

# **Musical Theatre in Schools: Searching for a Successful Model**

by

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BEd, Simon Fraser University, 2006

BGS, Simon Fraser University, 2005

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## **Abstract**

Musical theatre is a common discipline being taught in schools on Vancouver Island. Since there is no set curriculum in British Columbia, each school develops its own musical theatre curriculum. This study examines best practices when developing and running musical theatre programs in the high school setting. Using the qualitative method of multiple case-study analysis, the researcher interviewed four teachers at public secondary schools on southern Vancouver Island. Participants gave detailed accounts of how their musical theatre programs operate, including insights into their program as a whole, production details, learning outcomes and assessment. Each set of answers is examined as an independent case before being compared with those of the other participants. Results show that the teachers in the study operate their musical theatre programs in a very similar fashion.

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Finally, I'd like to thank DeeJay and Cameron who provided support on the home front while I was writing this project.

## **Dedication**

I'd like to dedicate this project to my son Cameron who has waited patiently for me  
to finish at the computer on many hot summer days.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

*I must study politics and war, that my sons may have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and navigation, commerce and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.*

*-John Adams*

### **Rationale**

What could be better for school aged children than a project that builds self-esteem, is full of energy and emotion, helps develop dedication and a good work ethic, creates a community of learners who are supportive and respectful of each other, and allows them to sing, dance, and perform? Children love musical theatre. At least I did when I was a child. I still love it and want to offer my students the same comprehensive, continuing opportunities that I received as a student.

I studied musical theatre in and out of school as a child. In elementary school, there was a musical performed by the entire school every year. This tradition continued (with different leadership) on a smaller scale through junior and senior high school, where I had the opportunity to participate in numerous musical plays. The program allowed students to develop their skills and confidence on and off stage, provided a safe community where we felt we belonged, and gave many of us the impetus to attempt a performing career. Musical theatre continues to have a strong influence on my lifestyle. I've participated in community theatre productions internationally and attended musicals in London's West End, North American touring productions, local professional companies, local amateur troupes, schools, and shows on Broadway.

I have worked on the production/direction side of several musicals at various schools and grade levels in my six years of teaching, but have received no formal training on how to direct and produce a musical. In these productions, the procedure for creating the musicals varied drastically. In my first teaching assignment, I was a part time drama teacher at Frances Kelsey Secondary, a school with a 15-year tradition of great musical theatre productions. In this assignment, I took on the role of vocal director in *West Side Story*, and *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*. At Frances Kelsey, musical theatre was a locally developed, Board Approved/Authorized course taught by three teachers (drama, band, and dance), during one curricular block and supplemented by after school rehearsals. I assisted in an extra-curricular capacity. The program was very robust with 70-80 students out of a population of 1000 participating as actors, musicians, or members of the stage crew.

The following year, I was assigned as a part time music teacher at an elementary school. There was another music teacher who directed the extra-curricular choir and taught most music classes. Involving only choir students, she mounted a short musical. I assisted with dramatic direction. There was no dancing and the music was recorded. About 16 students out of 300 participated.

In my third year of teaching, I taught a class of 13 grade three to five students full time. We rehearsed and performed a short musical where I assumed the roles of director, music director, and producer. The students led much of the creative process with my guidance. They choreographed the songs, blocked the scenes, and created sets as part of their participation. The rehearsals and

performances all occurred within class time and I was the only adult involved in the production.

In the spring of 2010, I returned to Frances Kelsey as the sole drama teacher. The original drama teacher had retired the previous summer and the current teacher left for personal reasons at spring break. I took on the responsibility of directing the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar (JCS)*, which was midway into production. The program at the school had changed dramatically. Since my assignment four years earlier, the dance teacher had retired, the band teacher had been reassigned, and the original drama teacher had also retired. For *JCS*, I was the only teacher involved. The music director was a parent and the choreographer was a student. Approximately 50 students participated in this show. At this point, musical theatre was still a curricular offering within the school, but the teacher availability for the course was greatly diminished. I returned to Frances Kelsey the following year, and the musical theatre program had diminished to the point where it was no longer curricular. I chose to direct the musical *Little Shop of Horrors*, but it was strictly extra-curricular and on my own time. I received the assistance of the band teacher with a portion of the vocal coaching, and this alleviated some of the burden of time and energy for me, but the show was very dependent on my leadership.

Out of my experience with musical theatre in four different schools, I can safely deduce that all the shows met with some degree of success. I would, however, characterize the musical theatre program at Frances Kelsey as being successful only in my first year. This is because the program had a history of producing great plays, there was staffing continuity from year to year, students appeared happy and

involved, and there was no evidence of teacher burnout. The other shows were stand-alone productions, which, although they had great value, would not be built upon in future years.

In my future practice, whatever that may be, I would like to develop a long-standing, successful musical theatre program, where students have a sense of accomplishment, audience members have a good time, and I don't suffer burnout as a result of my involvement. I would like to offer my students the opportunity to find success within the musical theatre genre year after year. In order to do this, I need to have a solid starting point.

It appears that research into musical theatre in education is quite sparse. Due to the fact that it does not fit under the single umbrella of either drama or music, but has elements of both, few researchers have studied the idiom. The majority of available material justifies why musical theatre should be included in schools and outlines how to mount a musical. I determined to delve further into the phenomenon of musical theatre in schools by examining the common elements of musical theatre programs to determine best practices.

Musical theatre is prominently produced by schools and displayed for the general public. Teachers are under a great deal of pressure to produce a "good show" because of this. Some of the hazards of this pressure include teachers losing sight of the clientele they are teaching and putting undue pressure on children, or losing sight of their own lives outside of school and suffering burnout. The musical could easily be successful financially or critically without engaging elements of a successful program as a whole or implementing best practices. Above all else, a

successful musical theatre program must create a healthy situation for both teachers and students. Successful musical theatre programs should allow both students and teachers to experience growth and should foster performances of high quality.

I found no research that had been conducted to determine the elements of successful musical theatre programs in schools. Boyes (2003) conducted a study to determine what students gain from a musical theatre program and the description of her program seemed to fit that of a successful one, but defining and determining best practices within musical theatre programs was not the aim of her research. The present study aimed to address the gap in the literature regarding success in musical theatre programs. It will hopefully benefit teachers who are interested in creating a musical theatre program as well as those who have an existing program by identifying best practices when mounting a musical or designing a program. Of course teachers have individual instructional styles of countless varieties. I, however, suspect that all successful programs have some standard elements that can act as guidelines for those wishing to create a program of their own.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics of school musical theatre programs and to determine best practices within such programs. The main research question was: What are the characteristics that make a public high school musical theatre program function successfully? This study aimed to act as a guide for those wishing to create a musical theatre program by determining best practices

and a theoretical base for those researching musical theatre education in greater depth.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The purpose of this study was not to justify musical theatre in education. Music and theatre are accepted components of the standard curriculum in British Columbia. It was expected that musical theatre should also be accepted, being a combination of both subjects. Musical theatre productions are performed in many secondary schools throughout the province on a yearly basis. In most districts, musical theatre courses are offered as Board Authority/Authorized courses in which rehearsals take place within instructional time in addition to being extra-curricular activities.

### **Assumptions**

It was assumed that musical theatre is good and even necessary in schools. Schools have musical theatre programs. For the purpose of this paper, it was assumed that musical theatre will continue to be a part of school offerings either as a Board Authority/Authorized course or as an extra curricular activity.

I have been heavily involved in musical theatre since childhood and therefore am intrinsically biased toward the inherent value of musical theatre and the benefits it provides to all who participate.

**Definitions**

For the purpose of this study, the term “musical theatre” refers to theatrical productions with acting, singing, and dancing as major components. At the high school level, a musical theatre program often, but not always, contains stagecraft, stage managing, property management, lighting, costume management, and sound design in addition to the three factors listed above.

The concept of a “successful musical theatre program” was assumed to denote a long-standing program in which musical theatre is produced in a way that students and teachers are fulfilled and experience growth, audience members enjoy the show, and teachers do not suffer burnout.

**Summary**

This chapter provided a rationale for this study on secondary school musical theatre programs. Along with a brief personal history pertaining to my experience with musical theatre, I outlined the rationale and purpose of this study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature associated with secondary school musical theatre, followed by the methodology and explanation of multiple case study analysis in Chapter 3. Individual cases are examined in Chapter 4 and cross-case analysis occurs in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, I present conclusions and implications for program development.

## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

### Introduction

Musical theatre is prominent in Canadian schools. Musicals are incorporated into the curriculum at every level from primary to senior secondary. As an integral part of the school experience for many students, musical theatre is a celebration of many art forms melded into one. This has been articulated many times in the literature (Bespflug, 2009; DeGroot, 2008; Handrigan, 1983; Marchand, 1989), but possibly most eloquently by Lee (1983): “Nowhere do we find a better conceived, more effective synthesis of all the fine arts. Nowhere do we find a medium more ideally suited to the interests and capabilities of high school students” (p. 41). A large population of teachers and students are passionate about musical theatre. Since musical theatre, however, solely belongs neither to music education nor drama education, it seems to be under-researched.

For the purpose of this literature review, I thought it prudent to not only research material on musical theatre in schools, but also to locate references on general musical theatre along with dramatic theatre. Common themes that arose were:

- 1) Rationale for producing and performing musicals in schools;
- 2) History of musical theatre;
- 3) Step-by-step instructions of how to direct and produce a musical; and
- 4) Possible show choices.

This review outlines these themes and their implications in determining the essence of a successful musical theatre program and developing best practices when creating a musical theatre program.

### **Why? Benefits of Musicals in Schools**

Many authors and researchers feel the need to justify the worth of musical theatre within schools. “Musical theatre is the only art form that brings all the arts together as one unified whole, unique from its individual components” (Degroot, 2008, p. 62). This is reason enough for some to include musicals in schools, but in a world of budget reductions, arts teachers need to have strong arguments for the advocacy of their programs. Since musical theatre is a fringe subject that does not always enjoy dedicated instructional time during curricular hours, teachers need to articulate clear justification to validate their programs. In an experimental study, Michel (1982) concluded that musicals increase musical ability. He argues: “It can be claimed that there was measurable development of an overall ability to perceive and appreciate music in secondary school students as a result of their involvement in a musical theatre program” (p. 61). In her article, Kindall-Smith (2010) determined that students “achieve group objectives such as memorizing, blending, balancing, and interacting with lighting, movement, scenery and the orchestra or the piano accompaniment” when performing a play. Musical theatre, as could be guessed, makes one a better musician and a better performer.

Musical theatre can also appeal to each of the multiple intelligences (Gotlib, 2005) or create an authentic arts experience:

By an *authentic arts experience*, I am referring to an experience that is not only about creating a final product, be that visual artwork or a musical performance, but rather, one that is also about “expanding our consciousness, shaping our dispositions, satisfying our quest for meaning, establishing contact with others, and sharing a culture”(Eisner, 2002, p. 3) as we go through the process of creation. (Bespflug, 2009, p. 45)

The benefits of musical theatre espoused by Boyes (2003), Handrigan (1983), Marchland (1989), Poliniak (2010), and Robinson (1990) can be distilled into these 11 points. Musical theatre:

- 1) provides a way of involving many students and teachers;
- 2) creates a sense of self-esteem in students by allowing them to accomplish something relatively independently;
- 3) offers opportunity to learn the value of self-discipline and working collectively;
- 4) develops self-confidence and stage presence;
- 5) aids in rapport between students and teachers;
- 6) allows for the learning of earlier styles of popular music;
- 7) offers the opportunity for experiencing live performance;
- 8) presents a training ground for musical theatre techniques;
- 9) produces positive publicity for the school;
- 10) encourages creative problem solving in dealing with difficult scores, and;
- 11) aids in the development of musical and dramatic technique.

It is clear that musical theatre often has a positive effect on students, teachers and the community at large, but should also be valued in and of itself for the authentic arts experience that it is.

### **A Brief History**

The American (and West End) musical as we know it originated around the middle of the nineteenth century on the heels of minstrel shows and vaudeville acts. It has taken on many forms over the last hundred and fifty years from light and sappy love stories to the pseudo-operatic shows by Gershwin and Gilbert and Sullivan to tragic “mega musicals” with massive budgets. In their theses, Binnema (1996), Boyes (2003), Handrigan (1983), Marchand (1989), and Perry (1989) give similar accounts of the history of musical theatre with varying amounts of detail. Although musical theatre does not have a long history, it is certainly a colorful one and one worth knowing, if a person is at all involved in the genre.

### **How to Mount a Show**

A large number of books in this review cover the topic of how to “do” a musical. They vary in perspective and length, but contain the same basic list of steps; namely:

- 1) select the musical;
- 2) analyze the content, characters, setting, subtext, and story of the show;
- 3) organize managers, venue, and other production personnel;
- 4) hold auditions and cast the show;

- 5) hold music, choreographic and dramatic rehearsals;
- 6) prepare costumes, sets, lights and microphones; and
- 7) perform the show for an audience.

Robinson (1990), Alberts, (1996) and Handrigan (1983) each give a brief outline of those seven steps, but do not go into much detail, as the production process is not their focus.

In his book on middle school musicals, Bobetsky (2009) provides a comprehensive guide to producing and directing musicals for middle schools. In it, he recommends that directors adapt music for the students when necessary, involve as many adults from the school community as possible, fundraise and organize the budget, and plan well in advance (among many other helpful instructions). Ratliff and Trauth (1988) and Novak and Novak (1996) have written books aimed at general amateur theatre directors and producers, but they can easily be used as guides for the educator involved in theatre productions. Preparing young actors to take on a large (or small) role in a musical can be a daunting task. Deer and Dal Vera (2008) have addressed this difficulty by creating a textbook that takes actors through the entire process of basic acting and singing technique, exploring characters, developing the correct style for the piece, and putting it all together. This guide is a comprehensive one meant for older actors, but aspects of it are invaluable for the musical theatre teacher who doesn't know where to start. Novak (1988) also wrote another guide from the point of view of the actor. This book can be used as a teaching tool to assist actors new to the stage. It includes guides for such things as warm-ups, audition etiquette, and expected rehearsal behaviour.

**What shows to mount?**

A common criticism of using Broadway material in schools is that often the music and lyrics are not appropriate for the age and maturity of the performers. A musical may have excellent subject matter, but be technically difficult for the students to sing (such as *West Side Story*), or it may have subject matter that is far too mature for the students (such as *Hair*). Junior high and middle school is a particularly difficult age group to cast in a show because of the changing voices of both the boys and girls. Handrigan (1983) compiled a list and descriptions of several musicals that are suitable for junior high. At the time of publication, he stated that there were not enough resources for middle school and junior high aged students. There are now, however, extensive titles available in the *Broadway Junior* and *Broadway Kids* collections from music publishers such as Hal Leonard or Musical Theatre International, in addition to the shows that he listed.

At the elementary level, Broadway shows are usually not appropriate due to their length, mature subject matter, difficult singing parts, and general sophistication of the material. Gotlib (2005) solves this problem by writing his own musicals. Wooland (2008) takes it a step further and collaborates with students to create a unique theatrical piece. I have found a large list of musicals written for this level through major music publishers such as Themes and Variations and Empire Music.

