



Connect Charter School:

A Leader in PVA 1 of 3 Parts



Heather Millville
Connect Charter School
Drama Specialist

What makes PVA at Connect Charter School so unique? Our inquiry based leaning initiatives lends itself to the arts because it naturally encourages outside the box thinking. Connect Charter School is also lucky enough to have many of its students already involved in the arts as a part of their extracurricular activities as well as students who are diligent in developing their artistic talents. What really makes Connect Charter School's PVA program great are our PVA teachers! Andrew Bolen, Lorrie Emin and Heather Melville are specialists in their field and are all accomplished in what they are teaching. They have great connections in the arts community that allows them to tap into resources to enrich their disciplines with workshops and excursions. This article will be one of three parts to highlight our notable PVA program at Connect Charter School.

In the drama classes, taught by Heather Melville there are always new things to learn and gain for time spent in her classroom. In the beginning years, students focus on the basics of theatre. The grade 4 classes start by learning how to use the stage, how to develop characters and the art of storytelling. In grade 5, the students still focus on the basics that they learned the year before, but work mostly on story development by manipulating puppets with realistic movements while remaining in character.

The more intermediate skills are developed starting in grade 7, and drama becomes exciting for the students who are truly passionate about theatre as an art. These students have the opportunity to learn the art of clowning and the use of humour in theatre. They are also encouraged to dig deeper into character development and present more to the class. The grade 7s have the opportunity in term 3 to work on a film unit learning how to use cameras, how to storyboard and how to write a synopsis for film.

In Grade 8, the students work on monologues, speeches and radio plays. This year the students were individually challenged to write 'respect' monologues in



The grade 7s working
on their film unit



The grade 8s at The Beach recording studio

first person. This allowed students to become more aware of their emotions in order to create a truly personal piece. This was also some of the students' first time learning how to properly write in first person; however, that is not the only connection students make to their humanities curriculum. During the grade 8 humanities classes, one of their assignments is to write a radio play. The students who are in drama then have the opportunity to perform their plays with proper character voices, music and sound effects.

"I was really introverted in grade 4 when I first started drama and was super nervous about performing in front of my classmates. I quickly learned that no one cares what you do in drama and that you're free to be whoever you want to be. I think drama helped me be the more confident person I am today," states a grade 9 student.

During the student's last year in drama, the grade 9 classes are able to focus on specialize areas in theatre through scene work, playwriting and stage combat.

These specializations are never taught at a middle school level, and are more often taught to high school and university students majoring in theatre.

"People are always so surprised to hear I teach a stage combat unit," states Mrs. Melville, "if I have a group of students who I can trust, then I have no problem teaching these specialized units that are usually a success."

The biggest highlight for the drama classes at Connect Charter School this year was The Urban Jungle Book school play. Students from grades 7 to 9 rehearsed for four months before opening night. Joe Slabe, The Urban Jungle Book playwright, came to talk to the cast early on about character development and the importance of each part. On opening night, the entire original cast, the director and Slabe came to see the show and support our students.

Connect Charter School students have continued their talents for drama and theatre in their high school careers have been recognized for their high skills level and respect for the craft. During a recent tour of the PVA programme at Central Memorial High School, one of the instructors at Central Memorial was quoted saying "Connect Charter School students are always so prepared for our high level programme. They are usually the most composed and prepared for their entrance auditions."



Students creating leather masks



Grade 9 students learning to trust each other prior to stage combat unit.

The drama programme at Connect Charter School, not only helps students develop acting skills, but also prepares students to be extraordinary citizens.

“I always create my lessons, so that students learn transferable skills that can be applied to their learning at Connect and their future careers,” explains Mrs. Melville.

Drama teaches students self-confidence, problem solving and cooperation, as well as several other skills that can be applied to school, career and life. By taking risks in class, and performing for an audience, it teaches student to trust their ideas and abilities, which aids in the development of their self-confidence. To work on problem solving skills, students are taught improvisation, which

fosters quick-thinking solutions leading to greater adaptability skills in life. To develop strong cooperation skills, drama combines the creative ideas and abilities of all participants. This cooperative process includes discussion, negotiation, rehearsing and performing.

“Mrs. Melville is supportive, kind, and wonderful to me. She helped prepare me for my audition for the PVA program at Central Memorial High School, and now I can’t wait to start there in the Fall,” graciously explains a grade nine student.



The Urban Jungle Book performance

The success of Connect Charter School’s drama class would not exist without the safe and supportive environment Mrs. Melville creates by building trust with her students. It is her leadership and knowledge that encourages students to participate whole heartedly in each activity, and to recognize new skills within themselves that they would have not otherwise known they possessed.