Explore Music 7–9: Curriculum Framework

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Introduction

The Nature of Arts Education

The modules in *Explore Music 7–9* were developed within the framework of *Foundation for Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum* (2001)*.* This document describes the nature of arts education as follows:

> The arts have been part of the human experience throughout history and are embedded in daily life.
>
> Dance, drama, music, and visual arts are vehicles through which people make meaning of the complexities of life and make connections among and between themselves and others. The arts offer enjoyment, delight, and they stimulate imagination. They provide a common thread of understanding across generations. In short, the arts describe, define, and deepen human experience in ways that are both personal and global, real, and imagined.
>
> There are key aspects of arts education that are deeply personal and cannot be easily expressed as immediately measurable outcomes. They do, however, make a significant contribution to the achievement of essential graduation learnings. The internal experience that is an intrinsic, vital part of arts learning is something that cannot be demonstrated as a specific product. For example, learners involved in the creation of a dramatic work that has intensely personal significance, experience growth that cannot necessarily be demonstrated to others. In this context, whether or not this work is presented formally is irrelevant. The only way in which this kind of growth and learning can be measured is by gauging the extent to which it leads to self-awareness and has an impact on the way individuals come to relate to those around them. The importance of this learning only becomes apparent with time. Adults often reflect on these kinds of arts experiences as some of the most important in their early life.

The Nature of Music

Throughout history, music has provided processes that nurture personal growth and celebration of the universal connections among individuals. Music enables learners to know themselves, experience the natural and created worlds, and create dynamic new worlds in ways that are both personal and global, real, and magical. The development of aesthetic awareness is intrinsically related to learning in, through, and about music. However, music also nurtures the development of a broad range of cognitive, language, personal, and social skills.

Rationale for Music Education

Music provides a basic learning tool. Music makes specific and essential contributions to intellectual and aesthetic development, the education of feeling, the exploration of values, the development of physical and perceptual skills, and personal and social education.

Music provides ways of knowing and expressing. It is a dynamic part of our life and culture, providing insights and awareness as well as pleasure and enjoyment. Music also enables a sense of community within a school, playing a significant role in the development of a vibrant learning culture. Music simultaneously engages the learner's mind, body, and spirit.

The fundamental belief that underlies this curriculum is that music provides a range of unique experiences that are essential for the development for all students. The challenge for schools is to devote time and resources to music at all levels, so that students may experience a broad range of cumulative music experiences in a regular, planned, and coordinated way.

Intelligence theories indicate that all human beings possess several types of intelligence, each one a potential way to create meaning. While all learners possess the potential to develop each of these, every learner has strengths and aptitudes in certain areas.

While music education develops musical intelligence, it can also develop several other intelligences: bodily-kinesthetic, linguistic, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and spatial. It is also important to note that an education in music can contribute to the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that allow students to create, understand, and develop meaning in other areas of the curriculum.

The Nature of *Explore Music 7–9*

The delivery of an effective music curriculum at the junior high school level is dependent on the teacher's understanding of and appreciation for the variety of abilities of the students in the music class. *Explore Music 7, Explore Music 8,* and *Explore Music 9* were developed for those students who want to continue their music education beyond grade 6, but not necessarily in a band setting. The curriculum, therefore, focuses on

- expanding each student's knowledge base
- building skills in music to provide students with the necessary tools for self-expression
- extending the range of music strategies each student uses to construct meaning
- extending the range of situations that each student can create, interpret, and respond to
- providing consistent challenge and support to enable students to grow beyond their current level of creativity to one of increasing experience and maturity

Key Features of *Explore Music 7–9*

The curriculum is defined in terms of outcomes.

The identification of outcomes clarifies for students, teachers, parents, and administrators what students are expected to know, and be able to do, and value as a result of their learning in music.

The curriculum is designed to nurture the development of all students.

In recognizing and valuing the diversity of students, this curriculum allows for a range of learning preferences, teaching styles, instructional strategies, and resources. Learning environments should also allow for the range of ways and rates in which learners develop. Learning contexts and environments must affirm the dignity and worth of all learners.

The curriculum recognizes and affirms the universality of music.

The arts are central to every world culture. The music of a culture, like the other arts, clearly identifies a set of beliefs and values that exist within that culture. The artistic expression of a society is not a stand-alone enterprise but one that is integrated into all aspects of the culture. *Explore Music 7* affirms the notion that music is an expression of humankind and is integral to all societies.

The curriculum provides a framework for making connections with other subject areas.

This curriculum recognizes the importance of students working in and through music. When students engage in learning through music, they develop skills and understanding necessary for self-expression. As students develop specific skills, understanding, and confidence in music, they learn to make connections with all areas of the curriculum, thus creating a kaleidoscope of learning experiences. The connections contribute to the students' learning in music as well as other areas.

The curriculum emphasizes the importance of students' active participation in all aspects of their learning.

As students engage in a range of sequential, purposeful, and inventive experiences, they develop and use the processes associated with music making. In addition, they reflect upon and respond to the music making of others. Students are encouraged to construct their knowledge through musical activities and experiences, forming and revising their beliefs and understandings of their world.

The curriculum emphasizes the personal, social, and cultural contexts of learning and the power that music making has within these contexts.

The curriculum promotes self-understanding as well as an appreciation of the world's social and cultural contexts. Students are encouraged to recognize the power of creativity in music: to construct, define, and shape knowledge; to develop attitudes and skills: and to extend this new learning in social and cultural contexts.

Music as an arts discipline demands skills and knowledge unique to its exploration and expression. As students develop the skills and knowledge for exploration and expression, they arrive at a deeper understanding of how their works shape their lives and touch the lives of others.

Since music is an unmistakable extension of personal identity and a defining feature of culture, it is critical that the curriculum respect, affirm, understand, and appreciate personal and cultural identities in all aspects of learning.

The curriculum provides a basis for assessing student achievement.

The outcomes framework provides reference points for teachers to inform their instructional practice as they monitor students' progress and assess what students can and cannot do, what they know and need to know, and what they value.

Assessment involves more than a judgment made about a performance or presentation after learning has taken place. As a continuous, integral, and collaborative process, using a broad range of formal and informal assessment strategies, assessment becomes a powerful tool to enhance students' learning.

Who Should Teach *Explore Music 7–9*

Music engages students emotionally, physically, intellectually, imaginatively, aesthetically, and socially. It is a learner-centered approach. Music education provides opportunities for all students to experience, understand, and value the language of music within a supportive and nurturing environment. Music requires a balance of knowledge, skills and attitudes that stretches the students' creativity, expressiveness, and human spirit.

The successful music educator has an impressive suite of skills and attributes that contribute to her/his success. Most music educators agree on the importance of the key qualities listed below.

- a profound personal musicianship – music teachers must have well-trained ears, able to facilitate and nurture musicianship in their students to the level that they themselves are musical
- great organizational skills – planning ahead, maintaining systems, fundraising, managing inventories of instruments and music, planning trips, etc.
- great attention to minutiae and detail – in any artistic endeavour, achievement or failure are separated by the smallest of margins

- an ability to lead musicians non-verbally – conducting
- leadership ability - having the confidence and vision to lead groups with integrity and respect for the students, parents, colleagues, and school administration
- superior interpersonal skills, and the ability to communicate in person, and in writing
- a superior musical training in theory, composition and arranging, musical history, musical philosophy, and an understanding of the musical mind

An absence or deficit in any one of the areas will negatively impact the success of the school music program.

Explore Music 7–9 must be taught by teachers who have knowledge and experience in making music, both in independent and group settings. Ideally, each course should be taught by someone who has a solid understanding of pedagogy in music, with a background in music methodology courses. When assigning teachers to teach *Explore Music 7, Explore Music 8,* and *Explore Music 9*, it is important that administrators understand that someone who has proficiency in playing an instrument but who does not have training in music education may not necessarily be qualified to teach this course. The teachers who teach these courses, regardless of their background, must make a commitment to additional professional development to enhance her/his understanding of music education. Such opportunities include but are not limited to

- workshops offered by music education organizations such as the Nova Scotia Music Educators' Association, Nova Scotia Band Association, Carl Orff Canada, Kodaly Society of Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia Choral Federation
- summer institutes
- university courses in music education
- mentorship programs as offered by individual school boards

Explore Music 7–9 teachers must motivate students, thereby enhancing their self-esteem through music. The teacher encourages students to think, solve problems, act openly, take risks, create from nothing, question, and learn from what has already been created. The approach is similar to that used in the other arts disciplines (dance, drama, and visual arts). Community resources (i.e. local musicians, guest performing groups, "Artists in Schools" program) can enhance instruction in these courses.

