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Are the Arts available to Canadian Children? A 2016 examination of Canadian Arts Curriculum

John Poulsen
Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge
Lethbridge AB, Canada
john.poulsen@uleth.ca

ABSTRACT

The premise of this examination is that for some children the arts are the most important part of their education. For many students, it is vital that they are able to regularly study and self-express in art, dance, drama, and/or music. The purpose of this paper is to examine and report on the 2016 curriculum in K-12 art, dance, drama, and music in the ten Canadian provinces. Curriculum is the domain of each province and there is considerable variation province to province with what arts are required learning and even what is available. The methodology used was an in-depth examination of all ten Canadian provinces' K-12 curriculum plus interviews. These interviews were conducted with teachers to ascertain whether there was a difference between the stated curriculum and common practice. A major finding of this study suggest that Canadian K-12 arts curriculum is inconsistent with regard to what arts are even available to children. Some provinces such as B.C., Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec seem to place greater emphasis on children having regular access to the arts. These provinces have curriculum in the four arts areas and mandate how much time teachers are to engage students in the arts. Some provinces such as the Atlantic Provinces do not even have provincially mandated curriculum for all four arts. The importance of the arts to all children is often referred to in curriculum documents, but, as this examination shows, not all children have equal access to arts education.

Keywords: Teaching fine arts, Canada arts, K-12 Curriculum

Introduction

For some children, the arts are the most important part of their education. For certain students, it is vital that they are able to regularly study and self-express in art, dance, drama, and/or music. This is an examination of and report on the 2016 curriculum in K-12 art, dance, drama, and music in the ten Canadian provinces. Curriculum is the domain of each province and there is considerable variation province to province with what arts are required learning. That is, a child in Ontario could be given access to all four arts disciplines while a child in Nova Scotia could have access to none. Some of this variation is due to size of school and preferences of the school administration, but arguably the majority of the variation is due to provincial curriculum.

Students have more access to the arts in provinces where there is a current curriculum for the arts and even more so where there is provincial mandate to teach the arts. For example, students in British Columbia (BC) have access to all the arts from Kindergarten to grade seven. The following quote from the BC curriculum website clearly indicates that the arts are required education, "Arts education is an integral part of the educational growth of all students. From Kindergarten through Grade 7, all four arts education subjects – Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts are required areas of study.

The Prescribed Learning Outcomes for all four arts education subjects are therefore required at every grade level.” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4). Juxtapose this with the Prince Edward Island curriculum in which there is only curriculum for music education in the elementary grades.

Purpose of the Study

To compare and contrast Canadian provincial K-12 arts curriculum.

Objectives/Research Questions

1. How are the Canadian provincial K-12 arts curriculum similar and how do they vary?
2. What arts curricula are mandated?
3. What provinces require arts as part of a child’s learning?
4. Which provinces set out minimum arts requirements such as minimum number of minutes per week?
5. As more recent curricula may be seen as more valuable, when was each arts curricula created?

The Theory Used in the Research

If the arts are important for a child to grow optimally then the arts should be available to all Canadian students.

Methodology

The methodology used was an in-depth examination of all ten Canadian province K-12 curriculum plus interviews to ascertain whether there was a difference between the stated curriculum and common practice. The examination of the curriculum was conducted between January 2016 and January 2017. Interviews with select teachers took place in between September 2014 and December 2016.

Findings

Following is a province-by-province examination of the fine arts curricula beginning with the Atlantic provinces moving east to west.

Atlantic Provinces

An arts education document was created for all the Atlantic Provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island) in 2001. The document clarifies its purpose by stating that the “*Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum* is intended as a framework for dance, drama, music, and visual arts education programs in the Atlantic provinces” (p. 1). Further, the site indicates that “[t]he Atlantic Canada arts education curricula are shaped by a vision of enabling and encouraging students to engage in the creative, expressive, and responsive processes of the arts throughout their lives” (p. v). The document gives curriculum outcomes for what students “will have achieved” (p. 2) by the end of grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 in dance, drama, music, and visual arts.

