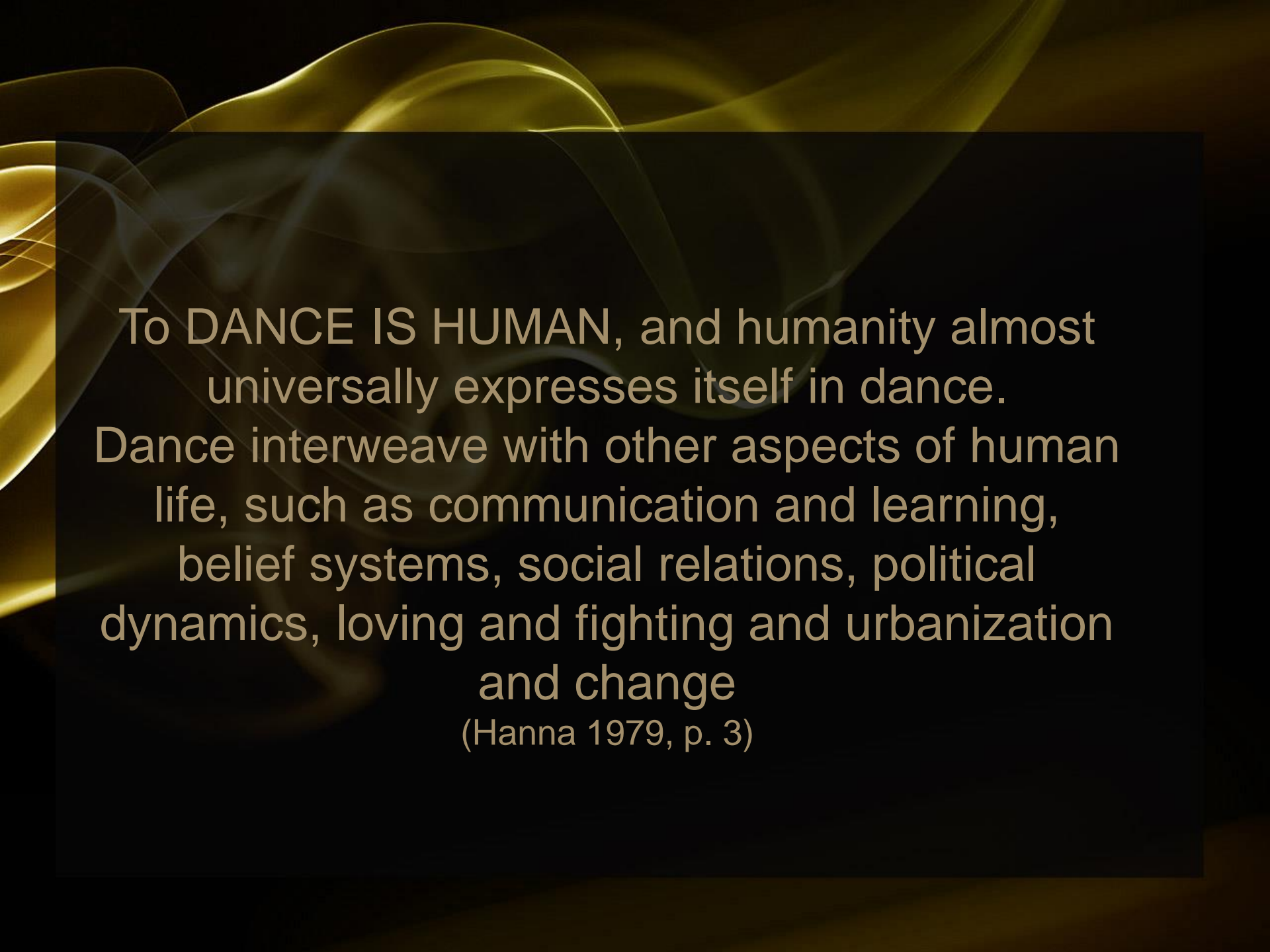


Thinking, Feeling and Relating Young Children Learning Through Dance

Dr Jan Deans



To DANCE IS HUMAN, and humanity almost
universally expresses itself in dance.
Dance interweave with other aspects of human
life, such as communication and learning,
belief systems, social relations, political
dynamics, loving and fighting and urbanization
and change
(Hanna 1979, p. 3)

The focus of the Thesis

- ✓ Investigation into young children's learning in dance and the role of the teacher in enabling the learning.





Theoretical Underpinnings

- ✓ Dance in education (Laban, 1963, 1975; Mettler, 1960; Pugh-McCutchen, 2006; Sanson, 2011; Smith-Autard, 2002; Stinson, 1993).
- ✓ Dance as art is a naturally occurring mode of expression that is aligned to *play*, *language* and *culture* (Hanna, 1979; Matthews, 1999; Rogoff, 2003; Trevarthen 1998; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wright, 2003), and as such is a key semiotic tool for artistic meaning making (Eisner, 2002).
- ✓ Dance and learning theories (Bruner, 1966; Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1962; Gardner, 1993; Wells, 1999) in particular: the social construction of knowledge and ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) and its place within the realm of artistic thinking and learning.

Theoretical Underpinnings

- ✓ Dance as voice in response to the key principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) in particular: Articles 12 & 13 and General Comment 7.
- ✓ Dance and collaborative learning through the establishment of a community of learners (Rogoff, 1994).
- ✓ Dance and early childhood pedagogy (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Schön, 1983; Ritchhart, 2002).

Model of Integrated Teaching & Learning through Dance

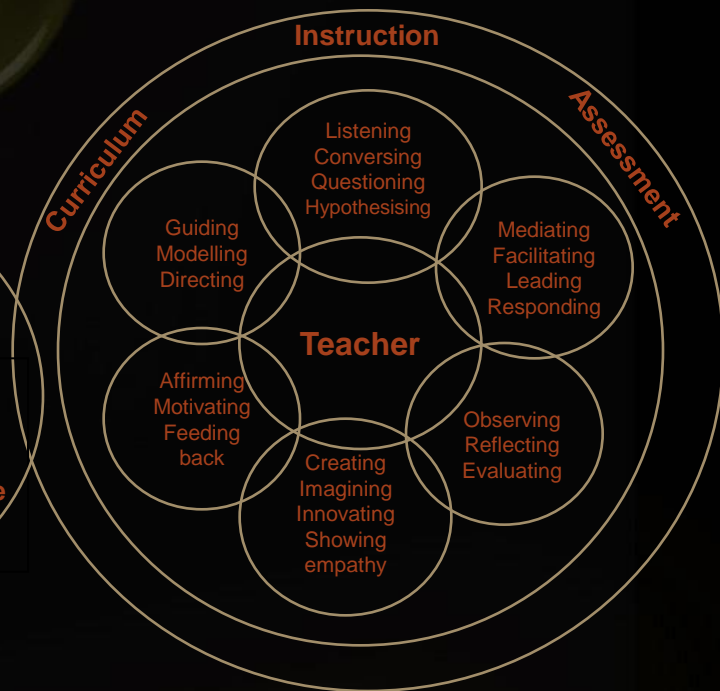
Domains of Learning



Core principles of
socio-constructive & rights
based theory

Principle formative influence-
mediating relationships which
support participation, child's voice
& agency

Domains of Teaching



Methodology

- ✓ A qualitative case study that investigated two overarching questions
- ✓ How does dance enable children's learning?
- ✓ What is the role of the teacher in enabling this learning?
- ✓ Framed within the field of practitioner research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000)
- ✓ A constructivist research paradigm (Charmaz, 2006)