The Modular Approach

The *Explore Music 7* curriculum is comprised of four 26-hour modules:

- Introductory Module, Rhythmic (required; with an option to complete in 13 hours)
- World Drumming
- Popular Music of the 50s and 60s
- The Art of Guitar

These modules are not sequential, although it is required that all students begin with the Introductory Module. This module reviews and reinforces the concepts and skills taught in *Music Primary – 6 and* prepares students for the learning activities they will experience in the other modules.

The *Explore Music 8* curriculum is also comprised of four 26-hour modules:

- Introductory Module, Melodic (required; with an option to complete in 13 hours)
- Superstars of the 70s and 80s (Popular Music)
- Voices of the Drum
- Following the Steps of Heroes and Legends (Guitar)

Explore Music 9 was developed to offer a broad range of experiences to prepare students to make informed decisions as to which arts courses they will elect in senior high. Therefore, the modules were designed to be completed in 13 hours, allowing for more diverse learning opportunities. Once again, the Introductory Module is required, and it will introduce students to experiences they will encounter in the subsequent modules. The *Explore Music 9* curriculum is comprised of seven 13-hour modules:

- Introductory Module (required)
- Music and Movement
- Music and Film
- Music and Theatre Workshop I
- Music and Theatre Workshop II
- Singer / Songwriter
- Glee: Singing and Dancing

It is intended that *Explore Music* should be taught for a minimum of two classes per 5- or 6-day cycle. Ideally, these classes should be at least 40 minutes in length, to allow the necessary set-up and tear-down time required. Teachers should feel free to determine the length of time spent on each module, based on the amount of instructional time given, and the progress of the students. It is recognized that this schedule may not be possible in all schools, and therefore alternate scheduling should be designed. For example, in grade 7 and grade 8, if only 60 minutes of instruction per week is available, schools may consider offering

- the Introductory Module (13 hour option) and one other module
- the Introductory Module in its entirety (26 hours), and the first two or three units of another module

Schools may experience challenges in offering music along with other electives (visual arts, technology education, and family studies). It is recommended that the administration work with arts teachers and other staff members to ensure a positive and fulfilling experience for all students. Creativity and flexibility with scheduling will be key, and the following examples provide suggestions for schools to consider.

- offering the same module three times to three different groups of students
- schedule one term each of technology education, family studies, and music
- have one group of students complete three music modules

The modular format allows for adaptability in the delivery of the curriculum and teachers should be flexible in designing the strategies for teaching, learning and assessment. Although there is a suggested grade level for each module, the activities may be modified to match a specific grade as teachers build programs based on the needs, interests, background etc. of students. For example, in a small school, it may be necessary to combine grade levels in one class. In this case, complete the Introductory Module (required) and then decide which of the other modules would match the needs and interests of students. This could be one possible scenario for a combined grade 7 and 8 music class:

- *Explore Music 7: Introductory Module* (required)
- *Explore Music 7: The Art of Guitar*
- *Explore Music 8: Following in the Steps of Heroes and Legends*

Other potential means of organizing the modules are outlined below:

- *Explore Music 7: Introductory Module* (required)
- *Explore Music 7: Popular Music of the 50s and 60s*
- *Explore Music 7: World Drumming*

- *Explore Music 8: Introductory Module* (required)
- *Explore Music 7: Popular Music of the 50s and 60s*
- *Explore Music 8: Superstars of the 70s and 80s (Popular Music)*

- *Explore Music 9: Introductory Module (required)*
- *Explore Music 9: Music and Movement*
- *Explore Music 8: Voices of the Drum*
- *Explore Music 9: Music and Theatre Workshop I, II*

Planning and Implementing

Planning for Instruction

Explore Music 7–9 strives for a high level of musical understanding and achievement. However, because of the range of abilities of the students whose prior experiences may vary, success should not be measured by making comparisons between students but rather by the individual accomplishments of the students as they work to achieve the outcomes. The suggestions for learning and teaching emphasize understanding, practical skills, and the ability to apply knowledge. In some cases, the program may need to be modified to accommodate students who have special needs.

As teachers prepare these modules, they will discover that the suggestions for teaching, learning and assessment vary in length and offer a range of ways for students to experience music. Although suggested times are given for each unit, in some cases it may take longer to complete the unit. In others, teachers may choose to do only some of the suggested activities. Indeed, often a range of suggestions are made for a particular learning component and it is intended that teachers select those that are most appropriate for their students. In situations where students do not have a strong background there may be a need to spend more time doing preliminary work to ensure success for all. In these situations, teachers need to be aware that the suggested times, including those given for the complete module, may need to be adjusted to allow all students to achieve all the outcomes.

Within each module there are units of work that focus on a particular aspect of the subject of the module. An estimated number of hours for each unit is provided so teachers have a sense of how to plan the activities. However, teachers must use discretion and exercise flexibility with the length of each unit, realizing that all outcomes for each course must be achieved.

As teachers plan, they should look for commonalities among the outcomes, and provide opportunities for the students to make broader connections in music. The learning experiences may be short activities to review or develop specific skills, or larger projects that take several classes to complete.

Performance as Part of Instruction

Music is a performing art and performances must be carefully planned as part of the instruction. The processes of preparing for and giving a performance are integral to a student's musical development. The performance can be prepared for a classroom presentation, for an assembly, or for the wider community. Performances not only build musical skills, but also provide experiences that illustrate the co-operative nature of music making. Whether the students are performing as part of the World Drumming or Guitar Modules, or performing their own compositions, it is important for teachers to stress the importance of process as well as product, to ensure students' self-esteem benefits from the experience, and build the students' self-confidence within the team environment inherent in musical ensembles.

Students need opportunities to perform their own works as well as the works of others, and teachers should carefully plan to ensure a balance between both. In each module, there is an emphasis on students improvising and creating their own music, using both traditional and invented notation. As in *Music Primary – 6* as well as *Music 10, Music 11,* and *Music 12,* this approach allows students to make direct application of the skills and techniques they are learning, and to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings in ways that words cannot. It is important that students not only improvise and create their own music freely, but also record it in symbols, and perform their own works and those of others. This will allow them to experience the true meaning of music, and its role in their lives and in other cultures.

Advance Planning

In planning the music program, it is effective if teachers have opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and discuss the curriculum. Because there is usually only one music educator in each junior high school, this may not be possible within the school setting. However, it may be beneficial to collaborate with the visual arts teacher, or other arts educators within the region. Often, the best planning takes place informally when music educators get together and is particularly important when implementing a new curriculum.

A planning chart is provided in Appendix B *in Explore Music 7–9: Appendices* to record information and ideas in eight different areas:

- Essential Questions/Focus includes the key questions and outcomes upon which instruction is based
- Essential Terms/Vocabulary: may include the terms and vocabulary identified in the suggestions for learning and teaching
- Content: includes topics and concepts pertaining to music
- Skills: specific skills and strategies you want students to develop as a result of the learning experiences
- Assessment: an outline of assessment that identifies how to collect data about students learning
- Learning Experiences: some of the specific organizational methods of instruction
- Notes for Differentiation: suggestions for ways to differentiate the learning experience in order to meet the needs of diverse learners
- Resources: resources you plan to use for whole-class instruction

Appendix B: Planning Chart

	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
Essential Questions or Focus			
Essential Terms and Vocabulary			
Content			
Skills			

Equity and Diversity

In recognizing and valuing the diversity of students, the education system allows for a range of learning styles, teaching styles, instructional strategies, and resources. Learning context should be adapted to meet the needs of students with different backgrounds, interests, and abilities, and to provide ongoing opportunities for all students to engage in new learning based on their previous success.

Music class can be a safe environment for those students who experience challenges in other areas of learning. While participation for students with emotional, physical, or cognitive disabilities may be limited, music teachers should be aware that the experiences they are providing could have a strong impact on the personal development of these students, although this may not be explicit or measurable.

Students' development as learners is shaped by many factors, including gender, social and cultural backgrounds, and the extent to which individual needs are met. In designing learning experiences in music, teachers should consider the learning needs, experiences, interests, and values of all students.

