

Sharing the Vision

A National Framework for Arts Education in
Canadian Schools

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Why the arts?

The arts are an integral part of our children's lives. Any parent or grandparent will tell you that from an early age, children naturally immerse themselves in drama, dance, music, the visual arts, literary arts, and media: to play, to learn, to communicate, to celebrate, and to find out who they are.

The arts both express and engage the human spirit in profound and powerful ways. They give our children a sense of the world outside themselves, uniquely touching the timelessness of history and the limitlessness of the universe. The arts help children celebrate community. Through the arts children find:

- opportunities to express ideas using the unique languages of the arts,
- opportunities to gain knowledge of the history of human creative achievements,
- opportunities to develop insights into community and global issues explored by contemporary artists,
- opportunities to become proficient with creative processes in a variety of media including technology,
- opportunities to learn about themselves and others through critical reflection on their own work and global arts expressions,
- opportunities to learn how societies and cultures construct and record their history, values, beliefs, and individual and collective visions,
- opportunities to communicate through the arts using their imaginations, ideas, observations, and feelings, and
- opportunities to become aware and proud of Canada's rich cultural and artistic heritage.

These opportunities are unique to the arts. The arts are an integral part of Canadian society. They provide important ways of meaning making in our lives.

Why arts education?

There is a growing body of research that shows that children learn in many different ways. If their experiences are limited to one way of knowing, their learning will also be limited. The arts provide alternative ways of knowing. As distinct disciplines they uniquely engage the senses, stimulate the imagination, and broaden our children's understanding of themselves, their connections with others, and the world in which they live. The arts provide opportunities for children to operate at the highest level of human cognition.

Howard Gardner of Harvard University has completed groundbreaking research that has led to a revolutionary reassessment of the way children learn and think. His work demonstrated that there are at least eight basic intelligences and that many children do not respond well to the

traditional approaches used in public schools throughout North America. Thus, in addition to the unique learning available through in depth experiences in each of the arts, the arts are seen as tools for the teaching and learning of many skills and concepts beyond the arts.

The arts in schools often provide a place where children are encouraged to take risks and meet personal challenges in a safe environment. This opportunity is especially important for children who are bullied or feel left out of the mainstream. Arts classes are often cited as the reason some children stayed in school, not because the arts are easy — they are not — but because they allow these students to blossom in different ways, to gain in self-confidence, to grow in self-esteem. Working in the arts, students learn how to work together and alone; they learn to appreciate quality, and they learn to bring a task to completion and evaluate it. Experiences in the arts bring enjoyment and personal satisfaction.

While children are attracted to the arts from birth, children need encouragement and nurturing to maximize their potential. The development of skills and understanding in the arts is one goal of arts education.

What is arts education?

Arts education can take place formally in the schools and conservatories, but also informally in homes and communities. Arts education builds on these home and community experiences and provides structured learning experiences throughout the elementary and secondary school years. This document focuses on arts education in the schools, where children from kindergarten through grade 12 have opportunities for in-depth, cumulative learning in dance, drama, literary arts, music, media, and visual arts. Arts education provides children with opportunities to create in each of the arts, opportunities to respond to art-making, and opportunities to learn about the arts. Arts education includes both learning in and through the arts and is a vital part of the school curriculum.

Learning in the arts. Arts education, as learning in the arts, seeks to encourage children in creative art making and responding processes, giving them a firm foundation in the practices and principles of the various arts disciplines. As students explore thoughts, experiences, and feelings to develop new understandings in the creation and expression of meaning, they use processes that value intuition and imagination while developing technical and personal skills and a commitment to high standards. Through cumulative experiences in the arts, students learn to respond with critical awareness and sensitivity to their own work and the work of others; and in making art, they learn the value of the arts in their daily lives and in the shaping of cultural identities within local and global contexts. The arts make learning relevant for students of the many diverse cultural backgrounds who attend Canadian schools. They enhance skills like teamwork, the ability to use and acquire information, and to master different types of symbol systems and use of technology.

Learning in the arts, which is often delivered by specialist teachers, is a vital part of each child's encounter with the arts and forms the basis for learning through the arts.

Learning through the arts. The arts are a vehicle for learning other subject content and a means of teaching more general educational outcomes such as nurturing students' social and personal development.

Thus, arts education builds on learning in the arts and infuses the arts throughout the curriculum. For example, dance is used in the teaching of math; drama is used in the teaching of history; music is used in the teaching of science; visual arts are used in the teaching of Aboriginal culture.

In addition, the arts contribute to the general education of students. They engage the social, emotional, kinesthetic, and rational capacities of children and become vehicles for releasing their creative potential while building deeper knowledge and a broader, more connected understanding of curricular concepts in other subjects. They facilitate the connections that need to be made among academic areas and events outside school.

It is not only the arts that should be infused throughout the curriculum. Other subjects should be infused into arts education, especially social or cultural issues.

Why is the vision important now?

Canada is a vast country with increasing cultural diversity and an on-going search for identity. What, we have asked ourselves on many occasions, does it mean to be Canadian? There will be different answers from the Aboriginal peoples, from the descendants of early English-speaking royalists and Québécois settlers, and from other immigrants from around the world, whether long established or recent. Working together will be an on-going challenge that the arts help us address by generating empathy and cultural understanding.

We live in a quickly changing world where adaptability, flexibility, critical thinking, and problem solving are survival requirements. The importance of visual and aural images that can be used both to enhance our lives and to manipulate our thinking cannot be underestimated. Careers in the arts and arts-related fields are multiplying.

