

## The Dance Education Laboratory's Model for Professional Development

by Ann Biddle, with contributions from Jody Arnhold and Joan Finkelstein

The Dance Education Lab (DEL) was established at New York's famous cultural institution, The 92nd Street Y, in order to bring dance into children's and teens' lives and education. Its stated mission includes:

- inspiring teachers to be lifelong learners;
- encouraging experimentation and observation in teaching;
- promoting the artistic development of teachers; and
- empowering teachers to give students ownership of the art form as a means of communication, a key to understanding their cultural heritage, and a medium for personal expression.

DEL was founded in 1995 as an institute for the training and support of teachers of dance in response to a need for sustained and philosophically consistent dance-teacher preparation. Its immediate goal was to provide an alternative professional development program that would cater to dancers who might not have access to or be eligible for a university graduate degree program in dance education. The 92nd Street Y, with its historic commitment to dance and dance-teacher training, offered the perfect home for the DEL program. DEL's long-range objective was to create a comprehensive dance education training program for professional and non-professional dancers, part-time or full-time dance specialists, and classroom teachers interested in teaching dance to children and teenagers. The current DEL faculty comprises top leaders in the field of dance education based in and around New York City.

DEL was designed as an interactive laboratory experience that would balance dance education practice and theory, while providing a supportive collegial network for aspiring and practicing dance educators. Initially, DEL began by offering a one year-long course, "Foundations in Dance

Education," designed and co-taught by Jody Arnhold and Ann Biddle. Since then, DEL has grown to include a comprehensive teacher education certificate program, a performance and workshop series for children, a Sunday workshop series, a public school outreach program, and a staff development program for the NYC Board of Education. In addition, DEL offers a job network, dance education library, and mentoring network. A certificate program is available for graduate and undergraduate college credit through Empire State College, part of the State University of New York. Since its inception in 1995, DEL has trained over 300 dance teachers, over a third of whom are international students.

### The Laboratory Experience

DEL's laboratory environment leads teachers through an interactive learning process that emphasizes both the artistry and practical skills needed to become an effective dance teacher. DEL courses and workshops engage the adult learner in the various processes in which students will participate. DEL instructors model effective teaching techniques and strategies as they lead trainees through various phases of dance technique and choreography. Since the majority of DEL students come from a technical dance background in modern, ballet, or ethnic dance, many find the DEL creative movement approach both liberating and challenging. Some dancers have never before experienced improvisation and dance-making opportunities in a dance class and feel delight and fear at the prospect of sharing in the creation process. It is DEL's goal to help teachers transform their teaching and become lifelong learners. DEL acts as a laboratory environment for DEL faculty as well; new approaches and new courses are designed, taught, redesigned, and retaught in a synergistic response to changes in the students' needs and current trends in dance education.

**Ann Biddle** was co-director of the Dance Education Lab (DEL) from 1995 to 1999. For more than 15 years, Ms. Biddle has taught dance in many public and private schools of New York City and abroad. A former Fulbright Scholar, she worked closely with ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax as a World Dance Analyst on the Global Jukebox Project at Hunter College, NY. She is currently the Dance Education Curriculum Specialist responsible for the overall design and implementation of the Empire State Partnership Project with Ballet Hispanico and P.S. 166, Manhattan. Well known as a staff developer, she works with dance teachers, artists wishing to acquire pedagogical skills, and classroom teachers who use dance as a means to teaching the academic curriculum. Ms. Biddle was graduated from Kenyon College (B.A.) and Teachers College, Columbia University (M.A.) in Dance Education.

**Jody Gotfried Arnhold** is a dance educator and advocate for the arts. In July, 1995, she co-founded the Dance Education Laboratory (DEL) based upon her 25 years' experience as a dance educator and her interest in promoting an effective methodology for training dance teachers. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University. With a B.A. in English (University of Wisconsin) and an M.A. in Dance Education (Columbia University), she is also a Certified Movement Analyst (Laban Institute of Movement Studies). Ms. Gotfried Arnhold is Chairman of the Board of Ballet Hispanico and serves on the boards of The 92nd Street Y and the Center for Arts Education in New York City.

**Joan Finkelstein** has been the director of The 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center since 1992. A former professional dancer who performed both internationally and on Broadway, she is a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts (B.F.A., M.F.A.). During her tenure at the Y, the Dance Center, founded in 1935, was named the Harkness Dance Center and has grown to offer more than 100 classes per week to adults and children, workshops and rehearsal space for professional dancers, 50 performances annually, and weekly social dances, as well as the Dance Education Laboratory. Ms. Finkelstein currently serves on the "Bessies" Performance Awards Committee and the Boards of DanceUSA and The International Committee for the Dance Library of Israel.

