

The Spirit of Parker

Many describe dance as just movement and, while they are not necessarily wrong, it is so much more. Dance is the feeling of flying, of release and heartbreak and joy and euphoria – all encompassed in the tiny details in a performance – a delicate por de bra or a tilt of the head. Dancers are first and foremost story tellers, sharing experiences and emotions in a collective journey that the audience is invited to join them in, requiring a level of vulnerability that is simultaneously intimidating and liberating. To not have to shoulder burdens alone, but rather share them through art and movement, creates a sense of community and a deeper understanding of one another. When words fail, movement helps fill the gaps, constantly being a grounding presence. In essence, those who have seen me dance know me the best. The feeling of the stage – the heat of the lights, the butterflies that rise from the base of your stomach into your sternum, the adrenaline that races through your veins with wild abandon, the satisfaction of a job well done when the music fades away – is addicting. Dance is so much more than movement; dance is the language of the soul.

Beginning at the young age of seven, dance has been a consistent part of my life. Through the practice of Ballet, Tap, Jazz, Lyrical, Contemporary, and Hip Hop, dance has enabled me to grow in both artistry and self-discipline. My mother, who was a staunch believer in the necessity of movement and exercise, enrolled both my sister and I in classes at the nearby dance studio; however, whereas my sister quickly tired of the repetitive and highly structured movements, I rejoiced in such routine and, ironically, found freedom within the predictability of class. Quick to love dance, I progressed in my studies, eventually moving to Studio 9 Dance Academy, where I still pursue my passion.

Led by the directors of my dance studio, who made a point to be involved in the community of Parker, I had the opportunity to perform at various events, such as at a nearby nursing home (prior to the epidemic) and several schools. These events brought the community of both dancers and non-dancers alike together to celebrate art in its joyful execution. Even more frequently than the performances, however, I became a teacher assistant at my dance studio, where I was led in an apprenticeship beneath several dance teachers. Through several years of assisting, during which I collected over 100 hours of service, I learned how to encourage the passion and excitement of younger dancers in a way that enables their potential to flourish and make movement an exciting adventure for every student.

After being a teacher assistant, I was allowed the opportunity to instruct several dance classes of my own throughout the week, consisting of students between the ages of two and seven. Admittedly, I initially struggled with the transition. Suddenly, I was the leader of several other individuals, a position that I had avoided prior to this experience and I felt overwhelmingly inadequate as both a teacher and a dancer. Regardless, I persisted in providing the students with as best of a dance experience as possible, giving the students and myself permission to learn more as the weeks passed. Now, teaching dance classes is the highlight of my week, having discovered a profound sense of joy that comes with being a leader. I am incredibly grateful for both the opportunity to teach dance and for the grit to see it through, without which I would have lost out on the opportunity to share my passion for the art form with the next generation of dancers.

Additionally, learning to love being a leader has encouraged me to pursue other, similar leadership roles, such as becoming a teacher within an academic setting. After my experience with instructing younger students within the dance studio, I made the decision to pursue higher education with the intention of earning a license in elementary education. As a future educator, I believe my experience as a dance teacher will not only enhance my skills as a teacher, but can enhance the experience of the students. By providing movement-based activities and techniques, I intend to utilize my background as a dance teacher to promote a classroom environment that instills the same qualities that I gained from my dance experience – passion, creativity, and, most important of all, community.

Dance has shaped who I am today and has given me membership to a unique and diverse community. I have had amazing teachers who have pushed me past my limits, as well as supported my endeavors in and out of the studio. By being given this incredible opportunity as an intern, I have been able to explore the many faces of dance and further develop my dancing to the next level. From receiving my pointe shoes to becoming a dance teacher myself, I am incredibly grateful to have been given these opportunities to grow and flourish within the community of Parker.