BRIDGING TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES OF KNOWING: REVALUING MIND/BODY CONNECTIONS THROUGH EXPERIENCES OF EMBODIMENT

A Thesis in
Adult Education

by

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ABSTRACT

Western thought is embedded in a traditional mind/body dichotomy that has privileged the mind in constructing knowledge and obscured the body. However, within emerging scholarly discourses situated in holistic learning practices, there is movement toward integrating multiple ways of knowing guiding best practice and informing learning processes in adult and higher education. With embodiment emerging as an interest area within these discourses, the primary purpose of this study was to explore revaluing embodiment as a way of knowing by examining how it was conceived of, experienced, and applied as new knowledge in a higher education classroom. It addressed a need to bridge the gap between the traditional rational paradigm of teaching and learning and integrated pedagogies that reconnect the whole person.

This study was a qualitative investigation of embodiment through a case study action research project in a higher education B.S.N. class of practicing registered nurses where a direct attempt was made to incorporate attention to the body in learning through five experiential sessions drawn from various conceptualizations of embodiment. Experiences of embodiment were examined among 13 participants with data collected through interviews, observation, and documents. Theoretical framing was established from cognitive science, situated cognition and social theory.

Several process findings were revealed as part of the action research process from participation in activities of embodied awareness. First, participants developed a deeper understanding of embodied awareness from initial physiological and emotive responses through the body by clarifying ineffable aspects of embodiment through experiential engagement and by relating conceptualizations of embodiment to prior
experiences. Second, participants made significant discoveries as new learning about embodiment that they were able to apply as greater self awareness through individual and relational integration in their personal and professional lives with realizations of self nurturance as highly significant for improving quality of life. Third, participants recognized value in experiences of embodiment for learning in adult and higher education related to enhancing course content and greater understanding of cultural relevance and generalized learning processes in new ways. Overall, this study informed a deeper understanding of embodied experiences and their impact and usefulness in facilitating new learning.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

One of the most significant, universal manifestations of embodiment occurs in striving for survival through the stress response. The biological basis, physiological and emotional reactions of the stress response and maintenance of homeostasis between mind and body point to an innate ability to tap into deep recesses of embodied knowing to effect survival (Damasio, 1999). In the broadcasted coverage of the tragic aftermath of the December 2005 tsunami off the coast of Thailand, a particular group of nomads known as the Moken village sea gypsies was featured in an investigative report for their high rate of survival along with the animal population in devastated areas (Simons, 2005). The report sought to discover possible reasons why this particular group of people had been able to survive the devastating tsunami when so many others had perished. In listening to the rich, descriptive stories of lived body experiences, the nature and essence of their embodied being-in-the-world as a way of knowing accessed through a cultural presence of interaction and interrelatedness with the environment surfaced as the most profound reason for the survival of the sea gypsies.

While there were extensive reports on the human tragedy and environmental devastation, some attention was given to the high rate of survival among the animal population. The animals’ keen perceptive, innate senses and responses to the imminent danger triggered their flight stress response to seek safety on higher ground. Discussion and speculation soon followed about such innate ability in humans with questions arising in the direction of embodied knowing. As humans, has our being moved away from this perceptive ability becoming inattentive to its potential in providing sensory information and embodied knowledge? Has our way of living in modern civilization for the most part
tuned us out and turned us off from this mode of knowing? Once the survival of the sea gypsies was discovered, the inquiry proceeded in respect to humanness, embodiment and cultural connections.

In turning to the culture of the sea gypsies to examine connections between embodiment and their survival, the sea gypsies described embodied ways in which they paid attention while interacting with their environment. There is no sense of time or aging, but an exceptionally keen, innate perceptive sense of immediate presence of being in their environment. With just one toss of a spear, a puffer fish is caught for sustenance. This culture was described in the investigative report as one of the least disturbed by modern civilization. Their profound cultural sense of being-in-the-world places them in interrelated consonance with their surroundings.

Living on boats during much of their existence, the sea gypsies are “virtually amphibious” (Simon, 2005, p. 1) and as such paid close attention to reading the signs of the sea and the reactions of living things to the environmental nuances taking place as precursors of the tsunami. Their narratives included perceptive descriptions of strange actions by animals and the sea with dolphins swimming toward deeper water, elephants stampeding to higher ground, the cicadas suddenly silencing, and the water’s edge receding from the lagoon. The villagers began to cry from this lived experience as they interpreted the signs and felt the spirit of the sea as recognized in an extraordinary legend of a wave that eats people perpetuated in their cultural history. As a most discernible comparison, the responses of the Moken villagers enabled their survival while others perished. When asked why they thought they survived, one villager responded that they paid attention, read and felt the signs when others didn’t take the time to notice
stating, “They (other Burmese fishermen) were collecting squid, they were not looking at anything. They saw nothing, they looked at nothing. They don’t know how to look” (Simon, 2005, p. 2).

A felt, perceptive sense of direct experience with their environment enabled the Moken villagers to mindfully interpret the signals of the impending tsunami and react accordingly to survive. Bermudez, Marcel, and Eilan (1998) suggest that this type of experiencing could be conceptualized as phenomenological rooted in the nature and essence of the sea gypsies’ experiencing selves. Their way of life resonates with their surroundings. Being embedded in their environment has placed them in touch with perceptively inhabiting and experiencing their world in a way of knowing rooted in their survival that could indicate that they make use of what is sometimes referred to as embodiment.

As a concept, embodiment is gathering scholarly interest and particularly emerging in the multiple ways of knowing discourses in education contexts. Within the discussion of embodiment in all its complexity is trying to determine just what embodiment is as a way of knowing. Is it intuition? The sea gypsies described a felt sense. Is it being mindful of surroundings through perception? The sea gypsies described their sensory experiences. Is it perhaps something more encompassing and holistic that captures the essence of interrelatedness and connection through a being-in-the-world as experienced by the Moken villagers?

Price and Shildrick (1999) explained embodiment as an interrelated essence stating, “Instead of the body being positioned as a bar to knowledge, knowledge is produced through the body and embodied ways of being in the world” (p. 19). This
description suggests that the way of knowing by the Moken villagers points to their direct experiencing as embodiment. The growing inquiry on embodiment as a phenomenon has emerged from a need to understand exactly what it is, how it can be applied in the construction of knowledge, and to what extent it is of value in learning spaces. In explaining how this inquiry hopes to make a contribution to that end, this chapter will first explore the definition of embodiment and how it connects to my own life experience. Next, I’ll provide the rationale for the study of embodiment in adult and higher education, setting the context for a deeper consideration of the rest of the chapter discussing the research purpose, significance, theoretical grounding, and methodology.

Defining Embodiment in Context

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore revaluing embodiment as a way of knowing by examining how it is conceived of, experienced, and applied as new knowledge in a specific nursing course in a higher education setting where knowledge construction is studied by teachers, researchers and learners – a setting quite different than the Moken villagers. The purpose of this study and the role of embodiment in higher education will be explained more thoroughly later in this chapter, but will make more sense to the reader following a discussion of the definitions of embodiment and an explanation of my personal connection to the topic.

Defining Embodiment

Arriving at a definition of embodiment is complex as it has been used interchangeably with other terms. First, closely aligned with somatic learning in some of the discourses, embodiment is associated with an evolving awareness of bodily experiences as a source of knowledge construction representing a domain of learning
derived from engagement through lived body experiences of physicality, sensing and 
being in both body and world (Beaudoin, 1999; Brockman, 2001; Clark, 2001). In 
synthesizing the use of these terms in the literature, a distinction is made between 
embodiment and somatic learning for the purpose of this inquiry. Somatic learning will 
refer to learning directly experienced through bodily awareness and sensation during 
body-centered (somatic) approaches and movements such as yoga while embodiment will 
refer to a more holistic view of constructing knowledge that engages the body as a site of 
learning also in possible connection with other domains of knowing (e.g., spiritual, 
affective, symbolic, cultural, rational).

Second, in pointing out variations in authors’ definitions of embodiment, Csordas 
(1994) adds, “most authors regard it as an existential condition, others as a process in 
which meaning is taken into or upon the body, yet others prefer the term bodiliness over 
embodiment” (p. 20). Csordas arrives at the experience of being a body and phenomenon 
of bodiliness in defining embodiment. Weiss and Haber (1999) also describe the 
complexity in attempting to clarify the use of embodiment among variations as follows:

… the very expression “the body” has become problematized, and is increasingly 
supplanted by the term “embodiment.” The move from one expression to another 
corresponds directly to a shift from viewing the body as a nongendered, 
prediscursive phenomenon that plays a central role in perception, cognition, 
action, and nature to a way of living or inhabiting the world through one’s 
acculturated body. (p. xiv)

Variations in the use of embodiment offer perspectives on thinking about bodies and 
experiences of bodiliness through being-in-the world in trying to understanding
the concept of embodiment.

A third direction in defining embodiment stems from cognitive science. Lakoff and Johnson (1999), for example, have proposed a perspective of embodiment through bodily activities and experience grounded in conceptual systems. Phenomenological embodiment and neural embodiment are delineated as two significant forms of embodiment stemming from several key concepts of cognitive science: reason is connected to our bodies (e.g., through perception, movement, and manipulation), brains, and environmental interactions and experiences to give “our sense of what is real” (p. 17); and because our conceptual systems are rooted in bodily capacities and experience inhabited in our environment, the mind is embodied in a common way that draws meaning “grounded in and through our bodies” (p. 6). Lakoff and Johnson’s conceptualization of embodiment is included in this section on defining embodiment since their view of cognition as an embodied process is part of the theoretical framework for this study.

In summary, for the purpose of this inquiry, embodiment is defined as a way to construct knowledge through direct engagement in bodily experiences and inhabiting one’s body through being-in-the-world. Simply stated, it refers to bringing attention to the body as a way of knowing. The conceptualization of embodiment also incorporates unity of mind and body in the process of knowing by embracing both objective and subjective realms of knowledge construction as follows; the objective realm refers to an externally-driven way of processing information through rational structures of reason to construct knowledge while subjective realms refer to internally-
oriented, personal ways of processing information to construct knowledge through thoughts, ideas, and feelings (Simon, 1998).

**Engaging and Connecting to the Topic**

The purpose of this inquiry has been stimulated by my interest in examining how people develop a heightened awareness of embodiment as a way of constructing knowledge in both their personal lives and in formal learning contexts. Several personal insights have been significant in driving my growing fascination with embodiment as a passionate research focus. While the sea gypsies fluidly described their embodied experiences, for most people in the Western world, how to describe and interpret actually being embodied and experiencing embodiment in the moment remains awkward and challenging. Indeed, we live in a culture that bombards us with unrealistic body images and societal preoccupation with physical appearance and body consciousness. This certainly could account for why many of us have become disconnected from our bodies. Further, until we deal with a health issue, for example from aging or illness, there is a tendency not to give it much attention.

However, this sense of body disconnect has begun to change. Recent proactive health prevention and education efforts are significantly bringing attention to the body to prevent illness, manage stress, and promote wellness through improved quality of life (Beaudoin, 1999; Bunce, 1997; Myers et al., 2000). Most of my more conscious experiences of embodiment are situated in this area, as a counselor, wellness educator and person in the world. I navigate through every day with a heightened felt sense of embodiment by engaging in somatic techniques and stress management strategies. It is deeply embedded in my lifestyle and has not only facilitated my survival in a far less
dramatic and traumatic sense of the word than the life survival of the Moken villagers, but also continually provides me with a rich, alternate way to access, engage and construct knowledge.

For my sister, however, it took having her leg amputated from the top of her thigh to save her life from the spread of infection as a complication of diabetes to wake up and listen to her body. Because of the insidious spread of infection, her leg needed to be amputated to try to save her life. Faced with the challenge to survive this health crisis, she has become highly attentive to her body’s signals and her interactions with her environment. From watching my sister suffer through this experience and my own recent interest in work on disability studies, I’ve reached the understanding that being able-bodied is a temporary state for all of us. Breckenridge and Volger (2001) note, “The designation temporarily able-bodied invites us to consider different sorts of vulnerability, different points of frailty, as features of our common lot and accordingly to shift our understandings of flourishing, social justice, and embodiment” (p. 356). Indeed, this recent experience with my sister has given me a different view as I think about and experience the body.

A final aspect that stimulated my fascination about exploring embodiment as another way of knowing within an educational context, was my personal engagement with significant, highly moving learning experiences through multiple ways of knowing that included embodied experiences in formal and informal adult education contexts. Through many years of formal education, I have been trained in the traditional pedagogical system valuing mind and rationality in the banking mode of dispensing knowledge mostly through lecture. However, many personal experiences, especially
through self-directed learning, exposed me to the value of embodied sources of knowing through my direct experiences and heightened sense of *being-in-the-world*. And yet, still I had little exposure to such value in formal education until my experiences in the adult education doctoral program. After some confusion from the incongruence in transitioning from my prior traditional academy experiences, I was introduced to theory and practice conducive to investigating and experiencing multiple ways of knowing. For the first time, the learning space in the academy was meaningfully opened to me through holistic knowledge construction in which the learning community was significantly enhanced by innovative engagement with multiple approaches that crossed and merged disciplines.

Collaborative engagement in discussion, group, and experiential activities gave rise to symbolism and creative expression through music, art, movement, and creative writing -- other avenues of knowledge construction incorporating aspects of embodiment that complemented the rational way of knowing. As a result of personal engagement and insights through multiple ways of knowing creating significant learning experiences for me in adult education, understanding limitations and resistance in moving toward a more holistic philosophy of pedagogy that includes embodiment is perplexing. Despite the scholarly resurgence of embodiment, how to pedagogically apply insights has remained challenging and warrants further investigation. Indeed, there is an intangible quality to this phenomenon that adds to the complexity of this undertaking.

Embodiment in Adult and Higher Education

While discussion and inquiry centered on embodiment have considerably intensified in educational discourses (Beckett & Morris, 2001; Brockman, 2001; Chapman, 1998; Clark, 2001; Fenwick, 2003; Michelson, 1998), there is a need to
substantiate its pedagogical legitimacy as a way of knowing beyond conceptual literature through further research. Even though the mind and rationality hold traditional value and significance in the construction of knowledge in the academy, clearly the evolving literature on embodiment has established a discursive nature in which embodiment “has emerged as a fundamental social and academic issue in the contemporary period” (Shilling, 2003, p. 3). The literature reveals a concerted effort to remove the body from an occupied place of “excluded other” (Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 2) in terms of knowing.

Perspectives, theories, and approaches toward embodiment are becoming aligned and associated with discourses on holistic, innovative learning practices that link bodies and minds through multiple ways of knowing (Barlas, 2001; Crowdes, 2000; Miller, 1998/1999; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Focused dialogue on the need to move “toward a theory and practice for whole-person learning” (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 176) and holistic frameworks (Grauerholz, 2001; Yang, 2003) signifies a shift in scholarly interest toward more integrated approaches. Engaging multiple dimensions of learning through deeply layered, interrelated knowing processes as “different aspects of the way in which we know the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual world” (Yang, 2003, p. 108) is being explored to improve the quality of practice in higher and adult education.

With considerable attention placed on philosophy, theory and action that guides best practice and informs the process of learning in the field of adult education, the question of how adults construct knowledge and learn has directed much inquiry (Caffarella & Barnett, 1994; Candy, 1991; Merriam, 2001; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). However, as the systematic study of adult learning seeks to explain how adults learn,
there is a need to broaden insight on more integrated, holistic approaches to learning and multiple ways of knowing. From the vantage of adult learning, for example, Clark (2001) explored the question of how embodied knowledge could be used in educational contexts. Her inquiry supported the significance of embodiment as an opportunity to open other spaces within educational contexts, to “encourage adult educators to look around and to notice new modes of learning” (p. 91) and to present crucial questions that direct and stimulate discussion on revaluing embodiment in learning. Such emerging questions pertain to both process and quality of practice in adult learning beyond traditional rational knowledge construction toward innovative approaches through multiple ways of knowing. An investigation of embodiment as a legitimate way of knowing addressed a need to further inform pedagogical understanding and implications of embodiment.

Purpose of the Research

The promise of discovery, opportunity, and insight to enhance significant learning experiences have given rise to emerging discourse on embodiment as another way of knowing in guiding practice and advancing innovative theoretical developments within learning contexts. The evolving revaluing of embodiment in the academy has been stimulated by a need to bridge the gap between traditional paradigms of teaching and learning set within the Western Cartesian mind/body dichotomy and innovative pedagogies that engage and reconnect the whole person.

Closely affiliated with movement toward holistic learning, a shift is beginning to develop in higher education in revaluing a connection between mind and body in researching knowledge construction. The vestiges of the traditional Western view of learning deeply rooted in dualistic assumptions between body and mind are giving rise to
developments in reconnecting minds and bodies in some small circles with implications for educational theory and practice (Michelson, 1998; Nikitina, 2003; Ross, 2000). The separatist mind/body paradigm is being scrutinized in the wake of subsequent interest and theorizing on embodiment and integrative educational approaches. Given innovative movement beyond traditional boundaries of knowing, the purpose of this research addressed revaluing embodiment as an alternate way of knowing by examining how it was conceived of, experienced, and applied as new knowledge in a higher education classroom where a specific attempt was made to incorporate attention to the body in learning. The specific higher education classroom was a Family and Community Health Concepts course within a B.S.N. program. This course was selected based on the instructor’s interest in embodiment and the direct and indirect relevance of the course content for bringing attention to the body in learning through experiences of embodiment.

By describing and establishing guidelines for creating significant learning experiences in higher education, Fink (2003) brings attention to the beginning shift from traditional approaches to innovative, integrated responses to teaching and learning in the academy. According to Fink, significant learning as a process is multidimensional and provides rich, active, high energy, integrated learning experiences that account for differences in learner demographics, experiences, affect, and learning preferences and styles. Outcome, also a key characteristic of significant learning, is conceptualized by Fink as the depth of impact from the learning experiences in learners’ lives with lasting change beyond the course experience (e.g., life enhancement, contribution to community, and/or professional preparation). Fink’s insights set the stage to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation in teaching and learning as follows:
We can continue to follow traditional ways of teaching, repeating the same practices that we and others in our disciplines have used for years. Or we can dare to dream about doing something different, something special in our courses that would significantly improve the quality of student learning. This option leads to the question faced by teachers everywhere and at all levels of education: Should we make the effort to change, or not? (p. 1)

In making the effort to change and shift toward innovation, Ross (2000), for example, highlighted the pedagogical value of embodiment through a holistic dance education paradigm integrating mind, body and affect in an academy context commenting, “The boundaries of academic disciplines are being rendered increasingly permeable” (p. 28). This investigation addressed a need to bridge traditional boundaries of knowing with innovative educational approaches by exploring a broader vision of learning paradigms that reconnect mind and body through experiences of embodiment.

**Guiding Research Questions**

The following research questions guide this investigation of embodiment in a Family and Community Health Concepts nursing course where a direct attempt was made to incorporate attention to the body in learning:

1) How is embodiment conceptualized in the academy by the instructor and students as a result of participating in activities conducted to facilitate body awareness?

2) How is embodiment experienced in the academy by the instructor and students when activities are conducted to facilitate body awareness, and how does it facilitate learning related to the content of the course?
3) How do instructors and students apply new knowledge about embodiment in their personal and professional lives as a result of participating in such experiences?

Theoretical Framework

There were three sources used to establish a theoretical framework for this study; situated cognition within the social constructivist view of experiential learning theory, Turner’s (1996) social theory approach toward the body within the discipline of sociology, and Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) philosophy of an embodied person grounded in cognitive science. While these will be discussed in-depth in Chapter Two, this section will provide an overview of assumptions in each approach and the appropriateness for each source for framing this study.

Beginning with situated cognition, this perspective was selected to help frame this study for two primary reasons. First, it conceives of the process of knowing as facilitated through active participation in a learning situation that is contextually defined (Fenwick, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Its emphasis on learning by doing through active engagement and participation in an immediate situation offers a way to try to understand and analyze the direct experiences of the body in learning. It also addresses the part of the research purpose that examines how embodiment is experienced and applied as new knowledge in a higher education classroom. Cheville’s (1997) focus on schematic orientations to space and time in an investigation of the nature of embodiment and student–athletes’ learning points to the relevance of situated cognition in this respect for framing.

As a form of social constructivism, situated cognition allows for framing through
socially constructed assumptions. Knowledge is viewed as a social construction created through social processes in the learning environment through social exchanges (Stage et al., 1998). Situated cognition acknowledges the engagement of interacting elements in the process of activity and doing in situated experiences within a particular learning community (Fenwick, 2000; Michelson, 1998). This type of engagement is manifest in various experiential learning applications that integrate multiple ways of knowing that connect the mind and experiencing body (Cheville, 2005; Crowdes, 2000; Nikitina, 2003; Ross, 2000; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). This experiential aspect of situated cognition was relevant for framing to inform how embodiment was experienced in a higher education classroom.

The second source of theoretical framing was derived from social theory within the field of sociology. Extensive work conceptualizing the body in relation to and positioned within society has been presented via social theory. The study of the body in society is a focus in social theory (Shilling, 2003) Turner’s (1996) social theory approach toward the body was used as an underpinning. This view of the body merges both the biological aspects of the naturalist position of the body in social theory with social phenomenon from the social constructionist perspectives of social theory. In this view, understanding cultural significance, for example, as a biological essence of the body can enter into analysis of embodiment as well as social meanings inscribed on the body (Shilling, 2003). This approach offered a more multi-dimensional framework to analyze assumptions of embodiment in terms of social processes and social relations while also acknowledging the body’s biological physicality. It also supported those aspects of this research that sought to understand how embodiment was experienced in a higher
education context and its implications as a way of knowing in the academy.

The third source of framing was an embodied philosophy proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1999) drawing from cognitive science. Claiming that “each experience is an embodied experience” (p. 562) with everyone of us having embodied experiences throughout our lives, it makes a case for “no such thing as a disembodied mind” (p. 563). Specifying multifaceted concepts of embodied experience, this philosophy is a view of embodied reason and phenomenological embodiment whereby “forms of embodiment arise from the way we schematize our own bodies and things we interact with daily” (p. 36). It proposes a way in which the traditionally rational process of conception builds from the inherently embodied nature of perception and movement in arriving at embodied reason. For example, concepts of perceptual, imaging, and motor systems are delineated within necessary levels to arrive at embodied reasoning. Thus, it was included as a framing source since it recognizes multiple facets of knowledge construction and provided a structural means to examine mind/body connectedness and the conceptualization of embodiment as a way of knowing as part of this research purpose.

In summary, the theoretical framing for this study intersected situated cognition, Turner’s social theory approach and Lakoff and Johnson’s embodied person philosophy. With each source contributing relevance to this investigation through connections with direct bodily experience, social processes and embodied structures, they were integrated as a theoretical framework to comprehensively address the questions guiding this research.

Overview of Research Methods and Design

A review of the literature on embodiment reveals that the conceptual information
and research on embodiment is situated in the interpretive paradigm for acquiring communicative knowledge (Ewert, 1991). Investigations through interpretive methodological approaches are appropriate given the subjectively-oriented centrality of lived experience and descriptive nature of reflections on such experiences in understanding dimensions of embodiment. Interpretive methodologies are described as appropriate for applications that “approach knowledge by focusing on the development of intersubjective meaning based on consensual norms and expectations” (Ewert, 1991, p. 351). Subjective understandings and interpretations of meanings through experiences are foundational in researching and understanding insights on embodiment.

I implemented an integrated approach using a case study design through an action research project as the methodology for this investigation. Case study provides a method to research a case or cases in a system bounded by time and place through a highly detailed, in-depth system of collecting data via multiple sources of rich, contextual information (Creswell, 1998). Case study was selected, in part, as a means to examine the how and what of embodied experience through a detailed view of a particular course within an academy learning space where a direct attempt was made to incorporate experiences of embodiment. However, since the purpose of this investigation also centered on how embodiment was experienced and applied as new knowledge and to understand the extent of its value as a way of knowing in academy learning spaces, it presented a practice problem that was best approached through action research as well. As a practical, inductive method, action research is implemented through a four-step process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to address a practice problem through change or improvement (Kuhne & Quigley, 1997). To provide the most useful
information contributing to knowledge regarding the purpose of this study, I felt I had the
greatest opportunity to examine this phenomenon by not only focusing on an in-depth
case study of a higher education classroom where a specific attempt was made to
incorporate attention to the body in learning, but also to develop and implement
experiences of embodiment through action research in trying to gain a better
understanding of how to inform and improve the quality of practice through experiences
of embodiment.

I was invited by the instructor of a nursing course within the RN-B.S. program at
a large, public university to facilitate experiences of embodiment as part of this course.
The professor and the students enrolled in this course who were willing to participate in
this study were selected as the purposeful sample. Thus, the nursing course provided the
context as a case and an opportunity to design and implement an intervention addressing
issues of embodiment in an applied setting. Since implementing a qualitative action
research case study requires the use of extensive, multiple sources of data, information
was collected through in-depth, semi-structured recorded interviews, experiential
observations, and documents to investigate experiences of embodiment. Participants were
asked to participate in and be observed during five experiential learning sessions
incorporating experiences of embodiment, to participate in one interview after several
experiential learning sessions and a final interview after completion of the intervention,
and to provide at least five reflections of choice drawn from experiences of embodiment
for document analysis. Field notes from direct observation were also used as a source of
data. Thematic analysis of this gathered data was conducted to reveal emergent themes.
Significance of the Study

By examining the connection between subjectivity and embodiment in adult learning contexts, Simon (1998) proposed to reconceptualize embodied subjectivity as follows:

Adult education has neglected the body and subsequently, has not generated a theory of embodiment or embodied learning. But, such a theory or construct is necessary to remedy a significant gap resulting from the historical devaluation of the body in learning and the continuing Cartesian subject/object dichotomy. A theory of embodiment brings an important and overlooked cultural and phenomenological perspective to adult learning … By stimulating a deeper exploration of how we actually learn – an understanding of the contextual and phenomenological nature of the learning experience, including its cultural and tacit aspects – we may improve the practices of working with individual students and the way we formulate institutional policies. (p. 17-18)

Simon’s research provides direction that substantiates the significance of investigating embodiment through its implications for practice.

An intervention and in-depth examination of experiences of embodiment in a higher education classroom presented opportunities to explore tensions, challenges, and innovation within academy learning spaces and enhance the quality of practice. While it is evident that professors are seriously reflecting on experiences of embodiment in the academy and its implications for practice (Freedman & Holmes, 2003; O’Farrell, Meadmore, McWilliam, & Symes, 2000; McWilliam & Taylor, 1996; Simmonds, 1999), how to further conceive of, engage, and integrate embodied experience beyond reflective
self-knowledge into meaningful practicing space within the learning community, for many professors, remains a somewhat elusive and awkward scholarly mystery. There is a gap in what embodiment means for practice and learning. Furthermore, a diversity in arguments, claims, assumptions, and theorizing surrounding embodiment produces a complexity “that feeds back into questions of the body and self” (Bermudez et al., 1998, p. 1) exacerbated by this gap.

The significance of this investigation of embodiment as a way of knowing was to address a need to sift through the complexities with research that examines embodied accounts, representations, interpretations, and engagement to further inform an understanding of embodiment as a dimension of learning and unearth its implications and value for practice. Within this type of investigation, there was also promise for insight into implications particularly associated with experiential learning and the exploration of integrative approaches with shifting possibilities toward the holistic engagement of multiple ways of knowing in the academy. Therefore, a vision for navigating space in the learning community beyond traditional boundaries helped situate this study’s significance.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Strengths

The nature of research is based on assumptions and has strengths and limitations. The assumptions, limitations, and strengths present in this investigation are detailed in this section.

First, embedded in this research was the assumption that there are multiple ways of knowing beyond the traditional Western view of knowledge construction through rationality in a disembodied mind. Embodiment is a dimension of multiple ways of
knowing and learning is a process of embodiment. Second, it was also assumed that experiential learning provides an avenue to access the realm of subjectivity for constructing embodied knowledge and creates significant learning experiences.

There were also limitations and strengths evidenced in this study. Starting with limitations, the rather obscure nature, limited understanding, absent presence of embodiment in the academy, and difficulty in communicating about bodily experiences present inherent challenges and barriers to eliciting rich, descriptive data on this phenomenon. Embodiment presents a unique, somewhat ill-defined challenge in trying to figure out how to grasp its potential for change and for improvement in practice, particularly within a formal academy context. While its evolvement as an innovative idea in practice is promising, it can also be limiting because of the complexity surrounding the nature of its conceptualization and application.

Furthermore, since this investigation explored experiences of embodiment integrated in practice as part of an established higher education course, there were constraints on the number and length of experiential sessions and on participant selection based on course enrollment. These limitations needed to be taken into account when the investigation was designed and implemented. The experiential learning sessions were limited to approximately sixty minutes per session and available participants for the purposeful sample were confined by course enrollment. Also, consistent participation presented limits at times by creating gaps in the experiential learning sessions when students were absent from class. Also given the time constraint to the length of a semester course for implementing this project, there was a limitation on implementing the action part of the action research cycle and on repeating cycles of this process.
In addition to noted limitations, there are several strengths to acknowledge in this study. The first strength was the use of action research within a case study of the higher education nursing course as the methodology. As previously discussed, the action research process provided an effective way to address embodiment as a practice problem through a specific attempt to incorporate attention to the body in learning. Not only did this methodology facilitate gaining a better understanding of how to inform and improve the quality of practice through experiences of embodiment, but also supported new learning about embodiment for participants in their personal and professional lives.

Second, the action implemented in the experiential sessions was considered to be a strength since the sessions overall were assessed as highly valuable by the participants. The participants responded that they found value in new learning about embodiment that they could apply as new knowledge in their personal and professional lives. Also in line with the action process, a third strength of this study included its emphasis on direct experience through an approach to bodily awareness that threaded with multiple dimensions of learning including cultural considerations. Participants responded that direct engagement was a crucial for developing new learning about embodiment and recognizing its relevance not only to course content, but also within other personal and professional contexts.

Definition of Terms

There are several significant terms that warrant definitions as used in this study.

Embodiment is used to refer to a view of constructing knowledge that engages the body as a site of learning. It is a way to construct knowledge through the direct engagement in bodily experiences and inhabiting one’s body through being-in-the-world.
It also incorporates unity of mind and body as a component in the process of knowing by embracing both objective and subjective realms of knowledge construction. It relates to discourses with holistic learning, whole-person learning and multiple ways of knowing (e.g., spiritual, somatic, affective, symbolic, cultural, rational).

**Embodied awareness** is used to refer to the capacity to understand through sensing, action, and knowing in a connected, simultaneous manner through perceptual, imaging, and motor systems (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

**Experiences of embodiment** refer to experiences that engage the body as a site of learning to construct knowledge.

**Phenomenological embodiment** refers to forms of embodiment presented by image schemas with our bodies through bodily projections, orientations, and inhabiting space (e.g., spatial-relations with objects such as front and back, use and movement of body parts such as pushing, pulling, and balance) while **neural embodiment** refers to neural mechanisms, such as neural circuitry tied to color concepts, that develop as concepts (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999).

**Somatics** refers to body-centered approaches and movements while **somatic learning** refers to learning directly experienced through bodily awareness and sensation during somatic engagement. Stress management and relaxation techniques and movement approaches (e.g., Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, yoga, Tai Chi) are examples of somatics.

**Holistic** as a term within education refers to integrative approaches through multiple ways of knowing to construct knowledge.
**Being-in-the-world** refers to the nature and essence of lived experiencing within one’s complete humanness, both mind and body, in perceiving, interacting and engaging with the surrounding world. It points to a sense of connectedness and interdependence.

**Subjectivity** is an internally-oriented, personal way of processing information to construct knowledge through thoughts, ideas, and feelings (Simon, 1998).

**Objectivity** is an externally-driven way of processing information through rational structures of reason to construct knowledge.

**Organization of the Study**

This study opened by specifying the background of the research problem, the purpose of the study and guiding research questions in Chapter One. It also included a description of the theoretical framework, overview of research methodology and design, the study’s significance, assumptions, strengths, limitations, and defining terminology. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature while Chapter Three details the methodology and procedures executed in the research process to collect and interpret the data. Chapter Four introduces the case for this study and its participants, phases of the action research process, and early findings. Chapter Five describes the findings of the research while Chapter Six discusses the findings in light of the theoretical framework and reviewed literature, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an in-depth review of literature to gain a thorough understanding of embodiment, the focus of this investigation, by exploring its theoretical underpinnings, the nature of research on embodiment, and the array of conceptualizations, manifestations, and implications of embodied experience in learning contexts. The discussion will focus on three areas within the literature base. The first area will inform an understanding of the theoretical framework with supporting literature that grounds this investigation. The second area will discuss the nature of research specifically on embodiment by examining existing research studies that help situate the context of embodiment in learning. The third area will discuss the emergence of embodiment as a revalued way of knowing and explore how and where embodiment is conceived of, manifested, and experienced. This area will also discuss the implications of embodiment as a way of knowing within such contexts as culturally responsive practice and holistic learning paradigms.

The Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this investigation is established through intersecting orientations to discussions of embodiment: situated cognition within the social constructivist view of experiential learning theory, Turner’s (1996) social theory approach toward the body within the discipline of sociology, and Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) philosophy of an embodied person grounded in cognitive science. This section will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of these three intersecting orientations as sources for framing by describing assumptions and related influences and how they situate framing.
Constructivist Grounding

Much of the embodiment literature is grounded in a broad understanding of constructivism. Clearly many researchers base their work on specific forms of constructivism such as situated cognition and/or feminist approaches to understanding the body as constructed and experienced in light of social forces and social contexts. The health education and wellness literature related to health promotion and therapeutic practice (Beaudoin, 1999; Lord, 2002; Mills & Daniluk, 2002) and experiential learning applications in some adult and higher education contexts (Chan, 2002; Crowdes, 2000; Michelson, 1998; Yorks & Kasl, 2002) point to theoretical connections between forms of constructivism and embodiment.

As Stage et al. (1998) note, some constructivist scholars (such as Piaget) focus more on how individuals process experiential knowledge in one’s head, while others such as Gergen (2001) who refers to social constructionism, focus more on the sociocultural elements of constructivism. Thus, the broad area of constructivism exists on a continuum with more of a focus on the individual at one end as individual constructivist and more of a focus on the social at the other as social constructionist. Most scholars between these two poles generally refer to themselves and their work as social constructivist in its orientation.

Constructivism centers on valuing interaction with experience and the process of actively constructing meaning from knowledge through experiences (Stage et al., 1998). Not only being active, this process is also social in nature whereby learning that happens in an interactive community is viewed as a social process. Learning is facilitated through collaborative social interaction and participation. Along with active engagement in
experience and a facilitative relationship in the learning community, the process of reflection is valued as another important element of constructivism. Experiential learning is a particular area in which the constructivist elements of active engagement, the social nature of experience, and the process of reflection are manifest in the process of learning. In describing this process, Fenwick (2000) noted, “To learn, people need to be deliberate experimenters in their own learning, willingly engaging in traumas of the self” (p. 252). Research (Mills & Daniluk, 2002) validating experiential learning in a therapeutic community where women dealing with sexual abuse trauma engaged in dance to heal from unconscious conflict through the body and to reclaim themselves, as they engaged the body and reflected on the process is an example of Fenwick’s point; the constructivist elements of active engagement, the social nature of experience, and the process of reflection are evident as underpinnings.

Assumptions from social constructivism are also foundational in the previously suggested ways. Along a continuum from individual to social focus, for the purpose of framing this study, moving toward the social focus in the embodiment literature will be the position of emphasis for framing within social constructivism. In this focus, knowledge is considered to be socially constructed through social processes in the learning environment. Knowledge construction is placed in the social realm through exchanges of dialogue, discussion and negotiation (Stage et al., 1998). Learning through this type of social interaction is evidenced in experiential applications that incorporate what could be considered as embodied knowledge in some adult learning and higher education contexts. Applications within the broad discipline of the sociology of education (Crowdes, 2000; Yorks & Kasl, 2002), for example, focus on socially constructed
experiences incorporating aspects of embodied knowledge through active, direct engagement of the body and collaborative, interactive, group learning that address issues of race and other societal “isms” in the academy. They draw on specific experiences of the body, and the marker of the racialized body as white, or of color. In these types of experiential learning, reflective inquiry was also significant in learner analysis of embodied experiences dealing with and understanding racial consciousness and power differentials. Social constructivist underpinnings of direct, active experience through social processes and reflection on learning as elements in these types of activities point to the social constructivist orientation informing these studies as embodied epistemology.

*Feminist influences.* This section will take a look at the concerted effort in large part driven by feminist perspectives within social constructivism launched in the past decade to remove the body from an occupied place of “excluded other” (Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 2) and frequent position of absence, neglect, ignorance, and subordination. Feminism has become an influential philosophy surfacing in body study literature (Davis, 1997; Johnson, 1999; McWilliam, 1996; Somerville, 2004; Vick; 1996).

Beginning with impact from the Women’s Movement, contributions from feminist philosophy seep through the conceptual literature on embodiment as an influential theory in bringing the body to the forefront as a unit of analysis (Grosz, 1995; Michelson, 1998; Price & Shildrick, 1999; Somerville, 2004) explained by Michelson (1998) as follows:

Feminist theory has had to account for the body from several contending perspectives: claiming the body as a traditional female realm, recovering it generally as a site of knowledge, and at the same time deconstructing the very
dualisms that code the body as female as opposed to male, as nature as opposed to culture, and mark it as the despised antipode of mind…One major focus within the feminist theorizing of the body has been to restore the body as a site of experiential learning and at the same time understand the body itself as a product of culture and history. (p. 222)

Feminist theory moved the body from a position of shame and privacy to the center of discourse and study. By investigating the objectification of the body from poststructural models emphasizing issues of marginalization and oppression for women in Western culture, feminist philosophy brought attention to the facilitation of embodied experiences as a connection between learning and the body (Price & Shildrick, 1999). Feminist philosophy challenged the view of knowledge construction from the Scientific Revolution rise to reason with separate knowing of mind from body to substantiate this connection.

While questions posed by feminist philosophy about the analysis, understanding, and theorizing of embodiment have undoubtedly established a significant conceptual literature base in feminist discourse (Price & Shildrick, 1999; Somerville, 2004), there is a need to more fully examine these influences and their pedagogical implications within research-based work on embodiment. Vick (1996), among others, has substantiated revaluing embodiment in the academy holding that “despite the apparent excision of the body from pedagogical space by the positioning of the mind as the true subject of pedagogy, the fact that the mind is an imaginary object, inferable and accessible only ‘through’ the body, paradoxically made the body central to pedagogy” (p. 113).
**Situated cognition.** Situated cognition is a particular perspective within the social constructivist view of experiential learning selected for framing because of its relevance in trying to understand an embodied epistemology. With an emphasis on being situated in the process of participation in an experience to construct knowledge (Fenwick, 2000), this perspective provides a way to understand how learning emerges through the body’s engagement in the process of activity and doing in situated experiences. Within the context of experiential learning, Michelson (1998) discussed insights on embodiment that suggest links among situated cognition, embodiment, and elements of experiential learning in emphasizing the significance of direct experience in knowledge construction. Conceiving of experiential learning as an integrated site of knowledge connecting the mind and experiencing body, she suggested a holistic conception of experiential learning in which knowledge is conceived of as “lived engagement” through “experience that re-members body and mind” (p. 224). It is a view of learning in and not necessarily from direct experience.

In revisiting the definition of embodiment as a way to construct knowledge through direct engagement in bodily experiences and inhabiting one’s body through being-in-the-world, situated cognition’s key assumption of learning through participation in direct experience is foundational in addressing and understanding the direct engagement aspect of embodiment. Fenwick (2000) explained:

*Situated cognition* maintains that learning is rooted in the situation in which a person participates … *Knowing and learning* are defined as engaged in changing processes of human activity in a particular community. Knowledge is not a substance to be ingested and then transferred to a new situation but, instead, a part
of the very process of participation in the immediate situation. (p. 253)

In this perspective, participation in direct experience points to an emphasis on contextual factors when knowing is viewed as constructed through action. The direction of questioning within this inquiry necessitates a framework with underpinnings that account not only for a consideration of participation in direct experience, but also for contextual factors to investigate embodied experiences in a higher education class where a direct attempt is made to incorporate attention to the body in learning experiences. Furthermore, discussion by Lave and Wenger (1991) includes a sociocultural emphasis and contextual focus in situated learning with social processes manifest through participation in a learning community. In their view, conceptions of situated learning are, in part, developed through relational aspects of the learning process and a situated learning activity involves understanding through the whole person; “on activity in and with the world; and on the view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 33).

Turning to the literature on embodiment, these key assumptions of situated cognition have been applied as a lens to ground and inform research-based work on embodiment (Beaudoin, 1999; Chan, 2002; Cheville, 1997). For example, beginning with Beaudoin’s (1999) investigation of ways in which individuals integrated embodied learning across different daily living contexts to promote wellness, analysis focused on experiences of direct participation in somatic techniques and derived meaning from embodied learning. This focus on the process of direct participation in somatic experiences and being situated in embodied activity is consistent with the participative assumption of situated cognition. Chan’s (2002) research on cross-cultural embodied
learning experiences among teachers and students also points to situated cognition’s emphasis on learning realized through active participation and the significance of relational, sociocultural processes in learning. In the context of adult learning for teacher preparation and support, this investigation focused on implications of embodied learning for increasing teachers’ cultural competence and sensitivity for culturally responsive practice. Teachers and students directly participated in culturally different movement genres engaged in relational learning activities within a learning community focused on experiences of cultural awareness. A final example of research with underpinnings from situated cognition is Cheville’s (1997) examination of embodied learning among women on an intercollegiate basketball team to arrive at an understanding of the ways in which student-athletes learn as an athlete within the nature of embodiment. Bodily action and place were central units to analysis of learning as embodiment within the context of participation in team experiences in women’s basketball. Cheville’s (1997) work brings attention to situated cognition as foundational to this investigation on embodiment by focusing on understanding the ‘situativity’ of bodily activity and embodied learning.

In summary, key assumptions of situated cognition informing an embodied epistemology are: learning is situated in the direct experience of participation with knowledge constructed through action and there are relational aspects apparent through learning as a social process in constructing knowledge. Evidence of these assumptions existing in the literature on embodiment has been presented in this section to establish the relevance of including situated cognition as one of the intersecting orientations for framing. What remains to be drawn upon from this perspective, however, in moving toward reconnecting minds and bodies, is more specific direction on exactly how to
incorporate the body through direct participation in learning contexts in a way that points to meaningful implications of embodiment as a significant, valued way of knowing in the academy.

**Social Theory and Approaches to the Body**

There is an extensive body of conceptual literature within the discipline of sociology on social theory and the body (Featherstone et al., 1991; Shilling, 2003; Turner, 1996). This work on body theorizing has also been cited to support theoretical underpinnings in several research-based investigations on embodiment (Chan, 2002; Cheville, 1997; Simon, 1998). Such interest has helped stimulate inquiry on the relevance and implications of embodiment in regards to practice and learning contexts. This section will provide an overview of social theory approaches to the body that inform an embodied epistemology and conclude with a discussion of underpinnings from Turner’s social theory approach as one of the intersecting orientations used to theoretically frame this investigation of embodiment in the academy.

*Common elements in social theory on the body.* Social theory is the study of the body in society (Shilling, 2003). It approaches embodiment through the view of relationship between the body and society with focus on social processes. As a lens, it explores the impact of social processes on the body and acknowledges the biological, physicality of the body as it intersects with social processes and social relations. Social theory has emerged as a way to view the body in society through a dual approach; naturalist views of the body analyze the body as a biological phenomenon and physical essence while social constructionist views suggest that the body is attached to social meanings and processes (Shilling, 2003). The naturalistic approach places physicality and
the biological essence of the body as the core determinant of a person’s action, self-
identity and social identity from “the idea that human bodies form a basis for, and
contribute towards, social relationships” (Shilling, 2003, p. 37). The social constructionist
approach looks beyond the naturalist analysis of embodiment as a biological essence to
the imprint of social forces. The body’s physicality and biological essence is considered
as intersecting with other units of analysis (e.g., race, gender, culture, sexual orientation,
age, disease and ableness). Thus, embodiment is viewed as a “social product” (Shilling,
2003, p. 63) based on the assumptions that social meanings are inscribed on the body, and
social classifications and forces define, shape, restrict and invent an embodied identity.
Accordingly, it suggests that embodiment should be analyzed as a socially constructed
phenomenon rather than solely as a biological phenomenon.

