

## **Igniting a collaborative practice**

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### Abstract

Dance has been present in the Ontario (Canada) elementary curriculum for over 50 years – our first creative dance curriculum occurred in *Physical Education for Primary Schools* (1955). The Ministry of Education has recently delivered a brand new arts policy document (2009) with dance as one of four (arts) strands alongside music, visual arts, and drama. Yet dance education remains on the periphery of education, and in many schools remains a null curriculum. The Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE), a provincial subject association (for teachers), works to support the cause of dance in schools, but we do not as of yet have a national dance education association, since education in Canada is a provincial concern. There is only one Faculty of Education in the province that provides teacher training in dance education (specifically at the secondary level), and the opportunities at the other faculties range from three-hour workshops to no information at all for elementary teacher candidates. We recognize that as dance educators, we need to become political advocates. We also recognize that as dance educators, we need to band together to ensure that fellow teachers are being supported with professional development opportunities that can hopefully challenge the dominant domains in education.

Our newest elementary arts curriculum (Ministry, 2009) emphasizes *The Creative Process* as well as *The Critical Analysis Process*. In terms of dance education, this has proven very challenging for the generalist elementary teacher and leads to questions about how individual school boards have managed to cope with the need for professional development for their teachers in the area of dance education. In the Peel District School Board (part of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)), it was the dance teachers themselves who, in 2004, created a professional

learning community. The Peel Dance Teachers Association (PDTA) is a model of collaboration for other provincial, national, and global districts. As an association, our collective vision is to ensure the highest quality of dance in education instruction by supporting teachers via professional development activities, workshops, locally driven conferences, and collaboratively organized and district-wide student dance showcases.

The PDTA has recently piloted a mentoring project between experienced and novice dance educators. We see this as action research that bridges collaborative inquiry and participatory action research, and encourages teachers to bring actual evidence to their reflections and to engage in professional discussions with other teachers about their practice. We are interested in developing a community of inquiry among dance educators. We focused our research on four main questions:

1. How can an on-going collaborative relationship between an instructional coach (mentor) and a collaborating partner (mentee) develop a richer teaching practice for both participants? In other words, how much does the collaborative relationship affect “change” in teaching practice?
2. How will the collaborative relationship develop confidence in becoming more engaged and invested in implementing the dance curriculum?
3. How can this model of collaboration sustain itself?
4. How can this model help build a professional learning community of dance educators within a school board?

This report provides insight into this project, including our methodology and preliminary results and how we as teachers are documenting and developing this action research project in conjunction with our school board. Additionally, we will discuss our next steps for how we plan to customize this program for the needs of the teachers within our district.

*Keywords:* teachers, professional development, mentoring, collaboration

In response to UNESCO’s Seoul Agenda, we realize that dance education needs to assert its place in developing the “imagination economy.” To do this, we need to embrace the development of the conceptual dancer by embracing the concepts of creativity and critical analysis as outlined in our newest Ontario Arts (Ministry, 2009) curriculum document. We need to see ourselves as creativity educators who use the “body” as a canvas for exploration. We follow in the footsteps of British initiatives, such as the National Advisory Committee on Creativity, Culture, and Education (NACCE), and organizations such as Creative Partnerships, which, as Jobbins (2006) attests, “has led to a concern to re-dress the balance in favour of more innovative and creative practice in schools” (p. 55). Our current standardized curriculum in Ontario places extreme pressures on elementary teachers for accountability on literacy and numeracy test scores, and in such a climate, embodied creative dance education becomes a low priority.

We recognize that as dance educators, we need to “enter the political domain” in order to “develop advocacy and lobbying skills to ensure that dance has a voice” (Jobbins, 2006, p. 59).

We also recognize that as dance educators, we need to band together to ensure that fellow teachers are being supported with professional development opportunities that can hopefully challenge the dominant domains (literacy and numeracy) in education. Although many current models of arts educators' professional development includes partnerships in which teachers learn from expert artist-teachers (e.g. Learning Through The Arts and Creative Partnerships), very few models have investigated how in-service teachers can learn about dance education from one another and how this might influence their praxis.