Explore Music 7–9 is inclusive and designed to help all learners reach their full potential through a wide variety of learning experiences. The curriculum seeks to provide all students with equal learning opportunities. It also recognizes that students develop and learn at different rates and in different ways. It is important for teachers to build in adaptations for those students who may be experiencing difficulty. Similarly, there may be students who have a strong background and need additional enrichment opportunities that allow them to go deeper in their learning. Adaptations may take the form of an adjustment to the length of the lesson, or extensions to the lesson that will challenge the students.

Differentiating Instruction

Differentiation of instruction becomes very important in a classroom because we know each classroom has such a diverse range of learners. On the one hand, differentiation will allow students who struggle to be supported adequately in meeting the outcomes; on the other, differentiation provides greater challenge for those who need it.

Differentiation is not about creating individualized programs for each student in the classroom. It occurs within the outcomes themselves. It is also not about establishing permanent homogeneous groups in which students work. Differentiation is about flexibility and understanding students well enough that instruction can be responsive to their needs. When students are provided with multiple exposures to a concept, in multiple ways, there is a greater chance of meeting the needs of more learners, and a greater chance of students successfully meeting outcomes.

In recognizing and valuing the diversity of students in the *Explore Music 7, Explore Music 8,* and *Explore Music 9* classes, teachers should consider ways to

- provide an environment and design learning experiences to affirm the dignity and worth of all learners
- model the use of inclusive language, attitudes, and actions supportive of all learners
- adapt classroom organization, teaching/learning/assessment strategies, time, and learning resources to address learners' needs and build on their strengths
- design teaching/learning/assessment strategies that are integrated with each other so that it is difficult to distinguish each as separate components of a lesson
- design learning and assessment tasks that draw on learners' strengths and abilities
- provide opportunities for learners to work in a variety of leaning contexts, including mixed-ability groups
- identify and respond to diversity in students' learning styles and preferences
- build on students' individual levels of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in music
- ensure that learners use strengths as a means of tackling areas of difficulty
- offer students multiple and varied avenues to learn, create, and present their work
- reflect on and offer students diverse opportunities to demonstrate their learning
- celebrate the accomplishments of learning tasks, especially tasks that learners believed were too challenging for them

The Teaching Process

Learning is not something that happens simply by osmosis. It is not enough to surround students with music, an audience, and computers and hope that they develop the necessary skills as musicians. While students will develop and learn many things on their own, it is important that in the music classroom teachers provide explicit instruction in a variety of areas. The level of support this instruction provides will vary depending on the needs of each student. Ultimately, the goal of the teacher is to decrease the level of support provided until the student is able to engage in the learning experiences independently and successfully. This requires supportive instruction that ranges from directed to supported, and finally to independent learning.

Direct Instruction

Direct instruction is essential in every class. This kind of instruction might be necessary to introduce a new or difficult concept or to ensure that the entire group receives a common message. Direct instruction is also helpful in showing students how to exercise a particular skill. It is important, however, that direct instruction be followed with supported instruction in situations where the student is still developing the necessary skills or when the concept is difficult. Telling and modeling are two different kinds of instruction.

Supportive Instruction

Supportive instruction goes beyond simply telling or showing students how to do something. This kind of instruction allows you to provide some assistance to students as they work toward independence.

Independent Learning

Independent learning is the ultimate goal. It is at the independent stage that students are able to demonstrate and apply understanding of concepts and skills. They are able to complete a task without support from the teacher. The challenge most teachers face is the tendency to move from telling students what to do to expecting them to complete the work independently. For many students, this leap is too great, and as a result they experience frustration and a lack of success. By gradually releasing responsibility, this problem can be alleviated.

The Physical Environment

In the music-making process, the variety of activities required to achieve the outcomes listed in this document requires flexibility within the learning environment, including space to move, create, rehearse, present, listen, and respond in traditional and non-traditional ways.

A large open space, preferably with a high ceiling, suitable for physical movement as well as multiple groupings of students, is recommended for music instruction. Students need to be able to move about safely and the teacher must be able to move freely throughout the classroom. Traditional classrooms that have rows of desks and chairs is not appropriate for *Explore Music 7, Explore Music 8,* and *Explore Music 9.*

Course Design

Essential Graduation Competencies

In 2013, the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAM ET) launched a review of the Atlantic Canada Essential Graduation Learnings, the 1995 framework for curriculum development endorsed by the four Atlantic Provinces. A committee representing each province was formed to ensure the framework, guiding expectations for completion of public education, responded to the changing demands of work and life in the 21st century.

What follows is a common vision of the competencies – a set of attitudes, skills, and knowledge – beyond foundational literacy and numeracy that prepare learners to engage in a lifetime of transitions and learning. It reflects the regional direction provinces want to take to achieve excellence and provides the flexibility to design curricula based on provincial priorities and timelines. It is intended to ensure that all Atlantic Canadian students are prepared to seize opportunities and meet the challenges of the future.

Competencies

- are interrelated sets of attitudes, skills, and knowledge that are drawn upon and applied to contexts for successful learning and living
- are developed over time through outcomes and a supportive learning environment
- are designed to be integral components of all subjects, at all grade levels and shapes all the curricula design work

Citizenship

Learners are expected to contribute to the quality and sustainability of their environment, communities, and society. They analyse cultural, economic, environmental, and social issues, make decisions, judgment, solve problems, and act as stewards in a local, national, and global context.

Grades 6-8 learners will

- analyse possible consequences of decisions, judgements, and solutions to problems
- engage in civic activities that support social and cultural diversity and cohesion
- develop skills and practices that support environmental sustainability
- examine issues surrounding human rights and equity
- recognize the principles and actions of citizens that impact society
- recognize the complexity and interconnectedness of factors in analyzing issues

Grades 9-12 learners will

- evaluate possible consequences of decisions, judgements, and solutions to problems
- engage in civic activities that support social and cultural diversity and cohesion
- develop skills and practices that support environmental sustainability
- examine issues surrounding human rights, social justice, and equity
- examine how the principles and actions of citizens impact society
- examine the complexity and interconnectedness of factors in analyzing issues
- recognize the principles and actions of citizens in a just, pluralistic, and democratic society

Personal-Career Development

Learners are expected to become self-aware and self-directed individuals who set and pursue goals. They understand and appreciate how culture contributes to work and personal life roles. They make thoughtful decisions regarding health and wellness, and career pathways.

Grades 6-8 learners will

- develop skills and practices to advance the physical, mental, and social -emotional well-being of self and others
- develop the skills to build healthy personal and work relationships
- connect learning with personal and career development
- develop skills and practices to learn and work in diverse, evolving environments
- develop strategies to manage career balance and wellness

Grades 9-12 learners will

- develop skills and practices to advance the physical, mental, and social -emotional well-being of self and others
- build healthy personal and work relationships
- interconnect learning with personal and career development
- develop skills and practices to learn and work in diverse, evolving environments
- develop strategies to manage career balance and wellness
- create personal, education, career, and financial plans to support transitions and achievement of education and career

Communication

Learners are expected to interpret and express themselves effectively through a variety of media. They participate in critical dialogue, listen, read, view, and create for information, enrichment, and enjoyment.

Grades 6-8 learners will

- express and respond to ideas, information, learnings, perceptions, and feelings appropriate to audience and purpose through multiple media forms
- listen and interact purposefully and respectfully in formal and informal contexts
- engage in constructive and critical dialogue
- evaluate the purpose, audience, and choice of media when communicating
- analyse the impact of information communication technology in relation to social justice and social equity issues

Grades 9-12 learners will

- express and respond to ideas, information, learnings, perceptions, and feelings appropriate to audience and purpose through multiple media forms
- listen and interact purposefully and respectfully in formal and informal contexts
- engage in constructive and critical dialogue
- evaluate the purpose, audience, and choice of media when communicating
- analyse the impact of information communication technology in relation to social justice and social equity issues

Creativity and Innovation

Learners are expected to demonstrate openness to new experiences, engage in creative processes, to make unexpected connections, and to generate new and dynamic ideas, techniques, and products. They value aesthetic expression and appreciate the creative and innovative work of others.