Examples of social theory’s dualistic approach toward the body revealing a shift
from the naturalist view of a biological essence to the social constructionist view of the
body as socially inscribed in regards to positionality and identity within the academy can
be found in some adult and higher education literature (Davis, 2003; Freedman &
Holmes, 2003; hooks, 2003, O’Farrell et al., 2000; Simmonds, 1999). The following
reflection on embodiment by an African-American woman sociologist exhibits
this dualism in the academy context:

I want to explore the relationship between my body as a social construct and my
experience of it. I want to examine the relationship I have with my body and how
I negotiate, daily, with ‘embodied social situations’… I cannot ignore the fact of
my blackness, even if I wanted to. Neither can my colleagues or students, even if
they wanted to. This makes me vulnerable. In the final analysis, I might be an
academic, but what I carry is an embodied self that is at odds with expectations of who an academic is. (Simmonds, 1999, p. 52)

This type of reflection in the literature from professors on embodied experiences in the academy points to what Palmer (1996) referred to as a need to “further flesh out the teaching body as a fuller social body” (p. 85). Reflections on the lived embodied experiences of professors examined as intersecting with culture, race, ableness, gender, sexual orientation, illness, age, and pregnancy have helped establish the need for a sociocultural orientation within social theory to examine multiculturally-relevant experiences of embodiment; it informs the embedded construction of embodiment as “affected by social relations and institutions … the body is not simply a basis on which society arises, but is itself affected by society” (Shilling, 2003, p. 59).

Shilling (2003), however, notes that while social constructionist views bring attention to the social significance of embodiment “by highlighting the ways in which social roles, meanings, and resources can be seen as determining the body and how it becomes important in society” (p. 63), this position is criticized for its narrow focus on the social importance of embodiment. Shilling (2003) points out that it neglects to recognize and investigate human agency and biological physicality as integral determinants in the construction of embodiment noting, “It is all very well saying that the body is socially constructed, but this tends to tell us little about the specific character of the body. What is it, exactly, that is being constructed?” (p. 9).

Contributions in the literature from other contemporary theoretical approaches of embodiment also emerge and intersect in discursive relation with social theory and feminist philosophy. Grosz (1995), for example, delineated two thematic concentrations
among the various approaches as “inscriptive” and “lived body” (p. 33). The inscriptive approaches examine “the body as a surface on which social law, morality, and values are inscribed” (p. 33) while the lived body approaches view the “the body’s internal or psychic inscription” (p. 33) as a construct of embodiment through the lived experiencing of the body as it becomes meaningful. The distinction between these approaches follows:

Whereas psychoanalysis and phenomenology focus on the body as it is experienced and rendered meaningful, the inscriptive model is more concerned with the processes by which the subject is marked, scarred, transformed, and written upon or constructed by the various regimes of institutional, discursive, and nondiscursive power as a particular kind of body. (Grosz, 1995, p. 33)

Both inscriptive and lived experience approaches of body theorization have been influenced by the revaluation of embodiment through feminist philosophy blending with other emphases.

Contributions through related contemporary approaches are also noteworthy by Foucault and Butler as prominent in social constructionist discourse and contemporary approaches related to feminist philosophy. These approaches are significant for establishing constructs that culturally frame embodied theorizing (Price & Shildrick, 1999). In theorizing the disciplined body as a construct, Foucault, for example, used a politicized analysis of embodiment with the body situated in terms of historical and cultural imprints with “emphasis given to the inescapable relationship between embodiment, power, and knowledge” (Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 218). An inscriptive view of embodiment and culture is also manifest in Butler’s theory of embodiment based on the construct of performativity. Embodiment is analyzed as a “process of becoming”
(Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 414) through normative acts and gestures ascribed from other units of analysis such as culture, gender, sexual orientation, race, ableness, and age. Butler’s performativity examines the development of an embodied identity from a position of paradox in which embodiment is both a fluid, open and often irresolute construct and yet highly subject to normative constraints (Butler, 1999; Price & Shildrick, 1999). Such perspectives stimulate inquiry that merges embodied learning with culture and structural social factors to provide a more expansive consideration of intersecting units of analysis with the body.

**Turner’s social theory.** This section will discuss the underpinnings of Turner’s approach to the body within social theory that helps support framing for this investigation. In response to limitations in accepting either naturalistic or social constructionist approaches within social theory, Turner (1996) developed what he considers to be a “theoretical consolidation” (p. 1) as an approach to reintegrate both frameworks on the body and society by merging assumptions from these dualistic views. Turner’s contributions through this approach on the body and society are prominent in the sociology literature (Featherstone et al., 1991; Shilling, 2003, Turner, 1996) and cited in research-based work on embodiment (Chan, 2002; Cheville, 1997; Simon, 1998) because it represents an approach that makes an “effort to understand the intersecting influences of nature and culture” (Cheville, 1997, p. 152). Cheville (1997), for example, examined intersections among the physical significance of student-athlete bodies with race, class, and culture in an investigation of student-athletes’ embodied learning.

This intersection is representative of Turner’s merged view of naturalistic (biological physicality) and social constructionist (sociocultural) social theory approaches
and is a key reason for including Turner’s social theory as one of the intersecting orientations for framing this study on embodiment. It offers a lens to look at the body with respect to culture and society and simultaneously as part of nature and part of culture (Turner, 1996). It is a significant approach in “the move toward asserting centrality of the body within social theory as a means to understand the complex interrelation between self, culture, and society” (Chan, 2002, p.10). The discourse and investigation of embodiment through theoretical positioning and research most certainly include the significance of culture as an intersecting unit of analysis with the body. This intersection will be discussed in greater detail later in this review and will further substantiate the applicability of underpinnings from Turner’s social theory approach in framing this investigation.

Cognitive Science and Related Influences

An emergence is developing within “a new interdisciplinary matrix” (Varela et al., 1993) of cognitive science that is beginning to take a look at facets of knowledge construction that point to connections with embodiment. Philosophy, neuroscience, and linguistics are examples of discipline areas that have significantly influenced scholarly interest on experiences of embodiment and guided exploration of this phenomenon into the realm of cognitive science in some respects. This section outlines developments through the principles of cognitive science and several supporting influences and discusses Lakoff and Johnson’s conception of an embodied person as one of the three intersecting orientations of this study.

Developments in the cognitive sciences. The grounding of cognitive science developed from a strong Western philosophical and scientific traditional view of learning
deeply rooted in dualistic assumptions between mind and body. The Scientific Revolution with insights by Descartes established the Cartesian dualism of object and subject and mind and body (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). In this separatist view, the reasoning mind and objectivity became privileged in the process of knowing detached from the body and its connectedness with more commonly devalued subjective modes of knowing (Fenwick, 2003). Despite this prevailing emphasis on the rational, disembodied mind, however, emerging work on embodied knowledge is beginning to scrutinize this traditional separatist mind/body paradigm. Within the field of neuroscience, for example, Damasio (1999) and Pert (1997) have pioneered new understandings of embodied knowledge expressly posturing a holistic, interrelated conceptualization of mind and body and revealing implications for cognitive and bio-medical sciences through body/mind linkages in what Pert (1997) referred to as “the new bodymind medicine” (p. 12). Body/mind connectedness particularly with respect to the physiology of emotions has been instrumental in guiding these new understandings and is beginning to surface in investigations of embodiment (Beaudoin, 1999; Mills & Daniluk, 2002).

Also, from philosophical understanding, early insights from Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) phenomenology of perception, in particular, are drawn from and ground several investigations on the nature and essence of embodiment (Colman, 2003; Torres, 2002; Walsh, 2003). Perception and sensorimotor modalities surface in connection with philosophical discussions of embodied knowledge and phenomenological analysis (Bermudez et al., 1998; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Moran, 2000). In these discussions, embodiment is described as “a way of approaching the question of what is distinctive in our knowledge and perception of our bodies” (Bermudez et al.,
with the nature and essence of embodiment explored through its “phenomenological character” (Martin, 1998, p. 267). It refers to knowledge acquired through a perceptual account of bodily sensation as an epistemology via perceptual modalities of experienced awareness. These ideas are key assumptions in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception is explained as a way of thinking that penetrates insight through the study of essences, such as perception and consciousness, in which deep description of embodiment is situated in the lived human experience of being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The construction of embodied knowledge develops through pre-reflective experience illuminated by reflective experience. Pre-reflective experience happens through bodily intentions before cognition and gives us a way “to understand how it is that we normally experience with complete confidence that the world is there” (Moran, 2000, p. 403). Connections are made between mind and body with the mind always embodied through corporeal and sensory relations and information (Grosz, 1995; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Merleau-Ponty (1962) explained:

We have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body. But by thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception. (p. 239)
In other words, “we perceive and receive information of and from the world through our bodies” (Grosz, 1995, p. 86). Hence, this is a most significance piece drawn from this philosophy to approach an understanding of experiences of embodiment.

_Lakoff and Johnson’s embodied person philosophy._ Lakoff and Johnson (1999) developed a new conception of an embodied person through the lens of philosophy and cognitive science. This section details this lens and focuses on the underpinnings from this view that support framing this investigation. Lakoff and Johnson present various levels in which the traditionally rational process of conception builds from the inherently embodied nature of perception and movement in arriving at “embodied reason” (p. 555) as follows:

- **Embodied Concepts:** Our conceptual system is grounded in, neurally makes use of, and is crucially shaped by our perceptual and motor systems.

- **Conceptualization Only Through the Body:** We can only form concepts through the body. Therefore, every understanding that we can have of the world, ourselves, and others can only be framed in terms of concepts shaped by our bodies.

- **Basic-Level Concepts:** These concepts use our perceptual, imaging, and motor systems to characterize our optimal functioning in everyday life. This is the level at which we are maximally in touch with the reality of our environments.

- **Embodied reason:** Major forms of rational inference are instances of sensorimotor inference.

- **Embodied Truth and Knowledge:** Because our ideas are framed in terms of our unconscious embodied perceptual systems, truth and knowledge depend on embodied understanding.

- **Embodied Mind:** Because concepts and reason both derive from, and make use of, the sensorimotor system, the mind is
These levels provide structural elements that could possibly be important as descriptive components for framing an understanding of embodied experiences. Perception and performativity through bodily experience via sensorimotor systems are included as necessary component levels in moving direct experiences of the body from unconscious awareness to conscious embodied awareness. The centrality of perception and sensorimotor experience in this view draws from Merleau-Ponty’s influence.

In addition to these levels, forms of embodiment are delineated in this conception as follows: phenomenological embodiment is used to refer to forms of embodiment presented by image schemas with our bodies through bodily projections, orientations, and inhabiting space (e.g., spatial-relations with objects such as front and back, use and movement of body parts such as pushing, pulling, and balance) as we go through daily experiences and interactions with our environment; and neural embodiment is used to refer to “the neural mechanisms that give rise to concepts” (p. 36) (e.g., neural circuitry tied to color concepts). Cheville’s work (1997), in looking at “how learners come to understand their bodies” (p. 197) through cognitive structures, bodily experience, and schematic frameworks and “how they are allowed to experience space, time, and motion” (p. 197), exemplifies research suggesting the suitability of Lakoff and Johnson’s embodied person philosophy for framing this investigation on embodiment. Given a focus on the how of experiencing embodied learning in the research questioning, in order to explore what happens to students as they engage in embodied experiences through subjective descriptions and how they derive meaning from these experiences, Lakoff and Johnson’s lens offers potential structures to inform this questioning.
Lastly, this particular lens suggests a new understanding of reason that brings attention to and is more compatible with the more subjective nature of embodied experience and mind/body connectedness. The traditional philosophical view of reason in cognitive science includes such abilities as logical inference, problem-solving, and evaluative, analytical thinking, typically considered as disembodied. The view of Lakoff and Johnson (1999), however, suggests that reason is far more encompassing and “arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experiences” (p. 4) and includes the following underpinnings: “reason is not completely conscious, but mostly unconscious; reason is not purely literal, but largely metaphorical and imaginative; reason is not dispassionate, but emotionally engaged” (p. 4). Their concept of an embodied person provides a view to frame the whole person in this investigation, connected mind and body, with embodiment playing a role in meaning “grounded in and through our bodies” (p. 6).

In summary, this section of the literature review presented the theoretical framing for this investigation through three intersecting orientations to discussions of embodiment. It also described the assumptions and related influences and how the theoretical underpinnings of these intersecting orientations suitably situated the framing. Next, this chapter will shift discussion to research directions within studies of embodiment that help establish the basis of embodiment within learning spaces.

Research Insights and Directions on Embodiment

The diversity in theorizing, assumptions and approaches toward the body and the definitional ambiguity of embodiment produces a complexity in researching embodiment described as “a complexity that feeds back into questions of the body and the self”
(Bermudez et al., 1998, p. 1) is explained as follows:

Another, independent source of difficulty is the fact that we have many ways of using, being conscious of, and representing our own bodies. Their nature and their interrelations are very much open to debate. An account of the relationship between self-consciousness and the relations we have to our bodies must respect the complexities in each of them. (p. 1)

These complexities have produced a gap to be addressed through research that examines embodied accounts, representations and interpretations with methodological approaches that delve deep into the core of embodied experiences to yield further insights.

In reviewing the literature, the extent of research-based work specifically on embodiment is quite limited given a need to address the complexities of this phenomenon as a way of knowing. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to gain an understanding of the nature of research specifically on embodiment through an examination of the studies that do exist. It is important to note here that this section only reviews research studies specifically related to embodiment. There are other studies that are related to body *image* or other related areas; these will not be considered in this section, but will be discussed in the third section in light of their insights for conceptualizing and relating embodied experience to educational practice. To a limited extent, this second section will also include some consideration of descriptions of authors talking about their own experiences of embodiment in narrative form, as well as how such discussions connect to theorizing or conceptualizing embodiment. Questions addressed by a review of this research on embodiment included: What is the nature of research on embodiment and how is it contextualized? What are the predominant
directions of researching embodiment? What are the methodological considerations of researching experiences of embodiment?

*The Research Studies: An Overview*

The research studies included in this review were selected because of their purposeful relevance and applicability in providing research directions and insights in response to these questions. There were four databases used through a computerized search to locate appropriate studies: Dissertation Abstracts, Education Abstracts Full Text (Wilson), ERIC, and ProQuest Psychology Journals. Health and Safety Science Abstracts and Medline (PubMed) were also perused but eliminated because of the predominant medical orientation in this literature not related or sufficiently applicable to the purpose of this review. The use of terms as search engines was narrowed to embodiment and somatic as most relevant with the output of sources including more than 1,700 results. While emphasis focused on embodiment as the term for this search process, somatic was included since a blur exists in the distinctions between embodied learning and somatic learning in some of the literature. These results were reduced to only 20 studies primarily by applying the criteria that embodiment as a concept needed to be consistent with the definition and interpretation of embodiment used in this study as a view of constructing knowledge that engages the body as a site of learning through bodily experiences and inhabiting one’s body through being-in-the-world. The definitional ambiguity of embodiment and its multiple divergent uses was highly evident in this significant reduction. Also, studies were selected based on either direct or indirect relations of embodiment and somatic terms within formal and informal learning contexts. Finally,
the results were narrowed to studies conducted within the last ten years with the exception of a dissertation by Knox (1992).

This section will begin with an overview of the core research studies conducted on embodiment within the selected literature and describe the nature of this research for developing an understanding of embodied experiences. The selected studies included three theses (Glaser, 2002; Johnson, 2003; Viramontes, 2003), 12 dissertations (Bruce, 2004; Chan, 2000; Cheville, 1997; Colman, 2003; Knox, 1992; Lord, 2002; Ogden, 2003; Simon, 1998; Torres, 2002; Walsh, 2003; Yahrmatter, 1998; Yu, 2004), and five published research studies (Beaudoin, 1999; Cheville, 2005; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Nikitina, 2003; Somerville; 2004). All of the research-based work is qualitative except for a quantitative dissertation study (Yu, 2004) examining language acquisition and the connection between linguistics and embodiment. The methodologies of the qualitative research studies are as follows: there are four studies using grounded theory and some elements of phenomenology (Colman, 2003; Knox, 1992; Ogden, 2003; Simon, 1998); two studies use narrative inquiry (Beaudoin, 1999; Bruce, 2004); Cheville (1997; 2005) used ethnography; three studies are phenomenological designs (Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Torres, 2002; Walsh, 2003); two designs are case studies incorporating elements of phenomenology (Chan, 2000; Nikitina, 2003); Somerville (2004) combined methodological approaches of narrative, ethnography, and phenomenology; Lord (2002) used grounded theory with an action research design; and Yahrmatter’s (1998) study is hermeneutic research. Each thesis is also situated in the qualitative paradigm drawn from narratives and phenomenology in approaching an understanding of embodiment.
Embodiment in Context

Colman (2003) expressed that “our experience is always embodied, always worldly, and always situated” (p. 4). Thus, embodied learning always takes place in a context. This section will explore the two most visible learning contexts situating this research on embodiment: the relational context (in the sense of the individual in relation with others and the environment) and the internalization context (in the sense of how the individual internalizes embodied learning with him or herself). Studies will be discussed and positioned in each of these contexts. Also, since subjective understandings and interpretations of meanings are foundational in this mostly qualitative research, subjective dimensions of embodied experiences will also be included in this discussion.

The relational context. Considerable evidence of embodied learning in investigations suggests a collective nature, interdependence, and interplay in social processes as the relational context in the research. All of the studies in this review except for six (Beaudoin, 1999; Bruce, 2004; Ogden, 2003; Viramontes, 2003; Walsh, 2003; Yu, 2004) are threaded in this context. The importance of the relational context often surfaces in experiential learning in adult and higher education.

Research by Somerville (2004) that situates body/place relations as a way to understand embodied learning in the workplace is a striking example to begin this discussion on contextualizing embodiment as relational. Somerville explored how miners learned workplace safety for survival in a highly dangerous work setting through embodied experiences in body/place relations in the mines “where one’s survival depends on sensing minute changes in sounds, smell, feel of air” (Somerville, 2004, p. 60). The embodied knowledge of miners known as pit sense is the way that miners inhabit their
place in the mine and assess their safety while situated in the mine. This way of knowing hinges not only on keen sensory awareness of one’s surroundings in a relationship with the mines, but also on reliance with other miners inhabiting the same place in the mines. This reliance points to the relational context embedded in pit sense described as follows:

It is a profoundly embodied knowledge and can only be learned through body/place relations. It involves highly individual learning through the senses but at the same time an elevated sense of teamwork and trust where they depend for their lives on a team they will often not be able to see or hear. They talk about learning pit sense from working beside experienced miners and from their own experience. (p. 60)

This research features the significance of body in place and relation in place in understanding the nature of being situated in bodily experience to develop embodied knowledge.

There is a similar team sense paralleling embodied learning among student-athletes in research by Cheville (1997; 2005) also setting the relational context in this investigation. Just as the miners described a sense of embodied knowing in part through reliance on each other down in the mines even though not always being able to see or hear each other, the women student-athletes at the center of Cheville’s study described their sense of embodied learning drawing from collective body/place relations through bodily experiences on a basketball team. Through a reflexive ethnography grounded in the theoretical framework of situated cognition, Cheville (1997; 2005) explored dimensions of learning as an embodied activity among student-athletes focused on 12 participants from female student-athletes, coaches, and athletic support staff members.
This exploration looked at bodily experience in place intersecting with cultural influences evidenced in intercollegiate athletic participation. Findings suggested a highly relational aspect of embodied learning through participatory involvement as a member of a basketball team and “the extent to which cultural place shapes bodily and conceptual orientation” (p. 167). Bodily experience is situated in place within space containment of a basketball court (e.g., designated paint space on the court for players in the post position underneath the basket) involving “the collective codification of schematic orientations to time and space” (p. 64). It reveals “intense conceptual engagement” (p. 64) among players as “a dialogical investment in shared subjective meaning and bodily knowledge” (p. 64) weaving together embodied learning situated in the direct experience of participation as relationally contextualized. Regarding a learned embodied court sense of place, Cheville (1997) concluded, “Theoretically, the investigation recognizes a mind-body partnership, thereby emphasizing that what one learns is inarguably a condition of how and where one learns” (p. 49).

Cheville referred to the relational sense of embodied learning among student-athletes as embodied intersubjectivity “linked to a sensitivity to otherness” (p. 59), like the pit sense of miners, where players talked about relying on each other through a sense of being oriented to one another “as part of a relational equation that is a team” (p. 101). One player commented, “In a sense, everybody has to know what everybody else does” (p. 57). Another player remarked about having a sense of where a teammate was on the court, “I did not even have to look where she was. If I threw the ball, I knew she was going to be there because you get their moves, their speeds, their cuts … You can always depend on them being there” (p. 59). Thus, undoubtedly, players arrived at an
understanding of learning one’s body as an athlete “according to a collective ethos” (p. 104).

Two dissertation studies (Colman, 2003; Simon, 1998) looked to interrelations in generating theoretical understandings of conceptualizations and meanings of embodiment focused on the subjectively-oriented centrality of lived body experiences. Colman (2003) theorized about interrelations among embodiment, meaning and subjectivity in the construction of knowledge with the purpose of enriching “existing accounts of the socio-historical situatedness of different bodies as subjects through a philosophical examination of the role of embodiment in the constitution of subjectivity” (p. vii). Views of embodiment from the psychoanalytical thought of Luce Irigaray and phenomenological thought of Merleau Ponty were drawn from by Colman to frame and develop her contention of a significant interplay between embodiment and subjectivity. Her notion of embodiment transgressed traditional assumptions of mind/body and object/subject dualisms.

Research by Simon (1998) also placed emphasis on subjectivity in theorizing a way to reconceptualize subjectivity with learning as embodied through an ecological foundation for adult learning. The findings revealed that in “highlighting the contextual and phenomenological nature of the learning experience, including its cultural and tacit levels, the importance of embodiment to the theoretical and practical dimensions of adult education emerges” (p. 2). As with Colman’s purpose, Simon’s study also intended to approach a theoretical understanding of embodiment that reconceptualized the traditional separatist view of mind/body and Cartesian subject/object dichotomy. She stated her purpose as follows:
to examine the construction of subjectivity, historically and culturally, and to offer an alternative conceptualization that re-embeds the subject within the body, culture, and the natural environment … I propose to move toward an ecological foundation for adult learning that grounds experience in relationship and re-embodies subjectivity and learning. (p. 11-12)

Simon theoretically arrived at an ecological foundation for adult learning formulated through subjective understandings of embodiment. This conceptualization was grounded in interdependent, participatory relationships with the natural environment defining ecological subjectivity “as a mode of perception, a perspective, and a process whereby the learner is viewed phenomenologically, embodied, and culturally constituted and constituting” (p. 21).

Furthermore, within relational learning contexts, a subjectively-oriented connection is found between emotions and bodily experiencing as a way of knowing in some of the research. Mills and Daniluk (2002), for example, in exploring the experience of dance therapy among five women survivors of child sexual abuse found a significant connection between emotions and bodily experience that facilitated profound change and healing for these women. Findings revealed that memories and corresponding emotions were retrieved through bodily expressions in dance movements in a therapeutic process of self-discovery, personal growth, and increased emotional awareness. The following reflections from participants are examples of this:

I knew somehow my body would tell me the truth … the surprise was how deeply my body felt the things that happened to me … for the first time I understood what body memory means. Another woman had a similar realization: Dance
therapy was one of the first experiences of discovering how much was stored in
my body … I discovered that there were whole aspects of my body and my
experiences that I hadn’t gone into … it was a powerful way of getting connected
to myself … As expressed by one participant, It’s being able to move and show
the emotion in some way that helps the words come out … I don’t have to just say
how I feel, I can show how I feel. (¶ 22-23)

Embodied learning was placed in a relational context of a therapeutic community via
group dance therapy experiences wherein participants engaged in dance movements
together and shared reflections on bodily experiences. Findings regarding this relational
aspect suggested positive benefits (e.g., surrounding bearing witness) and negative
impacts (e.g., feeling fearful and vulnerable from disclosing) in the therapeutic
experiences of participants as follows:

   Many talked about their heightened self-consciousness in sharing their
   emotional worlds through such a physical medium and about the difficulty of
   being “observed,” especially given their personal discomfort with living and
   moving in their own bodies. They emphasized the need for trust, underscored the
   power of this type of work, and emphasized their readiness to work within a
   group context. They also reflected very positively on the benefits of working in a
   group, describing the deep emotional connection that seemed to emerge
   spontaneously with others in the group in the absence of speech and their feelings
   of unity as they moved together in a synchronized fashion. The women also spoke
   about the therapeutic power of bearing witness to the experiences of other group
   members, and of others bearing witness to their experience. (¶ 58)
Also in relational context bringing attention to the affective domain in connection with embodied learning, Lord (2002), using action research through a grounded theory approach “to explore and understand the role of somatic education in the experience of well-being” (p. 32), developed a holistic somatic perspective of well-being. Lord’s approach examined the potential positive impact on well-being specifically through the field of somatic and embodiment practices. This study examined the impact of a four week series of classes (four classes held one hour per consecutive week) in embodiment practices offered on a university campus for faculty and staff through an existing staff wellness program with 17 average participants per class. The classes included yoga, qigong, and other stress management techniques with thematic focus on awareness, breathing, stretching/flexibility, and spiritual dimensions. Findings revealed that embodiment practices had a positive impact on increasing participant well-being (e.g., perceived sense of relaxation, stress management, mental concentration, energy level and vitality, sense of greater freedom). The research also found, however, that even though participants perceived and experienced positive effects, they were short-term.

Furthermore, the emerged multidimensional somatic theory of well-being, known as Experiential Well-Being, was delineated as “the personal experience of, or perceived sense of, wholeness or wellness, satisfaction and contentment in the domains of mind, body, and spirit.” (p. 29). This theory also includes attention to the internalization of embodied experience.

As another example, through a hermeneutic project with the purpose of investigating the nature, features, and implications of embodied experience, Yahrmatter (1998) focused on perception and its interplay with bodily experiencing by exploring
emotions, place, and motility as key structures of embodied experience. Ontology of embodiment drawing from Merleau-Ponty’s work on perception was formulated to include emotional expression as a significant subjective feature of bodily experiencing. Yahrmatter arrived at the following notion of embodied experiencing through this investigation as an ontology of embodiment: “The stream of experience includes and encompasses, all at once, thought, emotion, sensation, perception, movement, orientation, and culture. Concurrently, this is thought, the equivalent of embodied experience as such” (p. 9).

**Internalization in context.** How the embodied experience is internalized in context with embodied learning accessed through a more personal, individualized level of engagement is also the focus of some researchers. Self-directed learning, self-study, and self-engagement signify the general nature of embodied learning in the internalization process in several studies.

A study by Beaudoin (1999) investigated levels of integration of embodied learning techniques in daily life used by six adult participants experienced in body-centered approaches to alleviate emotional distress, relieve some type of discomfort and enhance wellness. Positioning the internalization context was a focus on the self-directed embodied learning of participants through personal choice of activities and level and extent of engagement in daily life circumstances. Even though it is not clear in the research whether or not all participants engaged in individual somatic practices, what is evident is an exploration on individual levels of integration of embodied learning in daily life with extensive narratives revealing individual engagement. Findings revealed integrated levels of willingness to learn and experience body-centered techniques through
personal commitment and heightened awareness, developed identification with perceived benefits of somatic techniques, and internalization in which participants incorporated somatic learning experiences as part of their lifestyle through a course of action based on wellness benefits. As an example of this, a participant who suffered from migraines developed a somatic technique to alleviate migraine pain:

When she felt a migraine coming, she immediately stopped her daily activity to check for potential stressors in the environment around her. She would then concentrate on her breathing to reduce any stress she may have felt and would do movements with her neck and shoulders (Beaudoin, 1999, ¶ 11).

The most helpful elements of embodied learning were found to include doing some type of movement (e.g., Eutonia Method, Alexander and Feldenkrais techniques, yoga), modifying body posture, mindfulness, and developing a quality of presence. Benefits of embodied learning through identified levels of integration included “feeling happy, having a new attitude, enjoying life’s pleasures, having a new way to look at life’s difficulties, welcoming life’s events differently, feeling changes, feeling the reduction of tension or stress, and noticing an overall feeling of wellness” (¶ 8). Thus, subjectivity was apparent in both the relational context and the internalization context of embodied learning in this study with manifestations in affective dimensions and bodily experiences.

Several research projects focused on how embodied learning is internalized in light of contextual factors place emphasis on the internalization process by significantly incorporating self-study in the research design (Bruce, 2004; Johnson, 2003; Viramontes, 2003; Walsh, 2003). For example, Walsh (2003) with the purpose of exploring the felt or lived experience of embodiment, used a self-study process known as phenomenological
doing to access rich, deeply personal accounts of analytical reflection, meanings and interpretations from embodied responses of resonance drawn from an aesthetic experience (line of poetry), the single word of “mercy” spontaneously surfacing from imagery, and an image of the sacred heart appearing in a dream. Each experience was used by the researcher as an avenue “to make conscious some of the embodied response which resides below our awareness, offer depth and largeness to our living” (p. 59). The body’s immersion in experience and responses were described through images and experiences of resonance. Findings emphasized the resonant, lived-experience of the body on personal and practitioner levels stating that if we find our own body’s resonance “new facets are extended to our perceptions and capacities for understanding, and so, we too are enlarged in our experiences of living” (p. 159). It should be noted that while this study focuses on internalization, the findings associated with resonance point to an essence of one’s interrelatedness in the world through an embodied being-in-the-world.

As a final example of research focused more on internalization, Ogden’s (2003) work was directed at developing a psychotherapy approach integrating somatic techniques to stimulate sensorimotor processing with emotional and cognitive processing as a treatment intervention for treating effects of trauma on the body. Clients are individually instructed on somatic-based methods (e.g., somatic awareness through body tracking and contact, practicing mindfulness, somatic movement practices, and completing actions evoked in trauma on the body). The intervention is intended to alleviate movement disorders resulting from body trauma with emphasis directed at
integrating the various somatic approaches within an individual level of tolerance and comfort. Findings demonstrated that this integrative approach toward treatment was particularly effective for individuals suffering from post traumatic stress disorders (e.g., flat affect, frozen states, emotional reactivity).

Research Directions on Embodiment

This section will discuss the relevance and use of several predominant research directions emergent in research and articles of theoretical and conceptual significance on embodiment including narratives, phenomenology, and methodological considerations.

Narrative direction. Riessman (1993) described narratives as deep personal representations of life experiences explaining, “Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself … how respondents impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and action in their lives” (p. 1-2). Some of the literature reveals that narratives, in particular, have provided an avenue to reflect on embodied experiences. Interpreting the telling about experience drives the research process in narrative analysis (Patton, 2002). Phillion (2002) identified three essential qualities of a narrative inquirer in approaching the interpretive process: “thinking narratively” in which experience is viewed as a fluid rather than fixed, contextualized construct; “being in the midst of lives” which centers research in the daily living experiences of participants; and “making meaning of experience in relationship” which involves understanding relationships with participants (p. 537-538). These qualities point to research potential for accessing multiple dimensions of self and identity intersecting with other structures such as race, gender, ableness, and culture in more complex, in-depth representations of embodied experiences.
While there are few formal research studies done on embodiment, there is an array of published pieces where the author is describing in narrative form personal experiences with the body in a particular context. To me, this is research though perhaps not in the classical sense. Particularly relevant to my own study, there are many narrative excerpts by professors that exemplify reflections on their embodied experiences in the academy where embodiment intersects with other structures (e.g., ableness, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, illness, age, and pregnancy) and point to implications for practice (Davis, 2003; Freedman & Holmes, 2003; hooks, 2003; O’Farrell et al., 2000; McWilliam, 1996; McWilliam, 1999; McWilliam & Taylor, 1996; Palmer, 1996; Simmonds, 1999; Smith, 2003; Vick, 1996; Wallace-Sanders, 2003).

Several excerpts from this literature follow as narrative examples. One professor reflecting on ableness in relation to his condition of dwarfism:

And yet I am my body – it has shaped my personhood more than any other single factor in my life. I carry my body with each word in class. I speak with a confidence that comes of having walked on braced legs for years … I also work with a compassion for my students born of years of uncompassionate stares and the kind hands of my parents … As my students struggle to write, as they face that fear of failure in a task so many of them hate, I need only respond as my body has taught me to: by encouraging patience but intense resolve, by pushing them but not without praising them. My body has created who I am in the classroom. (Smith, 2003, p. 31)

There are examples of people of color referring to the color of their skin as a fact of their embodied lived experience. Wallace-Sanders (2003), for example, an African-
American woman regarding her lived experiences of embodiment through pregnancy as a professor in the academy:

The academy largely insists on the body’s erasure because the body is the undeniable reminder of our private selves. Our bodies betray truths about our private selves that confound professional interaction … For academic women, the pregnant body emphasizes gender in an unsettling way… Regardless of how a teacher became pregnant, students will see her as both sexual and maternal, which complicates and can undermine her authority. She is the embodied evidence of sexual reproduction; suddenly the teaching body is fragmented into the sexual and reproductive parts of its whole… Faculty of color, and female faculty of color in particular, are often very self-conscious of their bodies in the classroom. They are aware that their bodies bear the ontological markings of race and gender difference as opposed to the typical authoritative bodies of white men. Erasing those differences does not end these tensions. (p. 188-189)

Clark (2001) noted that individuals are instinctive storytellers. The telling about experience revealed in these excerpts points to storytelling as a characteristic of narratives useful for reflecting on embodied experiences. Reflection by personal narrative provides a way to explore experiences in an expressive mode of learning in trying to make sense out of them. For most individuals, because it “is something with which we’re already familiar and comfortable” (Clark, 2001, p. 91), it can provide a natural, more at ease way to talk about embodied experiences with less difficulty and awkwardness.

From a more formal research perspective, turning to work by Johnson (2003) and Beaudoin (1999), these investigations on embodiment are examples using narrative
methodology within the context of adult learning. Through autobiographical and collaborative study, Johnson explored embodied experiences of herself and four other colleagues as somatic practitioners in the field of somatic education to gain greater understanding of the experience of the lived body and engagement of embodied learning. An extensive journaling process was used “to transform knowing into telling” (Johnson, 2003, p. 13) through stories structuring narratives. Narrative interpretation yielded themes associated with deep personal experience and affirmative connection to engagements with embodied learning. The themes revealed implications for professional practice for somatic educators such as “commitment to honour and witness” (p. 82) through presence in the teacher/student relationship. In the study by Beaudoin (1999), previously discussed in this section, data collected from 70 narrative stories of integration from repeated extensive interviews conducted over six months with six adult participants was analyzed to interpret particular ways in which participants self-directed, applied and integrated embodied learning using somatic techniques in their daily lives to enhance wellness. As earlier detailed, findings evinced stages of integrating somatic learning into daily life among participants through varied processes.

*Phenomenological direction.* Another distinct avenue of direction in the discourse surrounding research on embodiment includes phenomenology. Phenomenology is a way to get at the nature and essence of a phenomenon as a lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Patton (2002) explained that phenomenology addresses the foundational question: “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (p. 104). Looking back to early foundational work on phenomenological research in adult education,
Stanage (1987) contended that phenomenological investigation constitutes “a human science” (p. 41) defined as “an orderly and systematic investigation and description of a person’s (and persons’) felt experiences of direct phenomena through the various forms in which selected and relevant phenomena may appear or be manifested” (p. 41).

Research using phenomenology reveals that it approaches embodiment as lived body experiences in trying to understand derived meanings from such experiences. In the theoretical and conceptual literature, Marshall (1999), Somerville (2004), and Yorks and Kasl (2002) bring attention to phenomenological approaches on experience within the multiple ways of knowing discourse relevant to embodiment. Yorks and Kasl (2002) explained, “A phenomenologically-based perspective on experience highlights the role of presentational expressions of knowing in a way that suggests how these expressive ways of knowing can be used in balance with other ways of knowing” (p. 190).

Descriptions of experience are at the core of phenomenological methodologies. While some of the research uses phenomenology as the method of analysis (Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Torres, 2002; Walsh, 2003), other studies used elements of phenomenology in conjunction with another design to analyze the data (Chan, 2000; Colman, 2003; Knox, 1992; Nikitina, 2003; Ogden, 2003; Simon, 1998). Mills and Daniluk (2002), for example, used phenomenology in exploring the lived experiences and meanings drawn from engagement in dance therapy for women dealing with issues of childhood sexual abuse noting, “Indeed, the women in this study underscored the importance of being able to move “out of their heads” and past their cognitive defenses, so that they could begin to attend to their bodily sensations, feelings, and impulses” (p. 85).
As an example of an integrated design combining phenomenology within a case study, Chan (2002) used assumptions from Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception to guide phenomenological analysis of teachers’ experiences in cross-cultural movements to facilitate greater cultural awareness, sensitivity and competence in the context of multicultural teacher education. Thematic content in data analysis from participant reflections on experiences centered on perceptual phenomena consistent with Merleau-Ponty’s perceptual assumptions of active, direct experience of being-in-the-world. Through an investigation of experiences of embodied engagement in cultural movement practices, ontological consideration was situated in “phenomenological reality: the living body as a subject in relation to the world, and somatic knowledge: knowing as an embodied inside-out experience of being-in-the-world” (Chan, 2002, p. 179).

Methodology considerations. The focus that emerges through research directions from narrative and phenomenological accounts of embodied experience is involvement in some sort of dialoguing for describing this experience through a methodological approach addressing what Marshall (1999) noted as the need “to pay more attention to naïve accounts of experiences” (p. 73). Research directions and findings suggest that talking about ordinary experiences of embodiment in daily life is a way to grasp an understanding of embodied insights. A somewhat perplexing level of uneasiness and difficulty in communicating an understanding of embodiment presents a formidable methodological consideration in designing research to elicit insightful understandings on embodied experiences. Marshall (1999), Somerville (2004), and others most certainly suggest that narrative and phenomenological directions are particularly promising for
developing understandings of lived bodily experiences and derived meanings on embodiment.

Somerville (2004) has also brought attention to the need to establish methodological research direction in line with embodied theorizations. She focused on recommendations and the need for establishing congruence between methodology and theoretical stance in qualitative research designs on embodiment. In providing an example of this, through an intensive journaling process stemming from descriptions of lived experiences of embodiment in a women’s peace camp in Australia, Somerville (1999) immersed her experiences of embodiment within different landscapes or contexts of relatedness through the process of writing for telling about experiences. She centered her reflective writings from narrative accounts in embodied theorizing from feminist discourse explaining that it is necessary for research methodologies “to bring the lived body into discursive relation with theoretical formulations of the body” (Somerville, 2004, p. 49). Somerville’s theoretical and conceptual insights on this direction are particularly valuable considerations given gathering interest in exploring the body within learning contexts pointing toward innovative approaches to learning beyond traditional paradigms. In line with this direction, Ross (2000) noted, “We are currently searching intensely for new theoretical models and methods for addressing the production, structure, and exchange of knowledge”(p. 28). Given the limited research literature base that specifically gets at the experience of embodiment, clearly there is a need for further research on experiences of embodiment as another way of knowing.
Conceptualizations, Manifestations and Implications of Embodied Experience

There is an extensive literature base that explores the wide array of conceptualizations, manifestations, and implications of embodied experience within its complexities in trying to more tangibly understand the meanings of such expressions, from a wide variety of fields. The last section reviewed the research literature that focuses specifically on embodiment as it is defined in this study. In addition to that literature, this section will also draw on some research about the body that is different but related to the embodiment literature. The purpose of this section is to review the literature, research-based and theoretical and conceptual, that points to the emergent revaluing of embodiment as a way of knowing and that informs an understanding of the conceptualizations, manifestations, and implications of embodied experience. Questions addressed by this section of the literature review included: How has embodiment emerged as a revalued way of knowing? How and where is embodiment conceived of, manifested, and experienced? What are the implications of embodiment as a way of knowing?

Emergence of Revaluing Embodiment

Much of the literature on embodiment includes segments of discussion on movement from historical views of the body toward more contemporary views to situate the development of embodiment. This section will trace the points of emphasis within these discussions that help establish an understanding of the progression and nature of the emergence of revaluing embodiment as a way of knowing.

The process of knowing in ancient times began with value placed on subjective ways of knowing connected to the natural world and rooted within more bodily-oriented,
internal processes such as emotion and sensing (Clark, 2001). However, a most distinct shift from this view took place that cemented devaluing the body in the process of knowing through the rise of reason put forth by the Scientific Revolution. The Cartesian dualistic assumptions of a split mind and body and subject/object dichotomy became rooted in the structure of Western thought. This value on a rational approach to knowing established the position that “learning is largely transacted as a disembodied, rational, and competence-based activity” (Simon, 1998, p. 14). Underpinnings from the Scientific Revolution on conceptions of learning became firmly rooted in Western epistemology (Beckett & Morris, 2001). The experiencing body became absent as a way of knowing. Research by Simon (1998) in particular places considerable attention on this “historical devaluation of the body in learning” (p. 17) in an investigation that developed an ecological foundation toward adult learning that reconceptualizes subjectivity and embodiment as valuable in learning.

Also of significance in understanding historical views of the body, in the eighteenth century, theories of race and gender became profound doctrines for “a chain of being” (Schiebinger, 1999, p. 22) that set the stage of racial and sexual differences among human bodies. Scholars cite this work as scientific racism and scientific sexism noting the flawed assumptions of anatomists and anthropologists in these early times (Schiebinger, 1999). Even so, it would take considerable effort through emerging understandings of the body to shake core assumptions of views on the body established early on within the scientific community.

Cheville (2005) outlined the emergence of embodiment as a construct through historical progressions noting influences such as Darwinian evolution, Galton’s eugenic
research on body phenotypes and developments in microbiology, and interest in the body in culture positioned within the nature-nurture theoretical debate. Over the past two decades, growing interest on the connectedness of mind and body has shifted some attention and stimulated resurgence on looking to the body as a site of learning (Chan, 2002; Cheville, 2005). Contributions across disciplines and philosophies have led to “interdisciplinary discourse on the body” (Weiss & Haber, 1999, p. xiii) including influences from feminist theory (Grosz, 1995; Michelson, 1996; Price & Shildrick, 1999), neuroscience (Damasio, 1999; Pert, 1997), anthropology (Csordas, 1994), medical anthropology (Schepfer-Hughes & Lock, 1998), social theory (Turner, 1996), cognitive science (Johnson, 1987; 1999; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Varela et al., 1993), and linguistics (Yu, 2004). The study of somatics is another area informing developments on embodiment. Acknowledging the historical absent presence of the body in learning, work by Chan (2002), in particular, highlighted a shift in focus toward revaluing the body in Western thought. It brought attention to the significance of the interrelatedness and unity of mind, body, and relating to the world grounded in Eastern philosophies and Asian theory and practice closely tied to somatics.

Emerging contemporary understandings of mind/body connectedness increasingly have focused attention on the body’s importance in learning. Ross (2000) stated, “The twentieth century has made significant strides in moving the body into a more central cultural position as society has become more comfortable with issues of fitness, health, and sexuality” (p. 28). She continued:

Yet the thinking body is at the intersection of key concerns in education, society, and cognition. The body is likely to become increasingly important in the era
ahead – the thinking body in particular. Our cognitive processes gather data through the body – its senses, sensibilities, and physical dimensions. (p. 31)

This section has traced some of the most significant influences on views toward the body and knowing and the emergence of revaluing embodiment in learning. By situating the development of embodiment with knowledge construction, this discussion gave an overview of growing attention through theoretical and disciplinary stances for discovering the possibilities of embodied learning and what it might suggest for practice.

Conceptualizations and Manifestations of Embodiment

The nature of embodiment has been referred to as highly challenging, complex, mysterious, ambiguous, and paradoxical (Moran, 2000). Likewise, the literature on embodiment clearly establishes that perplexities exist in trying to understand how it is conceived of and manifested as a phenomenon of study. This section will discuss conceptualizations and manifestations of embodied experience evident in both psychological and sociological perspectives in bodies of literature that inform teaching and learning through an embodied epistemology. In essence, the orientations of these discussions exist on a continuum of emphasis from individual-level, psychological orientations to social-interpersonal level, sociological perspectives. Some of literature exploring how embodiment is conceived of and evidenced in learning extends efforts to not only understand the body’s relation to knowledge construction and learning, but also to examine other units of analysis (e.g., gender, culture, race, ableness, sexual orientation, power) as they intersect with lived body experience (Csordas, 1994; Freedman & Holmes, 2003; Price & Shildrick, 1999; Somerville, 2004; Weiss & Haber, 1999). With these comments in mind, the following discussion will begin with a consideration of how
the embodied experience is conceptualized and evidenced in health-related constructs, then in discussions of experiential learning and in adult and higher education.

**Health-related constructs.** Looking at this psychological-sociological continuum, beginning with conceptual literature related to theories of health promotion research and practice, both individual-level and social-level paradigms are discussed in a transdisciplinary approach to conceptualize embodied learning applications (DiClemente et al., 2002). The individual-level paradigm is mostly expressed in health promotion theorizing and practice. However, key constructs of embodied knowledge influencing health behaviors also fall either along a continuum or in stages stretching beyond an individual-level emphasis to one that recognizes the interpersonal-level of sociocultural environmental dynamics and variables impacting health attitudes, behaviors, and practices (DiClemente et al., 2002; Glanz et al., 2002).

The interpersonal-level paradigm “conceptualizes the individual enmeshed in a complex system of influences that ultimately shape health behaviors” (DiClemente et al., 2002, p. 7). A distinct focus within the majority of health education and wellness literature at this level related to embodiment is directed at theory, research and clinical practice in two major areas; one has a sociocultural focus while the other places emphasis on the individual.

