

Benefits of Boys in Dance

By Samantha Scotto, Director of Arizona Dance Artistry

As a forward-thinking dance educator, I was hoping to witness more of a positive change in attitude toward boys taking dance class, especially with the emergence of such strong male roles in dance. For example the lead role in the Broadway musical, *Billy Elliot*, centers around a young boy that would rather dance than go to boxing practice, the hit TV show “*So you think you can dance?*” features strong male dancers from around the country coming from all walks of life and the ballroom dance show “*Dancing with the Stars*” where football players and Olympic athletes are trained to dance.

Children who dance have increased self-esteem, coordination, balance and poise- this is a fact. Dancing cannot only be fun, but educational and even fill that competitive edge boys desire. In a classroom setting, children are placed by skill and age level. Being able to create moves with the music can be very satisfying for a child and an alternate outlet for self-expression.

Originally had a Boys Only class, however, as the year progressed, I felt that segregating the boys from the girls only continues to enhance the stereotype problem and limit the dance exposure for the male students. By combining the boys with the girls for their weekly Jazz , Ballet and Hip Hop classes , the students can both learn a variety of movements: smooth and sharp, slow and fast, strong and light. They need to feel the differences between these movements and relate this movement outside of dance class, for example, making a more agile soccer or basketball player.

Having boys in class benefits the female students in the class as well. Learning to dance with the opposite sex and understanding how to touch or dance with a girl in a non-sexual way is very important in our “MTV hip hop music video” society. Boys learn from the girls and the girls learn from the boys, the result is a very well rounded class and makes for fun choreography! The girls enjoy being able to partner with the boys and utilize their “muscle power” for the tricky dance lifts.

Dance teaches excellent discipline and teamwork. I expect excellent manners from my students in every class and we begin those lessons at age 2 at my studio. For the younger dancers it is less rigid, but as the dancers progress with skill and age, the discipline becomes stricter. We all know boys need discipline, some more than most, dance provides a healthy outlet for expression and a place to learn how to take direction. My “Turns and Leaps” class begins with 20 minutes of hard cardio, sit ups, planks and arm dips to build muscle for all students. “Pointe/ Pas de Deux” (partnering) ballet classes require the boys to perform a minimum of 60 push-ups per class plus various other upper body strengthening. No fluff in my ballet class- we are here to sweat and work hard. Period.

For all my students, boys and girls, I expect them to become motivated, disciplined and respectful people no matter their path in dance. Not every child who dances when they are young will become a professional dancer nor do they aspire to be, but the majority of them will remember the fun and the discipline.