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1-2016

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Catalano, Theresa and Leonard, Alison E., "Moving people and minds: Dance as a vehicle of democratic education" (2016). *Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education*. 203.

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Published in *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* (2016), 22 pp.  
doi: 10.1177/1746197915626082  
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# Moving people and minds: Dance as a vehicle of democratic education

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## **Abstract**

Engaging today's youth in civil discussions of contentious issues remains both a crucial element in democratically oriented education and extremely challenging to facilitate. The purpose of this article, which documents and presents pilot study findings from a dance workshop that engaged practicing teachers surrounding the issue of immigration, is to understand how dance can be integrated into the curriculum to prepare students to engage in democratic deliberation. Data collection consisted of pre- and post-workshop interviews with participants and was analyzed based on common principles of democracy and democratic education found in the literature. Findings point to the important role that dance could have in developing the trust, empathy, and reflectiveness necessary to engage in civil dialogue that is the essential foundation of a democratic society.

**Keywords:** dance, deliberation, democratic education, immigration, movement

## **Introduction**

One of the most important goals of public education is to provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary to become engaged, responsible, and informed citizens. Hess (2009) argues that "learning to talk about political differences is a "democracy-sustaining" approach to education, because learning to talk effectively about the issues of the day is the cornerstone of a healthy and well-functioning democracy" (p. 5). However, in today's hyper-mediatised and divisive society, where opinions have the chance to reach others at incredible speed, regardless of their accuracy, it has become more and more difficult to engage students in productive civic

dialogue that encourages “debate, discussion and the rational consideration of important issues” (Michelli, 2005: 17).

Much research has been done about the use of art as a tool in democratic education (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2012; Daly, 2002; McDonnell, 2014), but few have focused on the role that movement can play in democratic deliberation and the discussion of contentious issues outside of dance education and in everyday classrooms with non-dancers. We define democratic deliberation as the dynamic and reciprocal communicative process whereby decisions remain justifiable and accessible to stakeholders and participants (Gutman and Thompson, 2004; Noddings, 2013). Hence, the present article begins by explicating the unique qualities that dance alone can bring to curriculum. We then build the case for how dance and democratic deliberation are connected through the voices of in-service teachers participating in a weeklong workshop on the integration of the humanities into teaching. This workshop served as the platform for a pilot study exploring how to use dance to create the conditions for democratic deliberation of contentious issues. Next, the authors connect democratic ideals to dance through the reviewing of basic tenets of democratic education and research. Then the pilot study’s methodology is explained, including a discussion of the context and participants. Finally, findings that weave in participant comments from the workshop will illustrate how dance can be revisualized as a vehicle of democratic education.

## Why dance?

Dance is inherently embodied since it is always of, with, by, about, and through the body. Twentieth-century choreographer Ted Shawn is attributed with saying, “Dance is the only art of which we ourselves are the stuff of which it is made” (Leavy, 2009: 183). In academia, the body has been discussed as a critical site of meaning making in experience, history, and social, political, and cultural life (Bordo, 1989; Foucault, 1995; Grosz, 1994; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In this sense, social experience, along with biological processes and human action, occurs through “the lived body” (Leavy, 2009; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Warburton, 2011). Leavy (2009) concludes, ‘simply put, the body is a tool through which meaning is created’ (p. 183).

From the perspective of dance studies and dance education, dance’s innate embodied nature allows it as a form of art, expression, communication, and learning to make connections across the whole of human experience because the body is the means, the mode, and the maker (Hanna, 2008; Leavy, 2009; Leonard, 2014; Shapiro, 1998; Warburton, 2011). Therefore, dance has the capacity to serve as a form of both knowledge and inquiry. Although there are many ways to explore, acquire, and reproduce knowledge, dance and movement bring something to the table that other modes cannot since the body in dance takes a primary role in sense-making and contributes to aesthetic experience. Merleau-Ponty explains that, “the body gives order and structure to the phenomenal field simultaneously as the world recedes beyond and transcends our body’s immediate grasp of it” (Macintyre-Latta, 2013: 75). In order to dance, participants must pay attention to their own motion in the process of self-actualization, acknowledging time and space, the shape of one’s body, and the energy being used (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2012).

Thus, dance most certainly can be a “vehicle for self- and social understanding,” and it can also nurture human imagination and creativity in a way that literally and figuratively moves people (Shapiro, 1998: 11). In movement, “Imagination is freed from strict understandings of static images and more fully experienced as a catalytic presence permeating the act of sense-making. Embodiment and imagination concomitantly unify and vivify alongside inciting speculation and the possible” (Macintyre-Latta, 2013: 63). Along with what is possible, “expressive [cultural] practices, like dance, are often the first signs of cultural change, comprehensible but sometimes inchoate indications of a surfacing zeitgeist or mentalité” (Kowal, 2010: 6). It is in the

“doing something,” the moving, making, and performing of dance that blurs the boundaries between the aesthetic representation and the represented, engaging the individuals dancing and their audience “in a shared endeavor to make meaning of their individual and collective experiences” (Kowal, 2010: 18). Moreover, dancing bodies provide an embodied “mapping” of individuals and how society shapes them, leading to expression, action, and also analysis of experiences (Shapiro, 1998: 12; Weiler, 1988).

Unfortunately, day-to-day curricular practices fueled by “dismissive views of dance” and its relative newcomer status to academia (Hanna, 2008: 491) rob teaching and learning of bodily engagement such as that found in the incorporation of dance as curriculum. Thus, this article serves to illustrate how space can be created in everyday curriculum (specifically in history or social studies classes for our purposes in the article) for embodied experiences. Our work builds on the recent and determined work in dance education (Bonbright et al., 2013; Hanna, 2008; Stinson, 2016) and research (Bagley and Cancienne, 2002; Barr, 2015; Leavy, 2009) that seeks to illustrate the power and potential of dance in academic and curricular inquiry. In the next section, we build the case for the connection of dance and democratic education.

## Dance and democracy

While a detailed discussion of democratic education cannot be undertaken due to the scope of this article, the following is a brief overview of important elements in democracy and democratic education hailing from current research in the field. Apple and Beane (2007) refer to democracy as “a dynamic concept that requires continuous examination in light of changing times” (p. 24). According to literature on democracy and education, essential elements in a democracy include participation and access for all, bringing different people together and making connections, interdependence, hearing all voices, creating empathy/valuing diversity, paying attention to interrelationships, movement, change, and conflict, embracing ideological diversity, seeking and addressing injustice, and the freedom of speech (Leonard, 2014).

