A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING AN ARTS EDUCATION POLICY

by

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This statement is designed to provide information on the development of an arts education policy. It outlines the process of developing an arts education policy in some detail, and raises a number of fundamental questions at each stage in the policy process. It is based on experiences to date in developing policies in a number of areas, and may be as intensive or extensive as educators prefer.

In general, there are four distinct stages in the development of an arts education policy. These stages are:

1. Prerequisites to the development of the policy
2. Development of the policy itself
3. Approval and implementation of the policy
4. Evaluation of the policy

I PREREQUISITES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLICY

In order to develop an arts education policy effectively, the stage must be set properly. This requires attending to a number of matters at the very outset, including making the present policy explicit, researching policies, practices, experiences and beliefs in other jurisdictions and other countries, determining the scope, context and terms of reference for the policy, and establishing a critical path for the creation of the policy.

MAKING THE PRESENT POLICY EXPLICIT

It is often said that arts education policies do not exist, and the problem is to create them. It is more accurate to say that arts education policies already exist, and the problem is to make them explicit. This is necessary in order to determine how effective existing policies are in meeting actual and potential needs.

The first step in the policy process involves making the implicit policy explicit. What programs and practices exist at present? How many teachers are involved in teaching the arts? What art forms are included?
What art forms are excluded? What in-service and professional development opportunities are available for teachers? How much funding is available to the arts compared to other disciplines? How is the existing policy administered, and who is responsible for administering it? Analysis of these matters will reveal in no uncertain terms what the existing policy is, how effective it is in meeting actual and potential needs, and whether a new policy is required. It is important to know this, **even if a new policy is not created**. It lets people know where they stand and gives them something concrete to respond to or react against.

**RESEARCHING OTHER POLICIES, PRACTICES AND BELIEFS**

It is worthwhile to undertake some basic research to determine what arts education policies exist elsewhere. How have other educational jurisdictions - and other countries - handled the development of arts education policies? There may be valuable lessons to be learned here with respect to how arts education policies can be developed most effectively in terms of needs, outcomes, programmes, funding, training, facilities, administration, and the like.

**SCOPE, CONTEXT AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

It is advisable to ascertain the scope, context, and terms of reference for the policy at the beginning of the policy process. How extensive is the policy to be in terms of art forms, new developments, new technologies, cultural diversity, media requirements, audio-visual resources, facilities and equipment, courses, training programs, multicultural activities, and extra-curricular endeavours? What is the overall context within which the policy is situated, and how is it changing? What terms of reference will be needed to govern the development of the policy? What policy directives already exist in legislation? How general or specific will the policy be? What is it designed to accomplish?

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A CRITICAL PATH**

It is essential to establish a critical path for the development of the policy at the very outset of the policy process, even if it is changed many times during the actual development of the policy. This critical path should establish specific dates and time frames for all research activities, the development of the policy itself, approval and implementation of the policy, evaluation of the policy, and commencement of the new policy cycle. It is particularly important to set out in advance when all research activities will be conducted - particularly opinion polls, surveys, interviews,
focus groups and the like - as it may be too late to conduct them later if they are not incorporated into the process in advance. One of the biggest mistakes in policy development is to leave insufficient time to attend to key requirements in the policy process, only to find that lack of time does not permit their inclusion later.

II DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLICY

Once the prerequisites to the policy have been attended to, it is possible to proceed to the development of the policy itself. There is a logical sequence of steps to be followed here, commencing with the creation of a vision (ideals and principles), continuing with the refinement of the vision in light of reality (outcomes, objectives and priorities), and concluding with final actions (strategies and tactics). Each step in the process is slightly more practical and specific than the step immediately preceding it, thereby yielding a process that moves progressively from initial inspiration to concrete action.

IDEALS AND PRINCIPLES

No step in the policy process is more necessary than the creation of a vision. What is the ideal arts education? How will it affect teachers and students? What role will it play in the curriculum? What contributions will it make to other disciplines? What balance is required between creation and performance, historical and contemporary experience? What programmes, facilities, equipment, funding and administration are required to produce the ideal arts education? What level of community support and involvement is needed? What has been learned from teaching the arts in the past that is helpful in providing the principles on which an ideal arts education should be based?

It is essential to give consideration to these matters at the very beginning of the policy process, even if they are deemed to be “impractical” or “unrealistic.” They are fundamental aspects of the policy process, and will be brought into line with financial and administrative realities during the next step in the policy process. It is important to remember that a policy that lacks a vision is unlikely to inspire people to action regardless of how well it has been designed and developed.

OUTCOMES, OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

Once ideals and principles have been established for the policy, it is possible to proceed to outcomes, objectives and priorities. This is where
the ideals and principles get tailored to reality, since there will likely be insufficient financial, capital and human resources to meet the ideals and principles established for the policy. Consequently, the outcomes, objectives and priorities should be as specific and pragmatic as possible, as well as susceptible to various forms of measurement.

As far as outcomes and objectives are concerned, what would an effective program in arts education look like? What resources, programs, in-service activities and professional development opportunities are needed to realize it? How many teachers are required? What level of artistic mastery and technical proficiency is required of the students? In what ways can the desirable teacher-to-student ratio be realized? What facilities and equipment are needed? How much funding is required? How are the objectives and outcomes measured to ascertain if they are meeting actual and potential needs?

