

The Benefits of Creating a Local Dance Community

High School teams and dance programs tend to be siloed within the greater school community. To try and address this and create a stronger sense of belonging for dancers, we decided to form a larger community that encompasses teams and school programs called the foundry10 dance alliance.

With teams and clubs geared towards competition, the current format is set for students to train specifically with performance and winning in mind. There is a lot of bonding within the team but ownership within their school is limited, according to interviews with the students. Introducing them to a larger community allows the teams to work towards something together and share their challenges and successes with other, like-minded dancers.

Some students might feel isolated at their school, in many cases being part of only a handful of dancers rather than a community of people who share their same passion. Dance Alliance brings opportunities to these dancers that extend beyond dance classes and prepare them with an understanding of stage presence, audition etiquette, self-care, and training regimens. It introduces them to other styles of dance that they wouldn't be exposed to if they only stayed within their team. They can, in turn, take these lessons and connections back to their team to share with those directly and consistently around them.

A good example is Sehome, a high school that is geographically far from other schools in the alliance. The team there keeps coming back to foundry10 events because there is a sense of belonging as that is where the alliance convenes. While they enjoy what foundry10 does for high school dancers, the more important benefit they gain is connecting with other dance students their age. The students work hard knowing what is out there for other high schoolers. In the first year of Beyond Boundaries, they came in with a more contemporary piece, and although they didn't win, they were just thrilled to be part of the show. They returned in 2015 for Beyond Boundaries and placed third in the whole competition. They credit this largely to their interactions and help from other schools and dancers.

With Federal Way High school, there were 6 students who have never taken a dance class before. The first time they took a class together, half of them didn't show. Out of the ones that did show, only one ended up finishing the class. They were discouraged by how hard it was to learn choreography. Surprisingly, though, that did not discourage them to train. What we learned later was that those who attended were so intimidated by all the dancers that they felt uncomfortable performing. They didn't identify themselves as dancers as they were not technically a team, just a club. When they participated in foundry10 dance alliance events they met other dancers that look and acted just like them. They found like-minded peers and bonded over a shared passion for dance. Once they met and befriended fellow dancers, they started taking more classes and trained harder in order to help kids in their school find their passion for dance.

Creating this community has been a valuable experience for us and, more importantly, for young dancers around Seattle. As it continues to grow, we will be tracking how it affects the students, what about the community generates the biggest benefits to dancers, and how we can bring more and more people into the art form.