

Dance education in Ontario (Canada) schools: An opportunity for multi-level dialogue

Marc Richard (chair)

Instructor: Sheridan College, Charles Sturt University, York University

email: marc66@yorku.ca

Zihao Li

Teacher: Toronto District School Board, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

email: zihao.li@hotmail.com

Emily Caruso-Parnell

Teacher: Rainbow District School Board, Sudbury, Ontario Canada

email: carusoe@rainbowschools.ca

Richelle Hirlehey

Assistant Artistic Director: Dance Extreme

Teacher: Thames Valley District School Board, London, Ontario Canada

email: richelle.hirlehey@gmail.com

Abstract

In 2009, the Ontario (Canada) Ministry of Education released a new elementary (grades 1-8) arts curriculum document with four strands: dance, drama, music, and visual arts. This document includes 60 pages of theoretical and practical front matter, with a specific emphasis on the creative and analytical processes. This was followed in 2010 by a secondary (grades 9-12) document that shares the same front matter and focus. In 2011, a Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program was released with a stated emphasis on the arts. With so much curricular focus on the arts and dance education, one might assume there would be an equal effect on the status of dance education in Ontario elementary and secondary schools. Although dance has been an entity in Ontario public schools for over 50 years (our first creative dance unit was a part of the 1955 physical education curriculum *Physical Education for Primary Schools*) and a strand of the arts for over a decade, dance currently seems to enjoy only a sporadic existence in Ontario elementary and secondary schools. This panel explored the possible causes for the tenuous status of dance education in Ontario schools, suggested solutions, and developed common goals across the levels of education. The panel was comprised of public school educators and researchers from the early childhood, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels of education. In the first paper of the panel, politics and policies around dance education are examined by Zihao Li from the perspective of urban secondary teachers attempting to build new dance programs in their schools. Next, Richelle Hirlehey introduces a study recognizing that Ontario elementary students are not receiving equal dance education due to teachers' comfort levels and their understanding of the curriculum. The practices and reactions of elementary teachers to the relatively new arts document are examined along with their experiences of preparedness and their needs in regard to resources and professional development. Emily Caruso-Parnell examines an early childhood education project with an aim to place the arts curriculum at the centre of planning (instead of its fringes). This project finds that when children are supported in creating dance and are provided with space, time, and resources for choreography, dance occurs in surprising places. Closely related to this last project, Marc Richard examines the practice of

pedagogical documentation, inspired by the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, as a means of making the learning visible in dance for all the stakeholders in the field of education. By placing these four projects and researchers on a panel, we construct a space in which dialogical relationships can develop between dance educators from various levels of education. What are our shared and opposing views on dance education? How can we collectively advocate for dance education in our school system? What are the connections between the policies and practices at these various levels and the status of dance in Ontario schools? What are the factors both inside and outside of education (e.g. social media, comfort level, societal assumptions, and prejudices) regarding dance, that affect the stakeholder's views of dance education?

Keywords: education, dialogue, policy, practice, teachers

In 2009, the Ontario (Canada) Ministry of Education released a new elementary (grades 1-8) arts curriculum document with four strands: dance, drama, music, and visual arts. This document included 60 pages of theoretical and practical front matter, with a specific emphasis on the creative and analytical processes. This was followed in 2010 by a secondary (grades 9-12) document that shared the same front matter and focus. In 2011, a Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program was released with a stated emphasis on the arts. With so much curricular focus on the arts and dance education, one might assume there would be an equal effect on the status of dance education in Ontario elementary and secondary schools. This is not the case. Only a small percentage of elementary teachers are teaching dance in their classrooms. Many teachers admit that because parents don't ask about dance, they don't teach it (Richard, 2009). There are very few high school dance programs outside of the Greater Toronto Area. In many of these existing programs, the dance students are girls who take dance outside of school in the studio dance system. Dance is not yet a subject seemingly open to all students, including the boys. Although dance has been an entity in Ontario public schools for over 50 years and a strand of the arts for over a decade, dance at present seems to enjoy only a sporadic existence in Ontario elementary and secondary schools.

