

AVHS Junior High Dance Sessions
Anderson Valley Junior & Senior High School
2015-2016

The AVHS Junior High School Dance Sessions brought multicultural dance sessions into Physical Education classes at Anderson Valley Junior & Senior High School (AVHS). This project partnered dancer and retired Mendocino County teacher Jane Corey with AVHS teacher Jason Page to bring structured improvisation, partner and group dances into his junior high school Physical Education classes September 2015–May 2016.



Ms. Corey worked with the two classes once to twice a month from September 2015–May 2016 for a total of sixteen sessions engaging sixty-one junior high school students in dance. The sessions were ninety minutes in length. In each of the sessions students were engaged in working on rhythm, aerobic stamina, coordination, movement vocabulary and listening to music. Students were introduced to improvisation, partner and group dances, using music from a variety of cultures for warm-ups, dance fundamental lessons and specific dances with the goal of building a dance vocabulary while comparing and contrasting different music and movements. For example, noting the difference between a gallop and a slide, a stamp, a jump and a leap and considering kinds of music that elicit a smooth or legato response or a sharp or percussive response. Students had the opportunity to move together in playful and joyful ways and, as dance is a non-verbal way of connecting with others, to learn new ways for communicating with each other. Music from folk and classical traditions as well as live music were also brought in to introduce dances to the students.



Ms. Corey has danced all her life, was a teacher in Mendocino Unified School District her entire career and has also taught dance at the community college level. She is passionate about exposing children and youth to diverse dance and music traditions and believes that dance and “all the expressive arts are our birthright but too frequently our culture puts limits so that only the specialists or performers participate.” Ms. Corey puts a particular emphasis on making her dance sessions accessible and enjoyable for students of all ages and experience levels. Through the varied experiences Ms. Corey facilitates the opportunity for students and their teachers to broaden their knowledge and curiosity about the myriad ways people can enjoy music and dance. Because music from a variety of cultures is introduced, there is increased understanding that dance and music can contribute to the health of a community and, from questionnaires Ms. Corey has had Anderson Valley students complete,

students have shared that they felt increased comfort and tolerance getting to know each other through the sessions.

Here is a personal account from Ms. Corey about her experiences with the junior high school students during the 2015-2016 school year:

“As with the adult population, some children struggle more than others feeling rhythm and hearing musical phrasing, knowing which foot they are on and learning patterns. Some easily joy in moving bodies to music [while] others feel more inhibition or simply don't enjoy it. I have worked with most of [the junior high school] students since 1st or 2nd grade. Some are quite skilled, for others less so. My hope is that in spite of the extreme self-consciousness of adolescence, they can find a place of comfort and even joy in dance.”

The students were enthusiastic and engaged when in mid-February I brought in dance partner for swing dance. In light of their enthusiasm and because one of the musicians who has usually played for class was having surgery I opted to use the funds allocated for musicians for two additional sessions with [a dance] partner. Today at the conclusion of our final swing dance lesson some of the students were able to articulate the challenges and satisfactions studying dance at this age. I was pleased and surprised that several students reflected favorably on open-ended emotionally expressive improvisations they had done in primary grades. One student has an IEP, doesn't make eye contact and has difficulty staying focused. [AVHS P.E. Teacher Jason Page] volunteered that he observed [this student engaging in] good eye contact and focus during the dance sessions as compared with regular PE.

I believe the cumulative years of dancing together in school is empowering these students to be expressive, to connect with others through dance, allowing themselves to share play and joy. I try to stay attuned with effective practices for teaching dance at different developmental stages. Thank you for funding this endeavor. As a retired teacher it gives me great joy to be able to share my passion with Anderson Valley students.”