Secondary school students, with slightly more mature voices and bodies, are much easier to cast in shows. Challenges of singability and appropriate topic choice are, however, still present. Marchand (1989) gives a list and synopses of 40 musicals

that are suitable for secondary schools to produce and perform. From the perspective of producing community theatre, Engel (1983) gives a comprehensive list of many titles that were available in 1983. Each description includes a very brief plot synopsis, cast list, selected song titles and soundtrack listings. This list can also be helpful for teachers planning to stage a musical. For teachers planning a musical, the Internet is now an important source. We are now able to acquire titles, cast lists, synopses, and excerpts from both the script and libretto in a very short time from many different publishers.

Using a slightly different approach, Miller (1996) delved into the process of analyzing musicals for their content, story lines, hidden meaning, and subtext. He did a detailed analysis of 16 musicals. Rather than summarizing the plot and listing the songs in each of the musicals he examined, Miller provides a deep analysis as though preparing to direct each play. He wanted to give directors a place to begin.

As he explains:

This book isn't meant to hand directors ready-made musicals. It's meant to give them a starting point, things to consider, things to discuss with their music director, choreographer, designers, and cast. As a director, the fastest way to motivate a cast is to involve them in the creation of a vision and style for your show. (p. 5)

Miller sheds insight into the history, context, and motivation in his analyses in hopes that his work can act as a model for other directors to interpret shows in their own way.

Choosing appropriate musicals is a difficult task. Due to the apparent shortage of age appropriate, singable musicals, several authors have suggested teachers or students write their own shows for performance. For example, Handrigan (1983) suggests that teachers write their own musicals and gives an account of how he wrote one for a school at which he worked. He reported that he enjoyed having complete control over the range and content of the entire show. Concurring with Handrigan, Marchand (1989) takes this concept a step further and suggests that teachers could challenge students to write their own musicals based on folk songs or well-known stories (pp. 119-124.) Wooland (2008) gives explicit instructions on how to guide students in writing their own plays. Furthermore, he tells us, “creative pupils lead richer lives and, in the longer term, make a valuable contribution to society” (p.3). He states that drama is a creative process and writing plays is a wonderful way to help students connect with subjects and characters that are important to them. John (1971) has collected a number of stories from teachers who have written their own musicals or had their students write them. The stories are engaging and the music is age-appropriate.

### **The Other Side**

Musicals are an exhilarating and rewarding component of secondary school offerings. Students and communities benefit from performances and teachers have the choice as to whether or not to participate. Music and drama teachers, however, often have an extremely full schedule without taking on the added burden of a musical. According to Robinson (1990), “As in any decision making process, there

are always opportunity costs to consider. Using one's time to concentrate on one area obviously takes from the time and opportunity available for working on another" (p. 4).

With bands, choirs, trips, and fundraising all on top of their regular workload, music teachers don't always have the time available to put hundreds of hours into a production. The same is true of theatre teachers. According to Grote (1997), who is a theatre teacher and director, musicals tend to take the place of "real" theatre in high schools. He feels that staging more than one musical every three years will have a detrimental effect on a serious drama program.

Binnema (1996) identifies that when teachers direct a musical in addition to a full time workload, they face the possibility of burn out. She suggests:

If performing in secondary school musicals is without a doubt a valid educational opportunity, then musicals should not only be clearly identified as such in both the drama and music curriculum guides, but in-school hours should be allotted for the rehearsals. Only the performances would take place in the evenings, allowing more people to attend. (p. 98)

She identifies the fact that musicals are not considered a valid performing art because the BC curriculum does not name musical theatre in the Integrated Resource Packages. This marginalizes the entire discipline and forces theatre and music teachers to spend countless after school hours on their musicals rather than living a healthy, balanced life.

There is also concern that Broadway musicals are too difficult for young students. Marchand (1989) explains:

Several of the more traditionally popular Broadway musicals are not entirely appropriate for high school production in that they were initially created for professional performers who were usually much older than high school age musicians, singers, and dancers. As well, the Broadway musical often presents vocal range requirements that might strain the capabilities of high school singers. (p. 114)

We have a huge responsibility as teachers to ensure the safety of our students. If we choose a project that is potentially damaging to our students, it makes us irresponsible educators. We need to keep in mind that many of our students are also putting in extra hours and facing exhaustion. We need to provide the safest experience possible for them.

On a completely different tack, Cousins (2000) feels that traditionally offered musicals “not only offer a narrow view of drama but also upholds white, American culture and excludes others” (p. 86). She has noted the trend of typical musicals upholding the “all American” stereotype where there is little diversity, women are objectified, and characters are one sided. In some newer musicals such as *Avenue Q*, or *Miss Saigon*, these stereotypes are beginning to change, but many traditional musicals do contain misogynistic, stereotypical images of characters. Is that “white-bread” image the one we want to be projecting to the public and modeling for our students? Teachers must be aware of the messages being communicated when choosing a musical. Proper instruction and group analysis, however, will assist students in making smart choices about the content of the shows.

### **A Successful Musical Theatre Program**

The purpose of this literature review was to determine the generally recognized elements of a successful musical theatre program. Musicals are being presented in schools everywhere with varying degrees of success. Most often, students are left with a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment (Boyes, 2003). It is difficult, however, to identify the elements of a truly successful program. There are strong arguments in favour of musical theatre, and step-by-step guides for producing musical theatre shows in schools. There are many books that guide show selection, assist with analysis, and provide warnings to avoid burn out and exhaustion. The actual pieces of the puzzle that come together to form a truly successful program, however, remain elusive.

Poliniak (2010) interviewed four directors who gave their stories about their own successful programs. They seemed to agree that other adults including administration, faculty, parents, and community members need to be involved. The music needs to be singable and the topic engaging for students. One director suggested that young teachers/directors locate a mentor who will help them through the process of presenting a first musical. Gotlib (2005) reinforces the importance of collaboration and adult assistance:

I've asked colleagues and parents to assist with costume coordination, set design, set building, and even some of the staging. I have found that parents love being involved in such projects as they are contributing to the school community, sharing their expertise with others. There is an incredible wellspring of knowledge and experiences that parents and teachers can bring

to putting on a musical. This eases the director's load considerably as he/she can focus their energies on the presentation itself, leaving many of the other details to other responsible adults. (p. 35)

Staging a musical is a huge undertaking. A single adult cannot reasonably hope to take on a project as big as a school musical without a considerable number of sleepless nights. Many students at the secondary school level are very capable and responsible, but they cannot be expected to take on the role of an adult. Teachers need collaborators who are not fettered by the power imbalance of the teacher/student relationship.

From the anecdotal evidence in this review, it is clear that one of the elements of successful musical theatre programs is the capacity of the director to recruit willing and capable adult helpers. But what else does it take to create a wholly successful program? I took heart when I saw a heading in the index of a book that said, "10 hints to a successful program" (Grote, 1997). The hints, however, included vague and negative statements such as: "do good shows," "don't teach English," and "don't accept the dregs of school society into your program." Unfortunately, I didn't believe that these hints would be very helpful in investigating the components of a successful program.

## **Summary**

There has been limited research on musical theatre in schools. Although productions of musicals are prevalent, they fall into a grey area between the disciplines of music and drama. It is difficult to find research on musical theatre in

either of those subject areas, partially, I suspect, because it is not a pure version of either of them, but an altogether different art form that emerges when one blends all the performing arts together.

Much attention has been given to mounting a justification, and giving technical advice for musical theatre. It is a sad, but true state of affairs when art must be justified. It seems as though musical theatre advocates must work harder than their music and/or theatre counterparts to validate their particular discipline. This could be because it is a newer discipline, and it could be because it falls in between legitimized art forms, but it seems to be a fact reflected in the research. I suspect it will be in a setting where all the players (e.g. administration, Parent Advisory Council, arts teachers) feel a commitment to the discipline and feel justified in supporting the program, that it will be the most practical to identify best practices in successful musical theatre programs.

As far as history and instructions go, I'm sure that teachers of successful musical theatre programs are well aware of the background of their shows and the organizational steps of staging a show. I suspect that teachers in successful musical theatre programs will have plenty of experience putting on a play and choosing appropriate repertoire for their group of students. They may even write their own shows for their students, although it is a lot to ask of a person working full time and leading extra curricular activities to spend precious free time working on more school material.

On the side of the dissenters, Binnema suggests that high schools make musical theatre a locally developed course. This will probably be the case in a

successful secondary school program in which it is already an accepted course within the timetable, and includes extra rehearsals too. It is also understandable that some people may feel that their particular cultural voice is not being heard in traditional musicals. The content of musicals is beginning to change to reflect the diverse population of North America and elsewhere. One can only hope that the leaders of a successful program will be sensitive to their demographic and their audience.

The literature in this review hints at the best practices involved in the development of a successful musical theatre program without stating them overtly. Research is needed to pinpoint and identify exactly what it is that makes a musical theatre program great. The following chapter will outline the methodology used to collect information and conduct this study on musical theatre in schools.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

Instruction of musical theatre is widespread in British Columbia schools, many of which have long standing programs that produce a show or even two shows each school year. This study aimed to illuminate the essence of common and best practices employed by teachers leading such programs. Possible designs for this study included quantitative survey or qualitative case study approaches. A quantitative survey is classified as nonexperimental descriptive research. According to Phillips: “Descriptive research presents information on one group or compares factors between or among groups and determines trends, needs, or changes. It is a ‘snapshot’ of what is happening at the time the data are collected” (p. 155). With this study, I aimed to determine trends among the design and application of musical theatre programs in BC. A snapshot of general common practices, although illuminating, would not have provided a sufficiently detailed description of those practices. I turned instead to the narrative provided by qualitative inquiry to achieve the goal of this research. When starting this process, I had intended to carry out action research for this project, but on reflection, came to the conclusion that I could reach a wider understanding by interviewing other teachers who have developed musical theatre programs. The design of this study, therefore, falls under the umbrella of multiple case study.

In multiple case-study research, several cases are examined to determine truths about the cases as a whole. “The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition. The cases in the collection are somehow categorically bound together. They may be members of a group or examples of a phenomenon”

(Stake, p. 5-6). The cases in this study are teachers of musical theatre programs in British Columbia secondary schools. Case selection was based upon three criteria: 1) participants who teach at high schools with; 2) music/theatre departments that offer musical theatre programs within the curriculum; and 3) sites that have well-established programs. I identified four such programs and carried out semi-structured interviews of teachers involved with the programs. I located programs from three school districts in an effort to get as wide a sample as possible, since arts policies and program support vary at the administrative level from district to district. Interviews included main topics of: history of the program, structure of the program, procedures when mounting a musical, and learning outcomes/assessment strategies. Interviewees had the opportunity to read transcripts of their interviews to offer clarification and accuracy.

According to Stake (2006), analysis of each case as a separate unit is necessary to understand the scope of a collective case study. He states, "Each case to be studied is a complex entity located in its own situation. It has its special contexts or backgrounds" (p. 12). Therefore, it is important to analyze each case on its own merit before studying the parallel elements and oddities between cases. In keeping with Stake's suggestion, each case in this study was examined and analyzed to determine its own major themes before the cross case analysis was carried out.

Stake asserts that for multiple case studies, the optimum number of individual cases for study is between 4 and 10:

The benefits of multicase study will be limited if fewer than, say, 4 cases are chosen, or more than 10. Two or three cases do not show enough of the interactivity between programs and their situations, whereas 15 or 30 cases provide more uniqueness of interactivity than the research team and readers can come to understand. But for good reason, many multicase studies have fewer than 4 or more than 15 cases. (p. 22)

I kept to the low end of Stake's recommendation and decided to study four cases in detail in order to maximize the analytical value of the study, since I am the sole researcher in this study.

### **Procedures**

An application for ethics approval for human participant research from the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria was submitted prior to commencing research. Certificate of Approval # 11-370 was received September 8, 2011.

Subsequently, permission was requested from School District #61 to conduct the research. Ethics approval and project information were submitted to principals of all schools from that district involved in this study, who then signed their approval on a Principal Form for Research. Once these forms were complete, a Request to Use Public School Students or Staff in Research was submitted to School District#61. Approval was received on December 1, 2011 to commence research at two secondary schools. Ethics approval was not needed from School District #79 since interviews were conducted outside of curricular hours. Ethics approval was

also not needed for “Ben”<sup>1</sup> because he is a retired teacher and no longer affiliated with a school district.

I made some initial phone calls to schools to determine whether they had long standing musical theatre programs and subsequently emailed potential participants. Potential participants were also issued a formal invitation letter (see Appendix Two.)

Two theatre teachers, one current band teacher and one retired band teacher agreed to participate in the study and interviews subsequently occurred between September, 2011 and February, 2012.

### **Data Collection**

Open-ended interviews took place with all participants where the interviewer had a set of formal questions, but occasionally asked additional questions for clarification or to follow up on a promising answer.

I used Garage Band '09 by Apple Inc. to record the interviews. Subsequently, I played back the recordings and transcribed them to Microsoft Word documents. These completed transcripts were then sent to participants for clarification of interpretation and intent. Once final approval was granted from each participant, data analysis began.

### **Data Analysis**

Each case was studied as an individual entity under thematic headings of Program Overview, Production Details, and Learning Outcomes and Assessment. I examined the interview transcripts to determine details of each program and the

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant identity.

participant's role within the program. Next, I compared the cases to each other under the same thematic headings to determine similarities and differences between the programs. Finally, I compiled key findings from both the individual case studies and the cross case analysis and made some suggestions for further research.

### **Summary**

This study used the qualitative method of the multiple case study. I interviewed four band or drama teachers who are involved in long standing musical theatre programs on southern Vancouver Island. I conducted open-ended interviews with the participants before transcribing and analyzing the data collected. Chapter 4 presents analysis of the individual case studies.

## Chapter Four: The Cases

### Introduction

Four teachers from three districts participated in semi-structured interviews for this project. They were asked questions about their history with their respective programs, general questions about the structure of their program and specific questions about the details of how they mount a production. Two of the participants were music/band teachers and two were drama teachers. Ben<sup>2</sup> is a retired music teacher from Claremont School in Saanich School District #63, Simon is a drama teacher at Oak Bay Secondary in Victoria School District #61, Jeffery is a band teacher at Spectrum Community School in Victoria School District #61, and Matt is a drama teacher at Cowichan Secondary School in Cowichan School District #79.

Questions for the interviews were organized into several subheadings. In the interviews, themes that arose were: the program in general terms, individual production details, and learning outcomes/curricular implications. The interview data have been organized under the categories of *program overview*, *production details*, and *learning outcomes and assessment* for ease of reading. The *program overview* section outlines the individual teacher/participant's role in the program, the history of the program, program structure, and facilities. The *production details* section outlines the details of a particular production including show planning, budget, team meetings, technical roles, and procedures for rehearsals, performances,

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the participants.

and post-performance routines. The *learning outcomes and assessment* heading outlines how the participants evaluate their students.

## **Ben**

*The main one is the whole idea of team building. We are a family.  
We end up a family.  
-Ben*

### **Program Overview**

#### **Personal history**

Ben was the music teacher at Claremont Secondary in Saanich School District for 21 years. He retired from teaching public school in 2011. Originally from Ontario, Ben ran a not-for-credit extra-curricular musical theatre program at a school where he taught band. When he came to Victoria in 1990 to complete his Master's Degree at the University of Victoria, Ben was recruited by a drama teacher who had choreographed a show at the university. The other teacher, Sidney, had pioneered a musical theatre program at Claremont, which she single handedly kept running from 1986-1990. When Ben came on board, he became the musical component of the program and assisted in the productions.