According to McAvooy and Hess (2013), one of the elements of democratic education is preparing students to answer the question: “How do we want to live together?” (p. 44). Others offer that a democratic education entails: “The active engagement of young citizens in a democratic society involving the consent of the governed and equality of opportunity” (Apple and Beane, 2007: 7). Since democracy is “more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1966: 87), a democratic education involves deliberate and thoughtful communication. Thus, “providing experiences that enable our learners to feel responsibility and connection to others and to honor the vulnerable infinity of the other ... leads to a moral imagination” (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2012: 107–108).

Gould (2012) proposes that democratic education is “about understanding interdependence, seeking connections, exploring together, and inventing new ways of doing things” (p. 4). In this case, schools become places where students gain an awareness of interdependence. In addition, the

importance of symbiosis, interdependence, how it is critical to democracy, social justice, working for the common good, the way we view the world and others, and how all these things are connected should surface early in a democratic curriculum. (Gould, 2012: 4)

Michelli (2005) reminds us, “No consideration of the relationship between education and democracy is complete without examining the importance of the arts in a democratic society” (p. 6). Within the realm of dance, there are many ‘spaces and opportunities for the embodiment of democratic ideals and practices’ (Leonard, 2014: 3) as well as connections that can be made

between dance practices and democratic education. According to Daly (2002), dance is “a place where diverse groups of people can and do meet to share a common experience” (p. 9). Dance cultivates in its citizens the capacity for “close observation, meaning-making, reflective analysis, deliberative judgment and an aptitude for complexity” (Daly, 2002: 9). In addition, dance can foster interdependence through participation and a concern for the common good. Moreover, the artistic context of dance can “allow us to transcend established social and political boundaries—to express difficult ideas through metaphor, transcend the obvious to imagine solutions, communicate beyond the limits of language,” and raise awareness about an issue (Daly, 2002: 9). In addition, the engagement of students through dance and an integrated curriculum has the capacity to explicitly and implicitly nurture democratic principles such as equity, diversity, community, interdependence, and intellectual artistry (Leonard, 2014).

McDonnell (2014) encourages us to see education as concerned with facilitating opportunities for democratic practice and learning from it, rather than as a mere process of producing democratic individuals. Furthermore, she advocates for more investigation into the ways in which art is implicated in people’s experiences of democratic subjectivity and their learning from it (McDonnell, 2014). Here, we propose that dance is not only a way to engage in democratic practices, it can also be a method by which all students can be prepared (not just dancers or those in dance education programs) for democratic deliberation of contentious issues. The following section describes how this was accomplished in a workshop for practicing K-12 teachers, incorporating dance creation and performance as a precursor to a democratic discussion of immigration.

## Method

### *Context/data collection*

The context of this study was a weeklong workshop in which students received three graduate credits for their participation. The workshop served practicing K-12 teachers (several of whom were doctoral students) at a mid-sized university in a Midwestern state of the United States (hereby referred to as Midwest State). The course was entitled “Workshop Seminar: Integrating the Humanities into K-12 Teaching,” and featured activities from different domains of the humanities (i.e. film, visual art, theater, and dance) for each day of the workshop. Research for this study took place on the third day of the workshop, which focused on the incorporation of dance in democratic education, and more specifically, dance as a means of facilitating democratic deliberation of contentious issues such as immigration, which was the topic of the day. Before the workshop, students were asked to read several articles that discussed democratic education and dance in order to prepare. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at our institution approved participant consent, which was solicited by a graduate student at the beginning of the workshop.<sup>1</sup>

The workshop began with a short warm-up and introduction in which a colored ball of string was used (Hwang, 2015). In this introductory exercise, students had to explain what previous experiences they had had with dance and why they wanted to participate in the workshop. If students had a connection to something their classmate said, they would take hold of the end of the yarn and drag it to their seat. The end result was a Web creation (through the entangling of the yarn from person to person) that served as an icebreaker to further the creative community environment of the course and visually represent the way in which students were connected to each other. After the icebreaker, the six participants were videotaped using an iPad, answering pre-workshop questions (Appendix 1). A set of pre-workshop questions served as a guideline for an initial conversation discussing the participants’ views on immigration, democracy, democratic education, and any connections they saw between those concepts.

This was followed by a participatory activity in which the instructor involved students in movement-based exercises to illustrate the connections between democratic education and dance. For example, when talking about Dewey's (1916) notion that democracy brings different people together in the same space, participants were instructed to travel as a group to the door, with their bodies intertwined.

Next, students followed the instructor outside for a physical warm-up that eased the participants into the idea of dance by incorporating yoga and breathing exercises to get them in touch with their bodies since none of them had much experience with dance at all. Then, participants were asked to map various emotions onto their bodies (e.g. happy, sad, and angry) using only specific body parts, not their faces. For example, when asked to show "fear" with his right leg, one participant bent his knee and made his leg tremble. Participants continued moving in a group warm-up, physically responding to the instructor's prompts, exploring changes in the shapes of their bodies, and using different qualities of energy with their movements: sharp, smooth, heavy, light, and so on. This 1-hour warm-up served as a precursor in getting students to revise their previous assumptions of "dance" and learn to use their bodies in artistic and abstract ways, rather than just miming or acting out what they wanted to express. Following the warm-up, students were given a handout with nine selected summaries of immigrant stories (Appendix 2) from the instructor's research (Catalano, in press). These real stories taken from interviews with immigrants around the world served as a basis for the subsequent dance creations of the students. After reading the stories, participants were divided into two groups and asked to choose one of the stories to recreate in the form of a 5–10-minute dance. Students were given 90 minutes to choreograph the dance, with guidance from the instructor who acted as an artistic director of sorts. Participants then performed their dances for their classmates. After the performance, students reflected on the experience and then engaged in a discussion about immigration issues followed by a videotaped discussion of the workshop experience and what they learned. Data collection consisted of the videotaped (and later transcribed) pre- and post-workshop discussions.