History of dance in Ontario schools

Our Ontario dance education scene has had both American and British influences. Margaret H'Doubler from the University of Wisconsin and Virginia Tanner from the Modern Dance Department at the University of Utah were important mentors of our dance education pioneers. In England, the work of Rudolf Laban and his disciple Lisa Ullmann at the Art of Movement Studio were profoundly influential in British educational dance, and Canadians have benefitted from this work through British immigrants, including Joyce Boorman and Rose Hill. A vast network of British, Canadian, and American dance educators continued to flourish with the Ontario Physical Education Summer Courses between 1955-1968. Many physical educators who emigrated from England taught these courses, actively exploring a new way of teaching physical education that included creative dance. In 1965, a special committee of the Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (CAHPER) was formed at the University of New Brunswick in order to design and strengthen current dance programs and to improve the caliber of dance in education (daCi, 1979, p.106). The committee consisted of elementary and secondary educators from across the country, working to develop a national dance policy. At the end of the 1960s, the committee supported local, provincial, and national workshops.

In the 1970s, the CAHPERD (Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation and Dance) committee published several position papers that included important statements about the status of dance in Canadian education:

While accepting the heritage and value of all styles of dance and encouraging participation in these forms, the Dance committee is committed to the belief that creative modern dance should be the primary dance form taught from early childhood through post secondary education. (Dance Committee of CAHPERD, 1976, p. 3)

Most of the original CAHPER dance committee members were also very influential, founding members of daCi. Joyce Boorman brought these individuals together for an international conference, *Dance and the Child: Spectator, Creator, Performer*, in 1978. It is as a result of this conference that daCi (the organization) was later formed. Dance in Ontario education today stands on the shoulders of these giants, these pioneers who recognized the need for dance in education.

Due to a lack of funding, an emphasis on aerobics-type movement activities in physical education, the retirement of many of these dance education pioneers, and education's emphasis on technology, dance education virtually disappeared from Ontario schools in the 1980s. That was also a time period in which there was no standardized curriculum, but instead, policy documents that gave general philosophical statements about learning. In the early 1990s, there was a lot more discussion about all four arts areas in schools (dance, drama, music, and visual arts), owing to a growing interest in Gardner's (1983) Multiple Intelligences Theory. In 1991, the Ontario Ministry of Education published *Dance in the Intermediate and Senior Divisions* (grades 7-13). That volume was more of a collection of information, not yet an official curriculum document; however, it was the first document that saw dance as an *arts* subject separate from physical education. In 1998, a new arts document was published, which included dance "blended" with drama as one of the arts strands (i.e., drama-dance). At the time, the teacher subject associations for the three arts (i.e., music, visual arts, drama-dance, with CODE, the association for drama educators opened to include dance) banded together, forming a consortium along with one school board in order to write the new arts curriculum. Although the inclusion of dance was a last minute addition (due to an incredible fax writing campaign from teachers to the Ministry), dance was officially a part of the arts curriculum. For our newest arts curriculum (2009/2010), dance educators were invited to the table by the Ministry as dance was recognized as a separate strand. This latest arts curriculum contains 60 pages of front-matter (shared by all four arts), with a focus on the creative and critical analysis process.

Although dance is a recognized arts strand in the elementary education panel (on the report card) and a subject in secondary education, it remains on the periphery of education. There are no Ontario-based Faculties of Education that offer specific dance education courses for future elementary teachers. The one institution that offers dance as a teachable subject only offers courses for teacher candidates from grades 7-12 (nothing for elementary teachers). There have been few professional development opportunities for teachers already teaching in schools. We have an excellent arts curriculum that includes dance, but we have very few teachers able or

willing to teach it. The following four research projects represent the most current research occurring in Ontario schools that attempts to animate this problem with respect to dance education. From secondary schools to early childhood education, these projects offer a glimpse into the current issues with respect to dance, and suggest shared goals for future research and advocacy.

Swimming upstream: Building dance programs in secondary schools (Zihao Li)

In this section, Dr. Li focuses on the current status of dance education in high schools in Ontario, Canada. Compared with the amount of literature on general aspects of dance education, there is relatively little information about paradigms to initiate and develop a dance program. The researcher in this study examines several school-based dance programs by looking at how dance teachers cope with curriculum policies and school politics while initiating and developing their dance programs.

Research methodology

The researcher, Dr. Li, focused on 25 dance educators, chosen by lottery to be participants in the study. Of these, 15 dance educators were selected from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and 10 were chosen from other cities around Toronto. An online, anonymous survey was sent out to these dance educators to acquire general information about their dance classes/programs (e.g., number of students, years of experience, styles, and dance/education background). Five were chosen for one-on-one interviews, which took place after the online surveys were completed. It is worth noting that among all of the participants, only one taught in an arts-focused school. With an ethnographic approach, the researcher spent several months at various schools observing and interviewing those dance teachers and students.