The Selected Research Traditions

- ✓ Phenomenology (van Manen, 1990)
- ✓ Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)
- ✓ Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Neuman, 2006)

The Case Being Studied

- ✓ The participants & the physical setting
- ✓ The dance program
- ✓ The teacher-researcher



The Data Collection Methods

- ✓ Digital Video recordings (n=26 hours)
- ✓ Digital Photographs (n= 2500)
- ✓ Teacher program plans and journal notes (n= 26 weeks)
- ✓ Transcripts of teacher voice (n= 13 hours)
- ✓ Children's drawing-tellings (n= 450)

The Analysis

- ✓ Bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of the study
- ✓ Ongoing familiarization with the data
- ✓ Identifying a thematic framework
- ✓ Indexing, charting & mapping – creation of narratives/texts of selected dance events
- ✓ Five tiers of analysis of 52 dance events – solo, small group and ensemble

Bounding the Research



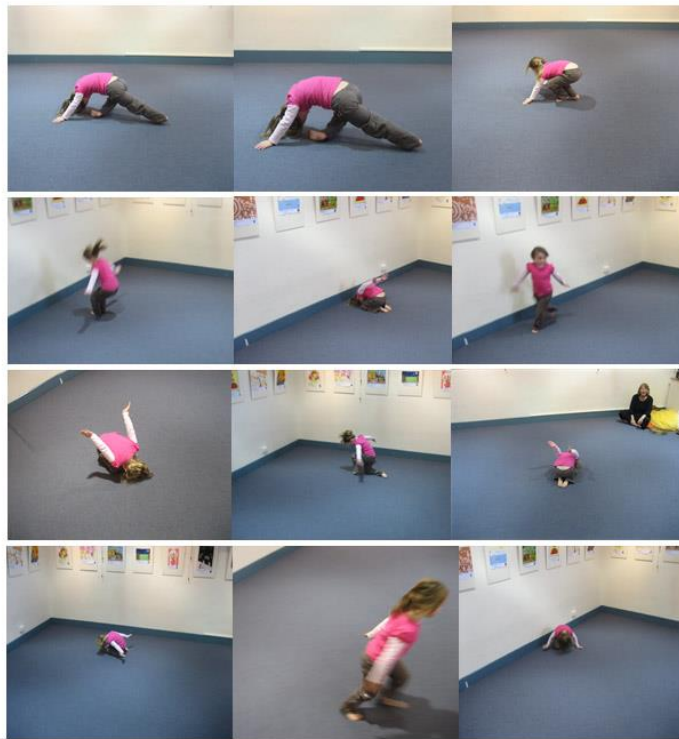
Dance Event Narrative

Date: 5/6/09

Child: Amelee

Duration: 58 seconds

Music: Bach Partition Violincelle



Amelee requests the recorded music used earlier in the class to accompany explorations of light arm gestures. She locates herself in the centre of the room and creates a closed body shape on the floor. She rests on her knees and lower legs, bending her upper body over her thighs. Her head is placed on the floor and her arms are stretched out. As the music begins she rises and runs quickly and lightly to the back wall facing away from the audience. Working with the rhythmic structure of the music she moves into the floor and closes her torso over her knees and stretches her arms out behind her in a 'wing like' shape. Amelee pauses in this position and then on cue with the phrasing of the music she rises and returns to the light run moving centrally forwards in the space towards the audience. She comes to stillness and returns to the body shape on the floor previously adopted. She waits in stillness before rising again. Amelee repeats the sequence of light running and closed floor shape. Working closely with the phrasing of the music she repeats the sequence three more times and with each repeat she is observed smiling. Amelee concludes the dance on the floor returning to the same shape she began the dance with, holding the shape until the end of the phrasing of the music. She rises and faces the audience smiling.

Table 1: Amelee: The up and down again butterfly

Ref: Clandinin & Connelly, 2000

Amelee: The Up and Down Again Butterfly



Dance Event Learning Story

Taking an interest

The boys elected to dance together; a choice that confirms their established friendship, which has been evidenced throughout the course of the dance program. They demonstrate a preparedness to willingly participate by immediately responding to collaborative group shape making linking their personalized and individual body shapes to create a complex and multi-level group shape to begin the dance.

Individual high-energy interpretations and focused concentration are also evidenced and they look very comfortable with engaging in bodily kinesthetic learning. Their facial expressions (eye contact with each other) indicate their focus and attention to the task.

The children take charge of the task, showing interest through their willingness to be involved and to draw on their funds of knowledge such as a still opening shape and reciprocal action reaction strategies to achieve a successful group improvisation. The starting shape is a clear indicator of their capacity for collaborative shape making.

They also indicate their shared interest in exploring jumping, hopping, spinning and falling and in maintaining a triangular spatial formation. It is this formation that enables them to keep eye contact and to employ the action reaction responding.

The interest and motivation to perform for their peers is also evident. All three boys demonstrate their interest in performance as a communication mode.

All boys display a positive sense of self and demonstrate through their willingness to participate their understandings of social schema. From a socio-constructivist perspective, they are demonstrating their connection to each other, willingly sharing their learning journey and taking on the roles associated with collaborative learning. They follow the socially constructed rules around dance performance, setting their starting shape in the space, calling on their funds of knowledge around elements of dance and choreographic form.

Bodily kinesthetic seeing and empathy are evident through ongoing focused observation of each other and a commitment to the collaborative improvisational process.

When asked to create a 'starting shape' the children respond with enthusiasm, a sign that they understood the requirements of the task and were keen and ready to be involved. The request enabled them to draw on familiar content and they demonstrated interest in non-verbally sorting out their group shape, making decisions and aesthetically pleasing adjustments until they found their starting still shapes.

Being involved

Paying attention for a sustained period, feeling safe, trusting others. Being playful with others and / or materials

The level of focused and responsive engagement and concentration exhibited by all children indicates that they are experiencing high levels of safety and trust amongst each other. There is evidence of ongoing sustained attention to the task and relaxed, reciprocal giving and receiving is observed and communicated as a sense of being 'at home' with each other.

Taking an interest

Being involved

Expressing an idea or feeling

Persisting with difficulty

Taking responsibility

Ref: Carr, 2001

Dance Drawing Content Analysis



Harper That's me when I'm spinning

Figure 11: "That's me when I'm spinning." (DDCA: 13/02/09)



Figure 15: "That's me when I was doing my tumbling and turning over dance." (DDCA: 27/3/09)

Ref: Wright, 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2010; 2014

Dance Event Dialogue

| <i>Dance Event Dialogue (DED) - Trio</i> | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p><i>Date: 17/7/09</i> <i>Duration 2.79 minutes</i> <i>Children: Hudson, George, Hadley</i> <i>Music: Peter Mumme – Veronica Takes a Bath – Track 2- The Golf Match</i></p> | | |
| <i>Elements of Dance</i> | <i>Body shapes</i> | <i>Beginning with a wide, joined shape using low and high levels and connecting, overlapping limbs of all dancers.</i> |
| | <i>Body activities</i> | <i>Jumping, hopping, spinning, twirling, running, crawling, turning, spinning, rising and falling.</i> |
| | <i>Body parts - gestures and postures</i> | <i>Out-stretched arms, crossed legs, foot spins, tilting upper body.</i> |
| | <i>Explorations of effort</i> | <i>Explosive jumping, accented spinning, strong, sudden, sharp, movement phrases. Free flow from one phrase to the next.</i> |
| | <i>Explorations of space</i> | <i>In place movement, direct and indirect pathways through space, levels, directional changes. The ABA choreographic form is evident as well as a triangular spatial form, which was maintained throughout the dance event.</i> |
| | <i>Relationships</i> | <i>Trio, question & answer, meeting & parting, leading & following.</i> |

