

Introduction

Dancing Backwards is an eight-week program that focuses on citizenship, gender equality in leadership and the many crucial contributions women have made to Canada's political journey. The program meets specific Learning Standards/Outcomes by Province and offers an engaging opportunity to achieve educational requirements and goals. The program is currently free for teachers across Canada.

Rationale

The contributions of women in political and leadership roles are too often overlooked in today's classrooms. Dancing Backwards seeks to fill this content void by creating an ever-growing archive of women's achievements, vividly reinjecting women into Canadian history.

Though 52% by population, as of 2016, women hold just 26% of the seats in federal government. Even fewer seats are held by Indigenous women and women of ethnic minorities. These numbers are on the rise with Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau's government - note for instance the appointment of a First Nations woman, Jody Wilson-Raybould, as Minister of Justice - and this is a trend we seek to foster and reinforce. Without proportional representation of these groups of women, their needs in the general population tend not to be met. More balanced representation is vital for the sake of innovation, and equality in the decision-making processes of government is an essential step in getting women's needs reflected in policy-making. As Linda Trimble states in her book *Still Counting: Women in Politics Across Canada*, "They [women] have come close...but have not reached critical mass, the point at which women's presence [in Parliament] would lead to basic change."

It is critical to the democratic principles that underlie our political system that both men and women be represented equally. It is also critical that young people in Canada understand that their engagement is an essential element in overcoming the gender disparity we see in politics today, and that they can protect democracy with their vote. In past elections, the youth voter turnout has been low. We hope to help raise this percentage in future elections. In fact, Statistics Canada reported that the voter turnout of 18-24-year-olds increased from 55% in 2011 to 67% in 2015. Among those aged 25 to 34, it rose 11 percentage points to 70%. Again, this is a thrilling trend we must build upon.

There are a number of reasons that Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous women in particular, from engaging in the vote. Many make the choice to remain a citizen of their own nation/band rather than of the Canadian state. Also, when Indigenous peoples are living on remote reserves they can be excluded from exercising their right as Canadian citizens. For example, on a reserve in Ontario, many reserve members encountered obstacles when registering to vote in the 2015 federal election because their addresses were not recognized. This was shown to deter many Indigenous peoples from engaging in the vote.

Aboriginal peoples in general did not receive the right to vote until 1960, and Chinese Canadians were not allowed to vote until 1947. The reason for the gender/diversity gap is multi-faceted, but it is our belief that a solution to the problem is education, activism, empowerment and inspiration. Dancing Backwards aims to highlight these women's stories in the classroom, in the minds of young Canadians, and on the web for all to see.

The material regarding women and politics is based on current research. The program's structure rests on established educational theory indicating that project-based and art-based learning can reach a broad spectrum of young people, expand critical thinking, and influence the behaviour of youth in future.

Educational Background

Using the experiential learning model, we focus on two specific theories: the experiential learning cycle, and the value-belief-norm behavioral model. We also focus on project and inquiry based learning with an arts and drama base.

The experiential learning cycle is four-fold. The first step is the experience itself. For the students involved in the Dancing Backwards program this cycle repeats itself each time a new part of the unit comes into play. The second step is processing the experience. This may seem obvious, but unfortunately, it is often the most overlooked stage of any learning opportunity for young people. During this time the students are asked about the experience and content learned. They are encouraged to evaluate what they've learned, think critically, answer questions based on their own assessment of the material, and engage deeply. The third stage is to generalize. Students are asked to compare, contrast and come to understand their experience and feelings. The fourth stage is to apply the knowledge gained.

The value-belief-norm behavioral model is a model for helping create positive behavioral change, particularly geared toward future action and involvement with an issue, and is based on the supposition that a person's behaviors are a direct result of their beliefs, values, worldview and sense of what's appropriate. A sense of equality and treating every person with respect is a value that grows out of this model and these formative experiences. It is the intention of Dancing Backwards to use this behavioral model in order to foster partnership between young men and women and to teach young men that supporting their female counterparts is a worthwhile and powerful pursuit in the journey towards equality. It also aims to reinforce the belief that women can be effective and respected leaders.

