



Professional Developments: Where Is The Love? Bringing Back Rejuvenation and Care

Jochelle Pereña & Sam Stone

To cite this article: Jochelle Pereña & Sam Stone (2025) Professional Developments: Where Is The Love? Bringing Back Rejuvenation and Care, *Dance Education in Practice*, 11:4, 23-27, DOI: [10.1080/23734833.2025.2570034](https://doi.org/10.1080/23734833.2025.2570034)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23734833.2025.2570034>



Published online: 12 Dec 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 20



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Professional Developments:

Where Is The Love? Bringing Back Rejuvenation and Care

Jochelle Pereña and Sam Stone

Luna Dance & Creativity, Berkeley, CA, USA, and Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, USA

ABSTRACT

When professional development events omit care, they can leave participants feeling drained, bored, and uninspired. Practitioner Exchanges (PXs) offer an antidote by centering care. PXs are informal community roundtable conversations around a particular inquiry topic, hosted by dance educators for dance educators. This article explores how PXs weave together three strands of care—care for questioning, care for self, and care for the collective—to create an essential space for practitioners to reengage, refuel, and recognize their own power.

We have all been there before: the mandatory, district-wide professional development (PD) workshop presenting yet another curriculum model for all classrooms to adopt. Or the conference designed as a self-serving platform for presenters to show off and gain résumé credibility. Or perhaps we teach at a studio without a PD budget, so we scour the Internet for free resources only to find endless top ten lists of dos, don'ts, best practices, and product placements. We leave these PD opportunities feeling drained, bored, uninspired, and wondering, “Do they even care that I came? Where is the care in PDs? *Where is the love?*”

Many dance educators have been finding the love at Practitioner Exchanges (PXs). Berkeley-based dance education nonprofit Luna Dance & Creativity has been hosting PXs since 2006 under various names: Issues of Practice, Lesson Studies, Professional Learning Communities, and Topic Tuesdays. The current name highlights the back-and-forth nature of a discussion between peers.

PXs are informal, community roundtable conversations hosted by Luna alumni around a particular inquiry topic. Topics selected by the hosts, based on their own questions have included Dance in Special Education & Inclusion, Family Dance, Dancers as Leaders, Performances & Informances, Restarting & Reimagining, Dance & Culture, and

more. PXs draw a wide range of participants, from teaching artists to classroom educators to administrators who work in public, private, home-based, and community settings. Cohosts and participants alike share questions, curiosities, reflections, stories, and experiences. Together, the group mulls over and meanders through inquiries, relating to one another while connecting.

Originally held in person, PXs switched to a virtual format during the COVID-19 pandemic and suddenly exploded. Practitioners were hungry for connection and co-reflection as they navigated new and constantly shifting teaching terrains, and the online format increased accessibility. Teaching artists joined from the East Coast, Hawai'i, Canada, Brazil, Germany, and Mexico. No longer did you have to be local to participate.

Practitioners joined in larger numbers, too. Whereas prepandemic, in-person PXs were small and intimate with three to five participants, Zoom PXs during 2020 and 2021 often included more than thirty participants. To emphasize collegiality, multiple perspectives, and exchange, Luna ensured all Zoom PXs were cohosted by at least two alumni and the Luna Professional Learning Manager. During the pandemic, many participants came monthly, no matter the topic. Some formed cohorts around inquiry themes, such as Family Dance and Restarting & Reimagining, and

continue to meet regularly. Those who return to PXs do so for a reason. They find something there they have not found anywhere else. They find a community, confidence, and care. They find the love.

Over the past five years, regular participants and cohosts from gatherings held during the pandemic met several times to talk about PXs, what makes them special spaces of care, and the impact those roundtables continue to have on their teaching. You will hear from public school teachers Christine Atkins (Figure 4) and Kristin Burke and dance teaching artists Rosalina Macisco (Figure 1), Jochelle Pereña (Figure 3), Sam Stone (Figure 2), Mara Beckerman, and Maura Whelehan, as we share some findings from our conversations.

