

# a fine FACTA



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The Space In-Between

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# From the Council

## *A Letter from the Editor*

Kim Friesen Wiens

What do you mean by ‘the space in-between?’” someone recently asked me.

I paused for a moment and then shrugged my shoulders and raised my eyebrows. No words came out. Now, if you know me, you will find this quite humorous, as I like to fill spaces with words. Yet I was at a loss to explain what I was thinking when I came up with the theme for this volume of *A Fine FACTA*. As soon as I define what it is that I’m looking for, the space becomes more clearly pronounced, and I really want to lean into those blurry edges and places where we spend so much of our time yet really don’t talk about.

So I was thrilled to receive the submissions for this issue. I hope you will find, as I did, that the authors have taken us into those in-between spaces.

First, Victoria Reid provides an amazing examination of the role of mind-body connection and embodiment in dance education. As I was reading her article, I felt like I was learning so much about what it means to be a dance educator.

Next, we highlight the spaces of fine arts teachers from across the province. The interviews with these teachers were a joy to collect, and I hope you enjoy reading them. You may discover someone whose teaching experience is similar to yours, or perhaps you will be inspired to try something new.

*A Fine FACTA* is pleased to publish both research-based articles and articles with practical application for the classroom.

Submissions for the next issue are due October 31, 2024.



Finally, I review a book on culturally responsive teaching with multilingual learners. While this book is written for the general classroom, it addresses tools for equity that are relevant for fine arts teachers. These tools can be applied in our fine arts classrooms and are also useful for thinking about how we can personalize our teaching to meet the needs of our students.

Thank you for coming with me on this journey into the in-between spaces.

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*Kim Friesen Wiens lives in Edmonton, where she teaches music and is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta, with a focus on critically examining music and culturally sustaining music pedagogical practices. She can be reached at [editor@fineartsata.ca](mailto:editor@fineartsata.ca).*

# President's Message

Tamera Olsen

I recently had the privilege of failing before my students—attempting something unfamiliar that didn't go according to plan.

Instead of hitting the panic button, I embraced the difficulty of the challenge and accepted that I, too, am a learner. Not everything turns out perfect, and not everything is sacred. By letting go of my ego, I allowed the artistic process to inform and motivate my next steps. As I listened to my students' feedback, we became invested in solving the problem and learned side by side. These moments are not atypical, and what they bring to the classroom is priceless.

This freedom to explore without being concerned about failure opens the floodgates for creativity. I like to discuss the mystery of art with my students—how an artistic medium can have a mind of its own, how sometimes our art becomes something we didn't intend and how happy accidents can occur. Working through the constraints of a process challenges us to become problem solvers and analytical thinkers and to be agile in our approach and plastic in our resilience.

Expression is fundamental to the arts. Channelling our insights, grace, anxiety, demons, brilliance and humility makes our art alive, vital and relatable. If we can impart this fantastic power of creation to our students, their imaginations can thrive. Fear of failure won't enter the equation.

As we strive to make learning visible, we give our students the tools they need to make connections



*Tamera Olsen, Gossamer, 2021, acrylic on canvas*

between their experiences in our classrooms and those in their daily lives. They develop confidence in their self-expression and become more willing to take risks. This empowerment bleeds into other aspects of their academic and personal lives and offers the potential for a lifetime of confident and expressive creativity.

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*Tamera Olsen is a junior high art teacher and the artist-in-residence at Louis Riel School, a science and gifted and talented education (GATE) school in Calgary.*

# Examining the Spaces In-Between

## *An Exploration in Dance Education: Is There Space Between in Mind–Body Dualism?*

Victoria Reid

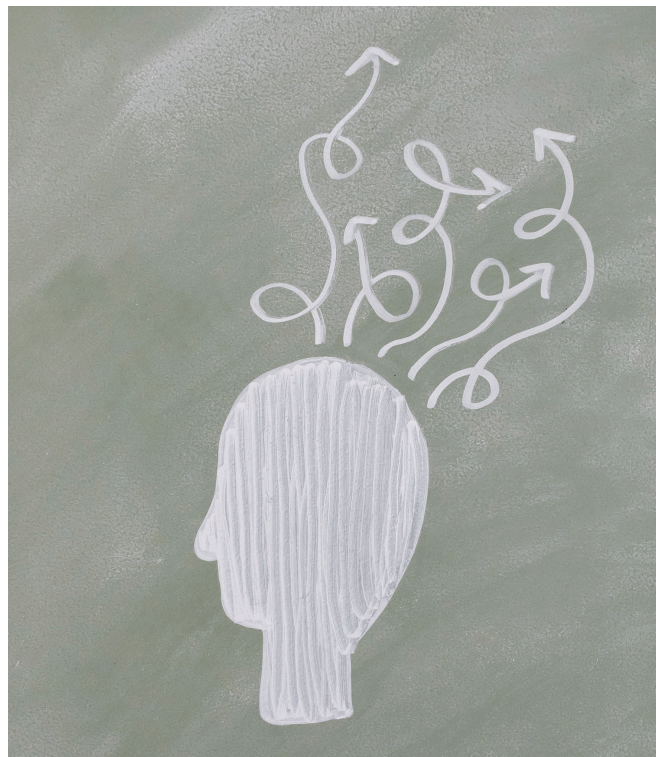
Dance education has traditionally adopted a view of mind–body dualism. However, shifting toward a pedagogical approach that incorporates mind–body connection and embodiment can transform the culture of the dance classroom, helping students develop an appreciation for dance as an art form, empathy for one another, and the confidence and trust needed to take risks and be vulnerable.

Dance teachers can facilitate mind–body connection and embodiment through teaching the history of dance, exploring preconceived ideas about dance and dance hierarchies, and engaging in somatic practice and improvisation exercises.

### **What Is Mind–Body Dualism?**

Mind–body dualism is the philosophical view that the mind and the body are two separate and distinct entities that exist independently of each other.

René Descartes was a proponent of dualism, arguing that the mental and the physical interact and



*Illustration courtesy of Tara Winstead, Pexels, [www.pexels.com/photo/adhd-drawing-on-chalkboard-8378736/](https://www.pexels.com/photo/adhd-drawing-on-chalkboard-8378736/)*

coincide casually without causation. He argued that the mind is nonmaterial, whereas the body is material, a mere object to be moved, and the mind can do without it (Descartes 1996, 18). In Cartesian dualism, the mind is viewed as superior, and the body is viewed as a mechanistic, passive instrument played by something other than itself (Fraleigh 1987).