Ref: Laban, 1963; Newlove & Dalby, 2004

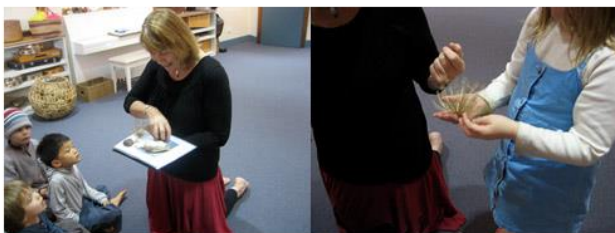
Dance Class Snapshot

Dance Class Snapshot (DCS)

Date – 17/7/09

Objectives:

For the children to explore pathways in space - lines direct & curving (extension of 'Wandering Dance'
For the children to explore contrasting dynamics – strong & light emphasis on body part gesturing



Welcome & Introduction – Sharing of news, looking at treasures brought in by children- rocks, stones, dried flower head, gum nuts, oyster shell.



Introduction to sound of the rainmaker - Starting shapes with rain-maker and tambour



Free Dance - Free Dance – Lily - solo



Free Dance – Aron, Ryle & Hamish- Trio



Ensemble - Bug Dance

Evaluation

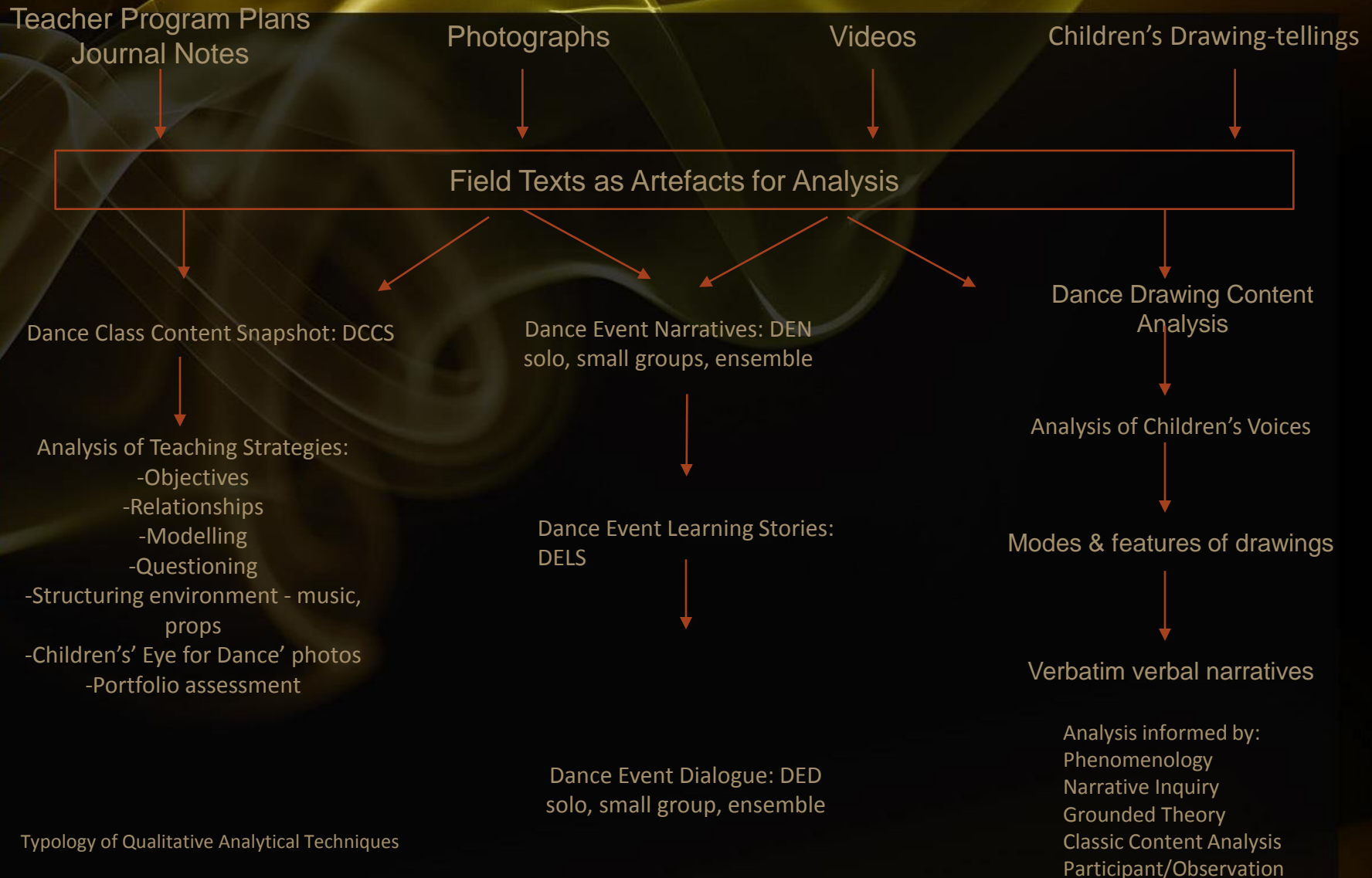
Our community of learners regrouped today after a two-week break and it was great to see all the smiling faces and hear and share the news. We looked at a number of special treasures that I received gifts of a small stone from Luxe (sparkling and white), a shell from Alex and a dried agapanthus flower head from Tilly. Hudson enjoyed the flower responding 'When I first saw that I thought it was a hedgehog'.

The children responded enthusiastically to shape making and at one point there were 6 children using the wall as an anchor for their feet. The final shape saw the entire group come together into a beehive shape.

The children's attention was maintained during the warm-up with cooperative line making and marching with direction changes. Ginger seemed very pleased to be asked to lead the line of children.

Ref: Rogoff, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Ritchhart, Church & Morrison, 2011

Qualitative Data Typology



The Findings for research question one

Informed by the analysis of seven dance events

Solos

- ✓ Amelee the Up and down again butterfly
- ✓ Hudson the spinner and turner
- ✓ Lily: Cross toes, happy toes and jealous feet



