is approximately 20 seconds in clock time. Given the imposed isolation from our partners in this pandemic, the seconds of our salsa shine turned, at first, to counted days ... then weeks and months to more than a year. Needless to say, the expression: "It's time to shine" has taken on a whole new meaning, not only for me, but for all dancers in my salsa community.

Despite feeling alone, depressed, and anxious about what the future holds, there is a feeling and surge of life that flows through me when I start to dance. No matter what is happening in my external world, from injury to heartache, dance has always been there for me (e.g., Lloyd, 2015a, 2015b). Whether it's the simple action of transferring weight from one foot to another or paying attention to the rippling sway of energy that shifts from my hips to my shoulder blades, there is something about salsa dance that draws me into what feels like a safe cocoon of consciousness. It also reflects back to me where in my body I am holding stress, tightness that exists beneath my everyday awareness.

"*Write immediately after you dance,*" encourages my dear friend and colleague Celeste Snowber, who is also finding ways to move creatively not only through this pandemic (Snowber, 2020a, 2020b) but through academic life at large (e.g., Snowber, 2016; Richmond & Snowber, 2009). I am sweating right now. My face is red. My glasses are sliding down my nose. I am taking a moment to sit in my afterglow. I am wearing my leopard print practice shoes – yes, the leopard print was a conscious choice. Why purchase basic beige dance shoes when one can draw inspiration from those who pounce and connect with the ground in the utmost of fluid ways? My inner cat woman is out right now. My posture is tall, my chest is open, my shoulder blade shake is visible in my torso while my forearms relax enough to offer a steady palm that is ready to accept an invitation to dance. Such opposition is a requirement for partner dance, quiet soft arms framing twisting torso wrings, shimmies and rolls, a feat that requires continual practice.

Somatic Awakening through Salsa Sways & Shimmies

I repeat a 64-count loop of my salsa solo, yet each repetition brings a new awakening. I can relax and drop more into my shoulders here. I am not transferring my weight there. I notice this is a habit. I step without really feeling the fullness of sinking into the floor, of letting myself feel the depth of each step. It is easier for me to transfer weight when the music is slow but when it speeds up, like life, I tend to hover between steps. For someone outside of salsa, it would look like I was performing all the required steps, but for someone with a trained eye, they would see my uncertainty between two points, not being fully here or there. I wonder if this straddling of weight between steps has anything to do with the two worlds I am now straddling? Part of me is with my brother. Even though he is sometimes too tired to engage in conversation when I visit or respond to the texts I send him during the week, I continue to carry him in my consciousness.

Heidegger (1938-39/2006) describes the existential nature of living within the "swaying of the 't/hereness of the t/here' [Daheit des Da] that holds unto the ab-ground, and the inabiding of Da-sein that as such grounds into beings" (p. 90). To walk in a such way that straddles the point of departure, here, when moving toward the point of arrival, there, depicted as t/here "invites the darkness, the abyss of one's existence to also enter one's awareness as one moves toward the brightness [... Such a sway thus] acknowledges the pain, moments that are easier to avoid and turn away from, as one moves toward a possibility of desired pleasure." (Lloyd, 2015b, pp.26-27).

I continue to dance on a daily basis, yet a pain in my shoulder becomes increasingly more debilitating. I can no longer reach out to close my car door with my left hand. My body has physically 'locked down' as we enter what has been named the third wave. I am not talking about a beautiful ocean wave that swells and rises as it makes its way toward me, inviting me to paddle harder so that I might pop up from my surfboard and ride it to the shore. No, this third wave drags on me. It wants to pull me under ... yet I find the strength to begin my mo[u]rning practice, my movement practice. My shoulder and neck stretches are first. My body holds tension in my neck, left shoulder, arm and upper back. I can't lie on my favourite side to sleep because it hurts so much. Like any decision to leave my house when I ask myself, "Is this an essential trip, one where it is worth the likelihood of coming into contact with COVID-19"?, I succumb to the reality that I need to see a physiotherapist. She examines me and tells me that my shoulder is actually out of my socket. Yes, this pandemic pulls on me ... it depresses my left scapula, freezing it out of place. But like any moment when one finds themselves locked in fear, movement is the answer. Movement is the antithesis of fear. My shoulder is manipulated by the hands of my physio and coaxed back into place. She prescribes a series of exercises for me to do at home. I comply. I move ... slowly and painfully at first, but I persevere. I continue to dance.

"*Make sure you experience body movement each time you transfer weight,*" my coach Samantha Scali, our current and multi-world salsa champion, explains as she demonstrates over Zoom the difference between doing steps in an upright stance versus transfers of weight with rippling and responsive hip, back, and shoulder action. While this technique is something that Anya Katsevman has taught me over the years and has actually informed my theorizing about moving into the present moment without hesitation or resistance (Lloyd, 2015a, 2017, 2020), I didn't realize how stiff my steps had become until they were mirrored back to me. Yes, I was rehabilitating a shoulder injury, but I was not aware of the impact such tension had on my fluid presence. Matching another's movements is a way of creating a relational connection with another, of "moving in harmony with another person" (Fraleigh, 2015, p. 32). Samantha faces away from the camera and walks in a way where her hips are liberated in a side-to-side sway. I drink in what she is doing and begin to move with her. Something releases. I do it again and a smile starts to turn up the corner of my lips.

