

The History and Development of Elementary Music Education in Canada: Curricular Perspectives

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Elementary music education in Canada has had a remarkable history and development. Today all provinces and territories recognize to some degree that music education is an integral part of holistic education in the elementary school. Provincial/Territorial Departments and Ministries of Education as well as some school districts have developed effective music curriculum documents that play a role supporting the teacher of music. The intended curricula help to guide classroom practice for both classroom teachers and specialized music teachers.

Since the founding of Canada and the signing of the British-North America Act in 1867, education has been a provincial responsibility. As a result, the organization of elementary and secondary education in Canada by provincial and territorial ministries and departments of education has varied from province to territory. Some, like Ontario, for example, have organized elementary education to include kindergarten to Grade 8. Others, like Nova Scotia, have utilized a primary to Grade 6 organizer for elementary education. In most provinces/territories, music at the elementary level is a required subject for all pupils (See Figure 1). For the purpose of this paper, the term “elementary” will describe the grade range attributed as elementary in each provincial/territorial context.

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Figure 1.

Provincial/Territorial Organization of Elementary Education in 2005

| Province/Territory | Elementary Curricula Organization |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Newfoundland & Labrador | K, 1-3, 4-6 |
| Prince Edward Island | K, 1-6, |
| Nova Scotia | P-6; |
| New Brunswick | K-5 |
| Quebec | 1-6 |
| Ontario | K; 1-8 |
| Manitoba | K-8 |
| Saskatchewan | K, 1-5 |
| Alberta | K,1-6 |
| British Columbia | K-7 |
| Yukon | K-7 (BC curricula) |
| Northwest Territories | K,1-5, (SK curricula) |
| Nunavut | K, 1-6, (AB curricula) |

Legend: K = Kindergarten; P = Primary

With this in mind, the following research questions guided my study:

- What are the historical foundations upon which our current Canadian elementary music education curricula are built?
- What musical learnings/experiences are outlined in each provincial curriculum document?
- What commonalities and/or differences exist among provincial music curricula?

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Historical Foundations

Historically, music education in Canada has had a long tradition of being a part of the elementary school program. In the colonial days of Canada West (Upper Canada) during the first half of the nineteenth century, education was primarily sectarian-based. By the 1840s, interest developed in a public school movement with music instruction as an integral part of an elementary student's education. As early as 1846, Egerton Ryerson affirmed that music was a subject worthy of inclusion in public school elementary education. A Methodist minister by occupation, Ryerson served as Chief Superintendent of Education in Canada West (Upper Canada) from 1844 to 1876.

Vocal music was prescribed as a subject for the elementary grades in schools of Upper Canada in the Common School Act of 1841. As a Methodist, Ryerson valued music in education for extrinsic aims rather than intrinsic ones: "I hope to see taught to the sons and daughters of our entire population—vocal music—an art and accomplishment which often converts the domestic fireside into a paradise, refines and promotes social feelings and enjoyments, and blesses the Churches of the land." (Ryerson cited in Hodgins, 1910, 148). (Ryerson, 1853; Green & Vogan, 1991).

In early Québec it was not until much later that music was accepted as part of elementary school education although music instruction was community based in a private music school established by Charles Watts from England as early as 1789, music instruction gradually emerged as a prescribed course, first in 1870 in Protestant schools of the province and then later in Roman Catholic schools beginning in 1873. In the course

of study published in 1886, singing was listed as an action for morning opening exercises and required for the inclusion of solfège (Green & Vogan, 1991).

In the Maritimes, the first course of study for common schools was issued in 1879 in New Brunswick; in this curriculum, singing was included under Language. In Nova Scotia, the first course of study was published in 1882. Before this teachers and school trustees determined the subjects to be taught and although there had been reference to music education as early as 1819, there had not been a provincially prescribed course of study. By 1883, the course of study for common schools in Prince Edward Island included singing and physical exercises for Grade 1 to 4 and music and physical and vocal culture for Grades 5 and 6 (Green & Vogan, 1991).