HERE IS THE LOVE. HERE IS THE CARE

Love and care are central throughlines in all PXs, no matter the topic. Christine reflected, “There’s such an absence of ego here that it’s kind of awe-inspiring. There’s just no ego in the room ... just compassion and love and joy and that’s pretty amazing to be part of that.” PXs offer a unique space in which the exchange of care serves as a catalyst for both professional and personal development. Care moves through the questions participants share, highlights individual well-being, and becomes the basis for the collective formed.

Care for Questioning

PXs lead with curiosity. There is care for the spirit of wondering that invites practitioners to be open to all kinds of responses and not get stuck on a single answer or solution. “I think those questions, the creative inquiry, is critical,” Rosalina stated. “There’s a problem-solver habit [of many



Figure 2. Sam Stone in discussion with students at the Finnish Hall, Berkeley, CA. Photo courtesy of Sam Stone.

educators], like, ‘I can fix that. Or, did you try this yet?’ ... Somehow we were able to circle back to ‘What’s the creative question here that’s really going on?’” Instead of compulsively trying to solve problems or prioritize content delivery, as in many PD experiences, PXs encourage a return to inquiry. PXers ponder, tease apart, try on, and fumble through questions without the expectation of answering them. They follow their curiosity. Curiosity is the antithesis of boredom; it is playful and highly generative. “Like how kids pile up their ideas and get fueled by them,” Jochelle reflected. “That feels very creative to me. That’s the spirit of PXs ... both a space for tuning into a question and for creating more questions.” Questions and curiosity keep teaching practices from growing stale by encouraging more exchange, experimentation, idea generation, possibility, and a place to spark teacher interests. Sam articulated that, for her teaching, “the inquiry was overarching ... I felt confident and ownership over what I was doing because I cared about my questions.” Now, reflecting on her current teaching, Sam shared, “As we talk, I feel a sense of rejuvenation for the question. ... I’m doing all this lesson planning with topics, but I’m like, ‘Well, what do I care about? What’s the essential thing here, you know?’ ... I need this space to fuel that and remember, this is good.”

Care for Self

PXers care for themselves just by showing up. “I’d continue to show up, not exactly remembering why, except that I always left feeling really good,” shared Sam. “I don’t understand how this was created,” mused Kristin, “but it feels like there’s a container where ... you can just be in the mystery. And something comes out of it, even if I can’t articulate it. So I just feel grateful that there’s the draw to keep coming back and be present, even if I don’t know why.” For some, the sense of mystery and unknown—not knowing what they might be asked, what they might say, whether or not they will



Figure 1. Rosalina Macisco dancing outside with her Santa Barbara Dance Institute students. Photo courtesy of Santa Barbara Dance Institute.



Figure 3. Jochelle Pereña dancing with third grade students in their classroom at Reach Academy, Oakland. Photo by Luna Dance & Creativity.



Figure 4. Christine Atkins surrounded by her Professional Learning Community at Luna Dance & Creativity. Photo by Luna Dance & Creativity.

show up as an imposter—sparks initial anxiety. Acknowledging their own anxiety, showing up, and sharing despite it helps participants see themselves in new ways. “Each time I come I feel nervous,” Mara revealed, “as if anything I say will be seen as strange, weird, and not dance teacherish. And then each time I come, I get great ideas and discover that what I share is appreciated and even welcomed.” This self-discovery is furthered as participants allow themselves to embrace not knowing, and messily stumble and fumble around in their reflections. PXers say things like, “Oh, wow,

I really needed to hear myself say that,” or, “That’s something that I just came to realize today [in this PX] that I need to work on.” By releasing the pressure of always knowing or formulating the “right” answer, practitioners create more space for themselves to move thoughts around, try on new perspectives, notice patterns to change or develop, and hear themselves process out loud. Maura explained it this way: “I don’t know how to take care of myself right now. I don’t know what I need. Like, it’s okay ... Having that reflection, having that calm, making space for that conversation, that, that is the practice, right? Making space and developing that relationship with yourself.” By showing up, PXers make space for themselves, they care for themselves.

