

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

I am very familiar with, perhaps even a bit too comfortable with, the space in-between. I don't fit precisely in any one box. With that musing in mind, this issue's theme is "The Space In-Between." If we fine arts teachers are drawn to those in-between spaces, how do we engage in artistic endeavours that fill in-between spaces with students?

This issue focuses on practical pieces for you arts educators to consider in your classroom. Izabella Orzelski, in her article on art education, highlights how she embraced cross-curricular learning with the in-between spaces that students inhabit. For dance education, Victoria Reid provides a lesson plan that draws focus to breath and movements of the body. In her unit example for drama education, Molly Danko offers myriad ideas for voice and sound, which can be explored from the technical or action side of production—you get to decide! For music education, Connie Ohlmann describes her journey through the CBC Music's Canadian Music Class Challenge and how this

challenge connects students' musical experiences outside of school with those in school. And the final article of this issue is from the ATA library. Check out all the amazing resources that are available to use in your classrooms (and for your own professional growth!).

My hope is that you find a space in this journal that resonates with you. These articles offer practical suggestions, lessons, tips and units for you to use. I would love to hear how you connect with the ideas presented here! Feel free to reach out. The Fine Arts Council is highly invested in making the content of the journals, conferences and workshops meaningful to you, our members.

I hope that this journal is as exciting to you as it is to me!

Kim Friesen Wiens teaches music in Edmonton. She is also a PhD student at the University of Alberta, with a focus on critical music and culturally sustaining pedagogical practices in music.

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

Submissions for peer review are due October 31, 2024.

President's Message

Tamera Olsen

When I heard about this issue's theme, "The Space In-Between," I recalled my practicum years ago when I discovered the power of third space pedagogy. During the practicum, students shared their experiences using classroom content in wholly separate spaces and without consideration for marks or time constraints. In the process, they found personal motivation to explore and create using prior learning.

Similarly, in-between spaces are self-directed and allow for a more personal experience. As we introduce collaborative learning into these places, cocreation provides further opportunities for emerging knowledge as students share with each other, enriching the experience and providing for lasting memories.

School beautification often falls to the visual arts departments and is a perfect environment for

collaborative learning outside of class. At my K-9 school, the Grade 9 mural club successfully cocreated a large roller art painting for our junior high and a 45-foot-long wall mural in our elementary wing. Throughout the process, students shared ideas, critical conversations and strategies to inform the project.

These experiences transform new information into contexts that students can make sense of and that develop their critical thinking abilities. Through this, students become empowered to pursue their ideas and are even willing to fail to explore something new, enlivening their freedom of expression.

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



La Geographía Manda: A Transformative Ongoing Artistic Odyssey Exploring Canada's Geography

Izabella Orzelski

In the dynamic landscape of educational advancement, a relentless pursuit continues to bridge the chasm between traditional classroom pedagogy and genuine real-world immersion. At the forefront of this endeavour stands *La Geographía Manda*, an avant-garde art initiative that introduces an innovative solution to this challenge, offering a comprehensive and enthralling odyssey through the diverse geography of Canada. Guiding this remarkable expedition, I am propelled by an unwavering passion for geography and a relentless commitment as an educator. My mission extends beyond the mere expansion of students' geographical knowledge; I endeavour to cultivate within them a profound appreciation for the intricate beauty and multifaceted diversity inherent to Canada.

The inception of the phrase *La Geographía Manda*, symbolizing the inextricable link between geography and the human experience, can be traced back to our exploration of the landscapes of Spain and Mexico. As we discerned the richness of geographical diversity and recognized the unique composition of our student body, predominantly comprising recent immigrants to

Canada, the project organically evolved into its Canadian manifestation.

In embracing the concept of *La Geographía Manda* on Canadian soil, our mural project has taken on a profound responsibility to reflect the diversity of Canada's geographical regions. This responsibility extends to recognizing and honouring the Indigenous perspectives woven into the fabric of each depicted region. Understanding that the landscapes we portray are not just physical entities but also storied landscapes with deep roots in Indigenous history, culture and traditions, we have sought to interweave the Indigenous voice into the very essence of our project.

The seven distinct geographical regions of Canada—the Canadian Rocky Mountains and Mackenzie Mountains, the Prairies, the Canadian Shield and Laurentian Plateau, the Great Lakes, the Atlantic Provinces, the Arctic, and the Pacific Coast—are not merely depicted as physical entities. Each mural serves as a canvas for the rich tapestry of Indigenous narratives that have shaped and continue to influence these lands. Guided by the commitment to respect and amplify Indigenous voices, our project strives to

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present an authentic portrayal of the interconnectedness between the land and its original inhabitants.