Across the prairies, music gradually emerged as part of the school curriculum. In Manitoba, the Protestant schools prescribed music in their program of studies as early as 1876. Training for teachers began in 1882 with the establishment of the first normal school.¹ When Saskatchewan became a province in 1905, limited support for music existed. Regina was the first to introduce music as a subject in elementary school but it was not until 1913 that the provincial department of education began to prescribe music as a part of the curriculum. Further west, in Alberta, music first appeared as a subject in the elementary curriculum in 1892 (Green & Vogan, 1991).

In the colony of British Columbia, two colonial statutes—Vancouver Island's Common School Act, 1865 and the Common School Ordinance, 1869—provided foundations for establishing school districts and the official course of education. The prescribed use of Hullah's vocal music text suggests that vocal music was beginning to

¹ The need was great: in 1883, fifty per cent of all teachers in the province had not received teacher training of any kind.

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become an integral part of early public school (Rules and Regulations for the Management and Government of Common Schools, 1870). In 1890 the common school curriculum consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic and geography. By the turn of the 20th century, it included vocal music and, for pupils at advanced levels, natural history (i.e. botany and biology) and bookkeeping. Object lessons and moral duties were also important features of the curriculum (Curriculum Development Overview, n.d.)

Teacher Training

From these early colonial days in Canada's development as a country, classroom teachers -- rather than music specialists -- were charged with delivering the music course of study. Montgomery (2000) elaborates: "While the practice of using classroom teachers to teach music has not always been consistent between, or even within provinces, such teachers have continued to be responsible for much of the elementary music instruction in this country" (p. 128).

Normal schools were established in various provinces to train teachers in all aspects of instruction. With great teacher shortages, normal school courses were very short running, from four months at first and then extending to eight months. The implications for music education were clear:

Normal school programs were not of sufficient length or academic depth to give teachers-in-training any real musical expertise. Much more than with other subjects, the quality of music instruction depended upon the ability, confidence and interest of the individual teachers. Although

inspectors complained about superficial training, these programs were not altered significantly to improve the situation because normal schools were already struggling to cope with the supply of regular teachers. The magnitude of that problem was more compelling than the seemingly trivial nature of the concerns of music. (Green and Vogan, 1991, p. 114)

Canadian Elementary Music Education Today

In the latter part of the 20th century and into this new millennium, research has helped us to broaden our understanding of commonalities or regional differences between provincially designed curricula. Research on the components of Canadian music curricula suggests that the action of singing remains central in many elementary music classes across Canada (Shand, 1982a, 1982b; Cooper, 1989; Montgomery, 1990; Shand & Bartel, 1993), and that the use of Canadian music in Canadian elementary and secondary music classrooms is supported by both curriculum documents and classroom practice (Bartel & Shand, 1995; Shand & Bartel, 1998; Bartel, Dolloff & Shand, 1999; and Shand, Dolloff & Bartel, 1999).

More specifically, Younker (2000) investigated the role of music thinking in elementary music curricula from the provinces of Prince Edward Island, Ontario and British Columbia. She found that curricula from British Columbia and Prince Edward Island devoted sections to instructional and assessment strategies. Younker suggests that this type of information may provide guidance about how to empower musical thinking for teachers and their students.

Finally, Montgomery (2000), in a critical reflection of elementary school music in Canada, suggests that in order to promote a successful elementary music teaching process, curriculum, teacher education and music specialists need to work together. She proposes that music specialists teacher education should be examined and that preservice teacher candidates should be encouraged to develop “sound before symbol” pedagogies that would provide children with multiple perspectives of music. Montgomery also proposes that “the musical sounds in 21st century children’s lives most likely will be quite diverse. Thus, music content as well as experiential practice should be reflective of this reality” (Montgomery, 2000, p. 136).