Lily: Cross Toes and Happy Feet



The Findings for research question one

Informed by the analysis of seven dance events

Small Groups

- ✓ Punching the monsters
- ✓ Slow walking fairies



The Findings for research question one

Informed by the analysis of seven dance events

Ensemble

- ✓ Whirling twirling gases
- ✓ Fireflies flying



Individual case study



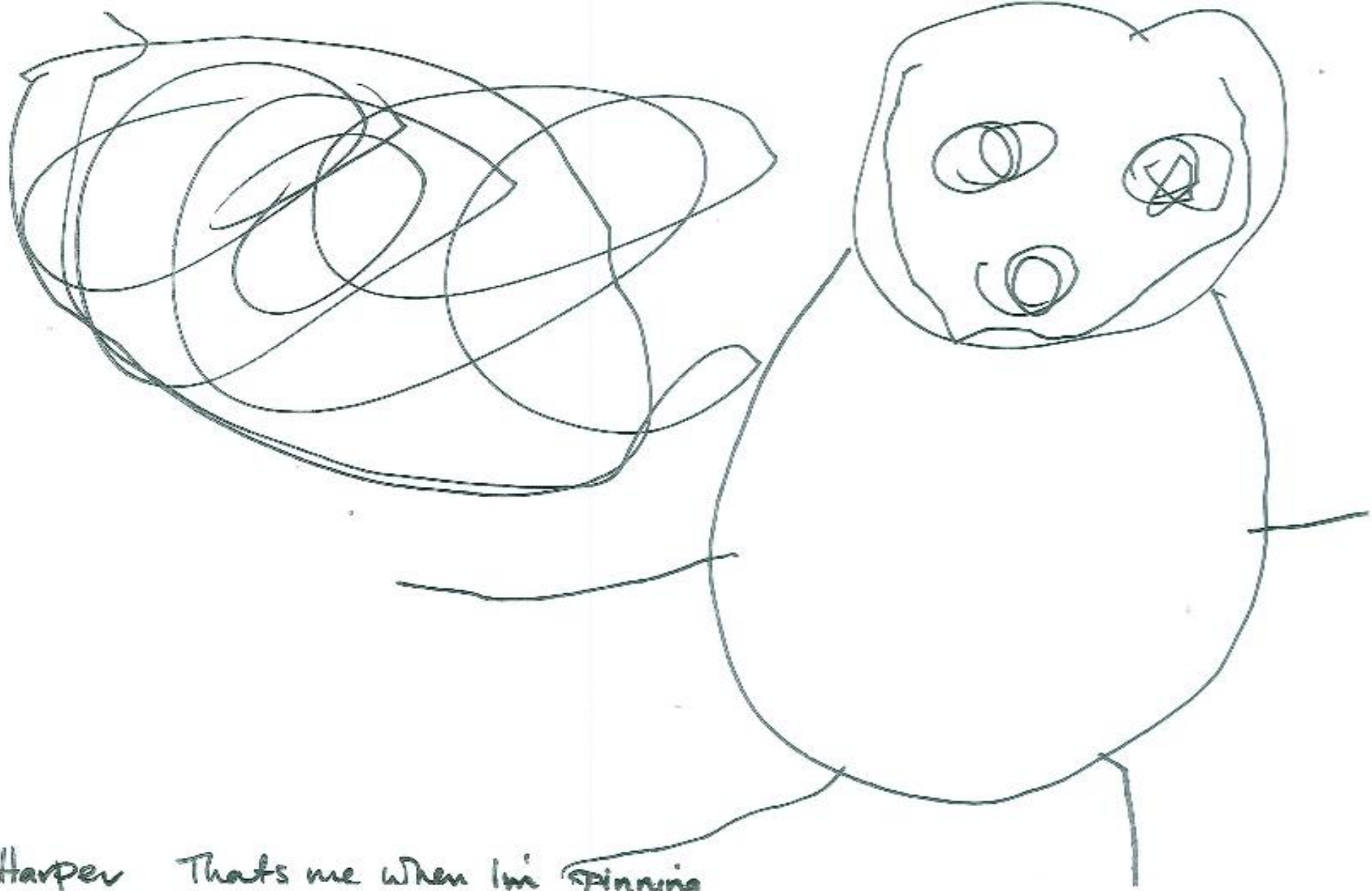
Hudson: The Spinner and Turner





"That's me spinning. That's a leg up. I'm spinning and running."
6/2/09

That's me spinning. That's a leg up. I'm spinning and running.



Harper That's me when I'm spinning

That's me when I'm spinning



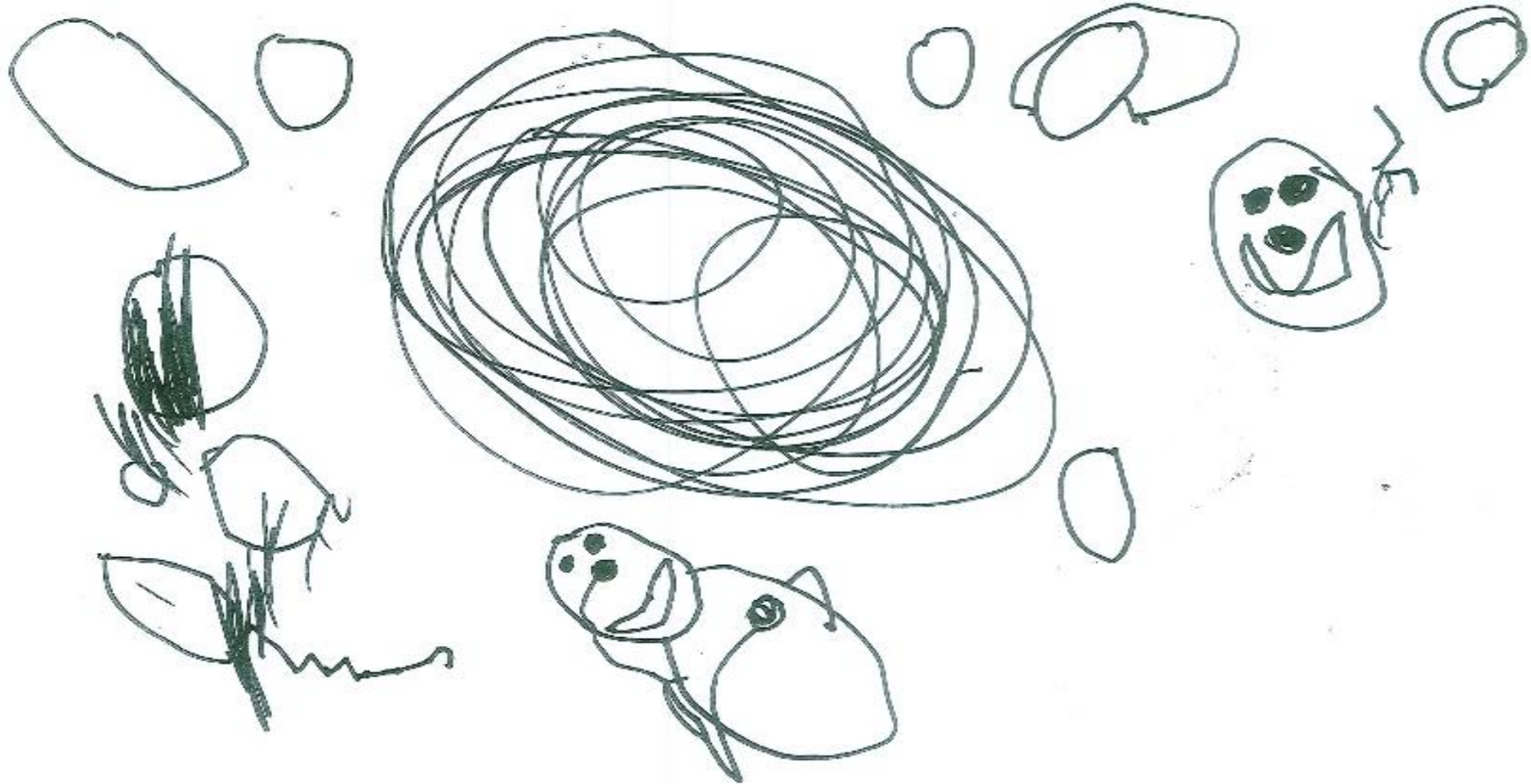
That's when I'm spinning

Harper



and that's when I'm falling
over spinning and when I'm
spinning more.