The first area of focus is on researching the intersection of sociocultural structures and body image (e.g., Cash et al., 2004; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Haworth-Hoeppner, 2000; Pelletier et al., 2004). This focus reveals the significant impact of sociocultural forces on body image. In a quantitative study, Cash et al. (2004), for example, investigated social factors in the development of body image among 103 men
and 125 women college students by examining the role of interpersonal experiences in relation to multidimensional elements of body image constructs. This research confirmed that body image is a social construct and found that it is “reciprocally related to how people experience their interactions with others” (p. 90).

Attitudes and perceptions hinging on the components of “evaluation (e.g., body satisfaction), investment (e.g., appearance self-schemas and the importance of internalized appearance ideals), and affect (e.g., body image emotions in specific situations)” (Cash et al., 2004, p. 89-90) converge to conceptualize body image in which sociocultural norms and values distinctly shape and direct such perceptions and attitudes. Cultural standards beset with the quest to meet expectations of the dominant culture have produced influences not only with negative physiological consequences (e.g., eating disorders, cosmetic surgery complications), but also with psychosocial repercussions involving body esteem and body consciousness. Furthermore, social and cultural standards of comparison defined by dominant White culture present an ideal objectified body image for women based on attractiveness and thinness that is far more difficult to attain than expectations of body shape and muscularity for men (Haworth-Hoeppner, 2000).

Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) compiled findings from extensive research studies on body image revealing significant cultural differences in body image among Whites, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinas. Examples of key findings are: overall, African American women indicated greater body satisfaction than women of other cultures possibly from “the flexible and multidimensional body ideals promoted in black culture” (Celio et al., 2002, p. 235) and African American men tended to be as
satisfied with body image as White men and indicated less dissatisfaction than women (Celio et al., 2002); Asian American body images seem influenced by traditional cultural values of collectivism, perfectionism, maintaining modesty and concealment of negative emotions with a study on the influence of Asian cultural values on body image revealing that “the need for social approval predicted eating disorders” (Kawamura, 2002, p. 244) while other research insights found body image dissatisfaction with racial features stemming from racism through Western cultural exposure; and for Latina women, body image is significantly shaped by traditional values through cultural fatalism defining the feminine role “by submissiveness, self-sacrifice, and restraint” (Altabe & O’Garo, 2002, p. 251) related to greater body dissatisfaction from unrealistic perceptions of thinness. This type of research is pivotal in drawing attention to the intersection of the body and sociocultural influences behind meanings of body image and represents “scholarly attempts to understand the profoundly human experience of embodiment” (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002, p. 3).

The second area of focus leans toward the psychological orientation mostly in response to environmental factors regarding stress management and wellness. Given a focus on health and wellness in some discussions, embodied knowledge has been described in theory through an integrated “mind-body-spirit connection” (Lord, 2002, p. ii) with practice focused on embodied experience to address wellness and facilitate therapeutic healing mostly applied through an individual, psychological orientation (e.g., Beaudoin, 1999; Cooley & Yanoff, 1996; Lord, 2002; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Myers et al., 2000; Robb, 2000). Most applications of embodiment in this literature are associated with health promotion, therapeutic practice and wellness strategies using somatic
movements and relaxation techniques (e.g., Yoga, Tai Chi, progressive relaxation, diaphragmatic breathing). It brings attention to the importance of context and its relation to the intentionality and purposive nature of embodied learning that points to implications of embodiment as a way of knowing regarding health and wellness-related lifestyle behaviors and choices.

This section will discuss several studies incorporating embodied knowing from the individual psychologically-based orientation. Most studies within this focus seem grounded in humanist and behaviorist influence based on the facilitation of personal growth and development to enhance health and wellness and prevent illness primarily through lifestyle behavioral changes. The humanist and behaviorist assumptions linked to health promotion aims with embodied learning initiated, selected, and acted upon by individuals include, for example, learner’s ability to self-direct and choose learning activities freely, centered attention on experiential learning, valuing of learner’s potentiality, view of learning as a highly personal endeavor, intrinsic motivation, immediate knowledge application, and learner-centeredness with learning occurring through discovery (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975; Elias & Merriam, 1995).

Stress management refers to purposeful applications, strategies, and interventions that effectively reduce harmful emotional and/or physiological effects of the stress response to maintain wellness and quality of life (Myers, et al., 2000). It is an area given considerable attention within research and conceptual discussions associated with embodied experience. Qualitative and quantitative research and conceptual literature on stress management and wellness point to associations with embodied learning mostly through somatic techniques (e.g., Beaudoin, 1999; Cooley & Yanoff, 1996; Lord, 2002;
Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Myers et al., 2000; Robb, 2000). For example, in a quantitative study on stress management comparing the effects of four different methods of relaxation techniques (music assisted progressive muscle relaxation, progressive muscle relaxation, music listening, and silence/suggestion) to reduce anxiety and manage stress among 60 university student participants, Robb (2000) examined the interactive effects of music with somatic-based progressive muscle relaxation techniques on state anxiety measures and perceived relaxation. Findings revealed that all four methods of relaxation techniques were effective at significantly reducing anxiety and increased perceived levels of relaxation.

In another study, Cooley and Yanoff (1996) investigated the effects of two interventions on managing stress and alleviating job burnout in a quantitative study of 92 special educators and related service providers. One intervention consisted of a series of stress management workshops including somatic techniques while the other intervention used a peer collaboration program. While both interventions were found to be effective ways to prevent or alleviate job burnout, the stress management workshops were rated slightly more effective than the peer collaboration program.

Elsewhere in the wellness-related literature, Myers et al. (2000) developed a holistic model of wellness and prevention over the life span defining wellness as:

a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community. Ideally, it is the optimum state of health and well-being that each individual is capable of achieving. (p. 252)

This model includes interrelated and interconnected elements through life tasks
(spirituality, self-regulation, work, friendship, and love) that incorporate attention to the body to promote wellness. For example, in an obvious light, the benefits of movement using somatic techniques and regular physical activity are outlined in measures to manage stress. But in a less obvious light, attention to gender and culture identity linked with the body and socialization processes to well-being was also included in this model. Lord’s (2002) grounded theory approach as another example also emerged from a holistic perspective in developing the Experiential Well-Being approach specifically through the field of somatics and embodiment practices. Somatic techniques as part of individual lifestyle choices to enhance wellness are evident in these perspectives.

**Experiential learning.** Learning through experience is at the core of much discussion in adult learning and higher education (e.g., Crowdes, 2000; Enns, 1993; Fenwick, 2000; Michelson, 1998; Wright, 2000; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Manifestations of learning from experience most related to an embodied epistemology will be reviewed in this section drawing from the research and conceptual literature and discussed with respect to psychological and sociological perspectives.

Fenwick (2000) has established a useful typology that synthesizes various perspectives of experiential learning for understanding its multiple dimensions. Some of these perspectives relate to conceptualizations and manifestations of embodiment across formal and informal contexts in adult learning and higher education. This section will proceed to explore these relations within discussions of experiential learning through interference, situated cognition, and critical cultural perspectives as explained by Fenwick.

Beginning with the perspective of interference, in coping with conflict between
conscious and unconscious processes, this perspective conceives of experiential learning as an avenue for individuals to come to terms with internal trauma by tolerating and recovering from conflict (Fenwick, 2000). Described as a psychoanalytic view, it has elements consistent with individually-oriented processes of self-exploration, healing, and well-being. This view is evidenced, for example, in research (Mills & Daniluk, 2002) validating the experiential learning activities of five women engaged in dance therapy to deal with and heal from sexual abuse trauma. Findings revealed that the process of psychological healing from past abuse trauma was facilitated by dance movements which holistically connected conscious thought and unconscious conflict, emotions, and the body.

Situated cognition is another perspective of experiential learning categorized by Fenwick (2000). Its relevance to an embodied epistemology situated in the process of participation in an experience was established in the first section of this chapter as part of this study’s theoretical framing. Also as noted in section two in reviewing the studies specifically on embodiment, several highlight the importance of the context in embodied learning. With knowledge construction and learning emerging from the process of activity and doing in situated experiences, a sociological orientation is manifest within this perspective through interacting elements of social processes of a particular community in some experiential learning activities (e.g., Crowdes, 2000; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). However, a psychological orientation also exists within individual applications and personal experience through self-studies (e.g., Bruce, 2003; Viramontes, 2003; Walsh, 2003) of embodied learning from this perspective. In a narrative form self-study, Bruce (2003), for example, explored “the relationship between self-generated movement
and processes of self-learning and self-change” (p. v) through personal experience as a dancer and somatic practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method. Experiential learning through participation in an embodied technique or movement is understood through direct experiences.

The critical cultural perspective of experiential learning examined by Fenwick (2000) within a sociological orientation toward embodiment hinges on the analysis of power relations in sociocultural systems in understanding cognitive processing. Contextual issues of politics, dominance, boundaries, discourses, and normative social representations are elemental whereby “learning is coming to critical awareness about one’s context as well as one’s own contradictory investments and implications in what knowledge counts in particular communities” (Fenwick, 2000, p. 258). Embodied experiential applications within this perspective are found in higher education. Glaser (2002) looked at embodied experiences in the Canadian higher education system through an investigation of social class and class consciousness. Using Bourdieu’s social theory approach toward embodiment through social structures with culture and class as key units of analysis, Glaser applied a critical lens to explore embodied manifestations of class in the higher education classroom that disadvantage working class students and reinforce power and privilege of middle class norms. Bourdieu’s work surfaces elsewhere in the literature as influential in providing social constructionist insights on embodiment guided by a critical perspective with respect to cultural capital, the analysis of power relations and perpetuated social inequalities, and knowledge construction (Fenwick, 2000; Shilling, 2003). Glaser’s work suggested the presence of an embodiment of classism in the Canadian higher education system. It proposed a refocus of mind/body
dualism in educational systems to “include the body in education to properly address “class in the classroom” and resist disadvantaging working class bodies” (Glaser, 2002, p. ii).

Discussions of other sociologically-oriented experiential learning activities connecting embodiment and affect in social processes influenced in part by the critical perspective found in adult and higher education analyze power differentials in society manifested in racism, sexism, and classism (Crowdes, 2000) and social representations of racial consciousness (Yorks & Kasl, 2002). In a conceptual article, Crowdes (2000) discussed experiential activities in an undergraduate sociology course using a progressive bowing exercise with prescribed conditions of authority and submission. Learners experienced and connected levels of cognitive, affective, and embodied responses for insight elicited from power differentials similar to those created by societal “isms” in what Crowdes (2000) described as “an integrity of mind, body, and action accompanied by some awareness of the nature of the connections in the broader social context” (p. 27). The students manifested their responses in varied reflective ways immediately following the experiential activities such as responding to guiding questions “regarding what they did, how they felt, and what thoughts they had at the moment” (Crowdes, 2000, p. 29).

Yorks and Kasl (2002), also in a conceptual article exploring learners’ reflections on experiential engagement, discussed the concept of whole-person learning. Merging affective, cognitive, and embodied domains of knowing for constructing knowledge, meaning for learners was derived from experiential activity involving presentations on emerging themes of racial consciousness. From the context of “learning-within-relationship” (p. 177), adult learners participated in a collaborative inquiry process and
activity involving team presentations on emerging themes of racial consciousness and racial identity. Learners as part of either the Black team or White team, based on their racial identity (no other races were represented among the learners), constructed presentations from “self-knowing and other-knowing” (p. 177). Self-knowing was based on themes of recognized differences and similarities in race and racial identity. A sense of rugged individualism was representative of the White team while a collective spirit was evident for the Black team. Other-knowing centered on insights drawn from observing the presentations of each team in relation to levels of racial consciousness such as White privilege. The presentations developed as highly affective, embodied activities using movement and physical positioning with various props to manifest interaction styles and racial identity. Reflective descriptions of presentations from the teams follow to contextualize the experiential learning. From a White team member observing the Black team:

They (the Black team) stand in front of a mural they have painted with bold color. The women are drumming and Lewis plays his sax. They fold their words seamlessly into their music. Speaking from their hearts, they voice their anger stark and cold, shout out joy, whisper anguish. I am transfixed by the visual beauty of their tableau and by my sense of their shared spirit. I appreciate how they keep catching each other’s eye, smiling, nodding signals and encouragement. (Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 178)

From the White team member on her own participation in the White team’s presentation:

We sit in hesitancy, heads down, making furtive eye contact. Mark handed out the white cardboard body parts, but I didn’t get one. I clutch a roll of white
crepe paper streamers. Someone finally murmurs something. Soon we are all standing and moving about the room. I hear individual voices shouting, “I want it my way, my way!” “You’re doing it wrong!” Voices rise in cacophony. I see bodies shuffling in all directions, pushing, hugging, veering off alone. I notice the clamor as people wave the white cardboard body parts with words printed on them like “Conformity,” “Individualism,” “Loneliness.” I try to connect. I approach several people, stretching out my arms with yearning, offering a crepe paper streamer that might link us. They turn their backs and walk away.

(Yorks & Kasl, 2002, p. 178)

A Black team member commented, “This clearly was a class assignment, yet the feelings we felt in our bodies were very real, alarming and validating at the same time” (p. 178-179). Such descriptions yield the richness of “felt encounter” (p. 179) from embodied, affective engagement in experiential learning that accessed reflective analysis of racial consciousness representing an alternative link to traditional practice. These types of experiential activities bring some attention to social processes and sociocultural factors in experiential learning by engaging the body in participatory, relational learning contexts. They also point to reflection as a connection between emotional responses and bodily experience in understanding how meaning is derived from embodied experience.

Implications of Embodied Experiences in Learning Spaces

This section of the literature review will focus on addressing the question: What are the implications of embodiment as a way of knowing? The discussion will be directed at exploring connections between embodiment and culture with relevance to
culturally responsive education and implications of embodiment as a way of knowing within holistic learning paradigms.

*Cultural implications.* Gay (2000) claims that “… culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education …” (p. 8). How culture intersects with embodiment with suggested implications for learning surfaces in the discourse on culturally responsive education and will be discussed in light of the universality of the embodied experience, and its implications for culturally responsive education.

This section will begin to establish the connection between culture and embodiment in regards to the universality of embodiment (Bateson, 1994; Brockman, 2001; McWilliam, 1996). Universality as a concept is used to refer to the assumption that the body is a dimension of human knowing that is common to all contexts and to all people no matter what their cultural background (Brockman, 2001). Bateson (1994) discussed universality in correlation with embodiment and culture as a dimension that either transcends cultural differences or deepens their entrenchment. To analogously impress the significance and paradox of embodiment and its universality, Bateson (1994) explained:

> We possess after all the essential basis of commonality. Of all the texts that must be read to understand the human condition, the body is the most eloquent, for we read in all its stages and transitions a pattern that connects all human communities as well as differences that divide. People in different eras and places have read it differently, or made every effort to deny access to parts of the story, to its alternate readings, or to the wider learning that flows from it, so it becomes
the justification for mutual suspicion and for alienation from the natural world. (p. 172)

Bateson’s view points to universality as a dimension of embodiment from which to approach cultural diversity and potentially infuse greater inclusivity in the learning environment. From Brockman’s (2001) discussion of embodied learning in comparison to cultural-linguistic epistemologies, the dimension of universality was grounded in the premise that since the body exists as a knowledge source across all cultures and traditions, “a curriculum inclusive of somatic dimensions of knowing would be much broader than the traditional curriculum, and, therefore, more likely to provide greater educational equity” (p. 330).

Other views of this dimension, however, focus on the more entrenched influences of cultural inscription on the body with the body deemed culturally inscribed, marked, or scarred “as unfinished and incomplete as a cultural production” (McWilliam, 1996, p. 17). While bodiliness is universal in the sense that having a body is part of the human condition, meanings and experiences of bodiliness, and reactions to bodies are highly diverse as culturally embedded. Several examples of this have been discussed throughout sections of this study. The opening description of the lived body experiences of the Moken villagers is an example of this in what could be considered as embodied knowledge through a presence of being-in-the-world that is very culture-specific for the Mokens. The embodied knowledge of pit sense among miners as a means of survival for working in the mines is embedded in the cultural history of miners. The intersections of sociocultural structures and body image point to the influences of sociocultural norms and values in shaping and directing perceptions and reactions to bodies revealed through
significant cultural differences. But perhaps the most striking examples are found in reference to the influence of cultural inscriptions that mark the body according to race and gender. Dimensions of learning the body as a cultural product by female student-athlete participants in Cheville’s (1997) study, for example, revealed restraints and prescriptions based on racial and gender differences. Reflections on embodiment by professors in the academy also evince the experience of the lived body as a social construct. Professors of color, for example, discuss issues of acceptance and acknowledgement in the academy in talking about their lived body experiences positioned with privilege, gender, and race (hooks, 2003; Freedman & Holmes, 2003). Thus, while Bateman’s contention of the body as universal is a given, it is within a very restricted sense of bodiliness in light of the very different bodily experiences of different cultures and representations of bodily being-in-the-world as a social construct.

In describing a reciprocal relationship between culture and learning, Gay (2000) stated that “education is a sociocultural process” (p. 8) in pushing for “multidimensional culturally responsive teaching” (p. 31) that taps into a wide variety of innovative learning approaches through multiple ways of knowing. These types of approaches suggest implications for attention to embodied learning in order to provide learning experiences that connect with different discourse structures, interaction performance styles, communication styles, and learning styles with perceptual dimensions embedded in learners’ cultural and ethnic variations. Gay (2000) noted that “languages and communication styles are systems of cultural notations and the means through which thoughts and ideas are expressively embodied” (p. 80). Through a discussion of cultural differences among Whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Native
Hawaiians in regards to preferences for traditional passive-receptive discourse structures versus participatory-interactive structures, Gay outlined the cultural distinctions and implications of participatory, communal engagement as a central feature of culturally responsive teaching. Multi-sensory stimulation connecting movement, music, and learning is given as an experiential embodied learning example that could be effectively integrated into a variety of culturally responsive learning approaches.

There are several approaches and investigations connecting embodiment and culture that are useful for understanding implications of embodied experience with cultural relevance. Two of these approaches (Crowdes, 2000; Yorks & Kasl, 2002) have been previously discussed in this chapter with respect to experiential learning while another is an investigation (Chan, 2002) specifically situated in an adult education context. There are two other investigations (Cheville, 1997; 2005; Knox, 1992) that also consider connections between culture and embodied learning in their explorations.

Cross-cultural embodied learning experiences introduced to both teachers and students in a qualitative investigation by Chan (2002) provides an example of embodiment with implications for culturally responsive education in line with Gay’s idea of multisensory stimulation. By engaging elementary and middle school teachers and their students in five culturally different movement genres (African-American, Caribbean, and Korean dances, Chinese tai chi chuan, and Indian yoga), research focused on examining teachers’ experiences of cultural awareness to facilitate increased cultural competence and sensitivity for culturally responsive practice. This experiential activity demonstrated a way to infuse cross-cultural embodied learning experiences in teaching and learning interactions in the context of adult learning for teacher preparation and
support. The findings revealed that embodied engagement of cross-cultural movements provided innovative practice for teachers to share in a new learning experience with students to gain insight into different cultural heritages through movement genres.

In connection with multicultural consciousness in adult learning and higher education contexts, Crowdes (2000) and Yorks and Kasl (2002) incorporated attention to the body as a way of knowing to examine power differentials and societal “isms”. Crowdes (2000) used embodied experiential engagement through critical social analysis to examine issues of power manifested in racism, sexism, and classism in an undergraduate sociology course. Learners were engaged in activities manifesting positionality and eliciting power differentials very similar to those created through societal “isms” with such experiences conceptualized as “conscious embodiment” (Crowdes, 2000, p. 27). Similarly, Yorks and Kasl (2002) engaged learners in experiential activity that integrated affective and embodied ways of knowing as an avenue to analyze societal representations of race and understandings of racial consciousness. Class presentations in an adult learning context given by a Black team and a White team were used to experience emerging themes of racial consciousness based on meanings of racial identities. These types of significant learning experiences provide pedagogical direction for exploring how experiential learning activities incorporating attention to the body have facilitated multicultural insights among learners.

Qualitative studies by Cheville (1997; 2005) and Knox (1992) further evidence intersections between embodiment and culture. In fact, Knox explored embodied knowledge in terms of movement and meaning grounded in cultural patterning in arriving at a theory of embodied knowledge defined through aspects of enculturation, movement,
healing, and relational processes. Knox formulated the Project Demonstrating Excellence to describe “the embodiment of knowledge as a culturally distinctive process of movement patterning” (p. 1). Cheville (1997; 2005) also looked to the influences of culture in trying to understand embodied learning among student athletes. Cheville’s findings revealed cultural constraints and prescriptions of femininity on embodied learning clearly pointing to learning the body as a female athlete as a cultural product.

For example, Cheville (1997) noted:

Aspects of racial and gender differences were dimensions of the body that players rarely talked about in public. Only in private conversations did I have an opportunity to learn of the dilemmas that female student-athletes experienced. That some student-athletes wished their differences to be recognized became clear to me when Simone remarked, “I’m Jamaican. I talk different. I look different. I’m just different.” Simone’s assertions underscored how a high priority on conceptual uniformity can challenge bodily difference in ways that threaten to erase players somatic knowledge and experience. (p. 196)

Through efforts to increase cultural awareness and develop appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity, these examinations and approaches inform implications of embodiment as a way of knowing that can effectively open and stimulate dialogue on cultural influences and understandings within learning spaces. The literature has established that new learning, insights, and innovation is beginning to give way to the exploration of integrating embodied learning as an another way of knowing with multicultural relevance. These emerging developments are moving the body from its traditional position of otherness and marginalization to one of an establishing presence.
and inclusion in practice … a fitting change in positionality from “privileging of mind over body” (Michelson, 1998, p. 218) that resonates with culturally-responsive awareness. Given the traditional Western positivistic dominance of rational knowing separate from other dimensions of knowing, this review of the literature points to the value of exploring how insights on embodied learning can facilitate a more culturally responsive approach to education beyond this traditional emphasis. McWilliam (1996) referred to this examination as “a project of re/covering the importance of the body as a field of political and cultural activity” (p. 17).

**Implications within Holistic Paradigms**

In moving toward a more holistic conception of teaching and learning, balance comes to the forefront as a thematic element in advancing the pedagogical value of innovative learning approaches as complementary or integrated with traditional approaches. Attempts to incorporate the body in learning tend to be viewed within innovative, more holistically-oriented learning paradigms. Some conceptual insights and investigations on holistic learning approaches are suggesting that balance among approaches has advantages for learners in creating and enhancing significant learning experiences (Enns, 1993; Fink, 2003; Nikitina, 2003; Poindexter, 2003; Viramontes, 2003; Wright, 2000; Yang, 2003). This section will examine some of the discussions on holistic practice discourse within adult learning and higher education contexts linked to embodied learning.

In looking first at experiential learning linked to a more holistic learning paradigm, discussions evolve around the engagement of learning on many levels (e.g., affective, physical, spiritual, cognitive, cultural) through multiple ways of knowing
Despite tensions and challenges in the traditional academy structure, this attention shifts investigation to the case for moving toward holistic practice as noted by Poindexter (2003):

> It is likely that a holistic perspective on teaching and learning will prove more effective than any single approach. Taken together, generational change in both students and faculty, positive patterns of adoption for alternative instructional techniques, and inevitable economic pressures on institutions seem to provide optimal conditions for a widespread shift toward a holistic approach in changing the collegiate learning environment … a holistic approach that looks at teaching and learning from an integrated perspective. Such an approach – based on repeatedly adding small increments of innovation and using multiple strategies to capitalize on their synergy – surely offers the greatest potential for impact. (p. 24)

Some learning experiences particularly within the arts are being explored with respect to integrated, holistic paradigms as opportunities to directly or subtly incorporate attention to the body in learning (e.g., De, 2003; Miller, 2000; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Nikitina, 2003; Ross, 2000; Sellers-Young, 1998; Viramontes, 2003). The holistic engagement of mind, body, spirit, and emotion through adult learning experiences in visual art, for example, was explored by Viramontes (2003) in a thesis exploring the role of visual art in opening the traditional learning space in adult education in Mexico. Through the reflective process of self-study, Viramontes integrated creative visual art, spirituality, and affect to understand embodied experience. The result was a heightened
awareness and deepening of the adult learning experience by converging these
dimensions in visual art.

An interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary stance is evident in a study by
Nikitina (2003) focused on an integrative performing arts program at Harvard
University examining the quality of an integrative learning experience for students within
a holistic paradigm that draws on “interdisciplinary teaching” (p. 55). The examined
course was integrated with neuroscience as “neuroscience proceeds from the belief in the
inherent unity of mind and body and attempts to discover the nature of the relationship
between them” (p. 55). Findings revealed that this type of integration and connectedness
fostered holistic balance across multiple levels of experiencing for learners with the
following academic and social effects: “academic stress reduction; setting a high
creativity standard; clarified and strengthened disciplinary interests and career goals;
increased awareness of one’s learning style; sharpened perceptual and communication
skills; and social development” (p. 57). Nikitina concluded that “close attention to the
pedagogy and integrative experiences of students in the performing arts courses could
provide some insights for pioneering bridge-making in other academic areas as well”
(p. 55).

This literature on holistic movement toward learning approaches has suggested
support for revaluing embodiment as another way of knowing. Poindexter (2003) equated
the holistic paradigm with synergy and referred to the shift toward holism as “a tipping
point for change” (p. 24) in the academy. Insights by Grauerholz (2001) and Wright
(2000), for example, are useful for direction in examining experiential learning within a
holistic paradigm that could incorporate embodied learning experiences. Miller (1998)
pushes for movement toward a holistic paradigm in emphasizing that holistic learning facilitates “a broader vision of education that fosters the development of whole human beings” (p.48) pointing to reconnected minds and bodies in learning. This literature also points to the value of researching the quality of integrative, cross-disciplinary approaches for insight on the pedagogical relevance of embodiment as a pedagogy that is “searching for better ways to connect and explain the unity of mind and body” (Nikitina, 2003, p.63) and “creating spaces where one’s natural gifts bubble-up to the surface” (Lakes, 2000, p.203). Given the dynamic flow of emerging discussions in the literature on movement toward multidimensional, holistic approaches, there is a further need for inquiry on embodiment and implications for practice.

Conclusion

The topic of embodiment is undoubtedly emerging as a revalued area of scholarly interest and attention in some fields and disciplines. While the review of the literature provides extensive information on the complexities and diversity in understanding how embodiment is conceived of, manifested, and experienced across learning contexts, there is a limited amount of research-based work informing this topic. Recommendations from most of the research and conceptual literature on embodiment focus on continued exploration on embodiment and its implications for practice as an innovative, complementary pedagogical approach. Clearly there is a substantial need for more research on experiences of embodiment as another way of knowing.

In reviewing the research, qualitative inquiry is the primary methodology. There is some variation in designs with more frequent use of grounded theory and phenomenology. Data collection methods of interviewing and narratives are most
prominent in this research for trying to specifically get at the experience of embodiment. There is also an emphasis on context and subjectivity with respect to embodied learning in the research. The discourses on embodiment also cross into discussions with health and wellness, experiential learning, culture, and holistic learning.

The challenges presented in researching embodiment as an ambiguous and somewhat perplexing topic, are most pronounced in the research. More attention needs to be directed at addressing and better informing a more tangible understanding of these challenges to curtail associated limitations in research efforts bringing attention to new frameworks and new possibilities for incorporating the body in learning.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will primarily detail the selection and implementation of the methodology for this study. It will begin by reiterating the purpose of the study and the research questions. Next, it will give a description of and rationale for the research paradigm followed by an explanation of the research methodology including participant involvement, data collection and analysis techniques. It will conclude with a discussion regarding the trustworthiness of the study.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to address revaluing embodiment as a way of knowing by examining how it is conceived of, applied, and experienced in a formal higher education class. It is based on growing interest in a broader, holistic vision of learning paradigms using innovative approaches that integrate mind and body and bridge traditional boundaries of knowing. A qualitative investigation is implemented through an integrated design using action research and case study to examine experiences of embodiment in a higher education classroom where a specific attempt is made to incorporate attention to the body in learning.

The following research questions guide this investigation of embodiment in a Family and Community Health Concepts nursing class where a direct attempt was made to incorporate attention to the body in learning:

1) How is embodiment conceptualized in the academy by the instructor and students as an outcome of participating in activities conducted to facilitate body awareness?
2) How is embodiment experienced in the academy by the instructor and
students when activities are conducted to facilitate body awareness, and how
does it facilitate learning related to the content of the course?

3) How do instructors and students apply new knowledge about embodiment in
their own personal and professional lives as a result of participating in such
experiences?

Qualitative Research Case Study Design and Action Research

Selecting a research paradigm and methodology requires careful consideration of
an array of choices and distinguishing features in arriving at a decision of which one is
the best research design for the intended investigation. The purpose of this study and its
research questions are most suitably approached by conducting qualitative inquiry
through an integrated design using action research in a particular classroom, or case.
Given that this action research project discusses embodiment in a particular classroom, it
is a case study. Case study is a common form of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998;
Patton, 2002; Yin, 1994). But because I was the facilitator of activities intended to elicit a
greater experience of and sense of embodiment, and I was trying to make something
happen, it is an action research project. Action research is a practical means to solve real
problems through efforts by real people to effect change or improve what is happening in
the classroom (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kuhne & Quigley, 1997). Given that this is a
qualitative action research study conducted as a case study in class, in this section I’ll
first provide an overview of qualitative research, then the case study design, and then
action research.
**Overview of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research generally centers on how participants make meaning or experience a particular phenomenon. This study lends itself to qualitative research as it is centered on individuals’ experiences of embodiment and the meaning that they derive from such experiences. In describing qualitative research, Creswell (1998) notes:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Qualitative inquiry, also referred to as the interpretive or naturalistic research paradigm, provides a way to examine multiple dimensions in collecting and analyzing data on the investigated phenomenon. This study on embodiment most certainly requires this type of holistic approach to examine how embodiment is conceived of, applied, and experienced in a particular higher education classroom where a direct attempt is made to incorporate attention to the body in learning. Also, trying to discover the implications of embodiment as a way of knowing adds to the complexity and need for a holistic approach for analysis consistent with Creswell’s description.

Merriam (1998) states that “qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding” (p. 8). A key aspect of this paradigm is its view that individuals construct reality from social world interactions. Merriam (1998) explains, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). In this respect, the quality of direct experience and its meaning as a significant component in the
study of embodiment connects the appropriateness of this paradigm to this investigation. Also, it is directly tied to the research question addressing the implications of embodiment as a way of knowing in the academy, based on what students and the instructor indicate they learn and how they derive meaning from experiences of embodiment.

Given that qualitative research focuses on how people make meaning of a phenomenon, it is an appropriate paradigm for this study. Colman (2003) stated, “My body, as sexed, raced, scarred, aged, etc., not only has meaning; it bears meaning. Hence, I do not so much have a body as I am embodied” (p. 6). This quote reflects the highly personal awareness of embodiment situated in the nature of a person’s being-in-the-world. It is coming to light in some spaces within educational practice that are particularly aligned with subjectivity (Colman, 2003; Simon, 1998). As an internally-oriented way of processing information through thoughts, ideas, and feelings, knowledge constructed through subjective awareness can cross multiple levels of engagement integrating mind, body, spirit, and emotion beyond traditional rational knowledge (Simon, 1998). Thus, the qualitative paradigm for acquiring communicative knowledge is justified as an appropriate means to research direct experiences of embodiment given its more subjectively-oriented nature in the process of knowing.

Reasons for doing qualitative inquiry and characteristics of qualitative inquiry further substantiate the use of this paradigm for this investigation. Creswell’s (1998) list of “compelling reasons” (p. 17) for engaging in qualitative research and Merriam’s (1998) description of characteristics are summarized as follows: the nature of the research questions presents a how or why direction of inquiry; the phenomenon warrants
exploration mostly through an inductive process; the phenomenon requires a detailed investigative view through extensive data collection and analysis of text information in the field; exploring the phenomenon is better suited to a study of participants in their natural setting; and the researcher, as the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, is positioned as an active learner interpreting the participants’ views through rich descriptions.

These characteristics and reasons for doing qualitative inquiry have guided my decision in choosing this paradigm as most appropriate for conducting this study in several respects. First, the guiding research questions establish probing that is descriptive of what is going on in regards to embodiment. Second, given considerable ambiguity and variations in the literature on conceptions of embodiment and body theorizing, this type of study is conducive to an inductive process of analysis to further develop understanding of this phenomenon. Third, the nature of the research questions also presents a complexity that requires a detailed view of embodiment. In order to address the revaluing of embodiment as a way of knowing, it is necessary to find a way to examine how it is conceived of, applied, and experienced in a higher education classroom where attention to the body is incorporated in learning. This necessity is well suited to a study in the natural setting and collection and analysis of extensive, detailed data from the field. Lastly, the role of researcher as the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data is appropriate for extracting meaningful data in conducting this investigation given my personal engagement and embedded familiarity with embodiment as a way of knowing.

Embodiment as a way of knowing is beginning to be discussed in adult and higher education. But there is a lack of research-based literature about how professors and
students in classes where attention to the body is emphasized actually deal with and experience embodiment. There is a focal point emerging in accounts of embodied learning experiences as involvement in some sort of dialoguing for describing experience as a methodological approach which Marshall (1999) notes as the need “to pay more attention to naïve accounts of experiences” (p. 73). Qualitative inquiry most appropriately addresses this descriptive need.

The research methodology selected from within the qualitative paradigm for this study is a case study design of a higher education class that brings attention to the body as a way of knowing through an action research project. This integrated design provides an appropriate investigative avenue to delve deep into the core of embodied experiences in trying to arrive at an understanding of this phenomenon and to approach it as a practice problem.

Case Study

First and foremost, in order to address the purpose and research questions guiding this study, a chosen design needed to generate extensive, in-depth information to elucidate embodiment as the phenomenon of study within a specific learning space that brings attention to the body as a way of knowing. Aspects of case study fit this need. It provided the best design to investigate what I wanted to know about drawing on embodiment as a way of knowing in a higher education class. It made sense to choose a particular case of one course in higher education that would lend itself to drawing on embodiment as a way of knowing.

Creswell (1998) describes case study as follows:

… a case study is an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case (or multiple
cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. This bounded system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied – a program, an event, an activity, or individuals. (p. 61)

A key factor in determining the fit of case study as a design is whether or not there is a unit for study that qualifies as a bounded system. According to Merriam (1998), if the topic for investigation can be set within certain boundaries of finiteness (e.g., a limit on the number of participants for interviewing or on time available for direct observation) regarding data collection, a determination can be made about appropriately examining the topic as a case. As mentioned above, this study seeks to investigate embodiment in a higher education class where a direct attempt is made to incorporate attention to the body in learning and deal with issues of embodiment. Multiple sources of data collection included interviews, direct observation, and document analysis with the instructor and students as participants. The classroom setting has limits as far as the amount of time for intervention and observation based on the course schedule and number of available participants for inclusion in a selected sample and for interviewing given the number of students enrolled in the course and the instructor for the course. Furthermore, the examination is bounded to a particular higher education classroom in which direct attempts are made to incorporate attention to the body in learning. Thus, there is most certainly a case to be examined that qualifies as a unit with boundaries justifying the inclusion of this method in this design.

Several other key characteristics also help substantiate the inclusion of case study in this integrated design. Merriam (1998) added that a case study is “particularistic,
descriptive, and heuristic” (p. 34): a particular phenomenon is the center of focus; findings are reported through rich, highly detailed description; and it sheds new light in understanding the phenomenon. There is also consideration given to understanding processes in effect within case contexts (Stake, 2005). In order to examine embodiment in formal learning spaces, the researcher also needs to get very close to it in that particular context. Stake (2005) explains that examining the activity or functioning of the case is crucial within the description of case contexts. Specific focus on embodiment in the academy establishes a particular concentration for this study. The how and what nature of questioning that guides this inquiry requires access to subjectively-oriented material through a wide selection of information sources that should yield findings rich in extensive, descriptive detail. Also, by considering processes when examining direct experiences of embodiment, interpretations can give way to new insights in understanding conceptualizations, applications, and implications of embodiment as a way of knowing.

Case study designs are directed at examining a single case or multiple cases and are also delineated by types or strategies. Yin (1994) classifies strategies for case study as exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory while Merriam (1998) designates types of case study categorized as descriptive, interpretive, or evaluative based on the intent or function of the research. The question of “What is the intent of the case study?” points to the type. Is it to describe, interpret, or evaluate? Descriptive case study concentrates on yielding extensive detail on the phenomenon through basic description, interpretive case study moves beyond description of the phenomenon to analysis, interpretation, or theorizing, while explanations and judgments are arrived at through evaluative case study (Merriam,
According to Merriam, case study can also be categorized by disciplinary orientation (e.g., ethnographic, historical, and psychological case studies). Applying these categories to determine the type of case study for this investigation, descriptive case study is representative of this design given its function. The suitability for descriptive case studies includes “presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38) typically centered on innovative programs and practices in education and creating a way to build data based on research or to build theory. Chapter One has established that embodiment can be included within the scope of innovative practice in education. In moving toward further insights and discovery on this emerging topic as a way of knowing in the higher education classroom, it is necessary to focus on basic description through in-depth, detailed data in trying “to optimize understanding” (Stake, 2005, p. 443) through concentration on a single case. Stake (2005) further notes that careful attention must be paid to every facet of the case to optimize this understanding in searching for particularities beyond common characteristics.

**Action Research**

How can experiences of embodiment be applied and incorporated within formal academy learning spaces and what is the value of such experiences? Hence, a problem for practice is posed in line with the purposive inquiry of this study. It can be best approached through action research, a method that specifically provides a means to address a practice problem, such as how to apply and incorporate experiences of embodiment in a formal academic context, in an effort to effect change or improve practice (Kuhn & Quigley, 1997; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Action research is a
cyclical process of identifying a problem and solving a problem in a repeated manner of refining and revising an intervention to act on the problem to assure the best possible solution. As an inductive method, Quigley (1997) explains that part of its objective is “to improve the knowledge, functions, or working environment of the self or an immediate group in a self-defined manner through induction” (p.18) as a practical category of research. The purpose of this research is not only driven by a need to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of embodiment but also to inform and improve the quality of practice in adult and higher education. With this in mind, the intention of action research to generate solutions that have immediate application in practice can also help connect theory related to embodiment with practice.

Action research has its root of development embedded in several social and educational movements throughout the United States and Europe (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). There are multiple approaches and various terms to describe action research, and these approaches and descriptions are variously defined by different authors in relation to different settings. Some of these include collaborative action inquiry sometimes used in organizations or other settings (Yorks, 2006), critical action inquiry often used to figure out ways participants in social action groups can directly challenge social structures (Kincheloe, 1995), and classroom action research (Hopkins, 1992) where teachers are directly trying to implement and study change in their own classroom. To some extent the participants in action research are involved in the planning and implementing of all forms of action research which is why Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) use the term “participatory action research” to describe their model of action research. Broadly speaking, as a collaborative social and educational process, it focuses
“on practice in a concrete and specific way” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 565). As a practical and cyclical method for practitioners to pose questions, implement action and reflect on practice, their model of action research based on a four-step process of plan, act, observe, and reflect (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) is what guided my study. While this is described in more detail in Chapter Four, it is briefly described here as well.

In this model, an appropriate intervention addressing a practice problem is developed, implemented, and evaluated using these steps as an ongoing, systematic process of intervening to provide an outcome. First, planning is the problem posing step whereby a problem that can be managed through research is clearly identified. It is also when the researcher explores the problem by gathering facts and clarifying it to grasp its essence and when the researcher needs to be certain that this method fits the problem. Planning also includes developing and organizing an intervention as a plan of action to address the problem. I described how I became interested in the topic in the first chapter. How I actually found the instructor and the course is described below in the case selection section.

In the second step, the researcher actually implements the intervention as a probable solution and tries to solicit the input of the participants in the study as much as possible. Action is taken as a possible solution in this acting step. As explained in more detail in Chapter Four, I discussed the course with the instructor to get a feel for the class, and to solicit her input and participation in figuring out an initial plan of implementation. Early on in the study, I tried to get student participants’ input through interviews including responses to written reflective guide sheets. In conjunction with this action part of the research, in the observing step, the researcher needs to remain keenly
aware of the progression and results of the intervention while actually doing it. In the reflecting step, a determination needs to be made as to whether or not the action effected change or improvement in practice in addressing the posed problem. Evaluative questions are pondered about the outcome of the intervention. These aspects of the study will be presented in a subsequent section here and will make more sense to the reader after a description of the case and participant selection. Further discussion of how these phases were implemented will also take place in greater depth in Chapter Four which actually explains the plan, act, observe, reflect cyclical process and how it unfolded at each phase of the study.

Case and Participant Selection

Since a single case study is integrated with action research as the design for this investigation to examine experiences of embodiment in a higher education classroom attempting to incorporate embodiment, selection determination needs to be specified for the case and the participants within the case. The selection process for both is discussed here.

Case Selection

I was invited to facilitate experiences of embodiment by the instructor of a nursing course in a B.S. program in nursing at a large, public university. The instructor learned about my interest and experience with this topic by attending my dissertation proposal as the instructor shared a similar interest in the topic of embodiment and its application and value in learning spaces. Her developing curiosity in how to possibly incorporate attention to the body in learning within the scope and sequence of a nursing course sparked her invitation to me to co-facilitate a fall semester nursing course,
Family and Community Health Concepts. Since there were two sections of this course, the instructor’s practitioner interest also stemmed from a curiosity in comparing the experiences of both sections for promising insight on the application and value of incorporating embodiment in the class.

Qualitative research typically utilizes a small, purposeful sample. Regarding case study, Patton (2002) stated that “the logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding” (p. 46) through a focus on “information-rich cases” (p. 230). Following Patton’s (2002) recommendations for “strategically and purposefully” (p. 242) selecting an information-rich case, I felt I could learn the most from a detailed view of a higher education course in which I facilitated direct attempts to incorporate experiences of embodiment given my familiarity and experience with this topic and experiential learning (Stake, 2005). Given the facet of experiential learning, Stake (2005) explains that this type of experiential knowledge is a significant part of understanding a case drawn from “situational descriptions of case activity, personal relationship, and group interpretation” (p. 454). As project facilitator, I was able to make certain that the nature of the project in this course through its content and process was highly reflective of a classroom where a specific attempt was made to incorporate attention to the body in learning with sufficient frequency to qualify as an information-rich case. I was specifically able to draw on and focus on aspects of embodiment in the course experience and engage students in experiential activities intended to explore the body as a source of knowledge during five experiential sessions in the class. Hence, this nursing course provided me with an appropriate case in which to investigate experiences of embodiment for this study.
The specific sampling strategy used in this study in selecting the case was purposive and somewhat representative of intensity sampling as delineated by Patton (2002). Patton states that in “using the logic of intensity sampling, one seeks excellence or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not highly unusual cases” (p. 234). Since this investigation seeks an understanding of embodiment and its application and value in practice by exploring a higher education class where a direct attempt is made to incorporate embodiment and deal with issues of embodiment, the basis of intensity sampling in finding a rich, but not unusual, source of the investigated phenomenon fits this purpose. The nursing class provides an information-rich case for in-depth study in that it lends itself easily to an examination of issues of embodiment, since nurses are involved in the care of people in the holistic sense and are directly involved in embodiment issues with their patients. Thus, the case centers on a specific higher education classroom that intensely manifests experiences of embodiment as the phenomenon of study. Furthermore, being conducted within the context of a nursing course adds to the richness since nursing tends to be viewed as a more holistic profession already grounded in the physicality of the body in the scientific view but also considering other avenues in understanding the body in varied health care practices, treatments, and perspectives.

Participant Selection

The participants for this purposeful sample included the instructor of the class and students enrolled in the course who were willing to participate in the study. However, in a broad sense, all students in the class were willing participants since direct observation during experiential learning sessions was used as part of data collection.
It was imperative that the instructor for the class was willing to be a study participant as instructor involvement was crucial for various data collection procedures particularly through interviews and class observations. The willingness of the instructor to participate in this study was established through the instructor’s previously noted interest of embodiment and enthusiastic invitation to me to co-facilitate the class. The instructor was a white woman.

Shifting to the determination of students as participants, selection was based on the following criteria: (a) their willingness to participate, including time spent beyond class to participate in necessary data collection, (b) their demonstrated openness and interest in body awareness, and (c) a level of comfort with offering in-depth descriptions of their experiences of embodiment because they indicate an interest in attending to body awareness and can talk about it. Furthermore, since Turner’s social theory as part of the theoretical framing gets at the interplay between embodiment and culture, effort would have been made to select participants who are both men and women and of varied cultural groups. However, the enrollment of all White women in this class was a limitation to this intended selection criteria. Students volunteering as participants were further involved in data collection beyond class observations (particularly in experiential activities) including interviews and document analysis, procedures of which are discussed in a subsequent data collection section.

