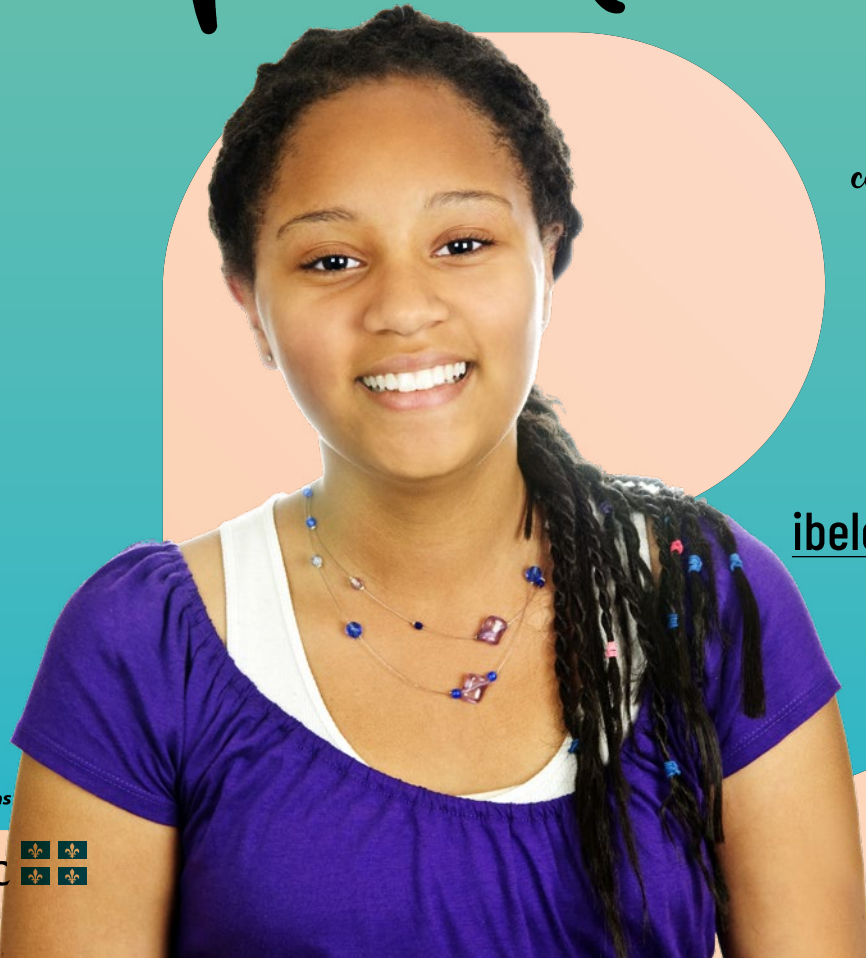




I belong!



*"Whatever the problem,  
community is the answer"*

- MARGARET WHEATLEY

LEARN MORE:  
[ibelong.learnquebec.ca](http://ibelong.learnquebec.ca)



Secrétariat aux relations  
avec les Québécois  
d'expression anglaise

Québec 



## INTRODUCING 'I BELONG!'

In 2019, the Secretariat for Relations with English-Speaking Quebecers (SRQEA) conducted consultations with representatives from the English community across the province. Their findings were unsurprising: most English speakers (still) do not feel a strong sense of belonging to the province. To better understand why that is, and to try and bolster the community's sense of belonging, the SRQEA awarded project funding to six COM-Unity based organizations, including LEARN.

Through its involvement in the COM-Unity project, LEARN is helping young Quebecers in grade 5+ to actively reflect upon, express and shape their sense of belonging to Quebec society.

## PROJECT AT A GLANCE

LEARN introduced four project-based learning opportunities that empowered students to explore their identity and sense of belonging to Quebec society through the arts and acts of community service:

### Make Art:

Students explored the relationship between identity and belonging as they witnessed performance pieces by artists from the Black, Indigenous and LGBTQAI2+ communities of Quebec. Students had an opportunity to turn the lens inward as they developed literary or visual arts pieces of their own with support from a local artist.

### Digital Storytelling:

Students explored what it means to them to belong to a community as they participated in a 6-week Digital Storytelling project, with support from digital media experts.

### Take Action:

Students engaged in a Community Service Learning project, where they planned, implemented and reflected upon positive actions that foster a greater understanding and sense of belonging to their communities.