The concept of mind-body dualism, although challenged in many fields, has a strong hold on how we view the mental and the physical in Western culture. As Johnson (2007, 4) states, “Our lived experience itself reinforces an apparently inescapable dualistic view of mind versus body,” as the very nature of our mental and physical capabilities gives rise to a dualistic self.

## Mind-Body Dualism in Dance

In education, mind-focused courses are often valued more than body-focused courses, as education is “more concerned [with] promot[ing] the habits of critical thought” (Carr 2003, 223).

In dance, dualism is also at play, but unlike Cartesian dualism, “in dance the idea of ‘body’ is often afforded priority” (Leach 2018, 113). As Leach writes,

Observing dance students over many years it is clear that their default conception of dance practice is dualistic: they routinely speak of their “body” in a way that implies a separate “self,” and in this way a “self” that is somehow separate from a “body.” This in turn implicitly carries the suggestion of mind-body dualism. (p 115)

When a dancer becomes aware of her body as a vessel to be moulded, moved and controlled, and “sees herself (through her body)” (Fraleigh 1987, 12), a form of dualism emerges. A body is all we see when we watch dancers dance (Leach 2018), and how dancers look and move is constantly reflected back to them in the mirror.

Moreover, dancers watch, assess and analyze themselves in comparison not only with one another but also with their teacher, and they have “the disturbing experience of finding themselves unable to do what their teachers demonstrate in dance class” (Leach 2018, 114).

In teaching and learning dance, the use of language that addresses the body in motion “reinforces a view that

the mind tells the body what to do; then the body responds to the command” (Fraleigh 1987, 11). Syllabi and exercises further reinforce this view that dance is physical.

Because of the separation of mind and body in dance practice, for students, “despite advice to think of themselves as a whole being, the split, once made, becomes tacitly ingrained and causes fundamental problems in their doing and learning-to-do” (Leach 2018, 114).

## The Embodiment of Dance

As a new teacher, I approached teaching dance in a dualistic way, by focusing on the body only, as this was how I had been trained at private competitive dance studios.

In my first teaching position, I was tasked with teaching a new dance program at a public high school. I approached this program the only way I knew how—by centring the teacher and focusing on technique.

The program had no audition process and was inclusive to students of all backgrounds. My class included students with a range of experience—those who had never danced before, those who had some movement experience and those who were highly trained competitive studio dancers.

This mixed bag of students and abilities created a unique opportunity for me as a dance teacher. After only one year of teaching, I realized that beginning with a teacher-led ballet unit was not effective. Ballet highlighted the discrepancies between students’ bodies, as each student looked different performing the highly technical movements. The experienced dancers seemed to demonstrate technical perfection, whereas the technical flaws of the novice dancers were evident. This created a toxic and competitive environment.

Fraleigh (1987, 23) suggests that dancers should not be focused on their own body but, instead, should be attuned toward an embodiment, striving to “represent the aesthetic . . . nuances of our human embodiment.” This was what I had been missing—the embodiment of dance. No dance pedagogy should remain static (McCarthy-Brown and Schupp 2023), and I needed to make a shift in my teaching. I could not continue to teach dance with a dualistic mindset.



Through this shift, I needed to bring about a culture in which students felt safe to take risks and to explore dance. My dance classroom needed to become one that incorporated mind–body connection and embodiment—a space where students could develop as whole, thriving dancers. As Fraleigh (1987, 11) writes, “When the dancer succeeds, neither body nor mind is held at a distance; they are the same in action.”

Through my teaching experience, I have learned that embodiment is crucial in creating an environment of appreciation, empathy and trust among students. Embodiment is the opposite of dualism. As Johnson (2007, 11) explains, a nondualistic approach “recogniz[es] the bodily basis of human meaning,” and “what we call a ‘person’ is a certain kind of bodily organism that has a brain operating within its body, a body that is continually interacting with aspects of its environments.” Basically, embodiment is the brain working within the body and interacting with the world through experiences—a mind–body connection.

Through embodiment, appreciation, empathy and trust transpire to develop a “person toward wholeness” (Fraleigh 1987, 24), which means dancing in the present moment with the “unity of self and body in action” (p 13).

## Facilitating Embodiment in the Dance Classroom

Leach (2018, 122) notes that where body and mind coexist, dancers “look for the idea informing the movement, rather than the movement itself.”

After my somewhat failed first year of teaching dance, I came to realize that my students didn’t have the ideas required to inform their movement. They lacked knowledge and understanding of dance as an art form.

As Kattner (2016, 5) notes, it is not uncommon “to encounter advanced and even professional dancers who are experts in technical execution, but do not know how their technique came to be, or the history behind the choreography they are learning.”

Further, McCarthy-Brown and Schupp (2023, 8) claim that “many students, particularly those from dance competition culture, have been brought up to believe that ‘technique’ means ballet and that ballet-informed technique is central.”

In my newly formed pedagogy of teaching, I facilitate embodiment with my students through first educating the mind and then engaging in a practical exercise of the body, through a “thinking in activity” (Leach 2018, 113).

I first focus on the mind, to help students learn, expand and equalize their knowledge, and broaden their understanding of dance. Through learning theory, students deepen their appreciation of dance and come to learn that technical proficiency is not the pinnacle. Opening the mind fuels the work of embodiment.

Then, we move into a practical exercise for the body that strengthens the mind–body connection, through ideas informing movement.

I facilitate embodiment through three explorations:

- Teaching the history of dance
- Exploring preconceived ideas about dance and dance hierarchies
- Engaging in somatic practice and improvisation exercises

