

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

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<http://www.ijea.org/>

ISSN: 1529-8094

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Volume 16 Number 22

December 5, 2015

### **Dancing on Thin Ice: The Journey of Two Male Teacher Candidates Emerging as Professionals within a Teacher Education Dance Program**

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Citation: Kalyn, B., Campbell, E., McAvoy, A., Weimer, M. (2015). Dancing on thin ice: The journey of two male teacher candidates emerging as professionals within a teacher education dance program. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 16(22). Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v16n22/>.

#### **Abstract**

Teacher candidates entering the world of curricula face the realities of teaching a variety of subjects, some more conceptually foreign than others. One challenging area for teacher candidates, particularly males, is in dance education (Gard, 2008; Kiley, 2010). A teacher's former dance experience, beliefs about who dances and why, personal identity, and the value placed on dance can shape one's attitude towards teaching dance. This paper shares the narrative account of two male teacher

candidates who faced the challenge of teaching dance in schools. These two elite hockey players experienced a shift in knowledge, attitude, skills, and perceptions towards dance by stepping outside of their comfort zone as they embarked on a professional learning journey through *Project Move*, an educational based dance opportunity, offered prior to their 16-week internship. They were awakened to their pedagogical responsibility, faced their biases, and responded to the call with great success. This is their story.

### **Facing Biases and Identity: A Critical Awakening**

Teacher candidates entering a world of curricula and making the transfer from student to teacher face new challenges as they begin to intersect with the realities of educational practice that include teaching a variety of subject areas- some more conceptually foreign than others. Teacher candidates accept the realities of teaching language arts, math, science, social studies, physical education, or health curricula; however, arts education, comprised of four strands including dance, music, drama, and art, often pose unique challenges for them. Personal experiences may have influenced their perceptions of arts education; while biases may have been generated from a variety of sources causing them to question the value of the arts within school curricula and question who participates in the arts (Greene, 2011; Hennessy, Rolfe, & Chedzoy 2001; Jacobs, 2008). Learning to teach often requires a personal shift in attitudes and perceptions regarding what teacher candidates believe and have come to know about teaching, and the realities of what it means to become a teacher of many subjects. Pre-conceived ideologies, perceptions, and biases can remain dormant until teacher candidates are called to pay closer attention to what it means to understand and teach curricula.

One particularly challenging curricula area for many teacher candidates continues to be in the area of dance education. Where and how teacher candidates experienced dance and in what contexts has an obvious influence on how they have learned to identify with dance (Ridler, 2015; Risner, 2014). As they face the professional reality that dance could be a part of their curricula responsibilities, it calls into question their perceptions and biases and many are startled to realize they may be called to teach dance.

Dance education intersects between physical education and arts education curricula and each has a particular focus that includes their own ideas about the physical, historical, cultural, thematic, and aesthetics qualities of dance (Saskatchewan Ministry of Learning, 2012). Pre-service teacher education programs vary in the amount of time spent teaching dance in physical education and arts education, and in some cases teacher education programs are not required to provide knowledge and expertise in these areas, as they may not be required for teacher certification. The irony that teachers are required to teach dance both in physical education and arts education, yet may receive little to no instruction within this area, leaves

teacher candidates and the students they will teach at a distinct disadvantage. It is of small wonder when teacher candidates think about teaching dance they may find themselves outside of their comfort zone.

For many teacher candidates, their physical education, extra-curricular, or community based activity experiences may well have centered around sports with limited exposure to rhythmical or dance experiences beyond their primary grades. For example, female elementary students may often be observed engaging in rhythmical activities such as skipping, ball bouncing activities, and singing games during recess; while boys may be engaged in playing ball or running games. Girls may be more likely to attend dancing lessons after school as an assumed part of their childhood (Risner, 2014).

Media, social influences, and individual experiences can shape teacher candidates' perceptions of teaching and learning in subject areas that are deemed of more or less value (deVries, 2011; Hopper & Sanford, 2006; Jacobs, 2008; Ridler, 2015; Risner, 2014; Rutledge, 2006). Stereotypical images of gender in relation to physical activities often compare athletic individuals, either male or female, with the more artistic dancing females (Tsoules Soriano, 2010). Males learn to express their physicality in what are perceived as gender appropriate ways and social influences direct how males identify with various forms of movement that influence their identities (Gard, 2008; Kiley, 2010). Tsoules Soriano (2010) acknowledged with her students, "Our individual identities are steeped in our bodies. How we move in the world often determines how we are perceived" (p. 59). Further, how we perceive ourselves as teachers and how comfortable we are with expressing ourselves through movement might influence our perceptions of what we believe we can or cannot teach and what we value in curricula.

Historically, individuals have danced for pleasure and purpose (Murray, 1975). Dance has been a part of cultural gatherings and celebrations and still is in many areas throughout the world. Many Indigenous peoples value dance and the holistic outcomes derived from dance (McArthur, 1987). Dance was valued in society as a social, spiritual, physical, and aesthetic expression of joy, sorrow, athleticism, and grace. Many cultures danced in preparation for war, for health, as a celebration, or merely when the spirit moved them. Contemporary western society, in many cases, has moved away from the social value of dance as a primary form of celebration and social gathering. Instead, the focus is more on casual dancing at social events, viewing dancing as an art-form or cultural performance, and something often performed primarily by females, or seen as entertainment at a half time show. The way dance is experienced culturally, through society and within school experiences, may influence attitudes and perceptions of what dance is and who dances. Many teacher candidates carry these perceptions and beliefs about dance into their careers and few have the opportunity to

confront these biases through practical experiences during their teacher education programs.

