

Transforming lives one Pulse Ontario Youth Dance Conference at a time

Marc Richard

Instructor, Sheridan College, York University, Charles Sturt University

Pulse Publicist

email: marc66@yorku.ca

Carmelina Martin

Teacher, Peel District School Board

Founder and Chair of Pulse

email: carmelina.martin@peelsb.com

Mary-Elizabeth Manley

Professor, York University

Pulse York Liaison

email: memanley@yorku.ca

Abstract

The Pulse Ontario Youth Dance Conference in Canada is transforming lives one conference at a time. This three day conference is dedicated to giving Ontario dance students (novice and experienced) an affordable opportunity and access to a province-wide dance conference where they can participate, experience, and develop their literacy, understanding, and appreciation of dance. By immersing ourselves in global dance forms, we are embracing the philosophical underpinnings of the Ontario Arts Curriculum document (2009). Our goal is for students and teachers to learn side-by-side, the value, scope, and diversity of dance in Ontario through artist-led workshops, live performances, keynote addresses, and symposia. After witnessing the impact of our inaugural 2006 conference on students, teachers, and artists alike, one thing became clear: we needed to find the means for “documenting” the many narratives that emerge during and after the conference participation. In the following 2008 conference, we commissioned professional filmmakers to create a brief documentary capturing the narrative of how dance was transforming and defining the lives of students. The results were quite astounding and the documentary drew out more stories as it was screened for various audiences. This has led us to further examine video documentation in the dance education community as a form of advocacy as well as anecdotal and/or qualitative evidence of learning. We have since made two professional 5-minute documentaries that together tell a compelling story of the impact of this dance conference on students’ ways of understanding their world: as they face the challenge of diversity and working outside their comfort zones; as they work creatively and trust their personal movement impulses; and as they work through the creative process with artists during composition workshops. For many students, being asked to create their own authentic material was a novel and empowering experience that was also transformational. In Canada, our government organizations are beginning to redevelop an awareness of the need for the arts in education (and youth culture in general), and the Pulse Conference, as a meeting place for artists, teachers, and youth, provides a crucible for dance advocacy.

This panel introduces the Pulse Ontario Youth Dance Conference through several 5-minute documentaries. Panel members address the themes and narratives that are animated through the documentation process and which reveal the personal transformations of the participants. Our

greatest research interest has been to discover the impact of these conferences on the lives of young people both during and after the conference event.

Keywords: youth, professional development, relationships, outreach, transformation

The Pulse Ontario Youth Dance Conference is a bi-annual, province-wide dance conference that takes place at York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The Conference invites Ontario elementary and secondary teachers, secondary students, dance scholars, and dance artists to come together to learn and share their experiences of dance education. We are now in planning mode for the fifth Pulse Conference, to be held in 2014. There have been many changes over the past 10 years of organizing this Conference, and in that time, the Conference has transformed many lives.

In 2002, in the elected position of Dance Liaison for The Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE), the provincial subject association for drama and dance educators in Ontario, Carmelina Martin was commissioned with the task of networking and supporting Ontario teachers who were currently delivering ministry-mandated dance curriculum. It was only four years earlier, in 1998, that the Ontario Ministry of Education produced a policy for dance education and published it for implementation. Subsequently, dance became a strand of the arts (Kindergarten to Grade 8) and a separate subject in grades 9-12. However, the reality and challenge of locating dance teachers to deliver this new dance curriculum across this large province was daunting. The vision for a province-wide dance conference began to emerge as a means of drawing teachers, students (recipients of dance education), and resources (the dance artist/professional) together in one central location. Through consultation with various stakeholders in dance education, the name of the conference was established as the Pulse Ontario Youth Dance Conference, and the idea became a reality.

