



Promoting Health by Sharing Dance

Canada's National Ballet School turns to D2L to ignite a passion for dance across the nation

Canada's National Ballet School leverages D2L's Brightspace platform to bring the School's progressive Sharing Dance initiative to youth and aging populations across Canada in a first-of-its kind, federally funded public health intervention strategy centered on the arts.

Company

Located in Toronto, Ontario, Canada's National Ballet School (NBS) is the only ballet academy in North America to provide elite dance training, academic instruction, and residential care on the same campus. NBS offers a professional teacher training program, a musician mentorship program, and community classes for both children and adults. The Associate Program offers after-school classes while an Adult Ballet program provides instruction for those over 18 years.

In 2012, NBS launched an initiative called Sharing Dance. As the school's flagship community outreach initiative, the program promotes public participation in dance, creating active and artistic health and wellness dance classes for Canadians of all ages, including those living with Parkinson's disease or dementia.

AT A GLANCE

Client: Canada's National Ballet School

Program: Sharing Dance

Industry: Performing Arts

CHALLENGE

- Use dance to engage Canadians of all ages and abilities in healthy activity.
- Scale a community-based dance-learning program from coast to coast.

SOLUTION

- D2L's Brightspace
- Capture
- Analytics
- Surveys

RESULTS

- Expanded program from 10 to 200 communities across Canada.
- Saw 600 instructors engage 20,000 Canadians in the Sharing Dance program using D2L's Brightspace.
- Increased partner network from six to over 100.

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Ashleigh Powell, NBS dance instructor and manager, Sharing Dance.

The Challenge

POSITIVELY IMPACTING ALL CANADIANS THROUGH THE POWER OF DANCE

Canada's National Ballet School is the foremost dance training institution in Canada, with more than 50 years of excellence in ballet training. NBS also delivers a broad range of community programs, all infused with the excellence of the professional ballet training program. The School believes that everyone should have access to high-quality dance programs, encouraging people to engage artistically and reap the health and social benefits that dance provides.

“We are educators training dancers to pursue professional ballet careers and at the same time, passionate about sharing dance with a wider audience. We want everyone to feel that same personal connection to, and with, dance,” says Ashleigh Powell, NBS dance instructor and manager, Sharing Dance.



The Solution

A FLASH MOB SPARKED A LIGHTBULB MOMENT

NBS's Sharing Dance initiative started with a flash mob. In 2010, to celebrate NBS's 50th anniversary, 300 dancers took over the Eaton Centre in Toronto on International Dance Day, their efforts coordinated by NBS instructors. Their performance—meant as a one-time celebration of dance—gained over 100,000 views on YouTube. That unexpected success sparked the idea.

“To prepare for the flash mob, we had created mini-tutorial videos and shared them on YouTube so everyone participating could practice at home,” says John Dalrymple, chief of external affairs at NBS. “What we didn't know at the time was that one of our participants showed her mom the videos on YouTube. The mom turned out to be a junior high school teacher, and she adapted the videos to meet the curriculum and taught her entire school how to dance. That gave us a lightbulb moment. We realized dance—and NBS—could be in every classroom across Canada, with the effort coordinated from our Toronto location.”

SHARING DANCE IS BORN

NBS realized that it needed to create an easy-to-use curriculum and resources to teach non-dancers to dance. So it created Sharing Dance, with a mission to engage Canadians of all ages in dance by offering in-and out-of-classroom activities to children and youth, seniors, people with Parkinson's, and people with dementia, to improve mobility, help childhood development, and provide health interventions.

“High-quality dance activities are shown to improve seniors' balance and help manage symptoms associated with age-related illness,” explains Powell.

ENABLING DANCE-RELATED LEARNING AT SCALE

NBS has been using D2L's Brightspace Capture™ technology since 2013, initially deploying the platform as part of an international ballet festival to connect 18 ballet schools around the world.

When NBS began to bring a curriculum approach to the Sharing Dance initiative, it turned to D2L's next-gen learning experience platform, Brightspace, to enable its instructors to provide dance-related learning at scale.

“For our first generation of Sharing Dance, we were exploring delivery, so we set criteria for the learner experience we wanted to create,” says Kevin MacLeod, manager of digital media and learning technologies for NBS. “We knew it had to be flexible—it had to effectively support multimedia; it needed to integrate really well; it had to support community engagement; and most importantly, it had to have scalable, personalized communications.”

NBS also began using D2L's platform analytics, which gave NBS insight into how people were engaging with D2L's platform.

“We could see when they logged in, and we could see drop-off rates,” says MacLeod. “This allowed us to monitor the uptake of the Sharing Dance program, and use D2L's survey tools to see what we were doing right and how we could improve our approach.”

“D2L’S Brightspace gives us the ability to create live participation in Sharing Dance through the delivery of online resources, written guidelines, demonstration videos, music, and live-streamed classes.”

Kevin MacLeod, manager of digital media and learning technologies for NBS.

The Results

STRONG GROWTH WITH A LIMITED MARKETING BUDGET

The Sharing Dance program has caught the attention of individuals and groups across Canada. With a very modest marketing spend the initiative has scaled from 10 to 200 communities throughout the country, including all provinces and territories. The program now has 600 instructors using its curriculum within D2L’s Brightspace platform and has engaged 20,000 Canadians in dance activity, with a specific focus on youth and the elderly. NBS has also been able to grow the program’s support network from six partners to more than 100 to help with research, financial support, program delivery, and promotional support.

D2L MAKES A VISION POSSIBLE AND SCALABLE

D2L is not only making NBS’s vision for Sharing Dance possible, but it is also increasing scalability across the nation. D2L’s Brightspace platform allows NBS to gain insight into student engagement by tracking usage activity such as how long classes are viewed and how users are actually viewing videos. This allows the school to tailor content to individual learning preferences.

“D2L’S Brightspace gives us the ability to create live participation in Sharing Dance through the delivery of online resources, written guidelines, demonstration videos, music, and live-streamed classes,” says MacLeod. “With these resources available to them, teachers don’t need to be dance experts, and their students—young and old—can quickly learn an entire dance lesson while having fun at the same time.”

“Our goal is to have more than 500,000 people engaged and 35,000-50,000 learners registered in the learning platform within five years,” adds Dalrymple. “We would love to have a million people in the country engaged in the program annually in the not-too-distant future. The Sharing Dance program has become a significant part of the school’s identity. ‘Sharing Dance’ as a philosophy really captures what NBS is all about at its core.”