U. program infuses arts into learning statewide

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Ninth-grade dance students twisted and turned in tune with DNA replication Tuesday at the University of Utah's Marriott Center for Dance, portraying the impact fine arts can have on basic education.

Their mingling of science and art was one of many performances that help to not only develop excellent dancers but develop young people "who are useful, imaginative, worthwhile human beings," said Raymond Tymus-Jones, dean of the College of Fine Arts at the University of Utah. He was quoting Virginia Tanner, who founded the Tanner Dance program at the U.

The DNA dance marked the beginning of a new partnership between Tanner Dance and the U.'s College of Fine Arts and College of Education. The U.'s new model for arts in education is meant to serve as a benchmark for infusing fine arts into curricula in districts state and nationwide.

"It is critical that we not lose sight of the central role the arts play," said U. College of Education Dean Michael Hardman. "You cannot measure the kind of learning you are seeing tonight."

Children from the Tanner Dance program at the U., along with students at William Penn and Lincoln Elementary schools, danced to show how learning the arts helped them to learn other subjects as well. The DNA dance was done to honor Mario Capecchi's Nobel Prize as well as exemplify the integration and intertwining of arts and education the new partnership plans to do.

"Artistic expression, like DNA, is what makes us unique as individuals and also what defines us as common members of the human family," said host James Lee Sorenson.

National studies, he said, have proven that study of the arts helps students improve learning in core subjects and also perform better on achievement tests. According to local data, students at Jackson Elementary School, a Title 1 school in the Salt Lake City School District, score 42 percent higher in language arts and 63 percent higher in math than students at comparable schools. Sorenson said it is due to the fact that each student learns to play the violin in fourth grade.

"We believe the arts have not only a synergistic effect on education but help to produce well-balanced, better qualified and motivated students and workers in our community," Sorenson said.

Katharine Dalton teaches fifth grade at Lincoln and said that "without dance, my class would not be the community that we are." She uses the art to help her students relax but also energize their minds and help them "express themselves in creative ways." Her class depicted the six traits of writing through a dance called "Boost."

"Using the arts enlivens the learning process," said Mary Ann Lee, director of the Tanner Dance Program. "It allows us to look holistically at education." Children, she said, learn in different ways and by incorporating different modes of learning such as moving and singing, "more children are able to learn more."

The proximity of the disciplines at the U. makes the unprecedented partnership more feasible, Lee said. "There isn't another site where this is all happening simultaneously."

In addition to the announcement of the partnership marking the integration of colleges, the school plans to build a new Arts and Education Complex on its campus, to serve as a model for statewide use. The new studio facility will offer resources for teaching and using fine arts in multiple disciplines as well as provide a location for centralized learning.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be part of a lifelong phenomenon," Tymus-Jones said. He encouraged anyone interested in contributing to the changing future of education in Utah to contact the U.'s College of Education, College of Fine Arts or the Tanner Dance program.

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