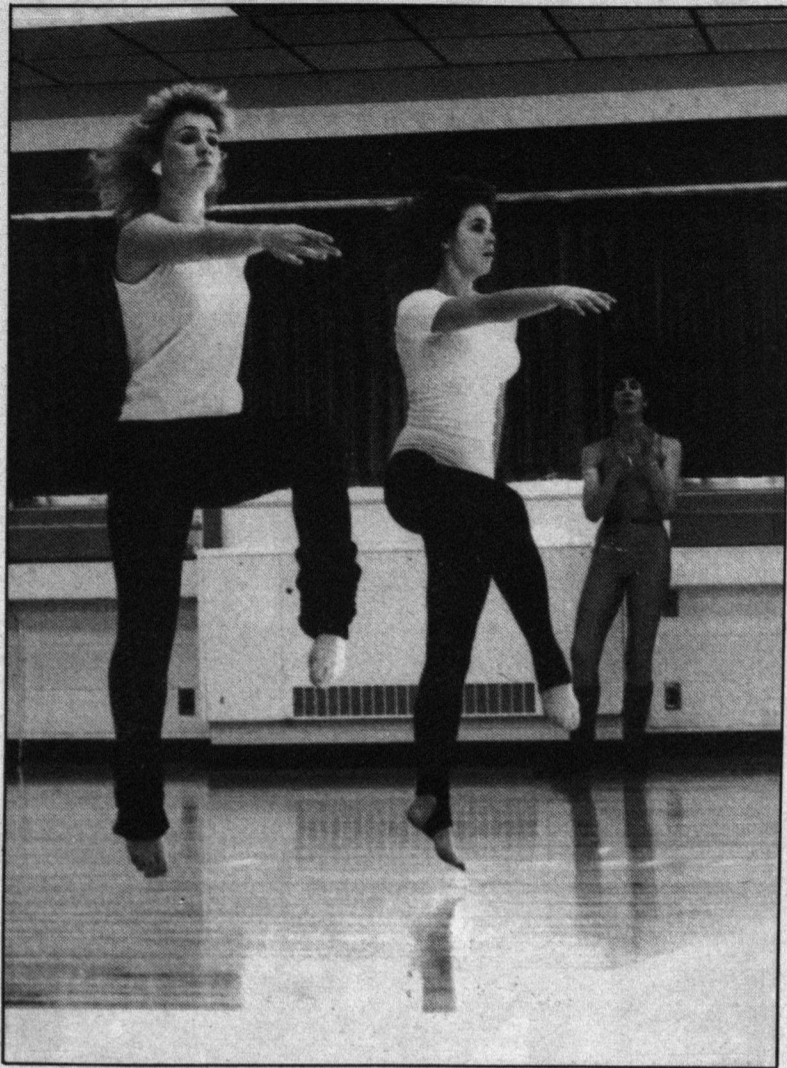


Vic Comp: Tough school



"The staff commitment and the student commitment to what is happening here is absolutely unbelievable!"

Victoria Composite High School is attracting students from all over the city of Edmonton and points beyond. Why this immense attraction for a school once known to bear a less than favorable reputation as an inner-city tough school? The school's new emphasis on the fine and performing arts is making Victoria Composite an exciting place to be.

Only a year ago Vic Comp was suffering from declining enrollment. According to Principal Bob Maskell, "Last year we had less than 70 grade nine students registered in grade ten at this school." This fall just under 1200 students enrolled at Vic Comp, a thousand of whom registered in the arts.

Indisputably, Vic Comp's new focus has brought about perceptible changes in the school's appearance and atmosphere. Corridors that were once forbidding and oppressive are now bustling and spirited. Diane Turner, a student in her third year at Vic, comments, "There's a lot of change in the students. When we put on Christmas plays and shows before they would always boo, but this year they are all excited about it!"

According to student Darren Giles the change is not just apparent among the students, "The teachers have changed too. There's an easier going attitude amongst them." Now that the students are having fun pursuing dance, theatre or music the teachers probably find their classes more receptive. The natural dividend? Their job becomes more enjoyable.

The new arts program has enlivened the entire school by drawing on previously unused resources. "There probably isn't a better school facility in this country for a strong focus on the fine and performing arts," exclaims Maskell. Indeed, there probably are not many high schools endowed with a 750 seat auditorium that includes an orchestra pit, dressing rooms, lighting and sound booths, as well as prop rooms. In addition, the school boasts art studios, a T.V. studio, and now, thanks to the marvels of Maskell, a completely modern dance studio.

The dance studio was created to enhance the new dance courses offered at Vic. "There is no dance curriculum in Alberta education," Maskell points out, "so we developed a dance program." Since Vic Comp is already home to the Alberta Ballet School, it seemed only natural to incorporate dance into the arts program.



Vic Comp now employs full-time dance teacher Hilary Hunt to instruct the 130 students who registered in dance this fall. "Dance gives non-academic students a chance to shine," Hunt remarks. Because all the dance students are given a chance to perform, they gain added confidence in their abilities and themselves.

Besides stimulating the students, the arts program is becoming a motivating force within the community. The extensive facilities of Vic Comp coupled with the programs offered by the Centre of Education makes the entire complex a potential site for developing special focus programs. Maskell remarks, "I think the vision we have for it is to imagine this place operating 12 months of the year," then he adds reflectively, "and perhaps down the road we could even have a kindergarten to adult program."

In recent years the school was simply not using all of its facilities due to the nature of its programs. "The school was basically filled with special allocation students," explains Maskell, "who were brought in for the trades and services program." During the 70's and at the start

of the 80's the school also English-as-a-second-language

With the opening of the Centre of Education on Vic property in 1984, the school is upgrading the regular high school. "One of the priorities of the school is to have a strong viable high school as part of the Centre for Education," Maskell says.

"By offering our teachers the resource to then creating a strong commitment in the"

Maskell, who at that time was at Jasper Place High School, was the emissary for the task of registration at Victoria Composite. September of '85 with a mission to bring the staff in developing a plan for the school," recounts Maskell.

Part of Maskell's plan in bringing to light the school's unused facilities but also draws on the local community to develop what he calls "partnership business". These partnerships



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