The document states what Atlantic Canadian students are to achieve but not how that is to occur. There is, for example, no minimum required number of minutes per week. Further, this document does not seem to be adopted by the provinces. The required curriculum seems to be something else according to each province.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador (Nfld) have curriculum outcomes for music and visual art. The *Newfoundland Elementary Art Curriculum* from 2009 states, “This only curriculum describes learning experiences for Kindergarten to Grade 3 that cumulatively provides opportunities for learners to develop knowledge, skills, and attributes they need to express their ideas, understandings, and feelings through art” (p. 3).

The art curriculum for Kindergarten to grade eight does not indicate a minimum number of instructional minutes, rather, it states that:

This art curriculum is defined in terms of outcomes. The identification of outcomes clarifies for students, teachers, parents, and administrators the specific expectations of what students should know, be able to do, and value as a result of their learning in art (p. 4).

Curriculum is available for grade seven art (2012), as well as grades eight and nine art (2014); within this curriculum there is a cinematic arts unit that allows for exploration in drama and dance. A curriculum for high school art exists in a 2002 document labeled “draft.”

The Newfoundland music elementary curriculum stems from 2005. The curriculum suggests that there are no minimum number of minutes required, but “The identification of outcomes defines for students, teachers, parents and administrators, specific expectations of what students should be able to do and value as a result of learning in music” (p. 9). The curriculum goes on to describe that “Key Stage Curriculum Outcomes (KSCOs) are statements that describe what students are expected to know and be able to do at the end of grades 3 and 6, 9, and 12, as a result of their cumulative learning experiences in music education” (p. 14).

The Intermediate Music Curriculum (grades seven to nine) is from 2009. The curriculum states that “music is an essential part of the intermediate curriculum and provides experiences that are relevant, meaningful and enjoyable to the adolescent learner” (p. 2). Like the elementary curriculum, there are outcomes that are required but no indication is given for how often the subject should be taught.

There is curricula for high school music - Ensemble Performance, Experiencing Music and Applied Music from 1996. It seems that Music at the high school level is an option.

Nutshell Nfld – No required minutes. Curriculum outcomes for art K-9 and music K-12.

New Brunswick

Although New Brunswick (NB) mentions the *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum*, the actual curriculum that Arts Educators are to teach in New Brunswick has only music and visual arts mandated by the New Brunswick government. The kindergarten to grade five music education curriculum stems from 2004. Appendix B of the music curriculum refers to creative movement and dance education. It seems that movement and dance are to be taught as a subset of music education. The *Junior High Music Education Curriculum* seems to be in process of being updated with grade eight having been completed in 2009 and the high school electives grades 11 and 12 curriculum were last revised in 2002.

The kindergarten to grade eight visual arts curriculum was created in 1995 with no apparent updates. As with other curricula, the document “outlines the outcomes for Visual Arts for Grades K-8. It identifies the skills, attitudes, knowledge and understandings that students must demonstrate at the end of Grades 2, 5 and 8” (p. 3). Therefore, without

indicating how much time students are to spend each day or week on music and visual arts, this curriculum indicates that students are to have achieved competency at certain levels. Who is responsible for ensuring that the students have achieved the required level of competency is not clearly stated. The visual arts grades nine and ten curriculum was implemented in 2009. In practice some larger school have drama classes as well but this is at the whim of the administration. The curriculum for these courses are created by the teacher on an as needed basis.

Nutshell NB – No required minutes. Curriculum outcomes for art K-8 and music K-5, 8, 11, & 12.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia (NS) has music curriculum for primary to grade six that contains “general curriculum outcomes” and “key-stage curriculum outcomes for the end of grade 3 and grade 6, and specific curriculum outcomes for grades primary–6” (p. 1). The Nova Scotia government requires outcomes but does not indicate specifically how these are to come about. There is a curriculum for high school music 11 and music 12. These courses are optional and may require audition:

Because the course requires a high level of self-motivation and the ability to work independently, students who enrol in these courses must have already demonstrated these abilities. An application process that involves prospective students, music teacher, and guidance staff is outlined in Appendix A. (p. 2)

The visual arts curriculum to grade 6 is from 2000, and, like music, is outcome based:

This curriculum is defined in terms of outcomes. The identification of outcomes clarifies for students, teachers, parents, and administrators specific expectations of what students should know, be able to do, and value as a result of their learning in visual arts (p. 3).