Grades 6-8 learners will

- gather information through all senses to imagine, create, and innovate
- take responsible risks
- use constructive feedback, reflect, and learn from trial and error
- use creation techniques to invent and innovate
- collaborate to create and innovate
- recognize how creative processes are vital to innovation
- use strategies to identify problems
- reflect on creative and innovative works and processes
- think divergently, embrace complexity and ambiguity

Grades 9-12 learners will

- gather information through all senses to imagine, create, and innovate
- take responsible risks
- use constructive feedback, reflect, and learn from trial and error
- use creation techniques to invent and innovate
- collaborate to create and innovate
- recognize how creative processes are vital to innovation
- use strategies to identify problems
- critically reflect on creative and innovative works and processes
- think divergently, embrace complexity and ambiguity
- evaluate the impact of creativity and innovation on social and economic well being

Critical Thinking

Learners are expected to analyse and evaluate evidence, arguments, and ideas using various types of reasoning and systems thinking to inquire, make decisions, and solve problems. They reflect critically on thinking processes.

Grades 6-8 learners will

- ask critical and purposeful questions
- analyse information and evidence, suspending judgement and accepting ambiguity
- formulate decisions based on evidence
- recognize that critical thinking is purposeful
- develop curiosity, inquisitiveness and creativity, flexibility, and persistence, open and fair mindedness
- reflect on personal ideas and opinions relative to the ideas and contributions of others
- communicate ideas, conclusions, decisions, and solutions appropriate to audience and purpose
- work individually, cooperatively, and collaboratively in problem solving
- synthesize information from relevant and reliable sources
- analyse and evaluate evidence, arguments, and ideas
- recognize that experiences shape points of view (perspectives)

Grades 9-12 learners will

- ask critical and purposeful questions
- analyse information and evidence, suspending judgement and accepting ambiguity
- formulate decisions based on evidence
- recognize that critical thinking is purposeful
- develop curiosity, inquisitiveness and creativity, flexibility, and persistence, open and fair mindedness
- reflect on personal ideas and opinions relative to the ideas and contributions of others who hold diverse points of views

- communicate ideas, conclusions, decisions, and solutions appropriate to audience and purpose
- work individually, cooperatively, and collaboratively in problem solving
- synthesize information from relevant and reliable sources
- analyse and evaluate evidence, arguments, and ideas
- recognize that experiences shape points of view (perspectives)
- reflect on the critical thinking processes used (metacognition)

Technological Fluency

Learners are expected to use and apply technology to collaborate, communicate, create, innovate, and solve problems. They use technology in a legal, safe, and ethically responsible manner to support and enhance learning.

Grades 6-8 learners will

- use technology in a responsible manner to create and represent new knowledge
- implement technology effectively as appropriate to the learning experience
- recognize that technology encompasses a range of learning tools and contexts
- examine how technology and society impact and advance one another

Grades 9-12 learners will

- use technology in a responsible manner to create and represent new knowledge
- implement technology effectively as appropriate to the learning experience
- recognize that technology encompasses a range of learning tools and contexts
- evaluate how technology and society impact and advance one another

It must be noted that the term **technology** is often misunderstood. It does not refer solely to computer-related materials and processes. *Foundation for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum* provides the following explanation of the term **technology** as it applies to the arts:

Technology in the arts is inclusive of those processes, tools, and products that artistic-minded people use in the design, development, creation, and presentation of their works. It is a means to use skills and imagination in the creation of aesthetic objects, environments, or experiences. It is also a means of knowing and understanding our world and the processes we involve ourselves in as we interact with it. Tools and devices alone do not constitute a technology. It is only when people use these tools and devices to effect a change that we can call them a technology.

Since the arts are always about the processes of presentation and representation, they are able to utilize the most recent technologies, along with those from the entire history of the arts. A technological device or technological process rarely becomes obsolete to the artist. An artist may choose to use any technology from any period of history if it is suitable. The final presentation of the artwork is strongly influenced by the technologies of production. When an artist engages in an art-making process or creates an art product, choices and decisions must be made about the appropriate technology of production and how an audience may respond to these efforts.

Curriculum Outcomes

The *Explore Music* curricula is a non-sequenced curricula. Below is a table that outlines the outcomes, rationales, and indicators.

Learners will analyse how rhythm, meter, and tempo communicate meaning. **Rationale:** For learners to investigate how the elements of time (rhythm, meter, and tempo) communicate meaning, it is essential for them to experience learning through listening, singing, moving, reading, and playing instruments. Independent and collaborative experiences assist learners in developing responsive skill sets that can be applied in a variety of settings. Meaning can be conveyed in multiple contexts. Learners will have opportunities to communicate their understanding through improvisation, performance, and creation and will gain experience in how the complexities of music are interwoven in a way that expresses meaning.
• Investigate time and meter (COM/CT)
• Apply tempi to convey intent (COM/CT)
• Perform rhythmic activities represented in multiple forms of notation to convey meaning (COM/CI/CT)
• Analyse how rhythm, meter, and tempo are used to convey meaning (COM/CI/CT)
Learners will analyse the role of melody and harmony in the communication of meaning. **Rationale:** Through listening, singing, moving, reading, and playing instruments, learners will analyse the elements of melody and harmony as a means to convey meaning. Applying developmentally appropriate ranges and tone sets will provide opportunities for learners to gradually extend their tessitura and range. Harmony will be explored through identifying and layering pitches to add depth and to create interest in musical compositions. Independent and collaborative experiences assist learners in developing responsive skill sets that can be applied in a variety of settings. Meaning can be conveyed in multiple contexts. Learners will have opportunities to communicate their understanding through improvisation, performance, and creation and will gain experience in how the complexities of music are interwoven in a way

that expresses meaning.

- Perform melody represented in multiple forms of notation (COM/CI/CT)

- Analyse how pitches combine in the creation of melody and harmony (COM/CT)

- Question how scale forms and tonality are used to convey meaning (COM/CI/CT)

- Analyse how melody and harmony convey meaning (COM/CI/CT)

Learners will evaluate the role of texture and form in communicating meaning.

Rationale: Learners will evaluate how the element of texture can be created through the layering of expressive sounds - combining melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic materials to convey meaning. Through investigation of a variety of musical structures (form), learners will evaluate the element of form in conveying intent. It is essential for them to experience learning alone and with others through listening, singing, moving, reading, and playing instruments. Meaning can be conveyed in multiple contexts. Learners will have opportunities to communicate their understanding through improvisation, performance, and creation and will gain experience in how the complexities of music are interwoven in a way that expresses meaning.

- Investigate the strategies used in the creation of texture (COM/CT)

- Question how phrases are organized in musical compositions to create form (COM/CT)

- Perform musical works in a variety of forms (COM/CI/CT)

- Analyse how texture and form are used to convey meaning (COM/CI/CT)

Learners will evaluate how composers and performers synthesize the elements of music to communicate meaning.

Rationale: Learners will investigate the elements of timbre and volume as a means to convey meaning. Additionally, they will analyze how multiple elements of music combine in a coherent manner to communicate emotion in compositions and performances. It is essential for them to experience learning alone and with others through listening, singing, moving, reading, and playing instruments. Meaning can be conveyed in multiple contexts. Learners will have opportunities to communicate their understanding through improvisation, performance, and creation and will gain experience in how the complexities of music are interwoven in a way that expresses meaning.

- Analyse how timbre and volume are used in musical expression (COM/CT)

- Investigate the intent of stylistic elements in performance and composition (COM/CT)

- Compare the impact of the different elements of music in creating meaning (COM/CI/CT)

- Investigate how combining the elements of music influences style (COM/CT)

- Analyse how unifying the elements of music impacts intent (COM/CI/CT)

Learners will analyse how the cultures of local and global communities are expressed through music.

Rationale: Music informs, influences, and sustains culture and identity. Through comparison, analysis, and performance of music from various cultures, learners will develop a deeper understanding of what makes cultures and people unique. It is essential that every opportunity be taken to promote the exposure of musical experiences derived from a variety of cultures in real time (and over time), as our learners' ways of knowing and experiencing the world are many. The music classroom is a place where deliberate, thoughtful selection of repertoire, activities, and involvement of mentors should reflect the learners and all voices of our ever-changing school landscape - a place where past and future can intersect in the most creative and respectful atmospheres. Culture is not an event; it permeates the environment to be actively and consistently fostered by all within it. Whether working on their own music or that of others, learners must see themselves. This will enable all students to feel valued and engaged.