That's when I'm spinning. And that's when I'm falling over
spinning and when I'm spinning more.



Hopper: I can't do what I want to. I want to up
draw myself spinning.

I can't do what I want to. I want to draw myself spinning.



Harper. I am trying to make the drawing of me spinning.

I am trying to make the drawing of me spinning.



(showing see video)

Me rolling over+ turning over with my legs and arms not holding on at the same time.

Me rolling over and turning over with my legs and arms not holding on at the same time.

Harper 23/3.



That's me taking the photo. I put my arm across my tummy.

That's me taking the photo. I put my arm across my tummy.



That's me when I was doing my tumbling and turning over dance.

Harper

3/4/09



I was making my birthday cake to bring to kinder

I was making my birthday cake to bring to kinder.

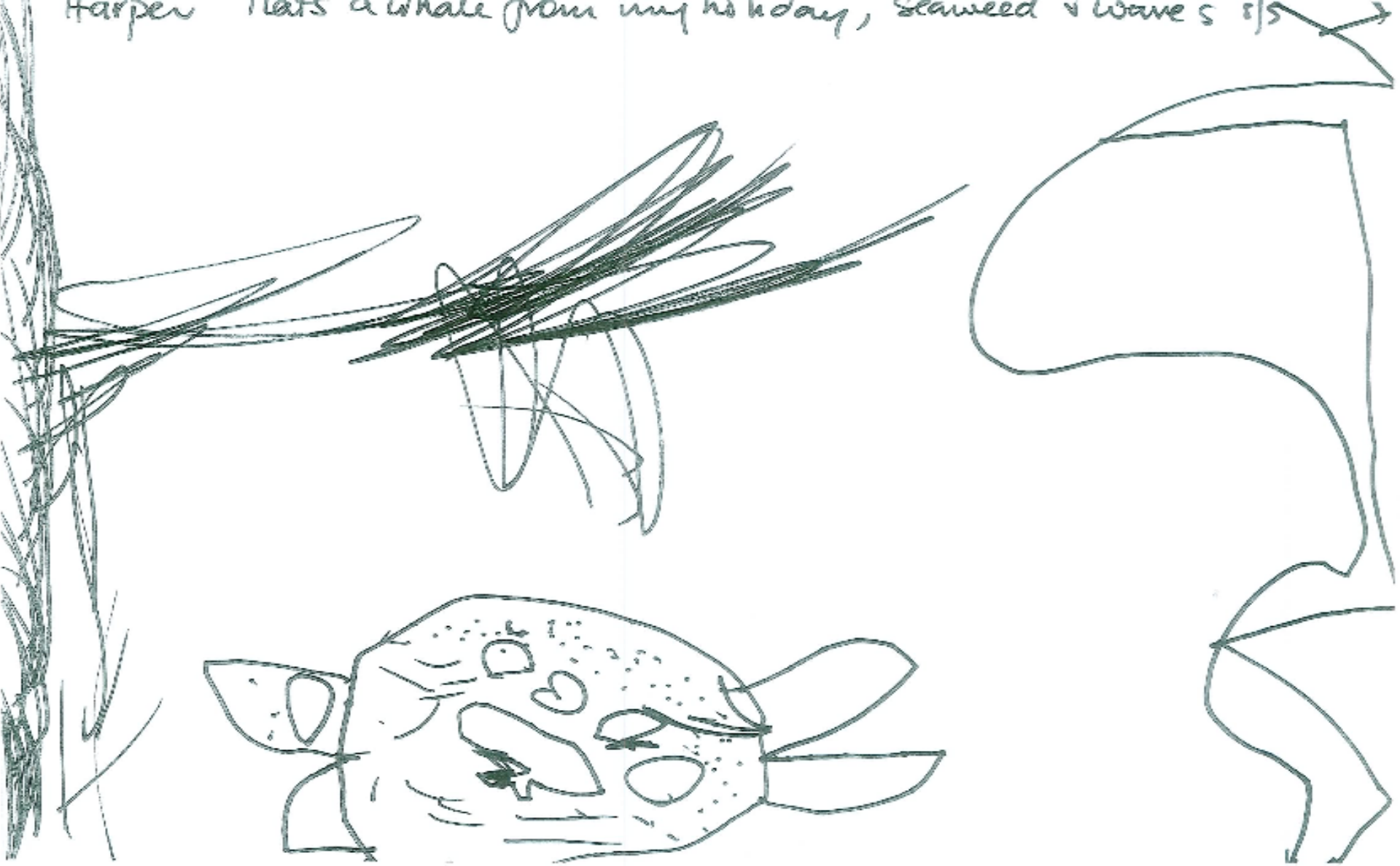


I'm dancing in our backyard.

Harper 10 when we're being the fireflies 29/4



It's when we're being the fireflies.



That's a whale from my holiday, seaweed and waves.

