



IN THE NEWS

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BE OUR GUEST: LYNDA ZIMMERMAN, arts advocate

Arts can be an invaluable tool in effort to help poor children

The National Center for Children in Poverty reports that 88% of New York City's children live at or near the poverty line. This is, on its own, a terrible statistic. But it gets worse.

Research shows that without structured support and intervention, children raised in poverty lag behind their more affluent counterparts in every academic sphere: readiness, performance and the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

This could be disastrous given the need for an educated workforce in the information and service economy of New York.

Fortunately, one of New York's most important sectors, the arts, is providing innovative and effective ways to help address the challenges these children face.

The CUNY Creative Arts Team (CAT) has pioneered the use of drama as a catalyst for learning in classrooms and community sites throughout the city.

At CAT, we know that all young people deserve the opportunity to reach their potential. Our engaging, thought-provoking interactive drama programs help them to do so.

You can find our professional actor/teachers in all five boroughs of the city – in classrooms of every grade, homeless shelters, Rikers Island and community sites

– merging role-play and learning to produce a unique educational environment.

You can also find them working with parents and caregivers on how to use role-play to defuse stressful situations with children and teenagers. One mother recently commented, "Things are different at our house since CAT came into our lives!"

We believe that classroom teachers should be able to use interactive drama every day, in every area of the curriculum. Therefore, we also offer three graduate certificates in which educators and teaching artists from all over the world learn, hands-on, how to use our pioneering approach. The certificates are accredited through CUNY's newest school, the School of Professional Studies.

Offering unique ways to connect with students

There's an old teachers' adage – "Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand." Under Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein, the arts – including CAT's interactive drama programs, as well as those of

our peer organizations such as ArtsConnection, Studio in a School and Lincoln Center Institute – are being recognized for their proven ability to involve children and their powerful impact on teaching and learning.

Each student has a unique voice and perceives the world through a unique lens. The arts have a special ability to help young people find their voices and hone their

focus on achievement and success. To that end, since CAT's founding in 1974, we have engaged more than a half-million New Yorkers of all ages.

In a note to CAT's program director last year one teacher wrote, "Once in a great while, magic happens in a classroom. Your gifted and talented messengers of drama-in-education never failed to create such magic. Quiet, shy students opened up before our eyes. Sensitive, creative students demonstrated their gifts and talents. The experience of teamwork in solving our problems had a wondrous effect on our class's cohesiveness."

CAT's interactive drama programs help teachers create student-centered classrooms, where learning is organic and achieving is natural. Indeed, interactive drama is an exciting and proven strategy to achieve that goal and lay a firm groundwork for New York's young people to become participatory citizens and achieve their dreams.

Parents who would like to know if CAT is available in their schools or neighborhoods and professionals who would like more information on CAT can contact me at lynda.zimmerman@mail.cuny.edu

Lynda Zimmerman is founder and executive director of the Creative Arts Team, the resident arts-in-education program of the City University of New York.