Care for the Collective

Care for each other and the collective is evident in all PXs. Because PXs are group-held, no one is leading, and everyone is leading simultaneously. There is a sense of being together with peers in a nonhierarchical way that encourages everyone to ask questions, listen, respond, co-reflect, and share generously. “It wasn’t drama-filled,” Christine remembered, “It wasn’t a gossip fest or ... all judgy or anything like that. ... It was so nonperformative, which is safe, which is healing, which allowed us to be vulnerable. People would just come in with whatever they needed to say, however they needed to be. And it was just fine. The container was that big.” Her usage of “we” highlights how the collective holds the collective together with care and space for everyone to show up in full authenticity. “For me, it’s that sense of belonging, right?” shared Rosalina. “I have my

own nonprofit. I don't have a district that I work with. I feel very, very alone ... So these, for me, are critical to be able to connect with other people who are practicing and teaching dance." PXs create community and remind dance educators that they belong to something bigger than themselves. As participants witness others, they also notice that they are being seen, which illuminates their value, calling them to step into their power and potential. "Doing PXs for so long, like a year, every month," reflected Christine, "it really made me realize, 'Oh, I got stuff. I got stuff.' Because I kept getting it mirrored back to me by so many other people. That really up-leveled my game." Seeing herself reflected back from her community with care gave Christine confidence and propelled her practice forward. Mirroring also builds connection, exchange, and a reciprocity of care: I see you, you see me, and I see you seeing me. Jochelle explained it this way:

We often talk about care either as caregiving and serving others, or as self-care and serving ourselves. Both feel unidirectional; either we're pouring care out of ourselves or we're dowsing ourselves in it to refuel. But in PXs, care is flowing and refilling in multiple directions as we give and receive. When I share something and people listen, I feel heard, like I'm receiving, but at the same time, I'm giving ideas for people to build off of. As a listener, I'm giving support to the speaker, but I'm also interested, I'm invested, I'm receiving. So I'm giving while receiving and receiving while giving.

This kind of exchange builds the collective. As participants acknowledge their role in reciprocity and what they bring to the exchange, they situate themselves within the community. "The conversation is *more* because you are here, and I am here, and we are all here together," Jochelle continued, "I think that's part of what draws us back." Because PXers are included in the collective care, they want to cocultivate the collective care.

The weaving of these three strands of care—for inquiry, for self, for the collective—is what makes PXs unique. Any one of these strands might be sourced from an interesting podcast, or a walk on the beach, or a gathering of friends. Because PXs intertwine all three, though, they specifically address the well-being and multidimensionality of dance educators as curious, creative, and connective beings. In PXs, practitioners gather to lovingly tend to themselves and their teaching art. Here they reengage and refuel so that they can continue to enliven the field.

SO WHAT? WHY DO WE NEED LOVE AND CARE IN PXs?

Because PXs are caring spaces, they are also healing spaces, which makes them essential spaces. PXs help practitioners combat and prevent burnout by promoting reflection and connection, which in turn inspires growth. Christine referenced PXs' medicinal and nourishing qualities during the

pandemic: "PXs actually fed our souls. This was, like, food and medicine and ... life-affirming. They really helped us all become great educators." Later she continued, "I was fed that entire time by a group that really was about creativity, imagination, doing whatever we needed to do ... with love, in terms of supporting ourselves and also really being present for our young people and our students in ways that were exciting." Whereas public criticism of teachers and the constantly evolving challenges around education policies often foster self-doubt, exhaustion, and career questioning for many educators, PXs affirm and validate their creativity.