As a teacher of dance for many years and as a result of my (Brenda's) personal and educational experiences, I propose that children are born with the ability to respond to an invitation to "dance." Like Purcell (1994) I believe that dancing is an expressive movement that translates emotion and ideas into movement. My two-year old grandson has been dancing at will for months. He hears music or the encouragement to "dance, Nicholas," and his little arms extend into space as he sways or stomps with his feet to express his innate reaction to the music. He is already demonstrating the ability to create or copy movement and rhythm from a video of Ukrainian dancing. His sister twirls along, pointing her toes, and extending her hands in interpretative ways. My 8-month old grand-daughter shrieks when she sees her mom's i-phone, reaches for it and begins to "dance" in anticipation of the music she has been exposed to on it. When my son was 6-months old he was sitting on a blanket playing with his toys. He suddenly sat up straight, paused and listened to a piece of music that was playing and began to bend forward slowly and rhythmically, the same way I did when I danced to this music while pregnant with him. I have yet to interact with a small child who does not respond, with joy to an invitation to "dance." Somewhere along life's journey many children learn *not* to dance and the joy of this expressive movement is eliminated from their experiences. These same little boys and girls might one day find themselves as teacher candidates called to teach dance within school curricula.

Again, I tend to agree with Purcell (1994) who posits that dancing "is the only form of moving that meets the child's innate need to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas through movement" (p. 4). As infants and before we developed our verbal language skills we began to create a vocabulary of movement and our kinesthetic language emerged as we connected body movements to music. We explored our space, danced with different forces in movement (fast, slow, gentle), and responded to relationships (with self, others, or props) within our dancing-naturally responding to these concepts, which are the heart of movement education (Pangrazi & Beighle, 2013; Purcell, 1994; Weiller Abels & Bridges, 2010). Pica (1995) described movement education as the foundational piece whereby all complex movements extending into all areas of activities are formed and built upon. Educators must be cognizant of the reality that children come to school with a foundation of movement experiences, and our work is to build on those experiences and not delete them from their learning.

Teachers are challenged to teach and respect all curricula as valued and important. Why is it that some subject areas appear more valued than others merely by the way they are treated in the classroom? As an educator, I have witnessed students experiencing physical education or arts education as a reward with teachers threatening to take these away if the core subjects have not been completed. My interns have relayed similar stories from their experiences or

from what they observed in their classrooms. I have never heard a teacher threaten to take math or language arts away from students. Many of my pre-service teachers make the comment, “I can’t dance, I can’t sing, I can’t run, I can’t draw.” I wonder, after all those years in school with physical education and arts education as core curricula requirements, how this real or perceptual deficit emerged?

In this paper, we ask how we can assist teacher candidates in recognizing and valuing dance education, as a viable component of a student’s day. We strive to facilitate greater acquisition of knowledge, skills, and pedagogical practice so teacher candidates can emerge from teacher education programs with a sense of accomplishment and a willingness to explore quality teaching in these important, and sometimes, uncertain curricula areas.

### **Pedagogical Responsibilities**

Effectively learning to teach a variety of curricula require teacher candidates to develop subject based knowledge and pedagogical expertise within these areas. Pre-service teacher education programs should facilitate growth in knowledge and instructional practice through quality programs that value learning in all curricula areas where teachers may be required to teach. Subject based knowledge, experiences in the practical application of this knowledge, and opportunities to transfer knowledge and theory to practice enhances teacher confidence in areas of less comfort and produces a greater likely-hood that beginning teachers will, in fact, value and teach all subject areas if they fall within the teacher’s duties (deVries, 2011; Hennessy, Rolfe, & Chedzoy, 2001; Kalyn & Krohn, 2005).

It is likely that many teacher candidates have experienced varied school based curricula programs as students and arrive at their methods courses with an eclectic array of experiences, biases, realities, and concerns situated around movement. Many teacher education methods courses in physical and arts education strive to provide a well-balanced approach to combining theory and practice with the ultimate goal of improving pedagogical competencies for teachers and increasing both the quality and variety of movement opportunities for school children. This may require a shift in attitude by teacher candidates who realize that part of a quality education program should include opportunities for students to experience movement through dance education, and if they are professionally accountable, they will teach it.

Teachers in the field who recognize a personal deficit in dance education often find themselves in a place wondering where to begin. Short professional development opportunities in subject areas often do not provide the knowledge or expertise for teachers to return to the classroom equipped to teach dance. There are limited opportunities for classroom teachers to engage in continuous or sustained immersion in particular areas while teaching full time (Fullen, 2007); therefore, pre-service opportunities to engage in curricular

studies and practical teaching opportunities are invaluable.

When teacher candidates are faced with the challenge of teaching dance within their physical education or arts education classes, how can education programs assist them in stepping outside of the box to investigate what it means to be a teacher of many subjects—especially those they are the least comfortable with? Teacher candidates who travel into these unknown spaces, with a keen desire to increase their professionalism, are among the most inspiring of learners and show the greatest of heart, for they are the brave ones who will make the finest of teachers.

This was the reality for two male teacher candidates who found themselves faced with the challenge of teaching dance within physical education curricula. These two elite hockey players experienced a shift in knowledge, attitude, skills, and perception towards dance by stepping outside of their comfort zones as they embarked on a professional journey of success through *Project Move*, a university based dance opportunity, offered prior to their 16-week internship. They were awakened to their responsibility regarding teaching dance education, they faced their biases, and they responded to the call. This is their narrative story.