Research findings

Gender and age of dance educators

Females still dominate dance teaching positions in Ontario secondary schools. All 25 dance educators in this study are females. This finding echoes Burt's statement that in the last 150 years, white males do not consider dance a legitimate career to pursue (Burt, 2007). Without male dance educators, it becomes difficult to retain adolescent males in dance, especially those with little or no dance experience (Li, 2010). The majority of participants (16) were between the ages of 25 and 34. The other nine teachers were between the ages of 34 and 54. Many of the 25 participants were Caucasian, with three Asians and one African Canadian.

Types of dance educators. Ontario dance educators can generally be classified under three categories: with qualification, with experience, and novice. Some dance educators are equipped with multiple qualifications (teaching certifications from the Royal Academy of Dance, Limón, or Graham). These teachers are experts in their subject area and are hired to teach only one or two styles of dance. The second group of teachers comes with extensive professional dance backgrounds. They are veterans who either retired from professional dance companies or left for other reasons (family, injury, etc.). These educators teach multiple styles of dance and maintain their connections with the professional world. The third group has the least experience in teaching dance. Most of these teachers are academic subject teachers (English, Science, Math, etc.) with one or two dance sections.

Credentials. Ontario dance educators are highly educated. All have obtained multiple university degrees, including a B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education degree), since all teachers are required to have this degree in order to be certified to teach in Ontario. Three quarters (18) have a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree (Dance or Performing Arts Studies). One third of them (6) have an additional professional dance teaching diploma/certificate (e.g., RAD, Graham, etc.). More than eight teachers in this study have even received graduate degrees: M.A. (Master of Arts) or M.F.A. (Master of Fine Arts).

Focus of the dance program

Robinson and Demenici (2010) asked the question, “Are we training or educating dancers within academia?” (p. 215). They explore the potential for expanding the depth of dance education from Western-focused styles or single technique-based training methods to a more “inclusive version of dance education in increasingly globalized local contexts” (p. 213). That means that in addition to forms of dance like ballet and modern, more diverse dance forms should be introduced. Nonetheless, this research finds that the majority of teachers interviewed (85%) have Western dance as their teaching focus. Modern and ballet are on top of the list, and hip-hop usually is moved into a dance club form. This is partially due to the fact that many dance educators graduated from specialty schools or universities that emphasized Western styles of dancing. The second most popular way of teaching dance is through creative dance (73%). Within this form, teachers encourage students to explore the elements of dance (body, relationship, time, energy, and space), or express their thoughts and emotions via movements. Some teachers (45%) choose project-based dance programs, which are mainly for the various events that take place in schools (e.g., the African Heritage assembly in February, the Asian cultural celebration in May).

Technology

A growing number of Ontario dance educators incorporate technology in their dance teaching. It has benefited not only the program but has also expanded their studio-based teaching methodology. Technology has changed the world, including dance, in the past three decades. Dance educators face both challenges and opportunities with the advancement of technology. Olander (2007) claims that in the classroom, computers and computer-related technology are leading the way for students to learn. Nonetheless, school administrators and subject teachers view the impact of technology on students’ learning differently. Out of the people surveyed, 23 out of 25, or 88%, rated technology in dance education as either important or very important. Many dance educators acknowledge, “Students are motivated to act for purposes of inherent value, which is tangible to them” (Dewey, 1966, p. 141). They realize the important role that technology plays in students’ daily lives, and they believe that the goal for technological advancement should be to build not only communities of individual students, but to connect learning communities in which students learn from their peers in collaborative and cooperative relationships rather than in the “traditional transmissive, teacher-centered, fixed curriculum mode” (Carroll, 2000, p. 117).

Now is the time to initiate dance programs

The positive attitudes of the dance teachers towards dance education are evident. While recognizing barriers, these persevering dance educators unanimously agree that *now* is the best

time to initiate dance programs in spite of the challenges. They agree that the advancement of technology, media popularization, politicians, and the curriculum all support the development of dance programs.

Elementary dance education: A review of the 2009 revised Ontario Arts Document: Dance strand ~ Where do we grow from here? (Richelle Hirlehey)

It seems that teachers are the limiting growth factor when it comes to dance education in elementary schools. Teachers' inexperience with creative dance, their perceptions of dance, and the pressures of standardized testing are only some of the reasons for their low comfort levels and the lack of implementation of the dance strand of the revised arts curriculum.