### Comic Zine Creation:

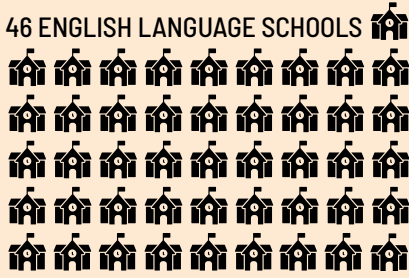
Students interviewed English-speaking seniors from their community to learn more about some of the ways in which they've helped to shape Quebec society. Their stories formed the basis for the creation of a comic zine, with guidance from professional comic book and multimedia artists.

*"The broad reach and deep emotional connections made through the arts prove they are powerful instruments to enhance belonging."*

Community Foundations of Canada,  
Vital Signs, Arts & Belonging (2017)

# FACTS & FIGURES

46 ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS



100 CLASSROOMS



12 QUEBEC-BASED ARTISTS FROM ELAN



1780 STUDENTS PARTICIPATED!



65% OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS ARE MEMBERS OF THE CLC NETWORK

900+  
DIGITAL STORIES

200+  
SPOKEN WORD PIECES

26 Make Art PROJECTS INVOLVING 553 STUDENTS

9 Comic Zines CREATED BY 184 STUDENTS

8 Take Action PROJECTS LED BY 233 STUDENTS



# PROJECT RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS INCLUDED:

- Orientation and debrief sessions with LEARN
- One-pagers describing project steps and curriculum connections
- Access to consultations with an Equity Education Advisor
- Question prompts for student reflection and discussion
- Note-taking template for students
- Grading rubrics
- Interview guide (for students interviewing seniors)
- Film Festival celebration hosted by LEARN & Hands On Media Education
- Padlet space for schools to share photos and films