### The DEL Model

The DEL Model is a holistic and multi-layered paradigm of dance education. Teachers in DEL receive dance education training through a variety of different perspectives or “lenses.” These include:

- Laban Movement Analysis (LMA)—learning how to describe the facets of dance in a comprehensible language.
- Dance Making—choreographic interpretation of ideas and feelings.
- Dance Sharing and Recording—performing for peers, eliciting feedback.
- Dance Inquiry—aesthetic inquiry involving analysis of a viewed performance.
- Lesson and Curriculum Planning
- Child Development
- Classroom Management
- Multicultural Awareness
- Integrating Dance into the Curriculum

Using these different lenses, we view the components of successful dance teaching as a kaleidoscope. While each perspective is equally important, it is the rich intermingling of all the lenses that produce a brilliant and meaningful dance program for all children in all contexts.

The foundation of the DEL model is the four categories of Laban Movement Analysis: Body, Space, Effort, and Relationship. These four pillars serve as the basis for structuring and designing dance lesson plans. The LMA vocabulary provides a coherent means of describing and analyzing movement and offers a strong link to the K-12 Language Arts standards.

Encompassing the different DEL model lenses are guiding principles that are basic to all good educators: creativity, imagination, innovation, risk

taking, flexibility, humor, communication, empathy, respect, and concern. At the core of the DEL model is an appreciation of the passion and commitment that draws each teacher into this challenging and rewarding profession. Teachers are encouraged to discover their own way of applying the DEL material to their unique teaching context.

The DEL model has been applied locally by its faculty and students in a variety of contexts—preschool, public and private K-12 schools, after-school and studio dance programs, and internationally at the university level. More recently, the DEL approach to professional development was introduced by Ann Biddle into the Empire State Partnership between a major professional dance company, Ballet Hispanico, and a K-5 public school, P.S. 166 in Manhattan, located just across the street from the company.

### DEL I: Foundations in Dance Education

Students entering the first year of DEL enroll in the Foundations in Dance Education course. Designed to provide fundamental training in dance education, this year-long course meets once per week for two hours for 20 sessions. Included in DEL I is the Sunday workshop series, six to eight half-day workshops in specialized topics of dance education.

### DEL II: Advanced Courses

Second-year DEL courses were developed out of a need to provide further training for DEL I students. Courses include:

- Planet Dance: Multicultural Dance Education, designed by Ann Biddle
- Integrating Dance into Language Arts, designed by Joan Sax
- Lesson Planning and Curriculum Design with the Standards, K-12, designed by Kathleen Isaac
- Conflict Resolution and Community Building

through Movement and Dance, designed by Martha Hart Eddy

For example, instructors of the course Planet Dance lead teaching artists through several approaches to integrating dance activities with social studies lessons. Teaching artists (or in some cases classroom dance teachers) learn how to make cultural comparisons as they analyze dances from historical or geographical settings. They reconstruct historical dances and consider interdisciplinary views of teaching history. Influenced by the seminal work of ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax, Planet Dance uses the Choreometrics system of cross-cultural analysis to help students draw connections across the global dance continuum.

Integrating Dance into Language Arts helps teachers learn how to use creative dance to support language arts learning. They develop dance lessons for different age groups based on stories, novels, and poetry. It is offered to teaching artists and classroom teachers involved in the Empire State Partnership programs sponsored by the New York State Council for the Arts.

Lesson Planning and Curriculum Design helps emerging teaching artists and dance educators make best use of the dance standards and other academic local, state, and national standards.

Conflict Resolution and Community Building Through Movement and Dance is a response to current interest in schools. Teachers learn how to apply innovative methods of movement and dance in violence prevention work with youth.

### **Additional DEL Programs**

#### *Dance Networks*

DEL offers partnerships with community school districts in New York City. In District 22 in Brooklyn, for example, DEL provides ongoing staff development in dance education for classroom teachers in the 34 schools interested in inte-

grating dance into their basic academic curriculum. The DEL team and the Arts Coordinator for District 22 designed a comprehensive plan for offering an intensive and sustainable dance education training program for the District's teachers. DEL provides a variety of full-day, half-day, and after-school workshops based on LMA vocabulary and DEL curriculum. A mentoring program for a select group of teachers has also been implemented. New York City's Community School District created the success of the Dance 22 Network, where a common pedagogical approach to dance education has been embraced by dance specialists and classroom teachers alike. Many District 22 teachers have been encouraged to include more dance in their curricula.