The Peel Dance Teachers Association (PDTA) has recently piloted a mentoring project between experienced and novice dance educators. We see this as action research in the tradition of Lewin (1946) and aligning with a description set out by Cochrane and McGuigan (2011), who see action research as a process of constant reflection, an "iterative process – a thoughtful inquiry that is acted out and tested in practice" (p. 47). These researchers encourage teachers to bring some actual evidence to their reflections, "to prove that what you're doing works" (p. 51), and to engage in professional discussions with other teachers with the result that they are "genuinely thinking about their own practice and thinking about real learners in real-life situations" (p. 49). The concept of the reflective practitioner refers to the work of Schon (1983), who argued for an ongoing development of knowledge found in the action of teaching. We, like Cochrane and McGuigan, are interested in developing a community of inquiry among dance educators.

### **The Peel District School Board**

The Peel District School Board, located just west of Toronto in Ontario, Canada, is the second largest school board in the country. The enrollment in Peel is 152,755, and of that, there are 108,503 elementary students (ages 3-13) and 44,252 secondary students (ages 14-18). In 2009, the Arts curriculum (elementary) was revised to include dance as a separate strand. Prior to this, drama and dance were combined as one strand (Ministry, 1998). The following year, a report card amendment was put in place to include dance as a strand that needed to be reported on by elementary teachers on the report card for a minimum of one out of two terms in the school year.

Although Dance is a provincially mandated subject for elementary students, the implementation of the curriculum varies from school to school and board to board throughout the province of Ontario. Inconsistencies with implementation of the dance curriculum are due to a variety of factors: little to no teacher preparation in the pre-service teacher training programs at Faculties of Education across the province; a limited number of providers for additional qualification courses in dance education; a limited number of dance education experts throughout the various school boards. Adding to these problems is the existence of a lost generation of students who received few arts experiences as students in the mid- to late-1990s, when the standardized curriculum and accountability measures were first implemented. These students are now our current elementary teachers. For all of the above reasons, it is not surprising that many generalist elementary teachers are uncomfortable with the idea of teaching or integrating dance into their programming.

### **The Peel Dance Teachers' Association**

The Peel Dance Teachers' Association (PDTA), established in 2005, came out of a need to establish a professional learning community of dance educators and to provide expertise and professional development opportunities for teachers across the district. This fledgling association

of a small group of elementary and secondary teachers came together to carve out a vision and mission statement, grounded in action-oriented goals by crafting six pillars to anchor the vision.

The Peel Dance Teachers' Association is committed to celebrating, advocating, and facilitating the growth and integrity of dance as an art form in Peel. The Six Pillars of the PDTA are:

1. Meaningful, diverse dance education for students.
2. Meaningful, professional development for teachers.
3. Celebrate and share dance.
4. Communication with other Boards.
5. Facilitate the growth of Dance in Peel.
6. Advocacy for the integrity of dance as an art form.

Once the PDTA was founded, it needed an initial vehicle for implementing the vision of the organization. The Peel Dance Showcase was created so that students from across the board could come together and share the curriculum-based or extra-curricular dance pieces they had been working on in their schools. This year (2012), the 8th Annual Peel Dance Showcase was held. What started as a small showcase with six schools in a high school auditorium has grown to over 500 students aged 8-18 in a world-class, professional theatre venue with 3000 seats called the Living Arts Centre. Not only has this showcase become an advocacy piece for dance education, but because it sells out, the showcase has become a money-making venture that further supports the development of dance through dance education scholarships.

The association has been flourishing since 2005. Teacher leaders emerged from the Association and have been developing and designing professional development initiatives for teachers within the district so that teacher needs regarding the implementation of the dance curriculum could be addressed. The PDTA became a thriving professional community as generalist elementary teachers reached out for support and assistance with the implementation of the new curriculum. Workshops ranged from lessons linked to literary texts for the primary and junior classroom to specific instruction in a variety of dance styles for secondary school teachers. Inviting guest artists to support teacher learning in dance was also included in the yearly roster of teacher experiences planned during the school year. When the newly revised arts curriculum was rolled out in 2009, the emphasis of the Association became focused on designing workshops that targeted skills involving programming, planning, and the assessment of a well-balanced dance program within the generalist teacher's classroom. Additional opportunities and resources for teachers included the creation of new and innovative resources that support the new curriculum. The leadership capacity keeps evolving in the association as our leaders are becoming involved in provincial, national, and international dance-in-education initiatives as participants or presenters in conferences. The teacher leaders continue to infuse their learning and experience into the design of hands-on experiences for a growing membership within the Peel Dance Teachers Association.

