

# A school shell-shocked by 9/11 uses art to heal

BY KARA ALAINO

Manhattan's Public School 20 is encouraging students to express their feelings through art after children there saw images they'll never forget on Sept. 11. Students watched the Twin Towers burn from their classroom windows. Much worse than that, 14 students lost parents or close relatives in the terrorist attacks.

The World Trade Center was in a "direct line of sight" from classroom windows and on that awful Tuesday morning students "couldn't help but see it" collapse, according to school principal Dr. Leonard Golubchick, known to all as "Dr. G." Although they were initially unsure whether the school would be evacuated, administrators went to each classroom to reassure students of their safety. School officials stayed until 7 p.m. because some parents had difficulty picking up their children.

P.S. 20, like all schools below 14th St., was closed for three days following the attacks. During that time, district officials met to discuss response strategies to the emergency.

When the school reopened, it was found that 14 students had lost relatives while other families were left homeless and/or jobless. "We tried to bring people together as a family and as a community," explained Golubchick.

Golubchick encouraged teachers to help the students express their feelings through art. In his doctoral research, Golubchick had studied with Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, a psychologist and celebrated author in Israel. Bettelheim had worked with the children of a kibbutz who slept in bomb shelters for fear of nightly attacks

from Syrian missiles. He found the arts to be an effective medium through which children could convey their emotions. The students' "drawings and writings initially reflected a detailed account of what happened," said Golubchick.

Sam Zilberzweig, a retired assistant principal from Junior High School 22, which was closed last year, does special crafts with the children of P.S. 20. In sixth-grade classes, reading-intervention specialist Lisa Radford had students write journal entries in which they split their pages in half and wrote what had happened on Sept. 11 and afterwards on one side and how they felt about it on the other side. The students' work was displayed around the school, although some of it has now been taken down so that the students can begin to focus on other things, according to Zilberzweig.

Zilberzweig said that art is especially helpful at P.S. 20 because many students do not speak English as their primary language. Over 10 percent of the student body is Muslim and 58 percent come from Latin American countries.

Many special projects were also undertaken in conjunction with the Henry St. Settlement, a social-service and arts agency that has worked with the school for over eight years. The settlement's mission is to "provide arts to the people who might not be affluent," according to Henry St. Deputy Director Susan Fleminger.

In addition to sending artists to work directly with students, the settlement house implemented a program to train teachers through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Editor photo by Lorenza Caviglio

**P.S. 20 Principal Leonard "Dr. G." Golubchick stands in front of a peace mural Minnesota residents sent the school after Sept. 11.**

The grant's theme is "A Walk Through the Lower East Side," and "through various art forms, the children learn skills but also become expressive about their ideas and emotions," said Fleminger, who describes art as "a way of working through these feelings" that children have had after the attacks.

Henry St. Settlement also works with P.S. 20's after-school program, which was extended through a grant given to the school by The After School Corporation (TASC) through donations from The New York Times.

The Henry St. Settlement's projects include architecture, ceramics, storytelling, theater and dance. Fleminger attributes the success of the P.S. 20 program to Golubchick. "He's made it possible for the children there to really experience a full range of the arts," she said.

The students brought their work to local police and fire stations to give to the officers. The school, which was listed on a Board of Education Web site as being affected by the crisis, received a lot

of support from the community, as well. The Red Cross sent a social worker to the school and representatives from the federal government's Project Liberty worked with the students.

"People came from all over the United States, bringing presents for the children, blankets for the children," said Radford. Every child in the school received a teddy bear from Idaho's State Police and the American Automobile Association. Residents of New York Mills, Minnesota, sent a peace mural of hands that now hangs in the school's auditorium.

The school has also been bombarded with reporters from CNN, CBS, ABC, The New York Post, The Daily News and The New York Times. But Golubchick has been protective of the students and teachers, especially of those students who lost family members in the attacks; as he did for this article, he discourages the media from trying to interview them. "There's really [been] enough," Golubchick said. "Now, we want to leave the families alone in peace."