#### *Dance Partnerships Mentoring Program*

DEL students often supplement their second year of training with participation in the Dance Partnerships Mentoring Program. DEL students are provided with a DEL master teacher, who serves as mentor for approximately ten contact hours over two to three months. DEL students may observe their mentors teaching, assist the mentors in the classroom, or be observed and evaluated by their mentors. Many DEL students have gone on to become mentors at DEL sites where DEL faculty teach or have gone on to assist in the DEL I course. Some DEL mentors conduct staff development workshops in response to requests from schools. Many DEL graduates who participate in the mentor program go on to gain employment either at their mentor's teaching site or at a site referred by the mentor.

#### *The DEL Job Network*

The DEL Job Network is a service that lists available teaching jobs. Administered by The 92nd Street Y Dance Center, current DEL students and graduates have access to the job roster. Approximately 30 DEL students have been placed through the network since 1996.



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#### *The DEL Library*

The DEL Library, housed within The 92nd Street Y's library, has an impressive circulating and non-circulating collection of dance education texts. Many are out of print yet remain seminal dance education texts by noted authors such as Joyce Boorman, Mary Joyce, and Rudolf Laban. DEL students and graduates have access to the library, and others involved with the Y may have access with special permission. In addition, students' final curriculum projects for all courses are archived here and available for student perusal. The collection is frequently updated to include the most current dance education texts.

#### *Fridays at Noon*

Fridays at Noon is an established performance series of works by new and emerging choreogra-

phers. Student groups from neighboring public schools are invited to attend performances and participate in post-performance workshops led by a former DEL student and current Program Assistant at the Dance Center, Amy Kail. Ms. Kail originally developed the post-performance workshop model as part of her final project for DEL I. Current DEL students often assist in the Fridays at Noon workshops and mentor with Ms. Kail.

#### *Empire State Partnership:*

##### *Tina Ramirez's Ballet Hispanico and P.S. 166*

Ballet Hispanico was founded by Artistic Director Tina Ramirez in 1970 to reflect and exemplify the traditions and cultural achievements of Hispanic-Americans through professional dance. It has a very active outreach program, "Primeros Pasos" (First Steps), and in 1998 joined in partnership with a neighboring elementary school, P.S. 166, in a four-year Empire State Partnership<sup>1</sup> (ESP) project to create a comprehensive dance program. The aim of the ESP project is to institutionalize an integrated dance and Hispanic culture curriculum in the school. Its emphasis is on integrating dance with language-arts and social-studies curricula, while also addressing higher standards in dance. Begun as a pilot program offering dance residencies for four classes, the ESP project has grown to include year-long residencies for nine classes, ranging from the second to fifth grades. Ballet Hispanico recently received funding to add another school to the project, P.S. 98, located in northern Manhattan.

#### **Development of Teaching Artists and Classroom Teachers**

Over the course of the four-year project, a DEL-influenced model of staff development has been instituted that enhances dance instruction and capitalizes on natural links between academic and

1. A grant conferring program initiated by the New York State Arts Council.

aesthetic domains. The teaching artists have been trained at DEL and use the common language of Laban to strengthen children's capacities to choreograph and recognize stories through dance. The DEL model promotes teachers' understanding of the new curriculum, including the Ballet Hispanico company repertoire, Hispanic cultural dance styles (Spanish, West African, and Indigenous dance), and the Laban creative movement vocabulary.

Ballet Hispanico's teaching artists gather together for pedagogical training eight to ten times during the school year to discuss issues of classroom management, choreographic process, and curriculum design. Individual artists may be helped to make the transition from performing artist to studio teacher, teamed with an elementary school teacher.

Regularly throughout the year, teaching artists' practices are evaluated using checklists to review live or videotaped sessions. After each assessment, teaching artists meet with the project coordinator for feedback and suggestions on how to improve the lesson. Overall teaching ability, effective classroom management, and innovative lesson planning have improved dramatically over the course of the four years, and we consider the incorporation of all of the DEL elements to be an important contribution to that improvement.