Having studied piano in university, Ben found his background perfectly suited to aid in his preparation of singers for the musicals. He notes that he would often play the piano with the orchestra in the pit, and conduct from there. Ben cites the best element of being part of the musical theatre program as the community feeling. As he explained, "Working with the kids is fantastic, year after year. It really does become like a family."

Ben has a hard time identifying drawbacks to his participation in the program, but feels that one of the most difficult processes is to watch the disappointment of students who didn't get the role they wanted after auditions.

### **Program History and Structure**

When Ben began employment at Claremont, the musical theatre program usually mounted musical revues. Ben describes the rationale:

The reason was [that] we had a really large program. There were about 80 to 90, or even 100 kids in the shows that we did. Mostly girls. We'd have about 10 boys and 70-80 girls. And so the revue worked really well to get a whole lot of kids on stage doing choreography and singing... And that was the format we used for years.

Ben and Sidney created each musical revue by compiling a show from a composer or time period from Broadway's history. For the orchestrations, Ben would find an arrangement with a few instrumental parts and, "write in or sketch in, sort of enhance the music for kids in the program who were interested in playing something like trombone or bass."

When Sidney retired, Carl, the new drama teacher was hired and the duo began staging full musicals. Ben found this a relief from the time consuming job of compiling a whole musical revue from nothing because, "It's a lot easier to have a show written where you can just rehearse it."

In recent years, the production team has included Ben as music director, Carl as general director, and Chloe the dance teacher as choreographer. Ben took care of

the choral portion of the production as well as the pit orchestra, which was usually comprised of students. Carl was in charge of staging, technical considerations, and overall design, while Chloe organized scheduling, choreography, and costumes. Ben describes these roles as being defined by “gravity.” Each teacher was in charge of his or her own domain, but was happy to do any job that came up. Ben feels that one of the strengths of his program was the enthusiasm that came from the teachers. He explains, “We would be excited about what we were doing, the show itself, and sort of selling it to the kids. Very quickly the kids would run with it.”

Other adults who were involved included a lighting designer who was hired to create the “look” for the show, parent volunteers who assisted with costuming and set building, and a carpenter who was occasionally hired to supervise the building of the bigger set pieces.

Students who wanted to participate in the musicals at Claremont only needed to sign up. When asked about prerequisites, Ben jokingly said, “They have to be breathing in order to participate. A warm body is good enough.” There was an audition process for students who wished to have a speaking or singing role, but the course was open to anyone in Grades 9 through 12. The yearly musical was organized as a curricular course, but outside of the usual timetable. Students received 4 credits for being on stage and 2 credits for being in the orchestra. The orchestra and stagecraft classes ran after school as well and were for credit also. Ben recalls a time earlier on in the process when guidelines for participation were stricter:

When I first started teaching there with Sidney, Musical Theatre was only available in Grades 10,11, and 12. You couldn't take it in 9. In Grade 9 you had to take choir, you had to take dance, and you had to take drama. So you had the skill base. You got the raw skills and then you could apply them in musical theatre. And that was nice, but enrolment and class selection being what it is, that didn't last long.

He continues to describe that although it is logical to train in the three disciplines before putting them together, students had a hard time finding elective time for all those courses and the numbers in the program suffered.

Ben identifies several shifts in administration during his tenure at Claremont, some positive and some negative. He describes most of the administrators as supportive and helpful, but in times of a not so supportive administrator, he says the program survived and even did well because, "We had a very strong program. Lots of parents and people were really supportive of our program and our kids just kept coming."

Most recently, the program was given a lot of autonomy by administration. The Fine Arts Department made all the major choices for scheduling and finances. Ben explains:

We were really free which was wonderful. The flip side of the coin is that we had a lot of autonomy. We had to make sure kids were safe. We had an accident—a kid would get bonked by something in rehearsal. We had to really push safety, safety, safety.

Ben says he felt very supported by administration because of their hands-off attitude.

### **Facilities**

Claremont is lucky to have a 250-seat theatre on site. Rehearsals take place in the theatre for staging and all orchestra rehearsals take place in the band room. There is an orchestra pit within the theatre that allows for a live orchestra without drowning out the actors. Set construction is carried out on the stage and sets are stored in the wings. Between shows, the sets and costumes are stored in dedicated storage facilities within the school. The school has all the facilities that Ben feels are necessary for a successful program including dedicated rooms for band, dance, and drama, but he would have liked for them to be adjacent to each other for ease of access.

### **Production Details**

Musical productions at Claremont were staged once a year. Students in Grades 9-12 were welcome to participate in the theatrical productions, which were performed in May. To choose the next show, the production team assembled in March or April to plan the play for the following year. Ben would ensure in the spring that the rights to the show were available and that he could get the materials for the show before school began in September. On the first day of school, students were expected to come to rehearsal after school and Ben would teach some of the bigger numbers. The team would proceed with casting in the month of September

and would begin rehearsing in earnest at the end of the month. Although the preparation for the yearly musical at Claremont took place outside of curricular hours, all students who participated received course credit. There were at least three classes dedicated to the musical including a performance course, a stagecraft course, and a course composed of the orchestra that ran rehearsals three afternoons a week. Altogether, there were often over 100 students who participated in the musical. The entire process of mounting a musical at Claremont from start to finish took approximately one year.

### **Budget**

Ben cites the typical budget for a musical as being around \$25,000. In this budget, most of the money came from ticket sales, which cost \$15 each. Ben's school did not give a special rate for students or seniors, but instead had a "cheap night" on a weekday where all tickets cost \$10.

### **Production Team Meetings**

Production team meetings for the shows at Claremont were not usually planned. Ben describes the meetings as occurring,

Usually right after rehearsal, really on the fly, we'd get together... The biggest meeting would be planning the show in June and then the whole thing around auditions, but once the show got going, we just did our own thing. We'd meet really quickly to touch base, but it's really [integrated into the rehearsals]. It's not like we had giant meetings.

Ben identifies that a challenge with these unstructured meetings was the difficulty in making decisions involving the whole team. Carl was often busy preparing other productions within the school, and it was difficult for Ben and Chloe to find the time with him to make large artistic decisions.

### **Rehearsals**

Rehearsals occurred outside the timetable at Claremont and continued for the entire school year. Ben explains, “We’d go at the end of the day from 3:30-5:30 every Tuesday and Thursday. And the orchestra was Friday.” He goes on to state that the orchestra did not begin rehearsals until January, because of the prohibitive cost of score rental. Ben would help with the vocal training for the show for the first few months, but when the orchestra began rehearsals in January, he spent the three afternoons rehearsing with them.

Claremont is fortunate to have a stage dedicated to the theatre program at the school, so rehearsals took place on the stage for blocking and choreography, and the orchestra rehearsed in the band room.

### **Performances**

Musical theatre performances at Claremont were very intense. Ben describes the “run” as consisting of 10-12 shows over two weeks. He states, “We would have our preview, dress rehearsal, opening night, and 10 shows. So I guess 10 shows and 2 previews.” In the two-week period, they would have a rest on Sunday and Monday where they did not perform the play. The students, however, were exhausted by the

end of the run. Ben did not double cast or have understudies, but he described a couple of incidents where the leads were not able to perform and others in the cast and crew came together to take up the roles that had been vacated. To assist students in getting the rest they needed, Ben would excuse instrumentalists from early morning band practices if they were in the play. His counterpart, Sidney, would have very low key dance classes where students would watch dance videos or musical theatre movies instead of their usual routine. Regarding student exhaustion, Ben states, “basically it was really hard. A lot of the kids [got] sick. They’d have midterms and a lot of tests and things. It was hard.”

### **Backstage and Technical Routines**

Students ran the entire musical theatre program at Claremont with three key teachers at the helm. During performances, Ben was in the orchestra pit conducting, so it was up to Carl and Chloe to keep the rest of the show under control. Carl taught stagecraft, as well as directing the shows. He was in charge of leading the students who ran lights, sound, and acted as stagehands. Ben says:

I did stagecraft for a while but it was harder because I didn’t know the show that well. So, Carl would handle that, and Chloe would handle the ushers and costumes. Ticket sales [were handled by] the bursar who does the accounts. So, it was us, the team.

The way Ben describes it, the three worked as a team to ensure that students were prepared and capable of pulling off a major production once a year.

## **Post Performance**

After the final performance, the team at Claremont had a couple of unique traditions. Ben explains:

We'd have a cast party on the last night. We'd be done at 10 o'clock. We'd do a "strike;" I'd get the orchestra pit out immediately. We wouldn't strike the set, but then we'd have a cast party with pizza and stuff right on the stage...

Another great tradition was that the crew would do a send off of the show for the actors. Because they [knew] all the politics and all the tweaks and stuff.

So they would write a script that did a huge send off of all the ridiculous moments in the show, the funny things, the ironies and such. And it would be really good fun.

He explains further that each person would clean up his own mess and the stagecraft class would be in charge of striking the larger set pieces.

## **Learning Outcomes and Assessment**

The musical theatre courses at Claremont are curricular, so students each received a mark at the end of each reporting period. Ben was unable to articulate the learning outcomes for the course, but he described the assessment process as being a collaborative collection of anecdotal evidence from all three teachers. He explains:

We didn't usually give any grades until the very end when the show actually went up. But we'd sort of keep track on an ad hoc basis [on] how the kids were doing. I'd be polled as to how the kids were doing in chorus, you can

kind of tell. It would often be the same in choreography and stuff, so we'd come up with a mark at the end. That was usually how we did it.

He follows up with a comment on how similar each of the teacher's marks were for most students. He felt that the collaborative aspect of the marking process made it a valid one.

Ben was a member of the production team for the musicals at Claremont for many years and through several large changes. Despite the fact that musical theatre was a small fraction of his assignment as band teacher, Ben describes musical theatre as holding a special place in his career:

I loved the band and choirs, but I always felt that the heartbeat of the Fine Arts Program was the musical theatre program. Partly because I was working with the other two teachers and we worked very well as a team. I felt grounded in the musical theatre.

## **Simon**

*We pride ourselves in cooperation to define the programs for the student as a whole person. Not a 'musical' student or a 'fine arts' student, or an 'athletic' student.*  
-Simon

### **Program Overview**

#### **Personal History**

Simon teaches drama, stagecraft, and musical theatre among other courses at Oak Bay Secondary School. He has been the Head of the Fine Arts Department for three years and worked as the musical and stagecraft director for the musicals for the three prior years. He has a Bachelor of Music in Music Education and he feels

that his training “falls beautifully into the path of musical theatre.” Simon took on leadership of the program because, “it is part of our Fine Arts Department and I arrived when there was a need for a Fine Arts teacher to take over the program. I was there at the right time.” Simon enjoys the process of creating musical theatre because of the satisfaction he gets out of it. The major drawback of his participation in the program is the investment of time that takes him away from his family during production time.

### **Program History and structure**

The musical theatre program at Oak Bay has been running for more than twenty years. During that time there have been several shifts in teacher leadership and in school administration. In the six years that Simon has been at the school, the biggest shift was his move to become department head.

Prior to Simon’s tenure as general director of the program, musicals at Oak Bay High functioned under a community organization called the *Oak Bay Theatre Society*. Under this model, the program had many people from the community involved and according to Simon it “wasn’t based on the school model; it was based on a community model.” Under the umbrella of the society, the cast consisted of members of the community and students. He explains:

It was quite active prior to my arrival at the school. When I arrived it was in its dwindling years, but it still had an influence on our educational programs.

When that was removed out of the school the educational component became just that. It was structured as a school project. That was a productive change to the benefit of the students.

Since this change, musical theatre has been a curricular course, for students only, that runs outside of the timetable from September through March.

The Fine Arts Department works collaboratively to mount productions at Oak Bay Secondary. Administration plays a supportive role in the productions, and the Art Department occasionally assists with set design and decoration. Currently, the production team for the program consists of Simon, Sarah the choir director, Angela the dance teacher, Jeremy the band teacher, and Ms, G, a social studies teacher. Simon explains their roles:

It falls basically into our teaching areas. Our choir teacher is extremely gifted in musical theatre and vocal development. She does the chorus work, works with the soloists. Our dance teacher does the choreography of course. I do the pit orchestra. I do the staging. I'm the director. And the band teacher does some of the preparation of the orchestra, but I do the majority of the orchestra prep. And Ms. G does costumes.

Simon is the only teacher who has musical theatre as part of his assignment whereas the others volunteer their time to participate in the program. He describes decision making as working on a "consensus model, but given that I have the accountability for the educational continuity of the program, I have the final call, being the teacher on record." He concedes that the dance teacher and choir teacher

are in charge of their own domains and there is much discussion over the artistic direction of each musical.

Simon has had the same administrators at the school since his arrival six years ago. He feels supported by them in that they assist with building budgets, but are not directly involved in the program otherwise. Simon is responsible for scheduling of rehearsals and performances and the administration allows him the autonomy to make the best choice for the program and ensures that other groups do not use the theatre during that time.

Students in the musical theatre program at Oak Bay have the choice to participate in one of several classes to contribute to the show. Actors and orchestra members take care of the performance aspect of the productions and are supported by students in the Fine Arts Leadership and stagecraft classes. As Simon explains, “The Fine Arts Leadership contingent are responsible for all the advertising for the show, front of house, tickets, ticket sales, and programs. They take care of every part of the business side of the show.” According to Simon, the stagecraft students “work together with me on all the set design and building, lighting design, and sound design. I lead with the basic design and we work from there.” Along with these four groups of students, there are approximately ten more students who assist Ms. G. with the costuming of each show. All of the courses are for credit, but none occur within the timetable. Simon explains, “Given the size of our school and the number of offerings within the timetable, it’s the best way to go about it.”

Prospective actors in the musical must undergo a rigorous audition process for the shows. According to Simon:

Everyone auditioning must have an organized audition time, must sing a Broadway showpiece, must have an accompaniment (either live or on a cd,) and they must learn a dance piece and be evaluated on their ability to learn that dance.

Even those who wish to have a chorus role must still participate in the individual audition process and from there the most promising actors move on to callbacks which can take up to five hours and include pairing people to see how they work together in scenes.

To demonstrate their commitment to the show, Simon requires that his students

Sign a performance contract that lays out their responsibility. And their parents must sign it as well so they know exactly what their children are being involved in. And the schedule is right there so they know exactly what they need to do. Students also understand their parts and they accept their parts. It's all right there.

Simon sees this as a preventative method of avoiding scheduling conflicts and determining whether students and their families are committed to the rehearsal and performance process.

## **Facilities**

Oak Bay Secondary has a 450-seat theatre dedicated to the drama program at the school. Rehearsals are staged in the theatre for blocking, but rehearsals for choreography and music rehearsals take place in the dance room and choir room

respectively. There is a place to build sets in the basement, but as the show becomes closer, sets are moved up to the stage where they are completed. There is considerable storage for props and costumes on site, so Simon finds it useful to reuse both.

Oak Bay Secondary School has recently been granted 63 million dollars to build a new school. Simon anticipates the construction of another 450-seat theatre that has a dance room, band room, choir room, and drama room all in the same pod. Simon explains his involvement in the design process: "It's my masters program, leadership in school building. I've been Fine Arts rep on the school building committee for the last four years." He defines the new facility as "an awesome opportunity to improve our program," one that will include an orchestra pit and other things that he feels are missing from the current facility.