As students engage in a comprehensive exploration of Canada's diverse geography, they are invited to delve into the unique stories, traditions and contributions of Indigenous peoples associated with each region. The murals become more than visual representations; they serve as windows into the historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous communities, fostering an understanding of the profound connection between people, place and identity. Through this intentional integration of Indigenous perspectives, *La Geographia Manda* becomes a conduit for acknowledging and respecting the enduring presence of Indigenous cultures in the shaping of Canada's geographical tapestry. It has since become an integral component of the Grade 7 social studies curriculum, serving as the gateway for students to embark on a comprehensive exploration of Canada's seven distinct geographical regions.

This undertaking transcends the ordinary; it represents an immersive educational voyage, peeling back the layers of our nation, encompassing not only its diverse geography but also the intricate threads of culture and environment that unite our vast country.

In the pursuit of infusing the learning experience with vibrancy, *La Geographia Manda* embarked on an ambitious artistic journey. The concept was deceptively simple yet profoundly transformative: the creation of expansive murals, each one an emblematic representation of Canada's seven geographic regions. These monumental murals, measuring approximately 12-by-9 feet, stand as living tributes to the natural grandeur and creative talents of our students.

The educational journey unfolding here is a testament to its richness and depth. Seamlessly integrating various disciplines, it bridges the chasm between art and social studies, fostering a participatory approach that transforms students from passive observers into active explorers of geography. As they delve into the culture and history of each region to create vibrant murals, students not only develop artistic skills but also a profound appreciation for the intricate cultural tapestry woven throughout Canada. This engagement extends beyond the confines of the classroom, cultivating a sense of unity and heightened multicultural awareness.

During mural creation, students encounter a myriad of intellectual challenges, demanding critical thinking and creative problem solving. Depicting the unique features of each region necessitates innovative solutions to artistic dilemmas, encouraging the development of essential cognitive skills. Furthermore, the research component of this project equips students with the tools of information literacy, honing their ability to gather and synthesize information from diverse sources, a valuable skill that transcends the boundaries of this particular endeavour.

Our journey commenced with the completion of the first three murals. These initial steps were primarily guided by my efforts, with additional contributions from artistically inclined students. Each mural stands as a masterpiece, capturing the essence of a different Canadian geographic region.



Dedicating the first mural to the prairies, the artwork captures the expansive beauty of canola fields under endless cerulean skies. The scene unfolds with silos dotting the horizon, and the contemporary grace of windmills adds a touch of modernity to the pastoral landscape. This mural serves as a seamless integration of art and social studies, bridging the realms of aesthetic expression and geographical exploration. In recognizing the importance of the prairies to Canada's agricultural and environmental identity, the mural also acknowledges the historical and contemporary significance of this region, including the perspectives of the Indigenous communities whose connection to the prairies is deeply rooted in their cultural heritage.

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The second mural transports viewers to the Atlantic coast, portraying Nova Scotia with the iconic Peggy's Cove Lighthouse, the expansive ocean, container ships and the ever-present seagulls. In this representation of Canada's eastern provinces, we intentionally interweave the Indigenous perspective, acknowledging the historical presence of the Mi'kmaq people in Nova Scotia. The Mi'kmaq, with their deep-rooted connection to the land and the sea, have played an integral role in shaping the cultural and historical landscape of this region. As we navigate the maritime allure captured in the mural, we also pay homage to the Indigenous heritage that predates even the renowned arrival of John Cabot on these shores. This inclusion seeks to broaden our understanding of Nova Scotia's rich tapestry, recognizing that its story encompasses both the enduring legacy of Indigenous communities and the subsequent chapters of exploration and settlement.



The third mural is a representation of the Arctic region, featuring a legendary polar bear perched on an ice floe amid the frigid waters. In addition to capturing the harsh, pristine beauty of the Arctic, it also serves as a canvas to honour the importance of the polar bear in Indigenous cultures. Among the many facets of Indigenous beliefs, the spirit of the polar bear holds profound significance, symbolizing strength and resilience, and a deep connection to the Arctic environment. By incorporating this aspect, the mural not only highlights the urgency of preserving the delicate Arctic ecosystem but also pays homage to the spiritual and cultural



significance embedded in the Indigenous understanding of this captivating region.

Embarking on a visual journey of the Northwest Coast, the fourth mural unveils a captivating portrayal of picturesque mountains rendered in atmospheric perspective. Ocean waves crash against the rocks of an island, setting the scene for a totem pole that stands amid the landscape. This totem pole symbolizes the profound connection between the Indigenous Peoples of the Northwest Coast and nature. The depiction of the whale's tale is more than a visual element; it serves as a powerful representation of the cultural and spiritual significance attributed to these magnificent creatures. The mural not only showcases the breathtaking landscapes but also pays homage to the deep reverence and symbiotic relationship that Indigenous communities share with the ocean in this remarkable region of Canada.



This visual saga remains an ongoing chapter, a work in progress yet to be completed. Nevertheless, the accomplishments thus far have been nothing short of remarkable. Perhaps most striking is the fervour and engagement it has ignited among our students. These murals, despite their prominent placement within the school, remain untouched and unblemished, serving as a testament to the deep respect and admiration the students hold for their own work and that of their peers.