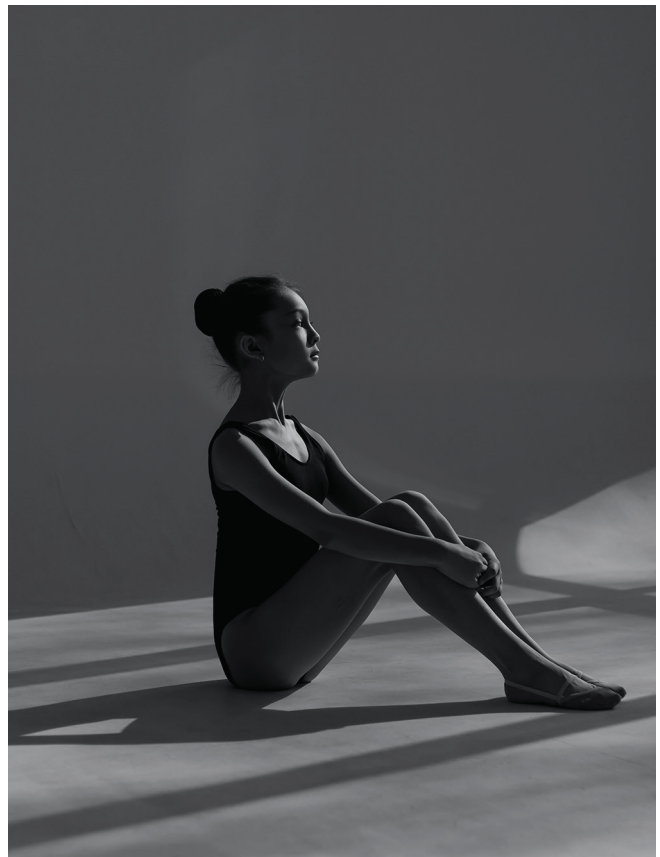


Photo courtesy of Rada Aslanova, Pexels, [www.pexels.com/photo/young-ballerina-sitting-on-ground-with-straightened-back-hugging-her-knees-11565630/](https://www.pexels.com/photo/young-ballerina-sitting-on-ground-with-straightened-back-hugging-her-knees-11565630/)

## Teaching the History of Dance

For effective embodiment, dancers must understand the idea before engaging the body. Learning the history of dance engages the mind to inform the body.

In my experience, studio-trained dancers have little or no knowledge or understanding of dance history or prominent dance figures. As Huxley (2012, 286) discovered among dance students in higher education, “dance history’ is an alien field of knowledge.”

### Theory

Huxley (2012) asserts that “the purpose must be first and foremost to give students an appreciation of dance, as historically situated” (p 280) and that learning dance history gives students “confidence and independence” (p 291).

Therefore, I begin by engaging students’ minds with dance history. My goal is to create dancers who understand and appreciate dance as an art form, by understanding who and what came before them.

### Practical Exercise

To strengthen the theory and facilitate embodiment, we then move into a practical exercise of the body. As Kattner (2016, 4) suggests, “Movement in conjunction with academic material can help [students] understand and retain what they are taught and will also enable them to see how dance history is important to them as dancers.” Moreover, it strengthens the concepts learned, as “student learning is defined not just by the curriculum, but by the ways the students engage with their learning situation” (Huxley 2012, 282).

An example of how I relate theory to practice is a classical ballet dissection. Using balletic language, I present a description of prominent ballet choreography, and the students then work together to dissect, understand and perform the choreography. This work allows them to connect to their new knowledge of the history of ballet and “to encounter dance history in a way that is useful to them as dancers” (Kattner 2016, 3).

### Implications

Through connecting to dance history and working together to dissect and rehearse choreography on their feet and in their bodies, students begin to see how learning about dance fuels their understanding of doing

dance with their bodies—forming a mind-body connection.

In the practical exercise, students’ different strengths emerge, and they begin to celebrate their differences, understanding that ballet is not solely about the body and technique and that choreography and movement are not disseminated only by the teacher. Students build an appreciation for both the dancers who came before them and the dancers who are beside them.

It is evident that embodiment has occurred when students are engaged in the practical exercise and have also developed a greater appreciation of dance as an art form.

## Exploring Preconceived Ideas About Dance and Dance Hierarchies

Another way I facilitate embodiment in my dance classroom is through exploring preconceived ideas about dance and dance hierarchies.

Although learning about the history of dance is formative for students, the teacher’s choices about which history or theory to teach can perpetuate preconceived ideas or engrained hierarchies related to dance. This is especially true when discussing ballet, as ballet is often viewed as the most valued dance form—“the foundation of dance” (McCarthy-Brown and Schupp 2023, 2).

Dance hierarchies are constructed through experiences with dance and can become engrained in the minds of dancers, choreographers and teachers. Each student comes into class with their own set of preconceived ideas or hierarchies, some of which have been passed down to them from their dance studio, their dance teachers or their background; some of which they have developed through their experiences; and some of which they have formed on their own.

### Theory

To dismantle engrained dance hierarchies, we “address inequity directly” by studying the contributions of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) dancers, as recommended by McCarthy-Brown and Schupp (2023, 18). As the authors state, “It is not a secret; students and faculty understand how dance hierarchies work. Create community space to come

together and think through the best way to move forward” (p 18).

Teachers can start by asking tough questions and providing a variety of examples from dance history and from around the world. Through class discussion, students begin to think about their own thinking and tackle their assumptions about dance head-on. As McCarthy-Brown and Schupp (2023, 2) assert, “Interventions that require one to reflect on their learned assumptions in relation to their values and practices must be built into frameworks for imagining and building anti-racist educational spaces.”

I show students the documentary *A Ballerina’s Tale* (George 2016), which tells the story of Misty Copeland—the first African American principal dancer of a major ballet company.<sup>1</sup> Through watching this film and then engaging in class discussion, students start to question the ballet system and how we got to where we are in dance today. As a class, we reflect on our learned assumptions about ballet, race and dance in general.

The documentary also spurs conversation on other topics, such as how the standard of the Balanchine body has influenced the type of dancers we see on stage today. (The Balanchine body is the ideal that choreographer George Balanchine held for his dancers.)

### Practical Exercise

I then move into an exercise that compels students to question and analyze dance and explore their assumptions in a practical way, using their body in dance.

I have students create their own movement pieces focused on creating “new ballet.” As choreographer William Forsythe states in the documentary *Dance Rebels: A Story of Modern Dance* (O’Brien 2015), “What’s taught is just one set of possibilities.” I allow my students to play with ballet technique and create something contemporary, using the basics of ballet in a whole new way.

I use this exercise as an opportunity to discuss the work of pioneers of modern dance and to show both their use of and their rejection of ballet. When we attempt to unpack these concepts as a class, students develop a much wider vision of what dance can be.

### Implications

Students are often inhibited as dancers by their engrained hierarchies. They are stunted creatively by not wanting to step outside their preconceived box of what dance is, and they are unwilling to risk looking unique

or different from their peers. When students are inhibited, they find embodiment challenging.

As Huxley (2012, 294) suggests, studying dance history and discussing challenging topics helps students develop “a historical sense” and “an empathy with the past.” Learning about dancers who paved the way and altered dance as we know it inspires them to take risks and trust in the embodiment process. They also begin to understand that each dancer brings their own background and experience to the studio or dance classroom.

Further, the practical exercise allows students to bring their own styles and strengths to dance and to engage in strong, positive teamwork. This helps them develop empathy, appreciate their differences and see dance in a new way. In this space of community, inclusion, empathy and support, students are willing to work with anyone in class, because they value each other’s differences.