### **Production Details**

Oak Bay Secondary stages a musical theatre production twice a school year. The senior production is the major musical that occurs in March, and the junior musical is a scaled down version for grade 9's. The senior production is announced in June, which allows time for students to prepare for their auditions in September. When choosing which show to mount, Simon says, "We take into consideration, first and foremost the orchestra because our orchestra is strictly students. We don't hire any outside musicians." After that, he looks at the students that he knows will be on stage for male/female distribution and singing roles. There are approximately 100 students who participate in the senior program on any given year. Simon explains,

“On stage, there are between 50 and 60 usually. Orchestra is 20 to 27, crew is about 12, costumes are 10, and so we’re looking at easily 100 kids.” With enrolment numbers this large, Simon wishes there were a way to allow for the other teachers involved to be paid for their service. The entire process from choosing the musical to performance takes approximately ten months.

### **Budget**

Simon describes the budget for his shows as being raised “strictly through ticket sales.” He anticipates a budget of \$10,000 to \$13,000 for each show and states, “The numbers usually come in virtually the same every year. It just depends on how you spend them.” He constructs the show budget himself by looking at the budget from the previous year and adjusting the numbers accordingly for the current show. Tickets cost \$10 for students and children and \$12 for adults. For the junior show, tickets cost \$5 each.

### **Production team meetings**

Simon schedules production meetings monthly in September and October, and weekly from November through March. He and the production team are given spares in kind, so the meetings occur during school hours. The topics covered include “scheduling for rehearsals, specific performance issues, budget,” and “social aspects of the musical, any problems that are coming up which inevitably revolve around [student interaction] and whatnot.” The entire teacher team participates in these meetings to formulate “game plans” for the upcoming performance.

## **Rehearsals**

Simon schedules rehearsals on a sliding schedule. In September, the team completes the casting for the show and rehearsals begin in early October and run through the end of February. Simon describes the process:

We normally rehearse [from] 3:30- 6:30 on Wednesdays. That's for the months of October and November. Then in December it starts Wednesdays and Fridays for the same time period. Six hours a week. And then January is the same, six hours a week, but the principals get together on weekends and whatnot. Then in February it's full pedal to the metal. But it's not outrageous. It usually ramps up around the Pro D day on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February.

Simon's challenge is to make sure that communication is strong between himself and the other teachers during the rehearsal process so everyone will know what they are working on. He says, "it does take time because we have such a large cast that choreography does take a long time to get together."

## **Performances**

The routine at Oak Bay Secondary is to stage the senior musical in the first week of March. The show is performed once for the middle schools in the catchment area as a dress rehearsal matinee and then seven more times in the evening. Simon has attempted two different models for performance frequency. The old model was to perform on seven consecutive evenings, but he found that students were exhausted at the end of the run, so now they perform 3 nights on one weekend

and 4 nights the following week. When asked further about student exhaustion, Simon describes students in previous years as missing 3 to 4 weeks of school because of the musical. He states:

There was a huge amount of tension at the school. We are now very thoughtful of the fact that kids need to be in academic classes. And they are scheduled such that they are given days off that they know in advance. And we are very thoughtful of the fact that they are young adults and they haven't got the stamina. So that needs to be taken into consideration also. We can't be dragging the students out of other classes because of our program.

He does not double cast, but he does train understudies for the principal roles in case of an emergency. The understudies prepare as much as the leads, but do not get a chance to perform unless the corresponding lead actor is unable to perform.

### **Backstage and technical routines**

Simon is very proud of the responsibility that his students assume for backstage duties in his productions. The stagecraft class is open to anyone from Grades 9 to 12, but he usually entrusts the older and more experienced students with the roles that require more responsibility. He describes the shows as being entirely student run. "We have a stage manager and two assistant stage managers. When the show is running, I'm the only adult in the house. They run the booth and backstage is strictly run by students."

Students in the stagecraft class are in charge of set design, lighting design, and properties management with Simon's guidance. He allows the students to

choose their role in the show depending on their level of responsibility and commitment to the show. He states: "I'm always very impressed by their ability to take on responsibility when it comes to running the actual show."

### **Post performance**

After the final performance, the team holds a celebration in the lobby of the theatre with cake, flowers, and speeches. All students involved in the musical are then required to return to the school on Sunday morning to "strike" the show. Simon elaborates:

On Sunday we arrive at 10 o'clock. Well, I arrive at 8, but everyone in the show arrives at 10 and we do not leave until it's done. Everything must be put away, all equipment is put away, sets are stored and all electronics are put away. Nobody leaves until it's all done.

The production team has one final meeting with an administrator and the production crew to debrief the show. Simon describes this as talking about the "triumphs and follies" of the show.

### **Learning Outcomes and Assessment**

As the courses in the musical theatre program at Oak Bay are curricular, all students are graded on their performance. Simon describes his assessment as an "overall, kind of holistic point of view. We are looking at the overall working of the show, how the kids are interacting, and how the jobs are getting done."

He cannot state specific learning outcomes for the courses, but he offers, “It may be naïve and it may be lacking in creativity, but if a group of 100 kids can put a show together, they have met any learning outcome that could possibly be articulated.”

Simon grades his students generously but does not let students take advantage of this grading process. He bases the grades on the performance of the individual student, so if someone is not pulling her weight, she will get a lower mark. He does, however, say that most students receive an A based on “the expectation that everyone in that production wants to be there and is working to their highest level of capacity.” He hopes that his students will develop lifelong memories of the performance. He concludes, “When they are approaching middle age, if they can remember standing on stage at Oak Bay Secondary School, and the feeling they got as the curtain opened or closed, I’ve done my job.”

## **Jeffery**

*We’ve never really talked about it, but we try to instill that respect in all three (or nine) disciplines that we teach.*

*- Jeffery*

### **Program Overview**

#### **Personal History**

Jeffery is the Director of Bands at Spectrum Community School. He teaches several different bands along with directing the orchestra for the school musical. He has been involved with the musical theatre program for 4 years and has been teaching band at the school for 6. Jeffery’s training lies in secondary instrumental

music, which he feels is helpful in his current position. He describes the experience as being, “very helpful in terms of the teaching aspect for rehearsing a pit orchestra of kids. Brass, woodwind, strings, percussion; Usually it’s a large ensemble.”

When asked why he teaches musical theatre in schools, he exclaims, “I love it!” He continues, “It rounds out what the kids do and adds an extra dimension to what they might be doing in concert band or jazz band. It’s a lot more challenging.” Jeffery enjoys leading the instrumental portion of the musical theatre program because of the pride involved in watching his students take the journey from “the most brutal sight reading you could ever have,” to “the point when they are supporting their friends on stage and playing all the music. It’s great to watch the musical growth and watch the way they can transfer that to their other ensembles.”

The main drawback to his participation in the program is the investment of time it takes. He describes the school musical as falling right into music festival season and performing a spring concert for his other bands within the same week. He confesses that, “it’s really mentally draining, being on every single night sometimes four or five nights in a row.”

### **Program History and Structure**

The musical theatre program has been running at Spectrum for over 30 years. Jeffery describes the program as having “been in various forms. This is probably the strongest it has ever been.” Over the years, there have been several shifts in teacher leadership, but Jeffery explains, “The team we have right now is probably the longest operating team in terms of teaching the cast and vocals and such... They’ve

got it down to an art.” Out of the current production team, Jeffery has been there for the shortest period of time.

The majority of teacher involvement in the musical theatre program at Spectrum is drawn from the Fine Arts Department. The Art Department helps with set design and painting, and the Business Department is in charge of programs. Currently there is both a junior and a senior stream in the Musical Theatre Department with students in Grades 9 and 10 participating in the junior musical and students in Grades 11 and 12 participating in the senior musical. Jeffery is only involved in the senior musical.

When Jeffery arrived at the school, the orchestra was compromised of staff members and adult community members. The music director of the shows was an English teacher who had taught band in the past. He continued to lead the orchestra until Jeffery created a course called “Music On Stage” so students could play the music. He explains:

I guess I got kind of frustrated because the kids should be doing this. Before I came along it was all pros or contracted out, or alumni. And I thought that the kids should be doing this. The kids are on stage, so they should be in the orchestra too.

The production team for the musicals at Spectrum is currently comprised of three main players: Terry the drama teacher, Lori the dance teacher, and Jeffery who teaches band. Terry is the general director for the shows. He acts as vocal director, stage director, stagecraft teacher, and major decision maker. Lori does the choreography and assists in the major decision-making. Jeffery’s domain is the

orchestra for which he has sole responsibility. For the junior musicals, Terry and Lori switch roles. Lori becomes the general director and Terry leads the music including the band. Other adults who are involved peripherally are the art teacher who assists with set construction, the Business Department whose students design the programs and the office staff who print them. There is also a teacher who does “headshots” for the actors, and another retired teacher who volunteers as a consultant for set design, lighting design, and other technical concerns. Terry’s mother volunteers her time as costume mistress. She enlists the help of parents who are able to assist her in creating the costuming for the shows.

Jeffery describes the organization of the production team as each teacher being in charge of his or her own domain. He notes:

I guess we look at the overall goal, which is putting on the show. We kind of keep our roles separate. Terry works with the cast and singers and Lori works with the choreography. Those don’t really overlap. If Terry is blocking, he’s blocking. If Lori needs to do choreography on a large number, then all the kids are there. I keep the orchestra separate from the actors until about January when we all combine to do a “Sitzprobe”<sup>3</sup> with the cast... I guess it’s a very slow integration of the three pieces together. And then we start looking at the big picture and honing it while we keep rehearsing.

Jeffery leaves all the major decision making to Terry, while he focuses on the instrumental part of the musical. Jeffery describes the process thus: “In terms of Terry as the director, it’s his show and he calls the shots.”

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<sup>3</sup> A seated rehearsal where the singers sing with the orchestra, usually for the first time.

The musical theatre program at Spectrum is comprised of a number of curricular courses that fall both within and outside of the timetable. According to Jeffery:

Our junior musical class is in two periods within the timetable in first semester. Our senior musical is a linear class that runs Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday after school. The pit orchestra runs Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday after school as well.

The stagecraft class takes care of the technical aspects of both these musicals and several other non musical plays throughout the year. It is a linear class that is scheduled within the timetable. Jeffery describes the senior production as being entirely student run aside from his role as conductor and Terry's supervision in the wings or the sound and lighting booth. If there are musical parts that are extremely difficult or if the score calls for an instrument that the school does not have in a particular year, Jeffery will spend extra time giving students private lessons or transcribing a part for a different instrument.

Students wishing to participate in the musical at Spectrum may audition to be in the cast or sign up for the Stagecraft course. Jeffery handpicks the students he feels are technically capable of being in the orchestra for the musical. Those wishing to secure a major acting role are expected to attend open auditions and then return for callbacks. Jeffery says, "Sometimes the kids are called back two or three times before the decision is made." The panel of adjudicators for casting include Jeffery, Terry, Lori, and according to Jeffery, "Another two or three teachers who may have done musical theatre at another school or whatever. It's kind of open to a small

group of people.” This small group is only involved in the audition process and not in the rest of the show.

Administrative involvement in the program at Spectrum is limited, but supportive. Jeffery explains that they are generous with funding and FTE allotment, but not involved in any other capacity. He elaborates, “It’s actually quite nice to have the ‘hands off’ approach.”

### **Facilities**

Spectrum is fortunate to be equipped with a 284-seat theatre with retractable seating. Rehearsals take place within the theatre for the actors and the orchestra rehearses in the band room. When the theatre is arranged for the musical, some seats are removed to make space for the orchestra pit and there are 220 seats available for audience members. The school is well equipped with storage areas for props and costumes. Jeffery clarifies, “We have a prop room that’s locked off from students... and I know for some of the larger pieces that we tend to use year after year, they have a storage canister outside in the back.” In a perfect world, Jeffery would like to have a real orchestra pit but he is very pleased and grateful for the facility they do have for the productions.

### **Production Details**

Spectrum stages two musicals a year. The senior musical with Grades 11 and 12 students usually “goes up” in the first week of March. The junior musical is set for mid-January. Because Jeffery only participates in the senior musical, I will restrict

my comments to this production. Terry usually selects the show in the summer months and then consults with Lori and Jeffery before announcing the show. When looking at prospective shows, Terry takes into account the talent of the students he knows will be with him and the difficulty of the score for Jeffery. Altogether, the timeline for mounting a show at Spectrum is approximately 10 months from start to finish.

### **Budget**

At Spectrum, the members of the production team for the musicals are each responsible for their own working domain. At the time of interview, Jeffery did not know what the typical budget was for a production at Spectrum. He subsequently asked Terry, the director, who responded with this email:

We run somewhere around \$12,000. In terms of expenses, the biggest are royalties & orchestration/script rentals at around \$4,000. Renting wireless mics [costs] around \$1,000 and costumes around \$1,500. Sets cost around \$1,000-\$1,500 depending on the show. Printing costs [posters, programs, tickets] are around \$1,500 and advertising is around \$500-\$1,000. The rest are little bits here and there. In terms of revenue, most is from ticket sales.

We also pick up a bit from PAC requests and I sometimes put other budget requests in for stuff that will be of long-term benefit but also just so happens [amazingly] to be of immediate need for the current show.

Tickets for productions at Spectrum cost \$10 for adults and \$8 for students and seniors.

### **Production Team Meetings**

The production team for Spectrum musical theatre meets irregularly throughout the process. Jeffery states that they usually meet on ProD days after workshops and during lunchtime. Typical topics are casting and promotion. Jeffery explains, "I guess the biggest topic that we discuss is promotion and how we are going to get the info out. How are we going to make enough money? That's really it. There's not a formal organization. "

He feels that the production team works well with Terry overseeing things while Lori and Jeffery take care of their own areas.

### **Rehearsals**

Rehearsals for the shows take place Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons from three until five o'clock. Jeffery describes the timeline:

In September the first few weeks are quite quiet. Then we start auditions in the last week of September, first couple of weeks of October. Usually by mid or late October the musical theatre class is running and the pit orchestra is rehearsing. Then our shows run in the end of February and early March.

Altogether, rehearsals last for 5 months and when the show is over, the class is considered complete. The orchestra and cast rehearse separately for the entire rehearsal process except for one sing through (the Sitzprobe) about a month before the performance. The next time the whole ensemble works together is the dress rehearsal.

## **Performances**

There are 6 or 7 performances for the senior musical at Spectrum. Jeffery describes the pattern as, “Usually 3 nights the first week and 4 nights the second. Jeffery explains that his students are exhausted at the end of the run, but are expected to continue with school and other ensembles. He states:

The students are exhausted. We do stop rehearsing so they have a break between the end of school and the show, but they are tired. I do feel for them, especially the kids in band, because we finish a show that night and the next morning they’re on the bus to a festival. Then they are expected to go to class and do the show again the next night. I guess they are just told to make it work.

Students are expected to work hard during the “crunch” period at Spectrum, but are released from the course when performances are complete.

## **Backstage and Technical Routines**

The stagecraft class at Spectrum runs within the timetable, and students in the class are responsible for all the technical aspects of the show. Terry designs the big ideas and then, according to Jeffery, leadership flips to being student led. Terry designs the sets and lighting, but Jeffery states:

There is a lot of student input. He gives the general idea to the stagecraft kids and they take it from there. He makes suggestions for adjustments and such... but I think the majority of [the props and sets] have been built by students.

