

EDUCATION

Helping City Schools Bring a Taste of the Arts to Students

By ABBY GOODNOUGH

After a long morning of drills in reading, third graders at Public School 156 in Brownsville, Brooklyn, spent an hour last Friday dancing to the urgent flutter of flamenco music. Their small hands spiraled and their sneakers thumped as a professional dancer, Andrea Del Conte, guided them through stomps and whirls in a classroom with mirrored walls and glossy floors.

Dance is an indispensable part of the curriculum for all 750 students at P.S. 156, along with music, art and creative writing. Poems paper the school walls, parents sew costumes for special dance performances, and teachers gamely join students in daily artistic experiments. Linked to the subjects they are studying, flamenco, for example, ties into social studies and language arts lessons on the history and culture of Spain.

The school has developed a comprehensive arts program not on its own, but in partnership with several of New York City's nonprofit cultural institutions whose employees have advised the teachers, helped write the curriculum and frequently visited the classrooms to teach students about different art forms.

For the last two decades, schools like P.S. 156 have increasingly turned to the city's museums, concert halls and theaters for lessons in art, music and dance. They began to do so in the 1970's, when

An involvement that may cultivate future audiences.

the city's near-bankruptcy eliminated hundreds of arts instructors. Now, cultural institutions as large as the New York Philharmonic and as small as neighborhood dance troupes have become a permanent part of the city's educational landscape. Even though the city is investing in arts education again, the institutions are playing a greater role than ever, not just giving occasional performances or tours as they once did, but helping schools retool their curriculums to integrate art, music and dance into every academic subject.

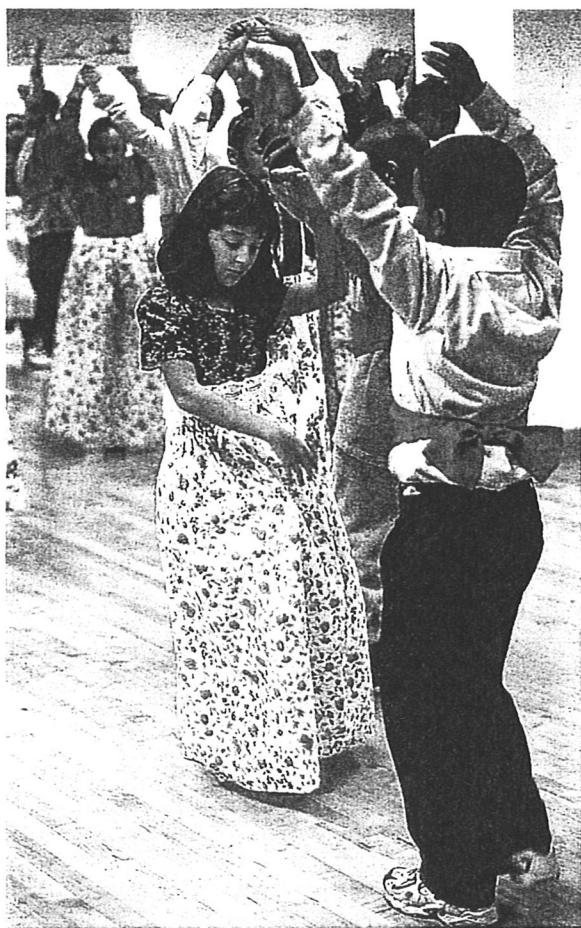
The institutions are becoming more involved not just to improve arts education, but out of self-interest: They want to cultivate future audiences and impress potential donors at a time when improving public education is considered an especially pressing and honorable cause.

Carnegie Hall spends close to \$1 million a year training teachers to use music in the classroom, putting on concerts for school children and sending musicians to 22 schools across the city for seven visits per class over a school year. The Roundabout Theater sends teaching artists to 40 classrooms in the city for 10 visits each. Those artists teach students about reading, writing, directing and acting in plays as part of their language arts and social studies curriculums.

And artists from Lotus Music and Dance Studios in Chelsea work intensively with six schools across the city, including P.S. 156, teaching students about the music and dance of different cultures.