The planning committee for Pulse was officially assembled in 2004 to begin building the architecture of this Conference. Its mandate was to support emerging/fledgling dance programs in the province, to support the development of new dance programs in under-serviced or rural Ontario, and to begin forging lasting relationships between educators and the professional dance community. With the unanimous support of the CODE executive, its management board, and York University's Dance Department as co-sponsor of the event, the planning committee for Pulse was assembled. The planning committee for the inaugural dance conference in 2006 included all of the stakeholders in dance education: elementary and secondary dance specialist teachers, CODE representatives, a York Dance Department representative, as well as professional dance artists. York's Dance Department had a keen interest in supporting Pulse, as there is a very strong strand of dance education in the curriculum whereby students may choose to complete their dance degree along with their Bachelor of Education. Students might also complete their B.Ed. consecutively. In addition, many teachers, both at the elementary and secondary level, were graduates of the York Program; it was quite natural for their alma mater to take an interest in the professional development of their alumni.

We developed the following goals to frame the Conference structure and to measure success:

- To initiate and support fledgling and established secondary dance programs in Ontario;

- To foster long-term relationships between youth, schools, and professional dance artists to animate the scope for dance in education and society;
- To bring youth and educators together for side-by-side learning;
- To encourage future dance-artist residencies and outreach in under-served communities;
- To support Ontario's policy expectations for secondary dance curriculum.

2006 Conference

The Pulse mandate was realized for the first time in May 2006 at York University in the newly constructed Accolade East Building, the new home of the Dance Department. This first conference included 24 dance workshops reflecting a diversity of forms and approaches to dance creation, a curated film festival on opening night with a keynote, followed by a facilitated icebreaker activity to inspire the delegation of 138 people from 20 schools across Ontario (including teachers). This allowed the Conference Committee to connect and to immediately gauge where the delegation stood on the topic of dance in education. Kick-starting the event in this way and providing an entry point into the kinds of thinking the Committee hoped the students and teachers would embark on was pivotal in shaping the full experience of the Conference.

In her keynote address, Canadian dance icon Peggy Baker (who started her dance training at the age of 19), relayed her very first experience meeting another dance icon, Martha Graham:

I think Martha Graham was the first person who really challenged me to have big ambitions about my dancing and I have struggled with that my whole life ... struggled with self doubt, and I know that's a struggle that I share with many, many people.

She remembers Graham teaching a class in her late 70s, sitting in a chair and with her eyes closed, explaining an exercise in images. At one point, she struggled out of her chair and challenged Peggy and her classmates asking, "Do you want to be dancers?" to which they all responded "Yes," and Graham chastised them saying, "No! Don't tell me you want to be a dancer; say that you are a dancer now!" Baker also recalled taking company class when she was a student on scholarship at the School of Toronto Dance Theatre. The tradition was that the least experienced dancers went first in the "across the floor" exercises. Peggy recalled:

That meant that you had to really concentrate and you had to have the guts to do what you could. The last people to dance the phrase were always the most senior company members, so you could look back after you had crossed the floor and see what you were working for.

When she later joined the Lar Lubovitch Company, she remembered "being totally amazed that the dancers in the company treated me like a friend and a peer; I felt completely out of my league." Peggy's moments of genuine humility about her own personal dance journey were inspirational to all the delegates. In addition to the keynote, the Conference included two evenings of live dance performances with programming that featured emerging and established dance artists in Ontario, such as Tilt (modern), Omo (contemporary jazz), James Dwyer (Duncan Reconstruction), Modesto Amagago (Ghanaian/community dance), Menaka Thakar (South Asian), and Julia Sasso (modern).

On the final day, the teachers had a special plenary session titled NUDGE (as in nudging our way forward). This session, facilitated by Christine Jackson of the Toronto District School Board, asked teachers to think about the dance curriculum. Christine posed such questions as: “What sorts of experiences might support teachers’ growth in delivering the curriculum?” and “How they, as dance educators, could help support this growth for other teachers, especially elementary teachers?” The focus of the plenary was to identify needs and priorities and to move toward action-oriented solutions. Teachers were organized in table groups, which included a variety of stakeholders so that the different constituents could voice their concerns within the context of dance education. Hopefully, such discussion would inspire connections, partnerships, and joint action plans. Jackson recognized that the discussion was rich, unearthing some of the counterpoints that needed to be tackled with respect to dance education in schools: validity, perceptions of dance, financial support, having the facilities to teach dance, qualifications for teachers, and the isolation felt by many dance educators. Jackson saw this plenary as an important opportunity to dialogue about the state of dance education in Ontario. She recalls, “[It] was at a critical juncture” because the review of the 1998 arts curriculum was just about to begin.

