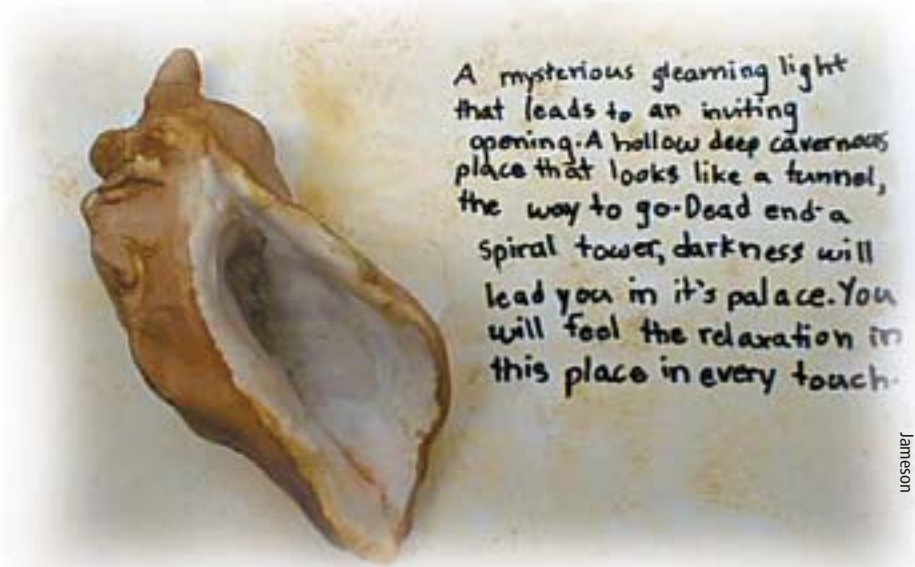


# Making a New Connection: Inner-City Arts Training Program

Pauline Clarke and Melva Widdicombe



The Inner City District of The Winnipeg School Division No. 1 poses challenges to the most determined teacher: high unemployment, extensive poverty, an often transient lifestyle. Yet teachers here are finding their students sharing ideas, making suggestions, and invoking new possibilities through words and images, while reveling in their own unsuspected powers of creativity, thanks to the Inner-City Arts Training Program which uses the arts to stir the minds and spirits of primary and middle-school students.

While the program focuses on integrating arts into the core curriculum, the process stimulates every region of the brain. Its success was recognized formally in 2000 when it earned the Fitzhenry Whiteside Award for Innovation and Excellence in Art Education.

The program began 11 years ago when Barbara Doncaster, Art Consultant, and Pauline Clarke planned a professional development program expanding on our growing realization that 'one-shot' professional development was not effective in changing teachers' behaviours in the

long term, and that a series of professional development sessions with teachers implementing strategies and then returning to reflect on their successes would be more effective. Our goal was to help teachers engage their students totally, not just with pen and pencil, but also with imagination, music and drama.

Today, this would be known as using multiple intelligences; then, we just knew instinctively that it would work. By offering a natural way of learning, the program became a process of

empowering students, of helping them to reflect on their own learning journey and find their own particular strengths through the arts in order to transfer those skills and strengths to other core subject areas.

Art programs had been cut substantially in the late 1980s as school resources became scarce. The responsibility for art education was delegated increasingly to the efforts of individual teachers, but many of those teachers were not comfortable with their understanding of art or their ability to integrate it with core subjects.

The Inner-City Arts Training program trains teachers in art appreciation, visual awareness and art production. This training allows them to guide their students through extensive projects intended to encourage individual contribution while furthering teamwork. At the end of the school year, the finished works are displayed; however, reflection on the creative journey focuses on understanding and process as well as results.

What began in the realm of art soon expanded. By the end of the second year, teachers were becoming aware that the consonance between visual and verbal language could be used to develop language skills. They began to see that art is language and language is art; it's all an integral package of learning. If you get excited about the visuals, the art, and the making of the art, the language percolates, and the children begin to talk about what they're doing and how they're doing it.

Teachers commit to four full days of training throughout the school year. Before those days, they discuss plans with their facilitators and consider themes they will develop through the year with their students. A key part of the program's success is the "idea journal," a concentration of written notes, drawings and images created by teachers to accompany their training. In writing about the training and taking both verbal and visual notes, they reflect upon both their own progress and how well they share their ideas with their students: how it went, what worked and didn't work, what changes they suggested for their students, and

any inspirational comments they received from students.