It is common practice within the executive committee of Peel Dance Teachers' Association to annually revisit our Association's six pillars (as stated above) for the purpose of reflection, refocusing, and establishing the next steps for our members. One of our next steps was to form an action research team with the mandate to envision and write a collaborative inquiry

framework to support “meaningful, professional development for teachers, to support meaningful, diverse dance education for students, so that we can facilitate growth of dance in Peel” (PDTA Pillars). Our initial steps included soliciting support from our school board through an existing program, which specifically focused on teacher development. As a result of a meeting with the coordinator of The New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), a proposal was presented to customize this existing program to meet the specific dance education needs of the generalist (elementary) teacher.

### **The Collaborative Dance Inquiry Project**

Our project involved designing a framework in which an expert dance educator could work alongside a novice dance educator supporting their learning goals, teaching practice, and implementation of the dance curriculum via a project we called the Collaborative Dance Inquiry Project (CDIP). Using the NTIP template that was designed to assist new teachers through a program of orientation, mentorship, and professional development, the CDIP was able to take advantage of board resources (both personnel and research) to develop a strategy for implementation. Although the NTIP model met the majority of our needs, we realized that our target audience was not necessarily new teachers, but, rather, teachers new to dance; therefore, our programming would need to recognize this distinction, as many of our participants would come with a wealth of classroom experience and knowledge. It was for this reason that we focused on the strategy of coaching, as described by Knight (2007). Although Knight (2007) outlines a number of different styles of coaching, the Instructional Coach presented the partnerships with the most effective method for enhancing their practices by addressing the potential range of needs the collaborating teacher might present, whether it be classroom management, content, teaching practices, or assessment (p.13). We embraced Knight’s (2007) seven partnership principles to help guide our building of the collaborative partner relationships:

- Equality – In a collaborative partnership, it is important that the coach and partner consider themselves equal. While the coach may have more subject knowledge than her/his partner, the partner still has ideas or insights of value.
- Choice – It is important to offer collaborating partners the choice to explore what is of interest to them within the given framework so that they can choose a topic to explore that will be meaningful to their teaching practice.
- Voice – It is important in partnerships that every voice count and teachers feel safe to express their points of view. The coach must create an environment where the voice of the collaborating partner is honoured.
- Reflection – A coach’s job is to provide their partner with experiences and information, and allow her to make her own decisions. “Partners don’t do the thinking for their partners. Rather, they empower their partners to do the thinking” (p. 36-37).
- Dialogue – This principle embraces theories of social constructivism (i.e., partners are constructing the learning together). “Dialogue is talking with the goal of digging deeper and exploring ideas together...” (p. 38). It is important that dialogue is learning-centered: “In dialogue, we display the gaps in our thinking for everyone to see. If we want to learn, we can’t hide behind a dishonest veneer of expertise” (p. 40).
- Praxis – “When we act on the principle of praxis, teachers have the opportunities to think about how to apply new ideas to their real-life practices... praxis is enabled when

teachers have a chance to explore, prod, stretch, and re-create whatever it is they are studying” (p. 42-43).

- Reciprocity – “Reciprocity is the belief that each learning interaction is an opportunity for everyone to learn” (p. 44). Both people in the coaching relationship are the teacher and the learner, regardless of their experience or number of years teaching.

Knight’s (2007) approach is embraced by the Peel District School Board as a means of developing ongoing relationships between teachers (i.e., building collaborative and collegial cultures in schools and job-embedded professional development). As one of the instructional coaches in his book states:

Quick fixes never last and teachers resent them; they resent going to inservices where someone is going to tell me what to do but not help them follow up. Teachers want someone that’s going to be there, that’s going to help them for the duration, not a fly-by-night program that’s here today and gone tomorrow. (Barnes, as cited in Knight, 2007, p. 1)

### **Other relevant literature**

Although Dyer and Loytonen (2012) recognize that teacher collaboration is “a grossly under-researched area within dance education,” other investigations into action research and instructional coaching beyond dance education have helped to guide this research project. Jaipal and Figg (2011) report that a group of Ontario teachers’ “personal and professional practice were more deeply influenced by their participation in self-selected action research, rather than participation in board-organized professional development” (p. 70). Hicks (2005) suggests that “the mentoring relationship at its core is a mutually enhancing relationship for both mentor and protégé,” but also unearthed potentially dysfunctional experiences, such as bullying, sabotage, spoiling, submissiveness, harassment, and theoretical abuse (pp. 3-4). Cole and Knowles (1993) recognize four challenges to teacher action research that they categorize as technical/logistic issues (issues of time and space), personal issues (issues around working collaboratively), procedural issues (issues in conducting research), and ethical issues (related to conducting ethical research).