### *Participants/data analysis*

The participants for this study consisted of six K-12 practicing teachers (4 males and 2 females) in the Midwest State where the weeklong workshop took place. All participants were of European ancestry except one male, who identified as Latino. All the teachers who participated gave their consent to be part of the study. Teaching areas and levels of the participants varied and included the following: first grade teacher (Steve2); three teachers from a high school that specialized in the development of the arts—one social studies teacher (Bob), one art teacher (Juan), and one English teacher (Sarah); a high school history/government teacher (Doug); and a nursing instructor from a local community college (Ali). Participants varied in their experience with dance as well, with Steve having taken ballet as a child, Juan, who loved to dance at social events, and the other teachers who had no prior experience or background in dance. The instructor (the first author) conducted the research as it was held at her institution. In terms of the experiences and fields of the researchers, T.C. is an assistant professor of second language education/applied linguistics and not a dance educator. However, she grew up participating in the dance world as an amateur member of a dance company in college, a choreographer of school dance programs and a participant in a modern dance cooperative later on in her life. A.E.L. (second author) is an assistant professor of arts and creativity, a former professional modern dancer and dance educator, and conducts research in the arts, particularly dance and embodied ways of thinking and learning.

After collecting the data, transcribed interviews were imported into MAXQDA (1989–2014), after which salient themes were coded (Saldaña, 2012). These themes were then compared to common ideals of democratic education, compiled from the literature review. Participant quotes

that exemplified these ideals through the workshop were then selected and analyzed in relation to how dance and democratic education were connected to the role of dance in the workshop within the context of creating effective conditions for democratic deliberation to occur. Ultimately, these pilot data and analysis will serve to inform a larger study on the role of dance as a platform for democratic deliberations in education.

## Findings: dance and democracy

Throughout the workshop, numerous discussions and activities occurred that illustrated how a curriculum incorporating movement could embody the ideals of democratic education as well as prepare students for democratic deliberation of contentious issues. In order to show how this manifested itself, the findings have been organized according to the democratic ideals presented in the previous section:<sup>3</sup> participation and access to all, connecting people/interdependence, hearing all voices, creating empathy, valuing diversity, paying attention, disruptive movement, addressing injustice, and freedom of speech.

### *Participation and access for all*

When asked after the workshop about the connection between democracy and dance, the participants expressed that movement was something that all students could participate in and could have access to, as in the following comments:

- Juan:** I think I understood that, by using it in a classroom environment, I think every kid is excited to move their bodies, to express themselves any way, but I think just to make it a more formal, like a choreographed performance. I just think **everyone can do it**. You know, it's not something you have to go to dance for years to figure out. Even if you are a student in a wheelchair, you can still do it.
- Doug:** Right. **You're going to have to participate**. But even that to a certain level, but you're going to have to participate otherwise it's going to be obvious in a sense to everyone else. And so, from that standpoint, we talk about collaboration and everyone doing their part. Here, I think it helps with regard to getting kids to do things, even those that would not be inclined to at all. The public nature of it is going to force everyone, I think, to do a little bit more.

The previously mentioned comments underscore the importance of collaborative activities in an era of transnational migration and increasingly diverse student bodies where there is a need for equitable activities accessible to students of all levels, abilities, and language. Today's teachers know that not all of their students are going to be proficient in the language of instruction, and the incorporation of dance into the curriculum creates more opportunities for collaboration so that students of all types can transcend language, gaining access to the curriculum in embodied ways. The physical performance of stories that students have read created opportunities for more nuanced and embodied understandings of the character's experiences. Moreover, experiences in movement can help students develop literacy by providing alternatives ways to access content.

### *Connecting people/interdependence*

In addition to providing access to all, engaging students in movement-based activities also brings students together in a common space and allows for trust building that is necessary to talk about

contentious issues in civil and productive ways. When asked about what they valued from the dance and democracy workshop, the participants had the following things to say:

- Sarah:** I liked the way it's created a **different kind of conversation** ... we are talking about the same issues but there's some laughter, there's some camaraderie, there's different things that weren't present in the beginning of the morning.
- Juan:** Doing it for the first time and that's where the joy comes in. It's like, well, I haven't done it, you haven't done it, **let's do it together** ...
- Doug:** There's security there.
- Sarah:** We're all going to look dumb **together**.

These comments highlight the community atmosphere that develops through occupying a shared space and making embodied connections to others. Some of the participants also noted how the proximity to one another made them nervous, but eventually they were able to get past the initial anxiety and trust each other, as in the following excerpt:

- Sarah:** ... I remember like at the beginning ... we were like, **you're going to have to touch people**, you're going to have to do these kinds of things and you're like oh gosh. You know. It sounds dirty ... (laughter). But by the end of the day we weren't even thinking about it.

Sarah's comment speaks to the close physical relationship that is required of dancers (and thus, the participants) when working together, and how it is often awkward at the beginning. However, after only hours, this feeling goes away and participants are able to forget their anxiety about working in such close proximity. Below, participants discuss the physical and emotional connections they made to each other and to their audience throughout the dance creation and performance process:

- Juan:** Well, the more stories you create for other people ... you know, you branch out affecting and somebody's affecting you. You always have something to talk about. And **you are able to connect with someone**.
- Ali:** You know one thing I said to Steve was, you know, after we had finished and we were kind of sort of talking about what we had just done. And I said this is such a **relationship building experience** for the three of us, just being part of that ... cohort, like, and this is something we'll be able to talk about and reflect on and it's pretty cool—a **shared experience**.

In addition to being in the same space with the other dancers in their group, participants also had to perform for the other classmates who were not in their group, as well as the teachers. Below, Doug talks about how the performance aspect of the dance brings the classwork into the public sphere and connects with the community aspect of democracy:

- Doug:** If we're talking about democratic education, particularly education for democracy, again [...], you have your private life but you also have your public life and you need to **be out there and be part of the community and be seen**. I think is an important thing. So, I think the public nature of dance, you're out there, being seen, and I think that is the connection.

