# Organization History

The Pulse Ontario Dance Conference is a bi-annual, province-wide dance education forum for Secondary dance students, dance educators, dance artists, and dance scholars.

**Background**

In 2002, in the elected position as Dance Liaison for CODE, the provincial subject association for Dance and Drama educators in Ontario, Carmelina Martin (current chair of Pulse) was commissioned with the task of networking and supporting Ontario teachers who were delivering ministry mandated dance curriculum. It was only four years earlier, in 1998, that the ministry of education had written and published a policy to be implemented for dance education. Subsequently, dance became a curricular area in Grades 1-12. However, the reality and challenge of locating dance educators across this large province who required curriculum support or professional development through a conference such as Pulse, was daunting due to the sheer size of the province.

The vision for a province-wide dance conference began to emerge as a means of drawing teachers, students, and dance artists/professionals together in one central location. Through consultation with various stakeholders in dance education, the Pulse Ontario Youth Dance Conference was conceived. With the unanimous support of the Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE) and York University’s Dance Department as co-sponsor of the event, the planning committee for Pulse was assembled. The planning committee for the first inaugural dance conference in 2006 was officially convened in 2004, and included many stakeholders in dance education. This included secondary and elementary dance specialist-teachers, CODE representatives, a York Dance Faculty Liaison, and professional dance artists.

The mandate established was: to support emerging dance programs, including those in under serviced or in rural Ontario, and to begin forging lasting relationships between educators and the professional dance community. This mandate was realized for the first time in May 2006 at York University in the Accolade East Building, the new home of the York Dance Department.

**2006 Conference Narrative**

This first Conference included 24 dance workshops reflecting a diversity of forms and approaches to dance creation, a curated film festival on opening night with a keynote address, followed by a facilitated icebreaker activity to inspire the delegation of 138 people from 20 schools across Ontario (including teachers).

On the final day, the teachers had a special plenary session titled NUDGE (as in ‘nudging’ our way forward). This session, facilitated by Christine Jackson of the Toronto District School Board, asked teachers to think about the dance curriculum . . . Jackson saw this plenary as an important opportunity to dialogue about the state of dance education in Ontario.

Overall, the 2006 Conference was successful in terms of realizing the Pulse mandate; it brought together the dance artist and the dance in education communities from around the province (secondary students and teachers) through dynamic workshops, performance evenings, socials, and visioning meetings. Conference delegates came from a variety of regions, as far as two hours away to the South and five hours away to the North. There were few delegates from the City of Toronto, perhaps owing to the many opportunities already enjoyed by these students and educators. Student delegates reported that they had a wonderful time at the conference and wished that it had been longer. One student mentioned that Pulse helped her “to lose the competition aspect.” Many students requested more workshops, and artists enjoyed the energy and enthusiasm of the delegates in their workshops. Bengt Jorgen, artistic director of Ballet Jorgen, offered, “There is a sort of freshness and wonderment to someone who hasn’t done it [danced] before and knowing, perhaps if you [the teacher] do it right, you may turn them on to what you’re doing.” Peggy Baker suggested that Pulse was an important opportunity “for these students to be surrounded by other people who care about the same thing . . . it’s fortifying.”

**2008 Conference Narrative**

For the second Pulse Conference in 2008, we received public funding from the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) and the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF). For this conference, a second evening of live dance performances was added to the program, which included Little Pear Garden (Chinese classical/contemporary), Arabesque (belly dance), Ballet Creole (Afro- Caribbean/contemporary), Sampradaya (classical Indian), Kaeja d’Dance (contact improvisation-based contemporary), Santee Smith (contemporary First Nations), as well as 12 additional workshops. The number of delegates attending rose to a total of 205, representing 17 schools from around the province. Keynote speaker Lata Pada, a Canadian icon and exquisite Bharatanatyam dancer, discussed her heartbreaking journey, returning to dance after her husband and two children were killed in the Air India bombing in 1985, a devastating tragedy that affected many Canadians. She shared video footage of her very personal autobiography, *Consumed by Fire*, a deeply evocative work that animates her journey of struggle to make sense of this tragedy.

It was during this Conference that it became clear how useful documentaries could be for advocacy work and in supporting grant applications. The documentary created in 2008 unearthed some of the gender discrepancies in dance education in Ontario. It also highlighted some of the tensions between dance education and dance training. In the 2008 documentary, Courtney, a young black male from a small town just north of Toronto, explained, “Dance means everything, dance and music . . . you put those two together, basically that’s my life . . . I can’t live without it.” At the end of the 2008 documentary, Courtney offered, “Dance just got a whole lot bigger for me.” This comment became an anthem for the Pulse Committee—an important piece of evidence that the Conference was achieving its goals of broadening teachers’ and students’ perspectives on what dance might be.

