

Canadian Music Education Policy Development

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During the past 30 years, music education in Canada has been a roller-coaster ride. From the high points, when effective music programs in schools were cultivated, to the lows, when there was, and continues to be, unceasing pruning to these same programs, music education has become a political football in many parts of Canada. Some might even say it has taken on the role of political currency, whereby those elected to public office—municipal, provincial, federal—become opportunistic in their support for the important role music plays in the education of our students. In Canada, responsibility for education rests with the provincial or territorial governments. Within each province, the Education Act or Schools Act prescribes the Public Schools Program for that province, and, through statutes and regulations, it creates the structures for the management of school districts and their schools. This chapter examines the structures available to school districts across the country to develop policies to support music education in schools. It presents models for creating policy frameworks, and makes reference to existing policies in school districts across Canada. Finally, it proposes guidelines for policy development in music education, and encourages all stakeholders to share the responsibility of ensuring that music in Canadian schools is firmly entrenched and sustained.

Educational Policy

Fowler (2000) defines policy as “the dynamic and value-laden process through which a political system handles a public problem. It includes a government’s expressed intentions and official enactments, as well as its consistent patterns of activity and inactivity” (p. 9). In this

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definition, “government” includes elected and appointed officials at all levels, including school board members, school administrators, and teachers. Individuals and community groups, through their elected representatives, also influence policy development. Hope (2002) discusses policy as “a decision about how to proceed, based in part on knowledge or research and in part on values and opinions. Its existence presupposes potential action aligned with the decision reached. Policy is made because of a perceived need to act” (p. 11).

Influential forces in educational policy

Until the early 1980s, all levels of government supported and respected public school programs across Canada. Policies to support education were grounded in the institution of schooling itself, and although there appeared to be outside influences from time to time, educators and administrators were given responsibility for developing policies to support programs. During the past 20 years, other forces have influenced policy development in education: organizational structures, the economy, community and business involvement in the day to day operations of schools, new approaches to curriculum, rising unemployment, globalization, and immigration. These forces have the potential for “moving together or in parallel to fulfill a common purpose” (Hope, 2002, p. 11); however, they also could be viewed as having the potential to destroy effective music programs in schools. For example, the gains music education experienced in the 1960s and 1970s became deficits in the 1980s and 1990s, and there continues to be an erosion of music education in many jurisdictions across the country. Could it be these same forces cited by Hope that might have caused this demise? Hope states: “To acknowledge long-term growth and development is not to hide serious problems in locale after locale. Successes and problems are both part of the truth about music education” (p. 21).

What is driving the policy-making agenda, and how does this relate to music education? Policies to support music in schools are critical, and if we can build the infrastructure for solid programs by providing sound policies, there should be greater guarantees to support the sustainability and further development of music programs. These policies must work in concert with the goals of public education as prescribed in the Education Act of each province, which is the constitutional provision for legislative bodies to govern the operations of schools.

In Canada, where the authority over education lies in provincial and territorial governmental hands, the political leanings of those elected to public office, particularly the party in power, is an influential factor when establishing educational policies. Since 1980, the education landscape across Canada has been changed by the amalgamation of several smaller school districts into larger units, a move prompted by legislatures in an attempt to reduce the costs for education. With these amalgamations, Ministries of Education began to take back authority that had once been vested in local school boards, and leadership at the local level was minimized to ensure that the primary authority for education remained at the ministerial level. This step in itself has had one of the most profound impacts on the development of policies to support music and the arts. The ideologies of the political party in power determine, to a great extent, those areas of educational priority, and currently there is a groundswell of support for a return to a “basic” education, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy. While school districts themselves may support music and the arts, they must comply with the directives of the Ministry of Education, which are driven by the priorities established by the party in power.

Policy Framework For Education in Canada

School districts anchor their policies in regulations, administrative procedures,

independent procedures, guidelines, and protocols. These terms tend to be confused in the policy manuals of many school districts across Canada. While each school district has its unique way of identifying and working within a policy framework, generally speaking there are clear distinctions made between each sub-set of a policy. For example, the Thames Valley District School Board (Ontario) uses the following definitions:

Policy: a statement or position adopted by the Board that provides the framework for a course of action. It is a commitment by which the board is held accountable.

Procedure: a course of action developed to implement and support an approved Board policy.

Independent procedure: a process to handle issues where an accompanying Board policy is not required.

Guideline: a recommended action that may be taken in a given situation.

Protocol: a process that sets out the operating norms for an interaction between the Board and its external public (Thames Valley District School Board Policy Manual, 2005, p. 1).

In terms of music education, one can see the importance of having policies that include procedures, guidelines, and protocols to support music in schools. Clearly, the role of the administration in a school district or in a school becomes clearer when these aspects are articulated, thus creating stronger guarantees for solid school music programs.