Overall, the 2006 Conference was successful in terms of realizing the Pulse mandate; it brought together the dance artist and the dance in education communities from around the province (secondary students and teachers) through dynamic workshops, performance evenings, socials, and visioning meetings. Conference delegates came from a variety of regions, as far as two hours away to the south and five hours away to the north. There were few delegates from the City of Toronto, perhaps owing to the many opportunities already enjoyed by these students and educators. Students reported that they had a wonderful time at the Conference and wished that it had been longer. One student mentioned that Pulse helped her “to lose the competition aspect.” Commenting on a contact improvisation dance class, she remarked, “It was amazing, I was on this tiny little girl’s shoulders ... like laying across her shoulders and ... it was possible. I have learned so much. Even just meeting people from all over the place, it’s been awesome to dance with [other people].” Many students requested more workshops, and artists enjoyed the energy and enthusiasm of the delegates in their workshops. Bengt Jorgen, artistic director of Ballet Jorgen, offered, “There is a sort of freshness and wonderment to someone who hasn’t done it [danced] before and knowing, perhaps if you [the teacher] do it right, you may turn them on to what you’re doing.” Peggy Baker suggested that Pulse was an important opportunity “for these students to be surrounded by other people who care about the same thing ... it’s fortifying.” The artists also appreciated the promotion on the Pulse website. The website not only provided workshop delegates (teachers and students) an opportunity to learn more about the artists with whom they would be working prior to arriving at the Conference, but it also provided contact information so that teachers could commission artistic residencies for their respective schools in the future. Having students connect with each other was an important part of the vision for the Conference. This vision was achieved and an overall sense of camaraderie was felt among the delegates themselves. Experiencing dance together in a non-competitive environment where experiential learning and discovery was the focus equalized all levels of dance students.

2008 Conference¹

For the second Pulse Conference in 2008, we received public funding from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) and the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF). For this conference, a second

¹ Pare, Chris and Jon Garcia. (2008). Pulse Doc 2008 [DVD]. Available from Carmelina Martin, carmelina.martin@peelsb.com

evening of live dance performances was added to the program, which included Little Pear Garden (Chinese classical/contemporary), Arabesque (belly dance), Ballet Creole (Afro-Caribbean/contemporary), Sampradaya (classical Indian), Kaeja d'Dance (contact improvisation-based contemporary), Santee Smith (contemporary First Nations), as well as 12 additional workshops. The number of delegates attending rose to a total of 205, representing 17 schools from around the province. Keynote speaker Lata Pada, a Canadian icon and exquisite Bharatanatyam dancer, discussed her heartbreaking journey, returning to dance after her husband and two children were killed in the Air India bombing in 1985, a devastating tragedy that affected many Canadians. Lata discussed how she came to the realization that in a very brief moment, her identity had completely shifted – she was no longer someone's mother and no longer someone's wife. Her only identity left intact was her identity as a performer, dancer, choreographer, and teacher. Through dance, Lata was able to find healing and restoration as she wrestled with her grief and loss, slowly rebuilding her identity within the context of that loss. She shared video footage of her very personal autobiography, *Consumed by Fire*, a deeply evocative work that animates her journey of struggle to make sense of this tragedy.

It was during this Conference that it became clear how useful documentaries could be for advocacy work and in supporting grant applications. The documentary created in 2008 unearthed some of the gender discrepancies in dance education in Ontario. It also highlighted some of the tensions between dance education and dance training. Many of the young men at the Conference discussed their passion for dance, and also their frustration with not having any previous dance education experience. They felt that they lagged behind the girls in their class in terms of technique. In the 2008 documentary, Courtney, a young black male from a small town just north of Toronto, explained, "Dance means everything, dance and music ... you put those two together, basically that's my life ... I can't live without it." As the camera caught Courtney taking a jazz class with Faye Rauw, he was standing off to the side, his face drawn, and his shoulders uplifted. Remembering the class, he reflected, "It was not my style at all. It was completely different doing spins. It's something I'm just not used to doing ... all these jumps and ballerina stuff. No, I'm not like that."

