

**kids tell kids** "Forget past problems and look for the best in the year to come. Stay focused and have fun."  
Ruth Anne, age 15, Bonsall, CA



## Let's Dance!

If you ask a fifth grader how he'd like to spend his gym class, chances are doing the fox-trot wouldn't be his initial response. But for the boys and girls at P.S. 11 in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood, ballroom dancing has become something they look forward to. In fact, they've been city dance champions for the past three years. ("Way cool" and "fun" are the words they tend to use, according to their fifth-grade teacher, Dinah Krosnick.)

P.S. 11 is just one of 55 public schools throughout New York City's five boroughs participating in the "Dancing Classrooms" program, a project of the American Ballroom Theater Company, a not-for-profit organization. Depending on the school, classes are taught twice a week to fourth, fifth and sixth graders over a period of 10 weeks. Kids learn to fox-trot,

merengue, waltz, rumba, tango, swing and polka.

### NOT JUST GYM

- In Omaha, Nebraska, physical education teacher Mona Rhoda and third-grade teacher Ann Cox started a morning walking club for staff members, parents and students at Bess Streefer Aldrich Elementary School. During the past year, they've averaged between 50 to 150 walkers a day.

- Thanks to a partnership in Issaquah, Washington, between the YMCA School-Aged Child Care Program and the Challenger Elementary School, kids in kindergarten through fifth grade are learning yoga.

Although the vehicle may be ballroom dancing, the engine is teamwork and social interaction. So explains Pierre Dulaine, the man behind the mission and a world showdance champion. "Ballroom dancing teaches children many lessons, such as respect for each other, cooperation, self-esteem and a love of the arts, to name a few," says Dulaine, who founded the organization with his former dance partner,

Yvonne Marceau. "The idea is to teach skills that are transferable and will be useful for their lives."

The program also encompasses culture, history and geography by teaching kids about the origins of the specific dances.

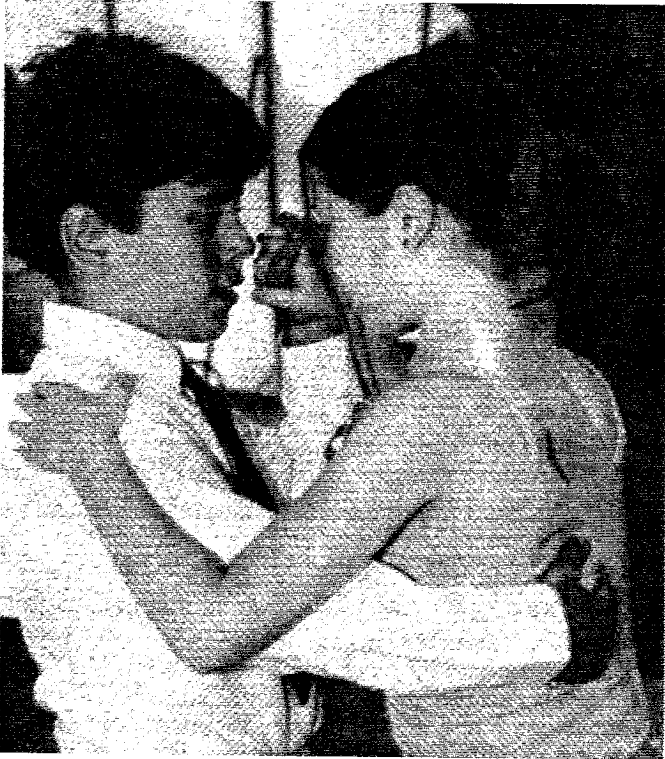
But what Dulaine is especially proud of is the social interaction and self-confidence that the children learn.

"Some children are good in math or reading or track and field. Other children excel in dance," confirms Krosnick, who's been involved with the curriculum since it started at her school seven years ago. "This program gives those kids a chance to shine."

For more information, call 212-244-9442 or log on to [americanballroomtheater.com](http://americanballroomtheater.com). *Jeanne Muchnick*

# Woman's Day

September 1, 2003



*A child duo takes center stage at the fifth annual "Colors of the Rainbow" dance competition*

And these good feelings are accessible to everyone, as Marceau points out. "Our program is for children of all skills. You don't need to be particularly trained to learn to social dance; it gives children who maybe aren't particularly coordinated or sports-oriented a chance to shine, and that ability to do well at something is important for a child growing up."

Another integral facet to the program is learning the cultural history of the respective dances

— Latin dances like the Mambo, Merengue, Salsa, and Swing; and Ballroom dances like the Waltz, Fox-Trot, and Tango.

This past June, the American Ballroom Theater Company's fifth annual "Colors of the Rainbow" competition featured students from nine different New York City public schools. Dressed up and ready to shine, the young ladies and gentlemen took center stage at the World Financial Center's Winter Garden, and put on a rousing show for their peers, family members, friends, and celebrity judges. P.S. 11 in Manhattan took home the first-place trophy for the second year in a row, and on the September 2 telecast of *CBS Sunday Morning News*, the champs got to show off a few of their winning moves. After the "Colors of the Rainbow" competition, I caught up with one of the school's shining stars, 11-year-old Adam Sammons, who told me, "I feel good about dancing. It feels good when you dance out there and people are watching you. You kind of have energy you never felt before. Winning first prize really made our team feel good, and I hope everyone else felt good." Judging by the continuing buzz after the show, it was fair to assume that everyone did.

This past year, nearly 40 schools featured "Dancing Classrooms" as part of their curriculum, and continual expansion since its inception has helped the program to solidify its position as a staple. And the A.B.T.'s vision may have to expand further to include public schools around the country — many have contacted Pierre Dulaine about implementing "Dancing Classrooms" into their curriculum. He says, "People are now calling us, and that's wonderful for the program." The popularity of the program is also evident in the fact that 115 children have already enrolled in A.B.T.'s Scholarship Program. This allows students to continue with their studies, attending class at A.B.T.'s studios on West 31st Street on Saturday mornings.

For more information about "Dancing Classrooms" or the American Ballroom Theater Company, visit their website at [AmericanBallroomTheater.com](http://AmericanBallroomTheater.com), or call (212) 244-9442. ♦