Many of the Pulse artists remarked at how special the Conference was for them—it was an opportunity to connect with a whole other generation of the dance community and with teachers. Andrea Douglas (Afro-Caribbean artist and Toronto-District School Board Principal), remarked after an Afro-Caribbean class she taught, “I wanted them to be themselves and let go. They were not afraid to take risks and I thought that was amazing.”

In 2008, the teacher plenary, once again facilitated by Christine Jackson, was titled REACH in order to highlight the advocacy efforts of the two previous years and to emphasize the teachers’ readiness to reach across the Province of Ontario, across subject disciplines, across grades, and across institutional boundaries to our arts community partners. In table groups, delegates discussed artist-teacher partnerships and developed metaphors to describe them: “The artist-teacher-student partnership is an ecosystem which is a shared responsibility that promotes the intrinsic values of movement as essential to spiritual literacy.” Teacher Sue Zuro found the plenary useful: “I thought the teacher plenary was very useful, especially the introduction of the Ontario Arts Council Officers. I brought in guest artist Andrea Nann through them. I also brought in guest artists from other Pulse workshops to my school.”

\* Link to 2008 Documentary

**2010 Conference Narrative**

The male presence at the 2008 conference became an important theme for the Committee members. It was for this reason that the former National Ballet of Canada soloist, Rex Harrington, was invited to be the featured keynote speaker for the 2010 conference. Rex spoke of his mentally ill mother taking him to audition for the National Ballet School because she noticed he liked to move and was a very kinetic child. Rex offered that our passion is revealed to others and to ourselves, sometimes in the most unexpected ways, and that somehow his mother knew that ballet was to be his home and his family. He encouraged the 2008 delegates to nurture their passions and to find those places and those people who will encourage their journey and become their family, their community.

Two students were keynote speakers at this Conference: Chris Pattenden and Courtney Dyer. Chris was in his final year of high school in 2008 and had attended three Pulse Conferences. In his keynote address, Chris admitted that he started dance late (in Grade 9): He described dance as an “anchor . . . the ever-changing ebb and flow of life . . . It’s the gateway to the inner soul of a person . . . a chance for the world to see the real you. There is an inner beauty that you can find in a single movement that can’t be described by words.” Chris’s words seemed to transform the audience that evening—the entire audience was in tears as they listened to his speech.

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

\* Link to 2010 documentary

**2012 Conference Narrative**

The planning committee for the 2012 Pulse conference grew; four new members joined the team, including former Pulse delegate Chris Pattenden and three dance scholars, all with their own areas of expertise in dance education. Zihao Li (with a research focus on boys in dance), Jennifer Bolt (with a research focus on transitions in dance), and Mary Fogarty (with a research focus on street dance) contributed significantly to plans for the 2012 conference. With Jennifer’s leadership, the Free Flow symposium was planned for the afternoon of the first day of the Conference. This symposium brought together dance and education scholars, secondary school teachers and students, and dance artists in a conversation that centered on transitions in dance education. In a small group discussion, one Grade Nine student expressed, “I didn’t know people were even asking these questions.” The Free Flow symposium gave participants an opportunity to hear about recent research in dance education from four of Pulse’s committee members (Jennifer Bolt, Zihao Li, Blake Martin, and Marc Richard), as well as to enter into small group discussions on the topic of transitions in dance.

One graduate student offered that we need to look for our own definitions of dance: “Those moments where you realized what dance was for you and what was missing from your definition in order to be empathetic to other people’s experiences of dance.” Each group presented the major ideas from their group discussions. After further consideration, four themes emerged (later addressed in the plenary session with elementary and secondary teachers):

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

New in the 2012 Pulse Conference was the inclusion of a one-day workshop for elementary school (Kindergarten to Grade 8) teachers, led by Marc Richard. This workshop, “Teaching the Joy of Creative Dance,” allowed teachers to explore (the elements of dance) creating short phrases in partners and groups.

In her keynote address at the 2012 Conference, Stephanie Brinning relayed how she had attended her first Pulse Conference with a broken leg. She recognized that Pulse allowed her to see the creative differences we share as dancers. “I realized there was more than one way to move your body . . . that there was more than one way people could move their bodies. Later on, I realized that people enjoy watching things that are different and unique. At Pulse, I learned not to play it safe and learned how to create my own free movement . . . I learned how to be myself more.”

