**F**or more than a year, the pandemic has been forcing theatres and actors to take multiple precautions whilst working, and it hasn’t been any different for our performing arts department at BISB.

The performing arts department has been struck hard by the pandemic, forcing the drama students at BISB to adapt to keep themselves safe throughout performances, and the faculty to adjust to working online. Alex Fraser, Head of the Performing Arts Department and English Teacher in his first year at BISB, has been working tirelessly to help his students. Unfortunately, due to complications surrounding travel to the country, Mr. Fraser hasn’t been able to teach in person all year, presenting another major difficulty to both him and his students. Along with not being able to have a teacher physically present to guide them, there are technical difficulties in relation to sound and visual quality.

Before the pandemic, drama students and teachers were tasked with creating group pieces in which students would get to interact with each other to create their final result. Students were able to bring in props that they could share, and incorporate gestures and movements with another person. Now, instead of this interaction, they connect their characters using drama techniques such as the select and delete method (connecting characters using a common movement). They work on moving their characters around the space without bumping into or getting close to each other, using a technique called grid walking. They also make sure to practice pace and mirroring, adding dimension to their piece whilst maintaining Covid-19 regulations and guidelines.

We sat down with Mr. Fraser to learn about the impacts that the pandemic has had on his performing arts classes.

**What have the challenges been for you teaching online? And how have you faced them?**

It was quite challenging not to physically see the students but [being virtual] helped me focus more on the progression [of the students] from the academic side. As a people person, I genuinely love being in the space with students and staff, so it was challenging getting to the point where you feel confident enough to be able to deliver remotely.

**How have you adapted your teaching style? Is there anything you really enjoy about teaching online? Is there anything you've modified?**

I've had to think about interesting ways for students to collaborate. Ordinarily, as a teacher, it's really important to turn class into a sort of discussion and be more of a facilitator. In this way, it's been difficult to facilitate because I can't see the students, however, it's been wonderful having Ms. Stevens there to support that. Nevertheless, teaching this way has led to some real strengths coming from the students. I have also adapted a lot of little things where I’ve asked students to record, or present themselves. I've been able to use new software to be able to leave vocal video feedback for the students.

**How have you and the students adapted their performances to keep six feet away from each other? And has that stopped you or the students from delving into certain ideas?**

Instead of not pursuing our ideas, it's helped us to find a lot of different alternatives that have been really interesting to look into. For middle school students who are predominantly at desks with COVID protocols in place, it's opened up lots of opportunities to focus on design and to think about the arts from a digital multimedia point of view. We have a lot of students that are interested in that aspect, the whole virtual side of the art, whether it be through engineering or whether it be through graphic design, sound, or lighting. The technical aspects of drama and theater have been a real eye-opener for myself as a teacher.

**Anything else you find important or would like the BISB community to know?**

When it comes to the arts, the students have responded really well and in such a positive way to what's happening at the moment. Overall, there doesn't seem to be any real sense of negativity towards the arts, in light of what's happened, and that's amazing. For the foreseeable future, the arts have likely changed in terms of what they were. That's a good thing for students right now because they’re only just getting started. They have the opportunity to fill a clean slate.

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After interviewing Mr. Fraser, I saw that although it has been a challenging year, there have been good opportunities for drama students to develop their range of acting skills and for teachers to develop new teaching techniques. As a drama student myself, I can say it wasn’t easy having to deal with COVID protocols, but it was a challenge that we were able to overcome. I believe that working through these challenges can only improve our skills. COVID protocols have taught me to think creatively to perform and create different drama pieces- I believe I wouldn’t have been able to develop these skills in other situations.

In general, learning to adapt to a new environment is very important, and although it most certainly is challenging, there is always something good that can come out of it.

We thank Mr. Fraser for providing us insight into how he has persevered with performing arts through the pandemic. We wish him the best of luck in coming to Boston and hope to see him in person soon.