With the success of the first four murals, we are committed to continuing this artistic odyssey. Our students eagerly anticipate assuming a more active role, honing their skills and crafting artistic representations of the remaining three regions. *La Geographia Manda* stands as a living testament to the adage that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

La Geographia Manda has exerted a profound influence on both the students and the school community. For many, including recent immigrants to Canada, it has served as an eye-opener, establishing a meaningful connection to the country. Through art, they have learned to appreciate not only the breathtaking landscapes, varied climates and the rich tapestry of flora and fauna but also the deep-rooted Indigenous perspectives that shape Canada’s natural beauty.

Even in its incomplete state, *La Geographia Manda* has indelibly marked our school’s culture. These murals serve as a symbol of our students’ dedication, creativity and profound respect for the preservation of Canada’s geographical heritage, acknowledging the Indigenous communities whose histories are intricately intertwined with the land depicted. The inclusion of Indigenous perspectives adds layers of meaning to the murals, fostering a holistic understanding of Canada’s diverse and interconnected cultural and geographical tapestry.

The impact of this project transcends the mere creation of art. Participation in *La Geographia Manda* has had a profound effect on students in various ways. It has significantly bolstered their confidence, empowering them with the knowledge that their contributions hold meaningful value within the school community. The project has acted as a catalyst for encouraging artistic expression, unveiling a previously dormant creative side in many students who may not have otherwise explored their artistic talents. Furthermore, the murals have instilled a sense of responsibility within the students, serving as a constant reminder of their role as custodians of their school’s cultural heritage. This new-found sense of duty and respect for their educational environment is a significant outcome of the project.

La Geographia Manda is not merely an art project; it is an ongoing journey of exploration, creativity and love for one’s homeland. This innovative fusion of geography and art magnificently broadens horizons, nurturing a profound appreciation for Canada’s geographic and cultural diversity. It transforms the classroom into a canvas of exploration and imagination, leaving a legacy that enriches our school’s culture and the lives of the students who have participated in this incredible journey.

Izabella Orzelski is the FAC’s art representative and an art specialist with Edmonton Public Schools.

Dance Education

Take a Deep Breath and Find the Space In-Between

Victoria Reid

In the space between somatic practice and dance education, there is an opportunity for a powerful shift in the culture of our dance classrooms. In 1970, philosopher and Feldenkrais practitioner Thomas Hanna coined the term *somatics*, and since then somatic movement has been integrated into dance programming, education contexts and professional dance companies around the world due to its profound impact on bringing the focus of dance back to the body. A dance classroom with a somatic approach “is one of personal exploration, self-acceptance, and non-competitiveness” (Brodie and Lobel 2012, 2), three areas of our classroom culture we dance educators are continually trying to foster.

This lesson plan is inspired by the work in *Dance and Somatics: Mind-Body Principles of Teaching and Performance*, by Julie A Brodie and Elin E Lobel, and introduces the integration of somatic principles into your dance classes. My hope is that through this lesson plan you will feel inspired to read more, research and continue to integrate somatic movement and practice in your dance classrooms.

This lesson will bring awareness to four fundamental principles found in somatic work:

- “Breath
- Sensing
- Connectivity
- Initiation” (Brodie and Lobel 2012, 8-11)

These four principles “can assist dance students at all levels and with diverse learning styles in fulfilling

their movement potential” (2), and that is why somatic work is so beneficial in all classrooms.

“The ultimate goal of focusing on breathing, connecting, sensing and initiating while dancing is to increase awareness, and it is that awareness that opens the door to make new choices. When we are present in the movement, dancers are making choices informed by the kinesthetic sense and the external environment, not based on habit, feedback from the mirror, or verbal commands” (Brodie and Lobel 2012, 11-12).



Lesson Plan: Introducing Somatic Movement

Length of Class Time: 80 minutes

Grade Level: Dance 15-25-35

This lesson plan could be adapted for all grade levels, as somatic practice can be applied to all forms of movement and all levels of dancers.

Lesson Objectives

- To bring awareness to the body and the space
- To be present in the body and in the space
- To work on riding habitual movement
- To bring awareness to conscious breath

Materials

- Notebooks and pens
- List of Laban's Eight Efforts (see page 10)

Warm-Up 1 (10 minutes)—Breath

- Have students spread out in the space in a comfortable spot of their choice, with lots of room around each student.
- Bring a sense of calmness to the space. (In my space, I close off the mirrors with a curtain and dim the lights.)
- Have students stand in their spot and close their eyes. Ask them to inhale for four counts and exhale for four counts. They can continue breathing with or without cueing from the teacher.
- Ask the students to do a silent body scan while they continue to breathe deeply. Checking in and bringing awareness to each part of their body, I start with the feet and move up each body area. As they scan their body, encourage them to remember which parts of their body feel tight, sore, unbalanced, off, relaxed and so on.
- Have students choose one tight or sore area, and on their own time move and stretch that part of their body in any way that they need. Remind students to not over think this but instead to feel this in their body. All eyes should still be closed.
- Encourage students to find another part of the body that needs stretching or relaxing once they have stretched and released each sore area.
- Continue this for about 10 minutes in silence or with soothing music.