The course began with an enrollment of 12 students who were all white women. During the first class meeting, I introduced the research study, sought participants via a Recruitment Script (see Appendix A), and addressed questions about the nature of study. Initially, all but one student expressed interest in participating and were included in the
study providing a purposeful sample of one instructor and 11 students. However, the one student not interested in participating in the study did not remain in this section of the course while another student transferred into this section. The transfer student wanted to participate in the study. So, by the start of the first experiential learning session, the course instructor and all of the 12 students enrolled in the course met the selection criteria and were included as a purposeful sample of all white women.

The Action, the Data Collection and the Analysis in the Action Research Process

Qualitative research typically makes use of three major types of data collection techniques (interviews, observations, and collection of documents and artifacts used by participants in the setting), and inductive data analysis techniques (Merriam, 1998). How these techniques were used in this study will make more sense if the reader has some understanding of what I actually did in each session. Further details on what happened in each session will be discussed more fully in the following chapters. Thus, first I’ll begin by briefly describing the action as what I actually did and the general format followed in facilitating the sessions on embodiment. Then I’ll discuss the actual data collection methods, followed by a consideration of the analysis.

The Action

I attended seven sessions of the course biweekly from the end of September through the middle of December. During the initial meeting, I introduced the research study and recruited participants. As facilitator, I then implemented the action phase of the research project conducted during five sessions of face to face meetings in class. The regular class session typically opened with discussion and activities facilitated by the course instructor. After an intermittent break, I facilitated an experiential session with a
specific focus drawn from various conceptualizations of embodiment as a way of knowing. The focus of each session was as follows: in the first experiential session, I introduced the essence of embodiment and its connectedness with cultural considerations with beginner movements of Tai Chi as the experiential engagement; next, I introduced sensorimotor experience and sensory perception as concepts of embodiment and facilitated experiences including diaphragmatic breathing, guided imagery and visualization; the third session focused on attention to bodily awareness continuing with sensory experiences and imagery, and through muscular responses facilitated by a “camp fire” experience, progressive muscle relaxation, and yoga; body inscriptions, cultural considerations in learning spaces associated with body image, interaction styles, and power differentials was the focus of the fourth session facilitated through an experiential exchange of bowing; and the fifth session focused on the connectedness of embodiment with creative expression, symbolic representation, and healing through participation in musical, artistic, and movement experiences and sharing symbols.

Each experiential session lasted for about an hour. I usually opened the session with quotes, narratives, and personal insights pertaining to the conceptualization of embodiment that served as the session focus. Then, after giving an overview of the conceptualization, I facilitated an experiential session that directly engaged the body in learning with this focus. After the experience, time was taken for participants to reflect on the experience in writing and in discussion. At the conclusion of the session, participants were asked to complete readings and follow up with other activities outside of the session such as diaphragmatic breathing, movement experiences and journaling. I usually stayed and observed for the remainder of the class meeting. During the seventh
and final course session, I collected project evaluations and shared personal reflections on the project experience with the participants.

**Data Collection**

Interviewing, experiential observation and documents were used as sources of data in this study to delve into the instructor’s and students’ experiences of embodiment. Each of these methods is discussed next.

*Interviewing.* Interviewing, in particular, provides a reflective channel for individuals to communicate rich details of their experiences. Seidman (1998) referred to the process of interviewing as a meaning-making experience stating, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3). Given this nature of interviewing, I used this technique as one of the primary modes of collection to elicit information-rich data that addresses the *how* and *what* questioning in examining experiences of embodiment.

I used a semi-structured approach as an interview strategy combining an interview guide (see Appendix B) for consistency in questioning in conducting what Patton (2002) notes as standardized open-ended interviews. This particular combination facilitates covering specific questions in an exact format while also allowing some flexibility for questioning in other related areas. Interviews were conducted with the instructor and students in two rounds. The first interview was conducted with all participants after the second experiential learning session except for one interview that was conducted after the third session due to an unexpected schedule conflict for a student. This interview focused on initial impressions of the concept of embodiment, body awareness and early experiences of embodiment as facilitated in class. A second
The interview was completed after the fifth and final experiential learning session with focus directed at an assessment of the class experience in line with what was learned about embodiment and how it was experienced. These interviews attempted to explore what happened to participants from their perspective as they engaged in embodied experiences through descriptions of ideas, thoughts, and feelings, and how they derived meaning from these experiences. In addition, questions for the instructor were also related to practice issues and insights relevant to incorporating experiences of embodiment in learning spaces. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. Follow-up questions were also asked after interviews when necessary to clarify responses and add to the inquiry.

Observations. Since direct experiencing is at the core of investigating the phenomenon of embodiment, direct observation was used as another significant source of data collection, and is typically a form of data collection used in case studies (Stake, 2005). Direct observation is valuable for capturing a richer understanding of context and for gaining a deeper awareness of and attention to occurrences as they unfold through firsthand insight into experiences beyond interview perceptions (Patton, 2002). Attention to process and discovering contextual characteristics through a case study design and action research warrants direct observation as another key data collection procedure. Combining observational methods with interviews helps researchers “arrive at a more comprehensive view of the setting being studied” (Patton, 2002, p. 264).

During the facilitation of five experiential learning sessions, I observed the participants during the sessions and recorded descriptive field notes following each session as immediately as possible. I kept detailed notations of my reflections using a
contact summary form to record insights from participant reactions and discussions that unfolded during the sessions. Since each session included an opportunity for direct participation in an experience and a moment of reflection followed by discussion, my observations mostly focused on what struck me the most among participant responses and involvement during these phases of the learning sessions. There were available moments for me to observe the group while participants were engaged in experiential activities.

Documents. In addition to interviewing and observations, documents were collected for inclusion in the data analysis. As noted by Stake (2005), the importance of “using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning” (p. 454) is addressed by including documents as another information-rich source in data interpretation. Documents provided another way to view the case (Stake, 2005). Various types of documents were completed by participants throughout the duration of the course with at least five documents collected for analysis at the fifth and final session. Participants were asked to share at least three written remarks, creative writing, art work, music, or any other form of reflective or creative expressions of their choice drawn from their experiences in class or outside of class associated with bringing attention to the body as a way of knowing. They were also asked to share at least two written reflections from journal entries or responses to reflective guides (see Appendix C) used in class or any other reflection of choice as data sources for supplemental documentation for reflective insights on their embodied experiences. The process of journaling, for example, gave participants greater freedom, flexibility, and spontaneity in selecting details from reflections on embodied experiences through a highly open-ended format. Van Manen (1990) notes that journal writing facilitates “the purpose of self-discovery” (p. 73) as a rich, reflective source of lived
human experience of phenomenological value. Journaling is also one of several naïve accounts of experience which Marshall (1999) considers highly valuable “as a strategy … unearthing bodily and embodied experiences” (p. 50).

In summary, data collection included interviews, observation, and documents. Each participant completed two semi-structured interviews. The first interview was completed after at least two of the five experiential learning sessions while the second interview was conducted after the fifth and final session. I completed direct experiential observations of the five experiential learning sessions as I facilitated the sessions using field notes for documentation of the observations. At least five reflective documents were collected from the 12 student participants. The data collection process took place over a time frame of 12 weeks within the duration of the fall semester higher education class.

Data Analysis

Data analysis and interpretation in qualitative research is aimed at organizing information and reducing data through “a process of successive approximations toward an accurate description and interpretation of the phenomenon” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 206). In this section, I will highlight several sources of guidance on data analysis that I used to search for specific categories and themes that emerged from the collected data to investigate embodiment. I will also explain the selected process of coding to sort and organize collected data from interviews, observations, and documents.

Beginning with the significance of conducting thematic analysis to investigate the meaning of a phenomenon, Van Manen (1990) stated:

In order to come to grips with the structure of meaning of the text it is helpful to think of the phenomenon described in the text as approachable in terms of
meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes. Reflecting on lived experience then becomes reflectively analyzing the structural or thematic aspects of the experience…Phenomenological themes may be understood as the *structures of experience*. So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience. (p. 78-79)

The use of a coding system allows information to be accurately captured from the data relative to particular codes and to describe and understand the phenomenon of study in a meaningful way (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). While this is not a phenomenological study, there are aspects of Van Manen’s suggestion that are helpful and can be applied in this study to understand embodiment by describing the structures of embodied experiences through thematic analysis.

Next, Patton (2002) referred to the identification of core consistencies and themes from qualitative data as content analysis explaining that meanings found through analyzing text are described as patterns and themes. Findings are represented in a more descriptive manner through pattern recognition while themes are more categorical in nature (Patton, 2002). I was highly cognizant of emerging findings through pattern recognition and themes while analyzing transcribed interviews, field notes from experiential observation, and documents as the text for coding categories. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used as a process to make sense out of collected information from data collection by comparing the information to emerging categories (Creswell, 1998).

Several suggestions of qualitative analytic methods by Miles and Huberman (1994) also guided my data analysis. Incorporating analysis through coding, content
analysis, pattern recognition, and themes, Miles and Huberman recommended assigning
codes to interview transcripts, indicating reflections and other comments in margins,
deciphering data for similarities and differences by comparing and contrasting phrases,
patterns, themes, and sequences, and identifying consistencies. I used a contact summary
sheet (see Appendix D) as described by Miles and Huberman (1994) to provide a
structured means of reflection on interviews, observations, and documents. The contact
summary allowed me to document my reactions and responses in considering themes,
questions, challenges, and receptivity during data collection and analysis.

Lastly, Stake (1995) suggested several forms of data analysis and interpretation
specifically for case study including direct interpretation, categorical aggregation and
naturalistic generalizations. Direct interpretation involves drawing meaning from focus
on a single instance while categorical aggregation refers to looking at a collection of
instances for emerging meanings. Stake (1995) explained the association between these
two forms as follows:

The qualitative researcher concentrates on the instance, trying to pull it apart and
back together again more meaningfully – analysis and synthesis in direct
interpretation. The quantitative researcher seeks a collection of instances,
expecting that, from the aggregate, issue-relevant meanings will emerge. (p. 75)

Naturalistic generalizations developed through the analysis process then provide the
findings on what is learned about the case. As Stake noted, “Case studies are undertaken
to make the case understandable” (p. 85). By conducting analysis on data collected from
a specific higher education class incorporating attention to embodiment in learning,
a detailed description of the case provided an intense look at instances to interpret
emerging patterns. A case study by Lloyd (2002) using action research was particularly useful in considering how to analyze data given the similarity in methodological approach. As with Stake, Lloyd stressed the importance of examining and analyzing data through multiple perspectives as the crucial aspect of data analysis.

The use of inductive analysis was another significant aspect of examining collected data. My use of data collection by identifying categories and patterns to develop themes was characteristic of inductive analysis where “findings emerge out of the data, through the analyst’s interactions with the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). It is a way to see what comes out of the data with evolving flexibility through a more holistic interpretation of experiences of embodiment. Wiersma and Jurs (2005) noted, “Qualitative research has its origins in descriptive analysis, and is essentially an inductive process, reasoning from the specific situation to a general conclusion” (p. 13). Patton (2002) pointed out, however, that while qualitative inquiry usually begins with inductive analysis, it can proceed toward a deductive process:

Once patterns, themes, and/or categories have been established through inductive analysis, the final, confirmatory stage of qualitative analysis may be deductive in testing and affirming the authenticity and appropriateness of the inductive content analysis, including carefully examining deviate cases or data that don’t fit the categories developed. (p. 454)

As Patton suggested, I began with inductive analysis while organizing and synthesizing the data and then moved to deduction as a confirmatory process in reaching conclusions.

Given this study’s framing through the intersecting orientations of situated
cognition, Turner’s social theory, and Lakoff and Johnson’s embodied person philosophy, this analysis sought to reveal findings that draw upon direct participation, learning contexts, intersections between relational interactions, sociocultural processes, and the physicality of the body, and attention to structural elements related to embodied awareness.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Issues of credibility and trustworthiness associated with this study were addressed as well as ethical issues. Miles and Huberman (1994) provided guidance on numerous aspects of qualitative research that need attention, some of which are tied to ethical issues and others to trustworthiness and credibility (e.g., the project’s worthiness, competence boundaries, informed consent, honesty and trust, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity). I referred to these guidelines to ensure that I thoroughly and carefully considered the credibility and trustworthiness of my actions in what Miles and Huberman noted as research worthiness, integrity, and quality. For example, the trustworthiness of the findings were strengthened by making use of triangulation by using multiple data sources of interviews, observation field notes, and documents, and by closely collaborating with my dissertation chairperson. Furthermore, the course instructor served as an independent reviewer to confirm the thematic analysis of data from interviews and collected documents by examining the findings. The course instructor determined that the findings were appropriate. I also used participant review of the findings and member checks on interview transcripts, observation field notes, and analysis of document excerpts to confirm the credibility of findings. I accomplished this by restating participant responses during the interviews as accuracy checks for understanding responses and by
sending the findings to participants by email for verification.

Criteria by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in dealing with these issues of trustworthiness of the findings were also considered through what they term as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Activities including sufficient time in data collection and triangulation strengthen the believability of or confidence in the interpretation and accuracy of the findings. Credibility pertains to how well the research findings represent reality (Merriam, 1998). Dependability refers to the extent that the study is reliable based on its replicability and consistency in methods and findings. Since establishing the quality of the study through documentation is at stake in this respect, accuracy in collecting and documenting data through a very careful inquiry audit addressed this criterion. Confirmability, referring to the corroboration of the study procedures and findings, is closely connected to dependability and also strengthened through an exacting audit trail. Lastly, transferability involves concern with generalizing the research findings to other situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, “It is, in summary, not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316). Stake (1995) confirmed this with case study design noting that sometimes there will be interest in generalizing findings from one case to other cases and other times there may be little interest in generalizations. What is crucial is the provision of thick, rich description from a case so that the reader can determine whether or not aspects of findings should be transferred. Given that this was a case study design and action research, the detailed explanation of the action research process and the rich description of the case provide
sufficient information and direction for future approaches in comparable practice settings.

The sections on data collection and analysis procedures include a description of activities that address these concerns of trustworthiness. In summary, they include, for example, data collection techniques through an information-rich case to ensure rich, thick description on embodied experiences, member checks, peer examination, triangulation, a meticulous audit trail, collection methods including persistent observation and prolonged engagement, and a theoretical explanation of my position as the researcher in addressing issues of trustworthiness. Merriam (1998) noted that trustworthiness of qualitative findings are enhanced “through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (p. 199-200). Trustworthiness involves ethical, conscientious conduct as an investigator in all phases of implementing the study. Jacobson’s (1998) explanation of this aspect in terms of issues of integrity was also helpful in guiding quality and standards of research practice.

I adhered to ethical research practice in accordance with the Internal Review Board of The Pennsylvania State University. Areas such as informed consent and protection of participants’ confidentiality (e.g., using pseudonyms to identify collected data) were of highest priority and carefully addressed in conducting this research. As Stake (2005) notes, “Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world” (p. 459). Accordingly, I followed appropriate etiquette, consideration for others, and strict ethics in conducting myself as a qualitative researcher.
Summary

This chapter has specified the direction of examination for the phenomenon of embodiment as a way of knowing. It has established the usage of and rationale for the qualitative paradigm and an integrated case study design and action research as the most appropriate methodology to investigate the research questions. It also described the selection and use of a purposeful sample of participants, data collection techniques, and methods to analyze and interpret the data while addressing credibility and trustworthiness in the research process.
CHAPTER FOUR:

ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY PROCESS AND INITIAL FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore revaluing embodiment as a way of knowing by examining how it was conceived of, applied and experienced in a formal higher education classroom. It was based on the assumption that there are multiple ways of knowing beyond the traditional Western view of rationality in a disembodied mind to construct knowledge and that embodiment is an alternate way of knowing. It was also based on the assumption that embodied knowledge is accessed through the realm of subjectivity and experiential learning.

Given its purpose and assumptions, this investigation was a case study of a higher education classroom and an action research project. A single case study design was integrated in the method for this study as a means to generate extensive, richly descriptive information on embodiment as examined in a higher education classroom specifically where direct attempts were made to incorporate attention to the body in learning and deal with issues of embodiment. Integrated with the case study design, action research provided a method to investigate the phenomenon of embodiment as a practice problem in attempting to discover insights on how to apply and incorporate experiences of embodiment in a valuable manner to improve the quality of practice through significant learning experiences. As a practical process that goes through a cycle of posing questions, implementing action and reflecting on practice, action research generally follows a four-step process of plan, act, observe, and reflect (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).
This chapter will open with an overview of the initial planning in light of the case and its context. It will begin by describing the higher education classroom, the instructor and student participants in this study and my role as facilitator in the action research process, and how I initially went about planning the sessions, though in action research these are also adjusted in light of what happens in each session. Next it will describe what was done in the acting and observing phases of the action research process and then proceed with a summary explanation of the early findings. A detailed discussion based on participant reflections after the course was over will take place in the following chapter.

Planning in Light of the Case and its Context

Before the findings are discussed, it is important to establish how the study came to be and how I began planning in light of the case and its context. Thus I’ll describe the case and its context, and then discuss how I initially planned the sessions in light of this context.

The Case and its Context

The single case selected for this study was a nursing course, Family and Community Health Concepts, within a B.S. program in nursing at a large, public university. The determination of this course as an appropriate case for this study emerged through committee discussion at my dissertation proposal. The instructor for this course attended my proposal due to a shared interest in the topic of embodiment and how to possibly incorporate attention to the body in learning within the scope and sequence of nursing courses. This particular course focused on the study of concepts related to family and community-based nursing care through the lens of multicultural influences on health practices. The purpose and method of this study in dealing with the concept of
embodiment and experiential learning seemed applicable to the focus of this course and its design. The course was offered through two sections during fall semester that regularly met on a biweekly basis for 3 hours 30 minutes on a weekday evening as separate sections and occasionally for a weekend meeting as a combined section. I selected one section simply based on the suitability of the course schedule for me as the case to implement experiences of embodiment. I only attended the evening weekday meetings usually staying for the duration of the class in addition to the one hour during which I facilitated project sessions. There were 12 students, all white women, enrolled in the course. The students were experienced registered nurses who completed either a hospital-based diploma program or associate degree in nursing at other institutions and have returned to higher education to attain a B.S. degree in nursing. For most students, this course was a requirement taken near the completion of this program.

The course organization included clinical hour requirements and projects involving community health. Students were self-directed in formulating part of the syllabus requirements in these areas. However, there were several required assignments, such as an interview with someone from a different ethnic background, included in project requirements. Project development was directed at changing the way students perceive health in the community. The instructor used mini-lectures, discussion and small group interaction to set up the emphasis areas for course concepts focused on doing health in the community through cross-cultural and ethnic threads (international and U.S.) aimed at prevention and health promotion. During the initial planning phase in designing the sessions, I consulted with the instructor before the course began to discuss the course content and projected conceptualizations and experiences of embodiment. The
discussion focused on sharing ideas and suggestions with the course instructor regarding project design in an attempt to integrate the project sessions with the course content and syllabus as much as possible. I continued informal discussions with the instructor following each session when possible to gather her feedback. I also asked her questions during the first interview after the second session aimed at gathering her feedback on the early experiences of embodiment implemented in the course. For example, when asked if she had any concerns or recognized areas in need of improvement at that point, the instructor answered:

No, I don’t question any of it and I wouldn’t have known…it’s helpful to be there and experience how you are doing it because it helps me know a way to do it. Like some of the stuff I might have tried to bring into a class. But you’re doing it a little bit differently and then it just gives me confidence to, well always to be less teacherly which I try to do anyway but you know it just happens…so to be less teacherly and more human and this is a reminder of ways to do that. To have you come and do this gives me the chance to be the student and I guess, see that’s how I learn…that’s how I learn with my body and that’s how I learn period. There are certain things that you just do better… you get it better if you are part of the experience. So even having done it, so even having known about diaphragmatic breathing from singing and even having done Tai Chi, I can see and feel how to work with that in my classroom differently having experienced it in that setting. So I don’t have to go through this mental process of transfer because that just doesn’t quite do it. I would’ve had to experiment with maybe different ways. So there’s sort of a neat change thing as far as just thinking about how would you
transfer this knowledge or how do you teach it. How do you get people to do this in the classroom or help them feel safe about doing it?

As another example of feedback in monitoring the development and implementation of the project, the instructor talked about the nature of the course experience and its content and thinking about how the experiences of embodiment seemed to be threading with the course as follows:

It’s relaxing and it gives me ideas. I will try to use some of this when I teach the course again next year so it’s fun to see how this fits. It’s a course that I’ve found very difficult. It’s probably the least popular of the courses that I teach. It’s not bad but it is the least popular and I think no matter what I do it sort of is that way and it’s not that I don’t want to teach it and because I don’t like the content because I do. I think that most of the students come there not being terribly interested in community because most of them work in the hospital and then it’s just all of this content so I had decided to do less content and focus more even on the family aspect of it and try to make it more personal this year and then give them a whole lot more choice. But I think that this attending to your body…this enhances that because it’s another way to give them choice and put them in charge of this knowledge and because there’s a culture thread to the whole thing, it ties in that way and because there’s a piece about teaching about health so without even saying oh, this is stress management, they can put it there themselves if they want to and they’re learning skills without calling them skills. I think it’s really very beautiful.
These types of reflections were included in on-going discussions between Susan and myself throughout the project and were very helpful and important for monitoring further planning and implementation.

*Initial Planning in Context*

Embodiment as a highly complex phenomenon by its nature is problem posing. However, a search for new insights on embodiment and how they effect and solve practice problems associated with experiences of embodiment needs more clarification. It was within the planning phase that the complex nature of embodiment was considered in attempting to develop an effective intervention. I turned to the review of the professional literature for direction in developing a sense of the core areas of conceptualizations and surrounding issues and the research questions driving this study to clarify the intervention. The outcome of this planning phase was a conceptualized practice problem focusing on how to effectively develop an understanding of embodiment and conduct experiences that facilitate body awareness and learning in a particular higher education classroom. With this direction in mind, next I developed and organized an intervention as a plan of action to address this problem. I decided when and how to implement the action plan within the structure and content of the selected fall semester nursing course as previously explained. The project was developed to consist of an opening session to introduce the research project and recruit participants, five 1 hour experiential sessions to conduct activities that facilitated embodied awareness, and a closing evaluative session. It was conducted biweekly from the end of September through the middle of December, 2006.

Also as part of the planning phase, I made decisions to collect data using
participant interviews, reflective documents, and field notes throughout the study. While this was discussed in the last chapter, a brief summary is provided here to remind the reader of these decisions before delving into the project action. Each participant was interviewed twice. The first interview was conducted in mid October with all interviews completed after the second experiential session except for one that was completed after the third session. This interview focused on getting a sense of participants’ bodily awareness, initial impressions of the concept of embodiment and early reactions to the experiences of embodiment and lasted from 20 to 45 minutes. The second interview was completed after the fifth experiential session at the beginning of December with all interviews finished by the last class meeting except for one interview completed after that date. This interview was directed at gathering information on participants’ new knowledge and understanding of embodiment as a result of this project, its relevance to the course experience and their personal and professional lives, and an assessment of embodiment as a valued way of knowing. It lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. I also maintained field notes from each session documented with a contact summary form written up as soon as possible no later than three days after each session that included reactions, comments, and insights that stood out in the session. I collected at least five documents of participant choice for analysis. The documents included reflective guides completed during the sessions after experiential activities and other reflections of choice such as journal entries and creative writing. The documents were completed throughout the duration of the project and collected after the fifth session. A written evaluation of the project (see Appendix D) was collected from 11 of the 13 participants mostly at the last class meeting in December or by mail from a few participants who were absent from this
meeting. Participant names were withheld on the written evaluation to help facilitate candid responses. With the means of data collection in mind, next it is important to introduce the study participants before explaining what was actually done in the project sessions.

Study Participants

There were 13 participants in this study including the course instructor and the 12 students enrolled in the course. All participants were white women ranging in age from mid-twenties to mid-fifties with a wide range of experiences as registered nurses. The course instructor has a professional background as a nurse practitioner. Nine of the student participants work in hospital-based settings, one in public school nursing, and two in health care management.

This section will introduce the course instructor and provide a brief description of each student participant, as identified by themselves at the beginning of the study, to give the reader a sense of the study participants in this case context in a manner that will ensure participant confidentiality. Each participant is described through self-reported information on their nursing experience and educational background. Furthermore, the instructor will also be introduced with respect to her philosophical perspective in teaching nursing students that situates her interest in the topic of embodiment.

Susan as Instructor

Susan is the course instructor. She is a full time professor in the B.S. in nursing program at a large, public university. She brings an extensive background as a nurse practitioner to share with students in the nursing program. She indicated that she has been exposed to nursing and medicine all of her life. She has a B.S. in nursing and two M.S.N.
degrees in psychiatric nursing and family practice. In her early fifties, she has 21 years experience in army nursing with her nursing experience ranging from psychiatric nursing, burns, plastics, and trauma to community nursing and teaching. She has been teaching undergraduate nursing courses for the past ten years. She has been teaching at the present institution since the beginning of 2000.

Susan situated her philosophical view in working with nursing students, in part, as follows:

Well I will say, my students are routinely anxious and part of that is the environment that they work in and part of it is just the way they are, partly because of the environment that they work in and how they learn to be in nursing schools and sometimes how they see themselves as learners. They don’t expect or see themselves really to be great students or they expect to have to knock themselves out and do too much. So, I see this really…it’s another way of getting them past that. I do different things. I have them in four courses and I see people change over that period of time and I do lots of things to try to get them out of that mode and see how they can be in charge of their own practice. I mean and it’s not all about what’s on their to do list at their job. That is not even what nursing is … so to help them own nursing as a thing for themselves.

Susan expressed a deep personal and professional interest in exploring the phenomenon of embodiment. She holds a firm belief that bringing attention to the body as a way of knowing is highly significant in the learning process and that experiential learning is a valuable avenue for engaging learners in this way of knowing. She has a sincere interest in exploring how to apply and incorporate embodied learning into the
scope and sequence of nursing courses. She stated that this study presented an opportunity for her to compare the experiences of both sections of the Family and Community Health Concepts course for promising insights on the application and value of incorporating experiences of embodiment into nursing courses in general. She continued to explain her philosophy and position regarding the experiences of this study as follows:

But this is just another really effective way I think to enhance that whole process and I see it working that way. I see them just kind of looking at things in another way. So it’s transformative in that way I believe because I see them changing the way they look at things without having to ask them, “What are your assumptions about this? What are you thinking differently?” I don’t really care. I don’t care about the outcome. I don’t care what they think differently. I just want them to experience that as possible so I see that happening and later they’ll put it into words when they want to … maybe in this class, maybe in another one, maybe just informally, it doesn’t matter.

Susan’s involvement in this study allowed her to engage from both an instructor perspective and also from a similar perspective in line with the students’ level of participation.

Amy

Amy is a somewhat recent A.S.N. graduate who has been working as an RN since June in a hospital emergency room. She is in her mid-twenties. Prior to her degree completion, she was a nursing assistant for five years, part of which involved working in a hospital unit for women with problem pregnancies. She plans to continue to work in
hospital-based emergency nursing upon completion of her B.S. She described her sense of body awareness as always feeling in fast-forward perhaps because her work environment is so very fast-paced in dealing with trauma in the hospital emergency room.

*Rose*

Rose is currently employed as an elementary school nurse. She is in her mid-fifties. She worked as an LPN before completing an A.S.N. at a community college. She then worked as an RN in an extended care facility and then in home health. She hopes to complete a B.S. within two years and then become certified in school nursing. Rose claimed her sense of body awareness is tied to when she feels she’s “not balanced” and “flying apart at the seams.” She particularly enjoys kickboxing as a form of exercise to relax and release tension.

*Barb*

In her early twenties, Barb holds an A.S.N and Associates in Letters, Arts, and Sciences. She works as an RN in a hospital operating room. She plans to complete her B.S. and then possibly pursue an M.S.N.. Barb feels she needs to slow down more and become more aware of her body by paying attention to relaxing and managing stress. She participates in different forms of exercise.

*Mary*

Mary, in her early twenties, holds an A.S.N. and is a medical surgical oncology staff nurse. She expressed a level of intuitive or instinctual awareness that comes into play in her work environment with respect to patient assessment. She particularly enjoys relaxing outdoors in open spaces and experiences with nature where she has quiet time to herself. She also expressed that her sense of body awareness is geared toward pain,
illness, and manifestations of the stress response.

Karen

Karen is a maternity RN in a hospital setting for the past year. While earning her A.S.N., she worked as a CNA. All of her nursing experience has been in maternity. She is in her mid-twenties. She stated that she feels most in tune to her body’s physicality and health-related needs with respect to body awareness. She also stated, “I need to pay attention a little bit more,” to body/mind connectedness particularly in her work setting.

Mae

Mae is in her mid-twenties and has worked as a medical intensive care nurse for five years. She holds an A.S.N. and plans to continue her education to attain a Masters degree in anesthesiology. She considers herself to be a highly reflective person in tune with her senses and interactions with her environment. She gets that “gut-feeling” as the most pronounced physiological reaction to the stress response. She’s most curious about the development of what seem to be instinctual parenting responses for her as a parent of a one-year old and expressed a heightened sensitivity to body awareness most pronounced during pregnancy and the birthing process.

Lynn

Lynn has two years experience as a nurse on a medical surgical floor and also has an A.S.N.. She is in her mid-twenties. She described herself as very outdoorsy and most relaxed and in harmony with herself through experiences with nature. She enjoys hiking and kayaking and goes to the woods as her favorite place to relax and interact with her surroundings. She describes her work setting as a very fast-paced, hectic unpredictable environment where she experiences the most disconnect from her body.
**Diane**

Diane is in her mid-twenties and has an A.S.N. from a community college. She has been working as a maternal child health nurse for the past two years. She expressed that she is curious about and very aware of a strong personal sense of what she would refer to as intuitive judgment as part of her body awareness. She feels that she is perceptive to her environment by being in tune with interactions in her surroundings. Her current state of pregnancy has particularly heightened her level of body awareness brought on by the changes in her body.

**Sara**

Sara is in her mid-fifties. She is a hospital-based diploma graduate with 35 years of experience in the nursing profession. She has 17 years experience as a surgical and staff nurse and has served as a nursing director in management for the past 16 years. Sara expressed that she has developed a deep interest in alternative medicines and therapies, meditation, yoga and the power of healing and positive thinking. She considers herself to be an intuitive person stating, “I go with my gut feeling.”

**Sandy**

Sandy is in her mid-forties. She is a hospital-based diploma graduate with 26 years of experience as a hospital staff nurse an varied areas such as post-operative care, open heart surgery, cardiac monitoring, and emergency room care. She is currently adjusting to employment in a new position in health care management. She describes her sense of body awareness as “the vibe” in relation to having a heightened feeling of positive or negative energy present in interactions with others and her surroundings.
Hannah

Hannah started her career in nursing as an aid for six years. After completing her A.S.N. at a community college, she has been working as a staff nurse for the past two years. She is in her mid-twenties. She described a need to manage stress in her life particularly in relation to her work environment and is eager to learn and apply stress management techniques.

Kate

Kate is a hospital-based diploma graduate. She is in her late twenties. She has worked as a staff nurse on a general medical surgical oncology floor for four years. Since 2004, she has been in a clinical head nurse position. Kate considers herself to be very perceptive to her environment especially in the workplace given the demands of her role and function. She is keenly observant and aware of patient needs and interactions with others in the work setting.

Researcher as Facilitator

I held a dualistic role in this study as researcher and facilitator of the action research project implemented in the classroom. This project was a reflection of my personal and professional insights on ways to engage and connect embodiment in practice realities. Beside my research role, I served as project facilitator coordinating and conducting experiential activities and participating in discussions to facilitate body awareness. As facilitator, I was responsible for decisions regarding the project’s design and implementation including the various conceptualizations of embodiment and the experiential applications. These judgments were based on an attempt to develop an effective intervention addressing the experience of and new knowledge about
embodiment as a practice problem in the classroom. This dualistic role placing me directly in the action of the research as a facilitative participant is consistent with the highly personal nature of qualitative action research (Patton, 2002).

Acting and Observing: Facilitating the Sessions

Next, given that the case, my initial planning, the participants, and my facilitative role in the action research process have been introduced, this section will describe the process of what was actually done in the acting and observing phases of action research. Implementing the intervention is the acting phase of the action research cycle followed by observing its outcome. This section will give a detailed description of the action implemented for each of the five experiential sessions of this project and the observations of the outcomes. The implemented activities and materials were developed in combination from my own ideas and from other resources as referenced in the sessions.

Session One: Getting a Sense of Embodiment through Cultural Considerations

This first experiential session was designed to give participants a sense of embodiment as a concept, to introduce a cultural lens that brings attention to the body into focus, and to experientially engage in a somatic movement experience connected to this cultural lens. As an opening thread, this cultural consideration tied to the course focus of multicultural influences by looking at perspectives, practices, and way of life among other cultures regarding how they bring attention to and experience body awareness. For example, the instructor facilitated a discussion on cultural competencies and health during this class and the first part of a documentary was viewed about the journey of refugees from Afghanistan bringing cultural differences
into distinct focus. The following description of the first session is reflective of this focus.

My facilitative process. I opened the session with a narrative from a woman of Chinese ancestry born in America and raised in a black ghetto describing her struggle with self-image issues searching for grounding in her Chinese female physical body (Pay, 1997). Her reflection of embodiment threaded with the instructor’s opening discussion on cultural competencies and health.

Next, I explained the qualities of embodiment as a concept tied to a holistic view of multiple ways of knowing. I tried to keep its conceptualization as simple as possible at this point. I defined it as a way of knowing that brings attention to the body as a site of learning mostly through sensing and acting. I also discussed embodied awareness as a unity of mind, body, and surroundings through direct engagement in bodily experiences and inhabiting a sense of one’s body through being-in-the-world. Participants then viewed a video on the Moken Village sea gypsies providing a glimpse of a group of people whose way of life brings attention to the body as a way of knowing (Simon, 2005). The experience of the Moken villagers in perceptively recognizing the signs of the tsunami and their sense of being-in-the-world rooted in their culture gave participants an example of what could be considered as the essence of embodied awareness. I then facilitated a discussion on this initial concept of embodiment tied to the Moken villagers and asked participants to try to take on the felt sense of the sea gypsies over the next two weeks in their personal and professional lives by pausing to notice their own sense of being-in-the-world as they went through each day. They were asked to take several moments to reflect on heightened experiences which they felt brought attention to their body as a way of knowing by journaling about the experience or expressing it through
some other way of personal choice (e.g., art, music, creative writing, movement activity).

Next, I briefly introduced the technique of diaphragmatic breathing as a way to bring direct attention to the body. I guided participants through practicing this technique while they listened to relaxing music. Diaphragmatic breathing is a key element of Tai Chi which was also used as the experiential activity for this session. After receiving a brief explanation on its principles and watching a video segment on this practice, I passed around strings of pearls as a metaphor for participants to feel and manipulate in trying to get a sense of the flowing movements of Tai Chi. Since the movements in Tai Chi are very fluid and connected, holding and moving strands of pearls gave participants another way to associate with the movements through the sense of touch in trying to develop a feel for this somatic technique. I then guided participants through a sequence of basic warm-up movements in Tai Chi with attention on diaphragmatic breathing while experiencing the movements with everyone willing to participate in these activities. I encouraged participants to try to experience the breathing technique in a more natural, relaxed setting. I asked them to pause and pay attention to finding their breath over the next two weeks, practice diaphragmatic breathing, and reflect in writing on its effectiveness as a relaxation technique.

Each participant was given a portfolio to collect distributed materials, reflective guides and journal entries from session to session. Participants were also given a biographical data sheet to complete and informed about the interview process for the first interview for this research project. I closed the session with an excerpt from a Buddhist woman reflecting on her relationship with inhabiting her body (Thanas, 1997).
Reactions and observations: Initial timidity and ambivalence. Data collected through field note observations and the first interview completed after the second session revealed a sense of initial timidity among some of the participants and a range of ambivalent reactions depending on the experience. Beginning with interview reactions on trying to bring attention to a sense of being-in-the-world, for example, Mary commented:

I just felt like I wish we could bring back our life as simple as what the sea gypsies were...just bring it back to a much more primitive time, make it more simpler. I also thought that the way that they do feel embodiment that it made me more aware like when I’m not at work but I remember you said something about how we just have that intuition, that voice inside of us that tells us something is wrong and then I had a patient of mine that had something wrong and the patient knew there was something wrong and I could tell there was something wrong and sure enough there was a complication. So, I’m glad we reacted upon it. And I thought about that when this happened...alright my instinct is telling me there’s something not right here. My body’s telling me there’s something not right and there wasn’t.

Kate also related aspects of the sea gypsies’ way of life to her work context stating:

I think that I’m well, not on the same level that they are aware of their environment, but I consider myself to be more in tune to my environment especially at the workplace than others because I get bothered by others who aren’t aware. So I do consider myself to be very perceptive of where I am, of what’s being said and whose around and observing patients or family members...
the tone, the environment, that kind of thing.

Barb in contrast, however, had difficulty connecting to the experience of the sea gypsies stating, “I thought this was difficult because I’m not comfortable about something like that with being aware of your body.” Karen pointed out the major differences between our lives and the way of life of the sea gypsies as what struck her the most while Mae stated that she was very interested by their way of life and thought it “was really kind of neat” further noting, “I think like every human, whether they’re aware of it or not, has this other way of knowing (like the Mokens) and that some people just aren’t as in touch with it as others.”

Ambivalent reactions were very evident in response to the Tai Chi experience during the interviews. Barb commented, “Some of it could be a little awkward and I had a lot of trouble just slowing down to do the different things.” The Tai Chi experience was uncomfortable for Amy as well saying, “I don’t know that I like it… I’m too fast-paced and it seems like it’s too slow.” Mary, on the other, remarked, “I thought it was fun. I would like to see it done in a different setting. The classroom isn’t really a great place to feel the flow of your body and the movements.” Lynn also commented, “It was very fun and I thought it was relaxing and challenging at the same time and I’m interested in doing more of it.” Diane added, “I love those movements, I think they’re very fluid and natural for your body to do” and Kate also expressed that she was relatively comfortable with the movements. Mae felt the same way about the Tai Chi experience stating:

I thought that was nice because they’re such simple, natural movements and it just makes your entire … your physical body and mental state of mind just more at peace and it lessens the tensions. And I don’t know why that is because
they’re so simple, but I guess maybe because they’re slow you know and it relaxes everything … your mind and your body.

A range of reactions was also evident in response to the experience of diaphragmatic breathing. Several comments were made in the interview about feeling some discomfort with trying to control the inhalation and exhalation movements during the breathing experience. Having to think about how to actually do this technique made it feel somewhat unnatural for some participants. For instance, Mary noted:

At first trying to learn how to do the breathing, I felt sort of anxious. I guess I wasn’t getting enough air…But I mean I just felt I’m breathing kind of faster than everybody else here. Why am I breathing so fast? Why can’t I breathe slower and and I can only breathe these quick breaths and I was trying to use the belly breathing but it wasn’t quite working for me.

Karen also had an unnatural experience with this at first commenting:

It was hard to concentrate on it for me at times. I found myself almost wanting to like laugh …almost like it wasn’t natural to stick out…trying to make my stomach go out to breathe than what’s normal inflating my lungs. I was trying to push my stomach out…The most when I notice it is when I’m laying flat. I can definitely notice it and it’s a more calm inhalation.

Mae, however, talked about a different reaction to this experience. She stated:

I think that it’s really interesting. I have a one-year old and I notice how he breathes and he definitely does the diaphragmatic breathing mostly all the time. But when he is upset, he’ll breathe up in his lungs, like higher in the chest. And for me, it’s very relaxing and I can … I don’t know … it’s not hard for me to do
because I think I belly breathe as it is when I try to relax. But yeah, it’s really neat and for my patients…I’m an ICU nurse and usually my patients are sedated and a lot of times I notice with them how they breathe and that something’s changing with them.

Lynn felt that the breathing experience was relaxing and made her feel more focused and centered while Diane reiterated the feeling of relaxation stating:

It does help me relax. I actually could feel my muscles relaxing. At one point I thought I was very relaxed and within seconds I just felt them drop and relax even more, and I was like, oh my gosh, I wasn’t even relaxed there. This must be what relaxed is. Those are things that I noticed with breathing.

As for reactions gathered from field note observations, I noted that there were only a few comments shared during the session experiences by participants who felt that the Tai Chi movements were very relaxing. Also, in response to trying to experience a felt sense of being-in-the-world like the sea gypsies, several participants commented that they were amazed and somewhat envious of the villagers’ simple way of life and pointed to significant contrasts with our Western, fast-paced, stressful way of life. They recognized the cultural lifestyle differences and their impact on being attentive to sensory awareness and the surrounding environment. In general, I sensed some initial hesitancy and timidity among the group about discussing their reactions.

Session Two: Bringing Awareness to the Sensory

This second experiential session focused on sensorimotor experience and sensory perception as concepts of embodiment. This focus was developed and designed in an effort to bring greater clarity to participants’ developing understanding of the nature of
embodiment in light of their early reactions and experiences. The experiential engagement to facilitate this focus included diaphragmatic breathing, guided imagery and visualization. The nursing class for this meeting began with viewing the conclusion of the documentary on the Afghan refugees followed with reactive discussion on issues of illegal immigration, ethnicity, quality of life and living conditions.

*My facilitative process.* I unexpectedly began this experiential session by expressing my reaction to a documentary that was viewed at the start of class as it was deeply connected to what I considered to be an embodied experience for me. I started the session by vividly describing my bodily experiences from visceral responses elicited by several scenes in the documentary. I described the muscle tension that stiffened my neck and shoulders, flinging the shoes off of my feet, drawing my legs under my body, and fidgeting in my seat as I watched the refugees crying out in the blackness of the locked crate for release from their suffocating struggle for air. I strongly experienced the claustrophobic discomfort inside my body. I had to get out of my seat and stand in the back of the room, look away out the window for a moment of peace from the tightness and closeness. When the scene finally ended and the image of children playing carelessly flashed on the screen, golden beams of sun split the stormy sky outside the classroom and streamed into the side windows. My attention and eyes were immediately drawn to the warm color of the golden hue as it gently streamed into the dark classroom. I felt a brief moment of peace and took some deep breathes in relief from the discomfort. I shared these instances about how I felt in tune with and connected to my senses and affective responses as a significant part of how I engage and experience my personal sense of being-in-the-world.
I transitioned from this by facilitating a period of diaphragmatic breathing accompanied by classical music. Next, I discussed the significance of perception and sensory awareness as aspects of embodiment and revisited the experience of the sea gypsies as a reminder of the value in bringing attention to perception and sensory awareness of surroundings. I asked the class to continue to try to go through a day with a similar sense of perceptive awareness as much as possible over the next two weeks and to react to this experience by journaling or some other self-selected form of reflective response. I shared a narrative excerpt by a white, middle-aged woman describing her experience of turning to nature in connection with the Sekani culture to conquer her fears and restore her sense of peace as an example of this type of reflection (Minogue, 1997).

I proceeded to introduce the connection of body and mind tapping into bodily sensory awareness through the experience of guided imagery. I facilitated two different experiences of guided imagery and visualization created from an image at the edge of a terrace on top of a city skyscraper with the ability to fly introduced in the second experience (Canfield, 1992). After each experience, participants responded in writing to a reflective guide focusing on how they felt and what their bodily experiences were in each moment. I then asked participants to share a reaction from this experience.

Next, I closed the session with a beginner Tai Chi sequence that added arm circling movements. Participants were given pieces of sheer fabric in soft colors to enhance the flowing feeling of the arm movements from the swaying fabric. Everyone was willing to participate in the movements. Participants were encouraged to try these movements in a comfortable environment and to continue to practice diaphragmatic breathing over the course of the next two weeks and to journal about their experiences.
then invited participants to bite into pieces of citrus fruit to awaken their sense of taste and to take several deep smells of the fresh citrus scents. I asked them to try to bring attention to the different types of sensory experiences introduced in this session over the next few weeks in their daily lives and to continue reflecting on their experiences.

*Reactions and observations: Continued ambivalence but more at ease.* The second session started to provide a sense of participants’ developing impressions and understandings of embodiment through glimpses of how they were beginning to relate to it as a concept and as an experience. My unexpected opening reaction to the documentary was an opportunity for me to share a personal insight as an example of an experience of embodied awareness as I began this session wondering if anyone else had a similar experience. I noted as a field observation that several participants added to my comments with similar reactions and acknowledged that they could relate to what I was describing. Also, while she was interviewed, Rose brought up that she could strongly relate to my experience of this stating that she also had a strong physiological and emotional reaction to that particular scene in the documentary.