Through widening their mindset about dance as an art form, students begin to explore systems and concepts with the body in practice in a new way. When they are allowed the freedom to dance how they want, “their understanding about the nature of freedom in dance has deepened, due in part to a greater knowledge of dance history” (Huxley 2012, 293).

## Engaging in Somatic Practice and Improvisation Exercises

The third exploration focuses on bodily knowledge—“the ways we understand our selves and our environments through the body” (Green 2002, 114). This involves somatic practice and improvisation exercises.

Marques (2007, 151) states, “Traditional dance teaching tends to ignore relations between dancers and their own bodies.” This was my dance experience. I had never been exposed to somatics or to creative practices such as improvisation, and I had never been encouraged to think about my own body as more than a shell of technique.

### Theory

With my students, I ease into teaching somatics and improvisation with discussion and theory on the breathing apparatus, the body, energy and anatomy.

### Practical Exercise

I then close the drapes and dim the lights, and students explore their bodies from the inside—how it *feels* to dance, not how it looks.

My improvisation exercises always begin with closed eyes and a focus on the breath. Closing their eyes allows students to look inward, to assess their own bodies and tensions. The mind is checking in with the body, which facilitates mind-body connection (Green 2002).

Once the mind is calm and ready, students work through a variety of improvisation exercises. The goal is to reduce comparison, questioning and unnecessary thoughts and to focus only on the given stimulus for each exercise. This helps the mind focus on one thing and allow the idea to inform the movement.

### Implications

These exercises help reduce students' habitual patterns and their inclination to check themselves in the mirror, which creates a more free and relaxed movement environment (Green 2002).

Through engaging in somatic practice and improvisation exercises, students start to appreciate their own body, listening to and trusting the "inner messages of the body" (Green 2002, 115).

Learning about new dance practices (such as somatics) helps students' minds become engaged and open, and the exercises help them see the value of this work for their dance practice. Through being exposed to creative movement practices, such as breathing techniques and improvisation, students begin to see dance with a wider mindset and learn how to think and feel differently when dancing.

These exercises also require students to demonstrate vulnerability and trust. Through somatic movement, they build their confidence by learning to appreciate and trust their body. They also learn to trust one another and their teacher, reducing comparison and competition, which has proven to be immensely positive in my classroom.

### Conclusion

Incorporating mind-body connection and embodiment in my pedagogy has completely changed the

culture of my classroom. My students have developed an appreciation for dance as an art form, appreciation and empathy for one another, and the confidence and trust needed to take risks and be vulnerable.

Moreover, dancers who are more informed can make more creative choices about their choreography, process, dancing and performance.

As Fraleigh (1987, 11) asserts, "The whole self is shaped in the experience of dance." The way we educate dancers today will shape who those dancers will become, beyond dance.

### Note

1. For more information about *A Ballerina's Tale*, see [www.pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/ballerinas-tale/](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/ballerinas-tale/) (accessed April 30, 2024).

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# Celebrating Fine Arts Teachers and Spaces Across Alberta



*Photo courtesy of Mike Fox, Unsplash, <https://unsplash.com/photos/assorted-color-bag-lot-hanging-on-brown-wooden-wall-rack-P5PhmW-OoJg>*

Fine arts teachers fill so many spaces with the arts, and we want to celebrate you! In this section, we share a series of interviews with fine arts teachers across Alberta. We hope you enjoy this glimpse into their lives and classrooms.

# Thea Costello, a Music Teacher in Lethbridge

Kim Friesen Wiens



Thea Costello

*The following interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

In November, I chatted over Zoom with Thea Costello about what it's like to be a music teacher in Lethbridge.

So many times, I was nodding my head and scribbling notes so that I could keep track of the

amazing ideas she was sharing.

I hope you also find yourself represented in this interview and inspired to try something you may not have thought of doing before.

**Tell me a little about your journey to become a music teacher.**

I knew in Grade 9 that I wanted to go to the University of Lethbridge and get my bachelor of music and education.

I planned to move back to Grande Prairie but stayed in Lethbridge. I planned to be a band and choir teacher. However, there were no jobs in that area.

I got an elementary job and realized I love teaching younger students. And now I don't know if I'll ever teach high school. Elementary is just so much fun!

I've been at my current school for seven years. It's a new school. The school started at capacity, and I had a

music room for two years, but after that I had to start teaching off a cart because there is no space for a music room. Every year we get more portables and more kids, and I continue to teach off a cart.

My school is Spanish bilingual, but I teach K-5 music to the English side. My teaching partner teaches music in Spanish to the Spanish bilingual students.

**In thinking about the last year or two, can you describe a moment or lesson that stands out for you? What is it about that particular moment that is so significant?**

One of my favourite lessons is one I learned from Martina Vasil (2020), an associate professor of music education at the University of Kentucky. I took a course from her as part of my master's program.



## Celebrating Fine Arts Teachers and Spaces Across Alberta

It's a hip-hop and music lesson and uses Keith Haring art. We read the book *When the Beat Was Born*, by Laban Carrick Hill (2013), and talk about rap, DJing, dancing and art.

It's so fun, and the kids love it. For some kids, where music isn't their thing, this lesson really speaks to them. It kind of matches everyone.

I love all the backtracks that are available. Going to YouTube to find a backtrack for anything is amazing.

**Are there any resources (materials, online resources, tools, books, manipulatives) that you find particularly useful?**

I follow a lot of people on Instagram, particularly looking at ideas for combined grades. I have really been thinking about what it is that I teach, and if I'm not really interested in it, I don't think my students would be, so I'm revamping a lot of my program and using Instagram as inspiration. There are so many people that share so many ideas and videos.

I also love children's books. If I had a million dollars, I would buy all the children's books out there!

**The theme for this volume of our journal is "The Space In-Between." When you think about being a fine arts teacher, how do you navigate those spaces in between, or what does "the space in-between" mean to you?**

We are music teachers, but we do so much in the fine arts realm, in between movement, drama, acting and art (as inspiration). I've always loved to do cross-curricular activities. This is just something I've always done.

With curriculum changing, it will take some time to get familiar with the different topics in other subject areas. Weaving music with what students are doing in other classes makes it so that it's not such a disjunct leap between the things they are doing. It helps to create a smoother transition into music. Like, you've already talked about this, so now let's make a deeper connection. It's not just about us giving a prep but

about building in that richness and making learning more meaningful for our students.

**Tell me about something you do outside of work.**

I'm in a women's choir. It's a small choir with about 30 members. We sing every Monday and put on two concerts a year.

**Describe a concert, art installation, production or other event that you have recently attended or been involved in.**

This really goes back to the kids, because it's not actually about me.