The study

This research focused on how well elementary school teachers are prepared to teach the dance curriculum, how well versed they are in the work of Rudolph von Laban and the creative process, and whether they have sufficient knowledge and understanding of this methodological approach. As a corollary, I was interested in determining what dance education resources and professional development opportunities would be useful for both the generalist and specialist elementary-level teachers to support their understanding and implementation of the curriculum.

While a generous amount of useful print-based dance education resources is available to all classroom teachers, it is only with experiential learning and proper training in the methodological approaches to teaching creative dance that teachers can truly grasp the concepts of creative dance, which are rooted in Laban's work. Through an online teacher survey, I was able to uncover the answers to my questions.

Results

The majority of teachers do not value dance as a subject to the same degree as other subjects. I do not think they devalue dance necessarily, but do not see themselves as dance teachers. From my survey, I realized that the majority of teachers rated their preparedness to teach dance as low. The majority of teacher participants did not have fine arts backgrounds or prior experience with dance from elementary, secondary, or post-secondary schooling.

My research results uncovered the following reasons why teachers were not teaching dance in their classroom:

I have very little time to teach dance as it is, with Literacy and Numeracy demands. Additional expectations for teaching dance are not a good use of teacher (or government) energy. Parents (and many students) are not concerned with dance education and evaluation; their focus is on the 'big ticket' subjects.

I am a bit overwhelmed with teaching dance and need to get some more help in that area! I am interested in learning more ... there hasn't been enough time to explore anymore on PD days, etc. It is too bad because the two workshops that I

attended at Pearson were great. It is just that when we have PD now, it all seems to be Literacy-focused. I really don't feel I teach dance effectively.

I feel somewhat resentful that I am expected to find time to teach dance with absolutely no training, resources, or time – and then assess it fairly.

I was pleased to note that 90% of participants had read the Revised 2009 Arts Document and commented:

I need to be shown how to do specific things ... most people learn by doing when it comes to dance and not by only reading.

I would like to see teachers who are specialized in the arts teach the arts, like they do with music. Students are missing out because teachers aren't qualified...

There were some specific helpful points, but not enough for someone with no dance background.

There is too much technical detail. It is overwhelming for a teacher who is not an Arts specialist.

Some of the expectations are too obscure for a generalist to attempt; supporting resources are not readily available.

The Curriculum is well organized – follows a sequence/progression of skill.

The range of comfort-levels and perceptions of the curriculum are clearly quite broad when it comes to teaching dance and implementing the Ontario Curriculum.

Key findings

Classroom teachers are struggling to find the time to fit in their own personal dance education in order to teach it within their classroom. While resources are available, time is not. Provision of dance education resources for classroom teachers is important, but more notable would be an effort to equalize the focus on pre-service arts education with increased instruction in creative dance education. Why not give teachers basic creative dance experience as a solid base from which to expand their knowledge and skills during all pre-service teacher education programs? A hands-on, physical experience is what is needed to help generalist teachers begin to understand the roots of creative dance.

If boards of education were to return to the use of specialist arts educators using the Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) model, this would encourage well-rounded arts programs at all schools regardless of the classroom teacher's comfort level. The specialist model would ensure that dance has an equal place within the education system, and as long as the Ministry continues to mandate dance as a core curriculum subject to be taught in elementary schools in the Province, this may be one of the ways to ensure its longevity.

Dance education offers students an opportunity to take risks, expand their conceptual thought processes, and challenge their fertile minds. As dance educators and specialists, we must advocate for quality dance education in each school, where the quality is determined by both the content and delivery of instruction, as well as sound evaluation based on the thoroughness of valid and varied assessment techniques. Dance has the power to transform, and given the right teaching methods, movement experiences, and passionate teachers, dance will continue and hopefully begin to flourish within the scope of our provincial education system.

A dancing inquiry: Creating possibilities for expression by inviting dance into the classroom (Emily Caruso-Parnell)

In the Rainbow District School Board (Sudbury, Espanola, Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada), we have been experimenting with and exploring a radical shift in the way we approach curriculum in the early primary years. Inspired by Ontario's new Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program (ELKP) and the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia, and supported by the Early Primary Collaborative Inquiry project of The Ontario Ministry of Education's Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, we have worked together as teachers, administrators, consultants, researchers, and artists to develop and explore how placing the arts curriculum at the centre of our planning (instead of at its fringes) might impact teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum.