Jazz teacher Faye Rauw explained:

I went up to him specifically and I said, 'What's your forté?' and he explained, 'It's hip hop and break dancing,' and I said, 'Okay, show me that. Don't just show me four dancing walks, show me four hip hop walks: be specific about it.' And, he went into it and he did it, rather than it being a pivot turn it was more of his hip-hop style and I thought good for him for taking that initiative and [having] that confidence in himself and putting that forward ... for not being afraid in a modern-jazz class.

At the end of the 2008 documentary, Courtney offered, "Dance just got a whole lot bigger for me." This comment became an anthem for the Pulse Committee – an important piece of evidence that the Conference was achieving its goals of broadening teachers' and students' perspectives on what dance might be.

Another male student, Matthew, from a city one hour north of Toronto, explained, "I started late. I don't like to look 10 or 20 years into the future to think how good of a dancer am I going to be then, I think of how great of a dancer I could be now." Matthew stated that of all the dance forms

he experienced at the Conference over the weekend, Chinese dance was the hardest for him. “I found that a lot of the movement was similar to what I’m used to, like the jumping, but we were using these frilly fans and it was just so hard to get used to using them and paying attention to the actual choreography at the same time.” Zihao Li, Chinese dance specialist, said of Matthew, “He has potential; he’s definitely really into it. He reminds me of the movie *Billy Elliot*, that little boy, but a bigger version. He’s really into the dance and hopefully he can continue dancing.”

Many of the Pulse artists remarked on how special the Conference was for them – it was an opportunity to connect with a whole other generation of the dance community and with teachers. Afro-Caribbean specialist Andrea Douglas, remarked, “I wanted them to be themselves and let go. They were not afraid to take risks and I thought that was amazing.” Carmelina Martin noted that she brought 11 students to the 2008 Conference and 10 have continued on in dance – two students entered the Dance Program at York University that fall. Pulse 2008 was also a turning point for Niko Markakis (seen as a York Dance Ambassador in the 2012 documentary). It was after attending Pulse 2008 that he changed his major from drama to dance. Influenced by Pulse, Niko became a dance major and excelled in the program. In 2008, the teacher plenary, once again facilitated by Christine Jackson, was titled REACH in order to highlight the advocacy efforts of the two previous years and to emphasize the teachers’ readiness to reach across the Province of Ontario, across subject disciplines, across grades, and across institutional boundaries to our arts community partners. Two speakers were invited to help provide some context for dance education partnerships: Nasreen Khan, Arts Education Officer, and Miles Warren, Dance and Awards Officer. Both represented the Ontario Arts Council. In table groups, delegates discussed artist-teacher partnerships and developed metaphors to describe them: “The artist-teacher-student partnership is an ecosystem which is a shared responsibility that promotes the intrinsic values of movement as essential to spiritual literacy.” It was recognized that these partnerships provide “a long-term effect to a singular experience for some students ... They can bring students to an understanding that something else is out there.” In addition, policy/advocacy statements were developed: “Dance nourishes, enriches, communicates, and teaches about self and community in ways that profoundly shape the dancer and numerous facets of his/her world.” It was recognized that advocacy efforts need to be focused towards principals, superintendents, and directors of education, as well as parents. Teacher Sue Zaro found the plenary useful: “I thought the teacher plenary was very useful, especially the introduction of the Ontario Arts Council Officers. I brought in guest artist Andrea Nann through them. I also brought in guest artists from other Pulse workshops to my school.”

