

CAT IN THE NEWS

CREATIVE ARTS TEAM • The City University of New York



THE CENTER FOR ARTS EDUCATION

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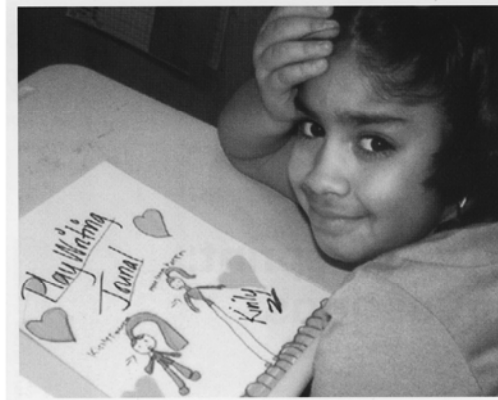
Success evident at PS 2X

PS 2X has evidence and Carmen Farina, Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning at the New York City Department of Education, wants it. Farina is collecting documentation of how the arts impact literacy and whole child development. According to Principal Mark Bailey, the school, in its third year of a Center-funded Partnership, has just what Farina is looking for.

"Student test scores are rising. Attendance is rising. There is tremendous enthusiasm among teachers and students about playwriting, performing and sharing what they have learned with the parents," says Bailey. "The whole PS 2X community is involved. Parents attend performances and assist in the classroom. Classroom teachers are now using theater arts techniques taught by our cultural partners Creative Arts Team (CAT) and Arts Horizons to foster literacy, numeracy and school morale in our students." Professional development workshops present engaging ways for teachers to introduce new vocabulary, concepts and curriculum to increase students' motivation.

Catherine Nettey, a first grade teacher, agrees. She has found that shy students and those with behavioral or academic challenges actively participate in theater activities. "Many children who can't read or write take the lead when it comes to drama. They are extremely motivated. A lot of my students are eager to respond to stories, write journals, draw pictures and write their own stories. Kids feel a part of the lesson and feel they have input in their education," says Nettey.

The school's original cultural partners were CAT and Open Classroom Collaborative. In the first year, three third grade teachers were trained by teaching artists. The program culminated with a play reading. In the second year, the program expanded to include six teachers, who focused on "Peacebuilders" and "Book of the Month" themes. The final productions went beyond play reading. Students memorized lines and performed in costume on stage. The



PS 2X student proudly displays her playwriting journal.

Photo: Sylvia Lopez

Visual Arts Club created scenery. Keyboard students played musical interludes during play transitions, under the guidance of music teacher Tom Hall. Hall was recently named the national Barbie Arts Teacher of the Year, an award funded by the Entertainment Industry Fund and Mattel.

Now, with the addition of Arts Horizons, the Partnership program includes a poetry component in the fourth grade and a playwriting component in the fifth grade. Classroom teachers incorporate drama, poetry and playwriting into their lesson plans.

Fran Yesner, Language Arts Specialist, described the evaluation process that measures the Partnership's success. "Student growth is determined through reflective journals and videotapes. Teacher growth is evaluated through pre-surveys, post-questionnaires and informal conferencing.

Every teacher has had a positive experience," Yesner says. "Remarkable things have happened. Students showed gains in written language skills as reflected in their journal entries."

According to Bailey, the arts have transformed the school. Classroom teachers are developing skills and confidence in using the arts during and beyond their collaboration with teaching artists in the school. They are succeeding in reaching academically challenged students. Students willingly come to school to participate in a range of arts activities. Bailey proclaims, "As a result of the Partnership program, PS 2X has developed a culture in which the arts are an integral part of the total instructional program." ❧