Inquiry-based learning is a style of education that builds critical thinking and investigative skills. Instead of solely offering answers or lecturing, educators ask questions of their students to allow them the space to form thoughts and opinions of a topic on their own. While inquiry-based learning is a broad and somewhat complex style of teaching, we believe it can be integrated within and throughout the Dancing Backwards program.

Inquiry-based teaching is a skill that takes some practice. For some it will be old hat, for others a new exploration. We encourage teachers to engage with the material with the experiential learning cycle and behavioral model in mind. We invite you to adopt as much as possible the inquiry-based style of learning, in which students are asked to consider, ponder and respond to questions rather than being given or told an answer.

Program Objectives

- Educate youth about women’s contributions to Canada’s history
- Combat youth voter apathy and
- Cultivate citizenship principles
- Nurture demand for equality between the sexes
- Empower female students to take leadership roles and male students to support them as equal partners.

The concrete outcome of this program for each student is a project detailing the life, contributions, controversies and socio-political atmosphere of a particular woman in Canada’s political history.

Students will be introduced to a number of influential women, given a few illustrative details about each, and asked to choose one for further study. Guidelines and the opportunity for self-assessments are offered throughout. The projects students produce will be presented to the class and will be recorded and posted (with permission) to the Dancing Backwards Her Story Archive. This archive will form a rich and evolving resource for teachers and students across Canada.

We believe in the importance and potency of art practice to facilitate learning. The application of the visual, literary, fine and performance arts for this project will aid in the synthesis and understanding of complex material.

Dancing Backwards was designed to address a wide variety of Learning Standards/Outcomes by Province and core competencies in order to facilitate broad and flexible use of the program design. It aligns with many of the goals for Social Studies, Drama and Language Arts.

Through their participation in social studies, students will be encouraged and enabled to:

- Understand and prepare to exercise their roles, rights and responsibilities within their families, their community, their country and the world
- Demonstrate respect for human equality and cultural diversity
- Acquire an understanding of, and appreciation for, the historical and geographical forces that have shaped and continue to shape Canadian society and societies around the world
- Develop the skills and attitudes necessary to become thoughtful, questioning, active participants in their communities and as global citizens.

A Learning Standards/Outcomes by Province page has also been included. These are meant to serve as guideposts for the teacher as the learning unfolds. Teachers are encouraged to adapt and tweak the unit to reflect and align with curriculum in their province.

As argued earlier, Canadian schools have on the whole failed to adequately represent the true range and value of women’s contributions to Canada. It is our goal to support teachers as they seek to correct this omission. We invite you to use Dancing Backwards as part of your effort to engage and excite Canada’s youth, encourage full citizenship, and make Canada a place of gender equality.

Program Design Overview

Driving Question

Why might equal representation of men and women in leadership be important to me? My community? My country? The World?

Project Learning Intentions

- Feel empowered to advocate and be an agent for change: your voice matters (e.g. voting)
- Develop competencies needed for participation in a democratic society: think critically and creatively; communicate effectively; develop a positive personal and social identity
- Reclaim politics as an integral part of our lives
- Identify personal role models in leadership/politics
- Communicate opinions effectively for an audience.

Understandings

Students will understand:

- Women's political/leadership contributions to Canada's history; making connections between past, present and future
- How both men and women can support equal representation in government
- The importance and influence of equal representation of men and women in leadership
- That political engagement has the power and potential to shape self, community and the world.

Essential Questions

1. How am I connected to those in the past?
2. How does the legacy of earlier groups and individuals influence following generations?
3. Why might equal representation of men and women in leadership be important to me? My community? My country? The World?
4. Can an individual make a difference?
5. What does it mean to be an active citizen in a democracy?
6. What does political engagement mean to me?
7. How might I communicate my opinion effectively?

Assessment Evidence

Informal

Pre/post assessment Blackline Masters (BLM) (BLM 1 - Before and After: Student Reflection and Self-Assessment):

- Student journal writing (reflections)
- Observations: partner/small group talk
- Student self-assessment.

Formal

- Quizzes
- Academic writing prompts
- Performance task – Final project creation and presentation
- Personal opinion written in response to the Driving Question: justify using examples from their research.