In the area of priorities, how will budget realities shape the policy once the budget has been set? It is important to consider this well in advance, as this will have a crucial bearing on the implementation of the policy. And this is what makes establishing priorities for the policy one of the most difficult parts of the policy process. Some very tough questions will have to be asked - and answered - with respect to what priorities are set. This area is often so contentious that it is ignored entirely by policy-makers, thereby making it difficult for implementers of the policy to know what is most essential if resources are scarce and decisions have to be made among a number of competing options.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Designation of the outcomes, objectives and priorities should prove helpful in determining the strategies and tactics for the development and implementation of the policy. What strategies and tactics are needed to ensure the commitment of ministries of education, school boards, teachers, students, parents, principals, community groups, and the arts and educational communities generally? Who will be responsible for approving the policy once it is finished? Who will be responsible for its implementation? Have these groups been involved in the process? If so, how is their input to be used? And what about the recipients of the policy? Are there strategic and tactical ways of using their input in the actual approval and implementation of the policy? Finally, what form will the policy take? Will it be a short, written statement, a detailed report, an audio-visual presentation, or some other type of policy instrument? Are recommendations to be included in it? Are they directed at particular
groups? How general or specific is the policy? It is important to give consideration to these matters well in advance of approval and implementation, since this will affect the outcome of the policy and the public and private response to it.

Often people who make important decisions about the approval and implementation of the policy have not been involved in the process. This deprives policy-makers of valuable input and ideas. It also reduces the chance of the policy being approved and implemented once it is completed. Thus, the determination of strategies and tactics is one of the most important parts of the policy process. Successful approval and implementation may well hinge on the strategies and tactics that have been developed during this stage of the policy process.

III APPROVAL AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

Adoption and implementation is a key part of the policy process. It does not make a great deal of sense to spend a lot of time and energy preparing a policy if approval and implementation are problematic or unlikely. Much may depend on the actual type of policy, as well as on how ambitious it is.

If approval requires a formal commitment from policy committees and decision-makers, it is advisable to prepare for this well in advance. This helps to work “bugs out of the system” and anticipate problems before they occur. It is particularly important if approval requires some sort of public presentation, since failure to anticipate reaction in advance may result in rejection rather than approval of the policy in public. This is why it is valuable to engage those charged with approval and implementation of the policy in the policy process. It is also why it is advisable to circulate the policy in draft form to key decision-makers, particularly committees of the board, principals and teacher organizations prior to any public presentation. It helps to provide feedback and anticipate reactions before they happen.

Once the policy is approved, it is ready for implementation. What leadership and decision-making processes will be used to implement the policy? What are the policy roles and responsibilities of the ministry of education, the school board, faculties of education, teachers, students, parents, trustees, parents’ and teachers’ organizations, community groups, and professional associations? It is advisable to spell these roles and responsibilities out in as much detail as possible, as failure to do so may impair the implementation of the policy.
Implementation is one the most crucial parts of the policy process, since “the proof of the pudding is in the eating” as the old saying goes. However, this is often where one of the biggest mistakes is made in policy development. Policy-makers are often so delighted once the policy is approved that no provision is made for implementation. It is assumed that implementation is the responsibility of others, not themselves. This is why it is advisable to set up “monitoring committees” to oversee the implementation of the policy once it is approved. Failure to do so may curtail the ultimate effectiveness of the policy.

IV EVALUATION OF THE POLICY

Once the policy has been in existence for some time, it is important to evaluate it. How has the existing situation changed as a result of approval and implementation of the policy? Is the policy meeting the needs of students, teachers, parents, boards, professional organizations, community associations, and the like? What indicators are used to determine this? How, and by whom, should these indicators be applied? Do indicators exist in other areas that might be useful in ascertaining the effectiveness of the policy? Some basic research in this area may be necessary if suitable methods and techniques are to be devised to assess the effectiveness of the policy once it is implemented.

This completes the process of developing an arts education policy. Having set out the process in detail, it remains to comment on some of the benefits that might be expected from developing an arts education policy.

In the first place, an arts educational policy should yield more financial, administrative and human resources for arts development than is possible with an implicit policy. This should help to raise the profile and priority for the arts in the educational system, as well as integrate the arts more fully into the curriculum and the educational system generally.

In the second place, an arts education policy should clarify the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in the process. Teachers and students should have a better idea of what is expected of them, and trustees, principals and boards should have a better understanding of the contribution the arts make to a well-designed and well-implemented curriculum.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, an arts education policy should make it possible to develop arts programmes in a coherent, comprehensive and cohesive manner, rather than piecemeal, partisan and partial manner. This should
help to eliminate duplication and waste, utilize resources more efficiently, identify needs more effectively, and plan future developments more successfully.

The beneficiaries of these activities are teachers, students, boards, parents, principals, trustees, and the public at large. By taking the time to develop an effective arts education policy, stakeholders and recipients are likely to participate in the process more actively and share the benefits more fully.

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