Not only do PXs affirm teacher creativity in a restorative way; they also offer a critical creative forum to rejuvenate and generate new ideas when educators feel drained. "After every PX I would have this whole list of ideas that would come to me that we never said [in our conversation]," Christine remembered, "but they would come because there was so much space for me to think about them on my own. You know, about possibilities and practices I could bring to my classroom, just based on having this huge space of inquiry to play around in." Diving into inquiry and reflection opened Christine up to her own creativity that carried her beyond the PX space, into her classroom, and into her future teaching. "I've been watching myself teach this year, and it's like my tools are tight," she reflected, "There's all kind of cray-cray going on in my school, but my stuff is tight. I think the seeds of me feeling like a master teacher really got sown during the 'rona' [pandemic] when we were meeting for PXs." Because PXs are about caring and making space for practitioners, Christine can tap into and trust her expertise and generative powers as a teacher, even with growing challenges at her school.

When teachers interact in the caring, witnessing, and inquiry-based environment of PXs, they echo that same care and curiosity in their teaching. This sustains their practice through times of chaos in the classroom. "Now I think about arriving to chaotic spaces in a receiving state," articulated Sam, "If you can arrive curious, that's a receptive state, and if you're in a receptive state, you're better. It's easier to see what's there and respond to what's there, as opposed to coming with a my-way-or-the-highway sort of plan. ... So it's more about 'Am I good? Do I feel connected and supported? Do I feel grounded before taking on the chaos of teaching?'" Questions become part of a vital daily hygiene that helps educators listen to their own pulse and that of their students and navigate through chaos.

PXers self-source their professional learning by actively co-designing the PX space, individualizing their own meaning-making from the conversations, and applying what they glean into their teaching practice. This self-sourcing act is an antidote to the destructive messaging that claims teachers are not enough on their own and that they need products outside of themselves to improve. "We don't need someone to tell us better," Sam confirmed, "We're already learning through our practice. We just need a space to reflect and process."

Dance educators do not need more boring PDs. They need spaces like PXs where they feel the love; where they care and are cared for; where they can connect, play, heal, and rejuvenate; and where they can live in the spirit of curiosity and imagination. These spaces are essential because they center the essentiality of teachers and their needs, and teachers know best. PXs' success is not in a handout of affirmations, telling teachers how good they are. Their success lies in cultivating an ongoing practice in which teachers reveal to themselves their impact and value. PXs honor teachers as empowered leaders of their own learning.

HOW TO SPREAD THE LOVE?

There are no step-by-step instructions behind creating PXs. In fact, we are continuously reimagining how they are shaped and held, adjusting to who shows up and the needs of the community. Instead of leaving the reader with a list of more to-dos, we leave you with some questions that have helped us form PXs. We encourage you to use them as jumping-off points to start your own exchanges—gatherings full of energizing curiosity, abundant care, and lots and lots of love.

- ◆ How can you create a space for participants to sit, reflect, and wonder? What kind of welcoming message encourages the safety for participants to not know?
- ◆ How can you encourage a peer-held experience where anyone can pose a question, a wondering, or a response?
- ◆ If cohosting the event, what roles does each host play? What do the cohosts talk about before other partici-

pants arrive? How do cohosts keep the conversation moving? What is the difference between an exchange and a presentation?

- ◆ What do the cohosts care about? How does this inform an inquiry theme and questions for the PX?
- ◆ Who holds the intention and tone of the PX?
- ◆ What are your goals for your PXs? How do you assess how PXs are meeting those goals? For example, do you reflect with your cohosts after? Do you ask for feedback from participants? What do you want to find out?
- ◆ How often do your PXs meet to serve the needs of your community? Does regularity in time help people show up? Who is missing from the meeting times you chose?
- ◆ Who are your PXs for? How are you spreading the word?
- ◆ What could make it fun? Music, food, dance breaks?
- ◆ How are you integrating care into your PX? What does this look like?

We hope you revel in questions like these, and more that you and your community ask. May they help you cultivate spaces where dance educators are reminded of their creativity and power, and can proudly proclaim, “Here is the love!”

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors. ✨

Address correspondence to Jochelle Pereña, Luna Dance & Creativity, Berkeley, CA. E-mail: ✉ jperena@lunadancecreativity.org