



## **American Ballroom Theater Company, Inc. Dancing Classrooms Program Evaluation Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

*Dancing Classrooms*, a project of the American Ballroom Theater, was launched in 1994 as a not-for-profit organization, teaching ballroom dance to fourth and fifth grade students in the New York City Public Schools. The mission of this arts-in-education program is to build social awareness, confidence and self-esteem in children through the practice of social dance. Through standards-based, in-school residencies, the vocabulary and techniques of ballroom dance are used to foster respect, teamwork, confidence and a sense of accomplishment.

Currently, *Dancing Classrooms* serves 19,000 students in 195 schools. According to program estimates, approximately 20% of participating students are White/non-Hispanic; 30% are Asian; 25% Hispanic; and 25% African/African American. The program uses a curriculum-based approach with a 10-week series of 45 to 50 minute classes held twice each week. Featured dances include the Merengue, Rumba, Foxtrot, Waltz, Tango, and Swing. Teaching Artists include information on the history and geography of each dance, with the course culminating in events with parent/family participation and a city-wide dance team competition.

In 2005, American Ballroom Theater engaged Philliber Research Associates to conduct a one-year evaluation of the *Dancing Classrooms* program.

- The purpose of the evaluation was to document changes in student skills, attitudes, and behavior as reported by classroom teachers, parents, Teaching Artists, and the students themselves.
- Student pre/post questionnaires, teacher questionnaires, parent questionnaires and Teaching Artist questionnaires were used to measure program objectives in the areas of improved social skills, improved self confidence, increased awareness of student cultural heritage, increased levels of physical activity and exercise, and increased skills in dance and coordination.
- Research was conducted by Leslie Scheuler, PhD, of Philliber Research Associates, in close collaboration with American Ballroom Theater staff.

### **Results**

Classroom teachers, parents/guardians, Teaching Artists, and the students themselves agreed that ***participants not only enjoyed Dancing Classrooms, but also made important gains in social skills, self confidence, and self image.***

- Overall, respondents (teachers, parents/guardians, Teaching Artists and students) agreed that the program **helped students overcome social anxieties**, including interacting with members of the opposite sex and overcoming shyness.
- They agreed that *Dancing Classrooms* gave students an important opportunity to **gain new skills and excel in an area that was new to most of them.**
- Respondents also agreed that program participation helped increase **etiquette** (or good manners), **respect for others**, and **social skills** (like politeness, teamwork and cooperation).

- They agreed that *Dancing Classrooms* helped **increase student confidence and self esteem**, with students reporting a significant increase in liking to **perform in front of a group** (on pre/post questionnaires) and more than 80% agreeing that they felt good about themselves while participating in the program.
- Nearly three-quarters of the classroom teachers agreed that the program helped **increase students' physical development, coordination, and participation in positive physical activity**.

Most teachers reported their students talked about their experiences in the classroom with some indicating that new skills, developed through program participation, were also evident in the classroom. More than 90% of parents/guardians indicated their children talked about *Dancing Classrooms* at home, with a number of them reporting that their sons/daughters practiced their dancing at home.

***Taken together, evaluation results suggest that Dancing Classrooms offers students unique opportunities to gain new skills, overcome social anxieties, develop more social skills, and gain self confidence.*** These tasks are critical to healthy adolescent development, and students are able to make these gains while having a great deal of fun. Finally, the program is successful at gaining the positive support of classroom teachers and parents/guardians for what these young people are capable of, and what they are accomplishing, during their 10 weeks of program participation. The following quotes help summarize the benefits of the *Dancing Classrooms* program.

From classroom teachers:

- *Many learned how to interact better with their peers and many learned to be respectful of one another.*
- *For children who are not academically gifted, this program gave them a chance to shine.*
- *The quieter children seem more open and more verbal. The students, overall, seem to take more risk.*

From parents/guardians:

- *I was surprised how mature [my son acted during the performance] and how respectful he was with the female partners.*
- *I think my daughter now recognizes that if she wants to do something, she can.*
- *Dancing made [my son] feel accomplished and raised his self esteem.*

From Teaching Artists:

- *A few students who did not normally "stand out" in class became very confident and began to open up with their dancing. Some of them who rarely got noticed because they don't misbehave finally received well-deserved attention for their quiet, subtle rise to being skilled dancers; they began to "stick out" in class as some of the best dancers. I feel like their hard work finally got appreciated without them having to call attention to themselves.*

And finally, from the students themselves:

- *I learned that to work in a team, I have to work with other people and I can't take the lead 100%.*
- *I learned not to be mean or put somebody down about how they dance.*
- *I improved my concentration. Ballroom dancing is hard work.*
- *I felt like I can express my feelings in the dances.*

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