

Music Education in Nova Scotia

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Music education programs in Nova Scotia are designed to provide a balanced, sequential, broad musical experience from primary through grade 12 in order to develop the student's aesthetic response, musical discrimination, and understanding of as many as possible of those diverse elements embodied in the term *music*. Relevant policy documents state:

Arts education, a critical component of a balanced program of studies, is fundamental to the aesthetic, physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth of all students. It provides unique ways of knowing, doing, living, and belonging in a global community and plays a key role in the development of creativity and imagination. (Public School Programs, 2004, p. E-3)

The policy goes on to state that, at all grade levels, music activities should form an integral part of as many aspects of the total education program as possible. Using headings identified in *Policy Guidelines for Arts Education in Canadian Schools*, (2003), this paper provides an understanding of the health and vitality of music education in Nova Scotia schools, and identifies those areas where targeted goals have not been met:

- learning in, through and about the arts
- curriculum
- culture and diversity

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- teachers and teacher education
- resources
- partnerships
- leadership

Learning In, Through and About the Arts

Within a context for learning and teaching, the curriculum of Nova Scotia schools reflects an understanding of the learning process that values the arts and places them at the core of public schooling. Learning in the arts focuses on the development of technical, creative, and aesthetic skills and understandings that enable students to create, perform, present, and respond to their own and others' work. Balance must be maintained between learning in the arts and learning through the arts, and arts educators play a key role in striking that balance.

Students must be provided a balance between creation of and reflection about their own art work and the study and appreciation of the works of others. Creative and critical thinking combined with thoughtful reflection enables learners to make connections to prior learning. When learners see the relevance and authenticity of their learning experiences, they value the experience even more.

Successful linking of the arts with other curriculum areas depends upon the knowledge of both teachers and students. Learning through the arts requires learning in the arts. When arts learning experiences are planned, it is important that activities be provided that develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes appropriate to the arts disciplines.

Connections must be made across the arts disciplines as well as with other subject areas in the curriculum. Students need to see connections between what they are learning in school and what they are learning in the world outside of school. Through partnerships with community arts

groups and institutions, students are provided with opportunities to learn about the arts. Performances by touring groups such as Neptune Theatre, Mermaid Theatre, Dance Nova Scotia, Symphony Nova Scotia, and exhibits from the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and other local galleries allow students to experience the arts in an authentic learning environment.

Whether learning in, through or about the arts, teachers are advised that connections across disciplines must be authentic, natural, and linked directly to the outcomes for all disciplines involved.

Curriculum

Elementary

The music program as outlined in *Music Primary—6* (2002) makes specific and essential contributions to intellectual and aesthetic development, the education of feeling, the exploration of values, the development of physical and perceptual skills, and personal and social education. The curriculum includes a range of music-making activities, including opportunities for students to make their own music and to learn about and respond to the music of others. Experiential learning in music develops psychomotor, intellectual, and verbal abilities, as well as musical ability.

Extensions to the classroom music program include opportunities for students to participate in choirs and instrumental ensembles, including band, strings and recorder groups. These activities provide performance opportunities that not only build musical skills, but provide the learner with experiences that illustrate the co-operative nature of musical ensembles.

Junior High School

Music is an elective course in Grades 7, 8, and 9 in Nova Scotia. For those who choose to study music, however, the music program is designed to be sequential, developmental, and cumulative. Students are given opportunities to perform, interpret, and create music through the study of the basic musical concepts. The program involves the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains, the last being particularly important. The practical component of the music program helps students perform with accuracy, precision, understanding, and feeling; it encourages an awareness of aesthetic values through direct experience with music. Extensions to the classroom music program are available to students through choral and instrumental performance ensembles.

Currently the curriculum for junior high school is under review, and consultations will take place during the coming school year to assess deficiencies in the program, and to provide for teachers and administrators a clearer understanding of music as part of the core program.

Senior High School

The implementation of *Music 10* (2005) and *Music 11* (2005) is currently underway. Like the elementary curriculum, the curriculum documents provide suggestions for learning, teaching, and assessment under three strands: creating, making, and presenting; understanding and connecting contexts of time, place, and community; and perceiving and responding. The intent of the high school music program is to engage students in creative, expressive music-making processes, providing a firm foundation in skills, principles, and practices of music, and preparing students for lifelong learning in music. All music courses include performance (either instrumental or vocal), theory/harmony, ear-training, and history, including contemporary styles.