Music Education and Policy Frameworks

The precarious nature of music in the core program places tremendous pressure on music

educators and supporters of the arts—whether at the school district or the provincial level—to attend to and influence policy development. To ensure programs continue, it is critical to secure support at the local level. However, it is equally essential to establish and maintain support at the provincial level; local policies are only effective if supported by the education budget established by the party in power. Therefore, pressure from the electorate may be influential in convincing politicians of the value of music, and they in turn can put pressure on the cabinet to secure adequate funding for school districts to provide for music instruction.

Additional pressures can sometimes be exerted from external groups such as arts organizations, consortiums, and coalitions working at a national level. For example, non-governmental agencies at the federal level—the Canada Council for the Arts, the Canadian Conference of the Arts, and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO—are currently collaborating through the *Arts and Learning: A Call to Action* initiative¹ to study and provide evidence to support music and the arts in schools across Canada. This initiative grew from several projects, including the National Symposium on Arts Education (now known as the Coalition for Arts Education in Canada), the UNESCO World Summit on Arts Education, and resolutions to develop a status report and national strategy for arts education as adopted at the Canadian Conference of the Arts Policy Conference in Halifax in November 2003. Although these organizations are well intentioned, their limited influence on public education in Canada is through the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC).

Nevertheless, with the Arts and Learning initiative, the primary impact will be in its ability to influence provincial and local policy development. Music education may find a

¹ *Arts and Learning: A Call to Action* is a project of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Canadian Conference of the Arts. It has conducted four consultations across Canada, and has created a Research Group to explore research in arts education in Canada. There is a link to the project from the UNESCO website at <http://www.unesco.ca>.

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champion for its cause, but the real test of this influence will be in its influence over the provincial Ministries of Education. Hope (2002) states:

The obvious power of government action, as an influence on the existence of and health of music education, can produce a dangerous myopia. Regular engagements with government policy at any level can obviate the time necessary to look at policy frameworks beyond government that influence music education. Some of these non-governmental frameworks create the values and opinions from which government policy is formed. What government does at any level is important, but it is not everything. All illusions to the contrary, government cannot legislate, regulate or produce individuals that will value either music or music study (p. 12).

School District Policies for Music Education

Music educators constantly justify the importance of studying music in schools. Nevertheless, unless school boards are willing to provide adequate resources, including qualified teachers, time, and professional development, any impetus from federal or provincial organizations and agencies will go unheeded. A study of the Policy Manuals from 55 school districts representing those with the largest student populations in each of the provinces and territories across Canada revealed the lack of support for music education as defined in their policies. The number of school districts included in this review represents approximately 15% of the total number of school districts in Canada. Sixteen of the policy manuals that were reviewed included policies directly related to music programs in schools, with only two making a strong statement for the benefits of music education. They are listed here:

Music education is an essential component of every student's education.... The Avalon East School District is committed to striving to provide a program of excellence in instrumental music throughout its jurisdiction, which makes it possible for all students to develop their learning potential (Policy # 507, Avalon East School District, Newfoundland, 2005).

The St. Boniface School Division recognizes music as an integral part of a well-rounded education that stimulates both mind and emotion. The general purpose of the music program is to provide each student with the opportunity to learn to appreciate, create and express himself or herself through musical experiences. The music program focuses on the development of a musically literate society that recognizes and values the contribution that music makes to the quality of life for both the individual and society (Policy C9-1, St. Boniface School Division No. 4, Manitoba, 2005).

Three school districts have strong policy statements for arts education:

The York Region District School Board is committed to equity and excellence in arts programs for all students. To that end, every student shall receive a balanced and comprehensive arts program based on the expectations defined in The Ontario Curriculum. As well, every teacher shall receive support for professional growth as educators in the arts (Policy #301, York Region District School Board, Ontario, 2005).

The Toronto District School Board believes that all the arts—dance, drama, music and visual arts—are essential to a complete education for all students (Policy P.005 CUR, Toronto District School Board, Ontario, 2005).

The Halifax Regional School Board and the Cape Breton Victoria Regional School Board state their commitment in policies that are both currently under review:

The Halifax Regional School Board is committed to providing a program of excellence in the Fine Arts, throughout its jurisdiction, which makes it possible for all students to reach their learning potential (Policy C.002, Halifax Regional School Board, Nova Scotia, 2005).

Elementary schools will include for all children, in each year's program, instruction in music and visual arts. The music program will be delivered by circuit music teachers. The art program in Primary–Grade 3 will be delivered by classroom teachers, and in Grade 4–6 by a circuit art teacher. Where possible, provision should be made for students in upper elementary to experience additional opportunities in instrumental music (band and strings) as well as choir (Policy 327, Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board, Nova Scotia, 2005).

