

The Importance of the Fine Arts Supervisor

NEW DEMANDS ON SCHOOLS

School districts are facing an emerging accountability as the public demands both successful teaching and evidence of that success. As school districts in B.C. strive to satisfy this societal demand they realize that their only resource is a human resource — infusions of money are not available as in years past, and there is some question as to whether a school system can "buy" quality.

In addition to a community demand for excellence, there is a rapidly growing demand for "a rebirth of the humanities".¹ Our society is coming to realize that the quality of life is its most important concern and that both this quality and our economic future are dependent on the development of creativity in our children.

The curriculum that prepares children for creative thinking while directly affecting the quality of life is the fine arts. Drama, dance, music and the visual arts develop metaphoric thinking in children and provide unique modes of experience leading to originality and self-reliance. Teachers in the arts have the responsibility of providing, "... the essential cultural link between past, present and future."²

MEETING THE DEMAND FOR THE ARTS — THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

Since the resource base for school districts has changed and there is an urgent need to maximize the human resources already in place, the position of fine arts supervisor, (or coordinator, or consultant), is a crucial one for school districts.

The Canadian Conference of the Arts recently recommended, "That school districts have a minimum of one arts coordinator for each school district, and preferably a coordinator for each discipline."³

Supervisors "are closest in competence and affinity to teachers and their work"⁴ and what is more, they are the link between the teaching function and administration. Supervisors must speak both languages and interpret between the two aspects of a school system in order to motivate teachers.⁵

The supervisor is essential in the areas of: staffing; motivation and stimulation; consultation; and program development and evaluation. In addition, arts supervisors are often responsible

for large amounts of specialty equipment; for enhancing arts programs using professional and community artists; and for a major public relations role as school arts programs reach out to the community.

Fine arts programs are different in nature from most other programs in that there is a dual emphasis on process and product. Fine arts learning activities are intrinsically valuable as they occur⁶ and the program outcome is not necessarily pre-determined.⁷

DUTIES OF AN ARTS SUPERVISOR

Arts supervisors are "expeditors" responsible for visiting teachers in the field to motivate them and keep them in touch with developments in the district and province. A supervisor uses human relations expertise to interact with a variety of individualistic teachers and gain their confidence. Teachers will then accept new ideas and suggestions for improvement.

Arts supervisors organize in-service to improve instruction. These sessions introduce new curricula and new teaching methods. In addition, teachers are encouraged to share expertise in these sessions.

Budgets are a central concern in B.C. and arts supervisors assist district staff and principals in planning and budgeting for the most cost-effective utilization of staff, equipment and supplies.

Public relations are of great concern for educators and district fine arts programs offer a unique chance to return value to the community. The fine arts supervisor is an effective contact person for the community and can help provide a balance between community involvement and educational requirements. A public that appreciates a play or a concert will realize that these activities reflect over-all achievement in a school. Similar arts events outside the community serve as ambassadors for that community and its schools.

Arts supervisors are involved with program evaluation and development on a regular basis. Evaluation of arts programs is a unique venture requiring what Robert State has called "responsive evaluation" since the arts do not have a single value, but rather several kinds of values according to audience and previous experience. Program evaluation in the arts requires an experienced arts professional since good programs exhibit quality, diversity, excellence, originality and vitality, rather than a dogmatic adherence to a single pre-determined goal.

SUMMARY

We are beginning a new Renaissance in B.C. with the visual and performing arts becoming more important than they have been before in our province. The audience for the arts is estimated at 40% of the population and growing.⁸ In order for today's children to have an opportunity for development through the arts, school programs will have to improve and develop as quickly as possible. The Fine Arts Supervisor is the key to that development — only the arts supervisor can provide the leadership and support that arts teachers need.

The evidence in B.C. is clear — those districts who have fine arts supervisors have dynamic successful programs that are growing. Every child in every district should have such a program.

REFERENCES

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7. *ibid.*
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Arts in Education Council