2010 Conference²

The male presence at the 2008 conference became an important theme for the Committee members (there were three male Committee members). It was for this reason that the former National Ballet of Canada soloist, Rex Harrington, was invited to be the keynote speaker for the 2010 conference. Rex spoke of his mentally ill mother taking him to audition for the National Ballet School because she noticed he liked to move and was a very kinetic child. When he was accepted, she arranged for him to stay in an adult boarding house and promptly left him to fend for himself. The Ballet School recognized that this young 13-year-old child was living on his own in a boarding house and decided to have him move to the Ballet School’s residence. Rex reflects that the people at the National Ballet School became his family. He was quite literally raised by

² Pare, Chris and Jon Garcia. (2010). Pulse Doc 2010 [DVD]. Available from Carmelina Martin, carmelina.martin@peelsb.com

the staff of the Ballet School and its residents. He reflected how, upon his retirement, he had located his mother and tried to bring her to Toronto to see his final show, as she had never seen her son dance. Sadly, his mother did not make it to the show. When he went looking for her after his performance later that evening, he found her confused and disoriented inside Pearson International Airport. He took her home with him and showed her a video of him dancing his last performance, thanking her for the gift she'd given him. He recognized that his success in the ballet world was because she had him audition for the Ballet School. Rex offered that our passion is revealed to others and to ourselves, sometimes in the most unexpected ways, and that somehow his mother knew that ballet was to be his home and his family. His talent and passion was nurtured there and he was adopted into a much bigger family, a place that he could call home. He encouraged the 2008 delegates to nurture their passions and to find those places and those people who will encourage their journey and become their family, their community. He acknowledged that Pulse was a place where their passion could be ignited, a place where they will find like-minded people who will care for them and get them started on their path in dance. A dance family became the unspoken theme for the evening.

Two students were keynote speakers at this Conference: Chris Pattenden and Courtney Dyer. Chris was in his final year of high school in 2008 and had attended three Pulse Conferences (he had completed an extra "lap" year). In his keynote address, Chris admitted that he started dance late (in Grade 9):

I wasn't expecting what I found when I started dance ... It was probably the first time someone ever told me I was good at something, that I really felt like I was creating and experiencing and using my body for something. The support and life it breathed back into my life that first year alone was spectacular. Before that, I was falling apart slowly.

He described dance as an "anchor ... the ever-changing ebb and flow of life ... It's the gateway to the inner soul of a person ... a chance for the world to see the real you. There is an inner beauty that you can find in a single movement that can't be described by words." Chris's words seemed to transform the audience that evening – the entire audience was in tears as they listened to his speech. Chris went on to explain what Pulse meant to him:

I guess something I've always taken from Pulse is a chance for new experiences, new people, new teachers, new dances, new passion, and confidence to get right up at the front of class every day and say, 'So what if I screw up? I'm here to learn and be me.' This is my third trip here and if I could, I'd never stop coming.

Carmelina relayed an anecdote from a potent conversation she had with Courtney. He came to Pulse in 2008 and was returning as a delegate and an invited keynote speaker because of the remarkable statement he made on the 2008 documentary, "Dance just got a whole lot bigger for me." She wanted to know how dance had gotten bigger for him and asked him this very question. Courtney disclosed that before his first Pulse conference, he made a daily visit to the principal's office. He said:

I had a problem with anger and violence. At home, that's all I saw. So that's all I did, too. I fought every day at school. After Pulse, I stopped fighting. I found

an outlet for my anger and aggression, and that was dance. After Pulse, I stopped going to the principal's office.

Six months later, he auditioned for a regional arts school in his district because he decided that he wanted to learn ballet and modern. He knew that he would need that background so that he could prepare himself to audition for the Dance Program at York University. In his keynote, he spoke about the transformation of his behaviour, finding an outlet for his negative attitude in a dance environment, and how his personality and life changed after his experience with Pulse. The experiences at the Conference had catapulted him into the world of dance beyond Hip Hop. He acknowledged that the sense of connection and the feeling of a dance family created at Pulse connected with him deeply. He reflected that he had not had that same connection with his own family.