Two British Columbia school districts make a commitment to providing for quality music programs but with provisions:

The Board of School Trustees is committed, whenever financial circumstances permit, to provide quality band and music programmes for pupils of School District No. 32 (Policy FP3, School District No. 32, British Columbia, 2005).

In addition to the band teacher, but within the current staffing formula, an attempt shall be made to staff every elementary school with at least two teachers—one primary and one intermediate—capable of teaching music (Policy FP3, School Division #23, British Columbia, 2005).

The remaining policies that make specific reference to music are primarily administrative in nature and deal with such things as the acquisition of band instruments, band fees, facilities, and performance opportunities for students.

Generally speaking, policies are rooted in problems or issues that arise as a result of action or inaction. It is, therefore, likely that policies created to address administrative matters in music programs will be effective, particularly in school districts where there is no central administrator who understands and has a good working knowledge of music programs. However, without a clearly stated policy that articulates the school board's commitment to music programs, there are no guarantees that sequential music education will be provided across the district.

Policy issues themselves are controversial and change from time to time. For example, literacy may have been a policy issue a century ago, and it is understood that one of the goals of education today is to ensure that all students are literate. One literacy issue that has changed, however, is the notion that students must demonstrate a variety of literacy skills, such as visual literacy and musical literacy. As educational issues change over time, policies must be created or

updated to reflect current realities. Certainly, what we consider critical in a music program in the twenty-first century must be clearly articulated in policy at the school district level; and this policy should be consistent with the requirements of the Public Schools Program as prescribed by the Ministry of Education.

Music educators and other advocates for music programs have traditionally felt powerless in their efforts to affect policy development that supports quality music programs in Canadian schools. Sometimes there appears to be a democratic deficit in the policy making process that prohibits the development of policies to support music and the arts in schools. We know that power permeates the education system with some players having more power than others. Typical types of power in an educational setting are economic dominance, legal authority, force, and persuasion. While some players may not automatically hold a particular type of power, it does not mean that they cannot have it but rather that they must exert special effort to obtain it. For example, the public may not initially have the power of persuasion, but through its right to vote on funding issues (economic dominance) and elected school board members (legal power), it can gain power of persuasion and influence. This is an aspect of the policy making process that could play an important role in creating school district policies for music education.

In the sequence of events that drive the policy process in education, various approaches to public problems are considered. All the “players,” including the elected officials, administrators, teachers, parents, artists, and the public in general, should have opportunities to address the policy issue and to provide feedback throughout the consultation process. This sequence of events is embedded in the Education Act of each province and territory, and, because it allows for pressure to be brought to bear from all stakeholders, it is an important aspect of policy development for music education.

Nagel (1984, cited in Fowler, 2002) identifies the process of policy analysis, as the “evaluation of alternative government policies or decisions in order to arrive at the best policy or decision in light of given goals, constraints, and conditions” (p. 18). This process provides another opportunity for public input (p. 18). Furthermore, it is based on the notion that the “policy process is not fully rational and that politicians, if left to themselves, often develop unsound policies” (Fowler, 2000, p. 19). Fowler identifies four types of policy processes:

1. monitoring: systematic collection of data relevant to the policy domain and the on-going policy process;
2. forecasting: predictions of what policies will be important during future years;
3. evaluations: descriptions of how well the policy achieves its intended purposes; and
4. prescriptions: recommendations and options available for amendments to the policy or for the development of the new policy. (pp. 21–22)

As noted earlier, it appears that few school districts across Canada have established policies in music education. Therefore, there is a need to undertake an analysis of other educational policies that directly influence music in the school curriculum, and in so doing, strengthen the need to create stand-alone policies to support music programs.

A Policy Framework for Music Education

Within the field of education, there are many stakeholders, each with their own set of beliefs and values, agendas, and motives. They all play a key role in the policy making process

and exert pressure on all levels of government in order to ensure that their interests are met. Similarly, in the field of music education, there are a variety of players—students, teachers, parents, artists, the community including the corporate world, and politicians. In her address at the first National Symposium on Arts Education, Eleanor Newman (1998) stated what each of these groups is seeking in terms of curriculum and schooling:

From a broad perspective, it is apparent that there are many judges of curriculum effectiveness. Each group of judges is seeking results that, while not inherently contradictory, are distinct and potentially divisive. . . . There are many demands on curriculum; students seek sense, parents seek stability, teachers seek significance, society seeks to be served and governments seek political gain (pp. 19-20).

Hope (2002) supports this notion:

In policy discussions, it does not take long for divergences to reveal themselves. Although teachers and the music industry share many common goals, core values are often quite different. The public relations goals of politicians at all levels of leadership, including school superintendents and principals, often reveal values about music that are inconsistent with those held by committed teachers who seek to raise individual competence in the discipline itself . . . The policy frameworks represented by corporations of various kinds constitute a complex array in and of themselves (p. 13).