This report provides insight into this project, including our methodology and preliminary findings, and how we as teachers are documenting and developing this action research project in conjunction with our school board. Our research questions include:

1. How can an on-going collaborative relationship between an instructional coach (mentor) and a collaborating partner (mentee) develop a richer teaching practice for both participants? In other words, how much does the collaborative relationship affect “change” in teaching practice?
2. How will the collaborative relationship develop confidence to become more engaged and invested in implementing the dance curriculum?
3. How can this model of collaboration sustain itself?
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### **Project timeline**

This study employed qualitative research methods to investigate the impact of a facilitated and supported action research process on the professional development of eight dance educators/generalist teachers. The action research team began designing the project in July 2011. The first meeting of the action research team with the participating teachers took place in October 2011. The teachers spent the school year collaborating, and the final meeting for the research phase of the project took place in late April 2012.

### **Terms**

- **Elementary:** In Ontario, “elementary” grades refer to Junior Kindergarten (4 years old) to grade 8 (13 years old);
- **Generalist Teacher:** In Ontario, a generalist teacher implies that they teach all core subjects (i.e., language, social studies, math, history, science, geography, arts [dance, drama, music, visual arts], physical education, etc.);
- **Instructional Coach:** Sometimes referred to as a mentor;
- **Collaborating Partner:** Sometimes referred to as mentee;
- **S.M.A.R.T. goals:** S – specific, M – measurable, A – attainable, R – relevant, T – timely.

### **Process of selecting the candidates**

In the summer of 2011, after the collaborative dance inquiry framework and materials were created, the team selected and invited several known and experienced dance educators to become instructional coaches. Four accepted the invitation to join the pilot program. The pilot project was introduced at the yearly fall launch of the PDTA and participants were invited to submit their names if they desired to be an instructional coach. Based on proximity and grade level, teachers were partnered up with a coach/collaborative partner. All instructional coaches worked with collaborating partners from another school. This came out of our desire to build the community, and since these teachers were volunteers, we did not necessarily have teacher partners in the same school. Not all collaborating teachers taught the same grade or had the same teaching assignments for that year (e.g. one teacher may be a classroom teacher while another is a rotary teacher, going class to class teaching dance).

### **Training and equipping the instructional coaches and collaborating partners**

Once the partners were established, a school board-supported release day was given for the collaborating partners and instructional coaches to train and equip for the inquiry, and the model for collaboration was presented. Each collaborating teacher received a Jim Knight resource entitled: “Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction.”<sup>1</sup> Collaborating partners established their own professional development (SMART) goals. These goals ranged from:

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<sup>1</sup>Jim Knight was also a guest presenter for a day-long conference on instructional coaching, which the pilot partners were invited to attend.

- Teacher-centered goals
  - The implementation of the creative process through our work both in the classroom and the planning process with a focus on feedback and reflection.
- Student-centered goals
  - We want to build and increase the frequency of the movement vocabulary that the students use to help deepen their understanding of the elements of dance.
- Goals centered on the teacher-student relationship
  - The instructional strategy we will be focusing on is co-constructing the success criteria with our students.

Additionally, teachers were led through an experiential session of contact dance as a metaphor for collaboration. As action researchers, we believed that in order for “novice” dance educators to embrace dance as an integrative teaching tool for their classrooms, we needed to model an embodied approach to experiential learning so that teachers could embody their own learning when it came to exploring the concept of collaboration.

The action research team shared the research questions and plans for the project. Instructional coaches were to teach a model class for the collaborating partner in their own schools, followed by an interview where the partners discussed their observations and surfaced questions. Collaborating partners, in turn, would plan an implementation class where they would teach at their own school. All aspects of the project were to be documented using video cameras and reflective journals, as well as audio recorded interviews and conversations. Media release waivers were signed for video and audio documentation purposes.