Besides making connections with each other and the community, participants in the workshop were able to make connections between dance and the topic of immigration. In his pre-workshop interview, Doug imagines his own experience in dance to be similar to that of an immigrant coming to a new land:

**Doug:** I just see the analogy, at least, with regard to myself. In that, if we're going to talk about **making a connection to immigration** ... for me, dance is a foreign thing. And so in a sense, I'm going to be an immigrant there. Think about ... all the apprehension that goes along with it. So, imagine you're going to do something with your students. OK—you don't want to do this, well, imagine. Imagine you're going to come to a foreign land. And you don't know any of the customs, any of the language. You don't know anything and you're going to have to learn to move within that environment. And, and, I guess, in a sense, how much courage must that take, for a person to leave the familiar and the comfortable and go to uh something that's completely different uh, and foreign to them. So I see an analogy there maybe for the students, in terms of trying to personalize what is it like for a person to leave their home and travel to a new country and make their way there. Uh, you know, you want to try to get kids to empathize with people that are coming, so put yourself in that position. How much apprehension would you feel if I would try to do a dance lesson? I would have, I think a great deal of backlash from some kids, so I would say, well, let's try and personalize this a little bit. So **I could make that connection.**

Data also revealed how dance can help students build interdependence and the interpersonal skills to be a productive team. Binding people together to solve problems that each member could not solve alone (e.g. re-creating the stories through dance) served as one-way to build interdependence. In the next example, Doug noted how interdependence was essential for the recreation of the stories because everyone had to have a role, and they all depended on each other to play their part. Below, he reflects on how interdependence would be developed among his students if he attempted this type of activity in his history classes:

**Doug:** Well, I was thinking, I was trying to think in terms of the kids that don't want to do anything ... and so, in a group project, there's always that danger of a free ride where the group's not communicating. Because of the public nature of this, it's, it's virtually impossible to free ride ...

In the next comment, Juan notes the interdependence that was developed through the sharing of stories. In essence, in using dance this way, students affect the people they perform for and make connections with each other:

**Juan:** Well, the more stories you create for other people ... you know, you branch out affecting and somebody's affecting you. You always have something to talk about. And you are able to connect with someone.

The comments mentioned earlier demonstrate how participants were mutually dependent on each other during the dance creation process, both physically and psychologically. Another example of this interdependence can be seen in the dance created by Juan's group. In his dance, Juan needed to jump over two of the participants as a metaphor for the barriers that the person in the story had overcome in order to migrate. In order for him to jump over his partners, they had to lean down and thus he was dependent on them to leave him the right amount of space

in order to avoid injuring himself. Therefore, in the process of dance creation, each person had to “consider the actions of others to give point and direction to his own” (Dewey, 1916: 87). This simple act built trust among the participants because they depended on each other and when they each did their part, the results were “very positive.”

### *Hearing all voices*

Dewey proposed, “In order to have a large number of values in common, all members of the group must have an equable opportunity to receive and to take from others” (Cammarota, 2011: 84). In the pre-workshop discussion, participants considered how hearing all voices was an important principle of democracy:

**Steve:** [...] I guess that is how I would define democracy that everyone has an opportunity to **voice their opinion** and help shape their part of the world.

**Doug:** And so, so, in democracy, true democracy, that idea of majority tyranny is a real concern and what we need to make sure we do is have a system that can control for that majority tyranny and **make sure that minority voices are heard** and respected as well, and that’s, obviously not easy to do.

During the dance creation and performances, participants had an equal role in the aesthetic experience. All participants had a chance to collaborate and work together, giving each of them a chance to voice their ideas on what should be included in the dances and their interpretations of the stories. Below, Doug reflects on how the collaborative element and ability for participants to bounce ideas off each other helped in the creative process:

**Doug:** ... It would have been much more difficult for me if it was a one-man show, in a sense that I would have sat here for a lot longer, thinking, geez, where to go? But the fact, in a sense that you have a **sounding board for new ideas** and **when someone throws something out that kind of helps generate whole new ideas**. And that made the whole experience a lot easier, I think, from my perspective, just, getting a sense of where do you start, what do you do and how do you proceed.

### *Creating empathy/valuing diversity*

According to Daly (2002), the heart of democracy is dissent, and civic dialogue is a means to “intelligent, respectful and productive dissent” (p. 9). However, one of the core requirements for civil dialogue is empathy, and without this ability to identify with another person’s point of view (even if we do not share it), true dialogue cannot occur. And thus, “Empathy is another link between dance and democracy” (Daly, 2002: 9). Through imagination, dance can put students in the place of others, even if they are outside the realm of the students’ own private realm of experience. The following comments reveal the participants’ appreciation for the empathy that was created with the immigrants in the stories they danced, and how they believe this type of empathy could be used in their own teaching:

**Ali:** With mental health ... there’s a psychology ... psych nursing class that the students take and I can see that things like this, dance and movement, would be a good place for them to maybe put themselves into somebody else’s shoes, kind of

like acting out these struggles that these people have. [...] I feel like this would be a really interesting way for me to help students develop empathy. It's really difficult for my students to understand the difference between sympathy for our patients and EMPATHY. [...] And I think it would be a great way for my students to develop EMPATHY, versus just walking into a room and feeling SORRY for a patient. But to actually be able to act it out and deliberately think about how they're going to use movement, I think it'd be a great experience for them.

**Doug:** Basically it's a form of role-play, as I see it. And so ... if you can get, again, the goal would be, is to get the student to **live someone else's experience**. And so, yeah, **if you want students to discuss a contentious issue, then you can have kids go and live that experience and then come back and then they can share views that in some sense have some protection in a sense that it's not my views, these are the views of the people I portrayed**. Again, I think you might be able to get more kids willing to share that way.

In the discussion on how the movement created empathy with the people in the stories, one of the participants expressed concern about the dangers of students feeling like they understand what someone has gone through when they really have not:

**Sarah:** One of the things I worry about in this role-playing is: where is there a danger in some of that? And where is there kind of a caution of well, yeah, it's good to walk in someone else's shoes, **but we really DON'T understand their experience from doing some of this?** And so I guess I just wonder, how do we sort of use these experiences? I am thinking about the Holocaust where they used to like, tape out the train car and everybody will get in it and you are supposed to understand what it's like but it's not a really nice thing to do because it's not really accurate. That's the line I think I don't quite understand and I'm trying to figure out as we are going through it.