**TAKE ACTION TEACHER TOOLKIT**

**Think Big**

**Spoken word**

**1 belongs!**

**Preparation and planning**

**Inventory and Investigation**

**REFLECT AND DISCUSS**

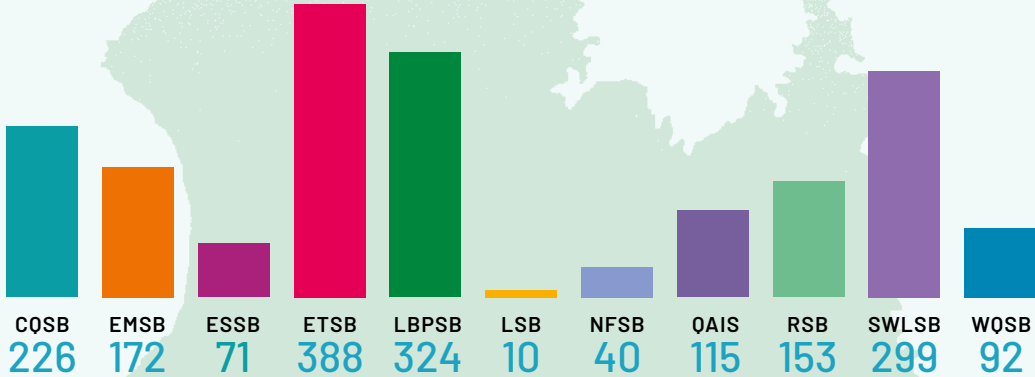
**CREATE**

**CELEBRATION**

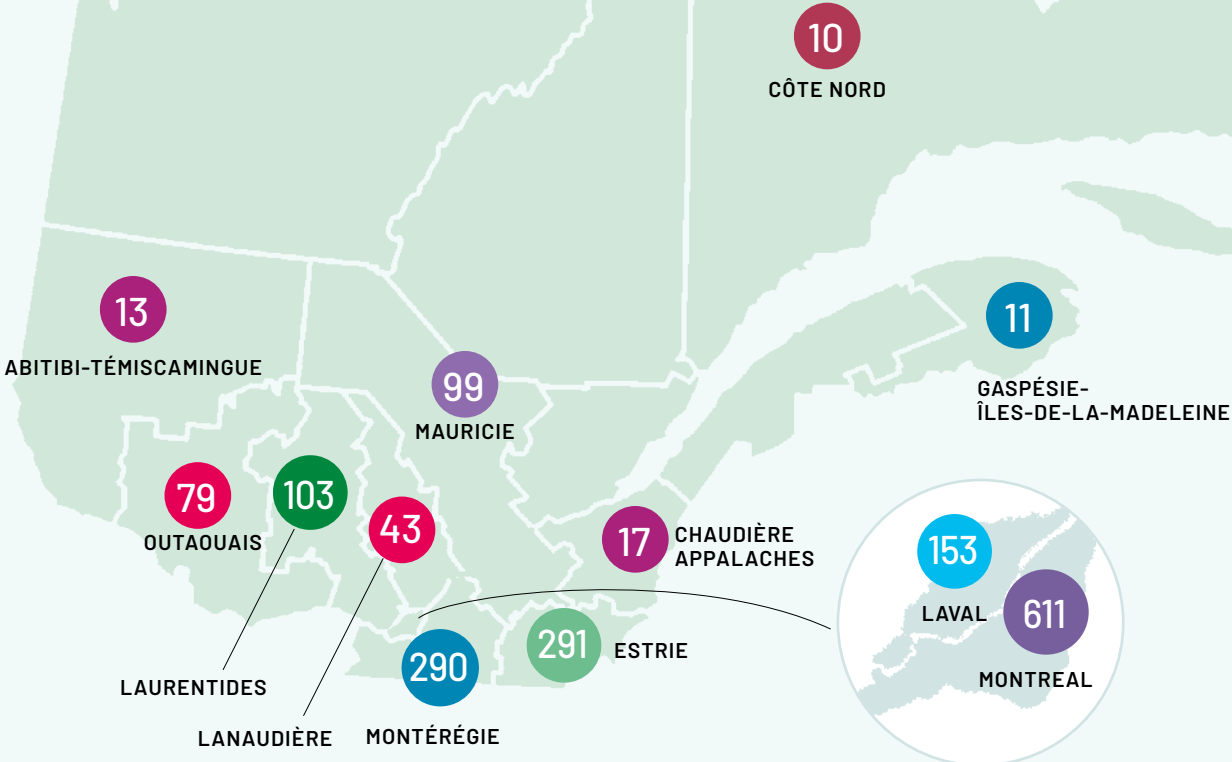
**COMPLETE IN A SLAM**

# STUDENT PARTICIPATION RATE

## BY SCHOOL BOARD



## BY REGION



# Spoken Word

In early spring 2021, the 17 classrooms participating in the [Make Art option of LEARN's 'I Belong!' project](#) experienced the kick-off performance led by Spoken Word artists Liana Cusmano, Jason "Blackbird" Selman and Deanna Smith.

Their performances helped introduce the themes of belonging and identity and inspire students to engage with the arts. Following the kickoff performance, 9 high school classrooms and 3 elementary school classrooms continued to work with the Spoken Word artists to develop literary pieces of their own.

## INSPIRING STUDENT EXPRESSION

[St Lambert International \(RSB\) Secondary V English teacher, William Marks](#), was thrilled when he heard about the [Spoken Word](#) option as he was looking for a way to engage his class with other voices in the classroom, aside from his own. For [Jen Lemesurier, Grade 6 teacher at Gault Institute \(NFSB\)](#), the Spoken Word option was a perfect pandemic replacement for her annual poetry slam as a way to achieve her ongoing objective of helping students talk about their emotions.

Both teachers were thrilled that 20-something artist, Liana Cusmano, was the guest artist who would guide them and their students in their 'I Belong' journey. William remarked that Liana offered a "generational closeness that can really help, especially when you're asking students to do something as difficult as expressing themselves." Liana also brought a unique perspective because they identify as non-binary. Elementary and secondary students alike were keen to learn and discuss gender, sexuality and gender relations as part of identity and consider how it influences an individual's sense of belonging.



Liana began the series of workshops by performing poems about their own struggles of identity and belonging in Quebec society. One poem seemed to touch all students - it was about how Liana's grandmother, someone who is supposed to love them unconditionally, didn't accept their queerness at first, but how now, despite having different worldviews, Liana feels accepted and has a sense of 'home' with her.

Liana's poems and their assurance that there are "no wrong answers and that this type of poetry doesn't have rules" created a no-pressure environment, inspiring students to jot down ideas and get writing! The grade 6 participants chose themes mostly related to their bedroom or home, school, sports or religious community - environments where they felt most comfortable and a true sense of belonging. For the secondary students, they wrote about a sense of belonging based on language, culture, ethnicity, gender, different music scenes, and sports. Jen found that students who at first said "I hate poetry, I don't want to do this - ended up writing amazing poetry!" William reflected that his "students came away with a new appreciation for poetry, because often when poetry is taught in high school and in elementary school, it's quite formulaic, it's quite rigid; but this was an opportunity to view poetry as something much more fluid and much more open and dynamic."