Nova Scotia has a non-required dance 11 curriculum that was created in 1999. It also has optional curricula for drama 10 and 11. All the curriculum documents are extensive with suggested units and glossary. There is a 2016/2017 initiative titled “Artists in Schools” that seems to encourage bringing artists into the schools.

Nutshell NS – No required minutes. Curriculum outcomes for art K-6; music K-6, 11 & 12; dance 11; and drama 10 & 12.

Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island (PEI) has curricula for music education in the elementary grades that was published in 2002. Their website states students are expected to attain Key Stage Curriculum Outcomes (KSCO’s) at the end of grades three and six, “These Key Stage Outcomes serve as benchmarks to help students and teachers reach the General Curriculum Outcome (GCO’s)” (p 28). The Intermediate and Senior High School Band curriculum is from 1997 and appears to be optional.

There is art curriculum for grades 7 to 9 that was created in 2002. There is also a senior high, art 401A, that was created in 2009. This is an optional course that may be taken only in senior high.

Nutshell PEI – No required minutes. Curriculum outcomes for art 7-9 & art 401A and music K-6, intermediate & senior band.

Quebec

The Quebec (QC) Arts Education website has a clarification of the importance of dance, drama, music, and visual arts: “These subjects enable students to express their own reality and vision of the world and they help them to communicate their inner images through the creation and interpretation of artistic productions” (p. 206). The curriculum requires that at least two of the arts education subjects are to be available at all elementary schools in the province. Arts education in the elementary grades requires that “the same two arts subjects [be] included in a students’ timetable every year throughout elementary school” (p. 206). At the secondary level, students are to continue with the arts, but it seems that they must select a single subject: “Students therefore continue the learning they have begun in elementary school, but in a specific subject, which they must choose from among the arts subjects offered in their school” (p. 331).

There is curriculum for art, dance, drama, and music from Kindergarten through grade 12. Dates of the curricula are not readily available on the website but it seems that they were mandated in about 2002.

Nutshell QC – Two of four arts required at elementary and one of four arts required in secondary. Curriculum outcomes for art K-12, dance K-12, drama K-12 and music K-12.

Ontario

The *Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8* defines which disciplines are included in arts education, by stating that students can “empathize with the characters in a dance work, a drama, a song, or a visual art work, and can imagine what it would be like to be in the same situation as these people” (p. 4). The 2009 curriculum has outcomes for dance, drama, music, and visual arts in each grade from grade one to eight. The curriculum also acknowledges that the arts have their own rigour:

All of the arts disciplines are distinct, each with its own body of knowledge, and with its own concepts, forms, styles, conventions, techniques, and modes of inquiry, but these disciplines are also linked in various ways and they enrich and are enriched by each other and by other subjects (p. 5).

Though there are no specifics for instructional minutes, the document states that: [O]verall expectations describe in general terms the knowledge and skills that students are expected to demonstrate by the end of each grade [...] The *specific expectations* describe the expected knowledge and skills in greater detail. Taken together, the overall and specific expectations represent the mandated curriculum (p. 11).

The 2010 Arts Ontario Curriculum grades nine through 12 states that “Experiences in the arts – dance, drama, media arts, music, and the visual arts – play a valuable role in the education of all students” (p. 3). In order to obtain the Ontario Secondary School Diploma students need one credit in the arts. Students may take more credits but the one credit is minimum. At this level, the Ontario Curriculum adds media arts, specifying that “the technologies and processes used and adapted to create media art may be traditional, including, but not limited to, photography, film, photocopy art, analog and electro-acoustic sound, classical animation, and video/television” (p. 89).