- Each time we do this, students become more comfortable with exploring a new way to stretch and will learn to listen to their body more each time. Cueing from the teacher can reduce as students become more comfortable with this warm-up.

This warm-up will be relaxing. It will connect the mind and the body as conscious breathing connects to our core, and it will ease students into their flow of movement.

Warm-Up 2 (10 minutes)—Sensing

- This warm-up energizes the group through pedestrian movement.
- Turn up the lights, and have students find a new spot in the room.
- Have students face any direction they choose in the space and to take in the space with their senses.
- Give students a cue to begin walking around the space, or allow them to do so on impulse.
- Give the following prompts as necessary:
 - Find a medium speed of walking.
 - Begin to walk as neutral as you can and think about your feet, heels, knees, hips, arms, chest and head becoming neutral. Drop all “isms” that make it a “you” walk.
 - Keep your eyes active and look up.
 - Maintain that medium speed, not too fast or too slow.
 - Fill space in the room and leave no empty spaces.
 - Remind students to breathe and to not hold their breath. Breathe consciously to become present in the space.
 - Take in the room as you walk.
 - What do you see?
 - What do you feel?
 - What do you taste?
 - What do you smell?
- Ask students to return to their original spot, come to a stop and take a deep breath.
- This is an opportunity for group sharing of what they saw, noticed, felt, experienced and so on.

This warm-up encourages students to be more present by focusing on the environment around them.

Movement Exploration (20 minutes)— Connectivity and Initiation

- Remind students of Laban’s Eight Efforts. Place them on the board for students to refer to.
- Encourage students to choose one effort to explore in improvisation today.



Source: www.pexels.com

- Have students spread out in a new spot in the space once again and face any direction.
- Have students begin to explore that effort in their body in as many ways as they can through different body parts, on different levels, using the space around them.
- While improvising, students must choose one movement they discovered while exploring what is new and unique to their practice.
- Have students save that movement in their head, write it down or share it with the class.

- Continue to do this exploration exercise a few more times, each time saving the movement they discovered.
- Have students link these movements together with other dancers to create a sequence.
- This exploration and the gathered movements can be created into little mini sequences as solos, duos or group work. Students can share what they worked on or write it down in their notebook to use another day.

Laban’s Eight Efforts

- Wring
- Press
- Flick
- Dab
- Glide
- Float
- Punch
- Slash

This exploration connects the body with the ground by moving in one spot and using the floor to ground, support and balance the improvisation. Linking movements together individually or as a group allows for connectivity and patterns of choreography to form. By continuing to create choreography, students are working on precision as they work on sequencing movements together.

Cool-Down (20 minutes)—Breath and Sensing

- Ask students to lie down in a comfortable spot.
- Encourage students to lie on their backs with their hands on their bellies, legs straight and feet relaxed.
- Dim the lights and play calming music.
- Have students return to their four-count inhale and exhale, feeling the rise and fall of the belly below their hands.
- Use a relaxation technique to bring awareness to each part of the body by squeezing and releasing it. Prompt students to bring awareness to their feet and to squeeze all the muscles in their feet and release. Continue to squeeze and release each area of the body moving upward and ending at the face and top of the head.

This cool-down refocuses the students on conscious breath and brings awareness and sensing to each part of their body for relaxation.

Discussion and Closure (20 minutes)

Using the four fundamental somatic principles above, ask the students to spread out and write in their journals what each principle means to them and how the principles connect to their work today and the activities that were explored.

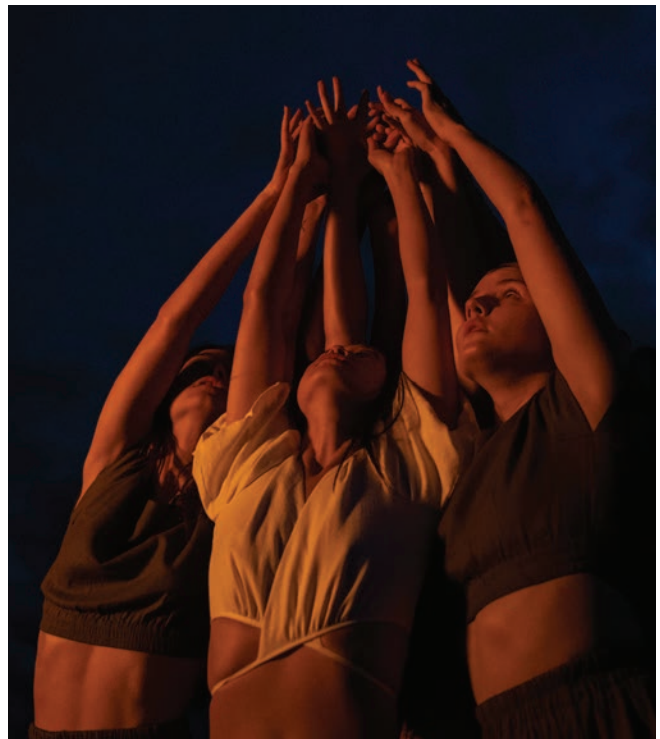
After about 10 minutes bring everyone to a circle for class discussion. See the ideas below.