In response to Sarah's concerns, Juan highlighted the increase in understanding that occurs through the movement but also the importance of consciousness raising that comes from the activity:

**Juan:** [talking about being in someone else's shoes] They don't fit you, so you can't wear them because these people have gone through things that you don't want to go through. But by looking at their situation from a different perspective whether using art or dance, or that sort of thing, I mean, you're not glorifying that, that feeling they're having, the emotions they're feeling. You're basically trying to understand. And in a lot of ways it doesn't go deeper than actually experiencing those things. It's not the fact that you want to experience the physical pain that they're feeling, because that's the only way that you can understand them. **But to make it aware in your mind at least. To know it exists and that's about all you can do because nobody's wanting to go, suffer ...**

Doug had this to say about how experiencing the event from a perspective that is different from textbooks or media accounts can be a lesson in critical thinking:

**Doug:** In terms of a **critical thinking exercise**. We go through all that and we think: What's left out? What don't we know? Uh, because there's a lot in our story,

particularly, there's a lot we don't know, there's a lot left out, even when we read the full transcript. So, you know, we had to make some guesses. From my standpoint as a Social Studies teacher, you can always go back and say, well, look, that's whenever your history textbook you're reading someone else's interpretation of what happened. And so, it's one of the lessons we always try and teach is that, o.k. **well, that's one person's perspective, what other perspectives are there**, or what parts?...

In the following, Bob compares dancing to painting and how participation in the dance gives students the emotional device with which to begin true democratic deliberation of the topic.

**Bob:** What's the right word? So, in a way, **it's like a painting**. So, you're really not necessarily in a train car, it's like, we're not really trying to experience the true reality of, you know, you said we can't, but when you put it in a more abstract form, probably, I mean, it's obvious that it's not the actual thing so **you are just trying to get a feeling of the emotions and then you can sit down and talk about it**.

In this next example, Sarah notes the unique way in which dance creates empathy because of the way in which participants are forced to return to the story (to create movements that represent their actions and feelings) and get to know the individual characters:

**Sarah:** [...] I think it's interesting how you had to keep re-visiting the story and so you were **constantly going back to the text and these ideas**, and I think that is a really positive part of this experience because if you don't read it ... I think there's something about having to constantly go back to it and re-think it, in ways that you're not doing with the other stories that's positive.

We would like to point out that it is not just that empathy is created because of the stories that the participants read. Above, Sarah notes that repeatedly going back to the text to translate the story onto their bodies caused them to rethink the stories. Moreover, something about the embodied experience added another layer of understanding that was brought out from within the participants. Dewey (1910) captures this idea in his remark that "[o]ne can teach others to think only in the sense of appealing to and fostering powers already active in them" (p. 30). Blumenfeld-Jones (2012) builds on this idea proposing that what occurs is that "the dance is drawn from the participants and the students are then drawn to their newly discovered potential" (p. 55). Thus, the dances "hold up for us, and draw us into, thinking and feeling what it would be like" (Macintyre-Latta, 2013: 64) to immigrate. The body then becomes the ground of all communication—"bringing thinking, feeling, seeing, and acting into relationship and interaction" (Macintyre-Latta, 2013: 64). Hence, we can no longer overlook the power of embodied experiences such as dance, as vehicles for self-understanding, nor can we overlook the power of the body as a location for thinking.

### *Disruptive movement*

Again, democracy is a "dynamic concept that requires continuous examination in light of changing times" (Apple and Beane, 2007: 24). In the dance workshop for this study, dance became "a dynamic means of moving, responding, creating, and transforming" which exemplified these democratic ideas (Leonard, 2014: 4). Movement during the workshop was enacted through dance and also through the change of ideas in relation to participants' views of the immigration

experience. One example of movement as in a change of ideas can be seen here in how Sarah notices how dancing has made her look at the world in a different way:

**Sarah:** Just because you, **it makes you an observer** to a point. You're having to watch one another, and you're having to kind of watch yourself in some sense, and it makes you **observe the world a little bit more**.

This comment echoes Blumenfeld-Jones' (2012) observation that democracy is really about "paying attention to our interrelationships and how we communicate about social issues" (p. 106). The heightened awareness that comes from having to observe your own body in relation to others (and learning to live together) is an important aspect of democracy and can be seen as a precursor to civil discourse. Noticing details about one's self and others can lead to a greater understanding, which can lead to robust debates that exemplify what Mouffe (2005) refers to as "disruptive movement" (i.e. the inevitable conflict that can arise when a public sphere of contestation is created) (McDonnell, 2014: 47). This conflict can often be internal, as well as external in that disruptive movement can also occur within one's self as ideas transform. The participants' comments in the following demonstrate this type of movement by showing how their perceptions of immigrants/ immigration changed through participation in the dance workshop and the democratic deliberation that followed the dance performances:

**Sarah:** Before it was, what is immigration, it was a fact. And we were sharing what we knew of it. And I think if you just listen to the conversation we're having now, it's at a more personal level, we're thinking of **individual people, individual stories**, it's not a law, or, uh, something that's big and affects a great number of people so I think we've **brought it to a smaller level**.

**Doug:** Personalizing, you know, I view it a little differently. I mean ... I want to talk about emigration. Immigration means I'm looking at it from a perspective of a guy in Midwest State, who's always been here and how am I viewing this person coming here. But our whole experience here was actually, uh, actually from the emigrant point of view, right? The people who chose to leave and go to a new country. And so, so it really, the lesson for me is not, uh, is not an immigration lesson; it's **what's it like to be an immigrant?** I think that's, that's the more important part of the story because again, it's not what is thought about.

**R:<sup>4</sup>** When you danced that, did you feel any differently, about the story? Did you understand the story in a different way?

**Juan:** Physical. I mean it was **an emotion coming through your physical body**. You were connected that way- **the story became more of a reality to you**. Even though it wasn't the actual events that were happening to you. But it was you taking the time and the effort to express and how he feels emotionally. I think we kind of just grabbed ahold of these all these emotions and just kind of played around with it, **just to feel, what would a person feel like in this situation**. Not that you'd ever want it to happen to you, but if somebody's dealing with it, then, we are all somewhat connected because we all could understand what it could feel like.

"Dance, as an emblem of democracy moves people, literally, intellectually and socially" (Leonard, 2014: 6). In addition to Doug and Sarah's changing views of immigration (now coming from the perspective of someone who experiences immigration), Juan's comments draw attention to how the movement-based activities changed his ideas about what immigration is like because of the way in which they made the stories seem more real. Thus, dance had much to

contribute in getting students to be open to a variety of perspectives through the embodiment of stories. When these stories were mapped onto students' bodies and they felt them physically, they become more real and more personal, resulting in the creation of empathy.