The course media arts is available also in grades 11 and 12, as is integrated arts. Integrated arts integrates two or more of the arts (dance, drama, media arts, music, and visual arts) so that students explore the interrelationship between the arts and personal development. They respond to creative challenges using elements, principles, materials,

and techniques from various arts disciplines, including dance, drama, media arts, music, and visual arts.

Nutshell ON – The arts are “mandated” at the elementary level but no minimum minutes. Students must have one credit in the arts in secondary school. Curriculum outcomes for art K-12, dance K-12, drama K-12 and music K-12.

Manitoba

Manitoba (MB) states on its Arts Education Website:

The Dance, Drama, Music, and Visual Arts curriculum frameworks and implementation resources are intended to support, promote and inspire the growth of all students as artistic learners as they journey towards becoming creative, artistically literate adults and citizens who will truly enrich their own lives and the lives of future communities (para. 2).

The 2011 documents state that arts education is not only mandatory but that the government also gives recommended time allotments: “The number and choice of Arts subject areas offered in a school will depend upon local context. Recommended time allotments are 10% of instructional time in Grades 1-6 and 8% of instructional time in Grades 7 and 8” (para. 3).

There are 2015 curricula for grades 9-12 dance, drama, music and visual arts. Students are required to have an optional graduation credit and “Schools may offer arts disciplines individually, in combination with each other, and/or integrated with other subject areas” (p. 10).

Nutshell MB – The arts are mandated - 10% of instructional time at the elementary level and 8% of the instructional time at grades 7 & 8. Students must have minimum one credit in the arts in secondary school. Curriculum outcomes for art K-12, dance K-12, drama K-12 and music K-12.

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan (SK) values the arts and states that, “In arts education, students learn how the arts can provide a voice and means to make a difference in their personal lives and in peer, family, and community interactions” (p. 3). The aim of arts education, as outlined in a 2011 policy statement is “to enable students to understand and value arts expressions throughout life” (p. 6). This one aim describes the main outcome for students and the primary reason for including arts education in the core curriculum for all students.

Saskatchewan mandates, in its 2011 curriculum, under the heading “Time Requirement for Kindergarten to Grade 5” that “Core Curriculum policy states that the time allotment for arts education at the Elementary Level is 200 minutes per week” (Arts_Education_1_2011-2.pdf p. 1). The curriculum further states that “Arts education is a Required Area of Study in Saskatchewan’s Core Curriculum. This is expressed that that kindergarten to grade nine teachers are to spend 50 minutes a week on each of dance, drama, music, and visual art (Arts_Education_6_2009-2.pdf pg. 1). Arts education is not required at the high school level. The grades 10, 11 and 12 Arts General Education Curriculum is from 1996. Specific high school arts education curriculum was created in the 90s – dance 1997, drama 1993, visual art 1996, band 1993, and choral 1997.

Nutshell SK – Minimum 50 minutes per each of art, dance, drama, and music in grades K-9. levels. Students must have one credit in the arts in secondary school. Curriculum outcomes for art K-12, dance K-12, drama K-12 and music K-12.

Alberta

The Alberta fine arts curricula include art, drama, and music. At the elementary level, music seems to be required. The curriculum states that “Music education should begin at an early age and should continue to encourage creative expression through performance, listening and composition” (p. A1). The Guide to Education (Alberta Education, 2015) indicates that music and art together in elementary is recommended to take up ten percent of the overall curriculum in elementary, leaving the exact proportion to the discretion of local school administration or the jurisdiction. The elementary drama curriculum clearly states that drama, “is an optional program designed to be used either as a separate subject or integrated with other subjects” (p, C1).

The Guide to Education indicates that fine arts instructional minutes are listed as optional at the junior high and high school levels. The junior high fine arts curricula were published in the eighties – music in 1988, drama in 1989, and art in 1984. These courses are not required but are offered in many schools. The High School fine arts curricula were created in the eighties and nineties – art in 1986, drama in 1989, choral in 1991, and general music in 1994. In Alberta, dance is not recognized as a provincially mandated subject and therefore has no provincially prescribed curriculum. Alberta allows locally developed curricula, and dance has become a successful subject in some schools, mainly high schools in the larger city centers.

