

Equity and Inclusion in Arts Education*

Every Grades 9 to 12 learner in Manitoba deserves and has the right to expect an equitable opportunity to access inclusive quality arts education:

- **Educational equity** is broadly defined as “a condition of fairness with respect to educational opportunities, access, and outcomes for all people” (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, *Belonging, Learning, and Growing* 12).
- **Inclusion** is defined as “a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe” (Manitoba Education and Training, “Philosophy of Inclusion”).

UNESCO calls for inclusion and equity in education:

“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (*Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* 7).

“The central message is simple: every learner matters and matters equally” (*A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education* 12).

It is important for schools to ensure that arts education programming is made accessible to all learners, regardless of their backgrounds, experiences, abilities, genders, or other factors:

Equity and inclusion are foundational to support the uniqueness and diversity of all students, respecting their backgrounds and/or personal circumstances, so that they can be successful. Application of these principles is essential for the education system and must be integrated into all policies, programs, operations, and practices. (Manitoba Education and Training, “Kindergarten to Grade 12 Priority Areas”)

Perceived disabilities should not prevent access to arts education. A learner with a visual impairment can still participate in visual arts education; a Deaf or hard of hearing learner can be a successful music or dramatic arts learner; and a student confined to a wheelchair can participate in dance learning. Students with special needs should “experience school as much as possible like their peers without special needs” (*The Administrative Handbook for Schools*, Topic A3, 1). Learning experiences should be **authentic** quality arts education experiences for all learners.

Students who have not had Kindergarten to Grade 8 arts education experiences, including some newcomers to Manitoba, should not be denied optional dance, dramatic arts, music, or visual arts credits in Grades 9 to 12. Students should also not be denied credited arts learning opportunities because of audition criteria. If an arts education credit course is available only by audition and there are no other options for the same learning, then learning in arts education is not equitable.

* The information included in this section is relevant for Kindergarten to Grade 8 and Grades 9 to 12 arts education.

Learning in arts education “is equitable and ethical when barriers that limit learning are understood and eliminated” (Grades 9 to 12 arts education curriculum frameworks, 7). Refer to the Overviews in the frameworks for information about equitable quality arts education for all learners.

“Barriers, biases, and power dynamics that limit prospects for learning may be related to ‘sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, race, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic background, physical or mental ability, or other factors’” (Ontario Ministry of Education 6).

Religious and Cultural Diversity in Arts Education

The arts are important and essential to many cultures, religions, and social groups around the world; however, these diverse groups practise the arts in very different ways and have a wide spectrum of views regarding dance, dramatic arts, music, and visual arts. It is important for educators not to place value on arts learning from only one perspective or a limited number of perspectives.

“Manitoba schools reflect the rich human diversity of our province. The last few decades have seen a rather significant change in the composition of Canada’s and Manitoba’s peoples and families. It is important to consider how diversity is reflected in our communities today and in the near future” (*Safe and Caring Schools*, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning 4).

Learners of all cultures, religions, and social groups should see themselves reflected and respected in the world around them, and the Grades 9 to 12 arts education curriculum frameworks are designed to facilitate opportunities to do so.

Although the arts are essential to many diverse religious and spiritual practices and traditions, some religious groups do not allow certain arts elements and practices and/or limit the arts to specific contexts. Factors that may affect student participation in arts education include the types of arts, the ways in which the arts are used, lyrics or subject matter, types of instruments, types of arts media, artifacts, and the persons involved.

The Public Schools Act (Manitoba) stipulates that Manitoba “public schools are to be non-sectarian” (Section 84[1]); however, the Act does not disallow using repertoire or subject matter with cultural, religious, and/or sacred references in classrooms, field trips, special events, or public performances unless they are used as a form of religious exercise or instruction.

Providing the history of, context for, and discussion about repertoire and subject matter with religious content related to arts learnings and to arts, language, and/or literature would also not be considered religious instruction, so such learning experiences do not contravene *The Public Schools Act*.

In accordance with Manitoba's diversity and inclusive education policies, arts learnings in dance, dramatic arts, music, and visual arts are inclusive of all students' religious, spiritual, and cultural traditions. It is not appropriate to focus arts learnings on only one faith, culture, or religion; however, no culture or religion should be excluded in order to be inclusive of others.

The document *Responding to Religious Diversity in Manitoba's Schools: A Guide for Educators* (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning) provides educators and schools with policies, guidelines, and recommended procedures for religious accommodation in schools in order to respond to the needs of their religiously diverse students and communities. The guide includes specific references and examples pertaining to arts education and is grounded in these beliefs:

In a region as dynamic and diverse as Manitoba, it is important that the public school system actively acknowledge both the freedom of religion that is protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the protection from discrimination and harassment based on religion that is part of the *Manitoba Human Rights Code*. (4)

Responding to Religious Diversity in Manitoba's Schools describes some of the religions of Manitoba educators and learners and provides contexts, scenarios, and guidelines for specific practices, beliefs, and observances that may need accommodation. The guide includes ways that schools and educators can adapt curricula, including curricular learnings in arts education, to accommodate religious diversity.