In the 2012 documentary, a fourth year York University Dance Ambassador remembered his 2008 Pulse Conference experience as his introduction to Western styles of dance and multicultural dances; the experience opened a door for him, making him realize that he wanted to continue dancing. Teacher Kim Wylde articulated that it was eye opening for her students to see her dancing with them. Contact improvisation teacher/artist Allen Kaeja said, “We work so hard to know what we are doing, but it is important for us to realize how essential not knowing is.” Student Sarah Langlois described how at the 2010 Conference, she “left all her fears and negativity behind and just went with it . . . and that changed me for the next two years and I’ve grown a lot since then. For this Conference, I’m feeling a lot more confident. I’m not looking around and judging. I’m just here for the experience and to be real.”

In his keynote address, Hip-Hop dance artist Mariano Abarca suggested to the delegates: “Ask questions, don’t settle for anything less. You are a scientist of this art form. Remember that. So no matter what anyone tells you, don’t take that as concrete evidence; you make your own decisions. Research as much as you can.”

\* Link to 2012 documentary

**Acknowledgements of Pulse Planning Committees**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2006 Committee** | **2008 Committee** | **2010 Committee** | **2012 Committee** | **2014 Committee** |
| **Founder & Chair**Carmelina Martin**York Liaison**Mary-Elizabeth Manley**Artist Liaison**Jenny Ann McCowan**Treasurer**Dre Gravlijn **Registrars**Melanie MepsteadLorrain Sutherns**Website Design**Oliver SuthernsBlake Martin**Hospitality**Alex Cilic**Code President & Plenary Facilitator**Christine Jackson **Stage Manager**Olivia Davies**Videographer**Justin Haigh**Observer:**Rhonda Ryman | **Founder & Chair**Carmelina Martin**York Liaison**Mary-Elizabeth Manley**Artist Liaison**Dre Gravlijn**Treasurer**Melanie Mepstead**Registrars**Megan Schroeder Emily Cheung**Website & Branding** Blake Martin**Hospitality**Andrea MitchellMariko AndreoneLauren Van GijnTara Breeze**Plenary Facilitator**Christine Jackson**Documentary Film makers:**Chris PareJon Garcia**Producer**Richard Martyn**Executive Producers**Carmelina MartinBlake Martin**Film Composer:**Blake Martin**Funding:**Trillium OACCODE | **Founder & Chair**Carmelina Martin**York Liaison**Mary-Elizabeth Manley**Artist Liaison**Dre Gravlijn**Treasurer**Melanie Mepstead**Registrars**Megan Schroeder Emily Cheung**Website & Branding** Blake Martin**Hospitality**Andrea MitchellMariko AndreoneLauren Van Gijn**Grant Writers**Tara BreezeCarmelina Martin**PR**Marc Richard**Documentary Film makers:**Chris PareJon Garcia**Executive Producers**Carmelina MartinBlake Martin**Film Composer:**Blake Martin**Funding:****CODE** | **Founder & Chair**Carmelina Martin**York Liaison**Mary-Elizabeth ManleyMary Fogarty**Artist Liaison**Dre Gravlijn**Treasurer**Melanie Mepstead**Registrars**Megan Schroeder **Website & Branding** Blake Martin**Hospitality**Mariko AndreoneLauren Van GijnBobbie Dhindsa**Social Networking &****Photography**Lauren Van GijnBobbie Dhindsa**Grant Writers**Tara BreezeCarmelina Martin**PR**Marc Richard**Documentary Film makers:**Pamela Rasbach**Executive Producers**Carmelina MartinBlake Martin**Film Composer:**Blake Martin**Free Flow Symposium Committee:**Jen BoltMarc RichardZihao LeeMary FogartyChris PattendenAdvisor: Mary-Elizabeth Manley | **Founder & Chair**Carmelina Martin**York Liaison**Mary-Elizabeth ManleyMary Fogarty**Code Liaison**Clyre Lyndley**Artist Liaison**Kate Cornell**Treasurer**Megan Schroeder**Registrars**Megan Schroeder **Website & Branding** Blake MartinDave Lawson**Social Networking & Photography****Grant Writers**Kate CornellCarmelina MartinAndrea Lefebvre**PR**Marc Richard**Documentary Film makers:****Executive Producers**Carmelina MartinBlake Martin**Film Composer:**Blake Martin**Free Flow Symposium Committee:**Jen BoltMarc RichardMary FogartyKate CornellChris Pattenden**Northern Ontario Team****Site Coordinator:** Andrea LebfebvreDance teacher /Chippewa SS**Team**Jayde Valliancourt Private studio owner/Dance teacher ScollardAmber Mclean - Dance teacherStefania Marchione- Graduate Dance Student – Dance teacherMichelle Webster – Capitol Centre Liaison & Dance Artists/teacherCarole Ann Yacoback – Educational Assistant/Dance CoachAngela Nichols – Dance Teacher/Supply teacherHelen Gobby- Grade 6 teacher – King George/ CODE RepShannon Falconi – Dance teacher/small businessJennifer Ritchie – Canadore teacher and professional artistChantal Brousse – Dance teacher at Alqonquin SSJocelyn Bell – Dance Teacher at WSSMarg McDiarmid – Dance Teacher at WSSMelanie Deibel - Graduate Dance Student – Dance teacherMacey Culhane – Graduate Dance Student – Dance teacher |