## **Post Performance**

After the final performance, students and adults each hold their own celebrations that are exclusive of the other group. At the end of the performance, Jeffery requires that his orchestra students return all their equipment, including chairs and stands, to the band room, but then they are free to leave. Jeffery states that Terry's stagecraft class organizes the cleanup. He explains:

I think in the weekend after, sometimes spring break, Terry will come in with a crew of kids. It's different each year. Sometimes the stagecraft kids do it all and sometimes Terry will come with a group of kids to clean it up.

As the final night often coincides with Spring Break, there is no debriefing with the students or post-production team meeting.

## **Learning Outcomes and Assessment**

When crafting the course description for his Board Authorized "Music on Stage" course, Jeffery was required to develop learning outcomes for his students. Although he was not able to articulate them during the interview, he says, "I looked a lot at the other courses. There are a lot of similar outcomes to the concert band and jazz band learning outcomes." Jeffery hopes that his students will gain confidence in what they do. He elaborates:

There is a big sense of accomplishment once the show is done and even nightly. They high five each other, they've got their little routines... It becomes that family aspect. And they do support each other. It's interesting to see the musical theatre kids support the band kids and the band kids

support the musical theatre kids. Most of the year they are very separate, but when we get to a show it's quite the team effort.

Jeffery describes his assessment practice as very subjective and anecdotal.

He continues, "I don't run it like a regular band class with the formal testing. We are at a dead run rehearsing until it goes up." He mainly assesses the students on their attendance, their ability to play the works and their dedication to performances.

Jeffery concludes with a parting thought about the production team at Spectrum:

I feel very fortunate to work with these guys. I learn a lot from them.

Everybody is very understanding of the way things work. I rant to my kids about keeping the dynamics down because I tell them they aren't as important as the kids on stage and the dance teacher will turn around and tell the dancers they owe the orchestra their lives because without the orchestra they'd be nothing. It kind of goes back and forth.

## **Matt**

*The form is a useful form of story telling. I tell my students this all the time. You can get an audience to a certain place with text alone, performance alone. But sometimes you want to push them somewhere else. The application of music to storytelling allows us to do that.*

*- Matt*

### **Program Overview**

#### **Personal history**

Matt is the drama and film teacher at Cowichan Secondary School. He has held that position since 1995. Matt is trained as a teacher, has extensive

performance experience with theatre groups and is currently working on his Master's degree in theatre production.

When Matt arrived at Cowichan, there had been no musical theatre productions for 12 years. At the time, Matt and the band teacher determined that they would like to do a musical theatre production. When they approached the administration with the proposal, they were supportive. Matt explains, "Musicals were really what the admin at this school wanted at that time because they sell well in the community. So we decided to do *Cabaret*."

Matt finds the process of putting on a musical extremely rewarding and different than teaching other classes. He notes, "You learn a lot about yourself and the kids. In theatre, like music, you are able to work with the entire child as a person." He continues, "I've seen growth for sure, in thinking for sure: in Social Studies or Psychology. But not personal growth the way that I would see in a production block."

Matt is willing to invest the personal time required to stage musicals because of the growth and community building he sees in his students. He describes the drawbacks as personal only: "In terms of massive investment of energy, brain space, and emotional space that is required to do it... If there is a cost to me, it's that time that is eaten up from my family time."

### **Program History and structure**

Cowichan Secondary School has a long history of dramatic performances although they have been intermittent over the years. Matt asserts that there has been a theatre program at the school since its opening. He explains:

You can find reference at Cowichan Secondary to a theatre program running right back to the opening of the school. The first annual I can find for the school is 1948. There is a clear reference to theatre at the school in 1948. There had, however, been no school productions in the 12 years prior to Matt's tenure at the school. Currently, musical theatre is a curricular course that runs within the timetable for half of the school year.

During the majority of Matt's 15 years at Cowichan, the production team consisted of himself as the dramatic director and Derek, the band teacher, as music director. In 2005, the school hired another teacher, Robin, to instruct dance and some junior drama. Since then, Robin has acted as choreographer for the shows. Two years ago Derek retired and has not been replaced, but Matt and Robin have maintained the program and continued to produce shows. Derek has volunteered some time to conduct the pit orchestra during performances, but the program has essentially been without a music director for two years.

Matt feels that the productions are a team effort between the three teachers involved. Prior to Derek's retirement, the musical production was part of each of the three teachers' assignments. Matt notes:

The structure we were able to secure prior to the completion of our last musical was that all three of us were able to be in the room at the

same time. The admin was quite content with us putting 60 kids in the room and having all of us teach together for a semester. We were each assigned 20 and off we'd go. In some cases, the numbers have been significantly higher. I think we had 90 in the show for *Chicago*.

The three (now two) teachers work together on all aspects of the show. Matt states, "We select the show together, we audition together, and we cast the show together." Although each teacher is in charge of a separate domain—Matt takes care of the blocking, Derek oversees the music, and Robin creates and teaches the choreography—the team works together to create the onstage feel and look. All major decisions are made by consensus. As Matt explains:

Some of it is almost as though the job does itself because we've been doing it together for so long. Whose assignment it was kind of gets lost in the getting it done. We saw the need that needed to be met today and we did it.

In addition to the three teachers who have been involved in the program, Matt has solicited the help of other adults in the community to ensure a successful program. Prior to 2005, a volunteer came in to assist with the choreography for the shows, and Matt has occasionally asked a community member with a special skill to come and instruct the students. In addition to these volunteers, a rehearsal pianist is often hired for the duration of rehearsals and community musicians are hired to play in the orchestra.

Administrative involvement has varied over the years. Matt has seen five different principals leading the school. In his experience, administrative support is integral to maintaining a healthy musical theatre program. Matt states:

Because we've had so many administrators, it is sometimes a blessing when we don't have any administrative involvement! And, administrative involvement takes on so many forms. I had an administrator for 2 years that never once came to my classroom or to the school production. Yet he was heavily involved in the program because he was making timetable decisions that drastically affected what we could and couldn't do.

Administrative involvement at its best has allowed us the flexibility to include the maximum number of kids as efficiently as possible. And to allow us to do what we need to do to put on a high quality production.

He continued by noting that the current administration is highly supportive and is eager to restore the program to include three teachers on the floor at once as has previously been realized.

At Cowichan, any student may choose to participate in the musical theatre program without any prior requisites. Matt expects students to work "to the best of their ability" and to "work hard during rehearsal." There is a structured audition process for those who want a major role, which includes singing a solo, reading a scene, and returning for callbacks. The production team puts the auditions on tape and "then as a group, we take it away and view the tape." The musicals are double cast with two students playing one role on a rotating basis. Matt says this frees students up to take on non-performing roles that need to be carried out:

We've made the decision to force the double cast kids to take outside roles on the days that they are not on. So they understand that the life of the performer is not always in front of the camera. You're going to need to sell

your own tickets, make your own costumes, and do these other things as well.

Because there is not a dedicated course for stagecraft and theatre production, the students not performing take on the roles that might typically be taken on by the technical theatre students. Matt cites lack of facilities and a strong trades stream at Cowichan as the reason for not having a stagecraft class.

### **Facilities**

Cowichan Secondary is an aging school without its own dedicated theatre space. For a few years, the school district leased the Mercury Theatre, which is a small venue near the school. The lease, however, has expired and the school has no facility to rehearse or perform. Matt explains:

The district has effectively offloaded the cost of production directly onto the production itself. They no longer support the Mercury Theatre. If I want a rehearsal space that is not the cafeteria I then need to pay for it myself. The musicals need to be done at the Cowichan Theatre, and the straight dramas are wherever we can find space.

There is no storage space dedicated to the theatre for set pieces and props and there is minimal storage for costumes in the music room.

There is talk of replacing the school in a few years and Matt is in consultation with administrators and the district regarding his new space. He is hoping to get a 500-seat theatre to stage his performances with “proper music rehearsal rooms, a proper dance studio, and then adequate space to build sets and store them and costumes and such.”

Matt is excited about being part of a process to improve the physical space for his program.

### **Production Details**

Matt does not have a set schedule for show frequency in his program. His production team originally determined that a full-fledged musical would be feasible every second year, but this has never quite worked for them. He explains:

It depends partly on our energy level as well as the “catch” group we’ve got.

Can this group get to where they need to get in order to be successful?

This year we’re doing two musicals! The pattern we had hoped to establish was one every other year, but our program size and energy level would determine that more than any other preconceived notion of how many [we] could do over a period of time. If we could do one every year without cutting other ends of the programs with student numbers, then we would do one every year.

Matt and his production team read 10 to 15 scripts and take into consideration such things as talent and facilities when choosing the script for the next year. Auditions take place in the spring, after the completion of that year’s musical (if there has been one), and casting is announced in early May just before course selection time. Rehearsals run from September to January and the show is performed within the first two weeks of January. Matt describes the entire process of mounting a musical as taking approximately 12-14 months.

## **Budget**

The budget for a musical at Cowichan is estimated to be between \$18,000 and \$20,000. Matt breaks it down into components:

(Rental of) the community centre alone generally runs us \$12,000 or \$12,500. And then the rights vary, depending on the show. With *Willy Wonka*, the deposit alone was \$2500. The rights will probably be around \$5000 for that one. Plus costumes, sets, advertising. You can anticipate a budget of \$18,000 to \$20,000.

For these productions, the entire budget is raised through ticket sales.

Tickets for the musicals cost \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors and students. Matt's program is not given any financial support from the school or district. He describes this as being a drawback for the program: "I think I could have and should have demanded from the school a financial commitment separate from my own budget." This would have alleviated some of the financial pressure he feels when taking the risk to do a large show.

## **Production team meetings**

Matt and his team conduct unofficial production meetings throughout the rehearsal process. These are done on a daily basis and they discuss, "what the goal is for the day and then more long term stuff too." Matt elaborates to say that his team does not structure the meetings because they have been together for so long. They do not feel the need to have regimented production meetings because they are so comfortable in their roles as a team. This year, for the first time, Matt has obtained

the help of a stage manager. He describes her as “a godsend to take some of the daily load off.” In the future, he would love to see other departments taking part in the production team. For instance, he would like to see textiles teachers taking on the costumes or technology/trades teachers taking on the set building.

### **Rehearsals**

Rehearsals for the musical productions at Cowichan begin on the first day of school in September and continue until the end of the semester in January.

Rehearsals all take place within school hours and occur every school day for 82 minutes. Matt describes the only exception as being during the Christmas Holiday:

We “go up” in January when we do them. We like to be the first show after Christmas in the community ... And the break being 2 weeks, we tend to call them in for a day or two during that time. That also tends to be the time that we bring the orchestra in for the first time. Other than those two, it’s all within the context of the day.

Rehearsals occur in the school cafeteria, which is a drastically different configuration than the stage at the Cowichan Community Centre. Matt says that because of this, “it’s difficult to get the timing right.” Also, because he rehearses in a room that is used daily by the general school population, Matt cannot rehearse with large set pieces. He gets around this obstacle and his lack of storage by minimizing sets and props for his musicals.

## Performances

As stated earlier, Matt prefers to hold performances in early January. He explains that the number of performances will vary depending on the show, but “at the Community Centre, we typically run 4 student matinees and 4 evening performances.” Matt charges \$5 for the matinees and states, “we have no problem selling them out.” The audience for the matinees is usually students from Cowichan Secondary and junior schools within the same catchment area.

With a rigorous performance schedule, Matt describes the students as being “a little tired.” He alleviates some of the stress by double casting most roles and telling them to “stay hydrated.” He elaborates:

What I tend to do with my kids is to ensure that there is a good working relationship with their teachers of other blocks. So there is an acceptance that during the run itself, they won't be in your class... The intention is that the kids will have completed all the material for the teachers in their other blocks so if they are not at least current, they are ahead... we also finish before the semester ends. We still have 10 days left in the semester this year, so the kids are done with me and it gives them an opportunity to catch up.

Matt sees the exhaustion as a part of the Musical Theatre experience and cannot spread out the performances due to the prohibitive cost of his venue.

### **Backstage and Technical Routines**

Because Cowichan Secondary does not have its own dedicated space to perform plays and musicals, Matt is unable to run a stagecraft and technical theatre class. He explains that the “kids who are not on stage will get some backstage responsibility when the opportunity occurs.” The Cowichan Community Centre theatre, however, is a professional theatre that is run by the IATSE union. Matt describes this as being a disadvantage:

It’s a union issue. We don’t control our own house. I cannot have a kid on the light board, I cannot have a kid doing sound, I cannot have a kid on the stage deck. They are not even supposed to move sets. So, to get around that, the set moving becomes part of the choreography... Where we are able to have the kids do it, we do. But frequently the union will decide who will do it.

He elaborates, “In the absence of our own space, we don’t have the facility to train kids in the technical aspects.” This becomes an expensive and difficult conundrum for Matt because he must pay professional theatre “techs” to do what students do in other schools.

### **Post performance**

On the night of the final performance, all traces of the musical must be removed from the theatre or Matt risks being charged an extra \$500 to \$600 for space rental. Matt requires the entire cast to remain at the theatre until the show has been completely struck because of this. The minimal sets and props make this job feasible for the cast of 30-90 students.

As a celebration, Matt says, “We typically go to a local restaurant. Sometimes we go every night and sometimes just the last night.” After this:

The routine is to always spend at least the very next day debriefing. Walking through the production. They’ll want to spend some time talking about how glorious it was. But if that’s all that we do, some of the learning that can be done is lost.

He will occasionally spend time with individual kids to touch base about their performance as well. The production team also meets on its own to debrief about the show. Matt notes:

As a teaching staff, we’ll sit down and talk about what worked, what didn’t work, where we are at in terms of the budget. Are we ahead of the game, behind the game? And then we begin to set strategies for the coming auditions.

Once the show is over, and students have had their debriefing session, Matt considers the course over and does not require any more commitment from the students.

### **Learning Outcomes and Assessment:**

The musical theatre production at Cowichan Secondary School is organized as a locally developed course. Students receive 4 credits towards their graduation requirement. Matt uses a set of learning outcomes that were written by another teacher in the district who developed the course. He was not able to quote specific learning outcomes, but he hopes his students will learn, “an appreciation for art in

it's many forms." He continues by saying, "I often will have kids from the disabled program in the show... to [be able to] watch kids celebrate their success as well. If that's as good as the kid's going to get, [it's wonderful] to have them and the cast celebrate them."

He sees the course as a holistic program where, "I have an opportunity to witness personal growth in a way that I've never been able to witness in other courses that I've taught." The grading system for this course is based on that holistic approach. Matt describes the process:

The premise I work under is that you arrive at the class with an A in September and all you do over the next five months is to give me justification not go give that A to you. Because art is so subjective, if you come to class and work to the best of your ability, and you're game and trying things and experiencing the process, and understanding that it is a process and not just an outcome, you will succeed. So philosophically, that's the basis of it.

Matt has had experience with students who are not willing to work hard as part of the team for the production. In cases like this, he has created alternate assignments for the students to complete. He clarifies:

It always comes as a monstrous surprise to them. They say, "this is a production; it's supposed to be fun. I'm supposed to be able to do what I want. I just want to perform, I don't want to rehearse." We had two kids when we did *Red Hot and Cole*; it became a biographical essay on Cole Porter.