In the second and subsequent sessions, teachers begin with an hour of self-assessment and feedback as they share experiences, idea journals, reactions and suggestions. They learn to articulate their findings and feelings with their colleagues, the better to share them with their students.

For the teachers, and subsequently for their students, arts education begins with visual awareness. Amassing a collection of visual images to permeate every aspect of the program is the first vital step. For example, learning about birds involves observing real birds, models, photographs, and artists' works of birds. Through these observations,

moisture. Movement brings these impressions to life and encourages a deeper sharing. Evocative music is used to set the scene (for example, with sounds that suggest an animal prowling the rainforest) and provide easy transitions between moments of visualization.

Reflecting that this can be a big step for the uninitiated, the sessions open with breathing exercises to relax the teachers and welcome them into what is called "the circle of light," wherein they can clear their minds for concentration. The first exercises are small. A typical exercise has participants visualising their own hands. "Can you see it when your eyes are closed? Can you see the lines in your hand? Can you do that with a partner and see your partner's hand?"

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teachers are encouraged to activate prior knowledge, formulate new concepts, and develop "bird related" vocabulary.

Participants engage in "look-draws", a visual awareness technique that improves their ability to see details. As they draw, paying careful attention to bird textures, shapes and lines, the concept of "bird" becomes more defined.

Using the collection of visuals, word collection begins and gradually grows. Magically, something wonderful happens as teachers and students make the emotional and intellectual connections and come out with spontaneous language – an outpouring from the heart. We are constantly amazed at what we can elicit from teachers and their students – it's fun, but it's also intensely academic.

Meanwhile, in their training sessions, teachers are learning to see with their imaginations via techniques of visualisation. With gentle guidance, teachers close their eyes and begin to explore with their mind's eye. If the subject is a rainforest, they may try to see themselves as an animal or a plant, travelling through the terrain, feeling the heat and the

Translating these experiences into writing results in a refreshing openness. When children make a connection to the heart, especially in the middle years, they are experimenting with all sorts of emotions – elation, sadness, hope, dismay, frustration. We see a great deal of this coming out in their writing. It becomes a safe avenue for them to explore their feelings.

Like their teachers, students are asked to maintain idea journals for reflection and understanding. In classes for the middle years, the "idea journals" play a larger role. Students are informed at the beginning of year that their journals will be displayed as an integral part of the finished product. Shyness soon fades as students come to take pride in their journals.

Students move along at their own pace, which is sometimes frustrating for teachers. But the process of accretion – building upon collections of words, images and their permutations – takes time: time to think, to let students reflect, and to see how the learning process develops. The process allows us to watch students, to find out where

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Le Inner-City Arts Training Program utilise les arts pour stimuler l'esprit et le cœur des élèves des niveaux primaire et intermédiaire de la Division scolaire n° 1 de Winnipeg. Le programme, amorcé il y a 11 ans, dispense aux enseignants une formation sur l'appréciation artistique, le développement d'une conscience visuelle et la production d'œuvres d'art. Mettant l'accent sur l'intégration des arts dans le curriculum commun, il stimule toutes les régions du cerveau. Grâce au programme, les écoles reconnaissent désormais la valeur des arts comme composante de l'éducation.

they are, and to plan next steps because we know where they've been.

Teachers are enthusiastic about the program results. "My first year I was apprehensive, as I didn't view myself as much of an artist," says one. "I know now that art is a process. I have grown so much in this area, and this growth has benefited my students." Another writes, "The inservices have helped me see how to create a predictable structured environment without cutting out everything that is life-giving."

In the 11 years since we began this program, we have seen excellent results in a situation where both teachers and students feel safe stretching their methods of learning. Given the right opportunities, children can be true partners in their learning. They can articulate and track their own learning journey while their teachers broaden their own teaching styles. In a safe and supportive setting, teachers are encouraged to take risks and work collaboratively, while raising their expectations of what and how children can learn.