### *Addressing injustice*

In Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) influential article debating the politics of educating for democracy, they discuss three conceptions of being a true citizen—being personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented. According to the authors, justice-oriented educators call explicit attention to matters of injustice and the importance of pursuing social justice. Throughout the dance workshop, which featured the reading and dancing of immigration stories along with a pre- and post-discussion of immigration, discrimination and injustice in regards to immigrants were frequently mentioned by the participants as in the following example. In this excerpt, Ali discusses how in her role as a teacher of nursing students, she has seen some of her immigrant students experience discriminatory practices:

**Ali:** ... test scores are one thing, a test score is a test score, but on the clinical floor, that's very uhm, it's subjective ... so, I think uh, they were discriminated against for that. You don't know this? You should know this? You're getting a fail for today. Uhm, So, I don't know, I just felt for these students who **I thought were like unjustly being singled out**. Uhm, some of them I even recommended [they] speak with, ... is the ... I can't remember his title, he was like the advocate for the students and I was asked "Why did you tell them to go talk to him?" and just, I was very confused and felt like there was **a lot of unjust treatment**. Uhm, but most of them were very successful and did really well but then some too, had trouble getting licensed as nurses even after they graduated.

In addition to directly addressing injustices the participants saw in their daily lives, some of the participants brought in immigration issues they had read about in the morning paper that affected their state, such as the increase in unaccompanied or separated minors coming to the United States from Central America:

**Doug:** Right, right now, what's the news this morning, they're going to try to allocate \$3.4 billion, and the President is going to Texas to meet with the governor and to figure out a way to help deal with just the humanitarian problems, I mean, it's a dangerous thing ...

**Sarah:** An interesting part of the story is that kids are actually just going up to the guards so they're not even trying to do it like sneakily at this point, they just go up to them. And uhm, I think one of the other things in the news right now is that [our] Midwest State is the only state that doesn't allow driver's licenses [for immigrants].

Noticing injustice is a first step, but whether students seek to address it in real life is much more difficult to assess. The following comment from Steve was sent to the researchers 2 months after the workshop (16 September 2014, personal communication):

**Steve:** I was thinking about something with regards to the class [referring to the workshop] and to my practice. After the class and before school, I read Paul Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [1970]. One of the points in the book he makes is a leader

cannot lead the oppressed out of their oppression. The oppressed must come to know and make their own way with the help and guidance of others. This is similar to the activity in which we told immigrant stories in the form of a dance. **You guided us to the point that we had some knowledge about what we were to do and let us make our own way to discovery. This made the activity more powerful. I still have visions of both dances in my head and can remember each story.** Whereas the other stories that we read and discussed have been forgotten. Similarly, this lesson and others from the class were not forgotten. I am in the early stages of setting up a Family Spanish club in the hopes of examining Latino Arts and Humanities as a way to keep alive the cultural and linguistic heritage of many of the students who attend my elementary school. In particular, I am hoping that after I introduce the idea of what we can do, that, the parents and students run with the idea and really make this their club.

Thus, Steve's experience in the workshop led him to uncover injustice and try to do something about it. Another important point about his above comment is the way in which the movement gave him a visual image that stuck in his head in a way that just reading the stories did not, epitomizing an embodied experience. This comment provides evidence as to the unique capacities that dance holds to get students to see and embody contentious issues from different perspectives and to advocate for their students in order to seek social justice.

### *Freedom of speech*

The freedom to speak freely and express one's opinions without censorship "has one of its most important expressions in the production of art" (Michelli, 2005: 6). Alexis De Tocqueville (1972) once wrote, "It cannot be repeated too often that nothing is more fertile in prodigies than the art of being free: but there is nothing more arduous than the apprenticeship of liberty" (pp. 247–248). Michelli (2005) suggests that one role of public education is the apprenticeship of liberty. In the following, participants voice their joy when they experienced the freedom to create in a way that eclipses verbal limits:

**Steve:** In a way I will admit it, in the end, it **became very liberating**. Because then we weren't, and this goes back to what I talked about earlier, about being confined and you're writing by conventions. **Because we weren't confined**. And once we kind of, once Ali and I sat down and kind of talked about what were the pieces and what did we want to represent, it became, I don't want to say easy, but kind of easy.

**Ali:** And exciting. I think like when we would put something together and it came, it came out well. I thought, wow, that's awesome. **It was pretty exciting**. There was a lot of jumping around and high fiving.

**Steve:** We actually jumped up. We're taking this show on the road (laughter)...

### **Conclusion**

Noddings (2013) astutely notes, "Education is an enterprise with multiple aims" (p. 41). Whether those aims are singular or collective within the personal, occupational, or civic domains, across the broad spectrum of education, we must acknowledge that we live within diverse global, mediated, and often divisive contexts. Facilitating democratic deliberations, nurturing reciprocal,

accessible, and justifiable communication, remains a challenge and more so when differing perspectives meet almost instantaneously in our digital world. Furthermore, educational settings in a democracy become increasingly complex given that not all involved see the aims of education as the same or from the same perspective.

Yet, one thing remains constant—education is a lived experience. It is through one's body that this lived experience occurs—it is embodied (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Dewey (1934), known for his emphasis on the notion of “experience” in education, advocated for the role of the arts in education due to the arts’ aesthetic powers of enhancing perception and heightening awareness. He aptly wrote that “our tangled scenes of life ... [are] made more intelligible in aesthetic experience” (Doddington, 2014: 61). We saw this process of intelligibility occur with our workshop participants as they grappled with democratic concepts and contentious issues, noting the increased trust, interdependence, empathy, and reflectiveness that the dance experiences allowed. Since the body remains our most accessible tool through which we experience the world, dance as the artistic and aesthetic means of bodily expression made these realizations for the participants possible in distinctly embodied and personal ways. Even though the data collected consisted of their spoken and written words, the lived experience that they referenced was an embodied and largely a transformative one, partially due to the new terrain of dance in their lives. Since dance accesses and expresses the most personal and most public aspects of ourselves, epistemologically and ontologically, it also becomes accessible to all. Anyone can participate in the dance. Therefore, dance holds tremendous potential as a tool to engage in democratic deliberation, moving people, and minds.

**Acknowledgments** —The authors would like to thank **Lauren Gatti** for bringing us together and the amazing teachers who opened up their minds, allowed themselves to let go, and added much insight into the incorporation of dance into democratic education of all levels and subject areas. In addition, much thanks goes to **Karl Hostetler** for his hard work in making this workshop happen and to the reviewers of the article whose insightful comments greatly ameliorated the article. The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

## Notes

1. Consent forms were collected by the graduate student not involved in the workshop and placed in concealed envelopes at the beginning of the project and kept by the department administrative secretary. These were collected (as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB)) by T.C. on 15 July 2014, after grades had been assigned for the course.
2. All participant names are pseudonyms.
3. Bolded words correspond to codes related to elements of democratic education.
4. “R” refers to the researcher who is asking the question.