In trying to thread and encourage more discussion into this session about participants’ immediate reactions to the experiences and their past reflections, responses continued to reveal ambivalent feelings. However, they also pointed to a growing sense of feeling more at ease in experiencing and exploring these activities. In response to trying diaphragmatic breathing, for example, Susan commented that she found herself trying to control her breathing based on the rhythm of the music which seemed uncomfortable at times during the session. However, she also expressed that she became more comfortable with it in bringing attention back to it as a technique that she was
familiar with from taking voice lessons years ago when she used to be involved in singing activities. In response to practicing this breathing technique, she noted:

To have that in class was a neat reminder and once you said that and how to pay attention to our breathing in class, I found that there was an association for me between awareness of my breathing and thinking about the course. And so in the coming weeks whenever I think about that class and what happened or what I have to do for it…anything related to the class and I notice my breathing and then my breathing starts to slow down. I just pay attention to it and breathe more deeply. So that was really neat to see that something could happen that simply and it would have this huge connection. Because if that could happen to me I was thinking, oh wow I wonder to what degree this happens for students.

Several other individuals still commented on having difficulty with trying to pause in their day to bring attention to their breath and to use breathing as a calming technique. Comments focused on interferences from living a relatively stressful, fast-paced lifestyle. Amy reflected in her interview on this practice that she continued to try it but felt she was still not that good at it saying, “I’ve noticed that stuff slows down like my pulse and I relax more but when I do it I feel like I’m still breathing some from my chest and it’s not complete and I have to think about it.”

Reactions from the skyscraper guided imagery experience also showed considerable variability from expressions of relaxation and comfort to highly discomforting depending on how participants perceived the images. Rose commented in her interview, “When we went to that skyscraper, that was terrible and I was standing on a concrete ledge.” Amy also expressed a strong reaction to this experience remarking:
I felt my heart racing and it was just from thinking about it so that was kind of weird for me...like as soon as you said something and when I was picturing it and then you would say something else, I would be like, oh my gosh, like there’s no railing What? and I could control it in my mind but I was listening to what you were saying and I was really getting into it and I mean all I would have to do was open my eyes and it would be over but it wasn’t. It was very realistic to me.

Amy continued that she wasn’t able to fly in the second experience because she was too scared from the height while other participants remarked that they were able to fly very peacefully and with ease to their favorite relaxing places. The participants seemed very curious about and surprised by their very different reactions to the imagery. Most expressed that they were able to experience a sense of mind/body connectedness from the guided imagery and I sensed that participants were starting to develop an early understanding about the nature of embodied awareness as an outcome of this particular experience.

Reactions to the second experience of Tai Chi expressed during the session and during the first interview revealed that this experience started to feel more comfortable for some of the participants than the first experience with Tai Chi. Karen, for example, noted the following about this experience during her interview:

The first night was very interesting and new. When you were trying to reach the yin and yang, the in between like movements, that was a little hard. But the second night when we did it with the little wavy pieces of fabric... that was definitely more interesting to me and relaxing. I had a fun time just waving my arms almost going with the way I was breathing back and forth in between
leaning on one foot when you talked us through to think about your whole body and equilibrium going from one side to the other…definitely better than the first night.

Also commenting on the Tai Chi experience, Susan remarked:

I think I really like the meditative aspect of it. It’s just so beautiful …we don’t use our whole bodies all in harmony but you do with that because everything about your being is all moving together. It’s wonderful and it’s purposeful without being driven which is such a good thing… I realized when I did it, you were talking in class about all the muscles you don’t realize are there. I thought that was the neatest thing because when I did the Tai Chi, I learned I had all these muscles in my thighs and that really nasty inside part of your thigh that women are always complaining about that you can’t do anything with…you can with Tai Chi. Because you work these little muscles that you don’t use any other time except when you’re having sex and Tai Chi does that. So when we did it in class I was real aware of how stiff I was which has nothing to do with those muscles. But I appreciated your comments because they are true. You just learn about these little aspects of your body that unless you did Tai Chi you probably didn’t realize.

As a final observation on this session, I noted that I felt it was very important for me to continue to enthusiastically encourage participants to follow-up with exploring these activities outside of the session to feel more at ease with these types of experiences.

First Interview: Initial Body Awareness

Now that the first two experiential sessions have been described, this section will add to the reactions and observation of outcomes by further detailing the early findings
on body awareness gathered from the first interview completed with participants. Participants were given the option of completing the interview by phone contact or in person. All interviews except for one were completed by phone contact. This interview focused on getting an initial sense of a participant’s body awareness, impression of the concept of embodiment, and reaction to the experiential activities conducted to facilitate body awareness. Initial impressions and early reactions to the experiential sessions were discussed in reactions and observations in the first two sessions. Therefore, the early findings for this section focus on establishing and explaining the thematic frames of reference regarding body awareness as described by participants during the first interview. Findings from the final interviews, collected documents, and the project’s final evaluation will be discussed in length in the next chapter along with the reflecting phase of action research. However, it is noted that reflecting is also inherent in the acting and observing phases as I reflected on what actually happened in each session to design and revise subsequent action.

In order to address the questioning of this research project about how embodiment is understood and experienced by participants, I needed to begin with an early sense of where each participant was personally starting from in this project in reference to body awareness. In describing their own sense of body awareness, part of this inquiry focused on when or how participants listened to their bodies and felt the most connected or disconnected to their bodies. There were three common themes revealed in participant descriptions of body awareness; a sense of physical and emotional responses and sensations, a sense of personal enjoyment, and a sense of disconnect with their bodies.
Sense of the physical and emotional. An inquiry into participants’ body awareness revealed varying types of physical and emotional responses and sensations. For most participants, a description of their sense of body awareness was attached to listening or attending to a physical or emotional response or sensation most commonly signaled by fatigue, pain, hurt, and stress. For example, participant descriptions of when they bring attention to their bodies included “when it’s unhappy and when it screams to me,” “when I’m tired,” “when I’m having sex,” and “when it hurts, like a headache, like pain.”

Bringing attention to body awareness was also often mentioned in the context of a physical or emotional signal or symptom usually as an alert that attention needs to be given to some aspect of self-care and wellness. For example, Rose stated, “I listen to my body when I don’t feel well, be it physically or mentally. If I feel bloated which is a physical thing then I do listen to what I need to do which is drink more water or get out and exercise some of this bloat off,” and Diane commented, “When I feel pain and fatigue, I’ll listen to my body to slow down.” For Karen, however, a reflection of bodily awareness included a consideration of both physical and emotional responses and sensations as follows:

I listen to my body when it hurts and it’s tired. Well, obviously everyone reacts to pain. I’m not sure if I react to an emotional hurt in my body. It’s more like something inside like you’re talking about like embodiment. Maybe I should pay attention a little bit more to that. Something like how it would make you feel, like death, how does it make you feel inside? Usually, I’m just pushing those feelings away and that’s what I know to do. I deal a lot with infant death. I have gotten so
immune to it. I don’t even like cry anymore.

Comments by Mae also reflected a sense of bodily awareness connected to both physical and emotional responses and sensations as she stated:

I usually listen to my body when it’s hurting when there’s like a physical uncomfortableness or if a situation is making me uncomfortable mostly in my stomach like a sinking, like something that just doesn’t feel right like a situation that I’m in or I’m a little nervous about something. It’s hard to say … like butterflies.

Attention to physicality connected with the experience of pregnancy was also recollected by two participants in bringing notice to their sense of bodily awareness. Mae noted the following:

I just had my little boy a year ago and I think during the whole pregnancy I learned a lot about my body through my pregnancy… just my limitations… I also learned how my body can change and adapt so I can still function, how I needed to function even though I had another little person growing inside of me. I think that I was probably more aware of my body and how I learned through my body anyway because it was a change so it was more evident to me.

Diane also responded that she felt she learned through her body by listening to her body’s changes during pregnancy. She remarked:

I am 20 weeks pregnant and when I first realized I was pregnant, I had physical changes that happened right away. And at first I didn’t pay attention to them because I’m so busy and everything. But then once I really took the test, I had already known I was positive because of some of my body’s physical changes.
Also associated with physicality but through a different response, four participants specifically connected bodily awareness to the relaxation response. Amy, for example, stated that she feels most aware of her body when she is calmed down. She commented, “When I relax is when I notice things, like if I’m sick or something I don’t really notice it unless I have a chance to sit down. I’m too fast-paced I think.” She did add that since she’s been involved in the experiential sessions, she seems to be even more perceptive to her surroundings stating:

I think that at first I didn’t really think much of it but now that we’re discussing it and stuff I’m noticing like little things more and more. Like the other day before I was in…since I work in the emergency room I was in a trauma and one patient came in, it’s almost like time stood still for a minute and it went real slow. Where usually we bring a patient in and it’s like in two seconds it’s this, this, and this, and for me it was really weird because all of a sudden when I was getting ready to work on the patient everything went real slow and like I noticed how bright the lights were and like little things like that.

Hannah also expressed that she is most in touch with bodily awareness when she is relaxed and doesn’t have any stress or anything else going on around her. For Kate, she felt that she gained some insight on her sense of bodily awareness elicited through the relaxation response facilitated during one of the experiential sessions as follows:

Part of my response to this past week’s class was that when we were relaxing and doing the relaxation on the floor was that I really wasn’t listening to my body in the past couple of weeks just because I’ve been feeling a lot in my chest … just very tight and I couldn’t get my breath and anxiety. So I guess I finally started
listening to myself but only when I was in the environment that enabled me to do that because I usually don’t take that time regularly.

In addition to physical responses and sensations, some participants also talked about affective experiences through an intuitive sense of interrelatedness with others and their surroundings in connection to bodily awareness. Sandy, for example, described her bodily awareness as “the vibe” commenting that she feels she listens to her body as follows:

when I can sense the vibe from people, like if you have a bunch of negative people and even before you have to see them you know there’s something going on that’s probably not the best thing. It’s just the way of feeling it and then whenever, you know, just how people are around you, they give off I just call it a negative energy. It’s just that something’s not right.

In addition to being attentive to her body’s physical responses when her heart rate goes up, Sara also described her bodily awareness in part as an intuitive sense as follows:

a sense of knowing when a situation requires me to be quiet and when a situation requires me to interact. I go with my gut feeling. I go with what I’m sensing from the environment, as well through my body whether it’s like just my heart rate or stress then, you know, I use my body to de-stress.

Diane commented that her early participation in the experiences of embodiment made her more curious about instinctive or intuitive aspects of embodied awareness. She expressed that she had several significant life experiences during which she felt a perceptive sense of body awareness. Looking back on the earlier experiences, she compared this awareness to an intuitive sense of embodied awareness somewhat like the
sea gypsies in sensing danger in their environment. She recalled the following past experience as an example of this:

My parents’ house is in a wooded setting. There are not a lot of neighbors and behind us are acres and acres of woods. And it’s not fully like the sea gypsies, but I always remember when I was a kid getting scared when I would no longer hear the crickets because it always told me something was there. They shut up for a reason. There might be a storm coming or there might be an animal there and I was always nervous whenever they would stop chirping. I always considered myself close with the woods or with nature because I would always hike in the woods and even though you’re really conscious … my dad and my brother hunt, so they can walk through the woods very quietly… I never hunted so I never learned to do that but I always learned to listen. One time I was hiking by myself and I was climbing on these rocks and I heard this low growl. It made all the hair stand up on my arms and neck. It wasn’t loud and I only heard it once but that was enough for me to get out of there.

*Sense of personal enjoyment.* While aspects of physicality and affective connections were talked about in participant descriptions of bodily awareness with physicality as a most prominent dimension, a sense of personal enjoyment often associated with relaxation through engagement in physical activity, experiences in nature, or playfulness with others was also talked about by most participants as a way to connect to bodily awareness – to feel “more in touch” with their bodies. Kick-boxing, kayaking, hiking, swimming, pilates, yoga and other forms of movement were noted as enjoyable activities for participants not only to feel better physically and emotionally but
also as a way to feel connected to their bodies.

Comments also varied between preferences to be alone or to be with others. Talking about when she felt most connected to her body, Mary, for instance, responded, “when I’m outside all by myself in an open space in the middle of a field on a walk…nature, totally….or laying in the sun.” Karen also preferred solitude responding, “when I’m by myself and just enjoying something that I like to do even if it’s just sleeping.” Amy remarked that she felt most connected and aware of her body in a few moments of peace and quiet when she first wakes up in the morning. For Mae, however, when asked when she felt most connected to her body she remarked, “I have to say probably when I’m playing with my little boy because we’re usually down on the ground crawling around and I’m probably most aware of my body when I’m just at that kind of child-like primitive level.”

While a few participants talked about experiences in nature as a source of personal enjoyment, Lynn, in particular, expressed a deep connection to nature as a way to get in touch with her bodily awareness stating the following in response to when she felt the most connected to her body:

when I’m relaxed, when I’m lying in bed, or when I’m walking in the woods.

Probably when I’m in my relaxed places, I have time to think about things and take in what I really love with all the sensory and the woods. I can reflect on things like that. I’m outdoorsy so I feel relaxed and more in harmony I guess when I’m in the woods.

She described her sensory experiences of body awareness while kayaking on the lake as a favorite activity as follows:
When I’m out on the water like that, kayaking is very relaxing for me. If I go on the lake or river so it’s kind of the same emotions. It’s very peaceful and relaxing and I don’t have to think about anything and all of my senses are being used and I notice things around me. I’ll just notice a lot more in the environment than I do when I’m wrapped up in life … on a lake I’m paddling out very slowly and I’m just leaning back and the sun is out and there’s a little breeze. It’s very peaceful. It’s beautiful weather. Everything around me is green and beautiful colors. There’re trees. The water is so pretty and it’s so relaxing and you just keep paddling. You smell the fresh air and you see birds flying and it’s so nice. You hear birds singing and see fish in the water.

_Sense of disconnect._ Perhaps a most noticeable difference in articulating their thoughts of bodily awareness was most pronounced in participant comments regarding when and how they felt most disconnected to their bodies. “When I’m in a hurry … responding to outside demands, I pay no attention to my body at all,” as stated by one participant was a typical expression of disconnect from one’s body. Most remarks by participants were quite extensive and for many, generated specific examples of recognizing when they felt most out of balance and disconnected from their bodies. Comments included feeling tense and stressed, “not balanced,” “can’t focus on me at all,” “having a lot on my mind”, “not having time to stop and think”, “going a hundred miles a minute” and, as one person emphatically noted, “I just think I’m flying apart at the seams and that’s really how I feel.” For most participants, this awareness and these reactions were embedded in their role and function as registered nurses. The following remarks by Lynn exemplify this:
Probably when I’m at work or doing too many things at one time, it’s what do I need to do, what do I need to do and you know, just very disconnected. Well with our job we have certain things that we need to get done in a certain amount of time so that’s like the big goal and that has to be done and I know where I work there’s so many disruptions and things can turn around in a second and it’s very varied all day and you have to be ready for anything and it interferes with feeling my body because it’s not about me. It’s not about me. It’s about everything else I have to do and everybody else I have to take care of. So you are focused on doing your job and you don’t pay attention to yourself. There’s no time.

Karen also recalled a time at work when she felt a sense of disconnect:

Just the other day I was back to work. I just grabbed a chart and I called the wrong doctor and had him come the whole way to the hospital to do a circumcision. And when he got there, he’s like, “No, I told you that you have the wrong doctor.” I was like, “No I don’t.” And finally the two of us looked in the chart and I was the one that was wrong. I called him…the wrong doctor to do a procedure and I thought, “Oh my God, how did I do that?” I know better and I just don’t know where my head was. A couple people that day were like, “Where is your head at?” And it was like over an hour process of me trying to get him in here and I could have realized but I never did. I’m so used to a normal routine. It’s just like old hat after awhile…don’t even pay attention. And I thought, “Well, God, maybe that’s what happened…maybe I need to pay attention a little bit more.”

Sara’s remarks also point to a sense of imbalance regarding bodily awareness
experienced in the work environment. She noted:

With the business I’m in, the most I experience a disconnect is when I’m trying to
multitask and it’s still not enough. At some point you kind of like have to say,
“This is crazy, take a step back.” So I think it’s when I’m trying to multitask, doing
two kinds of things and not doing anything, one thing right in my mind…
discombobulated…disconnected.

Several participants also talked about feeling desensitized at work as a type of
disconnect from their bodies because of the demands and nature of the work
environment. For some, desensitization became a learned way of surviving and
functioning in difficult, hectic, traumatic work experiences. Mary explained this
disconnect as follows:

When I’m at work, I try to disconnect myself from the situation in order to get
more things done. Things are busy and nasty with what I see at work that I try to
think this is just the job and this is really not me doing this. I have many cancer
patients on my floor so I see this type of tragedy 24/7 day in day out. Some are
young, some are older. You can’t change what they are going through. We had
somebody in the mid 40’s who came in for abdominal pain and ended up having
cancer in the pancreas and liver. She was shocked and very saddened by it all but
because of the way … because I see it often … I’m kind of desensitized by the
whole thing. It’s not that I don’t care about the way she’s feeling or that you don’t
want to hear it … just that I would try to just give her her pills, get her blood
pressure, vital signs, do everything I need to do to get my job done but kind of
ignoring the feeling that I know what she’s been through that day because I don’t
want to get into it with her.

However, for two of the participants, their responses focused on feeling a disconnect with their bodily awareness generally in a more personal rather than professional context. For example, Sandy noted that she felt disconnected with her body when she was doing something that didn’t suit her or that she didn’t feel like doing saying, “Like if I’m doing something that I really don’t care to be doing that doesn’t fit my style, it’s just like it doesn’t feel right, I just want to skip it and move on.” Kate related her remarks to her wellness needs stating:

I think disconnected is when I’m just not making time for myself and doing the things that I used to like to do, exercising those kind of things and it just doesn’t make me feel good physically and so I think that’s my biggest disconnect not allowing myself to do that enabling me to get the time to do that.

And perhaps most appropriately in closing, Susan offered a striking insight from her perspective as the course instructor that threaded together the participants’ emergent themes of bodily awareness into the nursing course context as follows:

When I first read a couple of articles … related to somatic learning I thought this is really cool because it had been my sense in teaching health assessment that in learning how to do assessment, you use your body, really. It is so much of what you do as a nurse that it’s just all about learning with your body and I don’t mean just psychomotor skills sort of thing. You have to read people using your body. You move through all of your work. You have this kinesthesia connection with people you’re taking care of. You use your body constantly and I think that part of the reason that people who have been nurses for awhile which is what my
students are … don’t even see the value of coming back to school because they think of it as just all this stuff about words and thinking. They know that, not that they don’t think, of course they think and they read stuff to keep up to date, but that’s not … you use your body when you are doing your work. So to me it would be fascinating to pay more attention to body in the classroom and just make it a little … help people at least understand for themselves better how they use their bodies to learn and show more appreciation for that kind of knowledge.

Now that a sense of body awareness among the participants has been established, a description of the remaining three experiential sessions of the action research project is resumed with the revealed body awareness of participants taken into consideration in the development of these sessions.

Session Three: Intensifying the Experiential

The third session continued focusing attention to body awareness through sensory experiences and imagery. However, there was a strong emphasis placed on heightening and intensifying the experiential aspect of this particular session through muscular responses facilitated by a “camp fire” experience, progressive muscle relaxation, and yoga. This emphasis was developed as an attempt to facilitate greater body awareness among participants through more fulfilling experiences of embodiment. The participants were immersed in experiential engagement throughout this session that heightened body awareness through physical and emotional responses. The nursing class for this meeting began with the instructor reflecting on her professional experiences in community nursing. She talked about health status and the importance of relationship in home health care as she vividly described challenging and rewarding conditions that she
experienced in the field. She also reminded students about trying to link whatever content they are exposed to in this course with what it means for them on both a personal and professional level of growth and development. This highly individualized approach to learning opportunities in this course was most conducive to intensifying the exploration of experiences of embodiment at this point as facilitated in this session.

_My facilitative process_. We sat on carpets and blankets in a small circle on the floor under dimmed lights, around candles burning in the circle’s center filling the space with autumn scents as we listened to sounds of crickets and then the ocean surf in the background. I shared my childhood recollections of camping out on my front porch in a tent with my sisters and dog as we told ghost stories. I then asked participants to go wherever the space took them and to relax and focus on deep breathing. I also asked them to gather a reflection of their choice from the past several weeks that they considered to be an embodied experience for them and to share it with the group. After some quiet reflective time, I opened the space with one of my own reflections and a poem on the essence of embodiment (Bays, 1997). More silence followed as we continued to listen to the crickets and then in a few minutes the space became filled with reflections as several participants took turns sharing their embodied reflections.

After a final pause, I closed the space with quiet relaxation and transitioned with a brief overview of principles of self-care and stress management. While we were still on the floor, I used a video of guided relaxation to introduce the release of muscle tension and bracing. The lights were turned off in the room while the candles continued to burn. Participants stretched out on the floor and were guided through a relaxation experience. Next, I added the concept of progressive muscle relaxation to this experience through a
series of cues for tensing and releasing various muscle groups involving relaxation of the face, neck, shoulders, upper back, hips, thighs, and calves. Participants were then given time to comment on and write down their reflections on these experiences.

In concluding this session, I introduced yoga and an instant calming sequence (Greenberg, 2002) as a somatic technique and guided participants through beginner yoga postures. A few people chose to observe or modify their participation during different movements. Since there was not enough time to immediately reflect on this experience, I asked participants to complete a reflective guide after class that could be submitted with final documents.

Reactions and observations: Deepening the connection. I previously mentioned that I sensed participants had experienced several moments of insight during the second session in getting an early sense of the connection between body and mind through experiences of embodiment and developing a conceptual understanding of embodied learning. I felt that this connection had definitely deepened as an outcome of the third session with the immersion in experiential engagement. Feeling connected to the body through a sense of enjoyment and relaxation replaced feelings of disconnect and awkwardness in these moments for most participants as revealed in their reactions and my observations.

The camp fire experience in particular seemed to deepen the connection in different ways for several participants. One person talked about her love and connection to nature as a way to feel embodied experiences. She described what it felt like to hike and kayak on the lake and read a favorite poem written by her grandmother connected to her love and appreciation of nature as embodied experiences for her. Another person
reacted with heightened sensory impressions recollecting family moments camping on the beach through vivid details of the past as if she were experiencing them all over again in the present moment. Her calm and warm tone in her expressive memories echoed a fondness and sense of peace and contentment. Another fond childhood recollection by someone else followed describing a first time sleeping out experience in a hut with a best friend and stuffed animals and being scared in the middle of the night by strange noises ending the sleep out. Again, the details were recalled as if in the moment. Some of us giggled with her like little kids relating to her story as she found the humor in the scary moments as a little girl. At one point, there was a pause in the comments. I glanced around the room. Most people were stretched out on the floor while some were sitting comfortably. Most people had their eyes closed. I saw another person wiping away a few tears gently trickling down her cheeks. Another person started to talk about being on the beach, watching the sunrise and feeling the awe of its beauty and reverie in that moment. Others chose not to share but instead some individuals did write reflections throughout this time. There were nonverbal affirmations with head nods as individuals shared reflections throughout the camp fire experience.

The relaxation response facilitated by the muscle relaxation techniques was also a key experience in helping participants feel most connected to their bodies through a sense of enjoyment and relief from tension. Several participants commented about how good it felt to be relaxed during these experiences and how they were really starting to look forward to the experiences. During the first interview, several participants also talked about how some of the experiences were starting to feel more natural and not as uncomfortable for them. Kate, for example, stated, “The first imagery experience was
awkward and I ended up not thinking very positive things and so I didn’t feel good about it. But the second, this past week our class was much more positive so it’s just been kind of a range of different experiences.

Session Four: Strengthening Relationships

The focus of this session was on body inscriptions delving into an awareness of how bodies are inscribed, marked, and scarred. It explored the sociocultural basis of body dissatisfaction through issues of gender, race, ableness, disease, age, culture, and sexual orientation discussed as structural factors in line with body inscriptions. Stereotypes, body image, interaction styles, and power differentials were examined in this context. Experiential engagement was facilitated through exchanges of bowing. The class meeting for the course started with a discussion of each student’s family assessment project. Students commented on various systems and patterns within their familial structures including ethnicity. Consideration of family and cultural awareness threaded with the sociocultural aspect of this session.

Analysis and further planning: On thin ice. I felt like I was “walking on thin ice” in planning this session. As a focus that dealt with why and how we are disassociated with our bodies, it was delving into territory that fed back into the muddied waters of body disconnect. As a significant issue in dealing with the conceptualization and presentation of embodiment, it was necessary to address body inscriptions. But the how and when part of it was problematic. Finding the right time to address it was not without risks. If done too soon before participants were primed and felt comfortable enough to tackle the issues surrounding it, the experience of body disconnect and sense of timidity could be exacerbated.
In light of the data analysis through reactions and observations, I felt this session needed to be introduced at a time in the project when relationships were strengthened between the participants and their understanding of embodiment and with one another in experiencing embodiment. I took the risk that it could be best approached after the third session as a time in the project when most participants felt an increased level of comfort in feeling most connected to their bodies and heightened sense of body awareness. However, I also ran the risk of bringing attention back to feelings of disconnect. Therefore, I made the decision to shift from the highly experiential engagement of the last session to mostly discussion of issues during this session with participants helping to navigate the flow and direction. I threaded segments of research findings related to race, culture, and gender related to body image and interaction styles in the discussion. The discussion closed with a simple experiential exercise ending in mutual respect. I took painstaking efforts to ensure that the session was conducted and monitored in a way that continued to attempt to strengthen positive relationships between the participants and their bodies and to enhance new knowledge of embodiment through fulfilling experiences.

My facilitative process. Before I began with the intended focus for this session, I gave a brief explanation and demonstration of a reading technique and talked about reading as an active process. I also discussed aspects of Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (1993) and gave participants a survey to take on their own time if interested adapted from Gardner’s theory to provide possible insights on learning style preferences. Including this material resulted from a discussion with the course instructor connected to the prior class and interest expressed by participants.
Next, to introduce the focus on body inscriptions, I shared two critical incidents from my personal and professional life as insights. I talked about my sister’s leg amputation from complications of diabetes and my discussions with her on phantom limb pain and my difficult interactions with a foreign exchange student from Japan in my role as a school counselor. I then asked participants to close their eyes and try to develop snapshot images or visuals of people in their daily lives including family, friends, co-workers. I then asked them to get a visual of themselves and followed with a discussion on the clarity of images. Most people agreed that they had very clear images of everyone but not of themselves. It was ill-defined. I used this experience to introduce the idea of spatial body awareness, the development of body image and the experience of the body. Discussion then quickly escalated around issues of sociocultural influences, particularly from the media, family and peers. Women and objectified body consciousness, men and function and structure issues with muscul arity, unrealistic ideals of thinness, cosmetic surgery, eating disorders, parenting issues and the development of body image were included in a highly active discussion. We also discussed differences of the white sense of rugged individualism in comparison to the collectivist values of other cultures. I placed this discussion and information within a need to be mindful of a person’s cultural experience in relation to body image and going through acculturation, and considering different experiences of body acceptance and satisfaction. The session closed with participants engaged in a bowing activity to experience power differentials ending with a mutual exchange of gratitude and respect (Crowdes, 2002).

With only a few minutes remaining, I asked participants to complete a reflective guide on this experience after class. I also asked participants to complete two readings
before the next session. One was a narrative from a nurse practitioner commenting on her experience in teaching male OB-GYN residents to perform a pelvic exam (Davis, 2003) and the other was a research article on dance therapy (Mills & Daniluk, 2002). Lastly, I asked participants to consider sharing a creative experience, expression, or symbolic representation with the group that touched on an aspect of embodiment for them at this point during the next session.

_Reactions and observations: A crescendo of discussion._ While this session was conducted mostly as a discussion, there seemed to be a more spirited level of discussion and greater spontaneity evoked by the focus of this session in comparison to other sessions for some of the participants. More participants seemed willing to add to the discussion although several still remained silent. I observed many affirmations of relating to remarks through head nods but also sensed some level of discomfort for some participants through their nonverbal reactions during discussion of body image. What stood out in the discussion was a strong sense of recognizing that for most people a clear perception of body was ill-defined and that there was considerable body dissatisfaction experienced in our culture. Most participants agreed that they had very clear images of everyone but not of themselves. Furthermore, several participants shared their reactions to the bowing exchanges commenting on being surprised by the intensity of their responses during such a simple exercise.

_Session Five: Creative Expression, Healing and the Body_

This final session focused on the connectedness of embodiment with aspects of creative expression, symbolic representation, and healing. Movement experiences facilitated through musical and artistic expression were the experiential activities. The
nursing class for this meeting was directed through a small group activity to analyze demographics as a way to consider statistics and potential impact on community health. While the focus for the experiences of embodiment for this session was not directly connected to the demographic discussion for this class meeting, it was directed at discussion of health practice in general tied to the concept of healing and wellness.

*Analysis and further planning: In the art of the moment.* My goal in planning this session was for participants to engage in activities that gave them opportunities to revisit a sense of childhood playfulness and to let go of body self-consciousness in finding enjoyment in spontaneous, simple moments of creative expression. I wanted them to be able to experience a sense of wonder and feeling like a kid again for a few moments and I wanted them to be able to realize the potentially healing essence of embodiment through creative expression. With this in mind, I developed the session to open up the learning space to fluidity in the art of the creative moment.

*My facilitative process.* The session began with discussion of the two readings assigned from the last session. I also shared a personal insight related to the OB/GYN article from a recent experience with a male gynecologist during a pelvic exam. We also talked about giving birth and how the birth process could possibly be made more healing particularly for women who have been abused. I then redirected the discussion to connecting the dance therapy article to a major body of literature tied to embodiment centered on healing and the body, aesthetics and creative expression – how art, music, movement, creative writing, imagination, symbolism, playfulness and others modes of creative expression give way to connections that bring attention to the body as a way of knowing.
As for experiential engagement with this focus, I started with an activity in which participants collectively did sketches and scribbles on newsprint using crayons and markers in response to music of different tempos, themes, and cultures. Several participants chose to do this activity individually from their seats and in a different way by expressing their elicited responses in writing. I then asked a participant who took belly dancing to talk about her experience and, if willing, to demonstrate and guide us through some movements. At first, she simply talked about her experience from her seat and then moved to the front of the classroom with encouragement by the group to show her beaded skirt and scarf. She brought along and played a music selection used for belly dancing. Then, very surprisingly, after initially expressing hesitancy in feeling uncomfortable about demonstrating some movements, she showed us several movements. Most participants got out of their seats and tried to perform the movements with her.

After this dance experience, we gathered instruments and other items to create sound. Participants played the instruments while two different musical selections were played. Since there was little time remaining, I asked participants to complete a reflective guide afterwards and to finish sharing other symbolic representations at the last class meeting. I collected documents for analysis and distributed evaluation forms for participants to submit at the last class meeting.

Reactions and observations: Inspired and improvisational. In opening the session with reactions to assigned readings, I noted that several participants talked about having personal and professional experiences similar to the nurse practitioner’s experience with the male OB/GYN resident stating that they could relate to this narrative. My personal
insights had sparked comments from participants acknowledging similar experiences. Comments generated from discussion surrounding the dance therapy article pointed to how we listen to our bodies more in terms of physical signs and symptoms and connectedness to health concerns and yet can still feel very disconnected from our bodies. Some participants remarked that the insights from the dance therapy article related to healing through dance and the discussion of this helped them become aware of the therapeutic process rooted in body experiences of creative expression.

With the session designed to have a creative flow, there were moments of high energy, fun and great surprise mixed with moments of awkwardness and hesitancy. Overall, though, there were more moments of high energy, fun, and great surprise with the belly dancing experience being one of the greatest moments of surprise and inspiration. Most of the participants were very enthusiastic about sharing in this experience facilitated by another participant as a symbol of her embodied expression. Several comments were made about really enjoying this activity and there were lots of questions for her about this experience from participants. I observed a level of high energy in the classroom during this experience. For some of the participants, I observed a similar level of excitement, playfulness, and high energy during their participation in the artistic expression activity. For others, however, I observed a more low-keyed, differently improvised level of involvement on an individual basis during this activity. As for the improvisational musical activity, I sensed a wide range of reactions with this. Some participants were very playful during this activity while for others, it appeared to be extremely awkward. I sensed that I should have ended this activity sooner than I did given the range of reactions. Overall, I noted that participants commented that they ended
this session feeling energized and exuberant.

Summary and Initial Evaluative Reflections

This chapter provided details on the case for this study and its context and introduced the participants. It also described particularities of the action research process including my involvement as project facilitator and what was done in the planning, acting, and observing phases of this process. It also specified the action implemented in each experiential session of the project to facilitate body awareness with supporting data from participant interviews and field observations discussed as reactions and observations of the outcomes.

Initial findings from the first interview were discussed in terms of the revealed frames of reference to body awareness among participants through three emergent themes: a sense of physical and emotional responses and sensations, a sense of personal enjoyment, and a sense of disconnect with their bodies. Furthermore, analysis of data gathered as reactions and observations of outcomes in the course of the cyclical process of action research provided several evaluative reflections. In general, there was a beginning sense of timidity among participants in engaging in this project and feelings of ambivalence toward the experiences that surfaced and continued throughout the project. However, there was also an evolving sense of relatedness, comfort, confidence, and interest in exploring body awareness as participants started to grasp the concept of embodiment and to deepen their connections of body and mind through the experiences and to one another via discussions and experiential engagement.

Now that the case and its context have been explained, phases of the action research process have been made visible and the initial findings have been revealed, the
subsequent chapter will discuss the findings from the final interviews and collected documents along with the project’s final evaluative results in light of the reflection phase of the action research process.
CHAPTER FIVE: ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY FINDINGS

With purpose of this study directed at exploring the revaluing of embodiment, this investigation was conducted as a case study of a higher education classroom and an action research project. As a case study, it was focused on describing a higher education classroom in a nursing program and the situation of this classroom specifically where direct attempts were made to incorporate attention to the body in learning and deal with issues of embodiment. The study also focused on the process and outcomes of a project implemented in a higher education classroom to facilitate body awareness with the intent of addressing practice issues by informing applications in practice regarding experiences of embodiment. The cyclical action research process involves the phases of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kuhne & Quigley, 1997). The planning, acting, and observing phases were detailed in the previous chapter. Reflecting and questioning were also integrated throughout these phases of the action research project.

With this in mind, there is more extensive discussion of the reflection phase provided in this chapter represented through findings with supporting data from participants to address the research questions of this study. Reflecting on the project involved data analysis gathered at the completion of the project from a second interview with the 13 study participants at the end of the study, at least five documents collected from the 12 student participants, and written evaluation results. The documents assembled by participants throughout the project’s duration typically included at least three journal entries or any other form of reflective or creative expressions of choice drawn from experiences associated with bringing attention to the body as a way of knowing and at least two reflective guides from session experiences.
The reflecting phase of the process informed the research questions by assessing how embodiment was understood and experienced by the participants, how experiences of embodiment facilitated learning related to the course content, and how participants applied new knowledge about embodiment in their lives. The data gathered for analysis delved into what happened to participants as they engaged in embodied experiences in the immediate moment and also during other reflective moments through descriptions of ideas, thoughts, and feelings, and how they derived meaning and applied new knowledge from these experiences. It also provided an evaluative component for assessing the usefulness of the action research project and what it suggests for the quality of practice regarding innovative approaches through experiences of embodiment.

As a brief overview of the findings, there were three main categories revealed through the data with emergent themes. The three identified categories were deepening connections, making significant discoveries, and reflecting on the learning. Each category and related themes are introduced and discussed in light of supporting data. A data display of the main findings of the summary are included on the following page.

Deepening Connections

In trying to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of embodiment, participants deepened connections to the presented conceptualizations in various ways. There were two themes emerging in this area. First, participants deepened connections by clarifying ineffable aspects of embodiment through experiential engagement and second, by relating conceptualizations to prior experiences. As previously noted, there is an ineffable aspect to embodiment that feeds into its complexity as a concept. It can be very difficult to put into words but much easier to feel and directly experience. This became
DATA DISPLAY: Findings of the Study

A. Deepening Connections
   1. Clarifying Ineffable Aspects of Embodiment
      a. Giving expression
      b. Heightening awareness
      c. Feeling the impact
   2. Relating to Prior Experiences
      a. Affirming connections
      b. Nostalgic connections

B. Making Significant Discoveries
   1. Developing Greater Self Awareness
      a. Finding enthusiasm and inspiration in the newness
      b. Realizing the importance of self nurturance
   2. Integrating New Knowledge
      a. Practicing relaxation
      b. Alleviating Other Discomforts
      c. Broadening a relational sense

C. Reflecting on the Learning
   1. Experiencing Leads to Greater Understanding
      a. Connecting through nursing and class size
      b. Developing a comfort level over time
   2. Enhancing the Course Content
      a. Connecting to generalized learning processes
      b. Understanding cultural relevance in new ways
      c. Facilitating personal and professional development
   3. Valuing the Overall Experience
      a. Engaging in actual embodiment experiences
      b. Connecting to lifelong learning
      c. Enhancing teaching options
very evident as participants expressed deepened connections through heightened experiences of body awareness and felt their powerful impact. Also evident was the manner in which participants made connections to embodied conceptualizations by relating them to prior experiences either by affirming what they already experienced to some degree or by making associations through nostalgic connections. The theme of clarifying ineffable aspects will be discussed first.

*Clarifying Ineffable Aspects*

All of the participants in this study expressed in varying degrees that they developed a greater sense of understanding and meaning of how embodiment is conceptualized as an assessment from participating in the experiential activities. They talked about their experiences in highly descriptive expressiveness as they developed a heightened awareness of embodied being-in-the-world and felt the impact of these experiences.

*Giving expression.* All of the participants were able to give expression to a developed sense of embodied being-in-the-world through rich, vividly described reactions and responses to experiences during the sessions and in their daily lives. In trying to verbalize their level of conceptual understanding of embodiment, participant reactions from the experiences included comments such as “noticing more,” “paying more attention,” and “being more aware” of attending to body experiences that had deep visceral, emotive, and physiological connections on a more intensified level of body awareness. The comments surfaced during interviews and were gathered from collected documents. They frequently described their developed sense of embodied awareness as “being in tune” to or with their bodies, and “listening to” the body as it talks to them and
tells them something. For Mae, for example, she stated “it means the signals of what my body is trying to tell me…my body talking to me” while Lynn noted that her concept of embodiment is “what your body tells you and how it makes you feel.” Other remarks about conceptualizing embodiment included “how the body influences the mind and how the mind influences the body and makes the body feel,” “just being one with your body knowing it completely and fully … just being in tune to your body,” and “where you feel the most in tune to your body.”

Another area of mention by several participants was greater notice of surroundings as part of their conceptualization. Hannah noted, “embodiment would be how we listen to our bodies and how we sort of learn through them and listen to how we react to different situations and things like that.” Rose stated, “It’s just being so well aware of your surroundings, and your own body movements and your own emotions.” For example, in paying attention to her surroundings during an early morning walk with her dog, Rose made the following journal entry:

   Everything was quiet and still. The sun was just beginning to come up.
   Everything seemed so peaceful. Then the wind began to pick up and I didn’t have the same feelings of peace and tranquility. The environment seemed more stressed as the winds became stronger.

Diane explained that her concept of embodiment involved “knowing what my body’s telling me as far as what’s happening with me on the inside and with the environment surrounding me.” Susan commented that she would describe it “simply as a way of knowing through your body and all that it represents and experiences.” It could be implied from these verbalized impressions that participants sensed a sort of
communicative or relational aspect with their bodies in experiencing body awareness and arriving at a conceptualization of embodiment.

**Heightening awareness.** While participants were able to put the concept of embodiment into words, most of them still remarked that it was much easier for them to directly experience embodiment than to talk about it. Their remarks revealed that they experienced a heightened level of body awareness facilitated by the activities.

One of the most pronounced triggers more easily put into words by participants that deepened connections to body awareness was the stress response. Most of the participants included some mention of a heightened sensitivity to physiological and emotive manifestations of it. Barb, for example, noticing how her body signals the stress response when she worries about loved ones wrote in her journal:

> I immediately get a gnawing feeling in my stomach that won’t go away and sometimes my hand will slightly shake. At this point, I’m not able to concentrate on anything else … It does make me incredibly aware of how my body is affected by my mind.

Mae made a similar journal entry in response to noticing her physiological reactions upon encountering an unexpected negative family situation commenting, “I immediately had a physical response … an immediate knot in my throat that traveled to my stomach. My shoulders were tense and my knees were weak.” Mary wrote about relating to my reactions to the documentary shown by the instructor to bring cultural awareness into focus before I facilitated experiences of sensory perception discussed in the last chapter. As a moment of noticing body awareness, she noted:

> I felt anxious from the Afghanistan movie too! The feeling of claustrophobia
made my body tense... Today I completely related to Tammy feeling claustrophobic with watching the video seeing the Afghans stored in the trunk of the train for days. My skin was crawling and I felt as though the open classroom wasn’t enough space for me to breathe. After completing the exercises with Tai Chi, I felt open and able to move again. It’s amazing how your body reacts so differently in a small amount of time.

Commenting about a particular moment of paying attention to direct body experiencing in her work setting, Amy wrote:

Last night I was working night shift in the emergency room. I was going to go and do a trauma … a suspected gun shot victim. So I am standing there beside the litter with my lead and gloves on waiting for the patient to arrive. I can feel my heart beating fast. I tell myself to take a couple of deep breaths. As I am doing this the patient arrives. It was weird because at this time everything seemed to go in slow motion. I could feel the excitement in the room, especially from all the residents… I felt the heat in the room. Then I was no longer nervous. I KNEW that I could do this.

Sandy, in particular, included several journal entries and collected different clippings of quotes, pictures, and creative writings in a portfolio that reflected intense moments of her heightened sense of awareness from the stress response associated with her work environment. She wrote:

This is the embodiment of the negativity and toxic behaviors of the staff. They are not aware of the negativity that pulsates through the halls that sends me outside to my car to catch my breath … There is no air … no breath to
catch. Why would I want to suck this dead foul air of this world? All it would take is the scan of this badge and I could step out into the sunshine. As the fresh air hits my face, I slowly inhale and once again breathe air not infected with negativity and meanness. Yet tomorrow I will enter the tomb and attempt to breathe fresh and new life into this lifeless space.

In addition to a greater sensitivity to physiological responses, Hannah’s reflections also revealed notice of emotive responses in her reaction to the bowing activity conducted in the fourth session remarking:

I felt uncomfortable being the person in power. I thought it was awkward. It made me angry to have to bow to the other person. It was degrading. It was comfortable to bow to each other in mutual respect. It was funny that I felt angry about the bowing even though I knew it was an exercise.

For many participants, the stress response was also most noticeable in physiological reactions to fear evoked by the first part of the skyscraper imagery experience. Amy wrote, “I could feel my heart racing. I also felt my neck get tight, especially on the left side of my neck. My legs began to feel weaker, almost as if they were going to start shaking.” Rose also noted that she was very scared during this experience. She noticed that she couldn’t hear any other sounds and felt a lump in her throat and a knot in her stomach. She wrote that she was very dizzy and couldn’t look down and felt very anxious to return to the center of the terrace.

While the negative feelings such as those identified by the stress response were more commonly discussed, there were a few participants who also discussed pleasant responses. Karen, for instance, noted the following on her reflective guide to the first
part of the skyscraper guided imagery experience which focused on sensory perception:

I sensed that, thank God, I was up high above all the hustle of down below.
I felt like an angel watching down on all the people in the world. I was standing on wild flowers. My body felt safe … not scared to be up so high.
I feel I responded this way because I was standing on soft wildflowers and the smell of them was very warming and relaxing.

Mary responded in a similar sense to this experience:

I felt calm. The wind was softly blowing my face and my skirt. The sun was warm burning on my skin. I felt it on my skin the most. I heard nothing but the wind graze over my ears. I think I was responding to my happy place in the middle of nowhere on top of the building with nothing around me. The soft breeze and warm sun just felt amazing on my face and my body felt the most.

Heightened attention to body awareness was further evidenced through other reactions and responses deepened by pleasant, enjoyable, relaxing connections. All of the participants mentioned intensified feelings of enjoyment, relaxation, and comfort related through heightened body awareness from various experiences. Barb, for example, noted in response to a reflective guide from a relaxation activity, “I was more aware of my body and what it was doing. I was able to enjoy the music more after the muscle relaxation. I believe that it made my senses more aware as well.” Hannah also reflected on this activity and wrote:

I liked the progressive muscle relaxation. It made me more aware of how tense I can be … I was experiencing my muscles and I could feel my stress melting away… I enjoyed the yoga exercises. I found it relaxing and it made me pay
attention to my own body and all of the muscles that work to make each part of me move.

Kate’s reflections on this activity were as follows:

As opposed to previous imagery experience, I was completely relaxed and calm… no palpitations and at ease. My body started to feel numb from head to toe as we did the relaxation techniques. As one area was focused on, the other numbed but in a good way. I only thought about my body and the areas being relaxed …not work, class, home…just me. I was very focused on me for a change and my breathing and relaxing…..eased and calm for once.

In closing, statements such as, “I really enjoyed this,” “It was fun and very relaxing,” “very interesting,” and “It felt wonderful” were also quite common in reflective remarks about participation in the experiences.