### ***Project Move: Background***

Teacher candidates are eager to participate in practical educational experiences that link theory and practice. Engaging with students in schools is a vital part of pre-service growth for teacher candidates who can authentically engage in curriculum, teaching, and students within practical learning environments. Education programs should provide ongoing, in-depth, and challenging opportunities during pre-service teacher education. *Project Move* (PM) is one program that responded to the needs of pre-service teachers in the area of dance education by providing professional environments to learn, plan, teach, and experience dance curricula. Through the practice of pedagogical skills in dance education, pre-service teacher confidence, knowledge, and self-esteem in relation to teaching dance increased immensely (Kalyn & Krohn, 2005).

*Project Move* (PM) has been an ongoing school partnership program at the University of Saskatchewan for over 22 years. PM began as a result of an inner city classroom teacher who was challenged to assist a group of male students aged 8-14 who wanted to learn how to choreograph their dance movements into a “real dance.” Struggling with her lack of expertise, she asked physical education/dance faculty from the Colleges of Education and Kinesiology at the University of Saskatchewan for assistance, and we in turn invited interested students, who were dance specialists to rise to the challenge and assist these boys in their quest. The experience turned out to be a highlight of these young boys’ lives as they proudly performed

their dance routine amid cheers at their school assembly and at the University of Saskatchewan School of Dance annual recital. The university students who assisted these young dancers were equally gratified. The following year, a pilot project with PM was conducted in three elementary schools to ascertain the need for assistance in dance education curricula within arts and physical education. Positive responses from teachers and students within this pilot led to the ongoing implementation of PM as an extended practical learning experience for university students. In subsequent years, teacher candidates and kinesiology students were invited to participate in this program in the elementary schools within Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. PM has a three-fold mandate to: 1) provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop their knowledge and skills within dance and practice the teaching of dance in schools; 2) provide classroom teachers with content and curricular ideas for their programs, and 3) provide classroom students with the opportunities to experience dance in a positive way and enhance their movement opportunities.

Since its inception, PM has advanced the pedagogical practice of over 500 teacher candidates and kinesiology students and taught over 12,000 elementary school children in dance. Each year in term two of the academic year an invitation to join PM is extended to university students in education and kinesiology regardless of their dance background, experiences, or perceptions about dance or their abilities to teach dance. It is a call to learn and practice the physical and artistic forms of dance. This is a non-credit, volunteer program taught in tandem with physical education methods courses. The PM curriculum consists of folk dances, creative dances (primarily from K-Grade 3), and hip-hop and theme dances from Grades 4-8 that use simple props. The foundation of the curriculum focuses on understanding the four elements of movement education (body, effort, space, and relationship) that are key to building on expressive movement through dance (Pica, 1995; Purcell, 1994; Wall & Murray, 1990). School requests for PM are filled based on the numbers of volunteer students, which averaged between 20-50 per term.

Volunteer members, mostly female, must attend one four-hour workshop where they receive a PM t-shirt, playlist of music, a syllabi of lessons created by the instructors, and they are provided with an elementary school classroom of students. Each PM team instructs a progressive series of three to six dance lessons, depending on their availability, once a week to the same group of students. They choose the dances from the lesson plans that they are most comfortable with and feel they can teach to the students; or they may create their own dances depending on their level of comfort and expertise. Two faculty members and one assistant supervise PM teams during these teaching opportunities by attending one of their lessons to provide support and feedback (usually the second one to give them time to feel more comfortable).

Past research in PM demonstrated that teacher candidates met or exceeded their professional and pedagogical goals in every instance, which included: 1) gaining knowledge of curriculum and improved skill in dance; 2) improving instructional strategies; 3) developing quality dance curricula; and 4) improving self-confidence teaching dance. Primary to these accomplishments were the opportunities to practice teaching dance, link theory to practice, and dialogue with faculty who observed one of their lessons. These factors strongly contributed to pre-service teacher success and their increased competencies (Kalyn & Krohn, 2005).

Consistently positive results through PM over the years have provided an ongoing framework for teacher candidates to practice the teaching of dance within physical education classes in elementary schools. Observations of teacher candidates and conversations with our PM members continue to validate previous findings that support increased pedagogical confidence within dance education through their PM participation (Kalyn & Krohn, 2005). Each year, all participants completed a pre and post experience questionnaire and participated in post experience open-ended interviews regarding their PM teaching experiences to ensure consistency in program goals and successful outcomes. Questions revolved around knowledge gains in curriculum, instruction, management and confidence levels as a result of their dance teaching experiences (Kalyn & Krohn, 2005). The participants are in the best position to provide qualitative data about their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glanz, 1998) through their reflections and stories. All interviews were taped and transcribed. It was during one of these post-interviews that a rich and unique story emerged regarding the experiences of the two male members of PM amid 28 females. Rich themes that grew from the data are narratively shared within this paper. The narrative process is a way of understanding experiences and the stories that others live by. These stories are real experiences that are told, shared, and reflected upon. This paper honors the participants' experiences by telling their stories through their words and hopefully provides readers with insight and an understanding of their journey (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This unique story provided new insights and understandings concerning what it means to change one's attitude, perception, and acquire self-confidence in teaching dance from the male perspective. These were two men who stepped outside of the box and faced a challenge.

### **Centre Ice: Face Off**

Initially, these two male teacher candidates were very reluctant to respond to the invitation to join PM. They agreed they were just "too cool" for the program when they first watched the video presentation about PM and the workshop. Subsequent email invitations to the workshop and plasma screen advertising caused them to reconsider, and they decided to "check it out" if they were going to be required, as teachers, to teach dance. They thought

they might acquire skills that would help them with this challenge and figured that “it couldn’t be too hard to learn.” They jointly agreed, “We had to stop being one-dimensional and acquire new skills because we can’t just do wrist shots all the time” [as elite hockey players] and besides, they added, “How hard can this be?” Their workshop experience was daunting. Eric shared:

I couldn’t believe my eyes walking into the gym! I’m sure I had that ‘deer in the headlights look’ on my face! There were 28 girls standing around in gym clothes and some even in dance shoes. Alekcei and I thought, ‘What the heck is going on here?’ We wondered how intense is this going to be? We felt like these girls were staring at us with a, ‘What are you doing here?’ expression. I wanted to leave but Alekcei suggested we should stick it out and see what happens.