Harper 15/5

going down on my knees

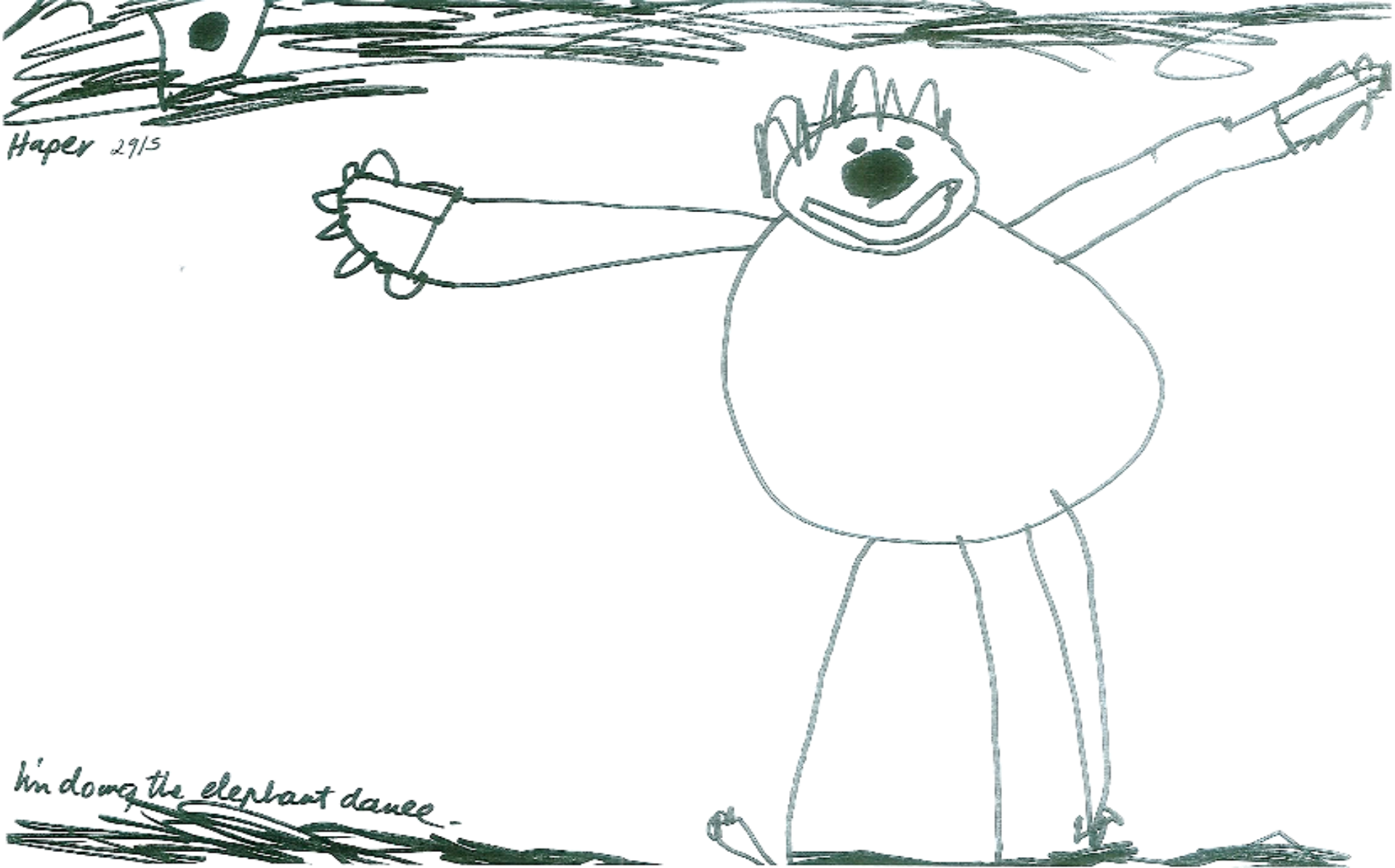


back + forth + nodding my head + slowly

That's when I was doing my skipping, arm + turning my hands

That's when I was doing my skipping, arm and turning my hands back and forth and nodding my head and slowly going down on my knees.





I'm doing the elephant dance.

29/05/09

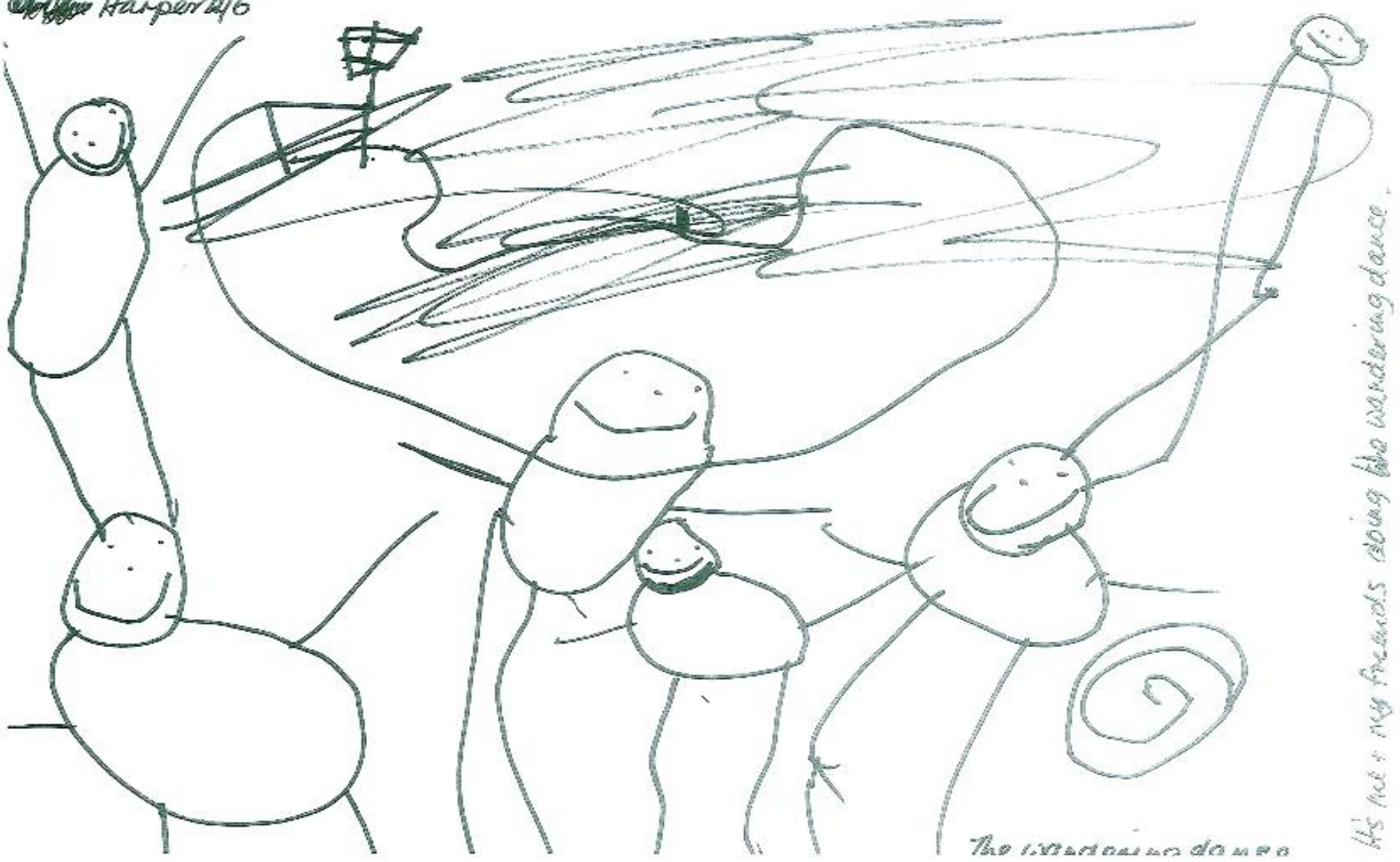


That's me Griffin and Harry dancing and we are twirling and going around and being a car.

5/6 H

... around at being a car

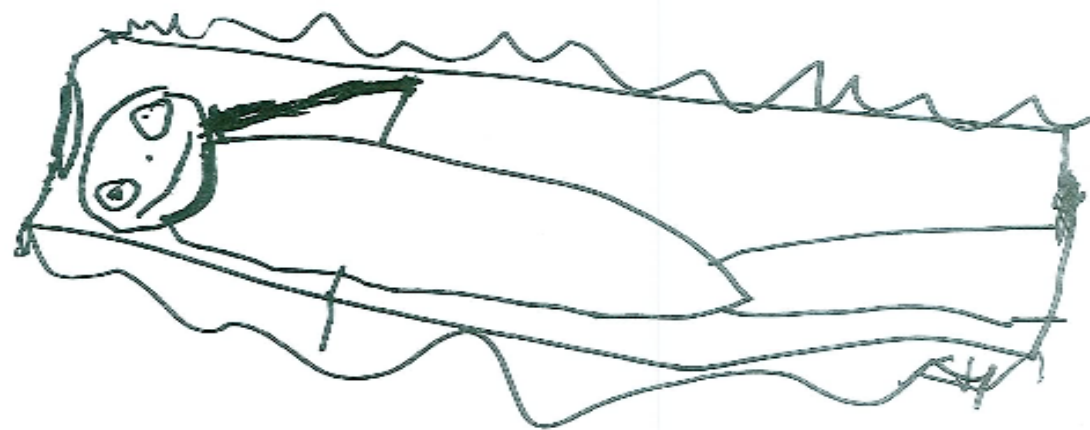
That's me, Griffin and Harry dancing and we are twirling and going around and being a car.



The wandering dance. It's me and my friends doing the wandering dance.