- Investigate compositional techniques in music of various cultures and communities (COM/CT)

- Perform music of various cultures and communities with intent (COM/CI/CT)

- Investigate how various cultural practices are expressed in and through music (COM/CT)

- Compare cross cultural aspects of rhythm, melody, harmony, texture, form, and musical expression (COM/CT)

- Analyse ways in which music informs, influences, and sustains culture and identity (CZ/COM/PCD/CI/CT)

Learners will create original musical works reflecting personal, social, and cultural contexts.

Rationale: Throughout the music-making process, it is essential for learners to have opportunities to explore and experiment with the creation of their own works. Through direct application of improvisational and compositional skills learners can manipulate the elements of music to express themselves musically. Learners will explore how music is made for self-expression and/or to identify with personal, social, and cultural contexts. The process of creating music has equal, if not more, importance and value than the product. Four principles will guide these learning experiences:
   1. the process of creating music does not always result in a formal product;

2. changes in understanding can occur throughout the process;
3. learners need opportunities to discuss their works in progress, allowing them to reflect and modify; and
4. connections between their own music and the world around them is a vital component.

In collaborative and individual settings, learners can ponder what is happening in the world around them and let it come out as music.

- Investigate reasons for creating music (CZ/COM/PCD/CI/CT)

- Compare appropriation and inspiration in music composition (CZ/COM/PCD/CI/CT)

- Reflect on personal, social, and cultural contexts to inform music composition (CZ/COM/PCD/CT)

- Apply the elements of music to express meaning (COM/CT)

- Create rhythmic and melodic ideas using multiple forms of notation, improvisation, and extended techniques (COM/CI/CT)

- Reflect on the effectiveness of decisions made during the compositional process (COM/PCD/CI)

Learners will perform music in ensembles to communicate meaning.

Rationale: In both large and small ensembles, learners will have opportunities to rehearse and perform music to convey meaning. Meaning can be conveyed in multiple contexts. It is important that students collaborate to solve problems, make performance decisions, and participate in individual and group assessments. The environment in any ensemble setting must encourage collaboration, so that the learners' thoughts and ideas play an essential role in the decision-making process. This allows learners to gain experience determining how the complexities of music are interwoven in a way that expresses meaning.

- Implement rehearsal etiquette as foundational to ensemble culture (CZ/COM/PCD/CI)

- Formulate solutions to musical and technical challenges in ensemble music (COM/PCD/CI)

- Compare appropriation and inspiration in music (CZ/COM/PCD/CI/CT)

- Perform music with intent (COM/CI)

- Evaluate the impact of the ensemble in conveying meaning in rehearsals and performances (CZ/CT/COM/PCD/CI)

Assessment and Evaluation

Overview

The information in this section provides an overview of the basic principles and understandings related to assessment and evaluation in the Arts Education classroom and reflects the guiding principles as outlined in the *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada,* 1993. More specifically, these principles might be summed up in a statement of eight "big ideas" (Cooper, 2007):

1. Assessment serves different purposes at different times
2. Assessment must be planned and purposeful
3. Assessment must be balanced and flexible
4. Assessment and instruction are inseparable
5. Assessment must be helpful to students, and therefore feedback must be timely and descriptive
6. Assessment is most effective when it is a collaborative process
7. Performance criteria are an essential component of effective assessment
8. Grading and reporting student achievement is a caring, sensitive process that requires teachers' professional judgment

For teachers, planning how they will get to know their students as learners comprises some of the most important decisions they will make. Effective instruction flows from strong, recent information about students' strengths and needs. The information upon which teachers make instructional decisions should draw from a variety of sources and should consider students' interests and learning style preferences. What teachers decide to assess and evaluate, the methods they use to assess and evaluate, and how results are communicated, send clear messages to students and others about what is really valued—what is worth learning.

The curriculum outcomes framework shows teachers, students, and others the knowledge and skills to be learned, and therefore should form the reference for the gathering of assessment information in the classroom.

Making the Distinction Between Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment

"Assessment serves different purposes at different times. " (Cooper, 2007)

Assessment is the systematic process of gathering information about student learning. This process should include a broad range of methods for gathering evidence of learning, including the collection of students' work samples, observations of students' learning in use, and conversations with students about their learning so that a clear and valid picture emerges of what students know and are able to do in the arts.

Teachers need to plan a process for collecting, organizing, and analyzing assessment information so that they can fairly and appropriately use it for a number of purposes. When the purpose is assessment *for* learning, teachers can use evidence of student learning collected to:

- provide descriptive feedback to students concerning their individual learning strengths and needs, so they can help determine their own learning goals and next steps
- make instructional decisions to guide and enhance student learning
- change their own classroom practice to enhance future student learning

When the purpose is assessment *of* learning, teachers can use evidence of student learning collected to:

- inform decisions about student achievement of curriculum outcomes for grading and reporting purposes, and is often used to evaluate student learning to a specific point and time with a specific set of outcomes.
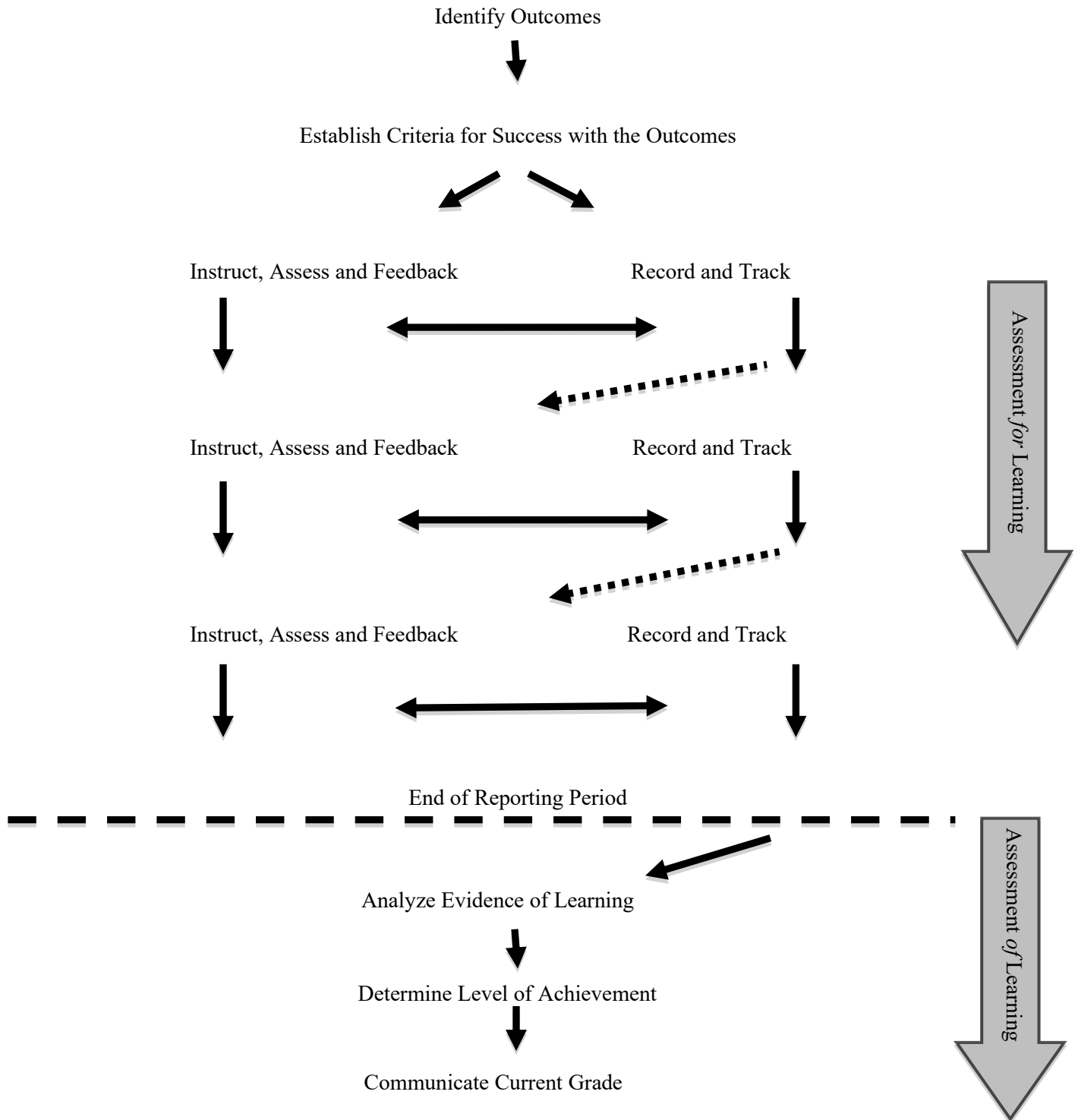
Evaluation

Evaluation is the process of analyzing, reflecting upon, and summarizing assessment information gathered over time in a variety of ways, then making judgments or decisions based on the evidence of learning collected. Evaluation serves two different purposes:

1. Teachers need to communicate whether students' performance of particular tasks, assignments, and work in progress successfully demonstrate specific curriculum outcomes throughout a reporting period. A variety of codes, marks and descriptive feedback may be used to record, track, and communicate growth in student learning to students and others.