Breath
Everyone breathes
Conscious breath versus unconscious breath
Connects mind and body
Can bring relaxation and calmness
Connection to core (diaphragm)
Sensing
Taking in self
Taking in the environment
Being fully present
Five senses
Connectivity
Connecting with body
Connecting with grounding (the floor)
Initiation
Where does movement come from?
Where does movement go?

Reference

Brodie, J A, and E E Lobel. 2012. *Dance and Somatics: Mind-Body Principles of Teaching and Performance*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Victoria Reid is the FAC's dance representative. For the past seven years, she has been teaching at Archbishop Jordan High School (ABJ), in Sherwood Park, in the department of fine arts, instructing dance, drama and musical theatre. She is the founder and director of the ABJ Dance Collective, a program with over 80 students, teaching the locally developed curriculum, Dance 15-25-35. She is also the movement director and choreographer for all ABJ mainstage musical performances.



Source: www.pexels.com

Drama Education

The Spaces In-Between

Molly Danko

There are so many connections and overlaps in a drama classroom, and I love to make those connections come to life in culminating projects where possible. Allowing students to focus on small elements individually and then combining them is always rewarding! This works well when overlapping technical theatre with acting; whether students are creating lighting for a scene or using elements of tech to enhance their acting, it is always fun and educational. The unit I outline below incorporates various ways of integrating strong vocal characterization together with sound and sound effects. This can start from the tech side of things or the acting side. My outline will start with sound.

Introduction to Sound

As we move into sound and character voices, students often feel silly or embarrassed about creating weird sounds; therefore, they must get comfortable with making sound first.

Sound Exaggeration Circle

This warm-up starts with the class in a circle. One person will start making a sound or sound effect quietly and calmly. As the sound moves around the circle, each person will amplify and exaggerate it more than the person before them. When the sound reaches a peak, the next person in the circle will offer a new sound, and the circle continues.

Sound Circle

The class starts in a circle, and one person (person A) will offer a sound. The person next to

them (person B) will repeat the same sound and then add a sound. The following person (person C) will make the sounds of persons A and B, and then add their own sound. This continues around the circle. Continue this for one lap around the circle or keep going until the group makes a mistake.

Variations: The whole class could repeat each sound before the next person adds a sound, or you could shift this into an elimination game if your class is competitive.

Soundscapes

As students begin to feel more comfortable with creating sounds, give them a theme or location (for example, birthday party, park, restaurant or theme park) and ask them to slowly layer sounds to create a soundscape. Encourage the students to think about all the sounds they might hear in this location, such as environmental sounds, phrases people say and sounds people make. Repeat a few times as needed.



Source: iStock

Small Groups

Next, I organize students into small groups, give them a theme or location and have them build their own soundscape. Sounds can be created with their voices as well as with objects. I ask students to write all the sounds that they would hear in their location, then brainstorm what could make those sounds. If they need a bell and do not have one, what could they use? One rule is that they cannot use digital sounds and sound effects that they have found online. They must make the sounds and present them live.

Playlist of Sounds

This could be done digitally with beginners or added in as a step before the soundscapes. During COVID-19, I asked students to pull 10 sounds electronically that represented their day (for example, alarm clocks, typing on the computer, television playing in the background).

Introduction to Foley Art

Next, I take a step away from the performer aspect and delve into the technical aspects of sound. I usually show two videos that explore foley art, what it is and how sound effects are created in film: “Foley Artists: How Movie Sound Effects Are Made” (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences 2016) and “The Magic of Making Sound” (Great Big Story 2017). We then translate that to the stage.

From here, you can take the project in many different directions. The two I go to most are radio plays and lip dubs. Both can start with a lesson on vocal characterization.



Source: iStock

Vocal Characterization

Define and explain vocal techniques. Depending on which grade you teach, look at the following: intonation, pitch, projection, articulation, rate, volume, rhythm, resonance, pausing and phrasing.

At this point, I pull out a bin of storybooks for students to explore various vocal techniques while reading. I will guide them through each technique, getting them to play with extremes of each. Many students will feel hesitant about jumping in to create voices for the characters, so continue to encourage bold choices and remind them that this is not how we will necessarily perform.

Students can read a section of their story to the class and receive feedback on where they were using the techniques well and where they could continue to improve.

Lip Dubs

This activity can be done in groups or individually. Start with getting your students to find a short scene from a television show or movie. I encourage my students to use cartoons because the character voices are often so exaggerated. They will find a minute-long scene to use.

