

IPEI Red and Gold 'Breathe, Jump, Slide into Wellness'

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'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' is folk wisdom rarely followed, but Boynton Middle School teacher Susan Eschbach took advantage of an Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) Red and Gold Grant to initiate 'Breathe, Jump, Slide into Wellness: An Expressive Arts and Health Initiative for Youth' during the 2011-12 school year.

Eschbach brought Lisa Tsetse, whom she describes as "a gifted movement educator," to seventh grade health classes for five sessions over a ten-week period that encompassed issues ranging from team reliance and cooperation to bullying. The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that, "There is noticeably more bullying in middle school than in senior high school," with emotional bullying being most prevalent. The widespread concern about bullying makes this part of Tsetse's program particularly meaningful.

Tsetse faced the challenge of differentiating instruction for heterogeneous classes that included students on the autism spectrum. Eschbach expressed that Tsetse is "a quick and astute thinker, changing things on the spot to meet each student where he/she is." Tsetse has 30 years of experience as a movement educator trained in modern dance, yoga, and Feldenkrais "awareness through movement" techniques. Her repertoire enables her to reach a broad cross-section of the student population.



Most students responded with enthusiasm to this program, noting that differentiating between private and public space was a reminder to be respectful of each other's personal space. Students reported that Tsetse's work 'nurtured creative energy' and supported self-control while empowering them to 'know what to do if bullying comes toward you.' Other students reported feeling 'weird' or 'confused' and 'out of [their] comfort zone' as the program challenged them.

Although Eschbach was pleased that "Tsetse taught me a few things I could bring into my own teaching," she would "love to be able to use her more. It would be ideal to involve her weekly for an entire quarter and then do the same for the following quarter so that all of the students in a given grade get the same experiences."

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