

was striking was how remarkably these untrained amateurs of varying ages and body types were able both to express themselves through movement and almost unconsciously to internalize the movements of others.

"Dance is a very intuitive art form that everybody understands on a personal level," said Mr. Rioult, whose company runs outreach programs at several schools. When he introduces dance to new audiences, children or adults, he tells them: "Dance is something you already know even if you think you don't. Look in the street or in a schoolyard, and you will know right away if a person is sad or happy by the way they hold themselves, by the way they walk."

But guiding people past their initial uneasiness can be difficult. Diane Coburn Bruning, whose Chamber Dance Project also performed in the workshops offered by the Center for Arts Education, says preparation is the key.

"The body as an expressive instrument is not something we're comfortable with," she said. "We're used to seeing it as either athletic or sensual. The gray area in between isn't introduced to people." She added that when students, for example, haven't been briefed about what to expect, their initial response is often to giggle when dancers come onstage in unitards.

Before Ms. Bruning presented her piece for the teachers, she had each participant devise a melody for his or her name and then create a movement phrase to accompany it. "Now let's do duets," she told them. The result was a jumble of sound and movement. But the assignment elegantly demonstrated to the teachers that while dance can indeed be a metaphor, it doesn't necessarily lend itself to precise decoding by an audience.

Russell Granet, the director of professional development at the Center for Arts Education, ran the workshop series for the teachers. He said he had been impressed by how much more "comfortable with ambiguity" the participants had

become over the five sessions.

For Karen Phillips, who teaches seventh grade at Middle School 217 in Briarwood, Queens, dancing her name and translating a memory into movement evoked the long-ago anxieties of girlhood dance classes. "I loved them, but they made me nervous," she said. She added that she felt privileged to be watching the professional dancers up close, in a room with only a few others. "The intimacy, discussing the choreographer's goals and hearing the dancers' thoughts, made the experience personal, and therefore more meaningful," she said.

Another participant, David Mitnowsky, also said he appreciated having "the backstage view." A theater director who works in the schools as a teaching artist, he said the sessions had made him "more informed on how to watch."

Ms. Bruning, who often uses open studio rehearsals as part of her company's outreach efforts, said she discovered the power of taking audiences behind the scenes when one of her brothers visited the studio and watched the company put the finishing touches on a new dance.

"He was totally in awe," she said. "He told me, 'I hope you're not offended, but this rehearsal was more interesting than any performance I've seen you in.' It broke down the barrier for him, the intimidation factor. He was right next to it. He heard us talking about it. He saw us problem-solving. All of a sudden he felt he had a license to talk about the dance."

That license takes some people beyond just feeling confident about watching dancers do their thing. Mr. Rioult recalled a question-and-answer session at a school where his company was conducting a program. A student asked one of the dancers how he had first become interested in dance.

"He replied that a group had come to his high school," Mr. Rioult said.

Score one for outreach.