Working in four classrooms (two Early Learning classrooms, one Grade 1 classroom, and one Grade 2 classroom), we explored, through a series of provocations and invitations, how students react to this change in curriculum focus and how it impacts our teaching. These explorations were very much inspired by our ongoing learning about emergent curriculum, multiple modes of documentation, the hundred languages of children (Rinaldi, 1998), and the underlying assumption that children are capable. The assumption in Reggio Emilia is that children come to school expressing themselves in multiple languages, and that while schools have traditionally only valued the oral and written, they have often actively discouraged the use of all others. In Reggio schools, the focus is on expression, not on compliance.

While Reggio Emilia-based practice in Rainbow Schools already had a focus on the visual arts, other arts domains are increasingly being explored in this way. As a result of children's interests and the researchers' observations, dance became a focus of our work with the children in this inquiry. We have found that when children are supported in creating dance and are provided with space, time, and resources for choreography, dance occurs in surprising places. We have been delighted by the surprising and sophisticated connections that children have made with the curriculum and with each other, using dance as their medium.

This was a double-barreled inquiry in that we were inquiring into our own practice as educators while simultaneously inviting the children into an inquiry stance. Each session began by looking at students' interests and where the arts curriculum could be used as a starting point for inquiry into other curriculum areas, such as mathematics or language. In our first session, for instance, we began with a student interest in pattern at one school, and an interest in shape at the other. These inquiries evolved to include dance, music, visual art, and other surprising discoveries along the way. Teachers were consistently surprised by the capabilities students demonstrated;

even though we assumed students were capable, they were always more capable than we expected. Students who were challenged by the limits placed on expression in traditional classrooms (limiting it to oral and written modes) were consistently the ones who shone when offered opportunities to express themselves using the languages of dance, music, and visual art.

Teachers, too, were full of surprises. We had many conversations about the challenges of broadening our definition of assessment “data” to include non-traditional forms of evidence, such as expressions of knowledge through dramatic play or dance. Much of this centred on what was considered acceptable assessment practice:

Researcher: What I’ve heard several times from you [the grade 2 teacher] is that when it comes to math expectations, you’re looking for numeric assessment forms.

Grade 2 teacher: Not in isolation but you’re absolutely right, I am.

Researcher: So when a student is giving you something that’s non-numeric but still is a growing or shrinking pattern...

Grade 2 teacher: I constantly second-guess myself.

Consultant: So there’s discomfort with stating you can assess growing and shrinking patterns through dance.

Superintendent: Think back, there was a time when we didn’t assess children’s thinking in math. It was just about the answer and now we ask them to verbalize, to draw. The reality is that all of our assessment is subjective [but] we like to think it’s objective. I think our whole system is wondering about subjective data, so feel good about that – you’re with everybody else.

Consultant: It is far more challenging as an educator to have to really get to know the kids and know what their strengths are and what you can provide the child with to demonstrate their best learning and understanding, what medium, what opportunity. (Caruso Parnell, et al., personal communication, February 3, 2011)

In this conversation, we see Zellermeier’s (2001) model of risk taking, challenging, and reflective assessment at work as the Grade 2 teacher talks with the researcher to define her discomfort in using observational data (which she is concerned isn’t objective enough). She then receives support from her colleagues, but also a challenge to continue taking risks in choosing to use non-numeric data for assessment purposes.

This tension within the inquiry continued throughout. In our final report to the Ontario Ministry of Education we wrote:

The reality of extending [inquiry-based practices] into Grades 1 and 2 is that reporting requires a grade and it creates a tension of time and product, while inquiry in contrast values the process. The use of documentation helped to address this

concern, but it still remained a constant tension within this inquiry. (Rainbow District School Board, 2011)

Given a sufficient amount of time, some specialized support, and plenty of opportunities for conversation and reflection, teachers were able to change their practices and deepened their understanding of and confidence in inquiry practices, the arts in general, and dance in particular. Seeing dance and numbers as equally valid ways of expressing children's understanding of geometry or patterning is a big leap, if you'll pardon the pun. To make that leap, we have to believe that dance, drama, music, and the visual arts are more than expressive media for emotions and personal experience. They have to also become ways of experiencing the world, lenses through which learning in every subject area occurs.