The Lethbridge Symphony has a Kids Choir event that happens at the end of November. This is a highlight for me and for the kids, because they get to play with real live musicians in this beautiful big church.

We rehearse during the day and perform at 7 PM. Four choirs perform each night, and there are four concerts (so 16 choirs get to participate). This is such a fun community event. The symphony creates a list of songs, from which I get to choose two, and then we perform with the symphony. At the end of the concert, all the choirs get together and sing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." It is just awesome!

## References

- Hill, L. C. 2013. *When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop*. Illustrated by T Taylor III. New York: Roaring Brook Press.
- Vasil, M. 2020. "Hip-Hop and Haring: Pop Culture and Interdisciplinary Learning for the General Music Classroom." *General Music Today* 34, no 1 (October): 6-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1048371320901541>.

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*Kim Friesen Wiens is the editor of A Fine FACTA. She lives in Edmonton, where she teaches music and is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta, with a focus on critically examining music and culturally sustaining music pedagogical practices.*



# *Maggie Myles, a Drama and Dance Teacher in Calgary*

Darrin Wilson

*The following interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.*

In October, shortly before she was elected social media manager for the Fine Arts Council, I sat down with Maggie Myles to discuss the ins and outs of running a successful drama program and the challenges of teaching dance in middle school.

Despite only having two years of teaching under her belt, Maggie has established herself as an exceptional teacher at MidSun School, in Calgary, with her sharp intellect and boisterous demeanour front and centre in every classroom she enters and every conversation she leads.

We sit at a circular table with dried paint splatter on its melamine surface. It's the end of the school day, but Maggie is bright-eyed and smiling, her red curls hanging loosely around her face.

She is ready.

**Thank you so much for agreeing to sit down for this, Maggie. Let's jump right into this. What do you look to in order to inspire the work that you create? What headspace do you need to get into?**

I really try to make drama fun! I focus on gamifying my teaching and doing a lot of play-based learning. We have the most fun in my classroom when the kids are

creating quickly and forgetting that they are nervous—getting lost in the moment and overcoming the fear that sometimes comes with putting on a dramatic performance.

When I think about any task, I, of course, refer to the program of studies and look at what I'm required to teach. But I also think back to when I was in drama, when I was in theatre, and the things that really jumped out and bit me. These are the things I held on to for all these years. But I also think about the grade level and what is actually possible to do.

Right now my Grade 7s—for their very first project—are working on tableaux. Really, all they are doing is creating a frozen pose that tells a story, but I am trying to think about what is going to reach out and grab their attention. For these Grade 7 students, it really seems to be all the costumes, the wigs, the boxes, the props, the background sets and the lighting—all the technical theatre elements of performing on stage. So it's not just a simple, "Let's create three frozen poses that tell the beginning, middle and end of a story." There are lots of outcomes from the program of studies that I can tie into the technical theatre elements of this assignment, as well.

Finding what sparks joy in the drama classroom for my students is all the encouragement they need to play make-believe.



the day. I imagine it is a different feeling than teaching mathematics, English or fine arts.

[Laughing] I find teaching drama very overstimulating at times. It is a different kind of mental exhaustion. I get overstimulated because they get so elevated and excited, as well as emotionally and socially dysregulated, because there is that excitement there. But you need to be in that heightened place as a performer. Performers are naturally eccen-

**It is fun, isn't it? Your whole gig being a drama teacher is playing make-believe with the students, having them buy into these worlds that have never existed before and play in that world. How do you overcome the stigma related to gamifying, play and make-believe?**

It is a really fine line. I've had to talk to my students about balancing those games that they really want to play and the ones that target the outcome I'm hoping for. But I also try to give them opportunities for game of choice (GOC) time.

I have compiled a list of probably 60 drama games from the two full years I have been teaching. And these games specifically focus on the principles we are covering in that project. On the rubric for the tableaux task, the students have to show me different levels in space—high, medium and low. So when we're playing a full-class embodied Rock, Paper, Scissors game, where they become giant elves and wizards, they are addressing these various modalities in the space they are in. When we are playing Wax Museum, they are demonstrating stillness. In Graveyard, they need to lie down and not laugh, learning to not break character when they are performing. I tell the students that these games were chosen intentionally for the learning I hope they will take away from any one of these specific tasks.

**There is a significant physicality to teaching drama, akin to conducting a band or music class with students. Describe how tired feels for you at the end of**

tragic, naturally loud and over-the-top. I can't tell you how many Grade 7 boys I have right now who are dressing in full dresses and wigs because that is what they want to be wearing!

And while I have been talking a lot about my Grade 7s, who are extremely keen, a different kind of exhaustion happens with my Grade 9s. A number of them exhibit a sense of apathy and an unwillingness to try something new. And that is really fascinating.

When I started at MidSun School two years ago, I was teaching drama for the last three months of the 2021/22 school year, and I knew these kids from back then. So this is my first group of students that has progressed all the way through to Grade 9. And to see them go from those keen little Grade 7s to the kind of cautiously interested group in Grade 8 before settling



## Celebrating Fine Arts Teachers and Spaces Across Alberta

into their current Grade 9 state—where they are a little bit worried about what everyone thinks and it is a bigger class of 32 students—it is surreal. They are not willing to try or to have fun at that age. And I think it's exhausting to try to have people see it my way. I try to show them that this can be fun if you just let go. But I can't do that for them. And I know theatre is not for everybody, which is why I use a variety of games with students.

**Tell me a bit about teaching dance. What might the greatest barrier be for seeing dance programs thrive in schools? How might these issues be overcome?**

Teaching dance in a junior high setting was very interesting. Like any subject, there were students who were very passionate about dance and some students who were very vocal about their disdain for being placed in my course.

One of the biggest obstacles for dance being taught in schools is that it is such a dedicated craft. Students who dance competitively outside of school and have been taking weekly classes since the age of three in multiple styles are going to be light-years ahead of their peers. Meanwhile, there are absolute beginners and folks in a dance class who naturally lack rhythm and find dance very frustrating to learn. The vast multitude of comfort levels within my dance classes made it very challenging to scaffold my lessons for the needs of every student. I believe these obstacles can be overcome, but they have to be met by experienced and open-minded dance teachers who are able to accommodate for everyone in their class.

Another obstacle I experienced in teaching dance in junior high was the male students in my classroom stating that they felt dance wasn't for them. I heard students talking about the perception they'd be seen as gay for taking this class. I tried my best to upend this discourse in conversation, but this socially imbedded perception was a real obstacle that stood in the way of a lot of the boys in my class. I tried to overcome this by introducing many dance styles, including hip hop and jazz, that I thought the boys would enjoy. We also played fun *Just Dance* videos that the students loved.

