

REVIEWING K-12 ARTS EDUCATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK

2017



Creative Futures: The Province's Cultural Policy

The Cultural Policy for [New Brunswick, Creative Futures](#) (2014-19), lists as an item for action the establishment of “a provincial dialogue on cultural education in the Anglophone K-12 system with artists, cultural professionals and community stakeholders, to provide recommendations for further development and integration of arts, heritage and culture in education.”

As the province's primary overall voice for Anglophone artists and the arts, and as a leading voice on the benefits of the arts to society, ArtsLink NB is eager to take a leading role in that discussion and the development of recommendations to enhance the level of arts education in the Anglophone K-12 system in New Brunswick.



Community Benefits of Arts Education

New Brunswick's sustainable future relies on an up-to-date and responsive curriculum in all areas of K-12 education in order to nurture and develop citizens who are prepared for life's challenges by being literate, adaptable, and self-confident, and by valuing diversity. Arts education has a key and unique role to play in this development through three types of opportunities: learning in the arts (courses in making art of all kinds); learning about the arts (courses in visual and performing arts history and criticism); and learning through the arts (innovative uses of the arts to facilitate learning in other areas.)

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Developing Literacies

Practical courses in music, visual art, theatre, and dance provide direct experience of principles of composition, selection, and persuasion essential to the development of visual and media literacies. These literacies are crucial to informed and responsible participation in contemporary media-rich culture, society, and marketplaces. To complement the experiential learning, visual and media literacies can be further developed through formal studies in visual and performing arts history and criticism. With regard to verbal literacy, research suggests that the sound-recognition skills developed through study of music have significant positive impact on the acquisition of reading skills. Understanding visual art, music, dance, and theatre as alternative communication systems can also enhance learners' understanding of verbal language systems.

**Decision-making and problem-solving skills**

Challenging students to complete art projects frequently involves helping them to determine how to use available (and limited) resources efficiently, which sharpens their decision-making abilities. Such challenges also develop the recognition that most problems actually have multiple viable solutions. The autonomy and self-direction required in completing art projects help students explore and develop their own agency.

**Adaptability and Flexibility**

Research over the past two decades reveals that arts education improves students' flexibility, adaptability, and improvisational skills. It also suggests a strong connection between participation in theatre, dance, and musical projects and the development of collaborative habits. A study by Hill Strategies of music education in Canadian schools indicates increased levels of self-confidence among students exposed to arts education opportunities.



Learning through the arts

Brain-imaging studies, especially with music, suggest that arts experiences assist full functioning of brain and body. Habits of attention, self-regulation, and self-discipline have been shown to carry over from arts projects to other educational experiences. Participation in Learning Through the Arts programs such as that pioneered by the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto has been shown to improve students' performance on computational and estimation tests. Dance movement has been shown, in studies at Johns Hopkins, to aid retention of information in other subjects through repetition and elaboration; and a Kennedy Centre study points to greater levels of student engagement in programs where the arts are integrated into the rest of the curriculum. Surveys also indicate higher levels of teacher satisfaction where arts learning is integrated with other learning.



Everyone at their best

New Brunswick's 10-year education plan for the Anglophone Sector, entitled [Everyone at Their Best](#) (2016), outlines nine objectives, several of which resonate very strongly with competencies that can be developed effectively and uniquely by arts education opportunities.

One objective of the plan is to “improve literacy skills for all learners.” Through developing an understanding in their arts education courses of how images and patterns are constructed, how they communicate, how they appeal, and what value systems they perpetuate, students can develop their visual and media literacies. Music, in particular, has been shown to have a positive impact on language acquisition at an early age.

// improve literacy skills for all learners.

The plan includes an objective to “foster leadership, active citizenship and an entrepreneurial mindset.” Studies in theatre, music, and dance can provide students with opportunities for directing, collaborating, advocacy, and entrepreneurship.

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The plan includes an objective to “ensure all learners value diversity and have a strong sense of belonging.” Participation in the arts can enhance students’ sense of personal worth and accomplishment as well as of membership in a community. Appreciation of shared stories and representations can enhance a sense of identity; and the imaginative leaps, identification, empathy, and re-positionings required to create art projects can assist in the development of what psychologists call “theory of mind,” an essential building-block for understanding, appreciating, and supporting diversity.

// ensure all learners value diversity and have a strong sense of belonging.

The plan includes an objective to “ensure all learners develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to continually adapt to, and thrive in, their environment.” Whether the project is making a painting, designing a stage set, playing a musical work, choreographing or executing a dance, or acting a dramatic role, students involved in arts projects are constantly asked to review and revise, adapting to changes or unforeseen developments in media, physical space, instruments, and their co-performers.

// ensure all learners develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to continually adapt to, and thrive in, their environment.

Why an Artist-led review?

Robust and accessible arts education helps to make it clear to citizens at an early age that the arts are a vital and everyday element of a successful society. Artists have a key role to play in the community as mentors and models of such qualities as entrepreneurship, adaptability, communication, and acceptance of diversity. Involving artists in the schools-- performing, exhibiting, interacting, collaborating, and advising directly on curriculum design-- significantly enriches students' learning experiences. In addition to these obvious stakes that the province's artists have in maintaining and enhancing arts education, the artist's ability to look at a thing and see its potential to be something else make ArtsLink NB's leadership in this review an excellent fit. We hope, with the cooperation of educators, the department, and the community, to identify creative approaches to nurturing creativity in New Brunswick.

What can you do?

ArtsLink NB plans to work with partners in the arts community, the community at large, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and other government departments to conduct a review of the current state of arts education in the Anglophone system, K-12. The review, through its inventory and recommendation phases, will be designed to ensure that in curriculum design, in situating arts education in the entire curriculum, in staffing, and in resources, New Brunswick is doing the best it can to capitalize on the societal benefits that can be delivered by arts education in the schools.

We hope that you will share our passion for this review project.

Selected Background Reading

S. Baum et al., "[*Transferring Individual Self-Regulation Processes from Arts to Academics*](#)," Arts Education Policy Review 98(4): 32-39 (1997).

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E. D'Agrosa, "[*Making Music, Reaching Readers*](#)," General Music Today 21(2): 6-10 (2008).

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E. Fisk, ed., [*Champions of Change: The Impact of Arts on Learning*](#) (1999).

M. Forgeard, "[*The Relation Between Music and Phonological Processing in Normal Reading Children and Children with Dyslexia*](#)," Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal 25:383-390 (2008).

Hill Strategies, [*A Delicate Balance: Music Education in Canadian Schools*](#) (2010).

Jensen, [*Arts with the Brain in Mind*](#) (2001).

Rena Uptis, [*Arts Education for the Development of the Whole Child*](#) (2011).

Rena Uptis and Smithrim, "[*Engaging Students through the Arts*](#)" *What Works? Research into Practice* (April 2011).

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ArtsLink NB

The Arts are vital to all New Brunswickers

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