2. Teachers need to communicate student achievement to students and parents at the end of a reporting period, usually using either letter or percentage grades that summarize students' assessment information. Professional judgment is applied when summarizing assessment information for this

purpose. The best, most recent evidence, gathered over time in a variety of ways must be used when determining grades. Refer to the chart *From Outcomes to Reporting* below.

From Outcomes to Reporting

Identify Outcomes

Establish Criteria for Success with the Outcomes

| Instruct, Assess and Feedback | Record and Track |

Instruct, Assess and Feedback   Record and Track

Instruct, Assess and Feedback   Record and Track

Assessment *for* Learning

End of Reporting Period

Analyze Evidence of Learning

Determine Level of Achievement

Communicate Current Grade

Assessment *of* Learning

Planning for Assessment

Assessment is primarily intended to guide students' learning. Students need to know how well they are doing, and what they need to do in order to improve. They need this feedback information while they are still in the process of learning, not just at the end, and they need this feedback to be descriptive. Feedback needs to clearly indicate specifically what students are doing well, and what they need to do to improve.

Teachers need to know how well students are doing in order to guide their learning, and they need this information while students are still engaged in the learning process in order to have a positive impact on their learning. These are important considerations for teachers as they plan how, and especially when, to collect evidence of student learning, and also how and when to provide feedback to students.

Backwards Design

"Assessment must be planned and purposeful. " (Cooper, 2007)

To plan for assessment, teachers need to first identify the Specific Curriculum Outcomes that will be the focus for each unit of study within a reporting period. Whether the students will be creating, exploring cultural/historical contexts, or demonstrating their learning through a multimedia performance event, teachers, students and others should understand which outcomes are being taught and assessed by the learning experiences throughout the period of study. By engaging in backwards planning, teachers can plan and then explicitly and intentionally teach and assess specific curriculum outcomes (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998). Making the assessment process explicit and the criteria for success clear to all involved from the outset maximizes learning. It also ensures that over the course of a school year, all curriculum outcomes are addressed.

Once teachers decide upon a particular approach to instruction or curriculum focus for a unit of study, a cascading series of decisions is required in order to plan backwards from the outcomes:

- Which specific curriculum outcomes will be the primary focus of assessment and instruction during this unit of study?
- Which specific curriculum outcomes are addressed by the various learning experiences with which students will be engaged within this unit of study?
- What do students need to know and be able to do in order to successfully demonstrate the identified specific curriculum outcomes?
- Which sources of assessment information will best illustrate student learning of these outcomes?
- When in the unit, or at what point of the students' learning process, is assessment information about each identified outcome best gathered?
- What methods of differentiation need to be considered in order for all students to meet with success during this unit?
- What will be considered acceptable criteria for the successful demonstration of the identified curriculum outcomes?
- How will students and others be made aware of the criteria for success?

Co-Constructing Assessment Criteria with Students

"Assessment is most effective when it is a collaborative process. " (Cooper, 2007)

"Performance criteria are an essential component of effective assessment. "
(Cooper, 2007)

Co-construction of assessment criteria occurs when students and teachers work together to describe how the demonstration of a specific curriculum outcome or group of outcomes is judged to be successful. Teachers can involve students in helping to articulate what an acceptable demonstration of a particular outcome may look like and sound like. This does not mean that establishing criteria for success is handed over to students alone. Teachers contribute to the listing and description of criteria; they are the curriculum experts. Teachers and students contribute to the list of criteria together, clarifying and categorizing descriptors of success, and aligning them with specific curriculum outcomes. As an active partner in the co-construction of criteria, teachers can ensure appropriate fit to curriculum outcomes, as well as maintain sufficient challenge for students (Gregory, Cameron, and Davies, 1997).

Teachers need not be concerned that this process is overly time consuming. Initially it will be, but it is time well spent. As students engage in the process of co-constructing assessment criteria, they become involved in a form of explicit instruction. The process helps to clarify what is expected of students and helps focus the students' learning. Students are engaged in reflecting on their own learning, becoming aware of what they already know, and what they will need to learn more about in order to be successful.

Striking a Balance among Assessment Information Sources

"Assessment must be balanced and flexible. " (Cooper, 2007)

It is very important for teachers to recognize that the curriculum outcomes are inter-related and are developed most effectively as interdependent concepts. These outcomes identify what students are expected to know, be able to do, and value upon completion of study in arts education. When outcomes and curriculum offerings based on all outcomes are grouped as such, arts activities become more relevant to real-life situations, and the learning becomes more meaningful. Learning in the arts must be planned / shaped to incorporate all outcomes.

Conversations

Talking with students can provide evidence of student learning that might not be apparent from observations or products (Davies, 2000). Talk allows students to explain how or why they did something thereby revealing their thought processes, as well as providing opportunities for teachers to support and probe students' deeper thinking. Information gathered in conversations may be used immediately to inform instruction within the same context the information was obtained, or used to plan follow-up explicit instruction later. Conversations allow teachers to provide immediate descriptive feedback that promotes student learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Conversations may be very informal, as in the case of discussing a work of art in progress, songwriter's circle or responding to group presentations and performances. They also may be quite formal. Teachers may ask students to use writing and other means of representing to "talk" about their own learning in journals or sketchbooks.

Teachers must employ a recording and tracking system so that information gathered through conversations can be effectively and efficiently used to inform instruction, and be validly used to evaluate and grade students' achievement of the outcomes.

Observations

Watching students as they are engaged in the learning process can provide valuable evidence of student learning. Especially when used in combination with conversation, observation can capture evidence of student learning of which the students themselves may be unaware or may consider trivial. Such evidence would remain hidden if products alone had been the sources of information.

Observations can be made quickly and the information collected may be used immediately to inform instruction within the same context the information was obtained, or used to plan follow-up explicit instruction later. For example, a teacher may notice that a student is not providing enough clarifying examples while responding to their own and others' expressive works. The teacher may choose to offer some on-the-spot instruction and modeling, or may decide to provide instruction to a number of students with similar learning needs in a small group setting on another day.

Observations may be made informally, during independent work times or while students are engaged in small group settings. They may also be made during more structured assessment opportunities, such as during presentations or performances.

Products

Many teachers are comfortable and familiar with assessing products created by students. This should include a range of assessments to demonstrate understanding of concepts, as well as demonstrations of ability in art-making, composition and performance. Products used to assess students' ability to create and respond need to include a variety of forms, such as images and other visual representations, musical notation, director's book, as well as other non-print forms such as multimedia presentations, photo essays, audio and/or video productions, speeches, drama, dance, and other art forms.

It is critical that teachers and students assess not only products but also the journey or the process of the learning. Conversations as well as assessment forms and personal reflections will all contribute to assessment of learning.

Student Self-Assessment

Teachers can use student self-assessment to inform instructional decisions, checking for gaps in student learning, and responding with timely, appropriate explicit and differentiated instruction. Self-assessment

encourages students to monitor their learning, and note their own growth over time. It helps students reflect, set further learning goals, and celebrate their successes.   Metacognition, being aware of one's own thinking, is an important aspect of self-assessment and goal setting. It represents the highest level of thinking students can be asked to do.

Involving students in self-assessment and reflecting upon it also addresses a number of specific curriculum outcomes. Teachers need to include opportunities for student self-reflection and self-assessment as a part of their assessment planning. Engaging students in the co-creation of criteria for use with peer assessment is a valuable learning opportunity. Students benefit from the explicit statement of expectations inherent in this process, especially if the criteria are then used in conjunction with checklists or rubrics for use by students during self-assessment opportunities. See Appendix D, *Explore Music 7–9: Appendices* for examples of student self-assessment tools.