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## Appendix 1

### Workshop questions

#### Pre-workshop questions:

- 1) How do you define immigration?
- 2) What do you know about current immigration laws and procedures?
- 3) What do you know about the experience of immigration?
- 4) Who immigrates?
- 5) How comfortable do you feel talking about immigration?
- 6) How do you define democracy?
- 7) How would you describe a democratic education? What does it entail? Who is it for?
- 8) What experience do you have with dance/movement-based curriculum?
- 9) What experience do you have with dance at all?
- 10) Do you see a relationship between dance and democratic education? If so, what could it be?
- 11) How do you think dance could be used to get students to learn about issues such as immigration?
- 12) How do you think dance could be used as part of your teaching curriculum?

#### Post-workshop questions:

- 1) How do you define immigration?
- 2) What do you know about current immigration laws and procedures?
- 3) What do you know about the experience of immigration?
- 4) What do you know about the people who immigrate?
- 5) What do you feel uncomfortable talking about with immigration?
- 6) How do you define democracy?
- 7) How would you describe a democratic education? What does it entail? Who is it for?
- 8) After experiencing the workshop, how do you see a relationship between dance/movement and democratic education?
- 9) How do you think dance could be used to get students to learn about issues such as immigration?
- 10) How do you think dance could be used as part of your teaching curriculum?
- 11) Describe your experiences as a participant in this day's workshop.
- 12) What surprised you about this workshop?
- 13) What do you think is the most valuable thing about using dance as part of your curriculum?
- 14) In what ways was dance a democratic practice as you experienced it today?
- 15) What did you gain from creating an abstract version in movement based on a real interview with someone who immigrated? What did you find challenging about the creation of this movement?
- 16) What did you gain from watching other presentations of an immigration story?
- 17) How has your understanding of immigrants and immigration changed today?

## Appendix 2

### *Immigration stories*

\*All names are pseudonyms, stories are real and taken from the Migrant Stories Project (adapted from Catalano, in press)

Name: **Bo**

Country: **China**

Host country: **US**

Language of interview: **Chinese**

Bo came from a family that is not wealthy. He came to the United States for love. His life has changed a lot since he came to the United States. While he was at home, he was not independent. Now, he believes he is independent enough to live in the United States.

His dream was to become an architecture designer. However, he now works in Chinese restaurants, doing only manual labor with low wages. Because his English language proficiency is too low, he is not able to communicate well with native speakers. He works long hours that do not afford him much time to interact with others or have a social life. Therefore, he sometimes feels lonely. He also feels that he does not have any time to plan for the future because he is just surviving. He never regrets his decision to come to America for love, and if he could do it again he would. He suggests people who come to a new country should learn about it first and do research on what it is like to live there before making a decision.

Name: **Ashur**

Country: **Syria**

Host country: **US**

Language of interview: **French**

Ashur came to the Midwest 8 years ago from Syria for many reasons such as the bad economy, lack of opportunities, and religious freedom. Ashur is a Christian and felt as if he had no voice in his government and was in search of a society in which he could have a voice. He also left because of the impending civil war. Since he migrated, he has wanted to go back to visit family but has been unable to return due to the dangerous situation and because his family is still in Syria, he worries constantly about their safety. Ashur is currently a student and has found learning English to be the one of the most difficult parts of adapting to life in the United States. As a civil engineer, he compares immigration and community support to steel beams in a building—they come from many different sources but they are stronger together. Ashur also feels that often Americans are sometimes too busy to talk and thus it is difficult to get to know people, but he praised the United States for accepting immigrants and is very thankful for being able to start a new life here.

Name: **Yahaira**

Country of origin: **Mexico**

Host Country: **US**

Language of interview: **Spanish**

Yahaira came to the United States from Mexico to improve her life conditions. She did not have money to work there, so she worked in the fields while taking care of her baby son. Soon after he was born, they decided to come to the United States to improve their lives. She had to leave her baby son with her mother and come with a large group of people under dangerous conditions. She stayed in a safe house and eventually made it to the Midwest where she and her husband were able to find work, buy a house, and send money to Mexico for her son. When she first came she was so impressed with how clean everything was and how nice and respectful people were. Since then, she is no longer with her husband but she is so grateful for the help and services that single mothers receive in the United States. She believes that is important for migrants to know that when you come to the host country you must respect this country that opens its doors to you. She believes that people should have a goal when they leave their country and work toward that goal to move them forward in life.

Name: **Akari**

Country of Origin: **US**

Host Country: **Japan**

Language of interview: **English**

Akari was born in the United States to an American father and a Japanese mother. When the relationship fell apart and her parents got divorced, at the age of 10 years, she moved to Japan because her mother had custody rights. The move was not her first time to Japan and she already knew much of the language. Fortunately, her mother's family was able to help support Akari and her mother. Akari talked about her education experience in Japan and the relative ease in which she learned to write in Japanese and how much better her English was than many of her classmates. Akari touched on the subject of being bullied adding that in Japan, they have the saying that, "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down." Thus, Japan's belief in social harmony, although well intentioned, sometimes has negative consequences for those who look different, speak differently, act differently, like Akari. She also had some bad experiences with a teacher. At the time, she was not aware that the teacher's abuse of power was unacceptable in Japan, perhaps she was too young to understand what was normal behavior for teachers. When Akari reached high school age, she decided she wanted to study in the United States, but when she returned, she was shocked by the religious nature of her classmates and the individualist nature of society that she had not noticed as a child. She soon realized she felt more comfortable living in Japan and she returned to attend university. Since then, she has continued to live and work in Japan. Akari emphasizes that her experience has helped her see the world in a more logical manner. She does not accept superficial stereotypes and she now understands that different does not necessarily mean bad. She has also realized the complexity of being from or having lived in two cultures and believes that if one lives in another country, it is a privilege and one must live by the cultural rules established there.