Matt views the grading in this course as very subjective and the students are marked primarily on their effort and their ability to perform well as a team.

Matt concludes with these words of wisdom:

If teachers can keep the main thing the main thing, then that is the social framework in which musical theatre occurs. The kids need to learn about the form, and each other, and themselves. As long as that's ultimately the priority, there's no reason why musical theatre can't thrive at any school.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided the results of semi-structured interviews that were carried out with four teachers of musical theatre within public school systems on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The following chapter will present a cross case analysis of their programs and productions.

## **Chapter Five: Cross Case Analysis**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine characteristics that lead to successfully functioning musical theatre programs within public high schools. All four teachers viewed their program with a sense of pride and related positively to their experiences with musical theatre at their schools. This chapter will examine the similarities and differences across the four programs.

Earlier in this paper, I defined a successful musical theatre program as a long-standing one in which musical theatre is produced in a way that students and teachers are fulfilled and experience growth, audience members enjoy the show, and teachers do not suffer burnout. This chapter attempts to identify the commonalities between four programs that have been identified as successful by the participants.

### **Participants**

Each of the participants in this study brings a unique collection of experiences and training to his program. All are certified teachers, and all felt that their respective educational backgrounds assisted in their ability to effectively teach the subject. Matt, however, felt that his experience as a performer gave him more skills for the development and execution of teaching his musical theatre program than that of his formal education as a teacher. All participants felt that the benefits of their program strongly outweighed the drawbacks, which Simon, Matt, and Jeffery identified as the required extra time investment and Ben identified as the

disappointment of students when they didn't get the role they wanted. Participant involvement in musical theatre programs varied from 4 to 21 years, and all participants felt that their programs were successful.

Commonalities between the participants are outlined below.

- They all felt qualified and capable of completing their duties within their respective programs;
- They remained in the same position for an extended amount of time; and
- They felt that the benefits of the program both for the students and themselves outweighed the massive time investment needed to ensure success within their respective programs.

### **Programs**

The participants in this study all described their programs as being long-standing with shifts in both teacher and administrative leadership. The programs have been continuously running for between 17 and 30+ years. All of the participants described leadership changes within their programs, but with the exception of Simon, the changes were gradual. Ben and Matt both describe themselves as being the constant element during their tenure, who have weathered and possibly shaped fairly smooth transitions between leadership changes in their programs. Jeffery was a welcome addition to a well-established team, and Simon restructured his program when he took the helm.

In all the programs described by the participants, they were part of a team of dedicated teachers who worked together year after year to sustain the musical

theatre programs in their schools. In all the programs studied, there were at least 2 (in Matt's case), and up to 5 (in Simon's case) teachers heavily involved every year. In each case the three principal leaders were a Drama/Theatre teacher who acted as the general director, a Dance teacher who acted as choreographer, and a Music teacher who acted as a musical director and/or conductor. The exception to this was Matt's program in which the band teacher had recently retired and had not yet been replaced. Historically, however, his program had included all three.

Musical theatre was included in the teaching assignment of all participants in this study. Simon, Ben, and Jeffery explained that although their rehearsals and performances occurred outside of instructional hours, they were given blocks during the day in which they were not required to teach other classes, therefore ensuring that they were receiving financial compensation for their work with their respective programs. Matt's rehearsals all occurred within school hours and were part of his regular assignment. In the cases of Matt, Ben, and Jeffery, all three of the teachers involved in their respective musical theatre programs were financially compensated for their work with the musical theatre program as part of their teaching assignment. Interestingly Simon's team, with the exception of Simon himself, were not financially compensated for their involvement, but instead volunteered their time to teach the program.

When asked about administrative (e.g., Principals and Vice-Principals) involvement, Matt and Ben described many shifts in administrative leadership during their time at their schools. They both illustrated their preferred style of administrative involvement as being supportive, but respectful of the program's

need to run autonomously. Both Simon and Jeffery described their administration as very supportive but taking a “hands-off” approach. All of the participants were grateful for the support of their administration, and appreciative of the autonomy they were given to run the program.

The four participants of this study all described their programs as being curricular whether rehearsals and performances took place within or outside the school timetable. In the course selection booklet from each school, I was able to identify the scope of each program and the courses offered within each program. Matt’s school, Cowichan Secondary, offers two courses entitled “On Stage” for Grades 11 and 12. The offerings at Claremont, Ben’s school, are a musical theatre course for each of the grades from 9 to 12. Jeffery’s school, Spectrum, offers three courses that are split into grade levels including “Musical Theatre Pit Orchestra” for Grades 11 and 12, “Musical Theatre” for Grades 9 and 10 that intends to “ground students in both the practical and theoretical elements of the Musical theatre genre” (see Appendix Four) and “Musical Theatre Main Stage Production” for Grades 9-12 in which students prepare the major musical production of the year. At Oak Bay, Simon’s program offers “Musical Theatre 9” in which Grade 9’s have the chance to present a junior musical, and “Musical Theatre 10-12” which is the umbrella course that covers all students in those grades who wish to participate in the large musical theatre production either on stage, in the pit orchestra, or assisting with costumes and make-up. All of the course outlines studied warn students that they are required to commit extra time outside of school hours if they are to participate in the musical.

In this cross-case analysis, some striking similarities between the four programs studied have become evident. These similarities are outlined below.

- All programs are long standing and have been in existence for many years with a consistent production team;
- Three teachers taking on duties of director, music director, and choreographer usually lead the programs;
- In all cases, at least one teacher is paid for taking on duties of leading the musical theatre program. In three out of the four cases, the director, musical director, and choreographer were paid for their role in teaching the courses;
- All of the participants in this study preferred administrators that supported the autonomy of the program without becoming too involved; and
- Students who participated in the musicals received between 2 and 4 curricular credits toward their high school graduation.

### **Facilities**

With the exception of Matt's program, all of the schools in the study contain a theatre that is used primarily for theatrical productions. These theatres range in size from 250 to 500 seats. Claremont rebuilt their 250-seat theatre during Ben's tenure, but failed to put a ramp onto the stage. Many years later, an elevator from the orchestra seating area to the stage was installed. Spectrum has a 284-seat theatre with retractable seating, and a space for the orchestra, which Jeffery describes as adequate for musical theatre performances. Simon describes Oak Bay Secondary's theatre as the third largest in the city of Victoria boasting 450 seats. These three

stages are used during most rehearsals for the school musicals with blocking occurring directly on the stage. The theatres each have an orchestra pit where the orchestra usually plays. Ben and Simon describe their pits as adequate for dampening the sounds of the orchestra enough for the vocalists to be heard, whereas Jeffery's theatre retracts some of the seating to create a space in which to place the orchestra. He indicates that balancing the dynamics has proven a challenge in the past. Choreographic rehearsals occur in the schools' respective dance rooms, and orchestra rehearsals take place in the band rooms. Along with these dedicated theatres, Oak Bay, Claremont, and Spectrum each contain storage space for costumes, stage properties, and large set pieces. Simon, Ben, and Jeffery describe these storage areas as very useful so the programs can re-use and repurpose costumes and sets utilized in previous productions.

Matt's school does not have a theatre or even a dedicated room for drama classes. He conducts his rehearsals in the school cafeteria instead. Matt's program pays a considerable amount to rent the 700-seat community theatre that is next to the school for performances. Matt describes this as being a less than ideal situation.

Both Matt and Simon's schools are set for demolition within the next few years and both are involved in the planning stages of their new schools. Simon hopes for a theatre of comparable size to the 450-seat theatre he now works in, but with the dance, drama, and band rooms in the adjacent pod, making movement between the rooms easier. Matt hopes for a 500-seat theatre also with dance, drama, and band rooms nearby and adequate storage for props, sets, and costumes.

The four participants describe quite different facilities available to them, but there are commonalities between those that Ben, Jeffery, and Simon have, and Matt's dream theatre. These are:

- A small to medium sized theatre within the school that is primarily used for theatrical productions;
- Space for an orchestra within the theatres that is engineered to equalize sound levels for the audience;
- Band, Dance, and Drama rooms are nearby; and
- Substantial storage for sets, props, and costumes.

### **Productions**

The process of staging a production is more complicated than speaking of a program in general terms as outlined in the four pages above. It is more difficult to make sweeping generalities that encompass all four cases in this study because of this. There are, however, a great number of similarities among the participants regarding many of the details pertaining to productions at their school. In this next section, I will attempt to distill commonalities or generalities between production routines of the participants.

The frequency of productions within each school varies between programs. Matt does not have a schedule for how often he mounts a musical, but lately he says it has usually been once a year. The other programs each stage a full-fledged musical once a year with the addition of a junior musical production at both Jeffery's and Simon's schools. Matt's musical productions are performed earliest in the year

during the first two weeks of January. Jeffery and Simon both set performances for March, and Ben's musicals usually take place in the end of May.

All participants described the care their team took in choosing an upcoming musical. They considered the students they guessed would be participating in the program the following school year and chose a show based on previous knowledge of those students. Simon, Ben, and Jeffery also noted the proficiency of the musicians at the school and took into account the difficulty of the musical score when choosing a show. In all cases, the entire process from choosing the musical to the last performance took between 10 months and 1 year.

The audition process was similar in each of the cases. All of the programs were open to any student who wished to enroll in the course and make a commitment to the rehearsal and performance schedule. In Simon's program, all students needed to participate in an individual audition where they sang a Broadway song and participated in a reading, whereas in all the other programs, only those wishing for a speaking or singing role needed to participate in the audition process.

In the cases studied, the following themes arose regarding individual productions.

- Schools performed musicals when the teachers were able, usually once a year;
- The entire process of putting on a musical took around a year;
- All participants chose each show based on an educated guess of the "talent" available; and

- The participants all allowed anyone to be in the play, but an audition process was in place for casting.

### **Budget**

The budget for a single production at each of the schools ranged from \$10,000-25,000, with Simon and Jeffery's programs at the low end of \$10,000-13,000 and Ben's at the high end of \$25,000. Matt's budget sat in the middle at around \$18,000. All participants reported that the majority or the entirety of their budget came from ticket sales for the performances themselves. Matt and Jeffery were able to itemize their budgets, with Jeffery breaking down his budget into the categories of scripts and royalties for \$4,000, microphone rental for \$1,000, costumes for \$1,500, sets for \$1,500, printing costs for \$1,500, and advertising for \$1,000. Matt describes the added expense of \$12,000 for renting a theatre and paying wages for the unionized stage crew and ushers.

Ticket prices for each program ranged from \$8 to 15, usually with a cheaper rate for students and seniors. Table 1 outlines the exact prices each program charged for tickets.

Table 1 *Ticket sale prices*

	Adults / \$	Students/seniors \$	other
Jeffery	10	8	
Simon	12	10	
Matt	15	12	
Ben	15	N/A	Mid-week "cheap night" for \$10

Jeffery and Simon are at the lower end of ticket prices, with theirs ranging from \$8 to \$12 per ticket. Matt explained the extra cost of his tickets as covering the fees for rental of the theatre. I can conjecture that Ben's ticket price is higher to cover the cost of the budget, which is staggeringly higher than those of the others. I do not know what the extra money was spent on because Ben did not volunteer a breakdown of his budget. Ben's school, however, is located in an area of higher socio-economic status than the others. Therefore, the population comprising the audience must be able to support the higher cost of tickets for musical shows at the high school. Trends that became apparent when examining budgeting for the musical theatre programs studied are listed below.

- Budgets for productions varied drastically from between \$10,000 and \$25,000;
- All of the programs involved in this study are financially self-sufficient, with ticket sales supplying the budget for the show; and
- All of the participants felt comfortable charging between \$8 and \$15 for tickets to see their shows.

### **Production team meetings**

All of the participants in the study identified team meetings as an important element in their shows, but only Simon held structured meetings once a month in September and October, and weekly in November through March. These meetings were held during the school day when the production team was given spares in kind to conduct the meetings. Matt, Jeffery, and Ben describe a much less organized structure for the meetings with Matt describing them as occurring when needed, Ben describing them as occurring quickly after each rehearsal, and Jeffery explaining that his team conducted meetings occasionally on professional development days after workshops, or during lunch time. All of the participants explained a need for meetings when casting, while only Simon and Jeffery indicated a need for discussion on budgeting for the productions.

There is no consensus on production team meetings, only that there needs to be communication between the adults involved in the program.

### **Rehearsals**

Matt's plays are presented in early January. He casts the play in the previous spring so rehearsals can commence when school starts in September. His rehearsals occur within the school timetable for 82 minutes a day. This works out to about seven hours per week for a four-month period. He adds a couple of extra rehearsals just before the performance, but attempts to keep rehearsal time within the school day. Simon and Jeffery both stage their musicals in early March, so they spend all of September choosing the cast of the play, then begin rehearsing in late September or

early October. Jeffery's rehearsals occur three times a week for two hours over the five month period leading up to the shows, while Simon's rehearsals occur on a sliding scale, beginning with 3 hours a week for several months, then 6 to 9 hours a week and, for the final month, rehearsal frequency and hours increase to "full pedal to the metal" in Simon's words. Jeffery did not indicate whether extra rehearsals were called close to the performances. Ben's team completed casting in September and rehearsed four hours a week for the next seven and a half months. On average, it seems the participants were happy with 4 to 9 hours of rehearsal per week for a period of 4 to 8 months. Those who prepared the play in a shorter period of time needed more rehearsal time per week, while those who had a longer rehearsal run were able to adopt a more relaxed rehearsal schedule.

Each of the participants in this study works within a program that has, over time, developed a rehearsal schedule that is effective for them. I have outlined the parameters of the rehearsal process below.

- Rehearsals require between 4 to 9 hours per week depending on the length of the production period, usually between four and eight months.

### **Performances**

Choosing the number and frequency of performances for a given play is a delicate juggling act between ensuring the play is financially viable and battling student and teacher exhaustion. The participants in this study outlined their performance frequency as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 *Performance Frequency*

	Number of Performances	Duration
Matt	4 matinees for students 4 evening performances	4 days
Jeffery	6 or 7 evening performances	2 weeks
Simon	1 dress rehearsal/preview 7 evening performances	2 weeks
Ben	2 dress rehearsal/previews 10 evening performances	2 weeks.

Each of the participants felt comfortable with the 6 to 10 performances their school produced. With the exception of Matt who had time constraints based on the rental of theatre space, all the programs held their run of performances over two weeks with two or more “dark” nights in the early week where performances did not occur.

Each participant admitted that his students were exhausted by the end of the run, and each had a different method for dealing with that exhaustion. Matt always ensured that he double cast his musicals, giving more students a chance to perform major roles, and relieving them of the burden of performing lead roles in every show. Ben excused his instrumental students from early morning band practices during the run of performances. Simon spanned his run of performances over two weeks, giving students a couple of days to recuperate in between performances. He also trained understudies for the lead roles in case of a medical emergency. Jeffery conceded that by the end of the run, his students were exhausted, but they were released from the course, which was scheduled to run all year, after the performances in March.

The teachers in this study have outlined their ideal performance schedule.

The similarities are outlined below.

- The programs enjoyed 6-10 performances for each show, usually over a two-week period; and
- The participants in the study felt that the benefits of producing a longer run of performances outweighed the burden of student exhaustion.