The creative dance portion was their first experience. It took them a while to warm up to the expressive movement ideas and manipulating objects like streamers, balloons, and scarves. Gard (2008) observed, “For many of these young men, dance appears to be a completely foreign movement language” (p. 186). Eric shared that fit, athletic men who usually participate in sports found aesthetic movements daunting and even insulting in some cases when asked, for example, to interpret the movement of a floating leaf. Eric and Alekcei experienced the same discomfort initially with the balloon dance. They caught sight of each other floating around the room, changing levels, directions, pathways, taking on body shapes and interpreting the movements of the balloon, and they thought it was just too ridiculous. Eric commented that although he initially felt uncomfortable he began to realize that young children may come to class without these inhibitions and in fact, might find these movements and props engaging. These two hockey player teacher candidates slowly began to buy in to the program goals and a change in attitude emerged.

Transitioning into the hip-hop dance during the workshop went from bad to worse for these gentlemen. The upbeat Wild Wild West Dance (WWW) (Kalyn & Weimer, 2009) consisted of a variety of prescribed sequences. They loved the music but putting the movements and the music together was another story. Eric shared, “I remember feeling scared when the instructor asked us to try certain moves. I was paralyzed with indecision and fear for parts of that time but once I eventually let go of my insecurities it was easier.” Alekcei stated:

This was just one of the most humbling experiences. I consider myself a good athlete and I was good in physical education, never experiencing any difficulty with movements. We were trying to do this WWW dance, and we just couldn’t get it together. We had no coordination or rhythm. You’d just get the first part down after awhile and then they’d move into the next and the next. We couldn’t

keep up and kept forgetting the first part. The instructor asked if we were okay with the sequence and we said NO! Maybe after 10 more times. When we had to switch lines and move from the back to the front of the room, that was the defining moment. I thought, ‘What the heck. If I am going to look like an idiot, I am going to have some fun with it!’ We just started to meld into the dancing when one of the girls said, ‘You guys are going to teach this?’ They looked at us like, ‘When are you ever going to get this!’ We didn’t let them mess with our growing confidence at that point. We were in it for the long haul by then. We had caught fire. We had to admit that it was very hard to feel uncomfortable in a place [a gymnasium] that is a normal comfort zone because we were both good athletes and all of our gymnasium experiences had been positive until that day! It was very humbling to fail so miserably at something. We gained a lot of respect for the arts and the dance community that day.

Eric shared:

I reflected back to my school physical education classes at this point and reminded myself that I made similar negative comments or gestures to less athletic kids during basketball play. Knowing they could never make a lay-up, I would avoid passing to them because I figured they had no skill. Now, I was the one without any skill. I was humbled again. The focus of my elementary PE classes was dodge ball, volleyball, basketball and running. I don't remember ever learning dance. In high school we did a dance unit once a year. Social dance was brutal because I was lost the whole time. It was embarrassing. I think dance was ignored because I had a male teacher most years. I don't think he was comfortable teaching it.

Aleksei agreed:

I developed my opinions toward dance at a young age. I remember just wanting to play sports and roughhouse. Dancing was for girls and not for boys. I think I was scared of the feminine side of dance and needing rhythm and some grace to do it. I definitely would not have danced in front of people as a student. However, I was only taught social dancing like the two-step and square dancing.

They finished out the workshop and went away with their materials, determined to become great teachers of dance within their physical education classes. They added to their challenge by signing up to teach two grades back-to-back: one a 2/3 split and the other a 3/4 split for a total of six classes. They taught the same content to both grades with variations. When Eric’s

wife saw the two of them dancing in the living room one afternoon [in preparation for their lesson] and asked what they were doing, Eric and Alekcei shared their excitement as they prepared to teach their first dance class!

### ***First Period***

Eric reflected before their first lessons:

I remember when I first heard that in PM we had to go teach this stuff to a gym full of kids I was shocked. How were we expected to do that? I couldn't even clap to the beat. The turning point for us was when we really decided to buy into it. We decided to put the effort in on our own time and learn some dances and work to our strengths. We practiced our routines and headed to the gym. We watched as two PM girls worked with the class before us, and they did a great job. This terrified us because our routines and plans looked nothing like theirs. Minutes before the kids showed up, I was preparing like I used to for hockey games, getting fired up and trying to be positive. I have never been that nervous for anything in my life. Once the lesson started, we really tried to keep the enthusiasm up, make it fun, and enjoy ourselves. This was a good approach for us. It was good to have a partner in this because it took the pressure off the other guy for a bit. It also helped me realize there is more than one way to teach a dance lesson, and I continue to carry this lesson with me when I teach today.

These teacher candidates were very nervous and excited for their first lessons. Eric said he couldn't remember the last time he talked to a seven year old! He said he was petrified and lacked confidence. These elite male hockey players turned dance educators talked between each other and shared:

We've played hockey in front of thousands of people and were never nervous like this. Teaching these little guys was very nerve wrecking! I have never felt like this in my education before! I mean they are this high [gesture to knee high] and they are scaring me to death. Who would think we'd be doing this? Teaching dance to little kids. Did we really sign up for this?