Pedagogical documentation: A method for making the learning visible in dance education
(Marc Richard)

Dance in Ontario schools is in need of advocacy – we need to make visible the many profound types of learning within dance education in order to animate dance as a valuable language of learning. Hanna (1999, p. 59) recognizes that dance, as a rich resource for embodied knowledge and transformation, has been underutilized in our educational reforms. As Stinson (2005) urges:

We must become better at identifying what students are actually learning in dance and describing how well they are learning it ... Understanding what students are actually learning not only gives us ammunition for advocacy, but it also allows us to further our own thinking about what is worth knowing in dance and why. (p. 220)

In order to make learning visible within dance education, we need to find a means to document the processes of creation and the rich layers of learning embedded within it. This would allow both teachers and students to re-witness their own learning and engagement with the creative process in dance education. Sansom (2011) suggests that dance as a subject on the periphery of education can make its way into the dominant domains of education and still retain its integrity if we make visible the voices and thinking of children (p. 82). The process of pedagogical documentation as introduced by the educators in Reggio Emilia provides a potential research method for making learning visible in dance education.

The cornerstone of the Reggio approach is their image of the child as a protagonist in their own learning, “rich in resources, strong, and competent” (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 114). Pedagogical documentation, for Reggio educators, is the practice of attentively studying and actively recording the process of a student's learning, which involves their knowledge, understanding, thinking, communication, and application in a given social context (with an eye on values and cultures), and animating this process of learning for others (Rinaldi, 2001). These others might include the students themselves, other educators, parents, siblings, and the community at large. Documentation might take place in a variety of formats, including note taking, photography, audio recording, video recording, and samples of student works, as well as written reflections on the learning experience encountered. Because documentation is a tangible form (the traces of learning are present in the documentation panels, which include pictures and transcriptions of

actual conversations, as well as interpretive text from the pedagogue), it allows for constant revisiting and reconstruction of the original learning event (i.e., a spiral process) (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 154). Pedagogical documentation offers a chance to make visible the theories of children, but documenters recognize that these are provisional theories that are constantly re-worked and re-visited by the teachers and students, as well as by those who read and interact with the documentation.

In my current research project, I have used the methodology of pedagogical documentation in an attempt to animate the intersubjective space between teachers and their students, and uncover the learning that is happening for both teachers and their students as teachers facilitate creative dance classes. In the process, I hoped to model pedagogical documentation as a form of teacher research that teachers could bring to their classrooms. The Reggio Emilians recognize that documentation can be a powerful tool for advocacy and creating dialogue with the public: “Real examples of documented learning offer the public a more particular knowledge that empowers and provokes them to reflect, question, and rethink or reconstruct the image of the child and the rights of the child to quality education” (Forman & Fyfe, 1998, p. 256).

Used in conjunction with creative dance education, I believe pedagogical documentation can begin to “unmask – identify and visualize – the dominant discursive regimes which exercise powers on and through us” (Dahlberg, 1999, p. 152). In the domain of creative dance education, I believe these dominant discourses involve the bodies of teachers and, as well as discourses centered on creativity and what it means to learn.

As an example of the process of pedagogical documentation, I offer you a glimpse into a Grade 6 class creating dances in groups from lines of poetry. Through pedagogical documentation, I observed that students were learning to discover their own personal movement voices, but at the same time, had many pre-conceived notions about dance that were tied to gender.



Image 1. Photography by Marc Richard.

Rinaldo is a very shy boy who seems to come to life through dance. His teacher, Eva, says, “He

has just progressed so much in wanting to express himself in movement. He is able to get what he feels inside to be on the outside.” Eva also believes it’s because he has had no previous dance training “that he is able to use his body like a paint brush.” Rinaldo’s peers also recognize his creativity. When he reflected on his group work, he commented, “I am good, especially in this group because other members of my group take dance.”



Image 2. Photography by Marc Richard.

This comment, along with a picture of his group (two girls and him), is placed on a documentation panel in order to provoke a discussion about the underlying assumptions and gender biases in dance (i.e., that the girls who take dance after school are more creative and more capable than those who do not (in this class, the boys). The richness and authenticity of the dialogue that resulted from this provocation was profound. One girl stated, “It’s hard sometimes because the boys seem like they don’t care.” Greg, who had many creative ideas, interrupted to say, “I really care about dance.” One girl, whose mother runs a dance studio, clarified her theory about the primacy of girls who take dance after school:

I think that for some people it can be easier if you take dance outside of school, but in other cases it’s harder ... because you might get stuck on a script, like what you’ve done in ballet class or whatever and if you don’t, you have more of a free mind so you can think and let your mind go and do whatever. (Margie)

Later in a small group interview, we watched some video documentation from their first day in this project. Rinaldo’s two female group members were really upset at what they saw on the video footage, because they recognized that they had been completely ignoring Rinaldo. Bertha observed, “We were so mean.” Rinaldo reflected: “I wasn’t saying much; I was the only guy there and the girls were getting along so well, so I felt like an outsider. I was just waiting to see what the girls were going to come up with.” Eva, their teacher, recognized that “the girls have preconceived notions of the boys and the boys know it, so they function that way.”

