

Building Momentum for the Future of Dance in Our Schools.

by Bill Juillette

Becoming a Hip Hop Instructor

I've only been teaching dance for a little over 10 years. I was 24 when I started dancing with an Ottawa hip hop dance troupe and I immediately loved having a musical outlet for my physical activity. I enjoyed experimenting with new choreography during our weekly rehearsals and like any true artist, I was not in it for the money. Being recognized for talent and personality through performance was reward enough. Not long after, I was sharing my passion for hip hop dance as a community-based instructor.

To this day I am surprised at the resounding influence dance has had on my life. It has opened many doors while allowing me to openly express myself physically as a performer and personally as an instructor. What I find most gratifying of all, however, is the part of teaching that does not involve dancing. It is the opportunity to speak to a room full of kids who are participating in a healthy activity simply because it makes them feel good. Naturally, they are with me to learn to dance but there is always a part of them that is open to just "a little more" and that is what I give them -- more ideas, more encouragement, more motivation, more smiles, more nurturing, and more challenges.

Promoting Positive Dance Environments

My business partner, Marc-André Clement, has also been following a similar path as a dancer and instructor. We both started dancing with dance troupes and grew from there. Recently, through his affiliation with *Culture Shock Canada*, he has been using his influence as the National Director to encourage youth to choose dance as a positive physical and creative activity in schools and

communities. While we have been working independently to promote dance in schools, it is our shared passion for dance, fitness and nurturing young people that has brought us together.

As Marc-André and I continue to grow in our respective positions as leaders, we are increasingly aware of our responsibilities for the dancers we teach. Whether it is through a community program at a dance studio or school workshop, we have an innate desire to have a positive influence on the people we meet. Through dance, we have been able to have an impact on young people by providing them with the right type of environment for them to feel good. Though we may have a talent for dance, our real skill is in creating a feel good atmosphere that is infectious. We succeed by building our numbers in active participation, which produces more energy and eventually builds momentum.

Benefits of Dance

The Momentum Dance Challenge, held on April 25, 2008 is a new annual event that increases support for dance in schools. As society slowly shifts toward a stronger awareness for healthy living, we feel that dance is a viable option to get



Bill Juillette is an Ottawa based photographer and hip hop dance instructor who is passionate about promoting dance in schools. As a motivator and role model for his students, he never loses focus to deliver a powerful class that always leaves a lasting impact.

Email: just_b@rogers.com

students more physically active. Aside from being physically engaging, the social, creative and emotional benefits are equally rewarding. We have also learned that the non-competitive nature of dance makes it a great alternative to kids who don't care to engage in regular team sports. It is something they can do on their own and, moving to the sound of music is the most natural thing anyone can do.

Challenge VS Competition

Creating the Momentum Dance Challenge was not an easy task. We wanted to be sure

we were sending the right message to everyone involved and that the students felt they were being properly rewarded for their efforts. Since there was a prize to be won, the event was initially created as a competition. The message we received from the teachers, however, was to not have the students compete against each other. Marc-André and I completely agreed with them. Having been to many studio dance competitions, I have seen what losing can do to the morale of young people. An environment of winners and losers is not the best environment to promote healthy living so we knew we had to find another word for competition. Replacing "competition" with "challenge" was the most logical solution.

To give the perception of a challenge (and not a competition) we altered the layout of the performance environment for the dancers and spectators. Most competitions are performed on a stage in front of judges in a formal setting and can feel stressful. Teens face enough judgment every day. It was essential, therefore, to have our Momentum Dance Challenge participants feel like performers. We arranged the teams in clusters seated on both sides of the stage so they could cheer for each other. We also gave them quality sound and lighting so they could project to the energetic audience and feel the community support.

Performance Incentives

Our next task was to take care of the dancers' esteem directly. Giving them a prize at the end of the night was simply not enough. We needed to know that our

efforts in promoting dance in schools were going to make a long-term difference in their training and not just affect them for this one event. To help create an experience that was emotionally rewarding (which a trophy to does not provide), we came up with a double reward system; one that would reward the dancers immediately for their performance and the other to promote incentive for future dance training.

Judging by the popularity of performance based reality television shows, the only thing more motivating than money for teens is recognition. Fame is their fortune. To provide recognition and future opportunities, the initial idea was to reward the top performers of the Momentum Dance Challenge with an invitation to perform their choreography at the 2008 Culture Shock Showcase in June. This is Ottawa's only all hip hop dance showcase featuring local and international dance troupes, and it is directed by Marc-André. When we saw how much talent and preparation went into each routine, it was decided on the night of the event to invite all of the dance teams to perform. Participating schools included: École secondaire catholique Béatrice Desloges, Laurentian Regional High School, École Secondaire catholique de Plantagenet, École secondaire catholique Samuel-Genest, St. Patrick High School, as well as the winning team, Pulse N' Limited.



Pulse N' Limited.

The second reward for the dancers who participated in the Momentum Dance Challenge was the opportunity to facilitate the funding of dance programs in schools. All of the money raised from advance ticket sales (five dollars each), which the challengers were responsible for selling, went directly to their individual schools. Also, five dollars from every ticket sold at the door (eight dollars each) was equally divided among the participating teams.

The Future of Momentum Dance Challenge

As organizers of the school-based dance challenge, Marc-André and I want to see more kids dancing and we want to help the schools make that happen. That is our goal. By creating the Momentum Dance Challenge we believe we have created a win-win situation for everyone involved. The dancers are recognized for their talent, the teachers receive funding for their programs, and the supporters get to see a really good show. By making this challenge an annual event, we are creating the momentum we need to promote healthy living within in our schools and communities.

Stay fit! Keep Dancing!
Bill Juliette

Editor's Note: I had the pleasure of being a judge at the first annual Momentum Dance Challenge. The hip hop performances choreographed by the students themselves were truly sensational. I was amazed by the evolution of the street-inspired dance-form and the delightful nature of the isolations, the intricate rhythms and the fluid proficiency of their purposive, intermittent synchronicity. Bill Juliette and Marc-André Clement's initiative to create, promote, and produce the Momentum Dance Challenge has certainly captured the attention of CAHPERD's Dance PAC. I encourage you to contact Bill or Marc if you are interested in hosting a hip hop workshop or challenge at your school. Alternately, if you are already promoting dance in your school and would like to be featured in a future issue of the *PHE Journal*, send your story to phejournal@cahperd.ca.