The guide notes that, in general, an informed, commonsensical approach to religious accommodation is recommended. In many situations, dialogue between the school administrator, the student, and the student's family can solve issues and concerns about religious accommodation. Generally, the recommended process for religious accommodation is as follows:

If, and when, parents or students express concerns related to religious beliefs and practices in schools, it is important that all involved work collaboratively and respectfully to address the issue in an appropriate manner. The school administrator and staff, the student, the student's family, and the religious community often need to be involved to explore options and identify appropriate accommodations. . . .

Religious accommodation in Manitoba's school divisions and schools will be granted within a context of respect for human rights, welcoming of diversity, and safe schools policies. School administration should attempt to reasonably accommodate students where there is a demonstrated conflict between a specific class or curriculum and a religious requirement or observance. Where academic accommodation is requested, the school should have an informed discussion with the student's parents to understand the nature and extent of the conflict. (*Responding to Religious Diversity in Manitoba's Schools* 11)

Although schools should consider accommodation when religion and cultural practices and beliefs conflict with school activities or curricula, they cannot accommodate religious beliefs and practices that conflict with divisional and departmental policies.

Indigenous Perspectives in Arts Education

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* makes it imperative for Manitoba administrators, educators, and learners to recognize the validity of Indigenous knowledge and to infuse Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing into all curricula, including arts education, teaching, and learning:

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:
 - iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 7)

All four Manitoba arts education curriculum frameworks afford opportunities for educators and learners to build capacity for intercultural competencies, empathy, and respect, and for understanding Indigenous world views and perspectives. Indigenous perspectives are infused throughout all four essential learning areas in the Grades 9 to 12 arts education curriculum frameworks in implicit and explicit ways.

Examples of Infusing Indigenous Perspectives in Arts Education

In the Grades 9 to 12 dance, dramatic arts, music, and visual arts curriculum frameworks, learners are called to

- “develop understandings about people and practices in [the arts] by exploring a range of art works, forms, genres, styles, traditions, innovations, and performance practices from various times, places, social groups, and cultures (including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit)” (38)
- “construct identity and to act in transformative ways by
 - recognizing and respecting that individuals and groups may have different opinions, interpretations, preferences, and evaluations regarding [arts] experiences
 - identifying ways that the arts contribute to personal, social, cultural, and artistic identity” (52)

Indigenous perspectives enrich and deepen learning for all students and their school communities. They offer valuable and important ways of seeing, knowing, and relating to the world. By exploring Indigenous peoples’ rich historical and contemporary contributions to culture and the arts, all learners have opportunities to extend intercultural knowledge and diverse perspectives, and to reflect on and appreciate the integral role of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in Manitoban and Canadian society.

It is important, however, not to generalize Indigenous perspectives in arts education. Indigenous peoples today “are as diverse in their personal beliefs and ideologies as any other cultural or ethnic group” (*Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula*, Manitoba Education and Youth 7). While diversity and differences are apparent across Indigenous communities, common aspects can be identified. For example, different Indigenous communities across Canada have identified the following important commonalities and characteristics related to teaching and learning. Learning is understood to be

- interconnected
- relational (self, family, community, culture, the natural world)
- contextual
- holistic (with physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions)
- experiential
- learner-centred

Decolonization in arts education can occur only in a strengths-based, learner-centred environment. The best practices for infusing Indigenous perspectives in arts education in meaningful and authentic ways are dependent on situations and grounded in the identified common understandings about learning.

For example, understanding that **interconnectedness and relationships** are important Indigenous perspectives will help teachers be aware of the need to relate learning to students’ self, families, Elders, and communities. Teachers ensure that learning is **interconnected** by providing opportunities for making and creating arts connected to understandings about the significance of arts learning and to processes for critical reflection.

Arts learning is always **contextual**. It is unique and specific to the context of the school, the course, and the learners. As contexts change over time, teaching and learning design are adapted to meet the needs of all learners.

When teachers design arts education, it is important to design learning with the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions in mind (**holistic** arts learning). Arts learning inherently engages students to connect physically to art by making and creating art. Arts learning must also be purposefully designed so that students are engaged in all holistic dimensions while learning in the four essential learning areas of arts education.

Experiential learning is an inherent part of all arts education. Whether learning in dance, dramatic arts, music, or visual arts, students have multiple and authentic hands-on experiences for making, creating, connecting, and responding.

A **learner-centred** teaching practice means that arts education teachers must take the time to get to know all their students and design learning connected to students' identity, interests, strengths, prior knowledge and experiences, needs, and challenges. A learner-centred practice also means that teachers consider approaches that will engage their students in authentic learning and involve them in the design and assessment of learning in arts education. Teachers ensure that learners have multiple opportunities for self-expression and multiple and appropriate ways to demonstrate their understanding of learning.