The 2010 plenary session was named GRASP. In an effort to move forward in our advocacy work for dance education, teachers created Action items that spoke to ways in which teachers could more effectively voice their opinions and views on dance for youth in schools.

2012 Conference³

The planning committee for the 2012 Pulse conference grew; four new members joined the team, including former Pulse delegate Chris Pattenden, who had attended three Pulse Conferences as a student. Three dance scholars, all with their own areas of expertise in dance education, also became part of the committee: Zihao Li (with a research focus on boys in dance), Jennifer Bolt (with a research focus on transitions in dance), and Mary Fogarty (with a research focus on street dance). With Jennifer's leadership, the Free Flow symposium was planned for the afternoon of the first day of the Conference. This symposium brought together dance and education scholars, secondary school teachers and students, and dance artists in a conversation that centered around transitions in dance education. One Grade Nine student expressed in a small group discussion, "I didn't know people were even asking these questions." Four of our committee members (Zihao Li, Marc Richard, Blake Martin, and Jennifer Bolt) presented their research:

- **Dr. Zihao Li:** Swimming Up Stream: The State of Dance Education in Ontario High Schools;
- **Marc Richard:** Making the learning visible in creative dance education;
- **Blake Martin:** The Past 50,000 years: A (very) brief history of dance, cognition, and education;
- **Jennifer Bolt:** The transition experience of the Canadian University Dance Major.

In small groups, the symposium delegates discussed their own experiences with dance education from elementary to secondary school. They also shared what they felt had been missing from those experiences. One student mentioned that dance in school was important because of the team spirit: "I felt like I was a part of a sport." One teacher mentioned her frustrations with some high school programs: "People are literally running studios out of their high schools, sending kids to competitions." One male student admitted, "I took dance as a fluke – I had an extra course and I like to dance in my room by myself, so why not?" One graduate student offered that we need to look for our own definitions of dance: "Those moments where you realized what dance was for

³ Rasbach, Pamela. (2012). Pulse Doc 2012 [DVD]. Available from Carmelina Martin, carmelina.martin@peelsb.com

you and what was missing from your definition in order to be empathetic to other people's experiences of dance." Each group presented the major ideas from their group discussions. We talked about these ideas further, and four themes emerged:

- barriers versus access;
- process versus product;
- isolation of dance educators versus community of dance educators;
- dance teaching versus dance training.

On the Saturday afternoon of the Conference, these themes from the symposium were brought to the plenary session, titled FLOW. Elementary and secondary teachers reflected on the four themes, which had been placed around the room on chart paper. Teachers were asked to gravitate towards the theme that resonated the most for them and to add comments, reflections, and visions.

New in the 2012 Pulse Conference was the inclusion of a one-day workshop for elementary school (Kindergarten to Grade 8) teachers, led by Marc Richard. This workshop, "Teaching the Joy of Creative Dance," allowed teachers to explore (with the elements of dance) creating short phrases in partners and groups. This group of teachers included generalists with no experience teaching dance, some with a few years experience, and even a music teacher who will be teaching dance in his school. For many of the teachers, it seemed to be a transformational experience as they witnessed each other as dancers. One teacher who works in a segregated special needs class explained that she often puts on music and lets her students dance freely. She hadn't yet explored the possibilities of a more structured approach to creative dance by offering some scaffolding of the creative process. In this workshop, she admitted to discovering something from her past, the elements of dance. As it turned out, this teacher was a graduate of the Edna Manley College in Jamaica (site of the daCi 2009 Conference), and she had many formative experiences with creating dance, but had not brought these experiences to her own teaching. She realized that this was a piece of her that had been missing as a teacher – using her body. Marc Richard also shared some of the pedagogical documentation panels from his current Ph.D. research. One elementary school teacher remarked that she had been considering doing a Master's degree, but until then, hadn't thought of dance education as a topic of research. This experience seemed to open up a new world to her.