Feeling the impact. Another common area emerging in deepening connections to body awareness and communicating understandings drawn from experiences of embodiment was feeling the impact of the experience. The word powerful was used frequently by participants to describe their reactions and responses to various experiences. For example, Lynn’s response to the skyscraper imagery exercise in her reflective guide was, “It was very powerful… I felt it all over, mind, body, and soul.” In noting her responses to different feelings elicited from music during the creativity activities, Sara wrote, “Music can set the tone, moment, and mood. You cannot resist responding to the music through body movements.”

The skyscraper imagery experience was commonly noted by participants as having a powerful impact for those who experienced a distinct, immediate change from a
mostly fearful response to the first part of the imagery experience to a much more positive and pleasant reaction to the second part. For example, Kate noted a significant impact of body awareness from differently experienced reactions during the skyscraper imagery activity. She experienced a marked change from feeling anxious to angelic in a brief moment documented as follows:

When you let go of fear and anxiety you really can be a different person and allow your body to focus differently … more spiritual, more free. I saw myself as an angel which was powerful for me and most positive … having the ability to be one with “my angels” or have that angelic sense to connect with those I perceive have that ability.

Several other participants also mentioned feeling very surprised by how deeply they experienced body awareness through what seemed like very brief and simple moments during other experiences. Diane wrote about this aspect in response to the bowing exchanges in the fourth session noting:

One of the class experiences we did that struck me the most was when we had to bow to each other. I hated being the one who had to avoid making eye contact and had to bow to respect the other but not get it in return. Since I have been young I have had a hard time with people of authority. I feel if you give someone power over someone else, they will ultimately abuse it. On the other side I felt weird and hypocritical being the higher up person. The mutual respect bow was just right.

Mary also reflected on the bowing exchanges and its profound impact as she wrote:

I felt funny to be bowing to someone else. However, it kind of felt empowering to have someone bow to me. When she was bowing to me, I thought to myself, No,
you stand straight and enjoy her bowing to me. It’s strange how the power of the feeling of empowerment switched so quickly.

Continuing with what struck her the most about this, she also noted:

…how good it felt for someone to bow down to me. I feel in society, especially at work, nurses have to bow down to the physicians and drop what I’m doing for them. It felt good to stand ground and let someone bow to me for once.

Thus, it can be implied that the mostly powerful impact felt by participants from directly engaging in fairly simple, brief, and varied moments of experiences of embodiment helped to verbally clarify some of the ineffable aspects of embodiment.

Relating to Prior Experiences

Another commonly expressed way of deepening connections of embodiment for some of the participants was by relating it to prior experiences of body awareness through affirmations or by further connecting the experiences to nostalgic moments. Being able to relate experiences of embodiment from the sessions in a way that connected them to some other experience outside the classroom helped strengthen understanding and meaningfulness of the experiences for most participants.

Affirming connections. For several participants, the experiences of embodiment affirmed their present sense of relating to body awareness from prior knowledge or experiences. For example, remarking about her experiences in this project, Sara said, “It actually reaffirmed how I feel about listening to my body … the imagery…so I think it just added to what I thought I knew.” Sandy also felt this way stating:

Well, to be honest, it just kind of like gave me words to what I thought I’ve always known … like I’ve always kind of known that the body responds to what’s
going on around you like the different things that go on with the moon and
everything even though people think you’re just nuts. So for me it was just an
affirming sort of thing to hear and do all the things that we were doing in class.
She made the following entry in her portfolio of documents with respect to this:

I think of embodiment as intuition … feel what’s happening on all levels…what
can be seen and heard, but to me more importantly, the vibe, the true feelings. I
feel it just as if someone is telling me about it going on…sensing a patient is not
doing well as soon as I enter a room, feeling the rhythm of the floor, the pace,
knowing within minutes if a person is genuine or a player... I have learned with
this gift to keep my opinions to myself or my husband about the vibe regarding
the person. This is not always a negative opinion.

Rose also commented on having an affirming connection to aspects of embodied
awareness as follows:

Well I kind of always thought that there was some correlation between your body
and the environment. You know you constantly live in the same home and you
know every nook and cranny and you just know the sounds of the house and
everything. I think it’s basically the same thing …that you just become so in tune
to your own body… What really brought me into focus with this was the
skyscraper exercise.

She noted that her physiological and emotional reactions during both parts of the
skyscraper activity in the second session particularly deepened her sense of
connectedness to body awareness. Thus, for some participants, engagement in
experiences of embodiment affirmed prior notions of embodied awareness.
Nostalgic connections. For most participants, there were particular experiences of embodiment that deepened connections of body awareness through associations made with nostalgic feelings. The camp fire experience in the third session and the creative expression experiences with art, music, and dance in the fifth and final session were the most frequently mentioned experiences regarding this aspect. Feeling like a kid again and recollecting memories intensified the experience of body awareness and deepened understanding of this aspect of embodied experience. Rose commented about this aspect as something that influenced her sense of attending to body awareness stating:

I think as far as sensory goes …the music that you played, the oldies that brought back memories for myself as well as for another person who was sitting beside me and also the crickets at the camp fire because we grew up on a farm and in the summer time we had lots of crickets and actually when I was sitting there listening when it was dark and everything, I remember being in bed with my bedroom window up and hearing the crickets like that so yeah, the sound …I did picture crickets and I could close my eyes and it was like I never grew up.

Hannah focused more on the creative expression experience involving art and music and wrote the following in a reflective guide responding to this experience:

I had positive reactions to the coloring experience. It made me think of my childhood. My body automatically wanted to move with the music. I felt my feet and head automatically start moving. I felt happy, nostalgic. This was a fun experience. It made me realize how certain things can take you right back to a place in your childhood.

Kate centered in on the camp fire experience and related it to her experiences
during childhood and noted:

Night and nature sounds immediately took me back to my childhood…hot, summer nights, riding four wheelers with my brother and childhood friend, running between houses quickly and swiftly thinking how scared I was of this sound (the crickets), but now calmed by the sound.

She also had another reaction of feeling like a kid again during the creativity experiences despite feeling somewhat uncomfortable stating, “I cannot perform in front of a crowd so most of the activities were awkward for me yet jovial and fun in another way because you can let go and act like a kid again even as an adult.”

Mae also reacted to the creativity session by associating it with a childhood memory remarking:

Drawing on the board reminded me of Catholic school when I was in first and second grade when the teacher would let us draw on the blackboard. It was a really big deal to draw on the blackboard and it was really fun so that was a joyful memory that activity brought back. I must admit that it felt awkward at first but then it got more comfortable. I felt relaxed. All in all I enjoyed this experience because it reminded me of my childhood.

Diane also thought of early childhood memories during the creativity session stating, “I enjoyed adding to the music. It made me think of elementary school music class and that was fun.” It could be implied that these types of pleasant reminiscent memories deepened and influenced a sense of attending to body awareness among the participants. The nostalgic connections also eased some of the awkward and anxious feelings experienced by some of the participants from time to time during certain activities.
In summary, by developing an understanding of the phenomenon of embodiment, participants deepened connections by clarifying the ineffable aspects of embodiment through experiential engagement and by relating conceptualizations of embodiment to prior experiences. All of the participants were able to give expression to a developed sense of embodied being-in-the-world through vivid descriptions of reactions and responses to experiences of embodiment. They also experienced heightened levels of body awareness and described the impact of the experiences of embodiment as very powerful. Connections made through experiences were also deepened by relating them to prior experiences through affirmations and nostalgic moments and memories for most of the participants.

Making Significant Discoveries

As areas of the research questioning, how participants reached an understanding of embodiment and were subsequently able to apply new knowledge about embodiment are described as significant discoveries revealed through two themes; developing greater self awareness and integrating new knowledge. Participants reported gaining new knowledge from experiences of embodiment that revealed insights applied to both personal and professional growth and development. This section begins with considering findings associated with the development of greater self awareness among participants.

*Developing Greater Self Awareness*

There was a distinct quality of introspection that emerged from the data as a way in which participants made discoveries and constructed new knowledge through experiences of embodiment. Turning attention to heightened body awareness also brought attention to looking inward that led to greater self awareness. For example,
Susan said:

One thing that all of these exercises did for me personally was make me feel … I feel really old right now because I don’t get any exercise and I used to exercise quite a lot and I’m half afraid to even go to the gym now because when I did last summer I ended up hurting myself and I just had this thought …I felt really old and decrepit and unhealthy. So some of these things, like when we did stretches that night I was so astounded when I put my hand on the wall and stretched because my body actually stretched and I thought I’m not even flexible because I thought I couldn’t do anything anymore…I knew better but… because that is the way I was thinking about myself. So several of the things that you did with the Tai Chi and all of the things that required stretching and even the dancing the other night, those were very good for me because then I started realizing that I’m not old and decrepit. I just haven’t been doing these things and I can turn that around pretty easily so I felt much more healthy and I liked my body better again. It was not a thing that was letting me down. It wasn’t betraying me. It’s still mine and I can still have fun with it. So that was very significant.

This type of introspective sense unfolded among participants developed through feelings of enthusiasm and inspiration drawn from engaging in new and different experiences and by realizing the importance of self nurturance mostly related to enhancing wellness and improving the quality of life.

*Finding enthusiasm and inspiration in the newness.* Being exposed to experiences of embodiment as an alternate way of knowing was received with enthusiasm by all of the participants, and considered to be inspiring by many of them. It was determined by
participants through frequent mention that they arrived at significant discoveries because various experiences influenced their feelings and thoughts in a positive and inspiring way, even if their responses during participation in some activities were awkward or negative. For example, Rose commented on her new experience of belly dancing that she really did enjoy it and it was “fun to watch and participate” although she said it also “felt awkward because of a sense of my juggling belly.” She also noted that her thought in the moment while belly dancing was, “I hope I don’t look stupid” but also thought that it “could be fun and good exercise.” In responding to what she got out of this experience, she noted “that it’s okay to just relax and try something for fun.”

Being introduced to experiencing something new or different was also an aspect mentioned by several other participants with respect to feeling enthusiastic and inspired. For example, Lynn remarked that the Tai Chi experience was fun, interesting, and relaxing as “something I’ve never done before.” Mary wrote, “I would love to try Tai Chi outside of the classroom setting possibly somewhere outside.” For Diane, she commented about surprising herself by her willingness to demonstrate belly dancing for the class and overcoming her nervousness stating:

When I was belly dancing, I started to feel warm and inspired … also energized. This experience reminded me of fun, different ways to get energized and relax. It made me realize that I want to learn more and I may have inspired others to try.

The class response and participation in the experience of belly dancing during the creativity session was particularly enthusiastic. However, for Barb, experiencing the creativity session in general was most significant as a new experience in arriving at a
level of comfort with creative expression. She said that the artistic activity helped her to relax and “feel more at peace” even though she felt she was not at all the creative type. She concluded, “I felt that this activity allowed me to be comfortable with my creativity.”

Several participants also provided comments of enthusiasm and inspiration about their overall engagement in the experiences of embodiment. For example, Diane commented that she has become more curious about the concept of embodiment from engaging in these experiences stating, “Well I definitely like this whole concept of embodiment and I like exploring that and I would definitely if I could, learn about more.” Mary added in reflecting on being exposed to the experiences:

I think it was a really great experience I wouldn’t have gotten if you wouldn’t have been there. I think it’s something that we all can take something from in one way or another. It’s not that we’re all going to take up Tai Chi but we would do it in some other fashion and that has just made it nice. It’s like an outlet. It’s totally an outlet like saying okay just stop and I’m going to go do this now. I’m going to learn something else.

It can be implied from participant comments that they experienced varying degrees of feeling inspired and enthusiastic from engaging in new and different activities and developed new interests and curiosities to pursue about body awareness as significant discoveries.

Realizing the importance of self nurturance. Participants also developed a greater sense of self awareness by realizing the importance of self nurturance in identifying personal needs, wishes, goals, and challenges. These realizations mostly related to enhancing wellness, healing and improving the quality of life. For all of the participants
what was most pronounced as a new sense of self awareness was identifying personal
needs in paying attention to self nurturance. This aspect was frequently attached to a need
to intervene in the stress response and to find and take time for personal care. The need to
relax was perhaps the most significant discovery for all of the participants. Mary wrote
the following journal entry about this aspect:

After tonight’s class I realized just how tired my body truly is. There are times
when you just go, go, go until you drop. At class tonight, I finally stopped. I made
my brain stop working during Tammy’s presentation. There was not a thought.
My body reacted and finally unwound itself. I began getting so extremely tired
that I couldn’t stop yawning… I feel relaxed and much better at this time. Tonight
made me think about how I need to go to “my place” tomorrow to relax again.
Ever since I was a little girl, I would sit on the back stoop of my porch, play with
my cats, lay in the sun, and just breathe. Tomorrow that is what I’m doing.

She also expressed this need on a reflective guide as she noted:

My body was tense. It needed help relaxing because it’s been tense for so long it
forgot how the true feeling of relaxation was. I got that my body needs me to take
a time-out sometimes to relax or I’ll never know.

Mary stated that she felt relief in the discovery of knowing that her muscles could relax
again.

For Hannah, although she found the diaphragmatic breathing technique difficult
to get used to, she stated that focusing on her breathing made her realize just how much
she needed to relax. In response to a new discovery from participating in the progressive
relaxation technique, Karen noted that she realized how beneficial it was for her to
remember to pay attention to her body stating, “For the past few months I’ve been
ignoring my body and what it was trying to tell me. These experiences will help me listen
to me.” Lastly, Sandy emphatically wrote at length about becoming very aware of her
needs in response to a stressful work environment. One of her entries follows:

I crave the ability to relax, almost like a hunger for certain foods – continue to try
different foods without satisfying the hunger. I want and crave freedom. This
period of time in my life is just so not me! I am positive and enthusiastic, love
learning. But I am eternally hopeful that tomorrow will be better. I am going to
attempt knitting as if done correctly, you get into the movement of the needles. It
becomes hypnotic. So my relaxation exercise will be: knit one, pearl two, knit
one, pearl two, my hubbie playing the acoustic guitar, fire in the fireplace and
silence-allowing myself to become part of the stitch and free in the air.

For some participants, while they realized the importance of self nurturance,
it was attached to expressed feelings of guilt and a lack of time that presented challenges
for lifestyle changes. Mae commented on being struck by the importance of self
nurturance in response to the relaxation experiences but also noted feeling guilty about
taking time for herself in continuing to do this. She wrote, “It’s hard to slow down and
pay attention to embodiment when I am so busy!” She also noted that she should do
relaxation techniques more often and especially at work stating, “I need to self care more
but I have to get over my guilt for self care.” Barb also noted a hectic lifestyle as a
challenge to body awareness as she wrote in a journal entry:

Our lives are too fast-paced to have time to listen to our bodies. We are probably
the only species so completely out of tune with our bodies. Our bodies tell us
when to eat, when we are full, when we should sleep. But we don’t even listen to those things anymore.

Arriving at realizations was also put into expressiveness through wishful comments and a sense of yearning for lifestyle changes. Challenges as obstacles to lifestyle change were also mentioned at times with these realizations. Learning about the sea gypsies’ sense of being-in-the-world was commonly reflected on as a significant learning experience for realizing these challenges. Yearning for a slower paced, less stressful lifestyle, several participants expressed being somewhat envious and in awe of the sea gypsies’ way of life in their reflections. Lynn, for example, commented, “I almost wish our society could be more like them. They focus on the most important things in life.” Mary wrote the following reflection in her journal in response to the sea gypsies:

I wish I had a low stress level regarding stress. I don’t want to wear a watch or worry about what time I’m going to have to be somewhere. I don’t want to have to worry about money and working on something that doesn’t affect me. I would rather put in my working day doing something that is going to benefit ourselves like making a boat or a new hut. I would love to worry about food when I’m hungry and not focus on age or time. Wrinkles are just part of life, who cares.

Rose included two articles that she collected in her documents focused on wellness. In a section about overcoming adversity, she noted, “As I was reading it, I suddenly thought of the sea gypsies and how they just deal with everything that comes along.” Sara also related to the sea gypsies lifestyle in a journal entry. She wrote:

With the world today, life is often fast-paced with many distractions, noises, etc..

Distractions affect the ability to tune the noise out and concentrate on what our
minds and our bodies are trying to tell us. When I have the chance to meditate, reflect, you are able to feel and sense different energies. The art of mind over body can be powerful and regenerating to the soul. The sea gypsies were a true example of being in touch with the physical, mental, and environmental surroundings.

Several participants talked about coming to a realization about the importance of finding time to enjoy doing something creative as a discovery in response to the creativity experiences. Kate arrived at a discovery of personal need as she wrote:

I remembered that I just need to “let go” and live in the moment-stop worrying about what others think or say. I also learned that when all is said and done (school) and life slows ever so slightly, I HAVE got to do something fun and creative with my life and free time (exercise, yoga, cooking class, scrapbook).

Lynn remarked that engaging in the creative experiences reminded her of how much she loved music and dance and how it makes her “feel happy and light.” She said, “I wish I would have more time to do the things I love like dance and play music again.” Karen echoed this sentiment as well in her remarks about the creativity session commenting, “I wish I had more time for these types of things. I love the arts and think it’s a beautiful thing and way to express yourself.” She noted how quickly the time went by during this session as it made her feel calm and relaxed.

Now that the findings pertaining to significant discoveries of embodied experience have been discussed in reference to an introspective sense among participants, the next section of discussion considers the findings that revealed the integration of new knowledge as applied to both personal and professional growth and development.
Integrating New Knowledge

The analysis of data revealed that new knowledge learned from participating in experiences of embodiment was integrated into both the personal and professional lives of participants. Applications of new knowledge pertained to growth and development most consistent with enhancing wellness and improving quality of life not just for oneself but for others as well. The prevalent introspective sense of looking within and developing a greater sense of self awareness shifted to a consideration of surroundings through a relational sense with others and the environment. As a focus of this research’s inquiry, this section discusses ways in which participants applied new knowledge about embodiment through integration on an individualized level and in a relational sense in their personal and professional lives. On an individual level, participants talked about using new learning as strategies to enhance relaxation and alleviate discomfort. Beyond the individual level of integration, they discussed insights about a broadened relational sense in applying new knowledge. The following discussion begins with the findings pertaining to how participants integrated new learning on an individualized level for relaxation and alleviating discomfort.

Practicing relaxation. Participants commonly talked about how they tried to personally apply what they learned about experiences of embodiment into their daily lives. Relaxation techniques, such as diaphragmatic breathing and progressive muscle relaxation, were frequently discussed as new discoveries that participants tried to integrate mostly to alleviate stress by facilitating the relaxation response. Their comments also revealed that they took the time to reflect on the effectiveness and usefulness of the techniques in terms of personal wellness and improvement in their quality of life.
Beginning with Diane, she set a personal goal of trying to further develop the technique of diaphragmatic breathing. She wrote:

I enjoy the diaphragmatic breathing. I am a very tense person. People are always telling me to relax. I think to myself, Why are they telling me to relax? I feel fine. So I try to notice where my breathing is. Since I have been pregnant I do notice a lower abdominal breathing. I aim to slow it down with very deep breaths. Slowly I feel my muscles relaxing. Sometimes I can feel or listen to my heart rate and I aim to slow that down too.

Karen also wrote about trying to apply the breathing technique as follows:

Some nights I would try to fall asleep using the breathing methods that you taught us and it did seem to work and relax me a whole lot. It’s like I was clearing my mind of the present and only focusing on my breath and before I knew it I must have been asleep!

Lynn, as a person who is “very outdoorsy” and likes nature, remarked that her experience of relaxation from listening to the sounds created by the sound machine during the camp fire experience made her think about getting a sound machine to use for this benefit for times when she can’t be outdoors. Mary acted upon her realization of needing to take time to relax as a personal goal by spending quiet time going to “her place” on her back porch. She wrote the following as a restorative reflection about her moments of relaxation while sitting on the porch:

My body was tense. My brain was scattered. My feet were sore. My chest was tight. My breath was shallow. My nerves were shot. My patience was absent. I needed to be restored…. I sat on the stoop. I looked up at the sky. I stared at the
stars, the huge open blue trying to make my problems appear smaller. The wind blew lightly. I closed my eyes...The sun was warming and embraced my whole body. I was restored. My body felt relaxed. My brain was clear. My feet were numb. My chest was open. My breath was slower. My patience...restored.

She continued to note that her engagement in the creativity session was also significant in giving her new ideas for integrating other moments for relaxation and enjoyment into her personal life. Commenting about how the experiences gave her new ideas, she said:

It interested me to see you bring in a different type of a way to direct your emotions, your feelings, whatever your body is telling you. Like you redirected that through Tai Chi, or drawing, or listening to music. You directed it in so many different ways that it made me think, hey I don’t do any of that fun or cool stuff in my own life. I don’t do any of that stuff where I redirect my thoughts and my body from a different way at all. I don’t do anything. So I was at the dollar store today and I bought a coloring book and a box of crayons because I thought I’m going to color and I just thought it interested me in trying to find something that I would like to kind of turn my body off when I feel like I need it and just like not think and just do some mindless things and do whatever floats my boat doing whatever that is.

Hannah commented that she particularly noticed muscle tension in her shoulder and neck and felt the relief when it went away from doing the muscle relaxation techniques stating, “I learned several ways to help me relax. I could relate to carrying stress in my shoulders and using the relaxation techniques to take it away.” She recalled experiencing a very difficult work weekend resulting in physical exhaustion and tension
in her neck and shoulders. She noted that she tried some of the relaxation techniques and felt “they worked a little” but got more effective relief from using lavender oil. Thus, it can be implied from the ways in which participants attempted to incorporate strategies for enhancing relaxation in their personal lives that they made significant discoveries for integrating this new learning.

*Alleviating other discomforts.* While the relaxation response alleviated stress related discomforts such as muscle tension from bracing for many of the participants, new learning applied as strategies to alleviate other types of discomforts were talked about as well by several participants. These types of discomforts included emotional distress mostly manifested as anxiety and physiological distress from pain and illness.

Beginning with emotional distress, several participants applied new knowledge integrated through moments of deep emotive responses in dealing with anxiety. This was particularly the case for Kate and Sandy. With Kate, for example, experiencing the relaxation response during the second part of the skyscraper imagery activity elicited powerful emotive insights integrated from a combination of personal experiences. She recorded the following journal entry:

> After leaving class, I had my first ever panic attack. My imagery experience led me to think about **EVERYTHING**. At the moment in class I was an angel flying from the skyscraper near the heavens of the earth, flying with my cousins I lost almost nine years ago. This imagery experience brought back the day that I flew home from Louisiana after learning about the accident. It was sunset on the plane ride. I remember looking out the window thinking about what happened. I was above the clouds. The sky was pink and peaceful looking. It felt like I was
close to heaven. The imagery exercise was not unpleasant but rather it helped to shed light onto me and my body—calling attention back to me and my body. I believe that the panic attack was just a compilation of thinking about everything at once (cousins, school, work, building new home, family issues). Since that night, with the help of the other in-class exercises, I have been more aware of my body and started to listen to my body in a sense—no further panic attacks or palpitations.

Sandy used the instant calming sequence as a method to deal with feeling physically and emotionally tense noting that it “helped immensely.” She also listed in her documents what she considered as blessings to “find instant calm” in trying to overcome negative feelings from a stressful work environment. While writing this list she noted, “I felt myself smiling and my shoulders relaxing and my mood changed. I am so blessed.” She entered these comments after coming to the realization that she felt she lost touch with her inner self and lost balance. She was able to transfer her new knowledge in “starting a search for balance” in her daily life.

Regarding physiological distress associated with pain and illness, comments from Karen and Mary exemplified integrating ways to alleviate these types of discomfort. Karen recorded a journal entry about a way that she applied new knowledge in dealing with pain from a broken ankle noting:

"I did not go to the doctor right when it happened but I just knew something was wrong...the intuition. So the ride from Philly to Harrisburg was a painful one… I tried to do what you taught us and disconnect myself from my ankle and the pain and it actually worked. I was able to cope with it for about one and a half
hours until I got to the ER in Harrisburg. This was actually amazing to me that I let my mind almost “escape” my body and what I was thinking and feeling.

Mary described how an experience with illness brought her new knowledge to apply in the future to alleviate discomfort and deal with illness. She talked about having a cold and continuing to work when she felt very ill even though she knew she should have rested and taken care of herself explaining:

I didn’t stop and I didn’t listen to what my body was saying. My body was telling me stop-you need to rest, you need to drink water but I didn’t. I didn’t listen to myself and I kept going and then I got really sick. So I think it influenced me because then when I stopped and looked back I thought my body was telling me for a week to stop and take it easy and just rest. But I should’ve listened to myself and I didn’t. I felt obligated to work…If I called in sick, they were going to be short a nurse…so I didn’t call off when I knew that I really, really should have. I guess looking back on that experience, I wish I would have listened to myself more because then when I finally did stop and listen to myself I could recuperate …I didn’t do anything but like sleep and drink water and drink more water and take medicine. So I think that my body, when I finally listened to it, I did what I was supposed to do.

Thus, the realization of listening more attentively to the body as it signals emotional and physiological discomfort, translating what this means in terms of individual needs to alleviate it and reacting to this by applying new knowledge were significant outcomes among participants in reflecting on their learning from experiences of embodiment.
Broadening a relational sense. Another area of mention in which new knowledge was applied by participants beyond the more personal, individualized level of integration was through a broadened relational sense with others and one’s surroundings. In this sense, participants talked about applying new knowledge of embodiment within relational contexts in their personal and professional lives with the integration more other-directed rather than being highly internalized. Participants talked about arriving at new discoveries from their experiences of embodiment expressed somewhat as life lessons or “ah-hah moments” of insight. Several discoveries focused on relationship with nature in some sense. Karen, for example, included a picture of a serene setting in nature within her documents and wrote, “I love this picture. It reminds me of how small we really are in this universe.” Amy talked about relational integration in a sense through greater notice of her surroundings and spatial relations as a significant learning discovery from experiences of embodiment stating:

I think that after this whole thing I actually believe in it a little bit more…like I notice it more…basically being aware of where I am… I notice people around me and people being close to me. I got more out of it like where I am in space …like I can feel when I’m laying around with my cat, I can feel the cat close to me. I can feel the heart beating…more stuff that I wouldn’t notice before.

Another common area of mention among most participants was applying aspects of new learning from embodied experience connected to interpersonal relations with staff and patients in a professional context. While there was some mention of interpersonal relations in the context of the family related mostly to the stress response, there was more frequent mention of integrating new knowledge in the work context. Mary, for example,
felt that her new learning involved being more attentive to not only her own needs but also to the needs of her patients stating:

I’ve learned my personal boundaries and limits and when I need recovery time. And then if I put that more towards a job mode, an example of the way I apply embodied learning there is that I need to listen to the patient more because the patient knows what’s wrong with them... when they need to take a certain medication and if they don’t their body gets this way or if they don’t they get this and it made me think in your example about your doctor appointment when you said to the gynecologist, “Don’t tell me, I know my body.” I think perhaps my patients could’ve said that to me a couple times... So mostly we’re pretty adaptive to that but sometimes we can’t do it that way and I think this will make me work a little harder to get the patient what they normally do because they know what their body does if they don’t get something.

Mae also commented that besides enhancing some areas of her own personal wellness, her new knowledge included a heightened sensitivity of interrelatedness with others in her professional life. She stated, “I think I’m more in tune to what my patients are feeling” as she talked about being able to apply some aspects of embodied learning in her work context since the start of the semester. She added:

You have a tendency of getting, you know, you just have to do the job and sometimes the human aspect is taken away from it because my patients are sedated and vented and they can’t talk or interact with me. But I can relate more to the families and what they’re feeling through some of their body language and gestures. I think it’s made me more aware of that.
Most talked about integrating these embodiment experiences in their workplaces as if to do so were something new. Others discussed the fact that these experiences reaffirmed what they already knew. Hannah, for example, talked about embodied knowing through intuition as something nurses typically apply in the work context but are not always aware of. Her experiences of embodiment in the class simply reaffirmed this aspect in her work context by bringing it to her attention stating:

Before we talked about with nurses how embodiment has to deal with how we know there’s a change in our patients. Yesterday I had a patient who was going to be sent home with hospice to die. And we ended up not sending him home because I noticed a change in him and I wasn’t sure that he would make it through the ambulance ride home. So just knowing like that intuition in looking for things and he wasn’t telling me anything but just looking and having that feeling that something was different in him… I think it’s always been there and the longer in nursing you tune into that but I don’t know that this has made it any more or any different…but you brought it to our attention… because you don’t think about that a lot. You just do it.

Kate also mentioned intuition as an embodied relational sense and an area of application and greater comfort for her in the nursing context. She explained:

Nursing is very common with intuition as a way of knowing and I just used that yesterday at work with a new nurse saying you just know. You have this feeling inside of you and you just know. So I think it is becoming more comfortable and that I am using some applications in real life, professionally and personally.

Furthermore, several participants talked about being able to apply discovered
connections of a relational sense to their work setting from experiencing the bowing exchanges. For example, Karen’s insight from this experience was “to respect one another everyday in every experience and it works better if two people work together to reach a common goal.” Barb was struck by the nature of body movements in signaling subordination or superiority in interactions with others stating, “It made me think about how power affects our body movements. I had never thought about that before.” While Amy couldn’t relate to the bowing exchanges in the immediate moment, she could more easily relate to the experience by applying it to her professional life. She wrote the following reaction to the bowing exchanges:

I really wasn’t into it. I can relate more when I put it into the context of my own personal life. An example right now I am still in orientation for work. It’s my last week. Last night I made a small mistake because I didn’t know the policy and it was blown WAY out of proportion. My preceptor pulled me aside and told me how mad she was at me and continued to talk down to me, accusing me of something I did not do for about fifteen minutes. I stood there and took it because I felt that she was above me. Normally I wouldn’t do that.

Sandy also related the bowing experience to her professional life. She remarked about finding potential usefulness in the bowing exchange as a “great experience” for staff development in addressing interpersonal relations at work commenting, “Maybe it would settle down some of the stuff.”

Besides relational integration in the professional context, considering how to integrate new knowledge about embodiment was also directed at potential benefits and usefulness for significant others by some of the participants in other ways.
Rose, for example, thought about the usefulness of belly dancing as an enjoyable form of creative expression for her teenage daughter. She remarked:

I was telling my youngest daughter a little bit about this. She was asking me some questions and when the one student was doing her belly dancing the other day I actually talked to her about it because I actually thought that was something my daughter would really enjoy. She is very, very intuitive and very aware of herself and her surroundings and the kids at school they just kind of come in and do their own thing and say what they think and that’s that. So I think they are very aware of the wrong things. I thing this would be a good experience for her.

On a lighter note, even the benefit for a family pet was considered by Diane who felt that the breathing exercise would be a great relaxation technique for her dog stating, “I wish I could teach this to my little Jack Russell dog. He is always so tense.” Thus, it can be implied from participant remarks and reflections that they were able to apply new knowledge about embodiment in their own personal and professional lives as a result of participating in the experiences of embodiment not only on an individualized level but also in a relational sense with others and their surroundings.

Lastly, Susan’s observations as participant and course instructor were profound in revealing further insights about how embodiment was experienced by participants in a relational sense. She seemed to develop a deepened understanding of the relational impact of these experiences on the students in the course as her vantage point as participant and observer gave her an opportunity to watch as she stated, “It was really fun for me because I could watch. It’s like being in a therapy group and you never know what’s going to happen and you just have to watch and then go with it.” Her reflections
from the class comments during a final meeting between the two sections included insights on Diane’s very surprising demonstration of belly dancing that exemplified the significance of relational processes as follows:

The one who did the belly dancing the other night said she went home and thought to herself that she was just amazed that she had done it because she is a very shy person. I was just amazed to find out she had taken belly dancing and then to have her stand in front of the class and be so beautifully hugely pregnant, well, she was just as amazed at herself just as I was with her and she said I probably would not have been able to do that with this combined group today because we haven’t gone through all of this thing together. But with my own section because we’ve all been doing these things with our bodies, and no one’s embarrassed anymore and they all talked about embarrassment, they were very embarrassed and worried about how stupid they would look and what other people would think of them in the beginning. Then that just went away and it became fun…And I think she surprised everyone that they didn’t know that aspect of her. It was very lovely. That’s another thing that I saw that they didn’t talk about but that they saw aspects of themselves that don’t come out. They do reveal things about themselves in other ways certainly through what they write and share about their families and support each other around but this was different. These are other sides.

In summary, participants reported gaining new knowledge from experiences of embodiment by making significant discoveries revealing insights applied to personal and professional growth and development. There was an introspective sense expressed by
participants in constructing new knowledge that developed through feelings of inspiration
and enthusiasm and realizing the importance of self nurturance by identifying personal
needs and goals mostly associated with enhancing wellness and improving quality of life.
Participants also revealed that they were able to integrate new knowledge learned from
experiences of embodiment on an individualized level to relax and alleviate discomfort
and on a relational level in interacting with others and their surroundings in their personal
and professional lives. In terms of practice, instructor insights also revealed notice of
social processes in learning through a relational sense among the students engaged in
experiences of embodiment in the higher education classroom.

Reflecting on the Learning

The final category revealed through data analysis pertained to the reflective phase
of the action research cycle and addressed research questioning in discovering how
experiences of embodiment facilitated learning related to the content of the nursing
course for the instructor and student participants. This area is discussed as two themes;
experiencing leads to greater understanding and enhancing the course content. It
includes reflections on learning from both the instructor and student perspectives. The
first theme reveals the reflective sense of learning leading to greater understanding
facilitated within the higher education classroom while the second theme discusses how
the experiences of embodiment enhanced the content of the nursing course. Valuing the
overall experience is also discussed as a third area of reflection on the learning.

*Experiencing Leads to Greater Understanding*

Participation in activities that facilitated body awareness was predominantly
conducted through experiential learning. All of the participants emphatically noted the
importance of doing through experiencing as an essential component of developing new knowledge and greater understanding from experiences of embodiment. As noted earlier in the findings, the participants revealed that while embodiment was much more difficult to put into words, it was much easier to experience. Perhaps Mae best summed up this sentiment when she stated that direct engagement was absolutely a key aspect that strengthened the experiences for her as follows:

because it is such an abstract topic and you really don’t know exactly what it is because it’s kind of different for every person. It’s kind of personal but there’s a common thread that goes throughout humanity in general of how and what that means. So I think the activities were definitely key in understanding what it was in general and what it meant to me.

This section describes reflective aspects of experiencing embodiment and surrounding issues within the classroom setting of the nursing course. It begins with a discussion of participants’ sense of reflecting on the learning in the higher education classroom through their shared nursing experience and smaller class size.

*Connecting through nursing and class size.* Trying to get a sense of how embodiment was experienced by the instructor and students in the formal classroom setting was a prominent part of this research inquiry. The participants’ sense of sharing the formal classroom learning space with others during experiences of embodiment and how they experienced relating to and engaging with these experiences as the sessions progressed were revealed in assessing the project experience. Most participants felt an inherent relation to each other in the class through their shared professional connection as nurses. They expressed that this connection helped facilitate their willingness to
participate in activities and discussions during the sessions. They also felt that the small class size was another beneficial feature in helping to make the experiences more meaningful in a comfortable way that might not have been the same if the classroom dynamics were different. Barb explained the connection among nurses as an “essential feeling” where nurses “have the same core.” Mary also commented about this nursing connection stating:

It doesn’t matter where you are. They’re all typically normally very friendly and open in a conducive environment. We know what each other have been through throughout the day and I think if it would’ve been in a classroom with just a big general education class where you’ve got kids who haven’t been in the work field yet and everybody with different backgrounds and you don’t know where everybody is coming from, I would’ve totally not shared as much as we did even in that class. I know I wouldn’t have. I know I wouldn’t have. But I felt that I was among my own and that it was okay to share with the other people.

Karen added that she felt that nurses think alike to begin with and that this similarity reinforced student willingness to participate given this professional connection. She noted the positive influence on her ability to relate in this context because of the nursing similarity as follows:

If you’re not a nurse you really have no idea of what we actually go through and to share that experience with them, sometimes it’s really nice to just sit down and talk to other nurses because sometimes life is hard and it just gets to you.

For Kate, the nursing background of the group as “sharing a common bond” helped ease her anxiety about the session experiences. She stated, “I think people are just more
comfortable with people that they can relate to.” However, one participant felt indifferent about this common professional background in nursing even though she felt comfortable with this group cautioning, “I think it can be more intimidating because nurses are territorial and sometimes the younger nurses seem more competitive but that has more to do with the class.” Also with respect to nursing, Rose simply felt that being a nurse in general was of benefit to begin with in facilitating a comfort level with body awareness stating, “Nobody had to be intimidated by their bodies because being a nurse, once you’ve seen one body, you’ve seen them all.”

With small class size noted as a conducive feature for being able to relate to one another, most participants stated that the small group interaction enhanced learning through discussion and experiential participation. For instance, Amy said:

I think that it was good because it was a small group. I think that if it would’ve been much bigger I wouldn’t have been as comfortable with it. It was interesting when we would do stuff like the guided imagery and we would feel different things. You feel like other people are feeling the same things too and if it’s just you and the instructor sometimes you don’t know if what you’re doing is right or what you’re feeling is right. It’s easier with other people.

Mae also felt this way about sharing reactions with other participants stating:

I think it was positive because you heard other people’s take on embodiment and their experiences of embodiment and a lot of times they were similar to mine so I could relate to that and it made me feel more comfortable that I wasn’t the only one thinking or feeling something that I didn’t think that everyone else was.

Hannah likewise felt that group interaction was a beneficial aspect of learning through
experiences of embodiment. She said:

You know everybody else is a nurse so that is already one level of comfort and
I don’t think that it would have been any better on a more individual basis. With
the group, you got more shared experiences that enhanced it like the one girl that
got up and did the belly dancing. You wouldn’t have had that if it wasn’t a group.
I think it was good to have it as a group so everybody could bring in their thing. I
liked hearing what other people thought because they got such different
experiences out of it.

For Diane, she felt the group interaction was very helpful in hearing different
perspectives stating, “If I was like by myself and had to do some of these experiences, I
probably wouldn’t feel or understand it the way that I did as a group.”

However, in contrast to considering small group interaction as a benefit, for a few
participants, this aspect created anxiety at times. Feelings of insecurity and being self-
conscious surfaced as interferences during some experiences. Comfort levels varied
among these participants. Some felt uncomfortable with discussion while others were
uneasy about active engagement. There was also mention of such feelings in earlier
discussion of findings. A more intrapersonal learning style and a guarded feeling about
the more personal nature of body awareness were talked about as challenges to levels of
comfort in group interaction for these participants. Barb mentioned, “I was comfortable
participating with other people but not with discussing. I’m just not comfortable with
discussing. I just think those types of things are hard to discuss with other people because
I just think it’s so personal.” Karen stated that she was fine with participating but could
understand how it might be uncomfortable for some students. Lastly, Kate described her
level of anxiety with group interaction during some participatory experiences as follows:

When we were all just being quiet and with our eyes closed and we were just kind of individual that way and we were all just having our own personal experience whatever it was seemed more comfortable to me than the group experiences and that’s just how I feel. I don’t perform well in front of people. That’s just my personal anxiety with it… I wanted to try to just let go of any apprehension with being with a group or trying, you know … what people thought of how I was doing a movement or whatever and wanted to be able to let go of that which is why I wanted to participate.

Thus, from reflections on the learning, it is implied that the nursing affiliation and small class size were the most beneficial and conducive aspects of the higher education classroom leading to greater understanding from experiencing.

*Developing a comfort level over time.* Whether participants were comfortable with small group interaction or not, what was very clear about the experiential learning space was that as the sessions progressed, they all determined that they experienced a greater level of comfort in their ability to relate to and engage with the experiences of embodiment. Several participants mentioned that a developing comfort level corresponded not only with the progressive engagement in the experiences but also through an unfolding understanding of the presented conceptualizations of embodiment. Mary talked about this aspect saying:

I enjoyed the video with the sea gypsies but on the first night I wasn’t sure what you meant by being in tune with your body. But then I didn’t understand everything else that came along with embodiment the first night of class. And
then the more that we got into it, I realized that it isn’t just listening to your body and knowing your body well or any of that. It’s more like a way of expression … I got to understand that a little bit better with the more we did activities in class.

Karen felt similarly remarking that she felt her comfort level increased from the first session as she became more comfortable in trying to relate to embodiment as a concept by experiencing it. She stated that she went from thinking that I was sort of “crazy” from the first session to belly dancing in the last session. She remarked, “When we actually did it and after you taught us what it was, it was easy to understand and go along with a different way of knowing your body and a different way of learning.” Lynn also talked about feeling more comfortable as the sessions progressed explaining:

The first class… we didn’t know what you were about, Tammy, and it was just like, I don’t know how I think about this and I don’t know where she’s going with this and I think by the end, people really understood and it started to all make sense.

Hannah explained her developing comfort level as follows:

I think in general when we first starting doing all the stuff you were self-conscious about getting up and moving around in front of everybody. You didn’t know everybody in the class and that kind of thing. But overall after doing it every class it didn’t matter. I was comfortable doing whatever we did. It was interesting with the stuff that we learned. Once we got used to each other those inhibitions went away.

Mae added the following insights about a change in her comfort level with developed understanding:
As we did more things each week I kind of got more of a clue as to what embodiment was and what you were trying to explain to us. The activities kind of built on one another and I could bring what I previously learned to the current session.

Other participant comments about developing an increased comfort level over time through greater understanding were mentioned as feeling “more natural”, “less skeptical”, “not as awkward”, “more relaxed”, and “more open”. Perhaps Mary’s description of her impression of the change in comfort level among participants best exemplifies this aspect as she explained:

If you look at the first class and you look at the last class and the way that we acted together as a group and the way that we shared what we were thinking about or the way that we got involved in the activities, it was night and day because the first class, everybody did not feel comfortable. At least I didn’t feel comfortable the first class. Even the second class I just thought, I’m closing my eyes now, is everybody else in the room going to close their eyes now? I’m looking around thinking should I be doing this now too? And then at the end it was like we didn’t care. We’re all going to do these movements. We’re all going to act funny and silly. We’re all going to have fun. We’re all going to just listen to whatever … whatever I want to do right now, or whatever my body was telling me to do, draw, sing, dance, whatever right now and that to me was completely different from the first class because I know I would have never done that in the first class. If you would have taken the last night’s class and put it in the first class, I don’t think you would have had the response that we did. I think our comfort level to be able
to talk about what we know with our bodies… we were willing to talk about anything the last night.

As a closing comment of interest regarding comfort level and group interactions, I asked participants how they would have felt about sharing the learning space if it was a mixed gender class. The reactions varied with some participants expressing that they would have felt more uncomfortable but with most participants feeling indifferent about this. However, several participants did comment that they felt the classroom space itself was not very conducive to conducting some of these experiences. For instance, Amy emphasized that she felt the classroom environment was a key feature as an issue stating, “Maybe if we could have done it in a relaxing more comfortable place, you would have felt it (the effect) even more.” More surprisingly, some of the participants noted that they felt it would have been a different experience if it was conducted in the other section of this course. Rose, for example, talked about the importance of group dynamics saying:

Well it’s a small class and they are all very really nice people so I was kind of comfortable with all of them. I would’ve been more uncomfortable with the other class. The other class just doesn’t have the same personalities as our class had and I’m sure that they feel that way about us.

Sandy similarly talked about group dynamics in comparing the two sections and reflected on how the sessions might have been experienced differently in the other section noting that “the other class makeup is just different.” She felt that the class dynamics could have impacted the experiences as follows:

I guess it’s the maturity and I’m not even talking age but just the awareness of yourself…like how comfortable you are with yourself with doing these things.
But there is one girl in that other class and I know her very well but this would’ve just been so not her which is kind of interesting.

This aspect of group dynamics was also contemplated by the instructor as she reflected on how to integrate experiences of embodiment into future nursing courses stating:

I’m glad that you ended up being with this section. The other section would have done fine but they’ve been together through more classes and a couple of them have taken a holistic health class. It just would’ve been very different. This group was very fresh. They weren’t used to each other. You had a lot of shyness and still anxiety about being in the program. That was all there in that group and it was really useful for them.

From her participation and observation, the instructor was able to recognize the significance of considering personality styles, group dynamics and levels of experiences among students as new knowledge for practice in facilitating experiences of embodiment concluding the following:

I think you have to know your group and pick and choose activities accordingly and a little differently also for people who are not working with bodies because at least nurses are dealing with people’s bodies. So even if they see them through a different lens, they do deal with bodies and it makes them think about their own.

Thus, the reflections suggest that dimensions of classroom dynamics were significant for developing increased levels of comfort for experiencing embodiment over time.
Enhancing the Course Content

Part of the research inquiry of the study was directed at investigating how learning was facilitated by experiences of embodiment in relation to the content of a nursing course in a higher education setting, in this case the Family and Community Health Concepts course. Virtually all the participants indicated it enhanced the course content, although some found it somewhat difficult to express in words. Not surprisingly, Susan, the course instructor, was the most articulate in expressing how. First, in describing her sense of how the experiences and concept of embodiment threaded into the content of the course, she explained:

I thought it ended up fitting very well. I knew I just sensed that around anything related to culture, that somehow it would fit because my sense of relating to people who are different from me, not just culturally different but just different, my sense of how that happens effectively is that it happens a lot through bodies and that’s just from my own experience. So I knew there would be a way for that to fit - not in a theoretical way but that it would fit. But I didn’t know how you were going to do that. But it ended up…you found wonderful ways to fit with the content of the course not only with the activities but then in what you taught about embodiment and about their bodies. So I thought that fit very well but that was your creativity.