Video documentation was crucial to our methodology because as Wien (1991) points out, “visual data offers an engaging mirror to the teacher,” allowing her to “step outside her lived experience and see it from a novel perspective” (p. 60). Wien (1991) recognizes that this video data is not a replication of the teacher’s lived experience because she is able to respond to herself as a stranger (seeing it from the outside), while at the same time being intimately connected to what the stranger is doing (p. 61).

Collaborating teachers organized an action plan with timelines. The collaborating partners planned their lesson plans with their instructional coaches guiding them and their ideas. Each collaborating pair submitted their timelines and plans so that arrangements could be made to visit those schools with a camera team to document. The teachers were also mandated to collaborate on a piece for the Peel Dance Showcase in April and they were asked to document this process. The intention was to put some gentle pressure on the collaborating partners to raise the stakes and to give a sense of purpose to the process.



Parallel to our research project, three Peel-wide dance workshops centered on the theme of collaboration were designed as templates for collaboration between teachers (from the same or different schools, same or different panels) to support the Peel Dance Showcase theme of collective creations between schools or teachers across the whole system. These workshops also served to support the instructional coaching pilot program. Collaborating teachers scheduled their own meeting and planning times to work on their collective creation for the Showcase.

Collaborating partners were given a release day in April and guided through a final reflection, first re-visiting their professional development (S.M.A.R.T.) goals, and looking at their footage of both the model class and the implementation classes, and then re-connecting with the same embodied contact improvisation experience as introduced at the first meeting.

### **Data generation**

We amassed close to 30 hours of video footage from the two project meetings and the participants' school visits, which also included their reflective discussions after the lesson. Each team wrote initial and final reflection pieces, and these conversations were audiotaped. We also audio recorded their reflections as they watched the video footage of their classroom visits. In this sense, the video footage became the third party in the partnership. The participants were asked to record their own journal entries throughout the process, but this turned out to be a daunting task due to time constraints.

### **Data analysis**

We launched the pilot project in October 2011 and completed the research phase of the pilot in April 2012. It was intended that our video and audio data be transcribed in order for use in the analysis process. With the demanding workload of two full-time teachers, a full-time Ph.D. student, and a full-time [new] mother, there was not time to create full transcriptions, so instead, the research team opted for a preliminary viewing of the video footage and listening to the audio footage, as well as a transcription of selected moments, in order to uncover the initial themes that emerged from the data. The four researchers analyzed the data separately and then compared their findings to look for common themes. The action research team spent one month reviewing the footage both separately and together to establish preliminary themes emerging from the project. We find ourselves mid-analysis at this point and recognize that our current findings are preliminary and require further analysis before a more expanded version of this project can be implemented and written up.

### **Preliminary findings and discussion**

1. How did an on-going collaborative relationship between an instructional coach (mentor) and a collaborating partner (mentee) develop a richer teaching practice for both participants? In other words, how much does the collaborative relationship affect "change" in teaching practice?

The duration of the project allowed for the collection of video documentation, interviews, teacher reflections, and guided discussions, which provided the data necessary to track an evolution of teaching practice over a sustained period of time. Through documentation and reflection, we observed that for both parties, a change had occurred in their practice.

In general, teachers discussed the effect of the collaborative partnerships on their practice:

It encouraged more risk-taking and we worked outside of our comfort zones.

It helped me look deeper into the curriculum to explore all its possibilities.

It kept me more accountable in my teaching practice.

It gave me someone to plan with and we created new ideas together.

It inspired other collaborations with other colleagues and students who were not involved in the process

One instructional coach realized:

The more that I have to articulate to someone else what's happening and what works, I become more solid in my understanding of my own practice.

This journey has made the participants mindful of the relevance of relationships within a community of educators:

That has been my entire role this year – building those relationships ... because if you don't have those relationships, you will not continue to learn and grow and be able to share what you have to offer and also gain what others have to offer.  
(Instructional Coach)

I was thinking about *different* relationships, the relationships I have with my students, with other teachers ... even my principal, just how supporting and encouraging she is ... it played a part in my learning and the positive steps I took as I continued forward. (Collaborative Partner)

Good teaching does not happen in isolation, and we recognize that dialogue and feedback are important for changes in thinking and behavior to happen, which in turn influences one's teaching practice. The fact that this project was embedded in an already existing professional learning community added validity and merit to the project. We observed that the supported framework, facilitated by the action research team and the board, provided accountability measures and raised the stakes of the project. In addition, teachers were able to drive their own inquiry and learning and did not feel alone as they were experimenting with implementing the dance curriculum in their classrooms. They felt that it was helpful to have a person they could go to, to seek advice from and to co-plan with. The collaborating partners felt it was helpful to watch their coaches teach a model class. The pairs then had the opportunity to have a focused discussion about the concept of dance teacher vs. dance educator, teaching practice (strategies, tactics, and unit/program design), and digging deeper into the dance curriculum and the creative process.

