

## **The Present State of Music Education in the English Schools of New Brunswick**

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The term *music education* can have many different meanings. When I think of the term I focus on the wider meaning of music instruction—individual and group—in both private and public institutions, and for a wide variety of ages. But for the purpose of this current survey of the state of music education throughout Canada, I shall be concentrating primarily upon music instruction in the English public schools of New Brunswick.

The province of New Brunswick, one of the three Maritime Provinces in Atlantic Canada, is Canada's only officially bilingual province. At the time of the 2001 census its population of almost 750,000 was about 50 percent urban, concentrated in small cities, towns, and villages. Approximately 33 percent of the population was French-speaking. Various types of music instruction have been available since the early days of the province, including a strong folk music tradition from both the Acadian and English-speaking heritage. There are references to singing schools prior to 1800; advertisements for concerts and instruction in music can be found in newspapers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Music has played an important role in churches of various denominations, and church organists and choir directors have frequently offered music instruction in their communities.

### **Organization of the Department of Education**

The official website of the Government of New Brunswick's Department of Education states: "The New Brunswick Department of Education has responsibility for public education

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(kindergarten through Grade 12), post-secondary education policy with focus on the university sector, distance education and public libraries.” It continues with a description of the present organization of the public school system in the province:

Since 1967, the provincial government has had sole responsibility for financing public schools and is committed to equal opportunity for all students. The Minister of Education has the authority to prescribe curriculum and establishes educational goals and standards. Serving Canada’s only officially bilingual province, New Brunswick’s education system offers students the opportunity to learn in both French and English through two parallel but separate education systems. Each linguistic sector of the Department of Education is responsible for its own curriculum and assessment (New Brunswick Department of Education website).

These two parallel but separate education systems run independently of one another; each has a Deputy Minister of Education who reports directly to the Minister of Education. There are at present 14 school districts—five French and nine English. District Education Councils (DECs), consisting of publicly and locally elected members, are responsible for establishing the direction and priorities for the school district and for making decisions as to how the districts and schools are operated.

### **Teachers’ Organizations in the Province**

Until 1970, all teachers in New Brunswick public schools belonged to the New Brunswick Teachers’ Association. In 1970 the structure was changed:

All teachers were still required to be members of the newly-formed New Brunswick Teachers' Federation (NBTF), but had a choice of joining through one of its constituent but autonomous professional organizations—the New Brunswick Teachers' Association (NBTA), the English language section, or l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick (AEFNB), the French language section. ...

In laying the groundwork for the new structure, service responsibilities were divided into two broad categories—economic welfare and professional service. The Federation represents all teachers in matters of working conditions and economic welfare, while the two Associations serve their respective linguistic groups in matters of a professional, ethical, or curricular nature (New Brunswick Teachers' Federation website).

### **New Brunswick Music Educators' Association**

The New Brunswick Music Educators' Association (NBMEA) was formed in 1959. Membership was open to both English- and French-speaking teachers, primarily those who taught music in the public schools.<sup>1</sup> In 1962 NBMEA became a subject council of the NBTA. This council (officially named the Music Education Council of the New Brunswick Teachers' Association but also known as NBMEA) became the organization affiliated with the Canadian Music Educators Association. Full membership was available only to school music teachers, but associate membership was granted to private and university teachers. With the linguistic division

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<sup>1</sup> As an aside, an organization of private music teachers, which became the NBRMTA affiliated with the CFMTA, had already been formed in 1950.

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of the teachers' association this became an Anglophone organization and the French-speaking teachers belonging to the new AEFNB formed their own organization.

NBMEA played an important role in the development of music programs in the schools by providing inservice training. The group worked closely with the music consultant in the provincial department of education on workshops and curriculum development. Conferences were held each fall and spring, and the newsletter, *Accents*, was published twice a year. In 1983 NBMEA hosted the national CMEA conference at Mount Allison University in Sackville, NB, marking the first time that the conference was held in such a small community.

During the past decade, NBTA changed the format of the subject councils from subject to level of instruction (elementary, middle school, high school), thus eliminating the Music Education Council and subsequently NBMEA. At present there is no provincial organization of English-speaking school music teachers. Several teachers belong to the Nova Scotia Music Educators Association, a much larger organization, and attend NSMEA conferences; this has been a common practice for the last several years. NSMEA holds a fall conference each year which is well-attended by both teachers from both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, as well as by members of the music industry.