When I think back on teaching Grade 8 and Grade 9 dance, the content was met with a lot of apathy from the less experienced and less keen dancers in the room. One of the assignments where this was overturned slightly was at the end of the semester, where the students got to create their own choreography. I highlighted student choice and voice in choosing their own (school-appropriate) music for their dances. I believe this agency really helped the less willing students to buy in.

**How do you refill at the end of the day? What gets you jazzed about coming in after exhausting yourself at the end of the day?**

In my free time, I love taking in local live theatre with my fiancé. We both are musical theatre performers, and that is how we met.

This school year, I've also been performing and choreographing for theatre more often. Although this is draining and hard to balance with teaching, I find that filling my cup back up with theatre allows me to go back into my drama classroom and share my passion for performing arts with my students from a more authentic place.



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*Darrin Wilson has worked in the Calgary Board of Education since 2008, teaching English language arts, visual arts, career and technology foundations (CTF) courses, and drama to middle school students. He continues to work as an illustrator, painting mostly in acrylics from his studio. His work is part of the Avmor permanent collection in Montreal. He also writes regularly for McGill University and has published a number of works.*

# *Danielle Berg, a Preservice Teacher and MOD Dancer in Edmonton*

Victoria Reid



Danielle Berg

*The following interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

**D**anielle Berg was born in Sherwood Park and grew up dancing at the local dance studio, training in all styles of dance (including ballet, jazz and contemporary). At her Catholic high school, she was enrolled

in the dance program from Grade 9 dance through Dance 35. She has now been a competitive dancer for 14 years. She is a preservice teacher in her fourth year in elementary education at the University of Alberta and has danced with the U of A's MOD Contemporary Dance Movement for the past three seasons.

## **What led you to becoming a teacher?**

Along my dance journey, I've had many opportunities to dance and compete all around the world, as well as teach and assist in a variety of classes at my studio. That is what led me to discover my love for leadership.

I realized that over my many years of competitive dance and my high school dance courses, I acquired a lot of knowledge and skill that I wanted to share, and I had never had the creative opportunity to do so. Since I

was in competitive dance, I was only focused on the technique side of things and being taught by teachers.

Around junior high, I started to be a dance teacher assistant and began to branch out into teaching and leading. Eventually, in high school, I was able to explore my own creative brain, and I really enjoyed teaching and leading. That is when it shifted for me, in my later years. That is what led me to my teaching journey today.

## **What is MOD? And how did you get involved?**

MOD is a contemporary dance movement that is a student-led, student-run university club program, monitored by the University of Alberta. As students, we are the ones who keep it going. It's led by an elected executive team, with roles of president, dance captain, finance manager and so on, and they work very hard to keep our team running every year.

MOD is an audition team, so auditions are always held in the fall. We've had some great turnout in the past few years. Our current team sits at around 30 students, which is bigger than it's ever been before. Everyone on the team is a dancer, and many have a past as competitive dancers. There's a lot of good talent in the group, and it's a great way to keep training and performing. We perform shows every year, and we do a lot of video and photoshoot opportunities. We do everything except for competing. It keeps us in the



dance world, but in a whole different way, as we get to self-choreograph and teach ourselves.

When I was applying to university, one thing I was looking for was a dance team I could join. I found out about MOD through social media, and I was—fingers crossed—hoping to get into MOD, and I did! There are so many different aspects to MOD, and I'm happy to get this experience to talk about it, because not a lot of people know about it.

**The theme of this volume of our journal is “The Space In-Between.” How do you think this theme connects to your work as a dancer or teacher?**

I think *the space in-between* signifies the space between my past and my future, where many people feel like they don't know what's next.

I stopped competitive dancing on March 13, 2020, due to COVID-19. It was my high school graduating year, and I did think that it would be a very significant year, but I ended up losing everything I'd worked for. I didn't know what I was going to do next for dance or to fill the space in between. I expected that one day I would audition for a cruise ship or something in the professional world.

However, I had already applied for education at the U of A, so I thought I would give up dance and focus on school. I then discovered MOD, and it felt like the perfect environment to keep me dancing while I was a

student. With that, I was able to explore dance in a whole new light—which has helped me grow as a teacher and choreographer.

No matter what, for me, dance has been a part of my life since I was little, and without it for a bit there, I was very lost. I just don't see my life ever not having dance in it. The space in between me, my past and my future career, I believe, will always involve dance, thanks to MOD and other opportunities and teaching in and outside the competitive world.

**Are there any resources you find particularly useful as a dancer yourself? Or for your work with dancers?**

I'm not usually a person who will go back to a textbook again and again, but two resources I acquired through university are textbooks—*Creative Dance for All Ages* and *Brain-Compatible Dance Education*, both by Anne Green Gilbert. These books take a more conceptual approach to dance education. They have big concepts and deeper meanings for why education with movement is so important for children. *Brain-Compatible Dance Education* has a ton of exercises, anatomy, and even how to break down and teach more simple steps, like grapevine across the floor and many more activities.

Social media and apps have played a big role in inspiration and creativity for me, as well. Through social media and apps, I can discover new ways I can teach

things. There are apps for teaching acrobatic arts and ballet and all these different kinds of things that can spark ideas.

**What is next for you?**

Career-wise, I am hoping that I'll get a job as an elementary teacher in a local school. I just finished going abroad this summer, to France, taking French courses working toward strengthening my bilingualism, and I'm hoping to potentially work in a French elementary school!

Passion-wise, I would love to keep dance in my life in whichever form I can and maybe be able to bring my passion for dance to elementary school events, like fine arts projects, Christmas concerts or school plays.

Overall, I hope to keep dancing and teaching at my studio and maybe see where that takes me in the teaching world!

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- Gilbert, A G. 2015. *Creative Dance for All Ages: A Conceptual Approach*. 2nd ed. Champaign, Ill: Human Kinetics.
- . 2018. *Brain-Compatible Dance Education*. Champaign, Ill: Human Kinetics.

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*Victoria Reid is the Fine Arts Council's dance representative. She teaches dance, drama and musical theatre at Archbishop Jordan Catholic High School (ABJ), in Sherwood Park. She is the founder and director of the ABJ Dance Collective, a program in which over 80 students learn the foundations of dance as they progress through the locally developed Dance 15–25–35 course sequence. She is also the movement director and choreographer for all ABJ mainstage musical performances.*

# Lindsay Atkinson, a Drama Teacher in Peace River

Kim Friesen Wiens

*The following interview has been lightly edited for clarity.*

I was thrilled when Lindsay responded to my e-mail request to meet over Zoom to discuss what it's like to be a drama teacher in Peace River. It is so fascinating to connect with other fine arts teachers from across the province and to hear what is happening in the fine arts in schools.