Teachers need to be clear about the difference between self-assessment and self-evaluation, and make the distinction clear to their students. Self-assessment provides information and feedback that promote further learning, and should be included as an important source of evidence of student learning. Self-evaluation, on the other hand, is the assigning of marks by students to their own learning, and factoring these marks into the determination of grades. Evaluation is the job of the teacher; and should not be done by the students.

Peer Assessment

The use of peer assessment will clearly demonstrate the students' level of understanding of concepts, skills and techniques. For example, if students are responding to a composition or work of art that other students have created, their comments can be a good indication of their musical / artistic understanding. By articulating their thoughts and ideas, they will use vocabulary that will demonstrate that level of understanding. Planning opportunities for students to respond, assess and reflect upon each other's work provides an audience for that work other than the teacher, and puts the assessment in an authentic context. Moreover, since it is not practical (or desirable) for the teacher to be the sole provider of descriptive feedback, peer assessment provides a valuable tool in the overall assessment for learning process.

Involving students in peer assessment, and reflecting upon it, also addresses a number of specific curriculum outcomes. Engaging students in the co-creation of criteria for use with peer assessment is a valuable learning opportunity. Students benefit from the explicit statement of expectations inherent in this process, especially if the criteria are then used in conjunction with checklists or rubrics for use by students during peer assessment opportunities. It is critical that students understand the criteria and the expectation of the outcomes.

As with self-assessment, teachers need to be clear about the difference between peer assessment and peer evaluation, and make the distinction clear to their students. Peer assessment provides information and feedback that promote further learning, and should be included as an important method of providing descriptive feedback to students. Peer evaluation, on the other hand, is the assigning of marks by students that will be factored into the determination of other students' grades. Evaluation is the job of the teacher; peer evaluation should not be done.

Tracking and Recording Assessment Information

"The use of columns in a grade book to represent standards (outcomes), instead of assignments, tests, and activities, is a major shift in thinking…. " (Marzano, R. , and J. Kendall, 1996)

Assessment and evaluation depend on accurate and efficient record keeping. Teachers' assessment planning should include provision for the recording of assessment information in an efficient, systematic way. Since instruction addresses curriculum outcomes and student achievement is reported in relation to curriculum outcomes, it is essential that teachers' record-keeping systems track students' demonstration of curriculum outcomes, rather than only marks for assessment events, assignment, and tests.

Portfolios of Student Learning

Teachers may also want to include a system for collecting and archiving samples of student work collected over time as part of their assessment planning. Systems such as student portfolios are especially useful for the collection of samples of art making, including visual representations, video clips, podcasts, and compositions. They should not only be collections of summative assessment events, but also should include works in progress as well as polished drafts collected throughout the reporting period. Artifacts of student learning kept in student portfolios can inform assessment *for* learning decisions on a daily basis, as well as inform evaluative assessment *for* learning decisions made at the end of a reporting period. Concrete evidence of student learning archived in student portfolios works in concert with anecdotal notes, checklists, and rubrics to create a clear picture of the student as a learner. As well, the portfolio becomes especially powerful as a focus for student self and peer assessment.

Summary Grade Book

The grade book is a place where teachers track the accumulated evidence of students' learning in relation to each outcome assessed throughout the reporting period. This important part of the tracking system documents the summarized evidence of learning for each student and supports the use of professional judgment in the determination of summative grades.

Teachers may choose to organize assessment information contained within each class grade book by individual student files. In this case, each individual student file would contain a list of curriculum outcomes addressed in the reporting period, documenting with some sort of marking code—not letter or percentage marks—the degree to which the student demonstrated achievement of specific outcomes.

As an alternative, teachers may choose to organize assessment information by curriculum outcome. In this case, each outcome would contain a class list documenting with some sort of marking code the degree to which students demonstrated achievement in that outcome.

Recording Assessment Information

Individual assessment events or pieces of student work collected within a reporting period should not be marked and recorded using letter (for grades 1–8) or percentage (grades 9–12) scores. Letter or percentage grades are only used on report cards to indicate an evaluative summary of students' evidence of learning. Assessment feedback given to students and others during the course of the reporting period needs to be descriptive rather than evaluative. Students and others can make use of a clear description of academic strengths, needs, and growth evident in each piece, and can begin to implement improvements that are clearly described.

For grade levels where letters summarize student achievement on report cards, using letter marks as feedback for assessment events and student work throughout the reporting period can create challenges at the end of a reporting period. It is difficult to summarize letter scores. For example, a student who receives marks of B or A on individual assessment tasks addressing a limited number of specific outcomes, might end up with an overall grade of C based on an evaluation of all the assessment events over a reporting period.

Using letters as marks can also create confusion in reporting. Some of the confusion may be due to changes in the meaning of the letter grades used on the report cards. In many school districts and universities around North America, letter grades are linked to a range of percentage grade scores. Typically percentage grades of 90 to 100 percent equate to an "A" grade, for example. In the province of Nova Scotia, an "A" grade indicates the number of learning outcomes successfully demonstrated within a reporting period. It is an indicator of quantity, rather than some judgment of quality. For example, a student who may have consistently received a "B" mark throughout the reporting period would receive an "A" for a grade, according to the descriptors attached to those letters on the report card. For descriptors attached to letter and percentage grades currently used on report cards in the province of Nova Scotia see the following.

Province of Nova Scotia Descriptors for Report Card Grades

Grades 9-12

90 – 100%	The student demonstrates **excellent or outstanding** performance in relation to the expected learning outcomes for this course.
80 – 89%	The student demonstrates **very good** performance in relation to the expected learning outcomes for this course.
70 – 79%	The student demonstrates **good** performance in relation to the expected learning outcomes for this course.
60 – 69%	The student demonstrates **satisfactory** performance in relation to the expected learning outcomes for this course.
50 – 59 %	The student demonstrates **minimally acceptable** performance in relation to the expected learning outcomes for this course.
Below 50%	The student **has not met minimum requirements** in relation to the expected learning outcomes for this course.

Grades P-8

A	The student demonstrates achievement of the expected learning outcomes addressed during the current reporting period.
B	The student demonstrates achievement of most of the expected learning outcomes addressed during the current reporting period.
C	The student demonstrates achievement of some of the expected learning outcomes addressed during the current reporting period.
D	The student demonstrates achievement of few of the expected learning outcomes addressed during the current reporting period.

For grade levels where percentages summarize student achievement on report cards, using percentage marks as feedback for assessment events and student work throughout the reporting period may result in the averaging of all assessment marks from the reporting period. It is not appropriate to factor in exploratory or early attempts by students to demonstrate outcomes, when more current evidence indicates success (O'Connor, 2002; Cooper, 2007). Teachers' professional judgment, rather than the application of a mathematical formula, needs to be applied to the determination of summarizing grades.

To record assessment information efficiently, teachers may want to use a coding system indicating the degree to which students have demonstrated specific outcomes. Common coding systems use numbers from one to three or one to four, often found on many rubrics. An example of a 4 digit number code might be:

1. Not yet meeting criteria for success
2. Approaching meeting criteria for success
3. Meets criteria for success
4. Strongly meets criteria for success

An example of a 3 digit number code might be:
1. Not yet meeting criteria for success
2. Meets criteria for success
3. Strongly meets criteria for success

Coding systems do not need to use digits. Any sort of symbol system may be acceptable, as long as they indicate the degree to which students meet criteria for the successful demonstration of specific outcomes.

Regardless of the coding system used, adding and averaging the code symbols should not be the process used for determining student grades. The digits are symbols, not points to be averaged. Teachers must apply professional judgment to determine whether students have successfully demonstrated outcomes (O'Connor, 2007). For more on the analysis of assessment information to determine summative grades, see the section entitled *Using Assessment Information to Evaluate and Communicate Student Learning*.

Using Assessment Information to Improve Student Learning

Cooper's Big Idea #5: "Assessment must be helpful to students, and therefore feedback must be timely and descriptive. "

The primary purpose of assessment is to improve learning. Learners use assessment information to improve their efforts and set learning goals. Teachers use assessment information to adapt and change their instruction or the instructional context to meet the diverse needs of the learners in their classrooms. Using evidence of student learning for this purpose is called assessment *for* learning.