One of the skills that the teacher candidates learned was planning and the amount of planning required for a lesson. Eric said that their first lesson was so over-planned and they had about two hours worth of material for their 30-minute lesson. They were concerned about the students becoming bored and wanted to be sure they were not left scrambling for further progressions within their lessons. They said that from the first to the sixth lessons they learned a great deal about the amount of material needed for each lesson and how to build in

progressions and transition from one lesson to the next. The team teaching aspect also took some planning. They had to plan how to share the lessons, motivate the students, think about their management skills, figure out how they were going to use the tambourine within the lessons, and teach the dances they selected from the syllabus.

They felt well planned but once they started their first lesson it just “went all over the place!” They said they began by introducing themselves and told the children they were there to teach them some really cool dances. Instead of beginning with a warm up, they jumped right into teaching the Turkey in the Straw Dance (Kalyn & Weimer, 2009). Eric described:

I never laughed so hard as when I was watching big Alekcei getting on his horse, putting on his cowboy hat and getting the kids all primed up for this dance. There were squats in this dance, and we had all the kids, in character moving up and down into their squats practicing that part of the sequence [where they ride their horses] and the kids were just working so hard huffing and puffing away!

Alekcei commented:

We were trying to work the music beat into the squats, and I was getting tired myself, and I looked at Eric and said maybe we should do something else! These little kids were trying so hard and their little legs! One little guy looked up at me and said ‘I’m tired, my legs, are we done yet?’ They loved the part where we all joined hands and went into the middle and yelled ‘ye-haw!’ What a blast!

In spite of forgetting their management strategies, putting the squats before the warm up, yet somehow making it through the dance, they felt a great sense of accomplishment at the end of the first lesson and wondered why they were so worried. They said they were “on cloud nine and ready for more!”

### ***Second Period***

As a result of feeling success and a measure of confidence from their first lesson, these dance teachers embraced their second lessons for grades 2/3 and 3/4. They were excited and enthused as they prepared lessons using the streamers that resembled gymnastic ribbons. The streamers, used as a basic introduction to props within PM, are used in a variety of ways to encourage rhythmic movement and the creation of simple movement sequences.

Experiencing the streamers during the workshop felt like a foreign activity for these teachers. However, with increased skill levels and greater confidence during the lessons their attitudes shifted from discomfort to one of recognizing these props as important extensions of creative

movement. This was a shift in their understanding of pedagogical practice and developing teaching strategies to meet the outcomes of their lessons. They were focused on providing positive dance experiences for their students filled with color and movement challenges. They did admit that they were still quite nervous, but found they connected with the students and worked on developing their management strategies while experimenting with new teaching styles.

The teachers were surprised that the kids were excited to come back to dancing class. It is of interest to note that teacher candidates; although they have experienced success in their lessons do not always make the connections that their pedagogical strengths and the positive learning experiences they provided draw children back to learning situations. When teachers teach well, students are excited about subsequent learning opportunities and the synergy between students and their teachers is heightened.

During the second lessons, the teachers made the transition from focusing on the content of the lessons to combining the focus between content and actually teaching their students. They reflected that they were shifting from the “subject” to the “object” [students] of their lessons and this provided them with more enjoyment and increased confidence. Eric commented, “I danced around with that pink streamer, and I laughed the whole time. I can’t believe I did that”. He said these experiences taught him to try different activities that were normally out of his comfort zone having focused on sports all of his life. He lost his fear that day and realized mistakes and awkwardness are a part of teaching and that teaching requires one to step outside of the box. He determined that conquering his fears increased his belief that he could teach anything if he worked at it. This paradigm shift was pivotal for these pre-service teachers in developing competencies in new curricula areas.

### ***Third Period***

Eric commented:

Lessons five and six were my favorite. We practiced the Jump Dance (Kalyn & Weimer, 2009) in my living room for two hours the night before. Skipping around the living room and counting the beats felt normal, and I was comfortable that we had learned the dance well enough to teach it. We taught the dance, and the kids loved it. It was like we made their day. After it was over, I felt very satisfied with myself. Hard work paid off, and it was rewarding to see that the kids loved it. They were engaged in the dancing, sweating up a storm, and learning the sequences. This made me realize how valuable dance is in school. It was also rewarding that our peers from the first day stuck around to watch us teach our lesson, and said that we were awesome. Brenda was there too, and her positive

comments re-affirmed why we had chosen to take a risk, step outside the box, and become teachers of dance.

Gaining skills through practice builds confidence in teaching. Teacher candidates begin to understand how curriculum moves from planned, to enacted, and emerges as experienced curriculum (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009) through careful planning and thoughtful action. It is at this juncture that pedagogy and dance intersect in the teacher's practice and from here quality lessons and units become a sustained piece of their work and the student's experience.

### **Pedagogical Growth through Teaching Practice**

Strong pedagogical skills are developed through practice and reflection, knowledge of content, increased skill, and the ability to succeed and build confidence in teaching—particularly in curricula areas deemed outside the box for many teacher candidates (Pajak, Stoko & Masci, 2015; Pangrazi & Gibbons, 2009; Seidentop, 1991). Teaching is both an art and a science (Hellison & Templin, 1991; Ralph, 2005) and pre-service teachers can develop researched competencies through practice, feedback, coaching, and observation (NASPE, 2007). They learn to apply intuitive and artistic knowledge that becomes easier with time and experience. Through their experiences teaching six dance classes within PM these two male teacher candidates developed pedagogical skills and grew both personally and professionally within this teaching area.