From Sea to Sea to Sea: Curricular Perspectives

Atlantic Canada

In 1993, the Atlantic provinces under the auspices of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF), began developing a framework for future curriculum development. In 2001, *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum* was published. This document is shaped by a vision of enabling and encouraging students to engage in creative, expressive, and responsive processes through the arts, throughout their lives. This Primary/Kindergarten to Grade 12 document describes the knowledge, skills and attitudes in the areas of aesthetic expression, citizenship, communication, personal development, problem solving and technological competence expected of all students who graduate from high school. It provides 8 general curriculum outcomes arranged according to the types of understanding and processes that are common to the all arts disciplines: creating works of art; responding critically to personal work and the

works of others; and making connections in local, global and historical contexts.

Subsequently, key stage arts outcomes in each discipline are outlined for the end of Grade 3, Grade 6, Grade 9, and Grade 12.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Three documents comprise the current elementary music curriculum in Newfoundland and Labrador: *Early Beginnings: Kindergarten Curriculum Guide* (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1997), *Primary music: A Teaching Guide* (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1983); and *Elementary Music: Curriculum and Teaching Guide* (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 1985).

The kindergarten document embraces the APEF Essential Graduation Learnings. Specific curriculum outcomes are outlined for music. Appropriate actions for kindergarten children include: listening to music, singing, playing instruments and moving to music. Analysis and critical reflection are part of this curriculum, and technological competence is promoted as an important component.

Developed prior to the formation of APEF, *Primary music: A Teaching Guide* and *Elementary Music: Curriculum and Teaching Guide*, both contain a goal and objective-based approach. Using an aesthetic education philosophy, these curricula include grade-by-grade objectives employing an elemental framework for rhythm, melody, harmony, governed by a clearly defined child developmental scope and sequence in music education. Actions involve singing, playing instruments, listening, creating, and moving

to music. Instructional procedures, as well as assessment/evaluation and reporting suggestions are outlined and sample song materials and resource lists are also included.

Nova Scotia

The Nova Scotia Department of Education released *Music Primary – 6* in 2002, fully endorsing the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (2001) document. This curriculum espouses an aesthetic education philosophy and a multiple intelligences approach to music. The comprehensive document includes general curriculum outcomes and grade-by-grade specific curriculum outcomes. Other features include contexts for learning and teaching (i.e. principles underlying music education curricula); the learning environment; the use of technology; roles in music education; diverse learning needs; suggestions for learning and teaching; and suggestions for assessment and evaluation, including guiding principles, involving all partners, ways of knowing, and student achievement standards. In addition, appendices offer suggestions for organizing instruction, program extension, listening to music, sample learning experiences, sample assessment forms, a glossary of terms, music career choices and an extensive music resource list. Actions involve singing, playing instruments, listening, creating and analyzing/critiquing.

Prince Edward Island

The Elementary Music Curriculum Guide: Grades 1-6 published by the Prince Edward Island Department of Education in 2002 also embraces the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (2001) document. This document was originally developed in

1995-1997 and was revised in 2001-2002. Using an aesthetic education philosophy, it organizes the curriculum under four focus areas: musical participation, musical awareness and appreciation, musical understanding and musical technology. Curriculum outcomes are outlined sequentially for each grade in each of the aforementioned focus areas and instructional strategies are provided for key stage outcomes at the end of Grade 3 and Grade 6. Suggestions are provided for assessment/evaluation and communicating with parents. Appendices include: listening resources and activities, recorder skills, and various resource lists. Actions involve singing, playing instruments, listening, creating, and analyzing/critiquing.

New Brunswick

The New Brunswick Department of Education established *Music: Curriculum Outcomes K-8* with its sequential outline of concept/skill scope and sequence in 1996. The Department has begun the process of redeveloping their curricula based on Foundations for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum. The most recent of these developments is *Music Education Curriculum: Grade six* released in 2004. Although this document is for middle school, an analysis of its content reveals current curricular development in this province. The organizational and presentational framework for this Grade 6 curricula is modeled after that developed by Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002). The document includes: general and specific curriculum outcomes, suggestions for learning and teaching, suggestions for assessment and evaluation (including student achievement standards), and pertinent notes and resources. Actions involve singing, playing instruments, listening, creating and analyzing/critiquing.