Opportunities to explore music composition, often with the use of computer technologies, are also important.

Music 12 is being piloted in a select number of schools across the province. Its curriculum is based on a “project approach” to learning, teaching and assessment. Teachers select from a range of projects lasting from three days to three months. The rationale for this approach is that by grade 12 students should be able to apply all their prior learnings in music in an authentic way. Composition becomes an even more critical component of the music program in Grade 12.

Culture and Diversity

Society in Nova Scotia, like all of Canada, is linguistically, racially, culturally, and socially diverse. Our society includes differences in race, ethnicity, gender, ability, values, lifestyles, and languages. Through the music curriculum, like other disciplines, the understanding of such diversity is fostered. This, in a learning community characterized by mutual trust, acceptance, and respect, student diversity is recognized and valued. Teachers have a critical role in creating a supportive learning environment that reflects the particular needs of all students. The music curriculum promotes a commitment to equity by valuing, appreciating, and accepting the diverse multicultural and multiracial nature of society. Music education encourages students to question their own assumptions, and imagine, understand, and appreciate realities other than their own.

Teachers and Teacher Education

In Nova Scotia, specialized teachers are hired to teach the music program at all grades, primary to 12. However there is a shortage of qualified music educators to deliver the program as prescribed in the Public School Programs especially in rural areas of the province where school music programs are often assigned to teachers who have limited or no training in the discipline because it is not possible to recruit music educators to teach in these areas. The shortage of music educators is compounded by the fact that currently, only one university in Nova Scotia — Acadia University — offers music education as a degree program. While music programs exist at Dalhousie University and St. Francis Xavier University, graduates from these programs receive little or no instruction in methodology. Consequently, many of these graduates who pursue an education degree take a Bachelor of Education program in general teaching. Upon completion of that degree they seek employment as music teachers, but a lack of skill development in music education presents serious challenges in the delivery of the music curriculum.

Resources

Each year several new titles are added to the province's *Authorized Learning Resources* list to support teachers in the implementation of the music curriculum. These include student and teacher print resources, software, video and CD collections. However, the acquisition of Canadian resources that reflect our culture and diversity remains a challenge. Annually, a collection is distributed to every school in the province in order to support the implementation of curriculum. Teachers are provided with professional development opportunities to use these resources and to create dynamic learning experiences for their students.

Partnerships

Members of the music community provide a valuable enhancement for music education. Such projects as visiting solo musicians and ensembles, as well as participatory workshops held in the school and in the community also heighten the awareness of the important role music plays in community life. Funding for such projects is obtained from a variety of sources, including school and district funds, as well as *Perform!* (a special project managed by the Nova Scotia Cultural Federations), and ArtSmarts (a project funded by the McConnell Family Foundation and the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture). Partnerships with the music industry, including businesses, recording studios, managers and promoters, are often created directly between the teacher and the potential partner. Through these partnerships, students experience first hand the roles of various stakeholders in the music industry.

Leadership

Leadership in music education at the district level has become a major concern for music educators across the province. Of seven school districts in Nova Scotia, only one — the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board — employs a full time consultant in arts education, while another—the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board—employs a consultant in a 40% position. The other five boards have no one in senior administration whose primary responsibility is music and/or the arts. This absence of leadership impacts significantly on schedules, budgets, resources, and hiring practices. More significantly, it creates a sense of isolation for music education and seems to be leading toward low morale.

Conclusion

Despite the numerous positive aspects of music education in Nova Scotia outlined in this report, it should be understood that music and the arts are low in priority for the current government. During the late 1990s, Nova Scotia was viewed as a leader in arts education in Canada, but this changed in 2000. There are indications that the coming years will bring renewed interest in arts programs in schools, and teachers, parents and students are hopeful that a revitalization of arts education will become a reality.

Notes

1. Several excerpts from this report are taken directly from *Public School Programs*, published by the Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2004, as well as *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum*, also published by the Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2001.
2. The National Symposium on Arts Education (2003) developed *Policy Guidelines for Arts Education in Canada*. These guidelines are available on-line at [www.artsed.ca].