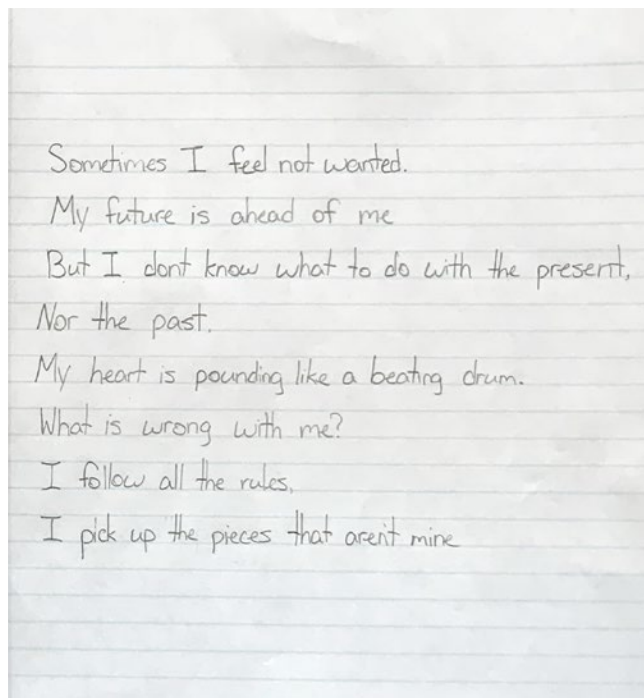
Perhaps this final anecdote from William summarizes best the deep reflection and learning about belonging that took place throughout the Spoken Word project:

after Liana had left the last workshop, one of his students said “wow she’s really good at poetry...” and then another student punched him in the arm saying, “they use ‘they/ them’ pronouns not ‘she/her’ pronouns!” This is something William would not have expected to hear from this particular student, remarking “I think it opened up their minds....they shared a moment of understanding of what it means to belong for other people.”

## INSPIRING VULNERABILITY

The combined works and approaches of this trio of performer-educators proved to be in perfect alignment with the goals of the project. Liana focuses on “heritage, queerness, relationships, and mental health, with the aim of helping others feel both seen and safe.” Deanna’s work is “rooted in her experiences as a descendent of the African Diaspora and as a person who thinks in two languages, a daughter, a wife, a mother and a neighbour of the many displaced peoples of Turtle Island.” For Jason, he “grounds his work in the themes of ethno-musicology, surrealist expression, love and the intersection of masculinity and emotional vulnerability.”

Deanna noted that “older kids have learned that being vulnerable can sometimes lead to shame, pain or bullying so they are often hesitant to get started. But once they do, they have more to share, and are a little more articulate about their experiences”.



*Jason Selman had a tremendous impact on my students; his mentorship of a group of shy young poets was inspirational in the truest sense of the word. He inspired my students to step well outside their comfort zones by creating an environment of trust and by giving meaningful and specific criticism, criticism that served the purpose of showing a path forward to improvement.*

PETER OLAND, TEACHER AT PIERREFONDS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL, LBPSB

## WRITING - A VEHICLE FOR EXPRESSION AND WELLNESS

Many participants were surprised by how much writing helped them feel better. One teacher told Liana, “the writing seems to be helping [my student’s] mood and the way he interacts with people in the classroom.” Furthermore, Jason’s influence as a man performing spoken word has prompted, to the surprise of some teachers, greater participation among boys.

Students came to realize that they could use words to express deep and personal emotions surrounding identity and belonging in powerful ways, without completely revealing their own confidential stories.

## THEY ARE THE FUTURE, THEY ARE THE TRUTH

When artists were asked what Quebecers should know about today’s youth based on their experience with the project, Liana noted that many of today’s youth are sad and anxious - they are concerned about the world they are inheriting. They added that today’s youth “are also bright, aware, and have good ideas - and we should be listening to them.” Jason concurs, “they are the future, they are the truth, and they are beautiful in their diversity. We have a responsibility to give them the full story and the means to tell their stories, and to live in a world where multiple narratives co-exist”. Deanna adds that when it comes to belonging and inclusion, “I think the kids are a lot closer to the way the world could be than we are.”

# Digital Storytelling

Through LEARN's six-week Digital Storytelling option, 940 students from 35 schools explored what it means to them to belong to a community, with support from digital media expert Jessie Curell, from Hands on Media Education.

Quebec elementary school teachers Marina McKenna and Michelle Pepin-Reed were both eager to participate in the Digital Storytelling option in late Fall 2020. For Marina, it was a chance for her grade 5/6 class at Butler Elementary School (ETSB) to learn more about themselves and each other. Michelle Pepin-Reed of La Tuque School (CQSB) took on the exciting challenge with her grade 5 language arts class, with hopes of developing a deeper understanding among classmates. Both teachers were keen to give their students the opportunity to enhance digital literacy skills and create something personal and reflective.