In this case, the comments, pictures, and video footage from this one moment of learning had provoked cycles of reflections and discussions around creativity, personal voice, and pre-

conceived notions in dance education. The teacher was shocked at Rinaldo's perception of himself, but also impressed with pedagogical documentation as a tool for uncovering these hidden learnings and provoking students to grapple with their pre-conceived notions.

Collective findings – Multi-level dialogue

Our multi-level dialogue revealed overall resonant themes across the levels of dance education in Ontario Schools. Dance education seems greatly affected by issues of creativity, pre-conceived notions of dance, teachers' relationship to the arts curriculum, and teachers' embodied experiences of dance.

The creative process is at the centre of our 2009/10 arts curriculums, and inquiry-based learning is central to the new Full Day Learning Kindergarten Program, but many current teachers struggle with concepts around creativity and inquiry-based learning. Some of these concerns come from our standardized curriculum and the need to assess students on their creative dance projects. What seems to be missing is a true and embodied understanding of the creative process, which seems to be related to time constraints for teachers in education at all levels. Everything seems rushed. The demands placed on teachers to focus on the dominant domains of literacy and numeracy leave little room for subjects on the periphery of education, such as the arts, and especially dance. This is evident in the amount of time teachers devote to dance education in the elementary grades, but also in their struggle to initiate and develop dance programs in secondary schools.

Many of the stakeholders in education have very narrow, pre-conceived notions of what dance education entails. As one could see in Emily's study, dance as a language of learning happens very naturally for young children, but teachers don't always recognize dance as a valid form of learning or a means of expressing theories and ideas. Additionally, dance in Ontario is still a very feminized art form for the general public. Despite the increased presence of men dancing on television, most dance programs in universities remain largely female. Currently, one male student is enrolled in a Faculty of Education course, seeking qualification to teach dance in high schools in the province of Ontario. Many of our current dance teachers focus primarily on Western dance forms such as ballet, jazz, and modern dance. Many of our current dance teachers who trained as dancers in the studio system spent 20 years learning how to "teach" dance as observers of studio pedagogy. A one-year course (three hours a week) can only slightly challenge their deeply entrenched notions of dance pedagogy. Many educators remain unaware that there is a difference between dance training and dance education.

Most teachers (both elementary and secondary) have a distant relationship to the arts curriculum. We realize that many teachers don't read the policy documents and therefore aren't aware of what the Ministry suggests they should be teaching. Some high school dance teachers simply replicate dance classes they learned or have taught themselves in studio settings. Some are not even aware of the elements of dance or the expectations in the Grade 1-8 policy document. They are therefore unaware of what the students should have experienced in elementary school and cannot make up for these null experiences. Elementary teachers, with few experiences in dance education, struggle to interpret the curriculum even if they have read it, finding it too "technical" or "obscure." Many elementary teachers see dance as an unnecessary add-on to an already overwhelming curriculum. They fail to see the full value of dance education because we have not

yet provided them with concrete evidence that it is important. Why teach dance when children can't read or write? Pedagogical documentation seems to provide a tangible means to advocate for dance education, helping to make the learning visible to all of the stakeholders in education, including parents and the general public. If teachers realized that students were learning to develop their literacy and numeracy as well as their own personal movement voices, their thinking-bodies, their social skills, and relationships with others, and also counteracting pre-conceived notions of gender, they might be more willing to accept dance as an important part of the core curriculum.

Collectively, we realize that both students and teachers require embodied experiences with dance education in order to fully grasp the potential for dance as a language of learning. A policy document and plenty of print-based resources cannot provide teachers with the necessary experiential learning to fully convince them of the importance of dance education and the incredible resource dance education can provide for education as a whole. When we invite the body, as a thinking and knowledge-filled body, back into education, what might result? What are the effects that dance education could have on education as a whole if we fully problematized the teaching of dance? We believe the focus for this embodied learning needs to be pre-service teacher education (i.e., teacher's college). There are currently very few experiences for embodied learning of dance education in Ontario Faculties of Education. Dance experiences in a Faculty of Education setting might help challenge some of the themes discussed, such as creativity, pre-conceived notions of dance, and teachers' relationship to the curriculum.