What was also striking and evident to her as relevance was her perception that each participant experienced new learning in different ways stating, “They didn’t all take the same thing from it which is actually true with content and theory too although we sort of make the assumption that we’re more in control of that and what happens with it but
we’re not.”

As Susan said, the student participants took different things from the course, and saw the experiences of embodiment as related in different ways. Described here are three distinct ways they discussed it: connecting to overall learning processes in general, understanding culture relevance in new ways, and to personal and professional development.

*Connecting to generalized learning processes.* While participants confirmed a sense of relevance with course content, it still seemed somewhat difficult for some of them to pinpoint and verbalize, and many seemed to connect their learning to more generalized learning processes. For these, there were ideas and suggestions expressed as relevance. For example, Karen mentioned a more general sense of relevance stating that the holistic nature of the experiences matched the more holistic approach of the course in terms of exploring health practices stating, “We all have been familiarized with a different way of learning.” Mae talked about how arriving at an understanding of embodiment and how to apply new learning from the experiences were similar to the way she arrived at new learning in the course in general stating:

> I think all in all especially the community nursing and especially if you’re dealing with a patient in their home because they act so differently in their home rather than in a hospital setting, I think it related pretty well because just with the cues with the patients and things ..what their living space is like and…like a draining space for them or something …the instructor does such a good job of exposing us to so many things and at first you’re like what is she talking about and then after you process it like even as I’m doing the work for the class I can see how
everything is coming together. I just have to be patient with it.

She found relevance in the similar way that she derived learning from the course experiences and learning from experiences of embodiment. Thus, experiencing embodiment as an alternate way of knowing enhanced learning within the course through exposure to and consideration of other ways of knowing.

Understanding cultural relevance in new ways. Another common area of connection for enhancing the course content pertained to gaining an understanding of cultural relevance in new ways. There were several discoveries of cultural considerations made by participants from experiences of embodiment. Many of the participants talked about developing further respect and understanding of cultural considerations through new learning of cultural differences. Learning about the way of life of the sea gypsies as the introductory activity was commonly mentioned as significant in developing an understanding of body awareness and its cultural connections for many of the participants. For example, Mary noted the following:

Looking back on the sea gypsies, it totally amazed me the way that they listened to their bodies and the way they listened to what they knew and what they felt and knew that they needed to get away from that tsunami. It shocked me beyond. I think like for me it made me want to become that connected with my environment…like how can I become that connected to my environment that I would know when something is very, very bad. And the way that I look at other cultures that do that, I just am enamored by them. I’m enamored by their way of knowing and their way of cultural connection.

Karen also mentioned the sea gypsies in her insights associated with cultural
understanding stating:

I can respect others in different cultures in the way that they live and think knowing that like an example for the sea gypsies … knowing that they live like that and they’re at peace with themselves and in a completely different state of mind from us and I can respect that. You really don’t need much except for what you know about certain things and that’s all you need to know and you’ll survive. I would consider myself not like that and I would like to be.

In addition to being exposed to the sea gypsies way of life, experiences with Tai Chi and yoga as Eastern somatic practices also developed new learning about how other cultures made connections among body, mind, movement, and the environment in comparison to Western thought. For example, Diane included a picture of belly dancers and the comparative view of the Eastern mystical view of the body and the Western scientific view writing:

As a nurse, I really enjoy this page. I have seen the Western view in many of my textbooks. Nursing is what made me tense. I need that so I can care for others. Learning to relax is hard work. Somewhere inside of me is the mystical view and it all comes together and makes sense.

Several participants talked about other aspects of cultural relevance related to the course content. For example, Rose expressed that she had greater awareness of and respect for the different cultures that comprise a community and issues of diversity as aspects of new learning enhanced by embodied experiences. When asked to comment on the relevance to course content, Diane said:

I think it was very relevant. The nursing course was a community course.
Basically what I do know is I’m a nurse in a hospital so you see someone in an acute setting and not their surroundings and studying the community as far as nursing is very important especially since different cultures settle in different areas. Learning about embodiment and different cultures was very important as we learn about nursing and different cultures.

With course content centered on health practices in the community through cross-cultural and ethnic threads, Sandy noted new learning related to cultural considerations, body awareness, and interaction styles as relevant to these threads. She stated that it gave her something new to think about that she never considered before as follows:

I never even thought about that… I just thought that was very interesting…We spend so much time in peoples’ physical space as nurses and touching them in very different ways and if you don’t feel that invasion at some point how can you be empathetic to how much you have invaded upon these people and to their bodies. And then we’re doing all this stuff. It’s hard for me to think you could possibly do this job and not be aware of when you’re infringing upon people. So I kind of look at it like that with nursing…

She continued discussing this connection with an example:

Like the Philippines, they don’t like you to touch their hair. I don’t know what that is but now I wonder what it is in their culture. I guess it’s more of an awareness that even though I don’t know what it is, there could be something and I might want to go find out before I go giving them the big hug. So I think maybe that is not anything specific but just the awareness that different cultures have some very different ways of …like some people want to be very close and some
people want their distance … just to be more aware of that.

While Kate also acknowledged that she found a cultural link from experiences of embodiment to be relevant with the course content, she said it was difficult to express the connection. These reflections suggest that most participants acknowledged developing an understanding of cultural relevance in new ways particularly about how the body is experienced by different cultures as a way of knowing even if it still seemed somewhat difficult to express.

Facilitating personal and professional development. Some of the participants focused more on how the learning about embodiment facilitated their personal and/or professional development. Amy’s remarks, for example, pointed to what seemed to her as more personal relevance not in line with the community-oriented nature of the course. Contrarily, for several other participants who also felt it facilitated learning related more to personal growth and development, they still found relevance within the course content through its meaningfulness for nursing in general. Mary explained her idea of this as follows:

Of course there’s a way that we would transfer that back to what we do the majority of our lives and I think we all did that in a way. We all looked at it through nursing because it was a nursing class … But I think we totally could relate it back to that if not just for being a more attentive listener to what the patient needs or wants. But even when the patient doesn’t say anything at all and their body is ... just something’s not right, and that we know it and we know it’s not going well … and we try to get their level of care changed so we don’t have to call a case… and we just know when we have to do that and we know when it’s
coming and when we should do this step and that’s something that you don’t really get in nursing school.

Barb also talked about the sense of relevance connected to personal integration of new learning for wellness and “to possibly help patients” with respect to discussions of community health practices in the course.

Thus, in reflecting on the learning, overall participants expressed that the experiences of embodiment enhanced the content of the nursing course through connections to generalized learning processes, gaining understanding of cultural relevance in new ways, and facilitating personal and professional development.

*Valuing the Overall Experience*

In assessing the experiences of embodiment, all of the participants stated that being involved in this project was a valuable experience for them. In addition to the qualitative data, they were asked to evaluate each session and the overall experience in the research project in terms of being a valuable learning experience based on a rating scale of one to five with one being not valuable and five being very valuable. The average value rating for the overall experience was 4.45. In line with this overall experience, participants were also asked to indicate a value rating for considering embodiment as a valued way of knowing in the learning space based on their experiences and new learning. The average value rating in response to this item was 4.27. While they all determined that learning about embodiment was of value in the higher education setting, there were differences in their recognition of what they considered to be most valuable. The differences were evident from data gathered during the second interview, collected documents and written evaluations rating the value of each session.
Engaging in actual embodiment experiences. One aspect that was most striking among participant comments was finding value in being exposed to and actually engaging in embodiment experiences rather than just talking about them. Karen focused on different types and noted:

You used all kinds of things to keep us interested in what you were talking about.
You used all of our senses, which included touch with the fabric pieces, taste with the oranges and lemons, smell, hearing with the music, and visual. I truly enjoyed you being in our class teaching us another way of thinking.

Others commented that the experiences provided an avenue to explore learning styles and other ways of knowing. Diane’s assessment of value exemplified this as she noted:

It was of value. I think what it told me is I’m not aware of all my preferred ways of knowing yet. Since high school I’ve been so focused on the book learning that I haven’t been able to explore anything else and now that I’m getting to where I’m having more of my life back and less things focused on school, it’s nice to learn different ways of learning.

Sara and Sandy both noted that they found particular value in the experiences as a way to affirm and renew their prior sense of being in touch with how they know through body awareness. In talking about assessing the experience, Sandy added, “It’s just so personal and it’s hard to describe but it’s very valuable and you can trust it if you learn how to let yourself be open to that.” For Sara, she stated that part of her assessed value centered on greater understanding with “being able to take care of yourself and being able to understand yourself…it’s all understanding and what’s going on and what you need to do for whatever your body’s telling you.”
Also with respect to being exposed to experiences of embodiment as another way of knowing, most participants considered the aspect of direct engagement to be most significant in terms of value. As discussed earlier in the findings, participants expressed experiencing heightened awareness facilitated by direct engagement in experiential learning. For example, Diane commented, “I think that was very important. I think you definitely have to do it.” Kate also talked about considering the value through direct experience saying, “You can read so much about it but the reading doesn’t do it as much justice as doing it and living it.” Amy also felt this way commenting that it was extremely important for her to directly experience embodiment saying, “I learn by doing. I don’t learn by reading stuff and by reading about that (embodiment) you really don’t believe it. You don’t buy into it.” As Mae noted from further participation in activities as the session progressed, “I got more of a clue as to what embodiment was.” Karen recognized the value in doing and being exposed to different ways of knowing as follows:

You taught us to do something as simple as the skyscraper thing. That helped us and all the different things that you brought in to try to get us in tune with our bodies like the music and the one time you brought in the brain that we could actually see a visual of it. It actually does help. You taught us very different, many ways of learning. Like you used every sense in our body down to taste with ways of knowing and learning … I actually really enjoyed it and I’m more and most people are more visual learners. I think that needs to brought into the classroom more than what it is.

Lynn also assessed direct experience as part of her valued considerations explaining:
I don’t really learn as well through a textbook than I do through experiences. I just learn better like that and the stuff that we did made sense to me. It wasn’t like real complex. It was simple and it made sense and it fit right.

There were also important points of value from direct experiencing expressed from the perspective of Susan as the instructor who stated, “There are certain things that you just do better, you get it better if you are part of the experience.” For her, having the opportunity to both participate in and observe student engagement during direct experiences of embodiment was assessed as valuable. Furthermore, she noticed the value of direct experiencing for the students. This became most obvious to her during the last class meeting when the two sections combined and the students participating in the study shared their insights about the experiences of embodiment with the other section. Susan noted that they had a hard time trying to explain it with words at first, but when they started to relate it to engagement in actual experiences of embodiment, their explanations started to enthusiastically flow. She described the following in reflecting on what happened when the participants tried to present what they had learned from the experiences:

At first they were really excited about doing this…Well then the time came and no one wanted to lead and they just weren’t sure what they wanted to do and then one student tried with starting to explain what embodiment was and they were trying to do it in a rational way and that is why they were stymied. She sort of struggled with trying to explain what it was and a couple people tried to help her but mostly they just sat there looking excited like they were waiting for her to make it all make sense because no one knew how to put it into words. So what
was interesting was that what set it straight for her then and what made it possible for other people to talk was that she went back to the first thing. She told the story of the sea gypsies and then they all had something to say, and they said tell the story. So she told the story of the sea gypsies and then the other students started to understand and they thought that was very interesting and then other people from the group would break in and say oh yeah, and we did this thing, and Tai Chi …But then what they did best was describe what they did with their bodies and somebody remembered that they had scarves and it was just interesting that they remembered these little pieces of what they had actually done. And then they said what it did for them and so they talked about being more aware of their breathing and being more aware of how stressed they were and how they didn’t breath deeply. Many of them said that the breathing thing was really striking…and all of them said the biggest overall thing was their attitudes toward anything different in health and creativity and just in living.

Thus, from these reflections as in previous discussions direct engagement surfaced as a most significant aspect of embodiment experiences.

*Connecting to lifelong learning.* Another area of recognition assessed as valuable by participants involved being able to integrate aspects of new learning as lifelong learning. While findings about the integration of new learning in participants’ personal and professional lives were previously described, this theme surfaced again in assessing the value of experiences of embodiment. Participants frequently mentioned that they found value in how they were able to relate to and apply new learning in their lives. Sara, for example, talked about this aspect of assessed value in regards to lifelong learning
being related to insights in her work as a nurse as follows:

The more I evaluated my own personal beliefs and feelings and knowing where I’m coming from, it definitely was of value. Because what I think it did for me and I think for others in the nursing field is again it created the awareness about your body and of being in touch with your body and what’s going on. You could help others because if you’re not understanding what’s going on or not paying attention, maybe you’re not as apt to be able to give the care to others that need it.

In reflecting on the value of the course aspect, Kate also recognized a connection with the nursing field stating, “I do feel it fits into nursing somewhere because nursing is such a holistic field” perhaps as an elective course offering. However, while she felt that learning about and experiencing embodiment was of value, she felt there could be a more appropriate learning space for it than the course in which the experiences were conducted.

Other participants talked about the value of experiences of embodiment in learning experiences in general pertaining to lifelong learning. For example, Karen commented on finding value in the experiences and the benefit for other students stating that embodiment would be “really awesome” for students to learn about “because someone who is not in the health profession and has no idea about a different way of knowing and learning could really, really learn from that and understand other people.” Mae also saw the potential benefit for others in reflecting on value commenting that she felt a course on experiences of embodiment would be a good elective course to offer to “enrich lives.”

Insights of a more personal nature were mentioned by other participants. For
example, Sandy commented on reflecting on the personal value for her from participating in these experiences during a particularly stressful time in her life noting as a closing journal entry:

I have enjoyed and appreciated the experiential activities in our class. I truly believe that all things happen for a reason. I was meant to be in this class. I knew at least every two weeks I would have a period of peace. During these exercises I would discover how my body was attempting to brace against the world and have the shoulders drop and my mind to rest and focus on the breath. I felt I was able to briefly see the core of the real me…the one with a quick smile or gut busting laugh. Breathe in, breathe out. Soften the eyes, relax the brows. Breathe in the positive and exhale the negative finding myself again in the silence.

Hannah and Mary also noted the value from the experiences of embodiment that were discoveries as applications for lifelong learning. Hannah recognized:

A lot of classes that you take are just about books and you have to learn all of this information and it’s about everything else and I think this is the only class that I’ve taken that was about learning about something about yourself or to help yourself.

Mary’s realization of value was that she felt these types of experiences should typically be included in learning experiences stating:

If we get taught some of the really odd stuff that we get taught in the formal setting this can certainly make its way into the context somewhere. I mean really there is so much other useless stuff that we learn throughout a formal education.
that it might be useful to throw something in there that makes us think different and we could actually use it throughout our whole life and not just for that class or not just to get through the next semester but for life. I’m kind of surprised that nobody talked about it (embodiment) before … that nobody mentioned it at all and I really find it shocking because we learn about so much other useless stuff that I don’t remember most of it. But yet something that we could have used and made sense out of, they’re not teaching us and I’m just getting it.

Thus, it can be implied from participant reflections that they found value in the overall experience from new discoveries about embodiment that they were able to incorporate as insights for lifelong learning in their personal and professional lives.

Enhancing teaching options. As for other aspects of recognized value from the instructor’s reflections, Susan said the outcome of the project was excellent. In reflecting on what experiences of embodiment mean for practice in terms of value, she commented, “I think as far as teaching, it’s let me know how much farther I can go than what I’ve done before.” She continued explaining other realizations that she arrived at about attempting to incorporate innovative practice approaches within future nursing courses as a valuable outcome for her as follows:

It was really helpful because this has been a very hard course and now I feel much more relaxed about the class because it’s overwhelming. There’s too, too much for one class and I always try these different ways to try to accommodate that and I wasn’t happy with any of them and this year with both sections, I’m much happier with putting students more in charge with what has to happen because there’s just too much for all of it to happen. But this experience let me know that
there are probably a million ways that this could be done and I don’t have to worry so much about it. Not so much just in terms of embodiment but creativity in general. Let that be and bring it into the space and let that happen.

She also talked at length about the students’ reflection on their experiences during a final combined weekend meeting with the other section of the nursing course. She stated that she thought the experience “was wonderful overall” for the students as they enthusiastically described and demonstrated different aspects of their new learning from the experiences of embodiment with the other section of students. She also noted that while they initially struggled with putting it into words, they soon were able to more easily verbalize their learning by talking about some of the direct experiences, their responses to them and how they were able to draw meaning from them. In reflecting on their summarization of their learning, Susan remarked, “I was amazed.”

Besides being able to take different aspects from these varied experiences of embodiment to integrate into the nursing courses, this project also gave Susan the opportunity to compare her experience with the two sections of the nursing course. In commenting about this, she recognized a difference in her emotional connection with the two sections of students as particularly interesting and surprising to her stating:

In the other group, I knew more of them better to begin with so they were more ready to be in charge of that class themselves because they were at that point. But there was a different emotional connection there. So I feel connected to them because I know them better and there were lots of connections around their family assessment and stories but in the section that you worked with I’m really grateful
that you ended up doing this because I feel much more connected to them that I’m sure I would not have otherwise. I know that because some of them did not want to be in this class. That’s always a problem with this course and then you had a couple who were really nervous about this class and it just would have been different. I know because I’ve taught this several times. It gave me some really good ideas. I thought what could I do - I was even thinking if I could keep this in two sections in the future the way I did this year I wondered if I should divide the sections that way and encourage people who are really farther along in the program and more experienced- have them in one section and then have this other group and deal with them differently.

She continued that this new idea about grouping students as an outcome of this comparison for her helped her to realize that “maybe a class has to be much more embodiment focused.” As a final recognition of value distinguishable for students that she instructs in the nursing profession and for other students in general, Susan arrived at the following implication of embodiment as a valued way of knowing in formal and informal learning contexts remarking:

I think most people are quite disconnected from our bodies and it makes us not as healthy as we could be. So I think it’s incredibly valuable to present that for anyone in the classroom. But for people who work - whose careers are around bodies, I think it’s essential. You’re not as safe. I think you are probably not as safe of a practitioner - as safe as you could be if you don’t have that way of learning.

She felt that her participation in and observation of the project addressed practice issues
for her and developed insights in considering how to incorporate experiences of embodiment and other ways of knowing into nursing courses. For Susan, as with the student participants, the learning space was further opened by exploring other ways of knowing beyond traditional cognitive approaches.

Summary

In summary, this chapter discussed the phase of reflecting as the fourth and final part of the action research cycle. Data was analyzed to reveal emergent themes related to how embodiment was understood and experienced by the participants, how experiences of embodiment facilitated learning related to the course content, and how participants applied new knowledge about embodiment in their lives as focal areas of the research inquiry. Three main categories were revealed: deepening connections, making significant discoveries, and reflecting on the learning with emergent themes detailed in each category.

How embodiment was conceptualized by participants as an outcome of participating in experiences of embodiment revealed that participants developed an understanding of embodiment from deepened connections that clarified ineffable aspects of embodiment through experiential engagement and by relating conceptualizations of embodiment to prior experiences. Being able to give expression, heightening levels of body awareness, and feeling the impact of the experiences of embodiment emerged as findings among participants as aspects that deepened connections with new learning. Connections were also strengthened for some participants by relating them to prior experiences through affirmations and nostalgic moments.

As for how participants applied new knowledge about embodiment in their
personal and professional lives as a result of participating in experiences of embodiment, the category of making significant discoveries revealed that participants reported gaining new knowledge and applying it to areas of personal and professional growth and development through greater self awareness and integration through individual and relational levels. Introspection was used by participants in constructing new knowledge developed through finding enthusiasm and inspiration in new learning experiences and realizing the importance of self nurturance through personal needs and setting goals mostly tied to enhancing wellness and improving quality of life.

Regarding how embodiment was experienced in the classroom, facilitated new learning related to the course content, and considered to be of value was revealed as participants reflected on the learning. There were different aspects of experiential participation such as small group interaction and other classroom dynamics assessed as highly valuable in leading to greater understanding and developing a comfort level over time. Enhancement of the course content was also revealed as connected to generalized learning processes through exposure to innovative ways of knowing, greater understanding of cultural relevance in new ways, and facilitation of personal and professional development. Lastly, the value of the overall experience was reflected on in terms of direct experiencing, connections to lifelong learning and the enhancement of teaching options regarding practice issues and considerations for the course instructor.

Discussion in the next chapter is directed at considering the theoretical relevance of the findings as revealed in Chapters Four and Five and what it means for practice in terms of future considerations and implications.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore revaluing embodiment as an alternate way of knowing by examining how it was conceived of, experienced, and applied in a formal higher education classroom. The study was based on the assumptions that there are in fact multiple ways of knowing, embodiment is one of those forms of knowing, and that embodied knowledge is accessed through experiential learning. Further, there is growing interest in holistic, innovative learning paradigms, but a limited research-based body of literature. This study was an attempt to fill that gap in the literature. The study was an investigative undertaking using action research within a case study of a higher education classroom specifically where direct attempts were made to incorporate attention to the body in learning. It was also intended to bring forth insights about embodiment as a practice problem. Intentions of the study included searching for insights through findings about how to deal with issues of embodiment and how to apply and incorporate experiences of embodiment facilitating new learning in a valuable manner to improve quality of practice. Thus, it was hoped that the findings would inform the need to bridge traditional boundaries of knowing with innovative educational approaches that reconnect mind and body through experiences of embodiment.

The following research questions guided this investigation of embodiment in a Family and Community Health Concepts nursing course where a direct attempt was made to incorporate attention to the body in learning:

1) How is embodiment conceptualized in the academy by the instructor and students as a result of participating in activities conducted to facilitate body awareness?
2) How is embodiment experienced in the academy by the instructor and students when activities are conducted to facilitate body awareness, and how does it facilitate learning related to the content of the course?

3) How do instructors and students apply new knowledge about embodiment in their personal and professional lives as a result of participating in such experiences?

Given these primary questions, this study focused on informing an understanding of conceptualizations and experiences of embodiment as an alternate way to facilitate learning in the higher education classroom, and the integration of embodied knowledge in participants’ personal and professional lives. The questions were examined in relation to themes emerging as findings discussed in Chapters Four and Five. In the following discussion, I’ll first briefly summarize the findings of the study given the research questions. Next, the major themes of the study will be further discussed in light of the theoretical framework, and the literature that guided this investigation. Lastly, the implications of the findings and recommendations for future research will discussed in relation to adult and higher education.

Summary in Focus

In trying to inform an understanding of embodiment and all that it represents as a practice problem, an intervention of activities conducted to facilitate body awareness was implemented in a higher education nursing classroom as a case for study through the action research process. After the first two sessions of the intervention, an initial interview was conducted with all of the participants except for one who was interviewed after the third session. This interview was intended to gather data as an early reference
point about a sense of participants’ body awareness including how they felt most connected and disconnected to their bodies. These early findings were discussed in Chapter Four and revealed that participants had an initial sense of body awareness mostly connected to physicality but also to affective dimensions of response. Another significant point of reference was that participants easily recognized how and when they felt most disconnected from their bodies.

With these initial findings serving as a vantage point from the onset of the intervention, in turning to the findings gathered at the completion of the project as discussed in Chapter Five, this study revealed three major areas of emergent findings from its focus on investigating experiences of embodiment in a higher education classroom. First, participants developed a deeper understanding of an embodied sense of awareness. Second, participants made significant discoveries as new learning from experiences of embodiment that they were able to integrate in their personal and professional lives. Third, participants recognized aspects of experiences of embodiment as valuable for learning in the higher education classroom. Each of these areas will be further discussed in this section.

A Developed Understanding of Embodiment

The review of the literature has established that arriving at a definition and understanding of embodiment as a highly complex and rather abstract topic is challenging (Csordas, 1994; Weiss & Haber, 1999). As a topic, it is difficult to describe and problematic for practice (Cheville, 2005; Chapman, 1998). The action phase of the research process was designed in a hopeful attempt to bring about an understanding of embodiment and its complexities by directly experiencing its varied conceptualizations.
The findings discussed in the previous chapter revealed that participants developed and deepened their understanding of embodiment by grasping its conceptualizations through participation in direct experiences. Furthermore, even though it was stated by all participants that embodiment was much easier to sense, feel, and experience than to define or explain with words, they were all able to verbally communicate a developed understanding of it in meaningful ways.

For all of the participants, a deepened understanding of embodiment was much more easily articulated as an experience through rich, vivid descriptions of what was felt or sensed as heightened embodied awareness. Arriving at a basic understanding of embodiment as “paying more attention,” “being more in tune,” or “listening to” body experiences gave way to thick, rich visceral descriptions of considerably heightened levels of body awareness that revealed deeper subjective understanding and meaning. For example, Kate’s conceptualization of embodiment as “just being one with your body knowing it completely and fully” broadened to extensive descriptions of physiological and emotive reactions in response to the reflective guides and interview questions. Her journal entry about experiencing her “first ever panic attack” following the session with the skyscraper guided imagery experience was one of several examples of a broadened level of understanding and meaning richly expressed through words.

This type of elaboration was revealed in conceptualizations by the other participants as well. Sandy’s portfolio in particular was filled with further examples. The descriptions noted in the previous chapter were steeped in physiological and emotive responses drawn from feeling the impact of the experiences. Thus, there was a vastly broadened sense of how to conceptualize embodiment among the participants as an
outcome of this impact. This sense was evidenced in their descriptions through reflective remarks and reactions to an array of experiences in their personal and professional lives and past experiences.

The ability to clarify and communicate a deeper understanding of embodiment through heightened body awareness as an outcome of participating in experiences of embodiment was consistent with the outcome of other work on embodied learning (Crowdes, 2000; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Nikitina, 2003). For example, in Nikitina’s (2003) study investigating the experience of an integrative movement class, student participants noted that they reached a new understanding through heightened perception “of how the body communicates to us who we are” (p. 59) as an outcome of participation. This sentiment was expressed in phrases that revealed the same type of communicative sense with “listening to” the body as a source of knowledge that was present in this study’s findings in the prior chapter. However, the communicative sense in these studies was more narrowly focused through physical expression in movement while this study incorporated other facets of embodiment such as imagery and creative expression in addition to movement.

Another noticeable area of congruence with the reviewed literature suggested by the findings in developing a deeper understanding of embodiment related to discussions associated with discourses on holistic learning (Crowdes, 2000; Miller, 1998/1999; Poindexter, 2003; Yang, 2003; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Several participants such as Karen, Mae, and Mary described connections to generalized learning processes in terms of the holistic nature of the experiences of embodiment. The common sentiment of becoming “familiarized with a different way of learning” was suggestive of the relevance
of the findings with movement toward holistic learning in the research-based literature (Chan; 2002; Nikitina, 2003; Viramontes, 2003). For example, the holistic engagement of body, mind, spirit, and emotion through adult learning experiences in visual art in a traditional adult education context stimulated a similar heightened awareness by integrating these dimensions to deepen adult learning (Viramontes, 2003). This type of holistic construction of knowledge as experienced across multiple levels with traditional rational knowledge also emerged as an outcome of this study and points to the importance of considering this emerged insight for learning in practice that recognizes and engages the whole person.

*Integrating New Embodied Knowledge*

The second major area of emerged findings pertained to other significant discoveries made by participants as new learning from experiences of embodiment that they were able to integrate in their personal and professional lives. The participants most commonly reported that their participation in experiences of embodiment led to greater self awareness through an introspective sense. Participants felt enthusiasm and inspiration from exposure to new experiences and subsequent new learning as important knowledge for self nurturance.

Furthermore, all of the participants were able to identify aspects and ways in which they could integrate new knowledge about embodiment in their personal and/or professional lives as a successful outcome of participating in the experiences. Much of this integration involved enhancing wellness, considering lifestyle changes, and improving the quality of life in both personal and professional contexts. Alleviating physical and emotional discomforts, practicing relaxation strategies, and enhancing
interpersonal relations were noted as key areas of integration by the participants on individualized and relational levels. Journal entries such as those made by Mary and Sandy were highly reflective of a developed awareness for self nurturance on an individualized level that led to integrating strategies to enhance wellness.

On a professional level, comments made by several other participants such as Mary and Mae, for example, pointed to integration in a relational sense with patient care. Given that the participants were all nurses, they were used to dealing with the body as a biological phenomenon and all that is encompassed with the body’s physicality. As simply stated from Rose given her nursing experience regarding the body, “Once you’ve seen one body, you’ve seen them all.” But the findings revealed that the approach of the body in the nursing profession rooted in the scientific view evolved into an alternate view of the body from more of an embodied perspective. The revealed findings of integration in a relational sense with patients discussed in the previous chapter were more in line with the holistic orientation of the profession as an outcome. These findings added to the positive outcomes of experiential learning approaches in comparison to traditional, lecture approaches in nursing courses reviewed in the literature (Pugsley & Clayton, 2003).

Also in reviewing the literature, similar types of integration were revealed in Beaudoin’s (1999) study investigating applications of somatic techniques integrated as new knowledge. However, this study was more strictly focused and narrowly applied on an individualized level using somatic techniques to alleviate discomfort. What this study in the higher education classroom added beyond the work by Beaudoin was a broadened application of how embodiment was conceptualized beyond somatic
applications on an individualized level to other areas of application and integration on relational levels and in professional contexts.

*Valuing Experiences of Embodied Learning in Higher Education*

A somewhat unique aspect of this study was that it focused on a direct attempt to incorporate experiences of embodiment in a more traditional formal higher education classroom setting where the relatedness of embodiment was not as direct in comparison to several other studies situated in more body-oriented contexts such as movement based experiences like dance (Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Nikitina, 2003). Its setting was slightly more in line with the higher education setting of the sociology course investigated by Crowdes (2000). However, exploration and application of embodiment in Crowdes’ study was restricted to examining manifestations of embodiment connected to social structures of power. Since the research direction of this study was much broader in application, its focus was expanded to other manifestations and conceptualizations of embodiment (e.g., cultural considerations, sensorimotor experience, somatic techniques, imagery, body inscriptions, creative expression, and healing).

Furthermore, given that this study was conducted in the context of a nursing course with nursing rooted in the physicality of the body from the scientific view but also considered as a more holistic profession broadened applications of embodiment as new knowledge into other contexts in the personal and professional lives of participants. The implementation of experiences of embodiment in the nursing course and the findings associated with the enhancement of the nursing course content discussed in the previous chapter added to the research work in the literature. What was revealed in this context in comparison to other applications of embodied learning in the literature was that embodied
experiences were considered valuable for learning in applying new knowledge about embodiment in contexts that were both directly and indirectly relevant to body awareness.

Another significant concern of this investigation was to determine the existence and extent of value in incorporating experiences of embodiment in learning in the higher education classroom. The outcome of participating in experiences of embodiment revealed that participants recognized several significant aspects of experiences of embodiment as valuable for learning in the higher education classroom. First, all participants recognized that learning about embodiment through experiencing was crucial as the most valuable aspect of embodiment as way to construct knowledge. Second, participants recognized the importance of small class size and classroom dynamics as another important point of consideration in creating significant learning experiences through a developed level of comfort for engaging in embodied activities over time. Third, most participants found value in the relevance of the new learning about embodiment as meaningful within the course content, for transferring new knowledge into daily life as a process of lifelong learning, and for facilitating personal and professional growth and development. Fourth, most of the participants reported gaining an understanding of cultural relevance in approaching the body in new ways including developing further respect and understanding of cultural differences and considerations. An outcome of greater cultural awareness and sensitivity was also confirmed as a finding in a study (Chan, 2002) exploring teachers’ experiences in cross-cultural movements in the context of multicultural teacher education. Fifth, most participants reported value in learning about multiple ways of knowing and more fully understanding their own
preferences for learning. This outcome was also discovered among students in a study investigating experiences of an integrative dance course in higher education (Nikitina, 2003).

Lastly, since this study was aimed at investigating embodiment as a practice problem, the value drawn from experiences of embodiment in this setting for addressing improvements in practice were of great importance. The data gathered from the student participants and the instructor recognized the value of embodied experiences for enriching the higher education learning space. Overall, the findings revealed in the previous chapter substantiated the findings from other research efforts reviewed in the literature that pointed to the value of integrating innovative approaches to learning with traditional learning paradigms (Fink, 2003; Nikitina, 2003; Ross, 2000). It added insights about experiences of embodiment as an innovative approach integrated into a nursing course within a traditional higher education learning paradigm.

Embodiment through Multiple Theoretical Lenses

As described in the first chapter, embodiment as a term is more commonly used to refer to a way of constructing knowledge that engages the body as a site of learning (Csordas, 1994; Weiss & Haber, 1999). However, the review of the literature with its varied conceptualizations and applications reveal that embodiment is much more complex and multi-faceted. As revealed in the findings of this study, its understanding and meaning are best arrived at from direct experiencing with the study participants emphatically noting that embodiment is much easier to feel, sense, and experience than to explain with words.

With this in mind, important points of consideration from the findings are
discussed from the theoretical framework of this investigation intersecting through
Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) philosophy of an embodied person grounded in cognitive
science, through situated cognition within the social constructivist view of experiential
learning, and through Turner’s (1996) social theory approach toward the body within the
discipline of sociology.

*Developing Embodied Awareness from the Lens of Lakoff and Johnson*

With the purposive nature of this study centered on activities conducted to facilitate body awareness, bringing attention to the body in learning was brought into focus through experiences of embodiment. The findings presented in the previous two chapters revealed that participants developed a heightened sense of embodied awareness as a valuable outcome of participation. There were dimensions of this development that could be drawn from Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) conception of an embodied person that views the inherently embodied nature of perception and movement in each experience to arrive at embodied reason. For example, participant comments and reactions as revealed in the previous two chapters were representative of a developed sense of embodied awareness described as the capacity to understand through sensing, acting, and knowing in a connected, simultaneous manner through perceptual, imaging, and motor systems (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Participants were able to verbally express levels of understanding associated with direct engagement in and attending to experiences of body awareness. Sensory perception, guided imagery, and movement were significantly incorporated throughout these experiences. Reactions in the previously discussed findings to the array of experiences of embodiment revealed that participants were able to sense, act, and know in a way that simultaneously connected the mind and
body resonating with the development of embodied awareness.

*Experiencing phenomenological embodiment.* Specific types of embodied awareness as designated in Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) philosophy of an embodied person also surfaced in the development of embodied awareness among participants. For example, they were able to more readily notice and more easily describe a heightened attention to spatial relations and body movements as an outcome of participating in experiences of embodiment. They experienced image schemas through body performances in projections, orientations, and inhabiting space as forms of what Lakoff and Johnson refer to as “phenomenological embodiment” (p. 36). Body orientations were experienced differently during several forms of Tai Chi and standing and sitting postures in yoga. As discussed in Chapter Four, several participants noted that they paid attention to balance and body orientation while doing supple pulling and pushing movements from front to back and side to side during movement experiences. For example, several participants such as Karen and Susan, noted being aware of inhabiting space through the use and movement of the body in performing the single whip arm circling movements of Tai Chi. These types of remarks about experiencing the movements demonstrated a level of body awareness that was representative of forms of phenomenological embodiment. As for other examples of this, all of the participants reported heightened notice of such things as where and how they were breathing and when and how they were tensing and relaxing different muscles during other experiences. Many of the participants also talked about noticing these types of phenomenological embodiment during interactions with patients in their work setting.

Furthermore, there were also several participants such as Sandy, Sara, and Diane
who reflected on being keenly perceptive to their surroundings in hindsight of previous experiences as a developed sense of embodied awareness. Several other participants also talked about the development of embodied awareness through a familiar type of sensing in spatial relations as a form of phenomenological embodiment. For example, Amy talked about her developed sense of inhabiting space as her most significant area of learning from the experiences of embodiment stating, “I got more out of it like where I am in space.” Other participants mentioned spatial relations through a sense of heightened awareness to surroundings such as Rose who talked about her familiarity in “knowing every nook and cranny” of her house and noticing even the slightest nuance as a form of embodied awareness tied to spatial relations. The previous chapter also described findings related to participant reflections on experiences that they considered as developed embodied awareness in noticing changes in patients in their work environment that were representative of phenomenological embodiment. Mary, Mae, and Hannah, for example, talked about this form of embodiment through their heightened awareness of patient needs.

These common types of participant descriptions of developed embodied awareness revealed some similarities in the reviewed literature with what Somerville (2004) noted as pit sense among coal miners in sensing danger through the slightest changes in the environment in body/place relations formed through a sense of sameness in inhabiting space in the mines. In describing miners’ pit sense, for example, Somerville (2004) noted:

They liken the bodily sense of things that are out of place, not feeling comfortable, to housework not being done. The sense of homeliness of the space
is created by the mine worker’s way of inhabiting the place and acute awareness when something is out of place.

It also tied to Cheville’s (1997) discussion of court sense among basketball players as a way that they know where to pass a ball to another player by having a familiar sense of where that player is spatially related to them on the court without having to actually see the player. However, what was added by this study in the higher education classroom beyond this former work was a sense of spatial relations applied in other contexts throughout participants’ personal lives and professional lives in nursing, and in the context of practice in the traditional higher education classroom.

*Experiencing neural embodiment.* Besides the development of forms of phenomenological embodiment, participants also revealed a developed sense of what Lakoff and Johnson (1999) referred to as neural embodiment. This form of embodied awareness is tied to neural mechanisms such as color concepts. Amy’s description of her heightened perceptual notice of things in the emergency room like the brightness of the lights as an outcome of her developing sense of embodied awareness exemplified the manifestation of this form of embodiment.

While some participants noticed this type of embodied awareness in their work setting, others were highly aware of it in relation to their surroundings in the natural environment. Vivid descriptions of interactions with surroundings gathered through perceptual and motor systems were revealed in the findings as discussed in the previous two chapters. In Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) conception of an embodied person, these descriptions would be suggestive of interpretations and understandings of “conceptualization only through the body” (p. 555) since it is positioned in their
philosophy that “every understanding that we can have of the world, ourselves, and others can only be framed in terms of concepts shaped by our bodies” (p.555).

As a person who states that she is very much “in tune with nature,” Lynn’s description of her sensory level of embodied awareness in her surroundings while kayaking on the lake in noticing colors, smells, and sounds is an example of conceptualization through the body in ways that her interactions with the natural surrounding were shaped by her perceptual and motor systems. Her conceptualizations were formed through both phenomenological embodiment in the rhythmical movements of kayaking and in inhabiting space in the natural surrounding and neural embodiment in the perceptual processing of her surroundings. Her conceptualizations are also representative of basic-level concepts in developing a sense of embodied awareness as suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (1999). These concepts keep us “maximally in touch with the reality of our environments” (p.555) and help us function in daily life through use of our perceptual, imaging, and motor systems.

Thus, in considering the findings from the previous two chapters and structural elements from Lakoff and Johnson’s philosophy of an embodied person, important points of consideration from the findings suggest that the participants were able to develop a sense of embodied awareness as an outcome or participating in activities conducted to facilitate body awareness and they were able to arrive at conceptualizations of embodiment as represented in forms of both phenomenological and neural embodiment.

Direct Experience, Situated Cognition, and Social Constructivism

The activities to facilitate body awareness were conducted mostly through experiential learning in this study because it seemed to be the most conducive approach
for connecting to this topic given its more subjective, body-oriented nature and abstract qualities. In light of this, the findings related to investigating how embodiment was experienced in the higher education classroom suggested that direct experience, contextual factors, and relational processes in social interaction were essential elements for new learning about embodiment to be not only constructed but also applied in the personal and professional lives of participants. One of the orientations framing this investigation that resounds with the importance of being situated in the process of participation through direct experience and social processes to construct knowledge in the learning environment is situated cognition within the social constructivist view of experiential learning theory (Fenwick, 2000; Michelson, 1998; Stage et al., 1998).

**The importance of direct experience.** The sentiment commonly expressed among participants as revealed in the findings discussed in the previous chapter was that one really has to do embodiment in order to understand it and that it is much easier to feel, sense, and experience than to put into words. Even though it became easier for participants to articulate their understanding of embodiment as an outcome of participating in the activities, they still felt that it was more difficult to explain or express with words.

The revealed data is highly suggestive that the impact of the experience and the new learning as an outcome of this impact stemmed from direct experience. All of the participants reported that the experiences would not have been as meaningful without the direct engagement in the learning. The participants felt that they “got more of a clue as to what embodiment was” by progressively engaging in the experiences. For example, Karen remarked about greater understanding from direct experiences of embodiment,
“When we actually did it and after you taught us what it was, it was easy to understand and go along with a different way of knowing your body and a different way of learning.” Amy said, “I learn by doing.” Lynn stated that she recognized that she learns much better through experiences than from textbooks. Susan, the course instructor, reiterated the crucial importance of direct experience for constructing knowledge about embodiment as well.

The importance of direct experience for constructing and applying new knowledge about embodiment was also highly apparent in other research-based work reviewed in the literature (Beaudoin, 1999; Chan, 2002; Mills & Daniluk, 2002). For example, the importance of direct experience was validated through experiential learning in a therapeutic community using dance therapy for healing in dealing with sexual abuse trauma among women (Mills & Daniluk, 2002). While these studies confirmed the importance of direct experience, they were highly specified in their focus. Beaudoin’s (1999) study explored direct engagement in somatic techniques to alleviate discomfort. Chan (2002) focused on direct experience in cross-cultural movements to facilitate greater cultural awareness while Mills and Daniluk (2002) investigated direct experience in dance therapy to heal from sexual abuse. In contrast, this study in the higher education classroom added a broadened investigative approach to the research for incorporating direct engagement across a wider variety of activities to facilitate body awareness as an important aspect of constructing knowledge about embodiment.

Emphasis on context and social processes. In connection with the importance of direct experience, other assumptions of situated cognition within social constructivism were evident related to contextual factors with learning facilitated through action in the immediate situation and relational aspects of the social interaction in experiential learning.
(Lave & Wenger, 1991; Stage et al., 1998). Research-based work reviewed in the literature focused on understanding the “situativity” of bodily activity in particular contexts (Beaudoin, 1999; Chan, 2002; Cheville, 1997). The emerged focus on the importance of direct experience in learning about embodiment within the context of a nursing course in higher education and as transferred to other contexts in participants’ personal and professional lives is consistent with the participative assumptions and emphasis on contextual factors through this framing. The findings related to how experiences of embodiment enhanced the content of the nursing course were suggestive of the importance of situating the experiences within the context of a higher education nursing course where bringing attention to the body in learning was considered relevant in several ways. First, it was relevant with the respect to the appropriateness of how the experiences and concepts of embodiment threaded into the course including consideration of cultural relevance. Second, it was pertinent to how participants developed a comfort level and gained greater understanding through group interaction and participation. A third area of relevance was found in how new knowledge about embodiment could be transferred and applied by participants to other contexts in their personal and professional lives as a successful outcome.

As a final area of relevance, the findings also revealed that a relational sense among participants was strengthened within the context of the nursing course because of a perceived sense of a professionally inherent connection. All of the participants noted that the nursing affiliation among participants described as an “essential feeling” and having “the same core” along with the small class size helped develop greater understanding about embodiment. The common bond in sharing the same professional
background in nursing was cemented within the context of this class as revealed in participant comments about acknowledged similarities among nurses such as Karen’s comment that nurses think alike and Kate’s insight about being able to relate to others in the class more comfortably because of the shared professional background.

As revealed in the findings in the previous chapter, social processes manifest in the dynamics of participation and interaction in the higher education classroom were significant. The instructor’s reflections about Diane’s surprising demonstration of belly dancing as well as Diane’s own reflections about this exemplified the significance of relational, social processes in learning. There were similar reflections by other participants about this experience along with descriptions from other experiences revealed in the previous chapter that also pointed to this significance. Furthermore, the instructor’s perceptive ability to watch and interpret the responses of the students while engaging in the experiences of embodiment with them revealed striking insights about the manifestations of relational, social processes in learning as described in Chapter Five.

An important emphasis of all of the participants was the value of small group interaction as conducive to active participation in discussion and experiential activities. There were common reflections among participants that the social processes of group interaction in the classroom especially from listening to different reactions led to greater understanding about embodiment among participants. For example, Diane commented that she probably wouldn’t have felt or understood the experiences in the same way that she did in the group situation if she had to experience the activities on an individual basis. The participants felt that listening to each other’s reflections about the experiences and either participating with others or observing others in direct participation enriched the
Enhanced learning through social processes in discussion and experiential engagement was also revealed in a developing comfort level through relational processes in a positive way from sharing reactions to the experiences with other participants. Mae’s feelings about sharing reactions with other participants were an example of this as she stated the positive effects of hearing “other people’s take on embodiment and their experiences of embodiment” in comparing them to her own reactions. In noting that they were often similar to hers, she said, “I could relate to that and it made me feel more comfortable that I wasn’t the only one thinking or feeling something that I didn’t think that everyone else was.” As the sessions progressed and participants became more comfortable not only with their engagement in the experiences but with each other, relational aspects and social processes in the learning experiences became most evident. Mary’s description of her impression about the change in comfort level among participants as the session progressed in moving toward greater understanding about embodiment was reflective of the importance of social interaction.