The "artistic-inquiry" nature of this program has meant assessment is based on a self-reflection, personal growth model for both teachers and students, with an emphasis on teachers as learners who model their learning process with their students. We evaluate in three areas. First, we evaluate professional growth during training, when teachers must meet specific criteria in their

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Le programme *Composers In Virtual Interactive Classrooms* (CIVIC) explore l'enseignement de la musique au niveau primaire grâce à un processus qui s'appuie sur la composition musicale, le partage, le dialogue, la réflexion et la révision. Les élèves de niveau primaire et intermédiaire composent, soit seuls ou en petits groupes, à l'aide d'un logiciel de notation. Puis, ils téléchargent leur composition au site Web CIVIC ([civic.acadiau.ca](http://civic.acadiau.ca)), où ils peuvent parler de leurs travaux avec des compositeurs professionnels, des étudiants du programme d'enseignement de la musique de l'Université Acadia et d'élèves compositeurs d'autres régions de la province.

complete a first draft, they upload their composition to the CIVIC Website ([civic.acadiau.ca](http://civic.acadiau.ca)) with a description of their composition, as well as a request for feedback. This request initiates a dialogue with professional composers, Acadia music education students, and other student-composers from around the province. These respondents read the request, listen to the composition, and upload a response. Once the student composers read and reflect upon the feedback, they are encouraged to make changes and submit additional drafts.

The process of composition, sharing, dialogue, reflection, and revision encourages music education students, music teachers and public school children to find their own voices by using musical skills in individual ways, to set and achieve personal goals, and to work collaboratively. The notation software both allows students to compose and acts as the performing instrument, bridging the gap between cognitive understanding and level of playing skills. Furthermore, students learn new musical skills and concepts as they are needed in the composition process.

As public school students come to view themselves as composers, they take ownership and pride in their abilities, and learn the importance of employing the skills of others – what Dewey would call *learning through experience*. Music education students and music educators are also *learning through experience* by using the same composition and feedback system as the younger students.

We have taken a number of steps to ensure that this innovative use of technology is not just another balloon ready to fizzle.

- We have extended the notion of *community of learners* into the development stages of the website, including all participants in the process of website development.
- We have developed partnerships to meet our need for technical support, partnerships with the Nova Scotia Department of Education, the Acadia Institute for Teaching and Technology (AITT), and the music software companies which provide Noteworthy and Sibelius, along with necessary notation programs, to the schools.
- We have broadened the project focus to include the compositional approach to teaching music to non-music majors in the university context.

CIVIC encourages the acquisition of musical skills by cultivating individuality and creativity within a virtual learning

journals: writing and art objectives; observations about the learning process; and self-reflections. Second, we help teachers assess the children's learning by collecting student work samples and self-reflection sheets which are assessed in small-group practical workshop sessions during the course. Throughout all discussions the curricula outcomes are used as a basis for expectations for children's learning. Third, we conduct formal evaluations of the program using written evaluations by the teachers and feedback from school administrators.

And schools are recognizing the true value of the arts as a component of education. This has led to the support of such ventures as the Inner City Arts Conference (which earned the Fitzhenry Whiteside Award for Innovation and Excellence in Art Education in 1999), an annual event initiated nine years ago in which a number of students drawn from the range of Inner City schools devote a full day to problem-solving through art. That same spirit of support buoys a new program, *Learning through the Arts*®, in which artists will work in partnership with teachers to develop new ways to teach the curriculum.

"With ever-increasing demands on teachers, it's becoming more difficult to keep the "soul" in education," writes Liz Kornelson of Pinkham School. "I think that one way to do it is to engage students in integrated arts projects. It helps awaken their passion, their imagination, and their ability to express themselves. As I see it, this helps feed my soul as well, and then I have more to give back to them." 🗣️

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community, but its benefits are not limited to the act of composition. The process of collaborating, sharing, responding, reflecting, evaluating, and revising promotes a model for life-long learning for public school students as well as preservice music education students.

The School of Music at Acadia has been recognized nationally for the quality of its music education graduates. Annually, school boards from British Columbia to Newfoundland actively recruit our students prior to graduation. We believe this is because Acadia seeks to be aware of the changing educational needs of Canadian schools. Most recently Acadia has responded to technological change by adopting a university-wide laptop program that provides all students with requisite skills, methodologies, and experiences to use technology effectively in their chosen field of study. Partnerships such as this one encourage and foster a collaborative model of curriculum development that helps to link theory and practice. Herein lies the success! 🗣️

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