For secondary teacher, Aline Gosdanian, her motivation to participate revolved around ensuring that her secondary 3 English students from Laval Senior Academy (SWLSB) continued to have exciting projects despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

## A SENSE OF BELONGING: FROM HOME TO COMMUNITY

In preparation for the project, each teacher facilitated conversations in their classrooms around the concept of belonging. They hadn't often had the chance to speak about inclusion and exclusion with their students, so these conversations stretched them to think about themselves in the context of their families, their school, their class, and as a member of the wider community. Many students focused on their identity and heritage, their place in their family, and their own unique interests and personalities. The project seemed to plant a seed about how having a

voice, expressing and celebrating one's own identity can bridge relationships and foster mutual understanding.

In Michelle's class, where many students have known each other since kindergarten, it was surprising that they still learned about each other, their common interests, their families, as well as their differences. One tech-savvy student proudly completed his project early and offered to help other students. Not normally one to extend himself to others, offering peer support was a new experience and it boosted his confidence! Marina indicated that the project itself helped deepen the sense of community within the classroom, and "normalized the idea of students helping students, supporting each other" to complete their projects. The experience seemed to nudge the class culture towards one of deeper collaboration.

Working with secondary students, Aline observed that her students welcomed the opportunity to think deeply about their identity and while at first shy, they became comfortable sharing their personal stories. One story in particular stayed with Aline. Her student described the evolution of his neighbourhood over his life-time – from an open field – to a vibrant neighbourhood of families with diverse cultures and traditions. The student's rendition on how much these changes influenced his daily life and his perspective on the world was touching.







## A TRANSDISCIPLINARY ENDEAVOUR

All three teachers saw the value in the project, not only for enhancing student motivation, confidence, and a sense of belonging, but also to cover a range of core competencies within the curriculum. For secondary students, the project aligned perfectly with prior learning in their Ethics and Religious Culture course (ERC) on personal identity.

Students at all levels enhanced their digital literacy skills including navigating their own device, planning and creating a storyboard, taking photos, creating audio, and editing skills. Many students were particularly interested in the legal issues surrounding creative commons licenses and felt honoured to be learning from an expert in the field.

With aspects of the project challenging students at all levels to practice a range of language arts competencies - writing, connecting narration to visual images, and learning how tone can change meaning in an oral presentation - the Digital Storytelling project proved to be truly transdisciplinary. The teachers also developed their pedagogical skills and learned new software. They are building on this new learning, inspired to design other projects, and are sharing what they've learned with their colleagues.

## MOTIVATING, AUTHENTIC LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Marina, Michelle and Aline reflected on how their students loved their connection with “real-life” digital media expert, Jessie Curell. They built a relationship with her, even though it was over zoom, and they looked forward to that regular time to connect and learn. Marina observed that “every time we connected with Jessie in the weekly zoom meetings, my students left more motivated with new ideas they wanted to implement”.

For Jessie Curell, one of the many touching highlights was with the teachers and students at the Galileo Adult Education Centre (EMSB). With many students on the autism spectrum or with other specific learning needs, these projects were transformational. Jessie remarked, “to hear them appreciate the communities they belong to and articulate with conviction statements like, ‘I am Alexie and I belong’, was powerful, and a tribute to their families, teachers and school.” Media literacy isn’t a given for all, and for some, it has been a real game-changer – as Lisa Trotto, one of the participating teachers at Galileo, remarked: “students went from not being able to open an otter case on an iPad to using iMovie! It’s amazing!”

## A WELL-SUPPORTED PROJECT

All three teachers noted that the project resources provided by LEARN and Hands on Media Education were a key ingredient to success. Resources included guiding questions for student reflection and discussion, a storyboard, a useful rubric as well as pre-recorded weekly videos outlining project steps in addition to regular meeting opportunities with Jessie Curell.

The 6-week program did require regular and creative scheduling of project time both in class and at home. This became challenging at times depending on student access to reliable internet and devices at home. Marina, Michelle and Aline recommend careful planning and even more up-front priming of students on the topic of belonging, and if possible, that teachers do their own project in advance to become familiar with any technical hurdles. They all welcome the opportunity to participate in the ‘I Belong’ Digital Storytelling Option again in the future!

# B Comic Zine Creation

**Stephanie Jonker, teacher at St. Francis Elementary School (ETSB) in Richmond, Quebec was keen to share the Comic Zine experience with her 24 grade 5 and 6 students as she was looking for “a long-term project that integrated art with language arts.” Not an art teacher herself, she was happy to bring comic artist, Laurence Dea Dionne, into the classroom and learn along with her students.**

Lori Litvack, visual arts teacher at Trafalgar School for Girls, was also excited to participate saying she “loves collaborative projects as they take you out of the norm” and “it was great to have an artist come into the school to share their expertise – it makes it real for the students.” She invited her colleague, Libby Fainsilber, grade 8 ELA teacher to join her in the adventure, and together they adapted their schedules as needed to ensure their 16 grade eight students were well-supported.

## INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Both lead teachers were intrigued by the intergenerational component of the experience, as they saw value in their students making personal connections and hearing stories from others, particularly older individuals in the community. In turn, many of the participating students felt good about connecting with seniors, some of whom were feeling particularly isolated due to the pandemic.

LEARN provided teachers with question prompts for students that explore the themes of identity and belonging within Quebec society. Students used the question guide as a starting point to prepare for and conduct interviews with seniors. Stephanie’s students were excited about conducting interviews but didn’t expect it to be so hard, particularly learning how to “take what people say and

then deviate from your question list”. Stephanie interviewed her own grandmother and showed her students the recording, sharing her questions and modeling the interview process! Her students interviewed seniors in groups of three.

## A MIX OF LANGUAGE AND ART

The Comic Zine project touches language arts competencies in oral expression (interviews), and writing as well as various artistic techniques which are part of the visual arts curriculum. Lori was grateful for the expertise that comic expert Laurence brought to her art classroom: “She is an absolute pro, very knowledgeable and so helpful in guiding students through the steps of bringing it all together.” Stephanie was thrilled with the drawing techniques that her students learned, including perspective, proportions, shading, outlining and colour. Students in Stephanie’s class also learned how to structure a story and tie it to the drawings. It was incredibly satisfying to give “my reluctant writers a chance to tell a meaningful story without using words so much.”





While turning the information from an interview into a story was really hard, students learned about creative liberty, using what they had heard as inspiration, taking an idea and making it their own. This was a complex undertaking, and the teachers - who are keen to continue their involvement in the future - are already making suggestions about dedicating more hours and providing additional scaffolding to the students throughout the process.

## BELONGING, HISTORY & HERITAGE

The resultant Comic Zine stories were wide-ranging in nature and mostly revolved around personal life journeys as individuals navigated and contributed to life in Quebec society. In the grade 5-6 classes at St. Francis Elementary, there were numerous stories about the comfort that comes with belonging to a small community, even when the community changes over the years; stories about the farming lifestyle and being able to choose your own path. One interviewee spoke about the book she wrote about the 1995 Quebec referendum - something that her grade 5 and 6 interviewees knew little about! Several grade 8 participants from Trafalgar were intrigued by some of the ways in which English-speaking Quebecers had helped to shape Quebec society: the founding of Geordie Theater, contributions to McGill's Leacock Lecture series, and the story of a Montreal artist with breast cancer who instead of accepting gifts for her wedding, created a fundraiser for breast cancer research.

It was exciting to share the final Comic Zines with the seniors in a final celebration over zoom. As students presented, Laurence shared feedback and comments to

help everyone understand the process and the choices the artists had made. The seniors were thrilled to be involved and be part of the experience with youth. Once the project wrapped up, Lori's students reflected on what they learned about the theme of belonging:

*"I learned that doing good things for your community like fundraising for charities gives you a sense of belonging and identity..."*

*"I learned that for most people, to belong [means being] included in a community or for people to respect you, like you and treat you as a friend."*

Students, Grade 8

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM FEATURED ARTISTS

With 10 elementary, secondary and adult education centres involved in all, the Comic Zine project started with accomplished artist-educators [Laurence Dea Dionne](#) and [G. Scott MacLeod](#) showing examples of their own comic work and in Scott's case, animated films.

Many students came in saying "I can't draw" but left realizing that they could! Scott observed that when he showed students a variety of tracing techniques, he immediately saw their shoulders drop and stress levels diminish. In one case, a student overtly asked, "Mr MacLeod, is it okay if I make a mistake?"; when the response was a loud, "absolutely!", the student said, "great, now I can move forward!"

Laurence explained that comics are for everyone - kids and adults - and that often on the surface they are cute and fluffy but that "when you dive deeper into the stories, you realize they're about mental health and physical health... and developing yourself and accepting yourself as a person with all your faults and all your complexities."

For Scott, this project enhanced his own sense of belonging as an artist and educator. He stated that through this project, he realized, "I belong here...I really felt like I'm part of something in society and passing the wisdom of my life experience on to the next generation; I'm feeling that it is even more important to properly equip them, and give them the best of what we have to offer."

# Take Action

The 'Take Action' option provides a Community Service Learning (CSL) framework for students and teachers to become active citizens and enhance their sense of belonging to Quebec society. Schools interested in this option were eligible to apply for up to 2K in project funding.