In her keynote address at the 2012 Conference, Stephanie Brinning relayed how she had attended her first Pulse Conference with a broken leg. She described a moment in a contact improvisation class:

The teacher offered to be my partner. I remember sitting on a stack of floor mats and mirroring her as our hands connected. She told us all to close our eyes and let our bodies connect and move freely as they wanted to. It was nothing like I had ever experienced before. That one-hour and [a] half taught me a very important lesson not just about dance, but about life: there are always going to be roadblocks in your journey towards your future, and how you grow as a person is figuring out a way to break through your insecurities and to figure out a way to be you and do what you love no matter what the obstacles are.

She recognized that Pulse allowed her to see the creative differences we share as dancers:

I realized there was more than one way to move your body ... that there was more than one way people could move their bodies. Later on, I realized that people enjoy watching things that are different and unique. At Pulse, I learned not to play it safe and learned how to create my own free movement ... I learned how to be myself more. For those three days, I experienced more culture, movement, and passion than I ever had in my entire life. Pulse made me realize that you shouldn't dance for anyone else but yourself. It taught me that you don't have to be able to kick your leg up past your face in order to be extraordinary. Everyone is extraordinary in their own unique way.

Stephanie acknowledged the important role her high school teacher played in encouraging her to nurture her creativity and to realize that she wanted to pursue dance.

In the 2012 documentary, a fourth year York University Dance Ambassador remembered his 2008 Pulse Conference experience as his introduction to Western styles of dance and multicultural dances; the experience opened a door for him, making him realize that he wanted to continue dancing. Teacher Kim Wylde articulated that it was eye opening for her students to see her dancing with them. Contact improvisation teacher/artist Allen Kaeja said, "We work so hard to know what we are doing, but it is important for us to realize how essential not knowing is." Student Sarah Langlois described how at the 2010 Conference, she "left all her fears and negativity behind and just went with it ... and that changed me for the next two years and I've grown a lot since then. For this Conference, I'm feeling a lot more confident, I'm not looking around and judging. I'm just here for the experience and to be real." Peggy Baker noticed, "A lot of big things can happen just in a single workshop. The practice of dance is one of transformation – it happens over the long term, one class, one day at a time." Student Daniel Beard described how overjoyed he was when Peggy Baker asked him to teach the class a movement he had created. Student Berlina Tan describes herself as a new dancer: "I was kind of nervous at first, but experiencing these workshops and meeting new people made me feel more comfortable in being myself, so I guess I felt more open." Student Precilla Snichar described how teacher Andrea Nann "goes very deep and really captures the inner sense of what you are – it was a very powerful workshop; I learned a lot from it." One student expressed, "I really liked how there were all different styles of dance and not just the studio type, which I'm used to." Students began to see the connection between different dance styles. Student Nathaniel Mitchell recognized, "A lot of styles are connected, and the deeper you go in any one style, you'll find a move that is similar to another one – house, dance hall, ballet, jazz, contemporary ... all have pas de bourrées in them."

Student Daniel Beard described his Pulse experience after the fact: "I felt like life had fast forwarded to the future and I was where I belonged." Daniel's classmate, Tamarra Zlicic, related her experience of Pulse as "a trip that changed [her] life forever." She recalled how she was at first "anxious and hesitant" because she knew that she "was going to be surrounded by dancers way past [her] level of experience." She recalled walking into her first class, contact improvisation with Allen Kaeja: "I saw a room full of dancers stretching in complex ways, their faces looked hard, powerful; they were intimidating to watch." She panicked when trying to find a partner, but located "someone who looked just as lost as [she] was." She recalled:

At first, we practiced transferring our weight onto each other, and we found

that we could effectively carry each other. Soon after, we learned jumps, and together we did not jump, we flew! We were so comfortable with each other and we trusted each other ... by the end of the workshop, I found myself walking out of the studio, grinning from cheek to cheek with a sense of accomplishment ... I was learning so much about dance ... not only that, I learned to be confident, I learned to trust people, and though I had only known them for two days, it seemed like they understood me.

