

Beyond Boundaries is a High School Hip Hop Dance Competition where students can create and showcase their own choreography and performances. We felt inspired to host an event like this for several reasons. Primarily, we wanted to give students an avenue to showcase their own work and choreography skills. Students themselves lead groups of their peers, on their own, with coaches and adults taking a back seat to the choreography/performance prep process. We also wanted competition team to experience a competition outside of WIAA regulations and closer to one they would experience in the dance industry. An additional component of our vision for the event is that not only does it highlight student choreography, students share the stage with professional dancers who are showcasing their own groups and choreography. Our overarching goal was to connect students with other dancers, whether high schoolers or professionals, that they otherwise wouldn't be able to connect with under typical circumstances. This environment allows for creativity, novice and expert learning as well as collaborative problem solving.

We traveled to many schools in Washington and found truly amazing communities of artists and dancers within each one. What we later realized was that many of these schools were somewhat isolated within their own communities. We saw enormous potential across the schools to bring students together, with one another, in a space that is largely focused on the creative process, not just on technique or traditional dance competition requirements. We wanted to honor the hard work and passion for dance that the students demonstrated by connecting them with learning opportunities to enhance their skills. By hosting the show, giving them a creative choreography challenge, running workshops with professionals (as well as student-led workshops) and providing a platform to engage with one another we saw the opportunity provide a platform for events that they can look back on and be proud of.

Providing this type of opportunity for students enables us to better understand the array of opportunities that exist within the world of dance. They can take this experience as a frame of reference for what it might be like to dance as a professional, to think like a choreographer, to lead other people, or gain exposure to dance styles they are not yet familiar. Students gain exposure to other teams and are able to grow their own programs as a result of these experiences. Typically, within dance teams, choreographers are brought in to teach the students. Students aren't usually given the chance to express their own creative voice. Beyond Boundaries allows them an avenue to express that voice.

Demographically, we found that the majority of students in Beyond Boundaries were upperclassmen and 72% of all dancers at the show identified as female. As a result of working with student choreographers (or being student choreographers), the majority of the dancers believed they were being listened to by their peers and that their opinion really mattered whereas prior to Beyond Boundaries their feelings on these measures were more neutral. Emotionally, over half of the students shared that even when things in their lives were tough for them, dance was something they'd still be able to engage with and perform well. We believe it is important to start asking students questions like these about their dance experiences. Not only is it interesting to note who attends class, but beginning to explore questions that involve social/emotional resilience and artistic mediums, such as hip hop dance, provide really unique avenues for research exploration.

Although having students complete surveys and do interviews helps inform the larger research questions we are beginning to explore, casual observation and interaction reveal some interesting things about the dance culture and youth. For instance, backstage, while groups were waiting to perform, students from one school would begin bonding with students from other schools, through dance! They would informally dance together for fun, off-stage, and it was a way for them to connect and engage with one another. By the end of the evening, students who were strangers to one another the morning of the event were exchanging contact information and making plans to meet up at future foundry10 dance workshops together. Even though the event was a competition, the feel was very different, which pleased us. We wanted the focus to be on dancing, sharing creative visions for dance and engaging and intersecting with peers and professionals. Student feedback from the event confirms that this is indeed what we've achieved.

If you're a high schooler that enjoys dance, wants to learn how to dance, or has a passion for movement, we encourage you to pursue your interest and find communities of dance that that can help encourage that interest. Check out of Dance Alliance on Facebook.