# Positioning Statement

**Pulse** is a catalyst bringing together stakeholders in dance education, providing a space to promote dialogue through a shared experience and collaboration. The conference fosters enduring relationships between educators, students, artists and scholars beyond the conference experience. It seeks to address ongoing concerns about the underdeveloped and under-serviced state of dance programs in Ontario and to model delivery templates to other national or international jurisdictions.

Dance is an established curriculum area in the Ontario Public School System, however appropriate teaching spaces, financial access, expertise, knowledge and opportunity are all issues of equity that need to be addressed as a province-wide concern in order for dance education to flourish in Ontario. This conference will not solve all equity issues but it will continue to develop links and promote inquiry between the dance community and Ontario schools.

**Stakeholders**

Pulse is for dance educators—elementary, secondary, pre-service and post secondary—to promote rich professional learning, dialogue and access to current research in dance education. It provides an opportunity to experience and cultivate an informed creative practice in dance education, develop partnerships within the dance education community, and ignite a desire for leadership and innovation.

Pulse is for students—to provide a breadth of dance experiences, a pathway along the continuum of dance education, nurture a creative practice, and connect them to the rich cultural heritage and diversity of dance in Canada.

Pulse is for artists—to foster potential partnerships within the dance education community and opportunities to perform and talk about their work. It provides a context for audience development, and a forum to develop prospective school residencies and touring.

Pulse is for scholars—to provide a forum to share current research, investigate themes for future study, and promote future collaborative inquiries between the various stakeholders in dance education.

## Pulse Ontario Dance Conference and Free Flow Symposium outcomes are:

* To initiate and support both new and established dance programs in Ontario;
* To foster long- term relationships between youth, schools, professional dance artists and researchers to animate the scope for dance in education and society;
* To share best practices, current research, and promote inquiry
* To bring stakeholders together for side-by-side learning;
* To cultivate future dance-artist residencies and outreach in under-serviced communities;
* To develop an appreciation for the rich cultural heritage (First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives, French Language culture) and diversity of dance in Canada;
* To manifest a safe and supportive learning environment for all participants;
* To support Ontario’s policy expectations for the dance curriculum.

**Project Description**

**Pulse Ontario Dance Conference** is committed to giving all participants an *affordable* opportunity and *access* to a conference, where delegates will participate, experience, and develop their literacy, understanding, and appreciation for dance. Transportation expenses will vary from school to school depending on conference location. Additionally the current registration policy limits each school to a maximum of 20 student representatives and 2 educators; to ensure a diverse range of schools representing many geographic regions.

# The Content of the Project

# What will take place from beginning to end?

# Throughout the project, all stakeholders will be immersed in a fulfilling and inspiring dance experience, including keynote speakers, workshops, live performances, dance film viewings, and an academic and professional development symposium. (See conference itinerary—create hyperlink to itinerary.)

# How will artists and participants work together throughout the project?

# Students and educators will participate in a variety of technique-based workshops led by Canadian dance artists, reflective of the diversity of dance in Canada. Delegates will also participate in a full-day creation based project with a commissioned dance artist and musician, resulting in an informal sharing of the work to the whole delegation.

# What is the intended artistic goal of the project?

# To provide models and methods of creative dance practice ­–to document and make the creative process explicit for all stakeholders.

**How will we know if we have been successful?**

Data will be collected in a variety of ways:

* Post conference evaluation sheets
* Documentary footage
* Transcribed narratives of conference participants
* Social Media queries and provocations
* Post-mortem committee notes

**Revenue and Resource Plan**

In order to participate, delegates will pay a conference fee. The conference fee will cover the costs of food, housing, live performances, all workshops, social events, and a Pulse t-shirt.

Public or private support is required to sustain an affordable and accessible conference experience for all participants. Appropriate funding needs to be in place to attract artist participation, and to fairly compensate our artists.

**Website Link**

[www.pulsedance.ca](http://www.pulsedance.ca)