**Tell us a little about your journey to become a drama teacher.**

I started doing drama in my youth. After I graduated from high school, I worked for a few years, but I kept working with kids and realized that I wanted to teach. I took a long route to complete my degree—nine years.

I thought I might want to go to British Columbia, but in the end I decided to stay here. I finished my degree and worked as an educational assistant until I got a call from Peace River and have been teaching Grades 7–12 here for 23 years, all in the same school!

**In thinking about the last year or two, can you describe a moment or lesson that stands out for you? What is it about that particular moment that is so significant?**

What really stands out for me is a performance the kids did—*The Seussification of Romeo and Juliet*, by Peter Bloedel (2004). We decided to do one-act plays, and the kids dove in. There was really a cooperative environment. The kids would build things, and we ended up with a very good production.

**Are there any resources (materials, online resources, tools, books, manipulatives) you find particularly useful?**

I really like *The Drama Teacher's Companion* (1999). It includes games and short scripts.

I also draw on skits from Kids in the Hall and Monty Python—great bits that kids haven't been exposed to.

YouTube has become such a huge resource, and I especially like it for special effects makeup. The kids really enjoy seeing the videos on the screen.

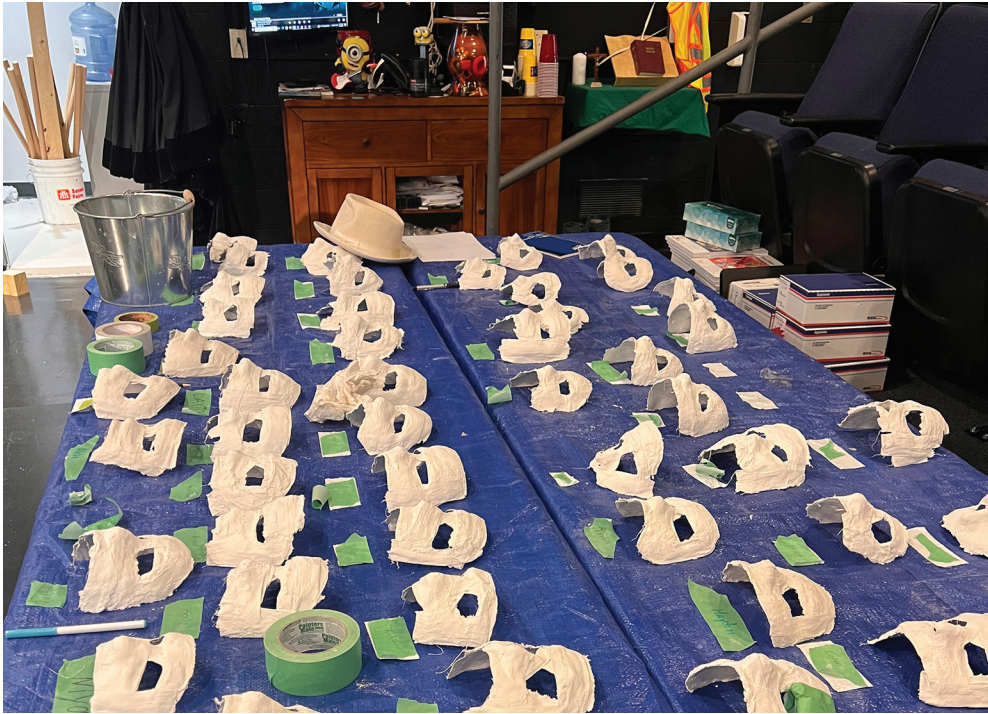
The BroadwayHD website is a fantastic way to see Broadway shows. You can watch so many different productions on this site, for a streaming cost. This is another great way to find scripts I want to introduce students to.

I also go back to old fine arts conferences. Shoutout to the Fine Arts Council conference of 2007/08! There were so many drama sessions and so many games that I still use today!

**The theme for this volume of our journal is “The Space In-Between.” When you think about being a fine arts teacher, how do you navigate those spaces in between, or what does “the space in-between” mean to you?**

The first thing that came to mind is from a drama teacher in college. I use a line from them all the time with my students.

The idea is that when you're doing a play, the only actor on stage is the person who delivers the first line, because everyone else is reacting to that. It's those moments when you see someone say something, and



Masks for a drama production

the others are listening and absorbing what they are saying and reacting. That's what makes it a beautiful performance that just catches you.

When you think of those spaces in between, I think about those moments when the first line has been delivered and everybody is reacting to what's happening on stage. It's those moments that I love. That's what blows my hair back every single time.

**Tell me about something you do outside of work.**

Going to the dog park with the dog. I used to be an avid mountain biker, and I'm looking forward to doing that again. You can get back to places that don't see a lot of travel.

**Describe a concert, art installation, production or other event you have recently attended or been involved in.**

It's been a while, because of the pandemic, but I'm going to go back to the production that my class did of *The Seussification of Romeo and Juliet* last year.

It's the first play I've done where I had someone working in the light booth, somebody doing the sound and somebody backstage, so I could sit in the audience, watch the play and enjoy it.

Even though I had worked with the kids on the jokes, it was fun to see them come out and do the delivery, to see them on top of things, to see them

fumble and recover. And to do so in a way that no one noticed except me. That was a great moment for me.

I've always had jobs to do, so I could never fully watch. So being able to just enjoy what these kids were putting out—that was such a great experience.

**Final thoughts?**

When I think about being a drama teacher, it is really about making that shift from performing to teaching. It's such an interesting shift. The performance becomes less and less what you do, and now you're doing the directing or the instruction. Either you miss performing or you realize that teaching is what you should be doing. I know that becoming a drama teacher is what I'm meant to do.

## References

- Bloedel, P. 2004. *The Seussification of Romeo and Juliet: A Comedy in One Act*. New York: Playscripts.
- The Drama Teacher's Companion*. 1999. CD-ROM. Englewood, Colo: Pioneer Drama Service.