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Québec

The Québec Ministry of Education released *Québec Education Program: Elementary Education* in 2001. This revised curriculum for preschool education and elementary education includes the organization of all elementary subjects and positions music as part of arts education (Québec Ministry of Education, 2001). This document began to put into place revised education policies presented in *A New Direction for Success: Québec Schools on Course* published in 1997. Using an aesthetic educational philosophy, music learning is organized under three foci of competency: to invent vocal or instrumental pieces; to interpret musical pieces; and to appreciate musical works, personal productions and those of classmates. The curriculum is organized into three cycles, cycle 1: Grades 1 and 2; cycle 2: Grades 3 and 4; and cycle 3: Grades 5 and 6. Outcomes are broadly stated at the end of each cycle and evaluation criteria suggested. In addition, a scope and sequence chart is presented outlining essential knowledges in the language of music (music elemental framework), graphic representation (traditional, conventional nontraditional code, student invented code), sound sources, instrumental techniques, rules for group ensemble work, composition procedures, structures, music appreciation repertoire, vocabulary and suggestions for using information and communications technologies. Actions involve: creating, playing instruments, listening, singing, analyzing/critiquing.

Ontario

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The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: The Arts and The Kindergarten Program, both released in 1998 by the Ontario Ministry of Education, promote an aesthetic education philosophy for arts education curriculum. Music, Drama/Dance, and Visual Arts comprise the three strands of the Grades 1-8 arts education curriculum. The documents provide grade-by-grade overall and specific expectations organized around three foci: knowledge of elements, creative work, and critical thinking. Expectations are arranged sequentially and involve actions such as singing, playing instruments, listening, creating and analyzing/critiquing.

In addition, the document identifies four areas of achievement in the arts: understanding of concepts; critical analysis and appreciation; performance and creative work; and communication. Suggestions are provided for achievement levels. A glossary of terms is also included.

Manitoba

The elementary music/arts curriculum in Manitoba is currently under consultation for redevelopment and revision. A survey on *The Arts in Education* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2003) welcomed input from various stakeholders in education to chart new directions for Arts Education in the province's public schools. The summary report of this consensus-building action was released in 2004 (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2004). In the interim, the Manitoba government has posted a concise overview of Arts (including music) expectations on their website (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005). These expectations suggest that the K-5 music

program involves actions such as singing, playing instruments, listening, and creating. During the interim, teachers in Manitoba rely on locally-developed music curricula.

Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan arts education curriculum has as its one main aim the ability to enable students to understand and value arts expression throughout life. The elementary music strand has six distinct curricula for each of kindergarten through Grade 5 (Saskatchewan Education, 1991a; 1991b; 1991c; 1991d; 1991e, 1994). Embracing a philosophy of aesthetic education, the music strand is organized around foundational objectives within a developmental elemental framework. The music curricula include nine key objectives involving, singing, playing instruments, creating, moving and analyzing/critiquing. Suggestions are provided for instruction, and guidelines for unit planning that addresses the Common Essential Learnings as well as some preplanned units are given for each grade level. Units show the division of the creative/productive component, the cultural/historical component, and the critical/responsive component. Some general suggestions are provided for assessment. Strategies for promoting technological literacy are also included.

Alberta

Alberta's *Music Elementary* document was released in 1989, *Kindergarten Program Statement* in 2000. Both promote an aesthetic education philosophy. To satisfy creative and cultural expression, kindergarten children express themselves through singing, moving, playing instruments, creating and problem solving. *Music Elementary*

presents five general learner expectations followed by sequential child-developmental specific learner expectations. The specific learner expectations are organized in charts that are structured on five conceptual elements: rhythm, melody, harmony, form, expression; and six skill areas: singing, playing instruments, listening, moving, reading (and writing), and creating. Attitudinal development is also considered.