Guiding Learning with Descriptive Feedback

Assessment information needs to be in a form that is useful to learners in order to impact their learning. Feedback is most useful when it specifically describes or indicates what learners are doing well, and what they need to do next in order to improve (Brookhart, 2008; Cooper, 2007). Effective descriptive feedback provides clear, concise information to learners about the learning strategies and processes they successfully employed in the performance of a learning task, and specifically describes qualities of the learners' work in relation to learning outcomes. Descriptive feedback should focus on the learners' performance, not the learner personally. Specific, descriptive feedback that focuses on success and points the way to improvement has a positive effect on learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Davies, 2000).

Percentage marks alone provide ineffective feedback (Brookhart, 2008). Such forms of feedback indicate the degree by which learners successfully demonstrate learning outcomes without indicating aspects of the outcomes learners have under control, and exactly what needs be done to improve their performance the next time. Numeric marks, whether it is intended or not, carry the connotation of evaluation. Evaluative feedback may very well interfere with the learning process (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Kohn, 1999).

Learners also need to be in a position to take action on feedback information provided to them. Feedback will have the most impact when received while learning is still in process (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Feedback provided after the work is complete will only be useful if learners perceive they will have a chance to put this information to use again on similar tasks in the near future. Feedback without the opportunity to use it is pointless (Brookhart, 2008).

The challenge teachers face is to gather assessment information during the learning process and provide their students with useful feedback in a timely fashion. The following are suggestions of ways teachers might provide their students with opportunities for descriptive feedback:

- teacher oral and written responses to works in progress
- peer oral and written responses to works in progress
- rubric or checklist criteria that specifically describe indicators of quality work
- supply students with exemplars of quality work, providing explicit instruction and discussion about the qualities present in the exemplars

Providing opportunities for metacognitive reflection is an integral part of this process. Descriptive feedback moves learners forward by encouraging them to think about their own learning. Self-reflective questioning leads learners to re-visit their work and consider revision. In this sense, the distinction between assessment and instruction is blurred. It is the provision of reflective opportunities for learners, and chances for them to incorporate feedback information into their on-going learning process that transforms the collection of formative assessment information by teachers into assessment for learning.

The Teacher's Response to Assessment

"Assessment and instruction are inseparable. " (Cooper, 2007)

Teachers use assessment information to inform their instructional decisions. For example, in response to assessment information, a teacher may decide to provide explicit instruction to the class or provide additional instruction to a select number of students. The teacher may decide to make changes to the organization of the students in the class, or differentiate the requirements of an assignment. The teacher may decide to gather further information before providing further instruction or making any changes to the instructional context.

Using Assessment Information to Evaluate and Communicate Student Learning

"Grading and reporting student achievement is a caring, sensitive process that requires teachers' professional judgment. " (Cooper, 2007)

At set times within a school year, teachers are called upon to evaluate the degree to which students have demonstrated learning outcomes focused upon during a reporting period, and communicate that decision in the form of a grade that summarizes a variety of students' assessment information. Teachers apply professional judgment, analyzing the evidence of student learning collected throughout the reporting period for reliable indications that students have demonstrated the outcomes. Using evidence of student learning for this purpose is called assessment *of* learning.

Exercising professional judgment is never a matter of merely applying a mathematical formula to all the assessment information gathered during the reporting period. Instead, teachers need to look for trends across all available sources of assessment information when determining grades. This might include information gathered throughout a reporting period, as well as information gathered from specific summative assessment events.

It may not be necessary to provide students with summative assessment events for all outcomes assessed in a reporting period. Teachers may have already collected enough valid evidence of student learning for many outcomes throughout a reporting period. For example, if students have been observed several times meeting the criteria for success in a specific outcome, summative assessment events would not be necessary for this outcome. Instead, the most current and valid information could be used to evaluate and then report.

Thoughtful analysis is necessary when weighing assessment information for evidence that students have successfully demonstrated outcomes. For example, assessment information collected earlier in a reporting period indicating that a student could *not yet* successfully meet the criteria for success for specific outcomes should not be factored into summative grades if teachers have more current assessment indicates that learning and growth have taken place. Likewise, teachers must also take care that a student's poor performance on any single assessment event does not cancel out valid evidence of success collected earlier in the reporting period (O'Connor, 2002).

Teachers need to ensure that grades represent students' achievement of curriculum outcomes. Behaviours that are not associated with specific curriculum outcomes should not be represented in students' grades. Promptness, for example, is not a specific curriculum outcome. The same is true for disruptive and inappropriate behaviour that may be displayed by some students in class. These behaviours can be reported in the learner profile section on the report cards, but are not included in students' grades.

Teachers need to make a distinction, however, between inappropriate student behaviour and small group or whole class behaviours that can be considered part of the criteria for demonstrating specific outcomes. Such behaviours as speaking in turns and treating others' ideas with respect, for example, are indeed indicators of appropriate small group interactions, and are reflected in certain curriculum outcomes.

Teachers also need to consult regional board and school assessment policies for guidance in determining students' grades with regards to a number of other issues, such as: late assignments, the use of zero marks, incomplete work assignments, homework as a source of assessment information, participation marks, and group marks.

Exercising Professional Judgment

 "There are no *right* grades only *justifiable* grades. " (O'Connor, 2002)

The process of exercising professional judgment to determine grades may differ depending on the grade level reporting system used.   Regardless of the system, teachers need to pay close attention to the descriptors that accompany the grade codes.

For grades indicated by letters

The process for determining letter grades, given the intent of the descriptors currently on the report card, is fairly straightforward. The question to be answered is how many of the outcomes taught and assessed during the reporting period did each student successfully demonstrate. Teachers analyze the evidence of learning for trends that will support their decision-making process. If the answer for a specific student is, "all of them", based upon current, valid evidence collected throughout the term, then the grade for that student is an "A". If the answer to the question is, "some of them", then the grade for that student is a "C", or perhaps a "D", depending on the number of outcomes demonstrated. Teachers with an efficient and effective assessment plan and a well-kept tracking system should have little difficulty defending their professional judgment.

For grades indicated by percentages

The process for determining percentage grades, is somewhat less clear cut. The question to be answered in the case of reporting systems using percentage grades is not "how many" but "how well" did each student successfully demonstrate the outcomes taught and assessed during the reporting period.

One process for determining percentage grades is to assign percentage values to each outcome taught and assessed during the reporting period. The percentage values are determined by the degree of instructional focus given to each outcome during the reporting period, or by simply assigning equal weighting to each outcome. Teachers use their professional judgment to determine each student's mark for each outcome category by analyzing most the current, valid evidence of learning collected and recorded throughout the term. A percentage grade can then be determined by applying a mathematical formula for central tendency to the outcome marks, along with teachers' professional judgment supported by the evidence.

In a variation on this process, a number code is used rather than a percentage mark for each outcome. Teachers use their professional judgment to determine a number code score for each outcome, and these codes are then used to determine a percentage grade (Clymer and Wiliam, 2006). For more on the use of number codes to record and track evidence of student learning, see the previous section entitled, Tracking and Recording Assessment Information.

Using Assessment Information to Inform Teachers' Practice

It is important for teachers to reflect upon the effectiveness of their own teaching practices. Teachers may use student assessment results to inform their own professional growth. A variety of assessment information sources, including on-going, informal classroom assessments as well as external assessment results, may be used to inform the professional learning process of a school staff.

This may often be carried on as part of collaborative teacher learning communities established within school sites. Such groups may typically be formed from professional staff serving the students of a particular grade level, or the professional staff responsible for teaching a particular subject area. Professional learning within such groups is intended to involve not only the sharing of resources and lesson ideas among colleagues, but also the analysis of student assessment information in a spirit of professional enquiry in order to inform pedagogical change.

Establishing Common Understanding Assessment Criteria Within a Board

Common understandings of assessment criteria occur when the professional staff within a school or board works together to articulate assessment criteria. For example, Visual Arts teachers of at the junior high/middle level school might work together to develop assessment criteria aligned with specific curriculum outcomes. Analysis of this information could not only allow teachers to focus instruction on those individual students in need of support, but would also allow staff to look for trends in board-wide change over time.

Assessment information tracked with collaboratively developed criteria can be used school-wide or at particular grade levels to determine areas of instructional need, facilitating the establishment of school or grade level improvement goals. Such collaboration can be a powerful professional development opportunity that can directly impact student achievement. Assessment information gathered through the use of co-constructed criteria can thus inform curricular decisions, and also inform change in teachers' instructional practice.

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