References

- Burt, R. (2007). *The male dancer: Bodies, spectacle, sexualities* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Carroll, T.G. (2000). If we didn't have the schools we have today, would we create the schools we have today? *Education*, 1(1), 117-140.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives*. London, UK: Falmer Press.
- Dance Committee of CAHPER (1976). *Position paper: Dance in Canadian education*. The Dance Committee of the Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation.
- Forman, G., & Fyfe, B. (1998). Negotiated learning through design, documentation and discourse. In C.P. Edwards, L. Gandindi, & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach – Advanced reflections* (2nd ed.). Greenwich, CT; Ablex.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Hanna, J.L. (1979). *To dance is human: A theory of non-verbal communication*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Li, Z. (2010). *Adolescent male dancers' embodied realities*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertation and Theses database. (HDL No. 1807/24468)
- Ministry of Education (2009). *The Ontario curriculum grades 1-8: The arts (Revised)*. Toronto, Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- Olander, M. V. (2007). *Painting the voice: Weblogs and writing instruction in the high school*

- classroom* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertation and Theses database. (AAT No. 3283949)
- Rainbow District School Board. (2011). *RDSB K-1-2 Inquiry Monograph*. Unpublished.
- Richard, M. (2009). *Finding the key to dance in elementary schools: A study of the current state of dance education in one Ontario school board*. (Unpublished master's thesis). York University, Toronto, Ontario.
- Rinaldi, C. (1998). Projected curriculum and documentation. In C.P. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach – Advanced reflections* (2nd ed.). Greenwich, CT: Ablex.
- Rinaldi, C. (2001). Documentation and assessment: What is the relationship? In C. Giudici, C. Rinaldi, & M. Krechevsky (Eds.), *Making learning visible: Children as individual and group learners*. Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children.
- Robinson, D., & Domenici, D. (2010). From inclusion to integration: Intercultural dialogue and contemporary university dance education. *Research in Dance Education*, 11(3), 213-221.
- Sansom, A. (2011). *Movement and dance in young children's lives: Crossing the divide*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Stinson, S. (2005). Reflections on educating dance educators. In J. Chazin-Bennahum (Ed.), *Teaching dance studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Zellermeyer, M. (2001). Resistance as a catalyst in teachers' professional development. In C.M. Clark (Ed.), *Talking shop: Authentic conversation and teacher learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

© 2012, Marc Richard, Zihao Li, Emily Caruso-Parnell, Richelle Hirlehey

Emily Caruso-Parnell teaches in the Rainbow District School Board and maintains a small private practice teaching and choreographing. She completed her undergraduate dance training at Bennington College and York University, her Bachelor of Education at the University of New Brunswick, and her Master of Arts degree in Dance Theories and Practices at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, supervised by Sue Stinson. Emily is also a registered teacher of the Royal Academy of Dance, sits on the board of directors of The Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE), and chairs the Program Advisory Committee for Dance of PHE-Canada.

Richelle Hirlehey is the Educational Director, Instructor, and Choreographer at Dance Extreme, Inc. London, and is the liaison to the Thames Valley School Boards. Richelle directed the Carousel Dance Company from 2005-2011. She choreographs for Original Kids Theatre Company, high schools in South Western Ontario and her own company, Barefoot Creative. She danced/choreographed for the University of Western Ontario Dance Company for eight years and the Hamilton Dance Company for three years. Richelle is a graduate of the Honours Kinesiology and Bachelor of Education programs for University of Western Ontario and is currently working on her Master's in Dance at York University.

Dr. Zihao Li is a Toronto-based dancer, educator, and researcher. He contributes to an array of conferences/publications and belongs to interdisciplinary research groups at the University of Toronto, and the Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators. He also serves as a curriculum consultant for the Ontario Ministry of Education. He edits conference proceedings and peer-

reviewed journals and has served as a grant judicator for the Canada Council for the Arts. Currently, he is the Co-chair of Education Network-North America for the World Dance Alliance. His research spans dance pedagogy, teacher/curriculum development, cross-cultural studies, gender and masculinity, and technology in dance.

Marc Richard is a Ph.D. candidate in the Faculty of Education at York University. His research attempts to make learning visible in creative dance education in Ontario schools. Marc is a graduate of the School of Toronto Dance Theatre and holds an M.A. in Dance from York University. He is the Canadian National Representative for Dance and the Child International (daCi), and a dance liaison for the Council of Ontario Dance and Drama Educators. He is a director, choreographer, teacher, and writer, as well as a faculty member in the Musical Theatre and Performing Arts Preparation Programs at Sheridan College.

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