### ***Instructional Strategies***

Eric and Alekcei became more comfortable with management strategies from the first to the sixth lessons and their ability to motivate and manage the students became more fluid and natural. Part of working inside PM with a strange class is utilizing management strategies that maintain focus and enthusiasm, which is often done through well-planned, motivating lessons. They felt they were more prepared and comfortable with each subsequent set of lessons and improved their strategies for gaining attention and keeping the students focused and enthused. Eric shared:

We gained confidence after the first lessons, but we were far from confident. It was like someone breathed a little life into us and we knew we could achieve some form of success. By no means did we think we were good at what we were doing. I think we were more capable of handling changes to our plans. Let's remember that neither of us had ever taught any type of lesson before, let alone a dance lesson.

They began their lessons waiting for all students to be attentive and prepared to participate. Wasting time was not an option as Eric stressed, "We only had 30 minutes so we just wanted

to get going.” He said that by the third day, “We didn’t use the tambourine for management. We just had them with us.” He said they used phrases like, “I expect you to go there and pick out a streamer and be responsible, and then come back to your spot and if you can’t do that then we will put them back and try it over again until you get it right.” Their intuitive sense of what it means to be a responsive teacher also kicked in when one young boy who went to get a streamer was very upset when he had to have a pink one. Eric said he went over to the bench and grabbed a pink one too, and told the boy that he was going to use pink. The little guy looked up at him and questioned “really?” and then he was happy. Their team teaching improved to the point in their lessons where they just “knew what the other was going to do next.” They grew to know each other, trust each other in the instructional process, and complement each other through their teaching.

### ***Motivation***

Motivating students to be engaged in the lessons was handled through positive, inclusive, and exciting dance activities as well as building up a sense of anticipation. They told the kids that the best dance was coming at the end of their lessons together, and the kids just kept looking forward to the culmination. The two teachers said they were going to teach them the Jump Dance and it would be “the most fun they’ve ever had!” These teachers confided that they had forgotten the dance from the workshop but were determined to stick to their word and learn the dance for the last classes. We told the kids, “It is going to be awesome and you are going to love it” so that kept us on track, and “we knew we had to learn the dance!”

The teacher candidates felt all of these accomplishments spoke to building positive classroom relationships with students. These teachers smiled a great deal in spite of their nervousness at times. They looked happy and excited to be a part of the children’s lesson and this became a great motivator between students, teachers, and dance curriculum. These teacher candidates will have little idea what impact they made during those lessons but the experiences they provided could last a lifetime for some of these students, and it may also have changed some of their students’ perceptions of dance. We will never know.

### ***Feedback and Teacher Validation***

These two teacher candidates felt supported through the encouragement and feedback received from the classroom teachers, faculty members, the school principal, and their students. Hearing specific feedback based on these observations provided them with a reflective look at their lessons and information on how to improve in some areas, while maintaining their strengths. Issues of space management; teacher placement; team teaching strategies; activity transitions managing student behaviors, equipment, props, and music; team teaching; and motivation were all discussed. They commented:

One of the classroom teachers came up to us and said she really appreciated what

we had accomplished with her students and that felt great. It meant a lot to us. She told us the kids were really excited to come to class when we were here and that was motivation for us. The teacher said the kids were practicing their moves on their own as a result of the positive experiences they were having with us! That was huge in our experience.

This was evident by the children's comfort level with these teacher candidates. When they would signal the children to gather in for further instruction, the kids would run up so close and hug them that they had no room to instruct them. They had to ask the kids to step back into their personal space so they could learn the next dance. Aleksei said, "The kids were right on us, and we couldn't believe how close they'll come to you!"

Feedback from their young students provided validation of success for the teacher candidates in a variety of ways. Observing the kids respond to the dances with enthusiasm, smiles, hard work, building up a sweat, and having fun during the classes made them feel like they were accomplishing their pedagogical goals. These successes also affirmed their belief in dance education and the importance it plays within children's movement experiences. Meeting these outcomes was encouraging and they felt they accomplished their goal of getting everyone active and fully participating in the lessons. The principal congratulated all of the PM team members from this school on an excellent job teaching the students. Receiving validations from respected administrators for their work provided teacher candidates with the confidence to further their teaching in this area of curriculum.

These pre-service teachers were pleased with the organization of their PM experience. They felt all the details were highly organized, and they just had to step in, learn the curriculum, develop their skills, and practice teaching effectively. The ongoing, professional liaison between PM coordinators and the school administration was imperative for success. The teacher candidates appreciated the opportunity to "settle in" to their teaching the first day before a coordinator came to observe a subsequent lesson to ensure that everything was going well. After one observation, the team members were typically left on their own unless faculty members were called to assist with anything.

### **Two Stars of the Game: Crossing the Professional Line**

#### ***Emergent Professionals***

It is impossible to score unless you shoot. These two elite hockey players, turned teachers of dance have scored in a major way and so have the students whom they have taught dance! Emerging as a professional teacher requires a passion for teaching. Inside that passion comes a call to learn what might not be initially comfortable or intuitive. These teacher candidates

discomfort with dance was a catalyst that challenged them to step outside of their comfort zone and learn something new. Eric and Aleksei both determined that becoming a professional required growth and a shift in attitude. They agreed, “If you need to learn how to teach dance, then that is what you have to do. If you have to teach algebra then you’d better figure it out. It is part of the curriculum and if you don’t grow as a teacher how will you help your students grow?”

They found the ongoing, consistent, and progressive practice within PM provided them with opportunities to grow as professionals, and apply their skills in a practical situation. They felt this had a huge impact on their confidence. Eric said:

I don’t lack confidence on my worst days, but this was nerve wrecking. As we grew in our teaching of dance we began to feel very accomplished and successful. We grew as professionals and were proud of our new diversity and our increased understanding and delivery of dance curriculum.

Their confidence grew to the point that they diverged from the syllabus provided to them and created their own idea for a Football Dance. They were particularly proud of their ability to select a piece of music, create simple choreography, teach it to their students, and observe the outcomes that demonstrated the joy of dance by their students.

