



## École Terre des Jeunes

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### **The dance program: The experience of a lifetime**

When Dawn Litzenberger and Martin Lefebvre, of Calgary Dance Foundation, approached me to host the first Latin and Ballroom Dancing Program in our school program, I was really excited by the idea. Even though some may think that boys and girls do not enjoy dancing together, we know, at the elementary level, that this is not the case for the early grades. Girls and boys tend to distance themselves in Grade 3. Before that, they play together and enjoy each other's company most of the time.

The goals of the dancing program went beyond teaching merengue. It was learning rhythm, increasing our listening skills, respecting all partners and becoming aware of others around us. The teacher was excellent in guiding them gradually through this over 10 weeks of program. It took that time to make the children comfortable with the dance and the partners, but they succeeded and the show was appreciated by all.

I witnessed children refusing to dance with others changing under the caring teaching of M. Martin. He made the children turn in circles, therefore everybody danced with each other, even the less popular students. Disrespect was not accepted and I witnessed changes in attitudes as many children discovered undetected talent for merengue.

Mr. Martin also accommodated the special needs and parents' requests of daughters not allowed to dance with boys. One of our student is autistic and participated in the warming up part of the program as the pairing up was impossible at that time due to his challenges. Some girls danced with each others if the number of girls allowed it or they danced with the teacher to respect the parents' demands (only 2 families out of 280 requested that accommodation). And, finally, one boy with severe ODD (oppositional defiant disorder) was assigned to sound and music as his participation was important in the program. He learned something of value even though he would not dance.

Therefore, I truly recommend that program. It integrates itself in the Alberta curriculum of physical education (dance) and brings much more than dancing objectives to children. A sense of respect and awareness of others is the beginning of a peaceful society.

*Sylvie Monette*  
*Principal*  
*École Terre des Jeunes*