MINNESOTA DANCER

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Tea Dance

Photo by David Chin Photography
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A Parent’s Perspective Regarding Dancing Classrooms

By Michelle East

When I first heard about Dancing Classrooms coming to our school, I wondered how they were going to get all these fifth graders to willingly participate. I did not think that ballroom dancing was going to go over well with 11 year olds. However, I liked that the goal was to incorporate subjects such as math, history, geography, etc. into the experience of learning the dances, while at the same time teaching and promoting manners, respect, and confidence, so I hoped for the best.

My daughter was not happy when she found out that she would have to dance with boys from school. She thought it was going to be embarrassing and old fashioned. I might have expected more resistance from her, but since her grandmother, who is a member of a USA Dance Ballroom group, was going to be one of the classroom volunteers, she had to put on a good face about it.

From the first class it was clear to me that she was intrigued, and definitely interested in learning more. As the weeks went by, I watched her blossom with this new activity in her life. Suddenly, school was not so dreary, but rather fun. I could see her growing in confidence with her new found skills, and watched her maturing right before my eyes. Although the consensus of the class was the same as hers had been, once the students had a few classes under their belts, the embarrassment seemed to fade and then the real fun began.

At the end of the program, the Fifth graders were expected to perform a few of the dances they had learned in the auditorium in front of the entire school. This was more frightening for my daughter than the competition that was still a few weeks away.

Our students had nothing to worry about as the crowd cheered and clapped for the dancers, enjoying themselves thoroughly. It was a great experience for the dancers, a sort of life lesson on how to put yourself out there in front of the crowd, while still within the safety of a group.
My daughter and three other classmates also had the opportunity to perform on Twin Cities Live on KSTP. It was an opportunity to promote the benefits and successes the program is having as it sweeps across the country. We went shopping for new shoes and a new dress to wear.

The together time was special as we talked about the dances and which dress would work the best.

At the TV station the children were nervous, scared, and excited. They got to wait in the green room and take pictures with the hosts of the show. The ladies wore a turquoise scarf and the gentlemen a turquoise handkerchief, handmade gifts from Miss Gabri-él, their fifth grade teacher. They performed the Swing in front of the cameras. It was an exhilarat- ing experience that we will re-member always.
Finally it was the day of the big competition we had been working towards from the start. This team match event would be the last step of a journey that I hadn’t realized we had been on until that moment. Thinking back to the beginning, I could see that my child had been transformed from a somewhat sulky, can’t take my headphones off preteen, to a vibrant and engaged young adult.

The atmosphere in the ballroom was fascinating as the children from the eight different schools came together. Everyone was polite and smiling. The children were dressed in their best feeling elegant and sophisticated, and everyone was so well behaved! Our team came in third place, but everyone was so excited, you would have thought we won first. The entire experience and afternoon was unforgettable.

I have to give much of the credit to the teachers and assistants involved. Without their diligence, patience, talents, and abilities, things may not have gone as well as they did. There are people looking everywhere for some way to reach our youth and instill within them a sense of pride and well being. Teaching young people how to treat others with respect seems to be hard won in today’s world. Dancing Classrooms has proven itself to be successful in these endeavors.