Nutshell AB – Art and music are to consume 10% of teaching time at the elementary level. Curriculum outcomes for art K-12, drama K-12 and music K-12.

British Columbia

The British Columbia education ministry states, in the *Arts Education Kindergarten to Grade 7 Overview*, that the fine arts are required study for students from Kindergarten through grade seven:

Arts education is an integral part of the educational growth of all students. From Kindergarten through Grade 7, all four arts education subjects – Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts are required areas of study. The Prescribed Learning Outcomes for all four arts education subjects are therefore required at every grade level. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4)

The document goes on to explain why the Arts are so important, saying that “People participate in the arts for a variety of reasons:

- to learn and play
- to communicate
- to honour rites of passage
- to define, strengthen, and preserve culture and heritage
- to nurture the emotional, social, intellectual, physical, and spiritual self” (p. 5).

The Ministry-authorized courses at the grade eight, nine, 10, 11, and 12 levels for the fine arts include dance, drama, music, and visual art. British Columbia mandates that all four of the fine arts (visual arts, dance, drama, and music) are required areas of study through Grade 6. In Grades 8 to 10, students are required to choose one or more of the four fine arts areas of study at each grade level. The grades eight to 10 curriculum is from 1995.

British Columbia requires that grades 10 to 12 students complete a minimum of four credits in the fine arts and/or the applied skills subject areas. The applied skills subject areas include carpentry, home economics, and business education, therefore arts education

is not required at the High School level. The basic dance, drama, music, and visual art curriculum is from 1995 with a 2004 supplement but there is a draft curriculum from June 2016 available.

Nutshell BC – The four arts are required at the elementary level but no minimum minutes per week are listed. Students are required to take least one arts subject in grades eight to 10. Curriculum outcomes for art K-12, dance K-12, drama K-12 and music K-12.

Discussion

The quotes from the above arts curricula maintain that arts education is important for children. Each of the Arts (dance, drama, music, visual art) has its own rigour and literacy that is unique, evocative, powerful, rigorous, and profound. For some children, the arts are the most important part of their education. Some children can perform equally well in all the arts but some children have unique dispositions that skew them to a particular art form. In certain provinces, there is not curriculum support for all of the arts. This means that from a curriculum standpoint, there are reduced educational opportunities for students.

Clearly students in Canadian provinces are not being given equal access to artistic forms of expression via arts education. For some children, the arts could be the most important subject in school that gives profound meaning to their lives, but in Canada, sometimes those subjects are just not available.

Limitations

The methodology used was an in depth examination of all ten Canadian province K-12 curriculum plus limited interviews to ascertain whether there was a difference between the stated curriculum and common practice. A major limitation of this study is the changing face of curriculum for example, Alberta is in process of a major curriculum change that will see all subjects with a common structure and some commonality with regard to incorporating suggestions from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission regarding Indigenous peoples. Manitoba suggests that its 2015 curriculum will be constantly updated. Another limitation is actual classroom teaching content versus the stated curriculum. Finally it is important to mention that the longer a curriculum is in place the less importance teachers place on it.

Recommendations

If it is vital that certain students need to regularly study and self-express in art, dance, drama, and/or music then all children should have availability to art, dance, drama, and music regularly throughout their schooling. Provincial curriculum should be created and/or regularly updated in the four disciplines of art, dance, drama, and music. A minimum number of minutes per week should be mandated for student exposure to the four disciplines.

Conclusion

A major finding of this study is that Canadian K-12 curriculum arts curriculum is inconsistent with regard to what arts are available to children. Some provinces such as B.C., Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec seem to place greater emphasis on children having regular access to the arts. The Quebec (QC) Arts Education website stresses the importance of dance, drama, music, and visual arts best by stating “These subjects enable students to express their own reality and vision of the world and they help them to communicate their inner images through the creation and interpretation of artistic productions” (p. 206). The importance of the arts to all children is often referred to in

curriculum documents, but, as this examination shows, not all children have equal access to arts education.

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