In music education, there remains constant debate over key areas, including curriculum

content; the appropriate emphasis on creating, making, and presenting music; methodology; technology applications; brands and quality of musical instruments; competition, and elitism in music programs; the list is endless. It is, therefore, critical that we establish a framework grounded in research to support the development of effective policies in music education. Moreover, it is important that we build our framework on values and beliefs that support music as a core area of the curriculum and reinforce the importance of expertise in instruction for music education.

Developing Policies for Arts Education

*Arts Education in Canada: Highlights of the National Summit and the Arts and Education Conference 2000*² presents a Framework for Developing an Arts Education Policy in the York Region District School Board (pp. 54–57). It lists four prerequisites as a first stage to policy:

- making the policy explicit;
- researching policies, practices, experiences and beliefs in other jurisdictions and other countries;
- determining the scope, context, and terms of reference for the policy; and
- establishing a critical path for the creation of the policy (p. 34).

For the second stage of policy development, the article addresses three sequential steps to follow:

² In 2000, a National Summit on Arts Education was held in Toronto. On the basis of research and feedback from speakers and delegates, it created a framework for developing an arts education policy.

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- create a vision;
- refine the vision in light of reality, identifying outcomes, objectives, and priorities;
- identify final actions in terms of strategies and tactics needed to ensure commitment of ministries of education, school boards, teachers, students, parents, principals, community groups, and the arts and education communities (pp. 35–36).

The article stresses that those people with the responsibility of implementing the policy must have sufficient opportunity for input throughout the consultation process. This involvement will ensure “buy in” on the part of key stakeholders and should guarantee commitment to the successful implementation of the policy, once it is approved. The very last step in the policy development process is evaluation, and this should take place after the policy has been in existence for some time. The indicators of success for the policy should include evidence of additional financial, administrative, and human resources. In all likelihood these most likely will help raise the profile of the arts, or, in this case, music.

In 2003, as an initial step in reviewing provincial curricula for the arts, the Manitoba Department of Education and Youth issued a draft statement on the arts in education.³ The statement provides another example of a document that has the potential to be adapted as a policy framework for music education in Canada. It developed its statement around three key areas: (1) the goals of arts education, (2) the value of arts education, and (3) instructional approaches to arts education. This draft statement was distributed to education stakeholders in an effort to elicit responses as a result of stimulating discussions.

During the 2003 National Symposium on Arts Education held in Halifax, the *Policy*

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Guidelines for Arts Education in Canadian Schools was developed after extensive consultation with key stakeholders.⁴ These guidelines provide direction for arts education in Canada along the following dimensions:

- learning in, through and about the arts,
- curriculum,
- culture and diversity,
- teachers and teacher education,
- resources,
- partnerships,
- research, and
- leadership.

As guidelines, they are intended to be used by organizations, institutions, school districts, Ministries of Education, and other arts education groups as they develop their own policies to support the arts in schools. In effect, they provide many of the key features of the prerequisite steps outlined in *Framework for Developing Arts Education Policy* (Orbit Monograph, p. 54). The policy guidelines could effectively become the basis for music education policies in jurisdictions across Canada.

³ The Arts in Education Draft Statement was developed by a team of arts educators. It was distributed to educational stakeholders for response in the Fall, 2003. The Draft Statement and the responses can be viewed at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/arts

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Where Do We Go From Here?

One of the outcomes identified in the current discussion of the state of music education in Canada is open dialogue and discourse that complement ongoing discussions about the re-development and revitalization of music education across Canada. It appears that one of the critical elements for revitalizing music in schools is the necessity to create solid policies to support music education. However, policies are only effective if there is commitment demonstrated by all stakeholders and if there are actions that can be monitored and evaluated. The efficacy of any national group to create sustainability through the creation of policies is limited by the very nature of power and authority vested in that group. Therefore, it seems fitting that efforts should be channelled into creating a policy framework that builds on the work already accomplished in jurisdictions across Canada. The first step is to identify issues and to prioritize those that need to be addressed. Furthermore, by adapting a set of policy guidelines to assist school districts, institutions, organizations, and ministries of education in their policy development, we, as a national body, can exert political pressure on all levels of government.

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⁴ The National Symposium on Arts Education (2003) developed *Policy Guidelines for Arts Education in Canada*. These guidelines have been distributed to stakeholders across Canada, and have been ratified by many. These Favaro, E. W. (2007). Canadian music education in policy development. In K. Veblen & C. Beynon (Eds. with S. Horsley, U. DeAlwiss, & A. Heywood), *From sea to sea: Perspectives on music education in Canada*. Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/musiceducationE-books/1/>

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