### **Backstage and Technical Routines**

Three of the four participants in this study had the benefit of having adequate facilities to produce and perform musicals within their school. Simon, Jeffery, and Ben explained the advantage of this arrangement because they, or teachers on their production team, were able to train students to carry out all backstage and technical routines for their productions. They unanimously agreed that adding the extra element of a stagecraft class where students who did not want to perform could learn the basics of technical theatre enhanced the pre-professional training at their school. Matt was unable to offer a technical theatre or stagecraft course because of his lack of facilities within the school. He was required by law to hire union professionals who took on all backstage duties, with the rental of the community theatre.

- The three teachers with their own facilities allowed students to run the theatre and taught them to be proficient in aspects of technical theatre.

**Post –production**

After a musical theatre production, there is usually a celebration and always a lot of tidying involved. Along with the tear down of the larger set pieces, there is also the removal and clean up of props, costumes, makeup, and other miscellaneous equipment associated with a production. Each of the participants in this study had a different method of cleaning up without being left with the major burden himself. In Matt's case, it was financially necessary to remove all traces of the production on the evening of the last performance. He required all of the students involved in the production to remain at the theatre to clean up until it was finished. Often they would then celebrate at a local restaurant. Simon and Ben each held a celebration for the students with food and speeches after the last performance. In Ben's and Jeffery's cases, students were in charge of their own property and the stagecraft classes dismantled the sets after the production. Simon required that all students return on the Sunday following the final performance in order to clean the theatre space.

In all cases, the postproduction routine included student responsibility for the majority of the clean up after the show.

### **Learning Outcomes and Assessment**

All of the participants in this study described their program as curricular, where students receive a mark for their achievement in musical theatre courses. Since Musical Theatre is not a part of the accepted British Columbia curriculum, all of the schools created Board Authority/Approved courses in which to place the musical theatre students. When creating a Board Authority/Approved course, teachers are required to submit a detailed course outline that includes the elements of the course. The Ministry of Education Board Authority/Approved Course Handbook (2011) states:

The requirements for BAA courses define the structure, components, and rigor of a course. They consist of the following:

Course name, Grade level, Number of credits (maximum of 4), Course synopsis, Rationale, Organizational structure appropriate to subject/topic, Learning outcomes that are assessable and observable and that can be understood by students and parents, Instructional component that clarifies the outcomes and provides a range of pedagogical opportunities, Assessment component that provides a range of both formative and summative assessment, and Learning resources that support the learning outcomes. (p. 5)

Because of this required approval process, I can conclude that each of the courses offered within the programs at the participants' schools has a set of learning outcomes that fit within the British Columbia curriculum framework. None of the

participants, however, were able to articulate any of the learning outcomes for their course other than in very general holistic terms. They all seemed to feel justified that their students generally tried their best, showed commitment, and were able to demonstrate the learning that had taken place with the culmination of a series of performances that, in essence, took the place of a final exam.

As far as assessment and grading, the participants each described a similar process of subjective grading where they gauged the effort and commitment of their students, determined if they tried hard to succeed, and gave a letter grade and percentage based on their observations. All of the participants seemed satisfied with this form of assessment and felt that it is a valid method for grading their students' work.

### **Summary**

Although the programs at each of the participant's schools have been developed within the school, there are many similarities between programs. The only differences seem to lie in minor details that do not contribute to the success or lack of success within their programs. The following chapter will outline the key findings from this study and my conclusions based on the research.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusions and Implications for Program**

### **Development**

#### **Introduction**

The last two chapters provided a summary of the research conducted with four teachers who have been involved in leadership of Musical Theatre programs in public schools in Southern Vancouver Island. I began this study with the intent of finding the elements of successful musical theatre programs within such schools and discovered that the four teachers interviewed for this study run their programs on a very similar model that works in each of their respective programs. This chapter will revisit the research question and offer a synopsis of elements of four successful musical theatre programs. I will also include my own reflection on the findings along with suggestions for further research.

#### **Key Findings**

The participants in this study described the musical theatre programs at their schools as practical training that involved “putting on a show” start to finish. The curricular courses were developed at each of the schools and approved by their respective boards to become four-credit courses that contribute to the credits required for graduation. These teachers are employed at schools where the musical theatre program has been legitimized by both the school administration and the provincial government.

The research question for this study was: What are the characteristics that make a public high school musical theatre program function successfully?

Revisiting this question with the programs of Simon, Jeffery, Ben, and Matt in mind, it becomes easy to determine the similar traits of their programs. The first similarity is that of personnel running each of the programs. All of the programs ran on the model of having at least three teachers involved. These teachers appeared to value the program enough to dedicate time and energy to their programs year after year. Their respective school boards and school administration, however, also validated them by ensuring they were financially compensated for their work.

Students in each of the programs were given a considerable amount of responsibility for the musical. In three of the cases, by performance time, students were in charge of most aspects of the musical, giving them the full weight of the success of the performance. This development of student leadership seems to play a key role in all four successful programs. In addition to this, the programs themselves were all financially autonomous with the revenue for ticket sales paying for the budget for each show.

Planning, time lines, budget, and team meetings varied among programs, but each of the programs had worked out the ideal combination for their own circumstances over a number of years. The final similarity was a substantial run of between 7 and 10 shows that ensured the show would be financially viable and would give the students a chance to understand the reality of performing a show multiple times over a short period of time.

When describing assessment practices, each of the participants, had a difficult time expressing their methods and justification for assigning the letter

grades and percentages to students. This deficit will be addressed in the following section.

In the definitions portion of this paper, I defined a successful musical theatre program as a long-standing program in which musical theatre is produced in a way that students and teachers are fulfilled and experience growth, audience members enjoy the show, and teachers do not suffer burnout. Each of the participants in this study illustrated programs that, from their descriptions, met that definition.

### **Suggestions for change**

The participants in this study and, I suspect, many other teachers in schools all over British Columbia have created successful musical theatre programs within their schools that contain a similar curriculum. They each run their program with the objective of teaching students the skills associated with musical theatre while staging an actual performance. Each of the schools studied has created an independent course to fulfill student and teacher desire to have a course dedicated to musical theatre. I'm sure this is a widespread phenomenon within the province of BC, where teachers need to go through the lengthy and time-consuming process of applying for the status of having a Board Authorized course before executing the program itself. Each of the teachers in this study was also rather vague on how they assess their students during and after the process of putting on their musical.

The creation of a province-wide curriculum, which would address the unique multi-disciplinary approach of musical theatre, would greatly assist teachers wanting to create a musical theatre program. In addition to it being a starting point

for teachers new to the field, it would act as a guideline for those unsure of methods of assessing their students, and provide much needed suggestions for teaching resources. Snider (1995) noted a similar gap in the California curriculum and many curricula across the United States. She has created and suggested a sample curriculum for use in schools on a widespread basis. She suggests that musical theatre should be a course with a standardized, if flexible, curriculum that is used for musical theatre courses. Her suggested sections of the curriculum are history, audition techniques, production values, and professional conduct (p.40). She notes that these complement and fit in with the California Framework for Arts Education. Upon scrutiny of the British Columbia Prescribed Learning Outcomes, Snider's suggested curriculum conforms with the *Theatre Performance* curriculum organizers which are: exploration and analysis, performance skills, context, and company. Snider's curriculum would be an excellent resource, should the British Columbia government decide to adopt a Musical Theatre curriculum.

Having a province wide curriculum for musical theatre courses would greatly assist teachers in designing assessment strategies and norms for their students. In the meantime, however, teachers must find ways of authentically assessing their students in a meaningful manner. The Integrated Resource Packages (IRP's) for the British Columbia curriculum areas of Dance Performance, Theatre Performance, and Choral Performance all advocate criterion-referenced evaluation and assessment as a valid and efficient manner of assessing student work. According to the Drama 11 and 12 IRP package (2002):

Criterion-referenced evaluation may be based on these steps:

- Step 1. Identify the expected learning outcomes (as stated in this Integrated Resource Package).
- Step 2. Identify the key learning objectives for instruction and learning.
- Step 3. Establish and set criteria. Involve students, when appropriate, in establishing criteria.
- Step 4. Plan learning activities that will help students gain the knowledge or skills outlined in the criteria.
- Step 5. Prior to the learning activity, inform students of the criteria against which their work will be evaluated.
- Step 6. Provide examples of the desired levels of performance.
- Step 7. Implement the learning activities.
- Step 8. Use various assessment methods based on the particular assignment and student.
- Step 9. Review the assessment data and evaluate each student's level of performance or quality of work in relation to criteria.
- Step 10. Where appropriate or necessary, assign a letter grade that indicates how well the criteria are met.
- Step 11. Report the results of the evaluations to students and parents. (p. C-3)

In musical theatre performance courses, learning outcomes and objectives are identified when designing the course and planning the show, teachers collaborate to establish criteria and time lines for rehearsals and performances. Students are given a rehearsal schedule, which dictates when they need to complete a given piece of

choreography or scene, and learning activities are implemented in a sequential manner in accordance with the rehearsal schedule. Step 8 is the weak link in the assessment practices of musical theatre teachers within this study. Due to the large number of extra hours musical theatre teachers tend to dedicate to their productions, assessment should not be an onerous prospect that adds many more hours to the production. Instead, it should be part of the organic process of rehearsal and performance including much student input and feedback.

Musical theatre is a performance-based discipline. Therefore, performance assessment is possibly one of the best-suited assessment tools for the discipline. According to the BC Drama IRP (2002), "Performance assessment is the gathering of information about student learning based on students demonstrating what they can do. It is assessment which values processes as well as product and incorporates a variety of strategies, from observation to self-assessment" (p. C-3). The emphasis on valuing process as well as product is an integral concept for assessment for students of musical theatre.

Some suggested assessment strategies from the Theatre Performance, Choral Music, and Dance Performance IRP's are performance tests, student journals, portfolios, observation sheets, and checklists. Each of these methods would transfer well to musical theatre. Performance tests can be easily conducted during any rehearsal to determine mastery when students have learned a piece of choreography, a song, or a scene. Creating a rating scale based on learning outcomes, using anecdotal records, or utilizing an observational checklist can all be used as performance tests. These tests could even be developed as a form of self or peer

assessment with students who are not involved in an activity acting as observers and assessing those who are involved. Student journals can also be an excellent tool for assessing knowledge and growth of students. They may include such elements as comments on specific activities, reflection of work done, goal setting, thoughts and feelings, observation of personal growth and many other topics.

A commonly utilized assessment tool in the arts is the creation of portfolios. Creating a portfolio would require a bit of organization on the student's part, but may also provide a valuable window into the student's thought process and a concrete representation of the student's growth. Student portfolios may include: annotated scripts, videos of their own rehearsals or performances by other actors, programs, rehearsal schedules, journal entries, self-assessment, goals, assessment of peer achievement, historical background of a character, play, or musical theatre style, and self-assessment of contributions to the ensemble.

The two other assessment strategies outlined above that may provide the most practical and least time-consuming assessment tools are observation sheets and checklists. Observation sheets may be completed during rehearsal or performance, and should focus only on a few attributes of the rehearsal or performance. In musical theatre, observation sheets could be something the dramatic director might complete during large choreography rehearsals or the choreographer might complete during a large scene. If, throughout the rehearsal period, the teachers were able to complete two or three of these sheets per student, they would then have a valuable resource for assessment. Checklists can keep track of specific information about attitudes, knowledge, and skills of the entire class in a

very quick, uncomplicated manner. These can be done for the whole class at once with a simple yes or no chart.

All of these forms of assessment would require some organizational time at the outset, but can be reused and revised for future productions and would provide a much more comprehensive assessment than the anecdotal, summative assessment described by the participants in this study.

The musical theatre programs in this study all focus exclusively on preparing for a large scale performance. While the process of creating a musical from start to finish is an excellent vehicle for teaching aspects of the genre, I feel that students may be pigeonholed into learning only about one show or style and miss out on the diversity of musical theatre as a whole. When teaching a senior theatre course that is not leading to a large performance, I give students the opportunity to learn about many different types of theatre by providing instruction on theatre history, different styles of acting, acting tools, and in-depth instruction on techniques. When presenting a Musical Theatre course that offers students the thrill of leading toward a major performance, students are missing out on the diversity offered in comparing dance styles for instance, or explicit instruction on delving into the subtext of a particular song.

Students at the secondary level who are performing a show that was written for professionals are often hard pressed to master technicalities, such as complicated choreography and 4 or 5- part harmonies. Often many of these students have little or no experience with musical theatre, so it is up to the teaching team to guide the students from basically raw talent to a pre-professional grade

performance in just a few months. This does not leave a lot of time, if any at all, to closely examine the artistry and diversity involved in musical theatre as a genre. In a perfect world, a Musical Theatre program at a large secondary school should incorporate both a Musical Theatre Performance class that is designed for the production of a single musical, and a Musical Theatre Skills class that is more process oriented, where students can develop the skills associated with different aspects of musical theatre. The skills class would allow students to examine, for example, the difference between the “belt” voice used in *Wicked* versus the “lyrical” voice used in *Carousel*. It would also give students the opportunity to work towards being the Musical Theatre “triple threat” with equal instruction in singing, dancing, and acting.

**Reflection**

I began this project in the hopes that I could examine several musical theatre programs in order to create my own. After completing my analysis, it is interesting to note that all the programs I studied run on similar models even though they were all independently created. The models each of the participants described match the model of the musical theatre program I described in my rationale as being the only successful musical theatre program I had been involved in. I am curious now to know how this model developed in synchronicity between schools and districts. I would also like to know why, if teachers are running similar programs, there is no province-wide curriculum that can be adopted by schools everywhere in BC.

One of the questions I had hoped to answer more thoroughly with this study was that of assessment. Like many music and theatre teachers, I find myself having to defend my subject area in staffrooms and to the general public. I vividly recall an incident a few months ago when it was close to the end of the school year and many teachers were drowning in a sea of marking. I had finished the large production of the year a few weeks earlier and had just a few pages of marking to do. When looking at the load in my hands and the mountain of paper in his hands, a social studies teacher turned to me and said, "Your job is easy. All your students do is show up to play for a while and they all get an A!" I was aghast that he viewed my subject area so disdainfully when my students had surpassed all my learning outcomes by completing exceptional auditions, showing up prepared to each rehearsal, organizing costumes and props, researching their characters and the time period, then completing it all with seven evening performances in addition to all their other

school work. The implication that the Musical Theatre production holds less value than other courses because it doesn't require the same amount of written output was clear. Admittedly, my assessment strategies have been similar to those of the participants in this study. Perhaps if I employ some of the formal assessment strategies outlined above, my course will be regarded more seriously in the eyes of my colleagues. In my experience, the devaluing of arts courses seems to be widespread, and the lack of common curriculum in Musical Theatre seems to perpetuate that mindset. The amount of energy and brainpower that goes into a musical theatre production is huge, but until it is recognized as part of the curriculum, and outcomes and assessment norms are well articulated, many people will dismiss it as unimportant or inferior.

