Educators from Carolina Friends School in Durham regularly explore the relationship between health and education in Health & Healing. In this issue, a Carolina Friends School graduate shares her thoughts about the art and science of learning and healing.

Dance is your pulse, your heartbeat, your breathing. It’s the rhythm of your life.

—Jacques d’Amboise

Dance embodies one of our most primal relationships to the universe. It is pre-verbal, beginning before words can be formed. It is innate in children before they possess command over language and is evoked when thoughts or emotions are too powerful for words to contain. It is essential that education provide our children with the developmental benefits and unique learning opportunities that come from organizing movement into the aesthetic experience of dance.

—National Dance Education Organization

As a 2004 graduate of Carolina Friends School, I was recently invited back to teach one of the School’s “mini-sessions,” which allows students to experience something new and end the school year on a high note. Our “Day of Rhythm” integrated ballroom and Latin dance with cardio fitness to enhance the students’ physical well-being while empowering them to achieve a greater sense of self-confidence. Those who thought they couldn’t dance quickly realized they could.

Carolina Friends School is a community I call home. It possesses a refreshing uniquely philosophy that created the foundation that I extend into my style of dance and my methods of teaching. It was wonderful to share the passion for the education of dance, science, and wellness that was instilled into me as a young mind.

When I was a junior at CFS, I was given the opportunity to teach my very own Salsa Dance elective. Though I was nervous, I was oh so excited and I remember the amazing sense of self-confidence, responsibility, and joy that rushed through my body when 30 of my peers danced gleefully alongside me. A true sense of unity and community had formed when I looked around to see the wide range of my great friends, faces from the classroom, and some classmates I found intimidating.

This eye-opening experience encouraged me to continue my exploration in dance, helping guide me to a deeper sense of self, an enriched feeling of health, and a joyful understanding of my place within my community. Teaching that one Salsa class set into motion a series of adventures that would eventually bring me back to CFS with a message to this year’s students: “Dance is a way to unify your body, mind, and spirit and create the power to heal yourself—mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially—and your community.”

DANCE, HEALTH AND HEALING

The body is such a powerful, extraordinary machine, and how we take care of it will determine how well we dance throughout life. Dancing releases the endorphins into the body, which creates positive energy and the euphoric enjoyment that dance brings. Whether you use your body for day-to-day tasks or to achieve great athleticism, the entire body, mind, and spirit are in motion, which then translate into positive energy.

The healing potential of dance is powerful, especially for our youth. From research, we find that dance is a great stress reliever, helps promote positive behavior, helps develop teamwork, and encourages self-expression, coordination, balance, and so much more. Dance teaches our youth discipline, patience, appreciation, adaptation, control, and drive. A dancer is a scientist of the body and an artist of musical interpretation, who is always learning, growing, and transforming. A dancer’s journey never ends. There is no stopping point, no final destination, only that moment, that movement that brings you true bliss. Dance is a form of communication within itself, a universal language that allows kids to express emotions and feelings that don’t have to be explained.

The science of control over body, movement, and the art of dance have been the most significant driving forces in my life, opening my soul to unexplainable connections with other human beings and bountiful opportunities. My dream is to continue to inspire and to enrich lives through dance and movement. Thank you to Carolina Friends School, my teachers, and my peers—all of whom have inspired me and encouraged me to become the individual I am today.

Professional dancer and dance educator Aubrey Griffith-Zill specializes in Ballroom, Latin, Tap, and Modern. She used her business degree to create two companies, Arvore Enterprises (which creates and assists with dance events around the world) and RhythmFitness.tv (which offers dance, fitness, health, and wellness programs). Carolina Friends School is an independent Quaker school serving students 3-18. Contact the school at: 4809 Friends School Road, Durham, NC 27705; Telephone: (919) 383-6602; www.cfsnc.org