

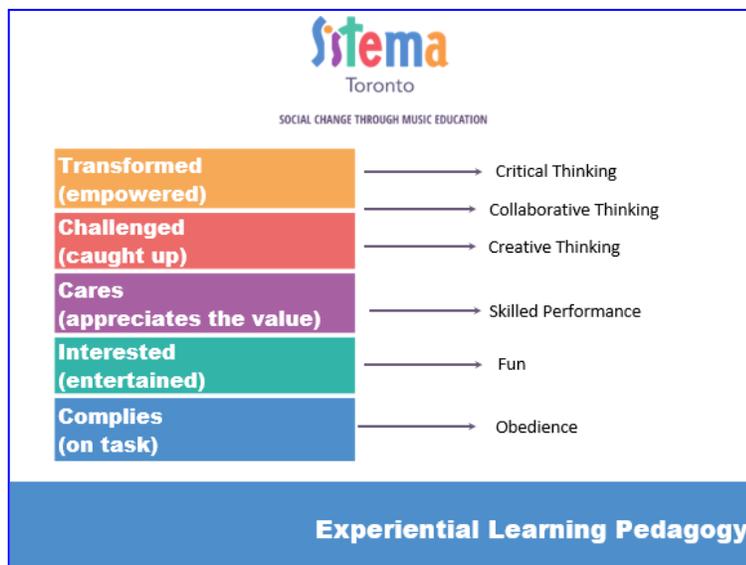
Sistema Toronto Curriculum Update

Over the past three years our teaching team has been working to transform our teaching approach and find more ways to increase student interest and engagement. Changing our pedagogical approach has centred around shifting from a transactional approach to an experiential approach to learning.

Most of us learned through transactional learning, a teacher--centered method of teaching in which the teacher dispenses all knowledge, acts as the keeper of truth, and makes all evaluations of learning. In this learning model, achievement is seen as students' ability to parrot knowledge back to the teacher and a high amount of value is placed on compliance and obedience. Transactional learning places limitations on students' ability to internalize information, solve complex problems or engage in critical thought. It also rewards compliant students while marginalizing challenging/challenged students.

Research on educational best practices show that social transformation is more likely to occur via experiential learning. Experiential learning is an interactive way for students to learn where students are asked questions (or ask questions themselves) that will lead them to knowledge. This method of learning encourages self-evaluation, the development of problem solving skills, and produces students who have the ability to think critically. When students can shift from obedient replicators of knowledge to problem-solving critical thinking knowledge-seekers, we can set them on the path for true social change and empowerment in the long term.

Many teachers are used to teaching in a transactional way, and so it has taken our team a lot of practice to shift our approach. Our teaching team meets for professional development sessions

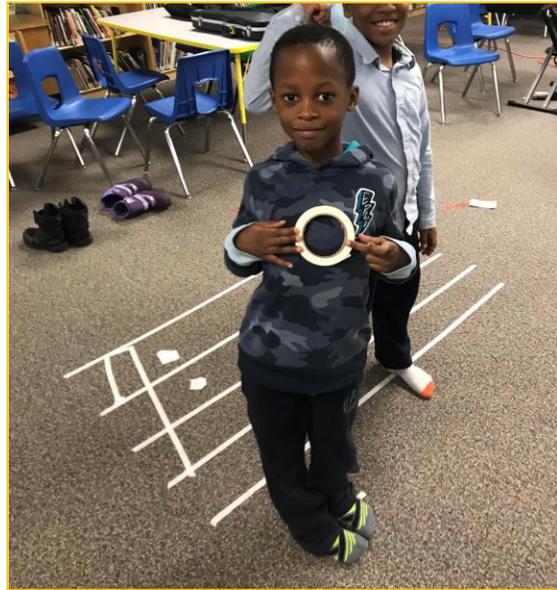


throughout the school year, and works together during program hours to find the best ways to create supportive experiential learning-based lesson plans for their students. In the early stages of this change some of our teachers found this transition stressful since some students turned out to be far less motivated and knowledgeable than they appeared to be in a transactional learning environment. Thanks to the dedication and determination of our teachers we have worked to overcome this stress in the interest of providing the

best possible environment for our students to learn. It's been exciting and rewarding to see our students shift from obedience/compliance to highly engaged learners who develop creative, collaborative and critical thinking learning skills.

An example of a shift from transactional teaching to experiential learning is how we approach teaching note-reading for junior students. In traditional transactional approaches, students are often taught note-reading via silent and non-interactive worksheet work. In this approach, student engagement is low and students frequently complain, are reluctant to participate, have

trouble retaining theory knowledge in an applied setting, and have a negative view of theory work. For one Junior class we tried an experiential approach to note-reading where students participated in a hands-on six-week "Theory Olympics" workshop. Students competed in teams and participated in hands-on activities to learn how to read notes and other theory concepts. In the note-reading "event" they used masking tape and were provided with "clues" from their instructor in order to build their staff, clef and open string notes. Student engagement for the "Theory Olympics" workshops were very much improved over the transactional worksheet model: the students had a very firm working knowledge of how to find open string notes on the staff, they were excited and eager to participate, and when the six-week workshop was over often asked when the next "Theory Olympics" would take place.



As we move into a new school year, our team will continue to work on new ways to bring an experiential approach to all of our teaching practices. In doing so, we empower our students to become exceptional musicians, critical thinkers, collaborators and leaders.