The enthusiasm for such programs is striking at a time when city schools are under intense pressure to prepare students for increasingly rigorous standardized tests. But while Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and Chancellor Rudy Crew have goaded schools to focus on reading and math, they have also increased the arts education budget by \$150 million since 1997, providing about 1,000 art and music teachers and badly needed supplies for the city's 1,100 public schools.

That investment is not enough to bring the arts into every classroom, but in this



At top, fourth graders at P.S. 156 in Brooklyn practice flamenco dancing as Andrea Del Conte, above, of Lotus Music and Dance Studios, instructs them.

flush economy, private foundations are joining cultural institutions in spending money on arts education partnerships. Most notably, the philanthropist Walter Annenberg pledged \$12 million to New York City schools in 1993 for academic offerings in the arts in a matching-fund program that is to total \$36 million. So far, 81 schools have received grants, most of them \$75,000 a year, to develop programs with nonprofit institutions.

"The question now is not whether to teach the arts, but how to put them at the core of everything a school does," said Hollis Headrick, executive director of the Center for Arts Education, which oversees the Annenberg partnerships.

Even with the infusion of money and the enthusiasm of cultural institutions, progress in arts education is slow. Some institutions report tensions with teachers who say the programs occupy too much of their time. And so far, only the most motivated schools are truly integrating the arts into their curriculums, a process

that requires extra work and money and a willingness to change teaching styles and methods drastically.

This week, educators from 40 countries are discussing how to speed the progress at the International Conference on the Future of Arts Education, sponsored by the New York International Festival of the Arts, at I.B.M.'s conference site in

Getting help to work music, art and dance into the curriculum.

Pailsades, N.Y. "We still need to teach the basic skills, but students today need an education that recognizes a much wider range of intellectual abilities and ways of communicating," said Ken Robinson, co-chairman of the conference and a professor of arts education at the University of Warwick in England.

Despite the booming economy, most arts organizations charge schools a fee for their expertise, ranging from a few dollars per student for a single lecture or performance to upward of \$50,000 for ongoing classroom visits and teacher training by several teaching artists.

"It takes so much extra work to start something like this," said Verano LaRue, the arts education specialist at Lotus Music and Dance Studios, which P.S. 156 is paying about \$40,000 this year to incorporate dance into the school's curriculum.

At P.S. 156 last week, the principal, Martha Rodriguez-Torres, nodded approvingly at a teacher and an aide who were learning steps with the young flamenco dancers, then walked down the hall to offer encouragement to fifth graders writing poems about things that comfort them — part of a project on Native Americans that uses the help of another cultural group, Teachers and Writers Collaborative.

"Come on, Dennis, let the ideas flow through you!" she told a boy who had put down his pencil after writing one line. And she clapped loudly when another student read a poem that began, "Oh dresser drawer, you smell so good with your aroma of fried chicken."

Ms. Rodriguez-Torres said that reading and math scores at P.S. 156, while still relatively low, have improved since the school won an Annenberg grant two years ago that has allowed it to work closely with cultural institutions.

"Our reading scores have improved every year, and I can say that our children now enjoy writing," Ms. Rodriguez-Torres said.

But even schools whose principals and teachers highly value the arts may have to work hard to convince parents and even students that they are as important an academic subject as math, reading and science. After ebulliently whirling to the flamenco music last week, Katherine Nevarez, a third grader, solemnly said that while the rhythms lingered in her mind all day, dancing was not her favorite subject. "When we do it, it's fun," she said. "But my uncle told me that if I study math I'll get a college degree."

One way of getting families to value the arts as much as they value math is to measure student progress with traditional assessment tools, and New York State has started doing so by introducing standards that outline what students should learn through arts instruction. But Terry L. Baker, an education consultant who is trying to measure the effectiveness of the Annenberg programs, said educators still are not sure how to assess a student's grasp of such "abstract, emotional and spiritual" subjects as music and painting.

"If the arts are going to be taken seriously, they have to be held accountable in the same way that other disciplines are," he said. "But we are still some distance from figuring out the best way to do that."

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