### **History of Music in the Public Schools**

Music was included in the first course of study for the common schools of New Brunswick issued in 1879; it was listed under language as rote singing for Grades 1 through 8 with optional singing by note for Grades 4 through 8. It is assumed that the classroom teachers taught music as no special teachers of music were listed prior to 1900. There was no course of study in music prescribed for high schools at that time but school students at all levels often

participated in mass choirs for the Queen's Jubilee and other community events.

Systematic instruction in vocal music by a full-time teacher was introduced into the schools of Moncton, Fredericton, Saint John, and a few of the consolidated schools in the province during the first decade of the twentieth century. Instruction expanded during the next two decades; by the 1930s there was also discussion of giving credit for private music study at the high school level. School music festivals were organized in both Saint John and Moncton.

Gradually more attention was given to teacher training, and instruction in teaching vocal music was offered at several summer sessions for teachers between the two World Wars. The summer school held in 1938, attended by over 600 teachers, aimed to introduce teachers to the new provincial curriculum that was being developed. "This new program of studies, like the one published in Nova Scotia a few years earlier, was child-centred and placed emphasis on the training of citizens for a democracy. In the music section, there was a marked departure from the previous single emphasis on singing and sight-singing with considerable attention given to music appreciation and the need to 'foster the creative impulse.' One of the most welcome changes for teachers was the authorization of new classroom materials for music" (Green and Vogan, 1991, p. 215). However, it would be several years before any substantial effects of this would be seen, especially in the rural schools of the province.

Following the Second World War, the *Let New Brunswick Sing* project, sponsored by provincial Kiwanis Clubs, provided the opportunity for conductor David Thomson to visit many communities throughout the province over a three-year period. As a result of both this effort and the lobbying of various groups and individuals, Thomson was appointed New Brunswick's first supervisor of music in 1949. During the 1950s a non-competitive 'Little Festival' movement was developed which greatly increased interest in music instruction in the rural schools.

Most music instruction in the schools was vocal until the 1950s. Instrumental instruction was offered in a few schools and it was also available in some communities through cadets or private endeavours. High schools in the larger cities had some type of orchestra and/or band but these were extra-curricular activities. When Boyd Neel from the Royal Conservatory visited the Maritimes in 1957 he expressed concern regarding the lack of instrumental instruction in the schools:

On my recent visit to the Maritimes, I was struck by the enormous interest everywhere in music. ... Hitherto, it would seem that concentration has been more on vocal and choral work than on instrumental work, especially as regards the schools, where I found that little attention has been paid in the past to instrumental performance of any kind, other than the playing of the piano (Neel, 1957, p. 3).

One of the first places in the province to develop an instrumental program (both string and band instruments) on a citywide basis was Saint John. This program sparked interest in several other Maritime areas. Two conferences on “Music in the Schools of the Atlantic Provinces” held in the 1960s—1960 in Sackville, NB, and 1966 in Charlottetown, PEI—enabled teachers to find out what was happening in other parts of the region and beyond. The featured speaker each time was G. Roy Fenwick from Ontario. Delegates discussed several issues surrounding music education but spent much of their time on the topic of instrumental music instruction. They recommended “a common board of examiners be set up to assess the qualifications of potential instrumental teachers from among ex-service bandsmen” (Brown, 1968, p. 64). The establishment of instrumental music camps at Mount Allison and the founding

of the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra both helped further promote instrumental music instruction.

There was an increase in the number of music workshops held for teachers, including one of the first Orff workshops to be held outside of Ontario. Other new methodologies and materials were introduced during the 1970s and 1980s and many more music specialists were hired for classroom music. Credit courses in music were also developed for the high school level.

### **Recent Curriculum Developments**

According to the current official curriculum documents for New Brunswick's English schools, "music is part of the common curriculum experience ... from kindergarten to Grade 10 and available as elective credit courses in Grades 11 and 12." Similar to several other provinces, the current music curriculum documents for English-speaking New Brunswick Schools are outcomes-based. Although each province develops its own set of documents, the recent ones in New Brunswick have all been greatly influenced by the curriculum work done through the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation. In 1993, New Brunswick—working with the other Atlantic Provinces under the auspices of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF)—began developing regionally common curricula for mathematics, science, English language arts, social studies, arts education, and technology education. In 2001, the *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum* was published.