The results of such extensive and careful training are that teaching artists have become superb teachers, as well as effective mentors and staff developers. Master teachers of this caliber are rare. Ballet Hispanico is in the enviable position of being able to train all new teaching artists in a common and shared pedagogical approach that is documented and proven to be extremely successful with elementary-age students. There is a direct link between teaching artists' preparedness and excellence and the impact on student learning in the dance class.

Staff development for classroom teachers consists primarily of a series of at least four two-hour dance education workshops presented by members of the Ballet Hispanico staff, P.S. 166 master teachers, and outside specialists over the course of the year. Workshops vary from year to year and generally focus on integrating dance into the academic curriculum. Other topics include the roots of Hispanic dance, dance assessment and standards, and techniques for creating multimedia dance portfolios for the Web. Teachers also attend project team meetings and curriculum planning sessions with teaching artists, and may attend an ESP-sponsored Summer Seminar.

Classroom teacher buy-in has been quite high in the ESP/Ballet Hispanico project; teachers have developed over time a sense of ownership of the project and involvement in the process. They have gained new skills and an appreciation for the connections between dance, and reading and writing by virtue of their presence and participation in the dance studio with their pupils. Regular exposure to LMA vocabulary and the artistic process involved in student dance making has helped teachers incorporate dance vocabulary and content into student journal writing and other classroom activities. Equally important, teachers have gained a new appreciation of Hispanic dance and culture—particularly relevant in a school with a 50 percent Latino student population.

### **Teamwork Between School-Based Dance Specialists and Classroom Teachers**

The DEL model offers a coherent paradigm using the LMA movement vocabulary as a common language that can be shared among students and teachers. The use of LMA vocabulary in a distilled form has proven extremely successful for both classroom teachers and school based dance teachers to help bridge the gap between disciplines. LMA is the foundation for the dance class—the vehicle for all children and teens to be

able to describe, record, and share their dances with each other. Choreometrics, a system for drawing cross-cultural comparisons between the world's dances, may be introduced to dance teachers and classroom teachers as the ESP partnership continues to develop.

### **Continuing Supervision**

Consistent and continuing supervision is an important factor affecting teaching artists, classroom teachers, and administrators alike. In schools, teaching artists and dance specialists often struggle in isolation without adequate guidance. School administrators are often unfamiliar with current dance education practices and often make unrealistic demands on the dance teachers, such as recitals without adequate time to develop a polished presentation. Dance teachers come from a huge range of technical and educational backgrounds and need to receive comprehensive yet individualized supervision to meet the needs of their students and to match their own varied backgrounds.

In order for dance teachers to become proficient in a variety of dance techniques, classroom management strategies, and integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum design, they need access to continuing supervision or mentoring from a master teacher. On average, this relationship needs to last at least two to three years, including the training period, and have access to dance education workshops or seminars. Additionally, in-class modeling of effective strategies and methods by a master teacher is vital. We can talk about good teaching in theory, but novice teachers need to see exactly how master teachers teach.

### **Assessment and Evaluation**

Assessment feedback is extremely useful in improving teaching practices over time. Teaching artists should be evaluated by a trained and experienced dance educator who has developed a sustained relationship with the school or cultural organization. Teaching artists should be observed periodically during the school year (number of times depends on length of program) and given ample time to self assess through access to video documentation and guided conversations with their evaluators in order to reinforce good practices or make adjustments to their teaching.

It is also recommended that as teachers develop and master skills, they be acknowledged and rewarded for their teaching excellence. Leadership opportunities for dance teachers should be created to enable these teachers to offer staff development for other teachers or act as mentors for novice teachers.

Student progress is measured through an analysis of checklists and notes derived from conversations between teachers, teaching artists, and the project coordinator. Generally, evaluators look for evidence pointing to increased understanding of dance vocabulary in the classroom, greater appreciation of Hispanic dance and culture, growth or continued self-esteem and pride, and increased physical dance skills and techniques. In some cases, the evaluation process has helped to identify talented students. Many of these students have gone on to join Ballet Hispanico's School of Dance for more advanced dance training.

**Conclusion**

The most successful professional development programs for teachers manage to balance theory and practice. The best programs enable participants to reflect on their practice and understand what dance has to do with the students whom they teach. Courses, workshops, demonstrations, mentoring, and assessment must all emerge organically from a common view of dance as a

kinesthetic art form. Professional development for dance teachers, teaching artists, and classroom teachers is exceedingly important as dance becomes an accepted part of the school curriculum. It is all the more important as planners consider time and budget allocations for an arts-centered school where dance is treated as a major sequence of study.