We also live at a time when violence and misunderstandings seem to be spreading in our society. The arts can be a direct way of vicariously but meaningfully encountering sensitive issues and values.

The habits of mind and understandings developed in arts education serve both to help our children make a life worth living and help develop highly desirable characteristics for citizenry and employability in the 21st century: creative thinking, decision making, responsibility, teamwork skills, adaptability, leadership, working with diversity, seeing things in the mind's eye, and knowing how to learn.

It is clear that the arts are critical to the well being of our children and that arts education is a way of ensuring that all children have access to equal opportunities.

Developing a shared vision

The National Symposium on Arts Education (NSAE) has been working since 1997 to build consensus around a Shared Vision for Arts Education in Canada. As a first step, participants at the 1997 Cape Breton National Symposium on Arts education adopted the following Resolution.

Given the value of the arts for learning;
Given the ability of education in the arts to nurture qualities necessary in the workplace of the 21st century;
Given the rapidly growing work opportunities in the cultural sector;
Given the need for creative uses of and content for new technologies, which artists provide;
Given the central role of the arts in the well being of communities;
Given the ability of the arts to respond to and embrace the movement of globalization, both affirming distinct cultures and understanding others;

The participants of the National Symposium on Arts Education '97, including artists, educators, arts administrators and education administrators from across Canada, urge the Ministers of Education, through the Council of Ministers of Education, to take steps to ensure that the arts are a fundamental and sustained part of the Canadian school system for all students and in all schools, by developing a vision and common outcomes for arts education in Canada.

The NSAE then went on to organize annual meetings of arts educators, artists, administrators, and supporters of arts education in different locations across Canada and to set up an infrastructure, largely held together by a website (<http://www.artsed.ca>), to ensure the ongoing development of the vision. The NSAE is dedicated to ensuring arts education, including learning in, through, and about the arts, for all Canadians.

The priority is to ensure that comprehensive, developmental arts education is available to all our children from K to 12. There are steps that must be taken if this goal is to be realized. If our children are going to benefit from arts education they need the best teachers possible. They need teachers who have the skills, knowledge, and understanding to teach in one or more of the arts. Currently in Canada, teacher education programs are not all designed to develop teachers who have the necessary qualifications to provide cumulative arts education programs in our schools, and not all school boards hire teachers with the necessary expertise to provide opportunities in the arts for all children. This problem is especially evident in the elementary schools where many classroom teachers are not confident about teaching the arts and using the arts in their teaching. Yet research has shown that critical building blocks for future learning are developed in these early years.

Although it is important for children to have in-depth experiences in the arts, the arts as a subject should not be isolated from other subjects but become recognized as part of the rich fabric of school and community living. As part of the school culture, the arts contribute to the spirit and vitality of the school community, promoting cooperation and teamwork and enhancing learning across the curriculum.

Collectively, we have a vision of arts education which has teachers delivering arts education on a regular basis but also includes teachers and artists working together to show children in

special ways the joy and delight of the arts. Both teachers and artists have different areas of specialized expertise which are often complementary.

We appreciate the cultural variety across Canada and support arts education that is flexible and responds to the diverse cultural and social needs of communities. We are dedicated to ensuring arts education, including learning in, through, and about the arts for all Canadian children.

Partners in arts education

What do children need if they are to maximize their potential in and through the arts? Children need:

- a commitment by parents, the community, schools, business, and government to support arts education in the schools;
- equitable access to arts programs from K–12;
- developmental and continuous arts curriculum K–12;
- qualified arts education teachers;
- access to visual arts exhibitions and live artistic performances;
- contact with artists in all disciplines; and
- the time, space, and resources to deliver arts education.

This framework is for many people. Families encourage and support arts interests and activities; communities provide resources to mount and enjoy artistic events; school boards hire qualified teachers; teacher education programs provide sufficient training and professional development for arts specialists and generalist teachers; government, school boards, and in-school administrators ensure that schools have the resources they need to deliver a rich arts education to each and every child.

Schools dwell in communities, communities that thrive because of business and industry. Partnerships are one way that people interested in the arts have developed to meet some of their needs. Examples of partnerships among Canadian schools, artists, and communities which provide innovative opportunities to teach both the arts and other curricular subjects through the arts include programs such as Learning Through the Arts™ (Royal Conservatory of Music), Arts Infusion (Nova Scotia Arts Council), ArtsSmart (The JW McConnell Family Foundation), DAREarts, and CAPES (Calgary Arts Partners in Education Society).

There is a cost to a good arts education. There is an equal or greater cost to not providing a good arts education. *As a nation we cannot afford the cost of depriving our children of opportunities to reach their full potential through the arts.*

How will we know we've succeeded?

We will know we have been successful when every child in Canada has

- equitable access to comprehensive, developmental arts programs delivered by qualified teachers and
- educationally appropriate opportunities to work with and enjoy professional arts and artists throughout the school system.

Partners in sharing the vision

The following organizations support the Vision for Arts Education developed in this framework.

Algonquin Academy of Wilderness and Wildlife Art
Atelier West Studios (Newfoundland)
Canadian Conference of the Arts
Canadian Music Educators Association
Canadian Society for Education through Art
CARFAC
Council of Drama and Dance in Education
EPCOR CENTRE for the Performing Arts (Calgary)
Laidlaw Foundation
L'Ecole de danse du Québec
Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council
Nova Scotia Cultural Network
Nova Scotia Music Educators Association
Ontario Society for Education through Art
Prologue for the Performing Arts
Sears Ontario Drama Festival
The Writers Union of Canada
Theatre Ontario
Young Alberta Book Society (YABS)
Theatre/Théâtre Canada

Reading List

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