

BUILDING COMMUNITY – How to keep the dance going when the music stops

Jeff Spero & Doc Litchman

Why do so many people come to a dance once or twice and then drop out? How do we integrate all the people that show up for a dance and build a community for all? We've give you tips and techniques to build everlasting friendships within your dance community.

[This was an amazing session, with everybody contributing. People were still talking to each other long after it was over. This notetaker couldn't keep up with all the contributions!]

1. Discussion: What Is Community?

When people get together with dance and music and fun, exploring options, working together

Belonging to community means taking time to share yourselves -- connecting

Self-identity

Being with people

Beyond entertainment: the need of the whole is greater than the need of the individual - to produce something greater than selves

It's like the set-up of a village: generative [property?] brings on a new generation

It's the care for individuals of the community within our shared interest

The dance is not the purpose - it's an element of a community, whether one of the small dance communities or the greater Dance Community

Trust

2. Discussion: Why is community important?

Human needs.

Social and psychological health

A need to belong. Acceptance

Closeness, empathy, honesty, integrity, contact

Our dance community is based on a basic need for and love of movement

“I was dragged into a dance kicking and screaming. The community is why I stayed.”

“What I like about contra dancing is sweating on people” [i.e., feeling comfortable with other dancers]

Connecting with other people without a sense of threat

Connection. Mutual support

Group movement: my idea is of working with other people for a common purpose

Opportunity to express yourself

Collaborative movement. The success of one is the success of all. Each person has a part to play in the dances.

Everybody gets to matter

3. Discussion: How can we continue this, and extend these opportunities to others?

Help people know that they are missed when they don't come

Each person has a role

Ask people to have a responsibility

Organizers: Make room for people to help. Share the work.

People need to have a stake in the dance -- it is their dance

As a dance community: go out together after the dance; do other activities together

Isolation is a feature of this day and time: this [dance] activity gives people a chance to escape isolation.

4. Discussion: Caller Techniques to Encourage Community

Let people talk and socialize - don't be in too much of a hurry to rush people into the next dance. Wait for a natural pause.

Contra callers: Back off calling - let dancers struggle a bit to keep each other going - to work together

One caller prefers English country dancing because there's more time for dancers to communicate

Remember that the difficulty of the dance affects how hard it is to talk to other dancers.

In your choice of dances, focus on variety without complexity -- variety adds the challenge

Ideas for caller over-the mike comments:

Between dances: "Mill around! Meet somebody new!"
"Find somebody you don't know for the next dance"

Ask dancers to ask inexperienced dancers to dance - and then go find them their partners for the next dance.

Announcement at end of evening: "We're a volunteer community. We welcome your help in cleaning up the room."
"It takes everybody to help."