Have the students write out a transcript of the scene and use that, or they can write their own new scene based on the scene’s action. The students will rehearse and perform their scene (keeping in mind the vocal techniques they have learned) and will also create all the sound effects.

The presentation of the scene dubs is quite versatile. Students can make the sound effects live or record them. I usually have the scene play on our projector (mute), and the students create the character voices and sound effects live.

Radio Plays

There are tons of radio play scripts online, and you can either choose and cast students in each scene or let them find something they are interested in.

The major focus I have with radio plays is creating strong character voices. I will often cast students in two roles, so they must be specific with how to contrast those characters. The other focus is the sound effects.

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By the end of the unit, they will perform a radio play for the class with live sound effects on stage.

If you would like access to any resources for these activities, please do not hesitate to reach out. Additionally, if you would like to collaborate and discuss these ideas further, please feel free to contact me at drama@fineartsata.ca.

References

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. "Foley Artists: How Movie Sound Effects Are Made." June 13, 2016. YouTube video, 7:11, www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_tqB4IZvMk (accessed January 2, 2024).

Great Big Story. "The Magic of Making Sound." January 12, 2017. YouTube video, 6:32, www.youtube.com/watch?v=UO3N_PRIgX0 (accessed January 2, 2024).

Molly Danko is the FAC's drama representative. She has been teaching drama at the secondary level for the past seven years with Edmonton Catholic Separate School Division. Molly also has over a decade of experience performing in, directing and producing work in the Edmonton theatre and opera scene.



Source: iStock



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The Canadian Music Class Challenge: Student Empowerment in a Grade 6 Music Class

Connie Ohlmann

As a music teacher with more than 20 years' teaching experience, my teaching philosophy and delivery has certainly shifted throughout my career. Increasingly, I find myself leaning into those in-between spaces of learning and embracing less traditional ways of teaching. This has happened with CBC Music's annual Canadian Music Class Challenge, which my Grade 6 students have now participated in for the past three years.

For those not familiar with the challenge, the Canadian Music Class Challenge invites music classes from across the country to submit videos covering a song from a curated list featuring Canadian artists. Submissions include students of all ages from primary to high school from all areas of Canada. The student videos are varied in both song interpretations and arrangement choices ranging from choral, concert band, instrumental groups, rock band style, choreographed flash mobs and everything in between. The videos reflect a wide spectrum of teacher and student involvement in the creation of the arrangements and creative process. Some videos are heavily influenced

and directed by the teacher while others are student-led projects.

In the city where I teach, elementary schools often include kindergarten to Grade 6 students. Grade 6 can be a challenging year in elementary music, and I have observed that students often begin to disengage from the lessons and musical choices offered in elementary music classes. I approached the Canadian Music Class Challenge in the hopes that it would increase student engagement, ownership and empowerment in music class. The project spanned nine weeks and was broken down into three distinct phases as listed below:

- Song selection
- Close listening and part selection
- Final arrangement and performance

Song Selection

To begin this project, I created slides highlighting each song on the list. The slides featured a photo of the artist, where in Canada the artist is from, the description of the song found on the Canadian Music

Class Challenge website and an audio recording of the song (see Figure 1). As we listened to the excerpts of the songs, students took notes about the song and whether they thought it would be a desired choice for our class or not.

The next step was for students to vote on a selection. Using Chromebooks and headphones, students browsed the slide deck of songs and then accessed a survey to share their preferences. The survey included the following questions:

- What are your top five selections?
- If you had to pick just one top song that we would perform, what would you pick?
- Is there any one song that you would not want to play?

After students had voted, I created a list of semifinalists of the songs with the highest percentage of votes. Students then voted again for their top song on a paper ballot (see Figure 2) listing the semifinalists, and from there the selection was finalized. After each round of voting, I shared the percentage of votes for each song to build trust and transparency between the students and me.

Although this part of the process was time-consuming, it was an essential factor in students buying into the challenge. Students were very serious about listening to the songs and casting their ballots as they knew and trusted that their voice mattered.

Close Listening and Part Selection

With the principle of student ownership in mind, the next part of the project was deliberately scaffolded by me, the teacher, but presented in a way that continued to develop student ownership over the process.

My homework involved taking the song and altering it to a user-friendly and accessible format for the classroom in terms of digital access and the key to the song. I transposed the song, if needed, to a key that was more accessible to them on the instruments that we had in the classroom as well as within the range of their singing voices. To access a transposed mp3 file, I used the website Transposr at www.transposr.com. I wrote out the chord progression as well as the lyrics on the slide deck that would later become the working document for the class. Using GarageBand, an iOS app, I then snipped parts of the song to create separate audio files for the different sections of the song, such as the verse, chorus and bridge so that as a class we could focus on one small selection of the music at a time. Last, I used the Moises app to remove the vocals from the audio tracks so that students could hear the music with and without vocals. All the various audio tracks were embedded in the slide deck so that students could access them at any point. The slide deck was shared with students in Google Classroom.