At the post mortem after the conference, committee member Chris Pattenden reflected on his recent experience with Pulse:

This year I would get to walk into the room for our monthly meetings with the people who have inspired me as an artist and as [a] human being for the majority of my adolescent life! There were so many students, teachers, and so many bodies moving and unpredictable circumstances, and that changed my thoughts on the Conference as a whole. To understand that you are the student's gateway to directions and information, a role model. To see that 'AHA! moment' when someone suddenly has the metaphorical atom bomb of understanding drop onto their head. You will see it on their face! Their eyes light up and the movement that comes from their body is like ... nothing else!

In his keynote address, Hip-Hop artist Mariano Abarca suggested to the delegates:

Ask questions, don't settle for anything less. You are a scientist of this art form. Remember that. So no matter what anyone tells you, don't take that as concrete evidence; you make your own decisions. Search as much as you can. If something feels good, do it. Have fun – it's about having fun, partying, dancing. If you're not having fun, you need to make a choice.

In the documentary, Abarca expressed:

Believing in yourself, that you can obtain anything, that's a big hurdle that we have as human beings, and unless you have something that can give you an example or can re-create that feeling in a different environment, you don't know what it feels like and we all need to know what it feels like, to use it in our real life situations.

One Grade 12 dance student from east Toronto, the student keynote speaker, Stephanie Brinning, remarked, "I just stopped caring what other people thought and it's now more about what I think about myself. She further stated, "My parents think I need a fall back, but they don't understand the concept that dance is my life and will be my life for the rest of my life."

Conclusion

The Pulse Conferences, as documented in three 5-minute videos, tell the story of how dance students grow, change, and are affected in a multitude of ways by their experiences in these four-day events. They grow in their understanding of the range of dance styles and forms available to them; they change in their attitudes towards their own capabilities in dance, towards forms of dance that might have been quite unusual for them, or towards competition in classes; and they

are deeply affected by the stories, values, and honesty shared by keynote speakers, artists, guest teachers, students, dance ambassadors, and others. The delegates take away a new understanding of their world as dancers. With renewed energy and perspective, they become advocates for dance education. Simply stated, one could not ask for better ambassadors.

© 2012, Marc Richard, Carmelina Martin, Mary-Elizabeth Manley

Mr. Marc Richard is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Faculty of Education at York University, where he also received his M.A. in Dance (2009) and his Bachelor of Education (1990). For the Halton District School Board, he has worked as a generalist classroom teacher, a dance and drama curriculum writer, workshop presenter, as well as an artist in education. Marc teaches part-time in the Musical Theatre Department at Sheridan College, and in the Dance Department at York University. Mr. Richard continues to be an advocate for the arts at all levels of education, but especially in Ontario's elementary schools.

A 2011 Ontario Premier Award recipient for Teacher of the Year, **Carmelina Martin** is recognized for her innovative teaching approaches in dance. Ms. Martin has been involved in a variety of provincial and national projects, including shaping policy for dance; curriculum writing and reviewing; Dance Additional Qualification writing and teaching for York University; presenting at UNESCO on Arts and Learning; presenting as a panelist at the National Roundtable for Teacher Education in the Arts in Ottawa; and founding and directing the Pulse Ontario Youth Dance Conference.

Since 1974, Professor **Mary-Elizabeth Manley** has taught a broad range of courses in the Dance Department at York University, including studio courses in modern technique, improvisation, and composition, and lecture courses in pedagogy, education, dance science, and community arts practice. Professor Manley's research and publications have focused on creative and modern dance pedagogy, dance education, choreography and performance for and by young people, and community arts practice. With Professors Ann Kipling Brown and Charlotte Svendler Nielsen, Professor Manley has edited *daCi's First 30 Years: Rich Returns*, an anthology comprised of papers from *daCi Conference Proceedings*, 1978 to 2009, and published in July 2012.

All citations of this paper from this source should include the following information:

In S.W. Stinson, C. Svendler Nielsen & S-Y. Liu (Eds.), *Dance, young people and change: Proceedings of the daCi and WDA Global Dance Summit*. Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan, July 14th – 20th 2012. <http://www.ausdance.org/> [Accessed on xx date]
ISBN 978-1-875255-19-1