Cultural Appropriation

"Cultural appropriation can occur when aspects of indigenous knowledge, artistic process, or style are presented either outside their context of origin or without careful attribution of the source. It is in these situations, even unintentionally, that the authenticity and significance of Aboriginal artists, art making, and artwork become diminished. While it may appear accessible for a teacher to bring Aboriginal arts into the classroom, replicating or teaching these arts without permission or contextual understanding risks excluding and muting the voice of authenticity from the experience and can offend the people and communities from which the artwork has been drawn" (British Columbia Ministry of Education 5–6).

It is recommended that teachers consult with and invite the participation of Elders or divisional/departmental consultants responsible for Indigenous education when designing for arts education and learning. This will help teachers to avoid cultural appropriation and ensure ethical and respectful arts practices.

Gender Equality and Equity in Arts Education

Schools have the responsibility to ensure gender equality in arts education. **Gender equality** refers to equal rights, access, opportunities, and outcomes for female, male, and gender diverse students. The achievement of gender equality in arts education requires **equitable practices** that ensure fair treatment of all genders. Female, male, and gender diverse students should have equal opportunities to see their gender represented in the arts and to realize their full potential as artists.

“Theatre [dance, music, visual arts] that is missing the work of women is missing half the story, half the canon, half the life of our time” (Marsha Norman, President of The Lilly Awards, and Co-director of Playwriting Program at The Juilliard School).

Administrators and educators must engage in equitable practices and pedagogy to

- acknowledge historical and social disadvantages experienced by women and gender diverse people in the arts
- redress historical and current gender imbalance in the arts
- deconstruct sexism and gender stereotypes in the arts
- ensure that learning and participation in the arts are not defined or limited by gender or gender stereotypes
- promote freedom of artistic expression for students of all genders
- value all students’ artworks and art contributions equally regardless of gender
- enable students of all genders to achieve their full artistic potential

Recommended Practices for Gender Equality and Equity in Arts Education

1. Critically examine historical bias and the impact of the male canon in the arts.
2. Challenge own assumptions and expectations about gender in arts education.
3. Challenge and disrupt students' existing gendered perceptions about the arts by promoting critical thinking and discussion about gender and gender diversity in the arts.
4. Broaden the range of resources (e.g., texts, references, repertoire, themes, examples) to ensure gender equality and equity.
5. Resist gender stereotypes related to
 - performance roles (e.g., portrayal of males as the stronger sex, and females as weaker, objectified, or supporting characters)
 - instrument choice
 - careers in the arts
 - thinking and learning styles
 - temperament for learning (e.g., activity level, sensitivity, attention, sociability, distractibility, interests)
6. Provide gender equal choices in arts learning and performing.
7. Provide gender equal and gender diverse role models (e.g., mentors, guests, artists) that challenge gender stereotypes and barriers and that enable students to develop their own artistic identity.
8. Ensure that student decision-making and leadership opportunities are equal for all genders and that no gender is placed in a position of power, privilege, or authority over another.
9. Ensure equitable access to services, supports, and opportunities (e.g., grants, scholarships, auditions, extracurricular activities, field trips) for all genders.
10. Advocate for equality and equity in arts education.

These positive practices can ensure and address equitable gender representation in arts education, break down existing gender barriers in arts education, and ultimately empower all learners equally and equitably to grow and flourish as artists.

Resources to Support Equity and Inclusion in Arts Education

Schools and school divisions can use various departmental resources to respond to learners' needs and to develop policies and guidelines regarding equity and access for all students in arts education.

Information, resources, and contacts related to fostering and facilitating inclusion for all learners in different contexts are available on the department's *Student Services* website at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/index.html. This website includes information about

- safe and caring schools
- school mental health
- services for students who are blind or visually impaired
- services for students who are Deaf and/or hard of hearing

The following resources are also available on the department's website:

Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, and Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning. *Safe and Caring Schools: A Resource for Equity and Inclusion in Manitoba Schools* (MB MyGSA.ca). Winnipeg, MB: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust and Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2014. Available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/mygsa/index.html (17 Oct. 2017).

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning *Responding to Religious Diversity in Manitoba's Schools: A Guide for Educators* (Draft 2015). Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2015. Available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/religious_diversity/ (21 July 2017).

———. *Safe and Caring Schools: Respect for Human Diversity Policies: A Support Document for Manitoba School Divisions and Funded Independent Schools in Developing Human Diversity Policies*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2015. Available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/human_diversity/index.html (21 July 2017).

Manitoba Education and Training. *Safe and Caring Schools: A Whole-School Approach to Planning for Safety and Belonging*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Training, 2017. Available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/index.html (16 Oct. 2017).

———. *Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Students in Manitoba Schools*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Training, 2017. Available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/transgender/index.html (16 Oct. 2017).

Manitoba Education and Youth. *Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into Curricula: A Resource for Curriculum Developers, Teachers, and Administrators*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003. Available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/policy/abpersp/index.html (1 Aug. 2017).

Notes