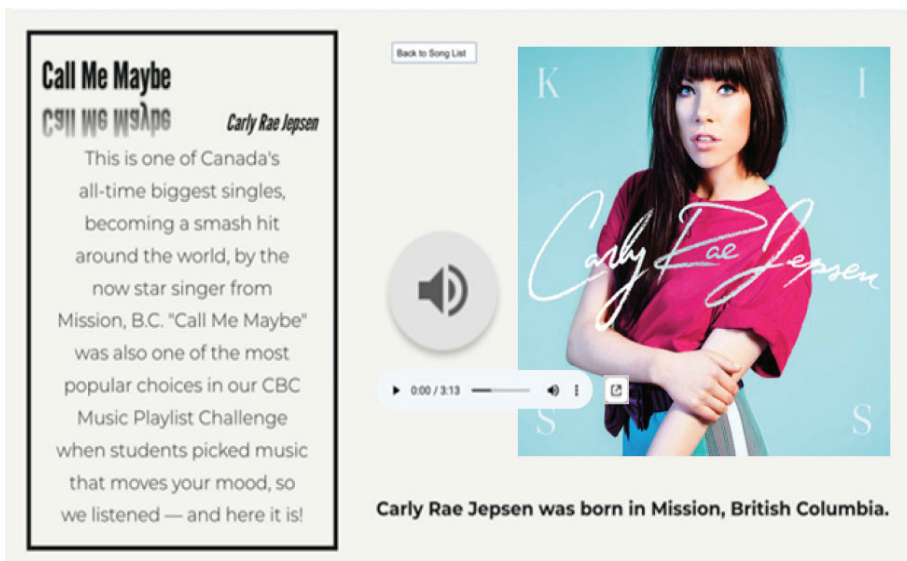


Figure 1. Sample image of slide deck

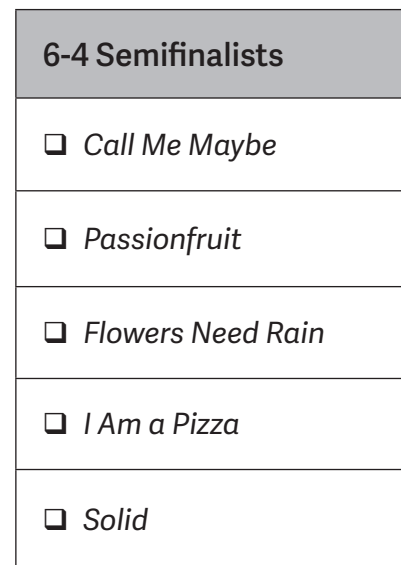


Figure 2. Sample final ballot

To begin the close listening, we listened to the song in the new key in its entirety as a class and wrote down the form of the song, such as the verse, chorus and other sections. We then listened to the chorus on its own with and without vocals. Students were encouraged to identify different melodies or instruments they heard in the music: the drum pattern, a melodic pattern in the background, a repeating pattern. The excitement in the room at this point was building as students were hearing components of the songs that they had never heard before. The students were then invited to get an Orff instrument, and we began to figure out melodies and patterns from the music, adding them to our slides as we went. This was the beginning of our co-creation of our arrangement.

Now that students had played various melodies and riffs from the song on Orff instruments, they were asked to consider what other instruments they might want to play. I am fortunate to have a wide variety of instruments at my disposal including acoustic guitars, an electric guitar, an electric bass, ukuleles, keyboards, a drum kit, as well as a class set of Orff instruments. I allowed students to select any instrument they wanted, whether or not they had experience with the instrument. I then created visuals on the slides using iconic notation from Music Will's (www.musicwill.org) resources (see Figure 3). This allowed students the means to interpret melodic patterns and chords without reading standard notation, removing a significant barrier for most of my students.

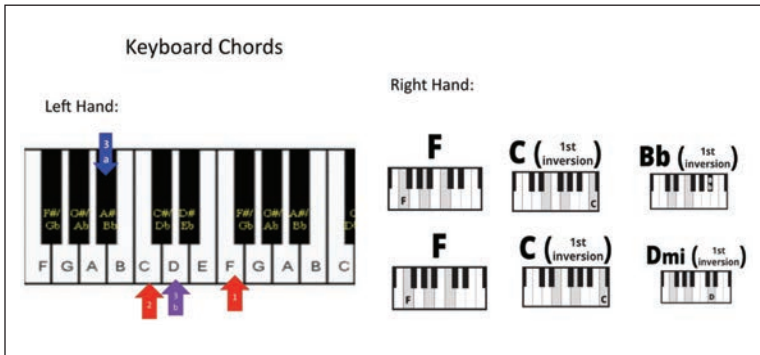


Figure 3. Example iconic notation

At this point, students selected their parts and began to practise in small groups or independently, with or without teacher support as needed. These groups included keyboards, vocals, drum kit, guitars, bass, and both pitched and nonpitched percussion. For these classes, I had both iPads and printed sheets available to students as a support, allowing them to independently listen to the song and to

access the slide deck of visuals as they practised their parts. Providing digital access on the iPads to the slide deck meant that students had access to the living document, as we were constantly adding and removing elements of our arrangement as students discovered riffs and patterns on their respective instruments. The observed level of engagement and student leadership was consistently high.