### ***Knowledge Acquisition***

These teacher candidates felt PM provided them with the opportunity to think about dance curriculum, the social aspects of teaching and learning, and other pedagogical strategies. They observed different stages of growth and development as well as the different social structures between grades 2/3 and 3/4. They addressed everything from students’ attention spans, fatigue, themes of dances, props, and what they believed would work in terms of dance content with each class. This was based on learned observation of their students and being pedagogically aware of what would be most successful in terms of content and instruction in relation to the social structure of their class, their past experiences, and the teachers’ comfort levels in instruction.

Working with young children quickly became more comfortable after they emerged from their initial fears. They did, however, express concern about teaching dance to older kids. They discussed using different themes and props with older kids. It is interesting that teacher candidates tend to distrust the idea that simple equipment like balloons or streamers can be used effectively with older students unless they see a demonstration of this or try it out themselves. When it is successful they are always so amazed and tell us “it worked!” The teacher candidates felt their experiences in PM provided them with: the acquisition of

extended knowledge in the areas of curriculum, management, instruction, motivation, team teaching, children's social and physical development, and increased confidence which would benefit their future work. They also believed their experiences in PM would look very good on their resumes. They were proud of their Certificates of Participation in *Project Move* and believed their experiences would set them apart when applying for a teaching position.

Ultimately, pedagogical goals are realized from a variety of contexts. Providing positive, ongoing, supervised practical learning opportunities for teacher candidates in the area of dance education has proven to positively influence pedagogical practices, change attitudes and perceptions about dance, enhance positive teacher self-perceptions as teachers of dance, increase knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and provide dance opportunities for school students (Kalyn & Krohn, 2005). Opportunities to engage in teaching dance have continued to shift teacher candidates' perceptions of what it means to dance and how they identify with their role in the teaching of dance. Most of all, we hope it takes students and teachers back to a place of joy where they can express themselves through dance and creative movement the way they did when they were two years old.

Eric and Alekcei felt that a little hard work and an open mind was all it took to accomplish their goals and grow professionally in the area of dance education. Shifting personal attitudes and perceptions takes courage and humility. They believed that many teacher candidates neglect to extend themselves professionally and step outside of their comfort zones. This self-imposed exile from some curricula areas stunts professional growth. Dance education can be a vulnerable area of curricula where curricula accountability is not always monitored and classroom students may be denied creative, challenging, and enjoyable movement experiences through dance. These gentlemen spent time watching the PM team who was teaching before their scheduled lessons. They were open to learning from other teachers and "picking up some tips," as they said. They commented that the first time they came in to teach after these girls, "The girls looked at us like, what are you two doing here, and we just sloughed it off thinking we could teach your class, too!"

Eric commented:

I learned that I have to respect other people's skill. I no longer look down on things I do not understand. I used to think that dance was a waste of time, but now I am living proof that it can change the way you see the world. I need to show students this side of themselves. Being a risk taker was a very positive experience for me, and I learned that I could achieve things if I worked at them, and that it pays to try something new. Also, I was able to let go of my insecurities and just have fun. Everyone should experience that. Finally, I have gained experience in an area that is not always taught very well or very often. This makes me more

valuable in my profession. I now have a skill that few people possess and that others are scared to learn. It makes me confident in my abilities as a dance teacher. A male dance teacher in elementary education, to boot! This has been one of my best goals that I've achieved and it wasn't even on the ice!

### **Continued Mentorship**

Faculty members involved with pre-service teacher education in dance and physical education may wonder what impact they have had on student's learning. Further questions included: have students continued to embrace this subject area through curriculum as they cross the line into professional teaching and what do they experience in their schools in relation to dance education? As faculty members involved with PM over many years, we have been fortunate to visit classrooms of former PM members who now welcome new PM members into their physical education classes to practice the teaching of dance. Former members continue to pass on positive comments about how valuable PM was in their pre-service education and support new teacher candidates as they pursue the same opportunity.

Reflecting on pedagogical practices from faculty perspectives and listening to pre-service teacher feedback, we assess what we have done well, and what needs further attention. As professional educators, we should be continuously engaged in the learning needs of teacher candidates. Our pedagogies should contain sound theoretical substance within a body of knowledge and this knowledge should readily be applicable to practice within teaching contexts (Ralph, 2005). Teacher candidates desire to learn how to transfer theory into practice. Providing ongoing, practical opportunities for teacher candidates through our methods courses and special programs is imperative to remaining current in our fields of expertise and accountable to the students we teach. Positive learning experiences enhances pedagogical knowledge, encourages shifts in attitudes and perceptions, and assists teachers in acquiring confidence in teaching. Ralph (2005) maintains that effective instruction at the college level requires a variety of skills including: 1) a commitment to learners; 2) knowledge of material; 3) organization and management of the environment; 4) a desire to improve; and 5) collaboration with other professionals. Ralph (2005) furthers that practice alone does not make perfect and requires ongoing support and feedback from a "respected mentor, coach or supervisor" (p. 108).

Mentoring pre-service teachers challenges educators to think beyond subjects and realize that good teachers become their subjects (Dryden, 1995). The embodiment of subject and learner requires an understanding that all students are products of their experiences and bring their personal identities to the classroom. Part of learning is expanding one's existing experiences and knowledge, while shifting perceptions to understand more deeply their value of a particular subject. If we can lead our students, whether they are children or adults, to a deeper

understanding and exploration between subject and self, we activate learning and turn it into a new joy. Dancing should be a joyous celebration between learner, perception, exploration, freedom, and new, unexplored spaces. Herein, the dancer in the teacher re-emerges and returns to that space and place where he or she danced as a small child. This freedom is a gift one gives to one's self and those they teach.