The most interesting, and unique part of a musical theatre program, from my observation, is the aspect of collaboration between educators. Teachers are surrounded by people all day long, but the actual act of teaching becomes a very solitary endeavor often with little collaboration and communication with other adults. Teaching musical theatre in the manner described by the participants of this study appears to transcend the model of one teacher in front of thirty students to include a creative element of collaboration and teamwork among like-minded adults. This enriched creative environment gives the adults involved the freedom to create something bigger and more complicated than anything that could have been done alone. The teachers in this study all spoke very highly of their team teachers and seemed to work as equals to produce their shows. I have had experience with directing and producing high school musical theatre both as part of a team and by

myself, and would agree that the team approach creates a better show with much less stress for the teacher. The students also appear to have a better experience when they have access to a variety of adults with different skill sets.

The participants in this research each proudly described their well-established programs to me. Although there are many similarities between the programs, each of the teachers described a growth period where the team of leaders was “ironing out the kinks” and discovering what works best for them. I think it is important to note that programs like these are not built instantaneously and that there is a lot of reflection and remodeling that goes into the process of developing a successful musical theatre program.

*In the production of a good play with a good cast and a knowing director there is formed a fraternity whose members share a mutual sense of destiny.*  
-Arthur Miller

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## Appendix 1



## *Participant Consent Form*

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### **Musical Theatre in Schools: Searching for a Successful Model**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Musical Theatre in Schools: Searching for a successful model” that is being conducted by Anna Roberts

Anna Roberts is a graduate student in the Music Education department of the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email at [atrustham@gmail.com](mailto:atrustham@gmail.com).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in music education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Garry Froese. You may contact my supervisor at [gfroese@uvic.ca](mailto:gfroese@uvic.ca)

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research project is to determine best practices when mounting a musical theatre production in a public school setting. I will conduct semi-structured interviews with music and theatre teachers who run musical theatre programs. They will be asked practical and theoretical questions about the nature of their programs and the elements they feel make their programs successful.

#### **Importance of this Research**

Research into musical theatre in the grade school setting is sparse. There are several “how to” guides for mounting high school musicals and one or two that include elementary musicals. There is, however, little research that looks into what makes a successful musical theatre program within the school setting. This research will examine music and theatre teacher’s perceptions of what they feel makes their program successful. It will be useful for teachers who would like to develop their own musical theatre programs.

#### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you teach or have taught at a high school that has a musical theatre program either within the curriculum or as an extra-curricular activity, and your program is well-established.

#### **What is involved?**

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a semi-structured interview of approximately one and a half hours in length and will take place outside of instructional hours. Interviews will be audio recorded. For clarity and accuracy, I will send you written transcripts of the interview for your correction/perusal

before analysis of the data takes place. I anticipate this review of transcripts will take between 15-20 minutes.

**Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you. This possible inconvenience consists of lost time during the interview process and transcript checking. I endeavor to minimize the inconvenience by coming to a place of your choosing for the interview.

**Risks**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

**Benefits**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will provide music and theatre teachers with an understanding of the process of developing a successful musical theatre program. It will also provide ideas and suggestions for improving their program structure, as well as suggestions on avoiding pitfalls associated with musical theatre productions within the school setting.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. Participants should not feel any obligation to participate due to a past or present relationship with the researcher. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used and will be destroyed within 1 week of your withdrawal.

**Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity, pseudonyms will be used for you and your school in the dissemination of your data.

**Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all the data in a password-protected computer. Backups will be kept on a password protected external hard drive stored in the researcher's home.

**Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the researcher's master's project that will be available in hard copy in the Curriculum Library at the University of Victoria and online on the University of Victoria's website. Results may also be compiled into one or more articles for a peer-reviewed publication such as the Canadian Music Educators Association Journal.

**Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be disposed of five years after the project is complete. Electronic files will be deleted and any paper records will be shredded or burned.

**Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include the researcher, Anna Trustham or her supervisor Dr. Garry Froese. Contact information for both parties can be found at the top of this form.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you agree to participate in this research project.

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*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix 2

### E-MAIL INVITATION FOR RESEARCH

I am Anna Roberts a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study on musical theatre programs in B.C. public schools. The objective of my research is to gain an understanding of best practices when developing musical theatre programs in secondary schools.

You have been chosen as a prospective participant because you are a teacher involved with a well-established musical theatre program at a public secondary school.

As a participant, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview focused on your understanding of the musical theatre program at your school. Major topics will include, the history and structure of the program, procedures when mounting a musical, and learning outcomes and assessment strategies for students. This interview will take approximately one and a half hours and will take place at a location of your choice.

There are no identified risks with participation in this research project. You may, however, be inconvenienced by taking time out of your busy schedule to be involved in the interview process. I will attempt to minimize this inconvenience by scheduling interviews at a time and place of your choice.

There is very little research on the structure of musical theatre programs in B.C. and it is expected that this research will contribute to the development of this discipline and aid music and theatre teachers in developing and/or improving their own musical theatre programs.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please contact me by email at [atrustham@gmail.com](mailto:atrustham@gmail.com), or by phone at 250-929-5500. If you have questions, feel free to contact me or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Garry Froese, at [gfroese@uvic.ca](mailto:gfroese@uvic.ca).

Thank you for your consideration,  
Anna Roberts

## Appendix 3

### Musical Theatre in Schools: Interview Questions

#### Program Overview

Personal history:

1. Please tell me your name and your position at this school.
2. Briefly tell me about your involvement with this program.
3. How does your formal education aid you in teaching musical theatre?
4. Why do you teach Musical theatre in school?
5. What do you get out of this process on a personal level?
6. What are the drawbacks of your involvement in this program?

History of the program:

7. How long has the musical theatre program been running at your school?
8. During the term of this program, have there been any major shifts in teacher leadership? School administration shifts?
9. How often do you mount a full-fledged musical?
10. Which departments are involved? What is the degree of collaboration between departments for school musical productions?
11. When looking back at the formation/development of this program, what do you feel worked well? What would you have done differently?

Program structure:

12. A musical theatre program is a massive endeavour. Who are the adults involved in your program (teachers, parents, administrators, other professionals, community members?)
13. What roles do each of these adults take in the design of your program/mounting shows?
14. How do you define the roles of the production team?
15. How does the decision-making process occur in this program?

(Consensus; each decision maker in his/her own domain; a highly centralized model or other model?)

16. Does the decision-making process change throughout the course of your productions?

17. Do rehearsals fall within scheduled class time, or outside instructional hours?

18. What roles do students take in the musical theatre productions at your school?

19. Are students involved in production elements such as lighting design, set design/building, stage managing, properties management, choreography, costuming, etc?

20. Is there a recognized training process for student participation in both an acting and production capacity?

21. Are students evaluated on their performance throughout the creative process?

22. Are there rules about eligibility for participation in the productions?

23. Is there a procedure for casting major acting roles?

24. Can you identify any improvements that could be made regarding the musical theatre program or the program structure?

Administrative involvement:

25. To what degree is school administration involved in your program?

26. Do you feel supported by your administration?

27. What types of support would be appreciated or helpful?

28. What is the role of administration in regards to scheduling productions and rehearsals?

Facilities:

29. Where are your rehearsal and performance spaces?

30. Do you have on-site facilities for set building? If not, who builds the sets and where?

31. Do you have on-site storage for props and costumes? If not, where do you store them?

32. What would your ideal facility look like?

### **Production Details**

Show planning:

33. How and when do you go about choosing the next show to mount?

34. What considerations do you take into account when choosing a show?

35. How is your production time-line structured?

Production budget:

36. What is the typical budget for a musical at your school?

37. Where does the money come from? (School contribution, revenue from tickets, community sponsorships, gifts in-kind etc.)

38. Who is in charge of constructing your show budget?

Production team meetings:

39. Who is involved in your production team?

40. How often do you have production meetings, and who is involved?

41. What topics are discussed in your production meetings and how are the meetings structured?

42. Are there improvements that could be made in the structure of your production team or team meetings?

Backstage:

43. Who takes on the backstage/technical responsibilities for your productions?

44. Who is in charge of sets, lights, sound, costumes, props, stage management and the other technical aspects of your productions?

45. If there is student participation in the technical aspects of your shows, who oversees them and how are their roles defined?

46. What improvements could be made to the technical aspects of your program?

Rehearsals:

47. How long is your rehearsal process?

48. How often/when do you hold rehearsals and how long do they take?

49. Who is in charge of the rehearsals?

50. Can you identify any improvements that could be made in your rehearsals?

Performances:

51. Where do your performances take place?

52. How many performances do you have for each production?

53. How much do tickets cost?

54. How do you structure the performances around school hours to alleviate student exhaustion?

Post-production:

55. What is your post-production routine?

56. Do you hold a celebration for the students?

57. What kind of post-production meetings do you have?

58. Who does the clean-up, when?

Learning outcomes:

59. Do you have a set of learning outcomes for your students?

60. What are the aesthetic, personal, and emotional outcomes you hope your students will achieve?

61. How did you determine these outcomes?

Assessment/evaluation:

62. How do you assess/evaluate your students?

63. Do they receive academic credit for their participation in the shows?

64. If so, how many credit hours do they receive?

65. If not, do students receive any volunteer/community service recognition for their involvement in the shows?

## Appendix 4: Course Outlines

### Oak Bay Secondary

#### **MUSICAL THEATRE 10 to 12 (Pit Orchestra)**

**Credits:** 4 (only grade 10, 11, 12)

**Prerequisite:** Successful audition

**Information:** This course meets entirely outside of the regular timetable. It prepares the orchestral music for the full-length school musical. A considerable time commitment during the run of the school musical is required. Musicians wishing to play in the pit should sign up for this course with full acceptance of this commitment.

**Important Points to Consider:** The students who choose this class may be expected to spend 3 – 5 hours a week outside of school time in preparation for the musical. For two weeks before opening night, the rehearsal schedule will be more demanding and may include evening and weekend rehearsals. The play must be a priority over other extra curricular activities during this two week time period. The students choosing this course must be responsible, self-disciplined and committed.

#### **MUSICAL THEATRE 9 (inside the timetable)**

**Information:** This course is considered to be Oak Bay's Junior Musical Theatre class. Grade 9 students in this class will prepare and present a full length 'Junior Musical' at the end of the year. Recent productions include 'Beauty and the Beast Junior' and 'Willie Wonks Junior'. This course includes:

- Introduction to Musical Theatre
- Stage vocabulary and techniques
- Vocal development for chorus and soloist
- Character development through performance
- Team building through games and performance

#### **MUSICAL THEATRE 10 - 12 (outside the timetable)**

▪ **Credits:** 4

▪ **Prerequisite:** Prior experience in musical theatre is recommended.

▪ **Information:** This is a course that meets entirely outside of the regular timetable. The context of this course is the production of a full-length musical. Everyone wishing to be a stage performer in this course must successfully audition at the end of September.

▪ **Costume and makeup:** Students interested in being in the costume and makeup crew for the senior musical will also register for this course.

▪ **Pit Orchestra:** Students interested in playing in the pit orchestra for the senior musical will also register for this course.

▪ **Important Points To Consider:** The students who choose this class may be expected to spend 3 – 6 hours a week outside of school time in preparation for the musical. Two weeks before opening night, the rehearsal schedule will be more demanding and may include evening and weekend rehearsals. The musical production must be a priority over other extracurricular activities during this two to three week time period. The students choosing this course must be responsible, self disciplined and committed.

## **Cowichan Secondary**

### **2521: ON STAGE 11**

**Recommendation:** Audition and consent of Instructor

This course is designed to give students the skills necessary to perform a major community based theatrical production. The play will be announced in the spring, with casting and crew interviews occurring during the course selection process. Activities include a school-based community theatrical production. Some out-of class time will be required. This course is both a skill development and a participation course, and marks will be assigned accordingly.

### **3521: ON STAGE 12**

**Recommendation:** Audition and consent of Instructor.

This course is designed to continue the process of extending the skills necessary to perform a major community based theatrical production, and to prepare students for the transition to both the performing arts workplace and post-secondary education. The play will be announced in the spring, with casting and crew interviews occurring during the course selection process. Activities include a school-based community theatrical production. Some out of class time will be required. This course is both a skill development and a participation course, and marks will be assigned accordingly

**NOTE: "ON STAGE" is only offered if a committed core of students audition and are accepted.**

## **Spectrum Community School**

### **MUSICAL THEATRE PIT ORCHESTRA**

**GRADE 11 Course 933**

**GRADE 12 Course 934**

**Suggested prerequisite:** Must be enrolled in band classes (exception by special permission/invitation of the instructor).

Music On Stage is designed to provide students with an enrichment to their courses in band and strings. Students in the ensemble will form the Musical Theatre Pit Orchestra and will perform during the Spectrum Musical Theatre Shows. The pit orchestra requires: brass, woodwinds, drums/percussion, strings, guitar and keyboard players. Students must commit to a busy rehearsal and performance schedule leading up to the opening of musicals.

### **MUSICAL THEATRE**

**Grade 9 Course 969**

**Grade 10 Course 960**

The intention of this course is to ground students in both the practical and theoretical elements of the Musical Theatre genre. The course will cover basic technique and theory of the arts of acting, singing, and dancing and relate them to the style of Musical Theatre. This will include the preparation of performance pieces. Additional topics may include theatre history, theatre etiquette, theatre terminology, principles of auditioning, basics of lighting and sound design, costume and properties design, script analysis, character development, music theory, and directed studies of specific musical productions. Emphasis will be on

process over product, although performance opportunities will be sought throughout the semester (assemblies, showcases, concerts, etc.) as well as at semester end. The students choosing this program must be responsible, self-disciplined, and committed. *Students wishing to be part of the Main Stage Musical Theatre Production must be enrolled in or have previously taken this course.*

### **MUSICAL THEATRE MAIN STAGE PRODUCTION**

**Grade 9/10 See Below**

**Grade 11 Course 961**

**Grade 12 Course 962**

Through instruction, rehearsal, and the mounting of a full scale musical theatre production (to be announced each fall) students will learn and practice the skills of the musical theatre genre (acting, singing, dancing and also backstage/technical work for those interested). This course runs outside of the timetable and requires dedication and commitment from all involved. Auditions will be announced in the first few weeks of school and rehearsals will begin in October (Monday, Wednesday and Thursday after school). In the Spring, seven performances will be staged with ticket sales open to both the school and general public. Students must be prepared to commit to the rehearsal and performance schedules and expect to put in extra time as the performance dates approach. Those who have a passion for singing, acting or dancing will enjoy the rehearsal and performance aspects of this course. Grade 9 and 10 students wishing to participate in the production are welcome and should sign up for an audition in the fall. *Note: It is expected that students in the Main Stage Production are enrolled in, or have previously taken, the Musical Theatre 9/10 course (exceptions only by permission of Mr. Barss or Mrs. Crust).*

## **Claremont Secondary School**

**MUSICAL THEATRE 9 (1760) ALL GRADES - AFTER SCHOOL TUESDAY AND THURSDAY**

**MUSICAL THEATRE 10 (2760)**

**MUSICAL THEATRE 11 (3777)**

**MUSICAL THEATRE 12 (4763)**

Want to be in a musical? Take this fun and exciting course! Musical Theatre teaches acting, singing, dancing and the experience of what is required to be a part of a production. A full-length musical is developed during this course and is performed at the Ridge Playhouse in the Spring. If enough students enroll for the course, there may be a separate Junior and Senior class. If not, there will be ONE Musical Theatre class consisting of students from grades 9-12. The class instruction time will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:35 - 5:45 p.m. and evening performances during the show run. This class runs from September to May. In addition, there will be other times arranged for rehearsals and performances, primarily during the second semester.