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*Kim Friesen Wiens is the editor of A Fine FACTA. She lives in Edmonton, where she teaches music and is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta, with a focus on critically examining music and culturally sustaining music pedagogical practices.*



# Book Review

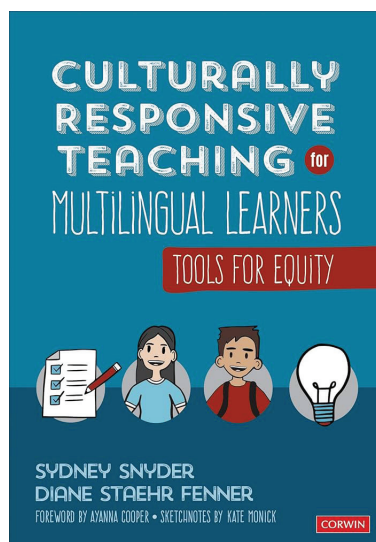
## *Culturally Responsive Teaching for Multilingual Learners: Tools for Equity*

by Sydney Snyder and Diane Staehr Fenner  
Corwin, 2021

Kim Friesen Wiens

I recently attended a session that reminded me about the importance of using the term *multilingual learner*, as opposed to *English as an additional language (EAL)* or *English-language learner (ELL)*. When we use the terms *EAL* or *ELL*, we imply that languages other than English do not need to be named or are not as important as English.

As the speaker shared these ideas, I looked at my bookshelf and immediately pulled out a book I had read during those times spent at home during the pandemic. As I thought about the theme for this



volume of *A Fine FACTA*, “The Space In-Between,” I was struck by the importance of addressing the space between the teacher’s life experiences and the life experiences of students.

The book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching for Multilingual Learners: Tools for Equity*, by Sydney Snyder and Diane Staehr Fenner, was highlighted in an ATA publication, and I was drawn to it and purchased a copy for myself. My copy is well used and full of sticky notes to remind me of ideas I want to continue to consider or maybe unpack more with colleagues.

The authors stress that “all teachers need to teach in their area of expertise in a way that is culturally responsive for all learners” (p 28). They then provide a five-part cycle for culturally responsive teaching:

1. Reflect on personal identities.
2. Examine personal beliefs.
3. Work to build trust with students.
4. Create collaborative communities with staff, students and families.
5. Self-reflect and prepare to start the cycle over again.

## Book Review

This cycle is designed to help teachers examine their practices and approaches in order to be more responsive to the multilingual learners in their class. This can be an individual or group process. Throughout the book are questions to consider and reflect on, making it useful for a group book study.

In reading this book, I was particularly drawn to the balance between theory and practice. I appreciated the background information on culturally responsive teaching and scholars in the field, but I found myself placing sticky notes on the pages with ideas for practical application. For fine arts teachers, books geared toward the general classroom can be challenging. To make the material relevant to the music space, I usually have to make tenuous connections or giant leaps. However, I immediately saw potential in many of the tools in this book.

For example, the checklist on page 172 includes items to consider for engaging in peer learning with multilingual learners. As I read the activity ideas, I was struck by how applicable they were to my classroom context.

Another example is the chart on page 181, which highlights practices for fostering engagement and

participation in conversations. With the recognition that cultures emphasize oral language in a variety of ways, I appreciated these ideas as a simple way to honour the diverse languages and learning styles of the students in our classes. This chart also made me wonder, What would it be like to create a chart for engagement and participation in singing or playing instruments? What would I need to consider for my multilingual learners?

This book is truly geared toward inservice teachers, with links, questions and ideas for further study to personalize the reader's journey through the book. I am thankful for the reminder to pull this book off my shelf (and also glad that I had used so many sticky notes in my first read-through).

*Culturally Responsive Teaching for Multilingual Learners* is available from the ATA library (<https://library.teachers.ab.ca>).

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*Kim Friesen Wiens is the editor of A Fine FACTA. She lives in Edmonton, where she teaches music and is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta, with a focus on critically examining music and culturally sustaining music pedagogical practices.*

# Submitting to *A Fine FACTA*

Enjoy reading *A Fine FACTA*? We appreciate submissions from our Fine Arts Council members.

## About *A Fine FACTA*

*A Fine FACTA* is a recognized scholarly journal published for the Fine Arts Council by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) to help the council achieve its objective of improved education in and through the fine arts.

*A Fine FACTA* invites articles of general interest and articles on theoretical, experimental or methodological topics. Both peer-reviewed (research-based) and non-peer-reviewed (practice-based) articles are published.

For more information, including submission requests, contact the editor, Kim Friesen Wiens, at [editor@fineartsata.ca](mailto:editor@fineartsata.ca).

## How to Submit

*A Fine FACTA* invites authors to submit manuscripts for consideration. Both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed articles will be considered.

Each volume of *A Fine FACTA* contains two issues:

- The first issue focuses on practical application in fine arts education. For this issue, we are looking specifically for lesson plans and rubrics, practical tips, reviews of books or resources, student artwork, and overviews of what you are doing in your classroom.
- The second issue focuses on how you think about the fine arts and fine arts education. We invite scholarly articles, opinion pieces, personal reflections and big picture ideas. (If you want your manuscript to be considered for peer review, please indicate that in your e-mail to the editor.)

Pieces should be 1,000–4,000 words long and should be accompanied by a brief (50 words) author biography.

Submit signed permission forms for student work or photographs of students, as well as permission to use any photos that are not yours.

E-mail submissions to the editor, Kim Friesen Wiens, at [editor@fineartsata.ca](mailto:editor@fineartsata.ca). The editor will confirm by e-mail that your submission has been received. If you do not receive a confirmation e-mail after one week, please follow up with the editor.

Submissions may be edited for correctness, style, clarity and length.

## Peer-Review Process

Peer-reviewed articles are subject to blind review by scholars and educators in the field of fine arts education. Upon completion of the review, they either accept or reject the submission, often including suggestions for revision. Once articles have been revised and resubmitted, members of the Fine Arts Council are consulted and a final decision is made about inclusion in the journal.

## Submission Guidelines

- Write in a clear and concise style. Avoid technical jargon.
- Submissions are not to exceed 4,000 words, although exceptions may be granted.
- We encourage you to submit photos and other illustrations, but you must submit them in a high-quality format. If you submit a photo on its own (not accompanying an article), please provide a brief description (50–150 words).
- Submissions must be in MS Word format and single-spaced.
- Use author–date style for in-text citations and the reference list.
- Do not use running heads.
- Use endnotes instead of footnotes.

**Submission Deadline for the Next Issue**

**October 31, 2024**

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I understand that I may vary or withdraw this consent at any time. I understand that the Association's privacy officer is available to answer any questions I may have regarding the collection, use and disclosure of these records. The privacy officer can be reached at 780-447-9429 or 1-800-232-7208.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information on the ATA's privacy policy, visit [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca).



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Complete contact information for the FAC executive is available on the council's website at <https://fac.teachers.ab.ca>.

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