

2008 Arts Education Survey of B.C. Teachers

The Arts in Education Council conducted a small, informal survey at the 2008 B.C. Teachers Federation conference. Teachers visiting our display table filled out a questionnaire of nine questions about the teaching of the four arts disciplines in their schools. Although the sample – fifty replies – was small, it was very representative of most school districts and gave us a quick snapshot of the state of arts education around B.C.

The nine questions were:

1. *Generally, do you feel that the arts are adequately taught in your school district?*
2. *Specifically, how would you rate the provision of each (of the four disciplines) in your district? Zero to Six where Zero is none and six is 100%.*
3. *Do you feel that the teaching of the fine arts is adequately supported in your district in terms of reference materials, textbooks, picture sets, music sheets, art materials, tapes and videos, appropriate space, etc.?*
4. *Are the elementary schools in your district each staffed with at least one fine arts specialist?*
5. *Would the arts curriculum in your district benefit from a fine arts coordinator/consultant?*
6. *Does your district employ a fine arts coordinator/consultant?*
7. *Did your Teacher Training include orientation to fine arts education?*
8. *Do you feel that an advocacy body such as the Arts in Education Council of B.C. has a role in assuring that the fine arts in B.C. public schools are alive and well?*
9. *Do you feel that fine arts education in B.C. schools could benefit from more support through advocacy? If yes, how?*

Not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of answers indicated a low level of arts instruction in most schools, and a high level of dissatisfaction with the current situation.

In hindsight we realize we should have differentiated between high school and elementary, as many secondary schools have excellent programs and specialized teachers, whereas in the lower grades the quality and quantity of arts instruction varies widely. This was commented upon more than once – secondary school programs have lots of support, whereas elementary teachers are more or less “on their own” when it comes to teaching the four disciplines.

Several other responses referred to the difficulty in promoting art education, when art is inherently *not* measurable by the methods applied to other subjects. “Find a way to measure it”, and “lobby to remove marks from the Fine Arts at the elementary level” were two of the comments.

Many suggested drawing upon the larger arts community (for example, from galleries, Emily Carr University, the opera, symphony, and so on) for support and then providing time and resources for teachers to take courses, workshops, attend exhibitions and performances with their students.

More publicity for the benefits of arts in education, making the present deficiencies very public, actively lobbying trustees during elections, and pressuring the Ministry for more funding for the arts in schools were all comments that highlight the advocacy role of organizations such as the Arts in Education Council.

All in all, the survey underlined our existing conviction that elementary level art instruction is uneven at best, and that part of the problem goes right back to the teacher training level.