## 1 BECOMING AUTHORS: WRITING FOR CHANGE

When teachers Sarah Macaskill and Ashley Rowley from [Beurling Academy \(LBPSB\)](#) learned about the [Take Action](#) option from Community Development Agent, Simone Viger, they knew immediately that it was a perfect fit for their vision. The teachers wanted their grade 7 and 8 students to "write something meaningful, and show them that their words have [the] power to create change."

To help inspire students, they invited author Danielle Murrel Cox to share her story - a children's book, *My Hair* - which promotes the celebration of Black hair and natural hairstyles. Danielle described her writing process to the students and inspired them to tell their own stories to build community and create a space where everyone can belong.

### Broad and Deep Discussions about Belonging

Sarah and Ashley set the stage with their students by sharing the LEARN resources about belonging as part of their Ethics and Religious Culture class, facilitating a wonderful opportunity to connect two disciplines - ethics and language arts. The discussions among Sarah's 20 grade eight students indicated that their strongest sense of belonging was felt at home and at school. Many of her students wanted to talk about individuals with learning disabilities and their frequent struggles with feeling a sense of belonging to Quebec society. Interestingly, the majority

of students in Sarah's class are identified with a learning difficulty themselves and have an accompanying Individual Education Plan (IEP). The project facilitated open conversations about "adaptation, making sure everyone has what they need" as well as "the lessons that other people need to learn in order for them to be accepted."

Ashley approached things slightly differently with her participating students: 22 in grade seven and 20 in grade eight. Using the initial discussions as a foundation, she prompted her students to think deeply about the challenges they face as teenagers. At first the students were a little scared and skeptical, but with more probing, they started to talk about their struggles with identity. Many expressed their longing for someone to truly understand them. Topics included the challenges that come with ethnic differences, physical and learning disabilities, abuse and sexual orientation.

### Writing, Editing, Illustrating, Binding, Recording

Sarah explained that the project is "a great way to start the year because we were able to touch the majority of the curriculum." The young authors at Beurling have had an authentic writing experience over a three month period, using all three ELA competencies through a process of constant feedback, small group discussions, peer editing and collaboration.

Adding illustrations to the book allowed students to demonstrate their artistic strengths, which has been very validating for many. Furthermore, CDA Simone Viger, who supported the teachers throughout the project, arranged for book-maker, Kate Battle, to give a book-binding demonstration - an important stage of the book-making process. The students are also doing a voice recording of their stories. Sarah shared, "we're planning to share those recordings with students in other schools; and despite



*“Supportive interactions between people in a neighbourhood is one of the strongest factors found to increase community belonging...the more we get involved in the community, the more we feel like we belong.”*

Community Foundations of Canada, Vital Signs (2015, 2016)

the pandemic, we’re still hoping to get into some classrooms and have students read their stories and interact with the classes, and maybe even have some discussions about why they wrote them.”

### Student Voice and Choice Drives Engagement

At first, Sarah and Ashley wanted to narrow down the number of thematic choices for students and structure their time more rigidly. But they have now realized that by giving students more choice and latitude, and including them in the planning process and even in determining deadlines, the students were more engaged and accountable. It has been so interesting to “watch the students who struggle to write things...here they are finishing full stories, becoming authors; being able to step back and let them take ownership has been very effective.”

### Moving forward

Sarah and Ashley are very appreciative of the opportunity to participate in the ‘I Belong’ project with their students. The resources, support and funding provided by LEARN helped them to launch and sustain their vision and they are thrilled with the results and the ongoing learning about belonging. They look forward to having even more resources in the future, with suggestions for development including a bank of visual prompts, videos and examples, in order to elicit deeper thinking about belonging.

## 2 LAST WAVE RADIO STATION: A BEACON TO BRING US TOGETHER

Teacher Alex Bon-Miller at [Laval Senior Academy](#) (SWLSB) was immediately enthusiastic about the ‘Take Action’ option as it aligned with his goal to help cultivate a deeper sense of belonging to the school community, particularly during the pandemic. “What we’ve experienced in our school culture is an enormous amount of atomization, people being separated from one another, unable to come together, physically. How do you get students to come together and to speak, exchange and share when you’re so restricted in terms of your physical movement ... I wanted

to cultivate a sense of belonging to the school so that we actually have some kind of beacon that brings us together.”

