

Carlota Santana Spanish Dance Company

Bahama, North Carolina

Category: Arts Integration; Artist Residency; Cultural Understanding

Flamenco is a dance of tradition, which is exactly why the Carlota Santana Spanish Dance Company and Mineral Springs Middle A+ Academy decided to make long-term plans when they teamed up. In an unusual residency project, the grant applicant was not the school, but the artist. Carlota Santana saw a need for some tradition building, some sense of continuity and a deeper understanding of Spanish/Hispanic culture in Winston-Salem. So she joined forces with Mineral Springs Middle, a public A+ school that transforms the lives of economically challenged students through arts integration and Multiple Intelligences. Because of its students' needs for more long-term cultural experiences and its commitment to the arts as a way to communicate the curriculum, Mineral Springs was the perfect choice.

The program began in 2002, when the Carlota Santana Spanish Dance Company spent three weeks in residence at Mineral Springs, providing a cultural immersion program for sixth graders. These sixth graders learned Spanish Dance from their toes to their fingertips, becoming immersed not just in the movement and the music, but also the history and culture, and creating some pretty powerful cross-cultural understanding along the way. In 2003 Carlota Santana's company returned to Mineral Springs for a delicious four weeks. To build on the tradition they had begun the year before, the company worked extensively with the seventh graders who had been the sixth graders of the year before.

Daily, the halls echoed with the percussive melodies of Spanish music as these students built on what they had learned of how to dance the traditional dances of Spain. Of course, tradition must be handed down to the next generation, so the sixth graders took part in introductory workshops, learning the basic steps and gestures that make Spanish dance so lyrical and expressive. The seventh graders, with their extra experience, acted as mentors and assistance in introducing the art form to the new sixth graders.

Teachers, too, participated in the tradition, as Carlota involved them with in-depth, hands- (and feet-) on workshops that showed them not only how to teach the art of Spanish dance, but also how to teach the art of other subjects, like Social Studies, through Spanish dance. She also provided each teacher with an extensive curriculum guide to be used with students.

Not content with limiting dance to the studio, Carlota Santana and her company extended the learning into every classroom by incorporating Spanish dance and culture into all subject areas. They extended an invitation to families and the community to see a culminating performance by students with the professional dancers. And while they were doing all that extending, they moved out into the community, offering professional and student Spanish dance performances at senior centers, in the workplace and in other locations where dance would be both unexpected and deeply appreciated.

Dance is all about taking a leap, and traditional dance of any country is about being grounded. Carlota Santana and her company have done both in choosing to bring dance into every area of the curriculum at Mineral Springs, and by creating a tradition of passing along the passion and precision of Spanish dance from grade level to grade level, as for years it has been passed from generation to generation.

Carlota Santana Spanish Dance Company: www.flamenco-vivo.org

Multiple Intelligences: www.pz.harvard.edu