Name: **Najeep**

Country of Origin: **Afghanistan**

Host country: **Italy**

Language of interview: **English**

Najeep left Afghanistan to get his family to a safer environment due to war. His wife and children are still in Pakistan, but he hopes to bring them to Italy soon. To get to Italy, his journey

took him 4 months. He had to travel over mountains through the desert and by sea. He took a boat from Athens with about 50–60 people, men, women, and children from countries around the world. His family is everything to him, and he missed them dearly and finds life away from his family to be very difficult. However, he moved to Italy with friends who are also refugees and in the same situation, so he has a support group in his new surroundings. He chose Italy because he feels that Italians are similar to Pashtuns. Najeep sees many connections between Afghans and Italian people. He mentions the long history of the Italians as noteworthy and calls them “good people.” This seems to suggest that not only did he choose to immigrate to Italy for practical reasons but he also admired their culture due to his studies at a university in Afghanistan where he learned English. If he could do it all over again, he would not. Even though he came because of war, he would choose to do whatever he could to stay with his family, wherever they had to be because being without them has been too painful.

Name: **Marie**

Country of Origin: **France**

Host country: **Indonesia**

Language of interview: **English**

Anna left her family and friends in France to move to Indonesia to do work in biodiversity in the rainforests. Her main reason for leaving home was to follow her passion and participate in meaningful research in her field. She went alone and talks about missing her family, especially her brother due to their similar interest in the preservation of the planet.

Anna talks a little bit about the benefits of moving to another country by mentioning the fact that her work has positively affected her family members’ choices of products they use and purchase. She also talks about the personal benefits of migration and the fact that it is an important situation involving learning of self. She also discusses the fact that she has become more patient with people due to her experiences in Indonesia.

Anna seems to miss her family and is not sure if she will stay in Indonesia long-term. She considers it since the environment is perfect for her research passions, but she is also not limiting herself to staying in Indonesia forever.

Name: **Mfoso**

Country of Origin: **Lesotho**

Host country: **South Africa**

Language of interview: **English**

Mfoso came from Lesotho, which is completely surrounded by South Africa. She moved across the border to further her education and get a masters degree, but later continued to get a PhD. A degree from South Africa has more weight when it comes to job hunting and there are more job opportunities in South Africa. She left her family, including her husband and three children, to immigrate and fulfill her goals. When she moved to South Africa, she did not plan for a place to stay, so she brought a blanket in her suitcase—she felt that this blanket would protect her from being cold— one of her biggest fears. Fortunately, she was able to stay with a friend until

housing had been arranged. In addition, she came without any hope or knowledge of where she could get a job or where money would come from. It seems that at one point, she was receiving a stipend from her government, which was helping to pay for her masters on the condition that she would return to work afterward. However, she had to give that up when she decided to pursue her PhD. At one point, she had a large bill at the school that needed to be paid before she could register for the next year's courses. She was lucky to receive a sponsorship that paid everything off and helped her get through the PhD program.

Despite living in another country, she is able to Skype with her family every day, and they get to visit each other from time to time. At times, she had no hope of success but due to her dedication and a little luck, doors opened that helped her continue down the path to a PhD.

Names: **Zlatan** and **Zhivana**

Country of Origin: **Bosnia**

Host country: **US**

Language of interview: **English**

This married couple lived in Bosnia with their two daughters until the war broke out. They were a mixed couple, one of Muslim background and one Orthodox, which was dangerous during the war because it was basically a war between religions. After the war started, some friends in Belgrade offered to take their children. The couple was scared for their children and sent them to Belgrade. They then spent 4 years in the Muslim area of Sarajevo throughout the war. In the beginning, they wanted to stay because it was their city, their country, and it was their duty to stay and work. Everything was there. However, every day they were exposed to bombings and shootings. There was a shortage of food and no electricity. They could only talk to their children two or three times per year by phone. The man had to dig trenches on the frontlines because the military did not trust him to have a weapon. The war was about hate and nobody trusted each other. People were judged by their name or religion not by who they were as people. This was hard for them because they were raised together, Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim and had been taught that it was okay to dislike someone but hate should be erased from your mind.

After the war, the hate persisted. When the woman tried to visit her mother who lived only 10 km away, she was denied many times. She then decided that if she ever could get away, she would never come back. The city they were born in and lived the majority of their lives in was no longer their home. They had lost everything. Eventually, they met up with their children again and spent a few years together waiting for immigrant visas. The woman said it was like being born again. The two daughters were able to obtain visas to study and live in Canada, and for a second time, they lost their children.

Moving to the United States was only the beginning of a long and difficult journey. They traveled from Belgrade to Milan, then to New York. After a night there, they flew to St Louis and finally Omaha where they were welcomed by friends. The day of their arrival was a very sunny day which filled them with hope toward their new life. They had to learn English which was very difficult for them. They felt ashamed because they liked to talk, they knew what they wanted to say to people, but did not know how to say it in English. However, English was needed for everything, to get a place, a job, and to meet people. They now work hard, continue to study English, and live. They are rather happy and paraphrase Nikola Tesla is saying that their native country is not where they were born but where they choose to call home.

Name: **Sal**

Country of Origin: **India**

Host country: **Jamaica**

Language of interview: **English**

Sam chose to leave India to work in Jamaica temporarily to see the world. He enjoys adventure and travel and taking risks to see what may come out of life. After having worked in Jamaica a few years, he chose not to return to India because he loved the country so much. He states that he appreciates the people in Jamaica for being so happy. Due to the large amount of tourists on vacation, he seems to enjoy owning a business and interacting with happy tourists. He has a sense of joy about having migrated which may be due to his success. He chose wisely when he came to Jamaica because the atmosphere seems to fit his personality. He was also able to move his wife and son to Jamaica, which makes immigration a more joyful experience compared to the families that are separated due to less than ideal conditions.

When Sam compares Jamaica to India, he seems to appreciate the open-mindedness of people in Jamaica. He talks about how conservative India was in the past (although due to the Internet and the media, that has also changed in his opinion), and how much he enjoys living among people who have open minds about people and ideas. Sam is open to new experiences, new cultures, new circumstances, and his personality and attitude play a big role in his success as an immigrant.

He is happy that he chose to move to Jamaica due to the positive personal transformations he has undergone. He feels as if he is a better person because of his decision to immigrate. He talks a lot about having to figure things out when you are far from home and far from family or friends. He talks about the strength of character that is built in these situations. He is very supportive of human migration as a choice for those who want to pursue a better life. For him, a beautiful life is about more than money, and for that reason, he is satisfied with his decision to leave India.