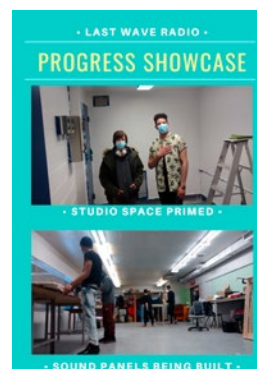
In this case, the beacon is a school Radio Station called “Last Wave”- it is something that the community can tune into, participate in by sending in responses through audio files and personal recordings, creating a dialogue of exchanges and interchanges. It is a “platform for amplifying voices - student voice and educator voice.” Furthermore, the project is originating from the Work Oriented Training Program (WOTP), giving students who often don’t have the opportunity to take on a school-wide initiative, the unique and powerful experience of modelling leadership for the rest of the community.

### Community mentoring relationship is a gift

The building of a sound studio is not a small undertaking, particularly as a student project within a school setting. However, as soon as he heard about the project, one WOTP student was keen to take it on as his stage. Fortunately, community sound expert, Max Husbands, agreed to join the project, sharing not only his depth of knowledge and experience, but providing key mentorship and guidance to the student. Max’s level of commitment to the project has been very inspiring and demonstrates how a school can create a deepened sense of belonging for students by reaching out to the wider community for support - ‘it takes a village.’

### CDA advocacy buoys the team

Alex is the first to express that this project would not be possible without the tireless accompaniment of Community Development Agent, Katrina Driver. Her advocacy buoys the team: she helped to pitch the project to school administrators and parents, coordinate budgetary matters and facilitate trusting relationships in the community. As a school of 1500 students, “it would be impossible to do alone, without the help of someone taking a high altitude perspective, connecting the dots within the institution and with community resources.”



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENTS LEND A HELPING HAND

Approximately 65% of LEARN's 'I Belong!' projects took place within Quebec's network of community schools, known as "Community Learning Centres (CLC). CLC school teams include Community Development Agents, who can support participating teachers by coordinating logistics and community connections.

One teacher involved in the 'I Belong!' project noted that their Community Development Agent (CDA), Siu-Min Jim, was the 'unsung hero' helping to make their project come to life. In her role as a CDA for the Richmond, Danville & Drummondville area Community Learning Centre (ETSB), Siu-Min supports one high school and one elementary school. Between them, teachers took on eight 'I Belong!' projects in total: 3 Digital Storytelling projects, 3 Make Art projects and 2 Take Action projects.

As CDA, Siu-Min first introduced the principals and teachers to the 'I Belong!' project opportunities, then followed up with details and in some cases, helped with the application process. She was keen to be involved not only because LEARN had thoughtfully designed the projects and secured funding for resources that would be welcomed by teachers, but also because she saw the projects as a great fit with the CLC's objective: "to provide schools with tools to support the mental health and emotional well-being of students."

As students at one school took on a Comic Zine creation project, Siu-Min used her intimate knowledge of relevant community partners to identify seniors in the commu-



ity who would participate in intergenerational interviews. The 'Take Action' projects allowed Siu-Min to leverage her knowledge of the community and relationships with local organizations further. In one case, a high school teacher had a vision of a wood-working project and Siu-Min was able to help him explore his vision with a community lens. His students ended up building wooden benches with integrated flower boxes and worked with the municipality to find appropriate locations for the benches where community members (particularly seniors) would want to gather and socialize. For the other 'Take Action' project, Siu-Min helped an elementary school teacher and her students identify a timely community need and act on it, in this case, developing a mask recycling program. She was able to help familiarize the teacher more deeply with the community; the teacher then brainstormed with students to choose, communicate and collaborate with local businesses and organizations, already vetted by Siu-Min.

As she walks through the schools, it is evident to Siu-Min that LEARN's 'I Belong!' projects have had an impact. She stopped by one classroom recently and on the door, there was the outline of an exercise that one of the teachers had done with her students about "identity, situating yourself and your community."

Upon reflection, Siu-Min shares that it is very rewarding to work alongside teachers who "go over and beyond to create a full experience for their students." And no doubt, the teachers feel the same way about Siu-Min - their passionate and committed CDA who always goes the extra mile.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 'I Belong!' project is funded by the Secretariat for Relations with English Speaking Quebecers.

The project was additionally supported by ELAN's ArtEd team, who works with LEARN to identify featured artists and expand participation through the use of its Artists Inspire grants.

We would also like to thank Liz Falco, who led interviews with participants and helped to draft this report.

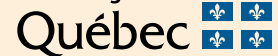
The success of LEARN's 'I Belong!' project wouldn't have been possible without the leadership of participating teachers, community development agents and featured artists. In a school year like no other, their professionalism and unyielding commitment to English-speaking youth has been nothing less than inspirational.

Finally, a special thank you to participating students for reminding us of how powerful simple acts of kindness can be in fostering belonging and for having the courage to speak your truths - the fabric of our province is made more visible, and more beautiful, through your eyes.



### SPONSORED BY

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