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Art installation aims to start a conversation

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In the middle of the dark classroom, projectors display a series of seemingly unrelated images across a “three-dimensional labyrinth” of screens. Viewers are invited to sit, stand or walk in between the screens – there is no wrong way to experience this video art installation, say creators Agnieszka Matejko and Robert Lysay.

The Space Between You and Me, a [video art installation](#) interpreting Tourette's syndrome, was inspired by Agnieszka's daughter's best friend, whose family was also friends with the Lysays.

“She was absolutely normal, as far as we could tell, until puberty, and then she developed a very severe form of Tourette's syndrome that came on almost over night,” says Agnieszka, faculty member in the Fine Art program.

The families were concerned the girl's neurological disorder might alienate her friends, as her outbursts could create embarrassing situations. But the parents were happy to see that their children didn't ostracize the girl and continued to be friends.

“It reminded me so much of what it's like to be a teenager and be embarrassed just because,” says Agnieszka. “And what happens if you have a disability?”

In January 2008, Agnieszka and Bob, who retired from the Design Studies program last summer, collaborated on *The Space Between You and Me*, combining interviews with teenagers diagnosed with Tourette's, video of an interpretive dance inspired by Tourette's movements, and nature images symbolic of the disorder.

The duo has expanded the installation into a web-based art project. And thanks to a grant from the Edmonton Arts Council, Agnieszka and Bob are creating a new art project from student work inspired by their work.

“*The Space Between You and Me* is a project we've had going for a very long time,” says Bob. “The whole thing here is another project.”

They have previously taken the installation on the road, but their show in May kicked off the first of three high school visits.

The installation was recently displayed at Braemar School. Agnieszka and Bob visited classrooms to introduce the project and begin a discussion about inclusion and diversity. The students are then invited to explore the display set up in another classroom. Afterward, the students share their stories about inclusion, which become part of the new project.

“All these stories are about the experience of inclusion or exclusion,” says Agnieszka. “It's not always negative – sometimes the kids describe how others protected them from being bullied.”

From Braemar School alone, Agnieszka and Bob have collected students' writing and art projects – even rap songs – that will be edited, organized and shared through a specially designed Facebook page. The collection, as with the initial *Space Between* web project, is meant to start a conversation about inclusion and diversity.

“My dream and my hope is that rather than preaching, just sharing these stories could make a difference for some of these kids who are a little bit different,” says Agnieszka.



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