Creation of the Arrangement and Final Performance

Now that the building blocks for the song were mostly in place, it was time to regroup and think about how the song would begin to come together. As a class, we began to make decisions about how the instruments would layer in and what the final form of our song would be. The creation of the arrangement was a spiral process in that we continually adjusted and made changes as we discovered what worked well and what didn't. Perhaps the most magical and exciting moments of this part of the process were the happy accidents—when a student would improvise with extra notes, play at the wrong time, change the rhythm of a part and so on—only to have the class hear something that they loved and wanted to include in the arrangement.

After the arrangement was finalized, rehearsals for the video commenced. The class periods now shifted from predominantly student-centred learning to a teacher-directed process with student input. This part of the project involved tidying up parts, physically arranging the students and equipment in the classroom for the performance, testing out the position of the video camera and working through challenges with sound.

On video day, we ensured that there would be no announcements or interruptions and got right to work. Students knew what they had to do and were on a mission—they came into class, set up their instruments and equipment, made sure their keyboards had fresh batteries, and were focused, prepared and excited! Taking the video was the culmination of more than eight weeks of work. The students' energy and excitement were palpable, with them spontaneously erupting in cheers after we got our final take.

Teacher and Student Reflections

To allow students to self-reflect and share their thoughts about the project, students completed a survey. Overwhelmingly, students indicated that they enjoyed the project, the way they learned the song, and their ability to select the part they played. Specifically, students mentioned that they loved putting the song together like a puzzle, solving things as a team and hearing the song take shape over the course of the project. Students were hard-pressed to pinpoint the worst part of the project with most students saying that there wasn't a worst part. A small group did indicate that the recording process was difficult and stressful.

As the teacher, I observed throughout the process that students were invested and engaged. They enjoyed working together, appreciated the independence within the structure and recognized that their voices were valued and that they directly impacted our project. Many students played instruments they had not previously played before, including keyboards, bass guitar, acoustic guitar and drum kit. This was a highlight as well as a source of empowerment for many of them to realize that playing basic patterns on these instruments is an achievable goal.

We experienced two main challenges throughout the project. First, although students were focused and actively working, the volume level in the room was high when students were working independently and in small groups. This was addressed by utilizing as many small breakout rooms around the school as possible and providing headphones to students playing keyboards. Second, students who had difficulty with playing on pulse chose instruments that had the potential to unravel the group. For these students, I navigated carefully and treated each circumstance differently. Some students self-identified that they wanted to change their role, and for others I doubled up a part with a student who had a more confident sense of beat. In the end, all students played their chosen role for the final performance.

Conclusion

While there are many ways one might approach a project such as the Canadian Music Class Challenge, I wanted to do so in a way that would engage and empower my students who, at their age, have sometimes shown a declining interest in elementary music programs. By choosing to follow a project model that centred on student voice as described, my students were invested and engaged in their Grade 6 music class in ways that I have not seen when following a more traditional teacher-centred approach. The key features of this approach included the song selection coming from the students, student input at every part of the creative process and allowing the students to self-select their roles and instruments. Overwhelmingly, my Grade 6 students have told me for the past three years that this project was the highlight of their year.

To learn more about CBC Music's Canadian Music Class Challenge, please visit www.cbc.ca/music/events/canadian-music-class-challenge/.

Resources

Transposr (www.transposr.com)

Moises app (<https://moises.ai/>)

Music Will (www.musicwill.org)—Iconic Notation

GarageBand (iOS app)

Connie Ohlmann has been teaching for more than 20 years and is currently an elementary music specialist for Edmonton Public Schools. In 2021, she completed her master of education in elementary music at the University of Alberta. She is passionate about finding ways to help students meaningfully engage in music programs. Connie has served on several not-for-profit music education boards and is currently the FAC's web manager. This is the perfect way to blend Connie's love for technology and her passion for fine arts education.

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Sandra Anderson



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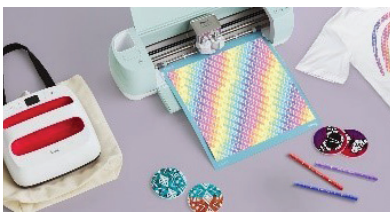
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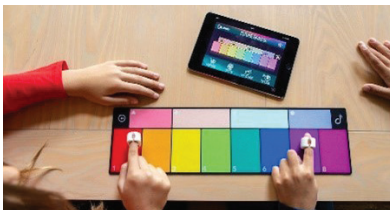
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