

National Dance



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The joy of national

Four young ISTD teachers from Canada and the UK share their perspectives on why national dance is important, wherever you are in the world.



Nagisa Inoue
 I have been teaching national dance since I became an ISTD Associate. I teach at The Pia Bouman School for Ballet and Creative

Movement and Canada's National Ballet School Teacher Training Programme in Toronto.

I am an immigrant from Japan and now have my family here in Canada. As a parent, I am trying to keep my heritage and to pass it on to my son. Cultural diversity and cross-cultural understanding are vital concerns. Learning national dance is a great educational tool for that purpose. Students also learn many other aspects of the culture that created the dance, such as customs, music, food, costume, geography, history, politics, religion and society. By studying national dance, we can learn to value our own culture and others.

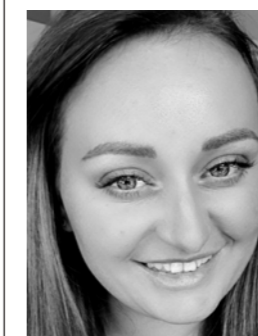
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At the Pia Bouman School, I teach primary to youth level. Students come from different backgrounds, and they like to introduce their culture to the class. I sometimes provide opportunities for their parents and grandparents to get involved. They always proudly discuss and share their culture and the information is very relevant to the dance. Children find that in many countries, dance plays an essential role in the living culture of the people. It is also a fun way to communicate and learn about one another.

In the Teacher Training Programme at Canada's National Ballet School, I teach

vocational-level students. In contrast to the ballet and pedagogy classes, I make this class more social and cultural. The students smile, make eye contact and dance together. I try to emphasise the importance of the unique style of each dance, which is affected by costumes, customs, climate and music. I encourage my students to visit cultural groups and their festivals. Luckily, in Toronto, we have many different centres where dance classes and performances are offered. Students find the interesting floor patterns and steps from national dance useful for choreographing in other genres. I find the more opportunities people have to use national dance, the more they feel its possibilities.

National dance plays an important role in bridging old and new generations and, by learning the importance of understanding their own and others' cultures, national dance furthers cross-cultural communication. I believe national dance has the power to bring people together.



Jenna Rushton
 Within my teaching career I am able to promote the genre, educating children about the value of national dance and sharing my feelings about

how it enriches people's lives and heritage.

For me, national dance provides an escape, an insight into the beauty and variety that the world has to offer without leaving your own dance studio! With vibrant traditional music, the compelling variation of steps, rhythms and combinations is underpinned by a fascinating study of European styles and costumes – it is truly engrossing.

I am now lucky enough to have had experience teaching national dance

to college students training for their DDEs, and local dance schools in weekly classes. I have travelled to other schools offering national dance workshops and taught in primary school settings as part of their geography and history studies. I have also enjoyed teaching national dance to groups of the older generation as a recreational and social activity.

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National dance rejuvenates the rituals of community dancing. What makes it so special is how accessible the study is. Regardless of age and ability national dance can be adapted to suit all.

Students love how they get to interact with friends and work with a partner – I don't think I've ever taught a national dance class where not everyone was smiling from start to finish. During lessons, other teaching methods I've used include inviting parents to participate so the whole family can get involved. Students also love to incorporate props into their classes when learning about traditions from different countries. National dance is fantastic to bring into primary school settings. It can aid cognitive and social development of the younger, less experienced dancer, both through the different patterns and figures, and the social interaction with peers.

National dance can provide a huge sense of personal achievement and physical and mental well-being. National dance can offer students joy of movement and music without necessarily the technical challenge of other dance forms. With its roots in community and celebration, national truly is inclusive and accessible to all.



Kristie Seeley
At our school, we offer students from the age of five years the opportunity to learn national dance. Many parents have never heard of the style.

I explain we learn different styles of folk dance from all over Europe and not only does it offer an historical, cultural and geographical aspect to learning, but it also develops so many important physical skills that will help support and develop the other styles they learn such as ballet, modern and tap.

The first class the children take, they come out absolutely thrilled having had so much fun.

From there, we build the skills, we talk about costumes, we engage in creative projects and once they start, they are hooked. National allows everyone to shine as it is such a social way of dancing.

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Over the pandemic, we were limited to what we could do with a partner due to social distancing and being on Zoom. Therefore, we had to find new ways to promote the fun of national without dancing with a partner, which is usually the selling point. We encouraged parents and siblings to join in at home, we used objects round the house to make patterns on the floor, to practice weaving, transitions and patterning, and we used teddy bears as our pretend partners to practice direction and change of hands. In class, we use two metre ribbons, hoops, spots on the floor and bean bags to help.

The incorporation of all these props and different ways of moving together, albeit in a socially distanced way, has strengthened the students' love for national even more. It has helped lighten the atmosphere and create such fun and laughter.

For anybody who doesn't teach it in their school, I urge you to consider it – it gives so much to the students and you can be so much more creative with rhythms, patterns and spacing. And the most important part is it comes with lots of fun and laughter.



Stacey Tordoff
When enjoying some of our greatest traditional ballets, *Swan Lake*, *Don Quixote*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, you will often find some

wonderful character dances. Bright vibrant music, intricate rhythms, partnerships and group dances. If only we could recreate this in class....