### **Epilogue: Post-Internship and Employment**

#### ***Eric's Closing Journey***

In discussion with Eric and Alekcei after their convocation and subsequent job acquisitions they shared some final and future thoughts. Eric said:

During my internship, I was responsible for teaching a 40 student, all male, grade 7/8 physical education class. I was nervous about teaching dance to this class and I never would have considered teaching dance without my experiences with *Project Move*. My first official dance class consisted of hopping and jumping to the beat of the music, and then I introduced basketballs and we dribbled to the beat. This helped get the boys to buy into the dance lessons. The way I teach is more athletic looking, and competitive and the boys like that. Once they gained confidence in their skills, I added a partner component to develop the social aspect of the lesson. That way they may have the confidence to try it with a partner; rather than just embarrassing them with moves they will not get on the first attempt. As the unit continued we put together routines, and the boys learned how to follow the beat of the music and they really enjoyed my male presence and the sporty twist I put on it.

I recorded the evidence of learning in this class and in my primary school P.E. classes (Kindergarten Grades 1, 3, 4) and shared them with the other teachers and it helped me gain respect as a new teacher. I put the rough videos into an iMovie and we had an "official screening" of each class's video. Everyone really liked seeing themselves and their students in a video. These dances, and the ones I have recorded since my first year, are part of my personal digital portfolio I used during interviews.

After my internship, I was hired as a full time teacher in the same school. I believe my work with dance in the school helped demonstrate that I was not scared to try new things, I took risks, and I was a fun and energetic teacher. I believe that gaining confidence through *Project Move* helped me get a job immediately after my internship.

Every chance I get to use my dance background, I am excited. I am confident with beat, dance, and understanding rhythm, and music. I have found that many teachers are scared to teach dance, and I think that puts me in a valuable position.

Overall, PM helped me become a well-rounded person. Sports are not everything and I am glad I learned that before I started teaching. It has shown me that I can succeed when I try things out of my comfort zone. I will never forget my first day teaching a dance lesson to those elementary school kids. To this day, that was the most terrifying, nerve wrecking thing I have experienced in my entire life. I think confidence in myself had a lot to do with that. Currently, I would teach dance to anyone, it does not scare me at all anymore, and I actually really enjoy it. I can't believe how much this has helped me personally and professionally. I will continue to teach and promote dance and the Arts in education and stress their value to student learning and teacher growth.

### ***Alekcei's Closing Thoughts***

After convocation, I was hired and I am currently teaching a grade eight homeroom and a variety of other subjects in grade seven with some upper level PE classes. The community I teach in is very conservative with strong Christian beliefs, so teaching dance can be a bit challenging, and I have to respect the cultural expectations in relation to curriculum within the community and how it can be taught. Adapting the curriculum, I took my experience with *Project Move* and made the most of it. I keep it fairly simple, learning basic steps and then I encourage the students to create their own movements. In my experience, this by far works the best when you put the creativity into the hands of the students and see what they can come up with. For the most part, everyone is able to produce something they can be proud of including the boys! During the performances everyone has fun seeing what each other created. While on a holiday cruise, I learned a few dances from others, and I taught them to my students in our PE classes and it was a great success! I plan to continue teaching dance because as a professional, I enjoy the challenge of teaching it and the students need to step outside of their comfort zone to learn and grow as individuals. PM gave me the opportunity to step outside of the box and work towards expanding my professional expertise in an area of curricula discomfort. Taking the risk and joining PM taught me both educational and life lessons that will benefit my students as I continue in education.

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Brenda Kalyn (B.Ed., M.Ed., Ph.D.) is in her 26<sup>th</sup> year of teaching at the University of Saskatchewan. As a faculty member in Curriculum Studies her research interests focus on the experiences of teachers and students within learning contexts to further understand how these experiences shape culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy. Primary interests include: physical, dance, and health education; curriculum theory; holistic education; culture; and trends and issues in educational research. She is also researching how creative practices in dance and music might influence the health and well being of cancer patients.

Eric Campbell (B.A., B.Ed., M.Ed.(c)) is in his sixth year of teaching and is pursuing his Masters of Administration and Leadership Degree. Eric enjoys recreational sports, coaching volleyball, basketball, and hockey. Recently, Eric helped secure a large federal grant that will be used to promote school/community learning through connections with Canada's role in World War I and World War II. Eric is community minded teacher who often steps outside of his comfort zones to enhance the learning of his students, particularly in dance education. Eric and his wife have a daughter Ella (5) and a son Jack (2).

Aleksei McAvoy (B.Ed.) is in his sixth year of teaching. He continues to teach dance within his PE dance units. His keeps instruction simple and fun and encourages student ownership over their dances, letting them choose their music, and explore creativity through various movements. Aleksei finds a high rate of success when students are able to have a voice and experience dance through a creative lens. He accredits taking the risk to attend the Project

Move dance initiative as an important professional experience and character builder. Aleksei also serves as the athletic director for his school coaching cross-country, badminton, and track.

Michelle Weimer (B. Ed., Dance) is the Dance Coordinator and Sessional Lecturer in the College of Kinesiology at the University of Saskatchewan. She is the Director of the University School of Dance and teacher/choreographer of the multidisciplinary wheelchair dance group, the Agility Ballet Company. Michelle has been teaching dance for over 27 years, in both the public and private sectors. She was a founding member and coordinator of Project Move, dance instructor for the PAAL program, and previously co-owned her own consulting and teaching business, Active Education. Her focus, for the past 10 years, has been on working with dancers, who have mobility or cognitive challenges.

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