12/06/09

Harper 19/6

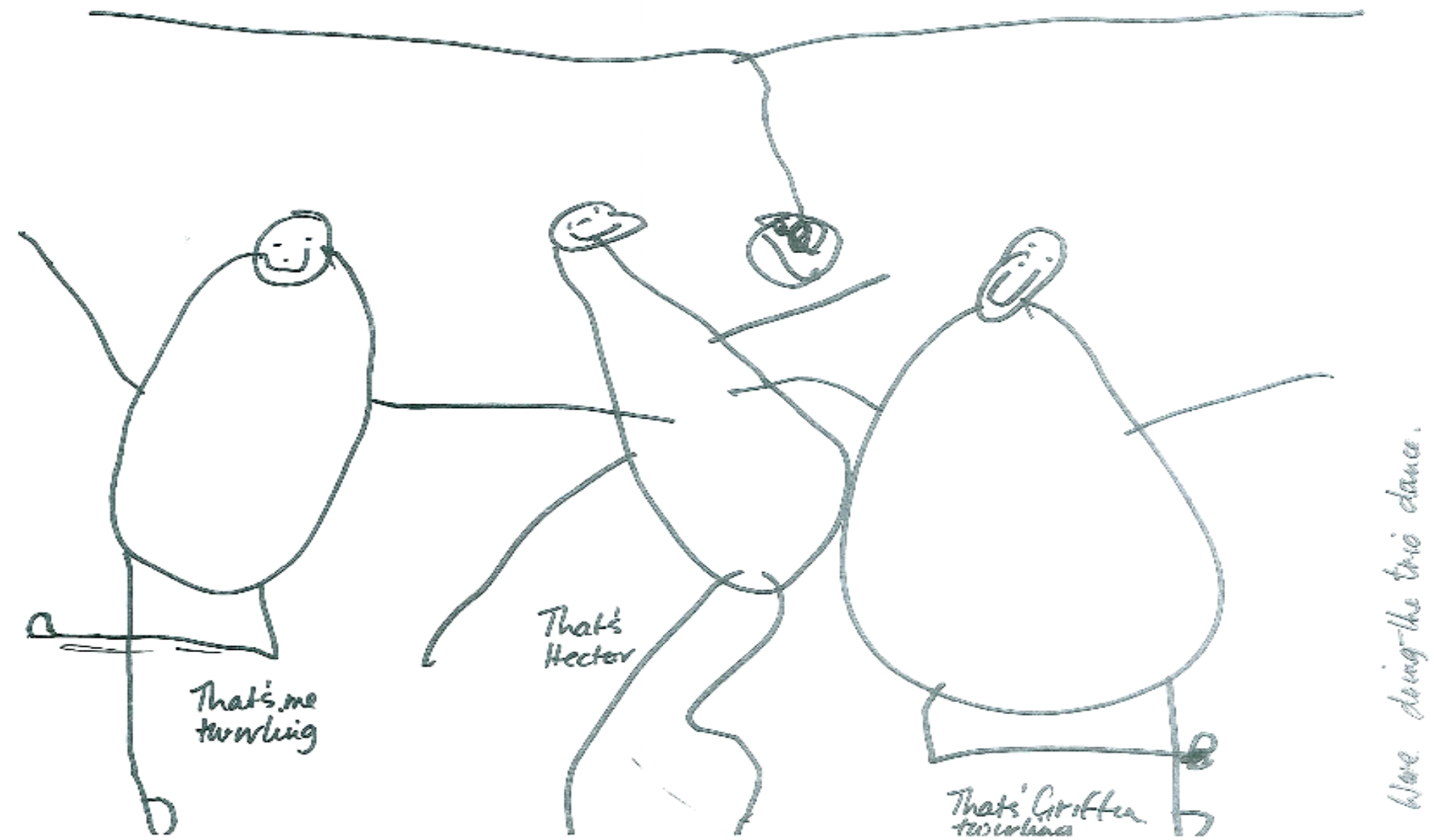


my feet first, then my tummy, then my arms, then my head, then my hair

That's me inside the white thing making my shape and I'm slowly going out

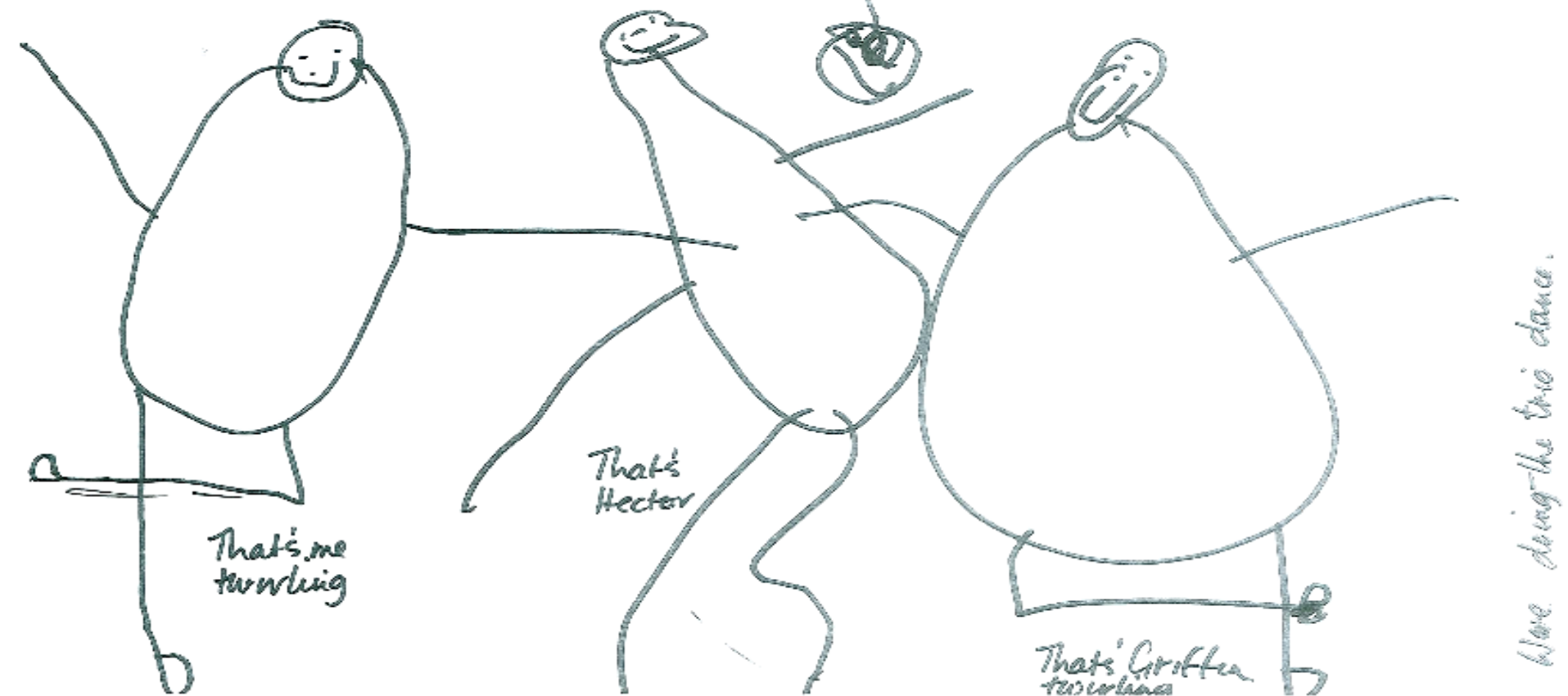
That's me inside the white thing making my shape and I'm slowly going out, my feet first, then my tummy, then my arms, then my head, then my hair.