2. How did the collaborative relationship develop confidence in the novice dance teacher to become more engaged and invested in implementing the dance curriculum?

The data revealed that gaining disciplinary knowledge and taking risks in a supported framework allowed the collaborating teachers to gain confidence.

I looked to the dance project as an avenue to improve my skills and my knowledge of dance and to be able to grow as a dance educator and also to bring that to my students – to tell them that I have a hard time performing and see “I’m here as a model to show you that. Now I’m teaching it and you can do the same to find those skills within yourself.” (Collaborative Partner)

It’s really motivated me to not only work with my partner, but also to do a lot of self-study looking at resources and I took my dance part one AQ, so becoming a part of this has helped me to become more confident because I’m really starting to dig in and understand the curriculum.(Collaborative Partner)

Teachers’ agency over their own professional development and growth increased engagement and investment in the project and improved overall confidence in implementing the dance curriculum into their programming. Self-directed goal-setting with a collaborator allowed for accountability and focus as the project progressed. Teachers were at liberty to change or fine-tune their goals as the project progressed and as their vision for the collaboration clarified. Collaborating teachers felt encouraged by their instructional coaches and felt that their ideas and experimentations were supported. Following the Creative and Critical Thinking Processes as articulated in the provincial arts document provided a rich context for collaborating teachers to develop their own creativity and voice in curriculum design. On-going dialogue allowed for the free flow of ideas between both partners, which in turn also impacted the instructional coaches’ practice, as often occurs when one has to try to describe the “tacit elements” of their teaching practice. Allowing release time for a teacher to observe an expert teacher modeling a class is a rare opportunity that most teachers do not get to experience after entering the teaching profession. Modeling is more than demonstrating a technique – it demonstrates the art of teaching that cannot be learned from a manual.

A transformation in attitudes and beliefs about dance education was observed through the changes in their contact improvisation sessions (from the initial launch of the project in October to their final day together in April). They were asked to reflect on how their relationship had changed and how their own experience with movement changed in terms of confidence and comfort level with their own moving bodies, and how at ease they felt exploring in a bodily, kinesthetic way.

In the video documentation, there is a shot of one of the collaborating partners draped over her instructional coach in the contact improvisation experience on the final day. The instructional coach reflected on this visible change in her partner:

When I think back to the very first time we met, we were at a workshop and ... we were doing a dance form where we had to connect bodies; it was contact and

there was a certain part of it where we had to contribute choreography, and one of the first things that she said was, “I don’t know what to do; I don’t know what to say,” and so I had just met her and I could feel that she felt nervous about it and it’s hard for me to imagine her at that point now because we have come so far in our practice. (Instructional coach)

Whole group discussions echoed what the movement revealed – partners felt connected to one another. They could anticipate each other’s cues and nuances as they moved together as partners, but could also see how that connection translated into their work together as collaborating partners. Instructional coaches revealed that they practiced a gradual release model whereby they reinforced experimentation and inquiry in their collaborating partners and allowed teachers to make lots of choices around curriculum expectations and design. Instructional coaches reported that collaborating partners had developed confidence throughout the project and that in fact the learning was reciprocal, that they in turn, through the process of having to articulate and model best practices in dance education, became better teachers.

### 3. How can this model of collaboration sustain itself?

All collaborating partners agreed that without the collaborative inquiry framework, it would be difficult to sustain the partnerships. However, there was also an understanding that the framework required a significant time commitment. Participants recognized that in order for a trusting, collaborative relationship to grow, a huge investment of time was required by both the instructional coaches and the collaborating partners. It was noted by one teacher that teachers are busy and the role of the modern educator is complex and demanding, and that trying to grow as an educator cannot be done in isolation – it must be nourished by community. It was noted by one of the participants that once the project was over, she felt alone again and missed the partnership and having that person with whom she could exchange ideas. Teachers do value the time together to co-construct and devise their own learning; however, they are frustrated that the education system does not always permit the flexibility of release time due to system-wide budget constraints.