Within the curricula there are various organizational strata. At the broadest level are six Essential Graduation Learnings (EGLs). Essential Graduation Learnings are statements describing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes expected of all students who graduate from high school. They are not unique to one specific subject or discipline. Rather, EGLs are relevant to all

subject areas. They function as the overarching framework into which all curricula fits. One of the EGLs states: “Graduates will be able to respond with critical awareness to various forms of the arts and be able to express themselves through the arts. This EGL is divided into eight General Curriculum Outcomes (GCOs), which are common to Visual Art, Music, Drama, and Dance” (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2004, p. 3). This document, along with the music curriculum documents currently in effect, are posted on the Department of Education website. They include *Music Curriculum Outcomes K–8* (Document 840960) published in 1996 and *High School Music Guidelines: Grades 9/10 Program and Grades 11/12 Electives* (Document 840350) published in 2002, as well as more detailed guides for K–6 and several elective courses for the high school level. There are no detailed guideline for Grades 7 and 8.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to classroom instruction in music, performing ensembles are a significant component of many school programs in the province. However, in the curriculum guidelines issued for high school, teachers are urged to maintain a balanced music program that is not based solely on performance. In many schools extra-curricular ensembles—choirs, band, stage band, musical production, recorder ensemble, or strings (violins or ukuleles, etc.) offer an exciting and worthwhile opportunity for students’ musical and social growth. These offerings should be the result of a school music curriculum that is designed for all students—not a substitute for it. Conversely, the outcomes of the 9–10 program and the classes in Grades at 11–12 cannot be achieved through instrumental classes being the sole focus of instructional time (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2002, p. 24). At the same time, in some parts of the province there is very little, if any, instrumental instruction at the middle school level; many students do not start to play an instrument until the Grade 9–10 program.

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<sup>2</sup> These can be all be accessed at <http://www.gnb.ca/0000/anglophone-e.asp>.

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## Present Challenges

The challenges for music teachers in New Brunswick to become certified specialists and to continue their professional growth are somewhat daunting. There are at least three factors at play: teacher certification in music, the accessibility of professional growth opportunities for experienced teachers, and the absence of leadership in music education at the Ministry or school district levels.

There is a constant need for adequately trained teachers in the arts throughout our country and New Brunswick is certainly no exception. Music instruction for English-speaking students at the post-secondary level has been offered at Mount Allison University in Sackville for many years; students may take a Bachelor of Music degree or a BA with either a major or a minor in music. Several music education courses are available to students in these programs. Specialized teacher training in music (a five-year integrated program in which the student obtained a Bachelor of Music degree and a Bachelor of Education) was also available at Mount Allison until the mid-1990s. However, with the closing of its Education Department, students who graduate with a B.Mus. degree must go elsewhere to obtain their B. Ed and their license to teach in the public schools. Such programs are available at both the University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University in Fredericton, and Atlantic Baptist University in Moncton, but these programs have limited offerings in music as they are focused on general classroom teaching.

The demise of the NBMEA has created a void for ongoing professional development for music educators in the province. Although there are other means of communication for music teachers in the province—NBRMTA, Choral Federation, Band Association, and so on—and, although teachers participate in NSMEA activities and other regional workshops in Orff, Kodály, and various aspects of instrumental instruction, there is still a need for a locally-based

professional organization that can be responsive to the needs of teachers in New Brunswick itself.

A recent restructuring of the English sector of the provincial Department of Education eliminated several of the consultant positions, including the one for fine arts and music, so that at the present time there is no government official whose primary responsibility is the development and implementation of arts education in the schools.

### **Challenges for the Future**

Despite the challenges currently being faced in the public schools there are still many strong music programs in the English-speaking schools and many excellent music teachers. However, there is a dire need for more teachers who are trained in music. Curriculum documents, left “on hold” with the elimination of a consultant to facilitate the project, need to be completed, and a new professional organization needs to be reformed. There is presently little opportunity for joint music making between the two language groups in the province, especially at the school level. One organization that does provide this type of opportunity is the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra. Although not officially affiliated with the schools, this ensemble draws its players from both school programs and private studios and includes both Anglophone and Francophone students. It performs several concerts throughout the school year in communities throughout the province, thus raising the profile of music education and instrumental music. And it provides these young musicians with playing experiences that they would never experiences otherwise, such as recent performance trips to Carnegie Hall in New York City and Italy.

In summary, while music education in English-speaking New Brunswick is still

somewhat active and there are a fair number of dedicated and excellent teachers, we are struggling to cope with the challenges noted above. These concerns are not dissimilar to the worries about music education in other provinces. However, because New Brunswick is such a small province and there is no leadership structure in place at all for music education, the current situation—best described as tenuous—could in a short time period lead to greater inequities with regard to access to music education as a subject in many parts of the province.

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