19/06/09



When we were doing the marching dance. I was doing all the things I know about doing the marching dance.

17/07/09

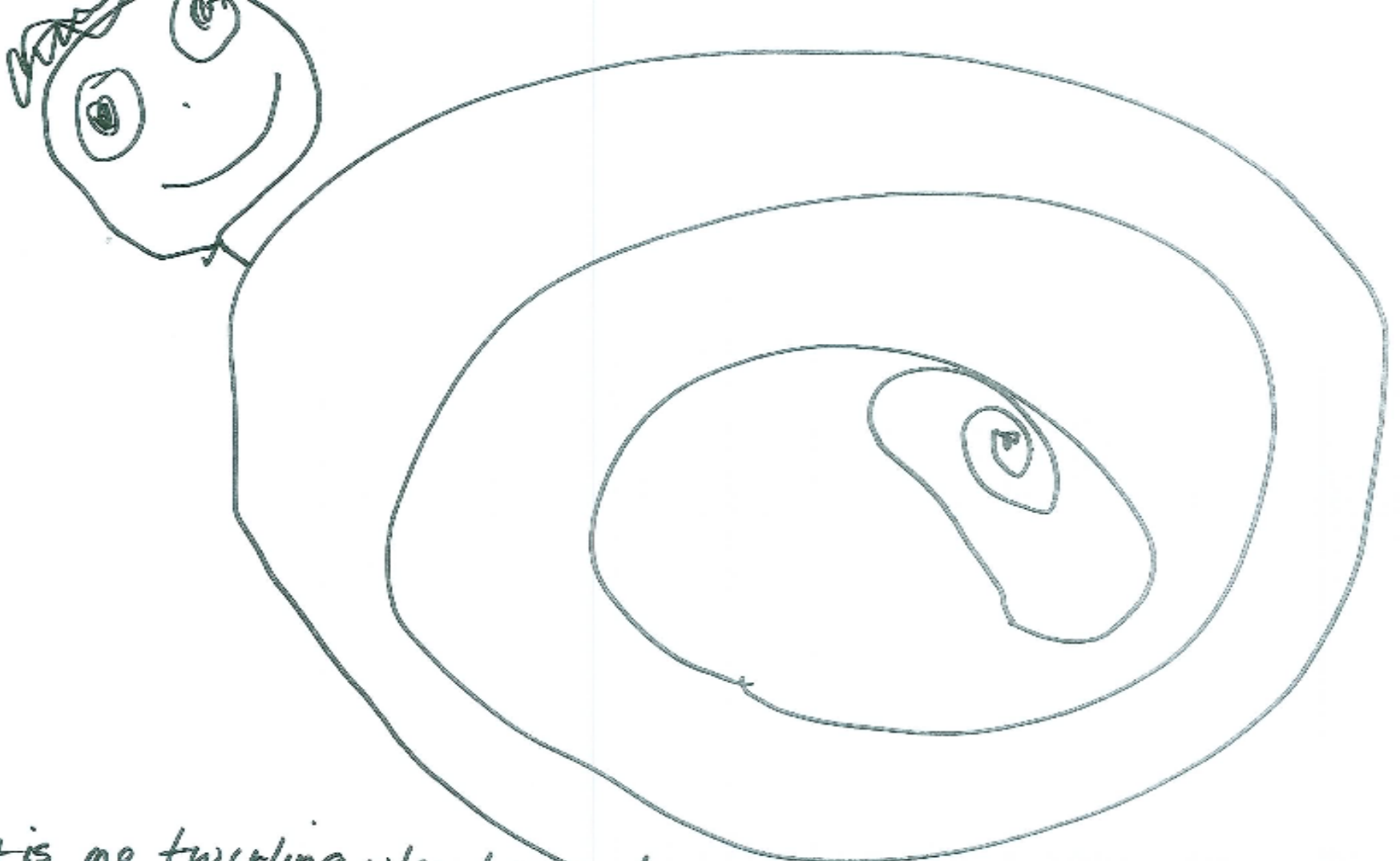


That's me twirling. That's Hector. That's Griffin twirling. We're doing the trio dance.

Hector 2/7
It's when we were doing the boy dance & Hector was in charge.
That's me falling over.



It's when we were doing the boy dance and Hector was in charge. That's me falling over.



That is me twirling when I was doing my solo

That is me twirling when I was doing my solo.



That's me, Griffin and Harper being the seeds and those are all the girls going around and I'm pretending it is the forest.

Harper 23/10



That's me round + round.

That's me round and round.

Signature Movements Captured Over Time



The Findings for research question one

How does dance enable children's learning?

- ✓ Dance enabled learning across three main domains, including:
 - **Embodied thinking**
 - **Multi-modal semiosis**
 - **Multi-focal relating**

The Findings for research question two

What is the role of the teacher in enabling children's learning?

✓ **Through the enactment of:**

- **Broadly based pedagogical knowledge**
- **Diverse and complimentary teaching strategies**

Role of the Teacher



Key arguments resulting from the findings

- ✓ The value of dance in an educational setting is in fact dance itself; which has proven to be a *unique and dynamic learning modality* for young children
- ✓ The power of dance as an authentic semiotic meaning-making tool that supports sophisticated levels of *embodied thinking, expressive communication* and *empathetic social contagion* and as such needs to be recognized as a vibrant learning area within mainstream curriculum.
- ✓ The effectiveness of dance as a learning modality that can be readily accessed by young children for the expression of *personal and collective voice*.
- ✓ The significance of a dance community of learners providing children and teachers with extensive opportunities to *co-construction of knowledge through ZPD*

Concluding statements

- ✓ The value of establishing a culture of thinking in the form of a dance community where the individual's and the group's thinking is valued, visible and actively promoted
- ✓ The power of dance as an authentic semiotic meaning-making tool that supports sophisticated levels of *embodied thinking*, *expressive communication* and *empathetic social contagion*
- ✓ The effectiveness of dance as a learning modality that can be readily accessed by young children for the expression of *personal and collective voice*
- ✓ The significance of a dance community of learners providing children and teachers with extensive opportunities to *co-construction of knowledge through ZPD*

Concluding statements

- ✓ The cognitive benefits for children associated with being challenged to express ideas and to articulate these through various modalities
- ✓ Individual , small group and large group problem solving: harnessing the power of the group to advance general thinking while recognizing the contributions and growth of the individual
- ✓ Teacher engagement with practices that support visibility namely observation, questioning, listening, recording and using thinking routines

Concluding statements

- ✓ Learning is at once the most natural and complex of processes. We who bear the task of shepherding this process often find ourselves amazed and energized as we watch the process unfold before us even as we respect, and are sometimes overwhelmed by its complexity and nuance. Herein lies the promise and power of making students' thinking visible: it offers a window into the learning process itself (Ritchhart, Church & Morrison, 2011, p.272)

Finally

- ✓ As noted by Palmer (1998), 'education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life and importantly it is about finding and claiming our place in the world' (pp. 18-19). With these thoughts in mind, this research has demonstrated how learning through dance can provide young children with opportunities to grow and develop in a stimulating, challenging and flexible learning environment where they can confidently and openly express their voices both individually and as a group with *agency and autonomy*. It has also demonstrated the important role that the teacher plays in scaffolding children's learning to support the co-construction of knowledge and in particular ZPD to enable children to experience the exhilaration of learning and in particular having the opportunity of feeling the magic of being 'a head taller' (Vygotsky, 1978) through dance.

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