One teacher mentioned her surprise at “how enthusiastic and supportive other teachers and administrators were in the process.” Another instructional coach wondered “if anyone at her school would be interested in becoming a collaborative partner.” She also said, “There are a couple of teachers at my school that I believe would make good instructional coaches.” One pair suggested, “We both want to be instructional coaches next year.”

Many of the partners reported that the project had a contagious element because the collaborators all talked about the project in their respective schools, which ignited curiosity in their colleagues. One collaborating partner reported that her Grade 6 planning team was interested in collaborating next year on integrating the dance curriculum in all the Grade 6 classes, and that her principal was very interested in the outcomes of this project.

The structure of in-school collaborations is something to be explored in the future. Perhaps this will become the more ideal model: schools will have teacher leaders within one building to create professional learning communities organized around the implementation of the dance

curriculum. Situating communities in their own buildings would address issues of time, proximity, logistics of having different classes of students working together. This could also address the issue of funding, since teachers could co-plan and work within their school day to plan and pursue collaborative projects. This would need to be supported by flexible thinking on the part of school administrators, as they have the power to create collaborative timetabling opportunities.

4. How can this model help build a professional learning community of dance educators within a school board?

One teacher offered:

A mentor might reach out to another mentor, especially if they're given a question that they're not sure the answer to, and I think that it becomes almost a network of people that can work together and rely on each other.

In the video documentation and in the whole group discussions, a sense of camaraderie between the instructional coaches and the collaborating partners was observed and felt. Teachers expressed the importance of feeling connected to a community that values the importance of being plugged into a supportive network of educators who model a culture of sharing.

Our goal was to equip and build confidence in new teachers to dance in education so that they would feel comfortable in going into their own schools to build their own professional learning communities around the implementation of the dance curriculum. The collaborating teachers have expressed an interest in staying connected with the Peel Dance Teachers' Association for their own continued learning and access to resources as they continue to build their teaching practice and the implementation of the dance curriculum. As previously mentioned, one collaborating teacher has expressed her readiness to become an instructional coach for next year. This speaks to the success of the project in that she feels equipped and prepared to take the next step in guiding another teacher.

Through the Peel Dance Showcase, the project reached out to a wider dance community. A school trustee who attended the performance took the time to construct an email to describe her interpretations of each collaborative piece and the strong connections she felt to many curriculum areas, which she noted as a rich educational experience for children; she encouraged us to continue this kind of work in Peel.

It was wonderful to see so many students engaged and excited, so many proud parents – a full house! – So many dedicated teachers cheering from the wings and in the seats, so many supportive and encouraging administrators, knowing how hard their staff and students had worked and how much they had learned. I was truly amazed, not only at the talent, but at the extent of the curriculum embedded in every one of the performances...

### Conclusions and next steps

Teachers reported a visible difference in student engagement when dance was integrated into other core areas. Students engaged with topics more profoundly and developed emotional connections with the content of other curricular areas. For example, one of the topics explored in the collaborative creation projects was disasters, such as the tsunami in Japan, and the effects of displacement on populations. Another collaboration explored the topic of immigration, diversity, identity, and belonging in a new cultural context, while another explored a literary source: the African folk tales of the Anansi stories.

Teachers taught us that we shouldn't leave students out of the equation when it comes to professional development. Any inquiry into teachers' practice is also an inquiry into student learning. However, there needs to be a balance so that the focus isn't completely on the students' learning, but on the teachers' learning as well. An additional research question might be:

How can a collaborative inquiry model focused on teacher learning transfer to collaboration and inquiry in their students? How does this relate to student engagement?

Reflecting on this project, we began to formulate more questions for further development of the project. How could the teachers be even more involved in creating the framework for the inquiry? How did the performativity (i.e., the need for a product for the Peel Dance Showcase) affect the results of the collaboration? What were the tensions between process and product? How can teachers help collect data themselves (i.e., how can we help build their documentation skills and get them to reflect on their own learning in a systematic yet organic manner)? We also recognized the need to spend more time training the instructional coaches in order to move them beyond the mantle of the expert.

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