Learning Activities

- Related to the themes of each lesson - Introduction to Politics – What is it Good For? Politics and Me; It's All About Everyone; Role Models, Telling Stories, Creating Her Story
- Political Word Game; Videos; Discussion Starters, Drama/Kinesthetic Exercises, Final Performance Task, The Her Story Archive, and Women's Biographies
- Ongoing research and self-evaluation
- Presentations and personal opinion writing.

Core Competencies

The Dancing Backwards Program encourages learning in each of the subject areas of Social Studies, English Language Arts and Drama. We are proud to present a program that is well-rounded and on-point with the various curricula.

Visit the Learning Standards/Outcomes by Province page on the Dancing Backwards website for more information on the specific core competencies for each province.

Who This Program Is For

This program has been created for students in grades 5 to 8. It is designed to be used primarily in the areas of Social Studies and English Language Arts, with related areas of Political/Women's Studies, History, and Dramatic, Visual and Performance Arts. The Lesson Plans progress in a strategic manner, allowing students time to process, engage with and synthesize the material.

The program material is intended to be a guide. Please use your professional judgment when introducing new material to your classroom. Familiarize yourself with all aspects of the

program so that you are able to deliver the material comfortably. Feel free to add any pertinent material or make relevant connections to other subjects you may currently be covering or have covered with your class.

Teachers are encouraged to pick and choose amongst activities in each Lesson and to modify the lesson in accordance with the needs and level of each class. The purpose of including these materials is to serve you and your class in the best possible way. Feel free to modify as needed.

It is recommended that teachers print out the PDFs of the materials on the website (Lesson Plans, Activities, Guidelines, BLMs etc.) and use the hard copies to teach from. However, teachers will need to refer to the website lesson overview page to start the short video that initiates each lesson. Refer to the Timeline, the Her Story Archive, and the Women's Biographies anytime during the program.

Above all, encourage students to have fun!

Assessment and Evaluation

Teachers are encouraged to assess student learning through co-constructing criteria, goal setting and reflecting with students. Dialogue and engagement with the material, paired with ongoing reflection, are the most important pieces of the project's process. Informal and formal assessments before, during and after learning allow for responsive teaching and deep learning.

Lesson Structure

This is a short outline of how to read the Lesson Plans. Lesson details are presented in the order the outline suggests.

Each Lesson Plan may include the following elements:

- Driving Question
- Essential Questions
- Lesson Objectives
- Learning Outcomes/Standards
- Background Information
 - Pre-Assessment (if applicable)
 - Prior to Class preparation
- Videos
- Activities
- Handouts (BLMs) for printing

Forms and handouts are downloadable in PDF format, so they can easily be copied and distributed as noted in each Lesson Plan.

Lesson Videos

Each Lesson begins with a short video designed to introduce lesson themes and provoke discussion. The videos are animated, colourful, entertaining and informative. You will find the videos on dancingbackwards.ca within the Dancing Backwards Program at the beginning of each Lesson. Teachers are invited to kick off each lesson by clicking and playing the embedded video.

Dancing Backwards Her Story Archive

On the site, you will find short Biographies of many Canadian political women as examples of possible choices. Refer students to the Her Story Student Archive to see what projects are already completed about their chosen woman, and to seek inspiration from storytelling styles of their peers.

Students are encouraged to research and choose local or provincial leaders to whom they relate as role models for their Dancing Backwards project. Our goal is for the Dancing Backwards Her Story Archive to expand and include as many stories as there are women in Canada's political and governance history.

Please feel free to reach out to your community for added support during the Dancing Backwards process. For example, a local artist, Elder, or woman involved in leadership or politics could be invited to the classroom to share her non-partisan experiences, any barriers she had to overcome, accomplishments, and advice and encouragement to future leaders.

Digital Timeline

A bonus research tool at dancingbackwards.ca is a searchable digital Dancing Backwards Timeline (from 1848 to the present). The Timeline gives context to Canadian and world social and political events that occurred during the lifetime of the political woman the students choose for their project. Browsing the Timeline adds historical context to the obstacles women faced at the time of their work.