Samantha then shows me how to do a double hip shake to the

side. Right hip up with the tap and again with the weight transfer as I sink into my right. My hips trace a zig zag pattern in a fluid pendulum-like swing. They are starting to move like Samantha's hips. She can perform this pattern at lightning speed. She is the embodiment of Zoom as she really does zoom from one move to the next. My computer screen is no longer two dimensional. I feel a little ball of energy, shimmying, swaying, and bouncing. In a way I sense that she is sending this ball of energy to me. I catch not only the technique of this bachata style hip-shaking variation, but a feeling of freedom and lightness. Samantha looks at me with a serious expression and says: "*This is your homework.*" A twinkle in my eye lights up and a giggle leaves my lips in response. Yet, we both know I will take this work seriously.

Each morning I wake up and I practice this movement over and over despite it only happening twice in my salsa solo routine. Each time I perform it, my feet are telling my hips that they can let go, they can sway out of alignment, out of my upright, somewhat uptight comportment. The wiggle enters my torso, my belly. My shoulders gradually soften. My face softens. I start to move into my forward and backward transfers of weight with this feeling of rippling release. Side-to-side movements morph into rotational spirals. My whole self is feeling the joy my dog expresses when he gets out of the water and shakes himself off. Such an action is never compartmentalized. A dog shakes his entire being without thinking about technique. It is instinctive.

Shaking Stress Off

Well known somatic movement educator, Peter Levine, speaks of the role mammalian shaking has when releasing trauma. From the shaking observed by animals in the wild to what we humans experience when we are cold, anxious, or fearful, to the uncontrollable shivers some patients experience when waking up from anesthesia, he theorizes that "these 'tremblings' experienced in diverse circumstances and having a multiplicity of other functions, hold the potential for catalyzing authentic transformation, deep healing and awe" (Levine, 2010, p.16). He continues to explain that "these gyrations and undulations are ways that our nervous system 'shakes off' the last rousing experience and 'grounds' us in readiness for the next encounter with danger, lust, and life" (Levine, 2010, p. 16).

I look at the closed posture my brother has taken on from spending his waking moments propped up in bed and see the effects and affects of his COVID-19 confinement. There is no shake, undulation or rotation of vertebrae. His upper back has fused into a concave curve, a stiffness that becomes more pronounced when he finds the energy to shuffle from his bed to the bathroom. Life slows down when I am in the presence of my brother. I follow his pace. I sit beside him in bed when he has the energy to converse and engage myself in other ways such as walking his dog when he needs to rest. I also, on occasion, break free from fusing with his rhythm and take moments to purposefully disrupt the heaviness that has a tendency to take hold. "*Do you want to see my salsa solo?*" I ask. He nods, and his smiling eyes widen as I shimmy and shake to my salsa song playing from my

iPhone. The next day, as I prepare to leave my family home, my mother profusely thanks me for my visit. When she called on me to come, it was because she thought it was time to say goodbye. But now, after the four days I spent with him, we sense that he has a new zest for life. I am not sure if the transfer of shimmying rhythm or energy had anything to do with this shift but within a day of witnessing me dance, he started to sing once more, a practice that brings him to life.

Closing Thoughts on Becoming Open to Possibility

I know that salsa dance isn't for everybody. It is often misunderstood as an expression of overt sexuality or submission in terms of gender (e.g., Bosse 2015; Davis 2015; Ericksen 2011; Harman 2019; McMains 2018; Skinner 2008). But I hope that this inquiry invites the suspension, bracketing, or release of these socially constructed viewpoints. I know deep down that, for me, dancing salsa solo is so much more than a distraction from this pandemic existence. There is a very real, physical release that is happening as my shoulder blades rapidly shimmy back and forth, a shake that alters and invites a new way of being. And I hope that sharing what somatically releases my COVID-19 constricted stress invites us to think more broadly about the ways we may move from closed off postures to becoming more open to possibility. Gosetti-Ferencei (2020) suggests that we may need to "shake free from inherited expectations, the pressures of the crowd, or mere habit, [...] to exercise invention" (p.278, emphasis added). She continues to assert that: "creatively can we envision new paths or interpret familiar aspects of life in new ways, as existentialist philosophy tends to invite." (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2020, p.278).

In closing, as I remain open to dancing salsa solo—a reality I never imagined—I am moved by the particular kind of "bodying forth" (Heidegger, 1959-69/2001, p. 97) that this practice brings in terms of the sense of life that is cultivated. Considering the precarious balance in which our current world rests, it seems that engaging in practices that bring us to life is a worthwhile endeavour. The grips and fears of pandemic death do not have to lock us down and take an omnipresent hold. There are pathways, as the exemplar of salsa shakes and shimmies reveals, to sense life's vital presence. Life—something worth living more fully, now and in the days, weeks, and months to come—has a felt sensation. While I do not have the power to remove the reality of COVID-19 constriction, I know that I can remain open, no matter how much suffering I sense, to experience the joys and healing qualities that movement brings. Whether it is within the genre of salsa or not, I hope this inquiry encourages us to embrace the possibility that it is, and could be, a time to shine.

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