Fortunately, as ISTD teachers, we can. Our brilliant national dance syllabus offers our children and students a wonderful opportunity to explore the dances and traditions of many European countries that have featured in our favourite performances. It is a clever way to expand their knowledge (and your timetable) and grow your school.

In our classes we love to explore, and most importantly, have fun! The national classes at our studios usually take place after the child's ballet class. We learn about other cultures, traditions and histories of the wide range of countries that the syllabus offers.

Children love to dance with their friends, the excitement of partner work is always well received, plus whole group dancing is popular too.

It is very inclusive, which can help with our children's mental health.

Exam day is also very exciting at our studios. The children love to bring their projects to show what they have been learning about. Although marks are not allocated for these, it is a really important part of the preparation and the children really get creative. It's also another way to work with your buddy or little group. They also love to find out about food. In Grade 2, we study Denmark – the pastries are always a hit. I did notice that I found none of the children were interested in trying snails whilst studying France in Grade 1!

“The children gain so much from knowledge and friendship, and it is another way to expand your teaching and grow your business.”

I teach at Tina's Dance Studios, in Wigan. During the lockdown I was overwhelmed by trying to work out how I could carry on our lessons online. I was very grateful that each grade has its very own solo that we could work on at home. We also took time to look at individual steps, for example the Scottish and Irish steps for our older students. Of course, we had fun creating our own solos at home, including an Italian dance and even a quick paced Russian number. We had quizzes and family members partnered-up too.

If you haven't tried the national syllabus I urge you to give it a go, the joy it can bring is immeasurable. The children gain so much from knowledge and friendship, and it is another way to expand your teaching and grow business. It certainly is very popular in our school and long may it continue.



Left Pioneering examiners of the National Dance Faculty at an event with Imperial Classical Ballet examiners. **Back line from left to right:** 1 Joan Hardy, 2 Margaret Benson, 3 Drusilla Duffill, 4 Cynthia Carr, 5 Mavis Butler, 6 Elizabeth Hodgson, 7 Alex Barnes, 8 Rosemary Woodd, 9 Jean Frecker, 10 Margaret Dixon, 11 Barbara Coales, 12 Judith Hockaday, 13 Elizabeth Harrison, 14 Hilary Say, 15 Patricia Prime. **Middle line:** 1 Patricia Plaisted, 2 June Rycroft, 3 Yvette Sargent, 4 Marjorie Barton, 5 Joyce Percy, 6 Doreen Bird, 7 Ivy Baker, 8 Jean Campbell, 9 Margaret Ward, 10 Marianne Mansell Edwards. **Front Line:** 1 Suzanne Hobbs, 2 Eunice Walton, 3 Leigh Bushnell, 4 Anne Winter, 5 Cherry Lloyd, 6 Jayne Taylor, 7 Gillian Farr, 8 Mary Cooke, 9 Heather Fish

Pioneers of the National Dance Faculty

Barbara Simons, Lead Examiner and committee member talks about the people responsible for our National Dance genre.

From the 1950s onwards, the stalwart pioneers of the National Dance Branch (as it was then) who first taught and examined the syllabus abroad were Robert Harrold, Joan Lawson, and Helen Wingrave. These wonderful teachers helped to create the syllabus together with Mrs Grandison Clark as Chair of the committee. New generations were, and continue to be, inspired and influenced by these pioneers of the genre.

“We are fortunate to have a generation of young and inspiring national dance teachers with fresh and innovative ideas to promote the national syllabus, keeping it alive and relevant for future generations.”

They all wrote extensively, sharing their knowledge and providing background information on style, music, and costume. Therefore, they were the primary source for teaching the syllabus abroad and then subsequently examining the work.

Irene Grandison Clark and Joan Lawson founded the National Dance Branch in 1952 and since then it has developed as both a theatrical and an

educational form of dance. A theatre approach demonstrates how various dance styles can be used as the basis for choreographed presentation and an educational approach allows students to study the culture around the dances, including the music, customs, and costumes of many countries.

In 1972, Helen Wingrave conducted the first overseas examinations, which were held in New Zealand. There was great enthusiasm for the work, and it subsequently spread to other countries such as Canada, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Mexico and South Africa.

Another pioneer was Miss Patricia Crail, whose best and most devoted love was that of the overseas development of the ISTD. This she started in 1972 during a period of searching for new ventures. Following an invitation to teach in Calgary, Canada, she knew she had found her chosen path and she continued to promote the work throughout the world.

She always spoke with pride and generosity of the faculties she had been so deeply involved with: National, Modern Theatre, Imperial Classical Ballet and Tap, and was a true exemplar of the qualities that have been the hallmark of the teaching of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing worldwide.

Like Patricia Crail, June Rycroft and Yvette Sargent also spent many months out of the UK examining, encouraging and supporting teachers in other parts of the world. These three women did so much to inspire teachers worldwide

and to encourage them to strive for better standards and they leave us with a treasure trove of memories.

Building on the solid foundations laid down by these wonderful people, we are fortunate to have a generation of young and inspiring national dance teachers with fresh and innovative ideas for ways to continue promoting the national syllabus, keeping it alive and relevant for future generations.



Above Members, including Robert Harrold; to his left Heather Rees, to his right Marjorie Barton, June Rycroft and Joyce Percy



Visit www.istd.org/discover/news/2021/september/pioneers-of-the-national-dance-faculty to read the full story of our national dance pioneers.