British Columbia

The British Columbia Ministry of Education released its *Fine Arts K-7* curriculum document in 1998. The organizers for the Music strand of this document are: structure (elements of rhythm); structure (elements of melody); thoughts, images and feelings; context (self and community); and context (historical and cultural) (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1998). These developmental expectations provide opportunities for students to create, listen to, and perform music, and to demonstrate their understanding of the expressive and physical properties of rhythm and melody. The document outlines prescribed learning outcomes for each grade, accompanied by suggested instructional strategies, assessment strategies and print, video and multimedia resources. Appendices include a listing of all prescribed learning outcomes, learning resources, cross-curricular interests, glossary and approaches to instruction.

Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut

The Yukon Department of Education, Public Schools Branch relies on curriculum produced by other jurisdictions, especially those of the British Columbia Ministry of Education. BC's involvement in the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol in Basic

Education (WNCP) benefits Yukon schools through the development of common WNCP curriculum framework. Other programs are modified to meet Yukon requirements and additional courses are approved by the Yukon Department of Education to reflect local interests, needs, and available resources. The Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment utilizes the K-9 Saskatchewan Education Arts Education Curriculum developed by Saskatchewan Education (1991a, 1991b, 1991c, 1991d, 1991e, 1994). Finally, the Nunavut Department of Education also supports the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol in Basic Education (WNCP). New programs and curricula are being developed for their schools, and currently Nunavut primarily utilizes the Alberta curricula.

Comparison of Provincial Music Curricula and Discussion

Curriculum development is always in a state of flux and change. However, most provinces currently have some type of provincially developed curricula, as is reported in this analysis. A number are in various stages of revision or consideration of revision. For this reason it is no wonder that Manitoba teachers responded that they are less likely to have an established music curriculum. As well, Manitoba teachers felt the least comfortable in comparison with other provincial colleagues at implementing the curriculum (Coalition for Music Education in Canada, 2005).

Some commonalities emerged through the content analysis of these provincial elementary music curricula. In general, most provinces have embraced an aesthetic education philosophy of music education, while Nova Scotia purports their curricula to be a Multiple Intelligence-based approach. As well, most provincial curricula content

demonstrates that music understanding of the knowledge in and about music comes through action: singing, playing instruments, listening, creating and analyzing/critiquing. Most provincial ministries/departments of education have now embraced the North American outcome-based education movement of the late 1980's and early 1990's. Outcome-based or expectation-based knowledge and skills are increasingly present in more recent curriculum documents. Those provinces that use objectives tend to follow older documents from the 1980s.

Some provincial documents such as Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island are more inclusive curricula with learning outcomes/expectations, strategies for teaching/learning, strategies for assessment, resource lists, etc., while other provinces like Ontario and Alberta have spartan documents with mainly expectations/outcomes listed and minimal supports provided to assist teachers in implementation.

It was interesting to note the strong promotion of technological competency in newer documents developed by Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. This development naturally grew from the *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum*. As we move to prepare our future graduates of high school, it may be incumbent upon all provincial ministries/department of education to consider the inclusion of technological competencies as part of revisions to elementary music curricula.

It must be stated and recognized here that the intended curriculum does not necessarily lead to implemented curriculum, nor to instructional reality in the classroom. It is but a first step. As Montgomery, (2000) noted, curriculum is only part of the

challenge in elementary music education in Canada. Music educators must consider the opportunities presented when provincial or regional curricula are revised and/or developed and rise to meet this challenge.

We must also continue to strive for enhanced and further developed professional learning for teachers at the pre-service and in-service levels. As Beatty (2001a; 2001b) in a study of elementary music education in Ontario schools found, generalist classroom teachers were struggling with the implementation of the music strand of *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: the Arts* (1998).

The issue of who teaches music in the elementary schools across Canada continues. Who has the best musical content knowledge and pedagogical skill to teach music to the elementary-aged pupil? Should it be a music specialist or the classroom teacher?

Elementary music education in Canada truly has had a remarkable history and growth. We have come far in public school music education from the early beginnings of music in the elementary curriculum of the Common School Act of 1841 in Upper Canada. As we look to the future and continue to strive for improvements to curricula in Canadian music education, we must always keep the student in mind as we prepare to meet the needs of our graduates of schools in this 21st century.

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