The significance of social processes in facilitating embodied learning through a developed relational sense was also highly evident in other research-based work (Cheville, 1997; Mills & Daniluk, 2002). Cheville’s study (1997) of women athletes revealed a relational aspect of embodied learning “linked to a sensitivity to otherness” (p. 59) that emerged as embodied intersubjectivity as referred to by Cheville. Also, an investigation of the embodied experiences in dance therapy among women survivors of child sexual abuse revealed the development of a deep sense of intimate, emotional connection among participants as an outcome of participation (Mills & Daniluk, 2002).
In addition to this research, this study confirmed the significance of developing social processes within the context of another type of learning space to bring attention to the body in learning in a conducive atmosphere.

A final area pointing to the importance of social processes and an emphasis on contextual factors in constructing knowledge pertained to the finding related to how participants were able to apply new knowledge about embodiment through a broadened relational sense with others and one’s surroundings. Participants constructed knowledge about embodiment not only through social interaction and engagement with each other in the class, but also with others and their surroundings in their personal and professional lives. For example, the findings revealed that new embodied knowledge was applied on a relational level with staff and patients in participants’ professional lives. Comments about being more attentive to patient needs, being able “to relate more to the families and what they’re feeling,” and about a heightened awareness of an intuitive way of embodied knowing connected to relational, social processes in participants’ professional nursing context. As for examples related to relational aspects in personal lives, Sandy’s description of feeling “the vibe” in being in tune with positive or negative energy during interactions with others, Mae’s notice of heightened body awareness in interactions with her son, and Karen’s comments about a developed sense of respect for cultural differences in approaching the body are revealed in the findings. Research investigating teachers’ experiences in cross-cultural movements revealed a similar impact of social processes in facilitating greater cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence in the context of multicultural teacher education (Chan, 2002).

Thus, in considering the importance of direct experiencing, contextual factors,
and relational, social processes in the findings, assumptions from situated cognition within the social constructivist view of experiential learning theory are manifest in these various elements of active engagement in constructing new knowledge about embodiment.

**Constructing Embodied Knowledge from Turner’s View of Social Theory**

From the onset of the sessions conducted to facilitate body awareness, the early findings in Chapter Four revealed that participants expressed a discernible level of disconnect from their bodies in reference to their body awareness. Part of the purposive nature of this research was to investigate how participants conceptualized and applied new knowledge about embodiment in their personal and professional lives as a result of participating in the experiences. As part of framing this study, assumptions from Turner’s (1996) social theory approach toward the body within the discipline of sociology are considered with respect to constructing new knowledge about embodiment as another major finding.

As an outcome of participation in the experiences, the findings discussed in the previous chapter revealed that participants developed a deepened sense of body awareness leading to new learning that they were able to integrate in their personal and professional lives. It is implied from the findings that the deepened sense of awareness through greater understanding and new learning represented developed connections with the body for participants beyond the initial reference point of disconnect. The findings pertaining to the application of new knowledge about embodiment were suggestive that the body was viewed as a significant source of information by participants as a new discovery and outcome more consistent with the view of embodiment as a way of
constructing knowledge that engages the body as a site of learning. The approach of the body in society by Turner’s social theory will be discussed in this section in light of this finding.

In general, as the study of the body in society, social theory approaches embodiment through the view of relationship between the body and society with focus on social processes (Shilling, 2003). The activities conducted to facilitate body awareness placed the body in social processes within the higher education classroom. Turner’s social theory approach brings a way of considering the centrality of the body in the classroom from its physicality and biological essence drawn from the naturalist view of the body and from the imprint of social forces from the social constructionist view of the body. It suggests that embodiment should be analyzed not just as a biological phenomenon but also as a socially constructed phenomenon whereby the body’s physicality and biological essence can be considered as intersecting with other social forces that define and shape an embodied awareness.

With this in mind, Turner’s (1996) social theory approach presents more of a comprehensive view about how participants constructed and applied new knowledge about embodiment. What became clear in the findings through the progression of involvement in the experiences was that the level of understanding of embodiment among participants became far more multi-dimensional and deeply layered. For example, in the early findings presented in Chapter Four, the initial sense of body awareness among most participants typically described body awareness through a view of the body as a biological phenomenon and physical essence. A sense of the body was commonly
attached to attending to a physical or emotional response or sensation most commonly signaled by fatigue, pain, hurt, and stress.

However, as participants progressively engaged in the experiences of embodiment in the higher education classroom, their sense of attending to the body became more deeply attached to social meanings and processes not just in the classroom setting but in other contexts in ways that they were able to construct and integrate new knowledge about embodiment into their personal and professional lives. Their understanding of embodied awareness and subsequent integration of new knowledge constructed about embodiment evolved from the body being predominantly viewed as a biological phenomenon to a socially constructed phenomenon. Participant reflections revealed in the previous chapter focused on ways in which participants constructed new knowledge from direct experience and applied new knowledge. On an individualized level, new knowledge integrated through techniques to enhance wellness were more consistent with approaching the body from its biological, physical essence while in the relational sense, new knowledge applied in such areas as staff and patient relations were more representative of a view of the body as socially constructed.

Furthermore, the literature has established the significance of culture as an intersecting unit of analysis with the body (Chan, 2002; Cheville, 1997; 2005; Knox, 1992). Turner’s approach offered a lens to look at culture as one of multiple intersecting units of analysis with the body’s biological essence. This look at culture became evident in the finding that participants gained an understanding of the body and its cultural relevance in new ways as mentioned by Mary, Karen, Sandy, and Diane, for example, with regards to insights associated with the sea gypsies, cultural connections with somatic
practices, and cultural differences with interaction styles. This lens brought into focus the interrelations between the body and culture through heightened attention and greater understanding.

While the consideration of culture was evidenced as a unit of analysis with the body, revelations about how participants considered the body to be socially inscribed were rather obscure as an emphasis in data collection but present in discussions during the fourth session on body inscriptions and cultural consideration and the evaluative session. Contemporary approaches related to social theory and feminist perspectives previously discussed in the literature review revealed views of body theorizing such as inscriptive and lived experience approaches (Grosz, 1995) and Butler’s (1999) construct of performativity that brought attention to understanding the body in part as a product of social imprints. Bringing the body to the forefront as a unit of analysis and surface of social inscriptions with other units such as culture, gender, sexual orientation, race, ableness, and age is considered within normative constraints.

In speculating about where the obscurity of these units except for culture possibly stems from, consideration must be given to several factors. First, as described in Chapter Four, I noted that I felt like I was “walking on thin ice” in planning and facilitating the session on body inscriptions. I approached this session with a very cautious level of sensitivity knowing that particularly for women unrealistic societal expectations of body objectification were suggestive of a significant impact on body disconnect. Dealing with other units of analysis were discussed in societal terms but avoided for the most part on a personal level among participants during discussions. However, what could be implied from some of the actions taken by participants integrated as new learning was that they
may have indeed recognized aspects of how social meanings are inscribed on the body and classify embodied identities but perhaps chose to keep this understanding at a personal, private level of awareness. Developing a comfort level in experiences of embodiment expressed as “letting go” and coming to terms with feelings of inhibitions and self-consciousness point to a release from normative constraints. Realizations associated with connections between learning and the body and the lasting impact of new knowledge integrated as changes in personal and professional lives are suggestive of internal processing of experiences of embodiment as revealed for example, by one participant who had the word breathe tattooed on her wrist as a symbol of her learning.

In summary, what this study contributed to the literature in framing through Turner’s view of the body was an investigative approach toward embodiment through a relational view between the body and society with a focus on social processes not just within the setting of the traditional higher education classroom but also within other contexts where participants applied new knowledge about embodiment in their personal and professional lives including a new understanding of the body and cultural relevance as an outcome of participating in the experiences. However, revelations of a more personal nature about how the body is viewed as inscribed as a social product remained relatively obscure beyond cultural considerations as an intersecting unit of analysis with the body.

*Intersecting Orientations*

Given that the major themes of this study have now been discussed in light of varied assumptions and elements of its theoretical framework, a final area of importance in considering what this investigation added to the literature through these orientations is
found in their intersections. This study presented a more comprehensive purpose and design for investigating embodiment that emerged through framing from intersecting orientations. Beginning with a consideration of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) conception of mind/body connections through embodied reason, concepts and thought develop from perceptual, imaging, and motor systems in a view that “the mind is not separate from or independent of the body” (p. 555). This view provides structural elements in understanding component levels in moving direct experiences of the body from unconscious awareness to conscious embodied reasoning. However, it is first important to note that it does not sufficiently inform the relational aspects of direct experience apparent through social processes in constructing knowledge nor the significance of contextual factors in direct experience. This is where both situated cognition within the social constructivist paradigm of experiential learning, as well as Turner’s social theory highlight important aspects of the study. Lakoff and Johnson do touch on contextual factors, but they are not complete enough in their analysis. Beyond an understanding of structural elements and movement among conceptual levels toward embodied reason, the relational, social processes that surface in constructing embodied knowledge in Lakoff and Johnson’s framework are not addressed. For example, forms of phenomenological embodiment with bodies inhabiting space through body/place relations are discussed in the context of the mines with how miners experience pit sense in Somerville’s (2004) work and in the context of a basketball team with how players develop court sense in Cheville’s (1997) research.

The participants in my study discussed the significance of the group process, and the common professional association of nursing as part of the informing context as
significant to their learning. The social processes and the particular social context were important here in developing this embodied knowledge, and is where assumptions from situated cognition as a particular perspective within the social constructivist view of experiential learning are helpful in foregrounding context and social processes in embodied learning. Turner’s social theory approach toward the body is helpful in explaining some dimensions of the social process as well as some of the significant aspects of understanding culture in new ways that were highlighted by the participants. Sociocultural considerations are crucial for understanding the influence of culture and relational, social processes, for example, in manifestations of embodied learning as evidenced in the literature (Chan, 2002; Cheville, 1997; Crowdes, 2000; Yorks & Kasl, 2002) and in this study’s findings. Turner’s social theory does attend to culture, but perhaps not to the extent that it could.

By intersecting these areas of orientations for framing, this study added a more comprehensive approach to understanding the multiple dimensions of embodiment as a complex phenomenon both in prior literature, and explaining some of the findings of this study. What emerged as a contribution was not only reaching an understanding about how embodied knowledge was conceptualized and constructed in terms of structural elements, but also how it was experienced and applied as new knowledge with respect to emphases on relational, social processes in learning and contextual factors. It also incorporated a consolidated view in approaching an understanding of the body from both its physical, biological essence and as a socially constructed phenomenon within the setting of a higher education classroom in nursing and in the context of participants’ personal and professional lives.
A final point of importance emerging from these intersecting orientations is their relevance for approaching experiences of embodiment within holistic discourses. Influences from each of the orientations could be related to some of the research-based work on embodiment (Chan, 2002; Cheville, 2002, Simon; 1998). If the influences are taken into consideration on a collective basis, they are suggestive of a holistic view of embodiment. For example, Cheville’s (1997) work explored intersections among the physical significance of student-athlete bodies with race, class, and culture given emerged manifestations of embodied learning among student-athletes. Structural elements of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) forms of phenomenological embodiment were evident in spatial relations of court sense. The significance of contextual factors consistent with perspectives of situated cognition were established within the context of participation in team experiences in women’s basketball. The significance of the biological essence of the body and sociocultural units of analysis within Turner’s social theory approach were also evident in line with body inscriptions as women athletes.

It becomes apparent from previous work on embodiment and from the findings of this study given intersecting orientations for framing that approaching the body is a multidimensional undertaking. The use of holistic in educational discourses refers to integrative approaches through multiple ways of knowing to construct knowledge (Grauerholz, 2001; Poindexter, 2003; Yang, 2003). Bringing attention to the body in learning brings attention to more than just the body. For example, among the findings, engaged learning through experiences of embodiment surfaced not only in physical, affective, and cultural levels, but also through cognitive processes of reflection and transferring new knowledge into other contexts. Kate and Sandy’s insights about
applying new knowledge integrated through moments of deep emotive and physical responses in dealing with anxiety as discussed in the previous chapter are examples of multiple levels of construction. These types of findings that emerged in this study are representative of the holistic construction of knowledge as experienced across multiple levels that merge and cross beyond traditional rational knowledge in diverse learning situations (Chan, 2002; Cheville, 1997; Mills & Daniluk, 2002; Nikitina, 2003; Ross, 2000). Thus, the findings of this study revealed the multiple dimensions of embodiment that incorporated unity of body and mind in the process of knowing that engaged both objective and subjective realms of knowledge construction affiliated with holistic learning discourses.

Implications of the Findings for Theory and Practice

The findings of this study contributed a deeper understanding of embodiment and its impact in facilitating new learning as an alternate dimension for teaching adults in the context of the higher education classroom. In revaluing the connectedness of body and mind in learning processes through experiences of embodiment, this study was representative of and contributed to the evolving movement toward more holistic learning approaches integrated within the traditional approach of knowledge construction through rational, cognitive processes. This contribution of greater understanding is taken into consideration in light of Ross’ (2000) suggestion that “the body is likely to become increasingly important in the era ahead – the thinking body in particular” (p. 31). Thus, a deeper understanding of embodiment has both theoretical and practical implications for adult and higher education. Building on the prior discussion of the value of the intersecting theoretical frameworks that inform the study, the implications of the theory
and practice of adult and higher education are given further consideration here.

**Implications of Embodiment Related to Theory**

According to Fink (2003), significant learning experiences in higher education are characterized by the depth of impact from the learning experiences in learners’ lives with lasting change beyond the course experiences (e.g., life enhancement, contribution to professional preparation and development). Based on this characterization, it can be implied from the outcomes of this study that participation in experiences of embodiment are characteristic of the creation of significant learning experiences. For example, the findings substantiated that participants were able to apply new knowledge about embodiment in their personal and professional lives and integrate this new learning as lifelong learning as a result of their participation. But beyond Fink’s supposition talking about learning in higher education in general, this study suggests specific theoretical implications related to how attention to the body can be brought into higher education contexts for teaching adults through experiences of embodiment related to practice issues and discourses on holistic learning paradigms. These theoretical implications point to areas of improvement in the quality of practice through the creation of significant learning experiences that tap into other ways of knowing related to the discourses on holistic learning paradigms.

**Implications related to theorizing holistic learning.** There is growing movement to explore innovation and integrative efforts in learning approaches emerging in adult and higher education as reviewed in the literature within holistic learning discourses and discussions of experiential learning (Crowdes, 2000; Nikitina, 2003; Ross, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). Research informing attention to spirituality and culture in
adult and higher education (Tisdell, 2003), focusing on the role of the affective dimension of learning (Yorks & Kasl, 2002), and in bringing recognition to experiential and somatic learning processes (Crowdes, 2000) are examples of contributing efforts that inform “knowledge construction processes of the whole person” (Tisdell, 2003, p.188) within holistic discourses. For example, Tisdell (2003) writes:

Education, and all of life, probably suffers when we lose sight of the wholeness and interconnectedness of all things, lose our sense of passion, or refuse to acknowledge the multiple ways in which people construct knowledge. (p.187)

Tisdell’s attention to spirituality and culture in adult and higher education includes discussion of facilitating activities “honoring the various dimensions of how people learn and construct knowledge” (p. 194) such as affective, somatic, symbolic, cognitive, spiritual, and cultural domains and by “encouraging learners to do the same in their presentations” (p. 194). Tisdell’s suggestions for integrating spirituality and culture in learning imply similar ways that attention to the body can also be brought into focus in learning spaces in adult and higher education.

This investigation addressed a need to bridge traditional boundaries of knowing steeped in rational, cognitive processes of intellect with integrated movement toward a broader, holistic approach to learning that reconnects body and mind through experiences of embodiment. Bringing attention to the body as a source of constructing knowledge and as a unit of analysis is implicitly or explicitly drawn from several assumptions in holistic discourses. According to Miller (1998/1999) the most crucial aspects of a holistic learning approach are balance, inclusion and connection. A significant emphasis on integration is present in these aspects in approaching learning through multiple levels of

First, revaluing embodiment as another way of knowing that connects bodies and minds in considering how adults construct knowledge resonates with a sense of connectedness, unity, and wholeness as a fundamental assumption present in holistic discourses. Yang (2003) for example, proposed a holistic theory of knowledge and adult learning that integrates facets of implicit, explicit, and emancipatory knowledge. Knowledge is viewed as a social construct stemming from interrelationships. Aspects of embodiment can be implied within Yang’s (2003) descriptions of both implicit and emancipatory facets of knowledge. For example, the findings of my study revealed that direct experiences of embodiment draw on characteristics of implicit knowledge as existing in “one’s behavior, action, and accumulated experiences” (p. 109) set within “personal, context-specific familiarity” (p. 109). A heightened awareness to emotions stemming from experiences of embodiment was also revealed in findings consistent with emancipatory facets as emotional components of knowledge “reflected in affective reactions to the outside world” (p. 109).

These facets of embodied knowledge are also implied in participation and conceptualization as processes of learning in Yang’s model. Participation involves constructing knowledge from practice directly from experience which was revealed as a significant aspect of new knowledge about embodiment in my study. Aspects of contextualization are also implied with learning processes in experiences of embodiment associated with the significance of contextual factors that involve action or behavior and effect change in implicit knowledge. For example, participants revealed that they were
able to transfer new knowledge about embodiment from direct experience in the classroom to other contexts in their personal and professional lives such as integrating relaxation strategies in daily life to enhance wellness.

A second implied assumption of an embodied epistemology within holistic orientations is that both objective and subjective realms of knowledge construction are complementary to each other. For example, drawing from another holistically-based proposal, Enns (1993) suggested an experiential learning model that integrated processes of connected knowing and separate knowing. This model offered another view of integrating the traditional objective realm of knowledge construction as separate knowing with subjective, relational aspects of constructing knowledge as connected knowing. From this model, experiences of embodiment are implied as a type of connected knowing. This model also follows Clark’s (1990) notion of moving from the traditional separatist view of body and mind to an assumption of wholeness where there is unity of body and mind connected through interrelated processes in constructing knowledge.

Thus, in light of these models and approaches, embodiment draws on the assumptions of integration and wholeness that connect body and mind engaged with other dimensions of knowing and merge objective and subjective realms of learning processes. What this study has contributed to these assumptions is a focus on giving the body a visible place of attention in the classroom bridging the gap between the Western Cartesian mind/body dichotomy and integrative holistic learning approaches that engage and reconnect the whole person.
A theoretical rationale for taking it to practice. It has been established in the literature that embodiment as a topic and how to approach the body and experiences of embodiment are complex and problematic for practice. Taking calculated risks with innovative approaches to incorporate experiences of embodiment in adult and higher education such as the approach implemented in this study is necessary if further insights are to be discovered that have meaning and usefulness for improving the quality of practice. Approaching the body in learning moves the growing interest about embodiment and concerns surrounding its issues for practice from problem posing to problem solving in the action research process. Doing embodiment helps inform an understanding of embodiment, body theorizing, and all that it implies for practice. The importance of engaging in the action research process and program planning to focus on the incorporation of embodiment in practice is that it provides an example and demonstration of the value of incorporating embodiment in practice.

Thus, as Fink (2003) posed the question, “Should we make the effort to change, or not?” (p. 1), in the wake of growing interest and theorizing on embodiment and discourses on holistic learning, embodied learning represents an opportunity to do something different in teaching and learning that is suggestive of improvements in the quality of practice and helps move body theorizing into practice. The learning space in adult and higher education is filled with diversity. Bringing attention to the body in learning adds another dimension to acknowledge another significant aspect of learners’ sense of being-in-the-world in attempting to address the diversity present among learners in the classroom. Thus, revaluing connections of the body and mind through experiences of embodiment provides another complementary avenue of connectedness
with cognitive processes to enhance the construction of knowledge for learners. With this in mind, there are guidelines suggested from this study which will be discussed next in approaching the incorporation of embodiment in movement toward an embodied and holistic view of teaching and learning theory in adult and higher education contexts.

Implications for Practice

The usefulness of direct experiencing as a way to gain and apply new knowledge about embodiment within the contexts of the higher education classroom and participants’ personal and professional lives emerged in the findings. The learning community has been referred to as “spaces in which our bodies exist and profess” (Freedman & Holmes, 2003, p. 7). Learning occurs in social contexts and bodies, not just minds, are present in social contexts along with their social imprints. In spite of this presence, the highly personal nature of the body and surrounding issues in dealing with it in the classroom given constraints and traditional expectations of an emphasis on cognitive processes have influenced it’s delegation to a place of otherness in the classroom as established in the literature (Clark, 2001; Fenwick, 2003; Price & Shildrick, 1999; Nikitina, 2003). Otherness and privilege as part of being situated in the human experience were once fairly obscure to me until I became exposed to social processes and other units of analysis intersecting with the construction of knowledge at the doctoral level of study in the academy. This study represented an attempt to remove the body from its traditional inclusion as part of the otherness into practicing space where both body and mind are simultaneously present and valued in the learning space through a more holistic approach to learning.

Research by Nikitina (2003) informed a need to search for “better ways to
connect and explain the unity of mind and body” (p. 63) as essential to learning through integrative approaches crossing disciplines. In following this lead along with insights from other recommendations in considering what movement toward an embodied and holistic approach in teaching and learning would involve, I have drawn assumptions and developed guidelines for incorporating embodiment in adult and higher education contexts given theoretical directions in light of this study’s findings. First, I discuss a few guiding principles to keep in mind in planning practice. Next, because the facilitation of growth and development in various facets of daily lives as an outcome pointed to the practical implications of this study, I will discuss its practical implications for participants’ personal and professional lives.

*Some guiding principles for practice.* There are a couple of philosophical issues to keep in mind when considering how to draw on embodiment in practice. First and foremost, an embodied approach needs to be considered within the broader vision of a shift toward holism in movement toward innovative and integrative approaches to teaching and learning. The body needs to be made more visible by being viewed as a source of information and site for learning that embraces both objective and subjective realms of knowledge construction. As previously discussed, the integration of both of these realms is consistent with Yang’s (2003) holistic perspective of interrelatedness among implicit, explicit, and emancipatory facets of knowledge. Approaching embodiment shouldn’t be done in a piecemeal fashion. Given the complexity and more abstract nature surrounding it as a concept and a problem for practice, approaching it from a more multidimensional angle is necessary. Experiences of embodiment can focus on physical movement in somatic dimensions of learning as well as affective, cultural,
spiritual, symbolic, and aesthetic avenues as other domains of constructing knowledge. An embodied approach within holistic movement should seek to provide balance across multiple levels of knowledge construction facilitated through experiential learning and corresponding social processes in learning contexts.

However, there are also cautions that need to be considered in incorporating embodiment with a holistic approach in the classroom. For example, Grauerholz (2001) suggests ways in which a holistic approach to teaching and learning helps learners achieve deep, lasting learning while also noting challenges. Resistance and discomfort among learners need to be acknowledged given that some learners may prefer and expect the traditional academic classroom with an emphasis on rational processes in learning. The possibility exists for learners to view a holistic approach with disdain as poorly structured and not as relevant for learning. For example, there were several reactions in the findings of this study such as those by Karen and Lynn that pointed to a level of initial uncertainty among participants from the more holistic, nontraditional facilitative approach to learning.

Second, a multidimensional view of an embodied approach needs to take into account the highly personalized individual nature of dealing with the body in learning along a continuum with social processes and sociocultural influences as intersecting units of analysis in approaching the body in learning. It has to be comprehensive enough to include the assumptions framing this study through intersecting orientations. The view needs to address the body’s biological essence and imprint of social forces as assumed by Turner’s (1996) social theory. It also needs to acknowledge the importance of direct experience, contextual emphasis and social processes in learning consistent with situated
cognition within the social constructivist view of experiential learning theory. Also given Lakoff and Johnson’s (1999) concept of an embodied person, sensing, acting, and knowing need to be connected in learning processes that engage perceptual, imaging, and motor systems. Thus, the body needs to be approached through a theoretical wide angle lens that brings the body into focus as it merges with other domains of knowing not just from an understanding of its physical essence but also from a place where sociocultural influences and social processes are recognized with respect to the body as a site of learning.

Given these considerations, there are several guidelines that are suggested by the findings of this study in developing an embodied approach within holistic movement in teaching and learning in adult and higher education. To begin with, an embodied approach needs to consider classroom dynamics and the relevance of contextual factors given commonalities and differences among learners in considering not only how to incorporate experiences of embodiment but also in determining what types of experiences are most appropriate. For example, taken into consideration with commonalities is the fact that connections among learners, such as the shared nursing background of participants in this study, help foster a sense of relatedness and comfort in approaching the body in learning contexts. This aspect of entering the learning environment to participate in experiences of embodiment given common backgrounds was also evident in research among women dealing with child sexual abuse (Mills & Daniluk, 2002), with teachers in addressing multicultural competence (Chan, 2002), and with individuals experienced in somatic techniques to alleviate discomfort (Beaudoin, 1999).

Furthermore, finding a way to approach and come to terms with body disconnect
as a given for most learners is crucial. It can be arrived at by fostering a developed level of comfort in being able to discuss and reflect on experiences of embodiment in the immediate moment and through direct participation in experiences of embodiment while also leaving room in the learning space to simply observe and listen to others. This aspect is a valuable part of consideration with social processes given that approaching the body is highly personal and private in nature for most individuals. For example, suggestive from the findings of this study was that participants feelings of inspiration and enthusiasm about experiences of embodiment stemmed from facilitative efforts to make sure that the activities were conducted in an enthusiastic, comfortable environment with different options for engagement across an array of activities. Participants also revealed that my self-disclosures were helpful in providing personal insights that they could relate to that helped ease their inhibitions about the experiences. Collaborative judgments were made about participant willingness and comfort levels in being ready to explore certain experiences by asking for their input throughout the progression of the sessions.

Also as revealed in the findings, learners need to be able to have a sense of implicit or explicit relevance for bringing attention to the body in the classroom within the course content. Decisions need to be carefully weighed about when, where, and how experiences of embodiment can be incorporated into the course content to enhance learning. For example, as part of a speech class, attention to the body can be brought into the classroom through experiential learning activities involving bodily projections, diaphragmatic breathing, and guided imagery by practicing the instant calming sequence (Greenberg, 2002) to alleviate anxiety associated with public speaking. Thus, timing, relevance, and developing comfortable space in providing guidance and choices for
exploration in direct experience need to be sensitively negotiated and navigated in
learning spaces.

Third, as noted by the course instructor participating in this study, “learners take
different things from the experiences” of embodiment and “they each experienced it in
different ways.” The findings revealed that they tended to draw from experiences of
embodiment in different ways in constructing knowledge about embodiment that brought
meaning and relevance to their own personal and professional lives. Therefore, as another
guideline also previously stressed in relation to holistic discourses is the importance of
providing varied experiences that touch on different domains of learning in bringing
attention to the body as an alternate way of knowing. The kinds of experiences that
are provided also depends on the background and comfort level of the instructor or
facilitator. For example, experiences that I conducted included relaxation techniques,
somatic practices of yoga and Tai Chi, guided imagery and sensory perception, creative
expression, and power differentials. Another facilitator that is comfortable with or has a
strong background perhaps in music and dance might conduct experiences in
multicultural dance and vocal and instrumental music.

Thus, in summary, approaching embodied and holistic movement in teaching and
learning in adult and higher education addresses questioning about how to incorporate
experiences of embodiment in the classroom and several of its subsequent issues
encompassed in practice. Basically, embodiment in learning needs to be approached from
a comprehensive, multidimensional view that takes into consideration the importance of
and sensitivity to direct experience, contextual factors, and social processes in bringing
attention to the body integrated within multiple ways of constructing knowledge. In this
study, participants found usefulness in their new learning about embodiment obtained through action that could be transferred into their daily lives. Thus the practical implications for personal and professional development are discussed next.

*Practical Implications of Embodied Learning*

The usefulness of direct experiencing as a way to gain and apply new knowledge about embodiment within the contexts of the higher education classroom and participants’ personal and professional lives emerged in the findings. The facilitation of growth and development in various facets of daily lives as an outcome pointed to the practical implication of this study. Participants found usefulness in their new learning about embodiment obtained through action that could be transferred into their daily lives.

*Implications of a personal nature.* On a personal level, experiences of embodiment developed areas of greater self awareness such as recognizing the need for self nurturance to enhance wellness and improve the quality of life. This implication was consistent with the findings for improving quality of life and enhancing wellness evidenced in other research (Beaudoin, 1999; Lord, 2002). However, the focus of these investigations were restricted to the role of somatic techniques as a particular aspect of embodiment. Coming to terms with normative constraints with bodies as performativity issues (Butler, 1999), participants were able to become more comfortable with aspects of themselves that they previously felt or experienced as inhibitive with respect to body awareness, such as “letting go” in a playful or nostalgic sense during the creativity experiences. Participants’ movement to a personal and relational space in the progression of the experiences placed them where it could be implied that they were able to more comfortably embrace their whole selves in the learning space even to the extent of belly
dancing in front of the group as a person in the last trimester of pregnancy. On another personal level, it also brought attention to multiple ways of knowing and preferred learning styles in a way that gave participants an opportunity to be exposed to alternate ways of knowing and to make new discoveries about their own learning processes in line with holistic discourses.

Thus, the findings related to greater self awareness through introspective discoveries held practical implications for participants simply in the overall finding that they learned more about themselves not only as learners but also as individuals consistent with the notion of analyzing embodiment as a “process of becoming” in the literature (Price & Shildrick, 1999, p. 414).

*Implications of a professional nature.* On a professional level, further considerations for patient care associated with embodied knowledge surfaced as practical implications. A developed sense of embodied awareness on a personal level among participants crossed into the professional nursing context in various ways. The findings related to new learning of heightened attention to body awareness, a broadened embodied relational sense and understanding culture in new ways with greater sensitivity were useful in their relevant application for staff and patient relations, in the delivery of patient care, and as related to the content of the nursing course. For example, being more perceptive as a nurse to sensory cues in the way in which a patient inhabits space while breathing is a practical implication of embodied knowledge for nurses beyond simply dealing with treatment of the body.

Furthermore, participating in a nursing class using experiential learning as an approach was practically suited to the highly applied nature of the nursing profession in
general. The positive impact on student attitudes in nursing courses using experiential learning has been substantiated in the literature in comparison to traditional lecture courses (Pugsley & Clayton, 2003). The findings of this study are also suggestive of the value of experiential learning as an approach to enhance the course experience for students in nursing especially in light of the action-oriented nature of nursing practice. Given their professional training and role and function, nurses tend to be more “hands-on” and thus perhaps even more responsive to constructing knowledge through action.

Thus on both personal and professional levels for participants, the findings were suggestive of implications of a practical nature whereby participants reaffirmed or developed a heightened sense of connectedness merging bodies and minds in learning processes to construct knowledge.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the scope of this study given its purpose, design, and intersecting theoretical orientations was a comprehensive approach to investigating embodiment in the higher education classroom, there were limitations that could be addressed as recommendations for future research. First and foremost, there were constraints on the number and length of experiential sessions and on participant selection based on course enrollment and on the repetitions of action research cycles. Given that the experiences of embodiment were incorporated into an established semester higher education course, the research process needed to end with the course. Therefore, a recommendation for future research would be to plan and implement an intervention that could be conducted in a similar manner using progressive multiple cycles of problem posing and problem solving in the four processes of action research over a longer period of time with the same
participants. For example, this could have been accomplished by continuing to incorporate embodied experiential learning with this group of participants if the same students were scheduled together as a cohort group into another nursing course in the next semester. Also, further attention needs to be given regarding the assessment aspect of incorporating experiences of embodiment in the classroom. For example, in this study, student participants were permitted to include documented hours of involvement in the experiences toward clinical hour requirements for the nursing course.

A second recommendation for future research would be to replicate this study or its cycle of action research with other participants not just in nursing courses but in other courses where there is relevance for experiences of embodiment to facilitate learning related to the content of the course or for transferring new knowledge about embodiment to other contexts. Also participant selection in courses should attempt to include women and men as participants and from varied cultural groups especially given the significance of understanding cultural relevance in new ways from embodied experiences.

Future research should also explore additional sources of materials and experiential learning applications to implement that would expand the attempts made in this study to incorporate attention to the body in learning. Given the aforementioned constraints, the activities that were conducted included particular types of embodied experiences with more attention to somatic, affective, cultural, and creative domains of knowing. This undoubtedly leaves room to expand the scope and sequence of this type of investigation to connect with other aspects of embodied experience and alternate ways of knowing such as spiritual dimensions and to delve deeper into some of the dimensions that were explored in less depth in this study such as the symbolic domain. More
intensified sessions in aesthetics including art, music, dance, drama, and other movement experiences based on somatic practices are examples of areas for inclusion.

In line with the recommendation for expanded breadth and depth, it is noteworthy to mention as a recommendation by several participants on the written evaluation that avenues should be explored to conduct the experiences in an alternate environment outside of the traditional classroom setting when possible (e.g., doing Tai Chi and yoga outdoors). Experiences in nature emerged as an important connection in heightening embodied awareness for several participants such as Lynn and Mary in the findings. In light of this, exploring experiences in an alternate environment more connected with the natural environment, for example, has the possibility of tapping into other dimensions and resources such as with spirituality (Fenwick, 2003; Tisdell, 2003). Thus, investigations of applications of embodied experiences tapping into other dimensions of knowing and in other contexts in addition to the higher education classroom would be considerations for further study.

Consideration should also be given to allotting more time in experiential engagement and for facilitating reflection in the immediate moment on the direct experiences with discussion, participation, and observation noted as valuable elements of this project as participant comfort levels increased over time. Future research should investigate additional ways to facilitate these interactive processes and further develop comfort levels in discussing and engaging in experiences of embodiment.

Closing Thoughts

There have been several profound moments of this research experience that will forever be etched in my human being. Throughout the sessions, I have vivid
impressions and memories of certain comments made by participants during interviews and discussions, certain reactions conveyed by a tear rolling down a cheek, an affirming head nod, or warm-hearted giggle, synchronous movements and a feeling of resonance filling the learning space. There are distinct moments that can never be replicated or replaced for they are preciously experienced in that unique moment in the human learning experience. There were other moments as well.

As I was taking some time to organize my final interview schedule, I started to gather the documents that participants shared with me for analysis. I had no intention of looking through them at that point as I was consumed by completing final interviews but found that I couldn’t resist at least taking a quick peek at some of the reflections. In an instant, I was completely overwhelmed and will never forget that moment. I took a few deep swallows as I literally choked up from the tears swelling up in my eyes. I couldn’t put them down and kept reading. It was very early that Sunday morning when I lost track of time and was bewildered by what I was feeling. After a few more deep breaths, I sat back in my chair at the dining room table with tears rolling down my cheeks and pages tossed all over and just paused in the silence. And then I knew what I was feeling. It was a deeply felt sense of shared gratitude with the individuals in this study. I sensed that their reflections from this learning experience gave them new insights and wisdom to take better care of themselves and for that they were grateful. I was touched by how deeply they were impacted by the experiences that we shared together in that learning space for such a brief amount of time. I felt that they sensed I was genuinely respectful of them and cared to try to honor their presence as learners by bringing attention to exploring other ways of knowing. Their trust in my intentions and passion for embodied
learning allowed them to not only share their learning space with me, but also their personal space.

My felt sense of gratitude was found in this shared opportunity to give others something of value that could enhance their wellness and quality of life. I felt compassion and empathy, warmth, a sense of accomplishment and meaningfulness, and saddened that our relationship in learning was coming to an end. It was truly an honor and gift to share in this learning experience. In finding ways to touch learners on other deeper levels in resonance with rationality, the creation of significant learning experiences can be penetrating and transcendent.

While my interactions with the student participants were filled with incredible moments, my discussions with Susan, the instructor, were particularly insightful. Her involvement added a highly valued dimension to this research. Her reactions struck me in unforgettable ways. For example, in discussing her early reactions to the experiences of embodiment, she talked about cultural differences in lifestyles and ways in which the differences are possibly related to individuals’ sense of connectedness or disconnect with the body. At one point she used the phrase “room for human being” in reflecting on cultures that she felt perhaps enhanced a more heightened sense of embodied being-in-the-world. Her insights were closely tied to being fascinated by the sea gypsies’ way of life and recalling her delightful experiences of living in Europe. I was struck by her use of this phrase as I felt it captured the essence of embodiment, purely and simply. While many have struggled and fumbled with embodiment in the holistic discourse to legitimize it in a scholarly manner in the literature, Susan consistently found a way to bring practical meaning to it that was useful for her in practice and for me as the
researcher and facilitator. I’m very fortunate that our paths crossed in this project. The insights drawn from her participation gave me an even greater opportunity to enrich understanding by adding to knowledge about experiences of embodiment in practice.
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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Bridging Traditional Boundaries of Knowing: Revaluing Mind/Body Connections through Experiences of Embodiment

My name is Tammy Freiler and I am a doctoral candidate in the Adult Education Program at Penn State Harrisburg. I am currently working on my research project for my dissertation in a thesis research course this semester under the advisement of Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell. My research interest focuses on exploring mind/body connections that engage the whole person in learning particularly through experiences of embodiment. Embodiment is a term used to refer to a way of knowing that engages or brings attention to the body as a site of learning and incorporates unity of mind and body in the process of knowing. It involves an awareness and capacity to understand through sensing, action, and knowing in a connected manner through perceptual, imaging, and motor systems. Diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, positive visualization, and movement techniques such as yoga and Tai Chi are examples of experiences of embodiment.

The purpose of my research is to investigate the implications of embodiment as a way of knowing in learning spaces, based on what individuals indicate they learn about embodiment. This research is designed to explore a broader vision of learning that reconnects mind and body with an educational approach that brings attention to bodily experiences in learning. It will address revaluing embodiment as a way of multiple ways of knowing moving beyond the traditional boundaries of rational knowledge construction.

I am facilitating five learning experiences within this course that incorporate attention to the body in constructing knowledge within a case study action research design. I am seeking 8 individuals from this course interested in serving as voluntary participants who have an interest in attending to body awareness and willingness to talk about it. Participants will be asked to complete two audio-taped interviews each lasting about 45 to 90 minutes and willing to have participation in the learning experiences observed by me for the purposes of collecting field notes. Participants will also be asked to share written remarks, drawings, or other forms of reflective or creative expressions of their choice and to provide at least three excerpts from journals or other projects of choice for document analysis. Participants may also be asked to review preliminary findings to confirm accuracy.

Participation or non-participation in this research will not have any effect on your student evaluation status. Participation in this research will be kept confidential. I am the only person who will know of your participation. All arrangements to conduct interviews and collect document submissions of participant choice will be coordinated privately with me through mail and phone contact. Interviews will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for participants. Audio-taped interviews will be kept in locked file storage by me in my home and destroyed within the required three year time period at the conclusion of this research. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participant identity. A professional transcriptionist may be used if needed to transcribe the interviews. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from this research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Participants may consider some of the interview questions to be of a more personal
nature which may cause discomfort. If you participate in this study, you may have a better understanding of multiple ways of knowing that may enhance the quality of your learning experiences and bring greater awareness of your learning preferences.

Your participation in this study would be deeply appreciated. If you decide to participate, you can choose to stop your participation at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer or participate in any activities that you do not want to experience. If you would like to volunteer as a participant for this study, please contact me, Tammy Freiler, at 570-366-0262 or by email at tjf185@psu.edu by (date TBA). You will now receive a written copy of this information.

Also, I am distributing an informed consent form to each individual in this course provided with a postage paid envelope at this time for your review and as a measure of anonymity. Again, please notify me of your interest as a participant by (date TBA). Since this study involves a maximum of 8 participants, I will notify you by email to confirm your participation. If more than 8 individuals volunteer for participation, effort will be made to select participants who are both male and female and of varied cultural groups. I will send you an email to confirm your participation and then ask that you complete and mail the informed consent form by a specified date. Are there any questions?

Thank you for your time and consideration with this research request.
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

FIRST INTERVIEW:

What was your reaction to trying to bring attention to your sense of embodied being-in-the-world in line with the sea gypsies’ sense of embodied awareness?

What was your experience with finding your breathe and the technique of diaphragmatic breathing?

Comment on your experience of performing the beginner Tai Chi movements.

Finish the following sentences:

- I listen to my body when or by....

- I feel most connected to my body ..... 

- I experience the most disconnect from my body ..... 

- I learn through or in my body ....

What, if anything, intrigues you about bringing attention to the body as a way of knowing?

How would you describe your own sense of embodiment at this point?

SECOND INTERVIEW:

What is your concept of embodiment at this point? Can you give me an example of what you would consider to be a significant embodied way of knowing at this point?

What were some of your most valuable insights or key learning points from the experiences of embodiment?

In what way have these experiences changed your understanding of the body and its connectedness to cultural considerations?

What were you most comfortable with and least comfortable with regarding these experiences?

How did you feel that your ability to relate to and engage with this topic changed as the learning sessions progressed?

How have these experiences affected your level of comfort in being able to talk about aspects of the body and exploring it as a source of knowledge?
What was your sense of sharing the formal learning space with other students in discussing and participating in these experiences?

How have your experiences w/this concept influenced your sense of attending to your body awareness?

How have these experiences impacted your interest in learning through direct bodily experiences?

Have you been able to apply any aspects of embodied learning within your daily life from time to time, on a personal and/or professional level? Can you give some examples of this?

Given your experience with this topic, what do you consider to be some of the main issues or concerns with experiences of embodiment?

What was your sense of relevance or connection between this topic and the nursing course?

What would your comments be regarding the value of embodiment in the formal higher education setting?

Were there any discoveries for you regarding your learning style or preferred ways of knowing?
APPENDIX C: REFLECTIVE GUIDE

What are some of your reactions to this experience? What struck you the most either positively or negatively?

How were you experiencing your body in this activity or what was your experience in your body? How did you feel in your body? What were you sensing in your body and where were you feeling it, for example?

What were any thoughts that you had in the moment?

What emotions were you feeling, if any?

What did you get out of this experience? How did you relate to this experience?
APPENDIX D: WRITTEN EVALUATION

Please evaluate the sessions that you attended on a scale of 1 to 5 (by circling the #) in terms of being a valuable learning experience for you.

Session 1 – Sept. 28
Introduce the essence of embodiment by meeting the Moken village sea gypsies (video), discussion on cultural considerations and connectedness with the concept of embodiment, view video of Tai Chi and participate in experiential activity of Tai Chi beginner movements

1  2  3  4  5
not valuable     valuable     very valuable

Session 2 – Oct. 12
Introduce sensorimotor experience and sensory perception concepts as components of embodiment, and participate in diaphragmatic breathing, guided imagery and visualization activity (skyscraper fantasy)

1  2  3  4  5
not valuable     valuable     very valuable

Session 3 – Oct. 26
Open with “camp fire” experience with senses, images and reflections. Introduce bodily awareness through participation in experiences of progressive muscle relaxation and yoga.

1  2  3  4  5
not valuable     valuable     very valuable

Session 4 – Nov. 9
Introduce body inscriptions, cultural considerations in learning spaces associated w/body image, interaction styles, and power differentials, and participate in exchanges of bowing

1  2  3  4  5
not valuable     valuable     very valuable

Session 5 – Nov. 30
Introduce connectedness of embodiment with creative expression, symbolic representation, and healing participating in musical, artistic, and movement experiences and sharing metaphors.

1  2  3  4  5
not valuable     valuable     very valuable
Please rate your overall experience.

1  2  3  4  5
not valuable  valuable  very valuable

Please indicate to what extent you consider embodiment to be a valued way of knowing in the learning space, based on what you experienced and learned about embodiment.

1  2  3  4  5
not valuable  valuable  very valuable

Please provide comments on recommendations for improving any of these experiences:

Please comment on what experiences and/or materials (e.g., provided quotes and narrative reflections, facilitator personal insights, supplemental readings, videos) in particular were most helpful or insightful. Please try to be as specific as possible.

Is there anything else that you want to comment on as a research participant?
VITA

Tammy Jo Freiler

Prior to pursuing a doctorate in Adult Education, Tammy earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Individual and Family Studies through the College of Health and Human Development at The Pennsylvania State University and a Master of Education in Secondary School Counseling from Kutztown University.

Certified as an Educational Specialist through the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Tammy has 17 years experience as a secondary school counselor involved in counseling, coordination, and consultative capacities with student services in secondary public education. In addition, she serves as an adjunct faculty member for Alvernia College teaching a health and wellness course. Prior to becoming a school counselor, she also served as a program coordinator for a Pennsylvania Department of Education gender equity career grant for secondary and higher education implemented through The Pennsylvania State University Division of Student Services and has several years experience in social services.

Tammy holds professional membership in the National Education Association, the Pennsylvania State Education Association, the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association, the Blue Mountain Education Association, and Pi Lambda Theta. She has served as a presenter at The Pennsylvania Adult and Continuing Education Conference on the topic of experiences of embodiment in adult and higher education.