

Summary of meeting between Kevin Willms, Joan Engel and Shelley Wells held Dec 8, 2009 at Alberta Education

1. Joan stressed repeatedly that nothing in the document is related to cutting funding for Arts Education. The process began prior to the economic downturn and implementation is years away. Further to this, she remains concerned that the quote from Susan McLeod's email regarding the "fine arts not being immune to financial restraint" has been interpreted and posted out of its context. She showed me the full email, where it is quite clear that Susan's message was in relation to cuts at Alberta education that have resulted in fewer people working on the curriculum framework, but that they were still moving forward with the work.
2. Locally developed courses are under review. The cost of the CEU funding for these has been increasing by about 3 million dollars per year. I suggested that this reflects the need for these courses and that, in fact many of these should become provincial curriculum and offered as co-curricular to the core fine arts program. Joan was receptive to this.
3. I expressed concern about the statement related to curriculum being accessible to both generalists and specialists in the current proposed framework. I was informed that this is true in all curriculum areas. It is true that staffing, teaching assignments and the use or non-use of specialists falls completely within the jurisdiction of each school division. I stressed that I hoped this did not mean that the new curriculum, when it is written, will not be written with this as the guiding principle resulting in a watered down content. I was told that this was not the intent BUT that the reality in many areas of the province, particularly rural, is that there are not specialists available and there needs to be a curriculum that can be delivered as the alternative to not offering fine arts to all in the province is not acceptable.
4. In discussing the junior high "arts exploration" stream as well as the single credit approach for high school it was stated that the intent is to draw in students who are not otherwise engaged in fine arts. The intent is not to undermine band programs etc., but to involve students in the arts who are not part of these groups. My concern remains that the language used opens the door for changes that could be implemented by administrators who are less supportive of the arts or where there are budgetary and logistical challenges. I was reminded that fine arts courses

at these levels are not currently mandatory. I would agree that there should be a place for courses for those students who have not been attracted to the current offerings. This must be done very carefully and some of the responsibility for delivering an "arts awareness" program must lie within other subjects, particularly the humanities. This is difficult to reflect in the arts education framework.

5. There is agreement that a single credit system has generated the most responses and concerns. We discussed the spiral nature of teaching and learning in the fine arts. I also suggested that 25 hour offerings of any topic "box in" the effective teacher and limit their ability deliver an integrated curriculum or even to teach to the level of the class where the outcomes should be the focus, not the specific hourly commitment to a particular topic. A part of a solution, I suggested that perhaps a core curriculum that had prescribed minimums in different areas (eg theory, history, technique) with the option increasing these components in accordance with school needs and with a series of elective components would better allow teachers to do what they do best. Joan was receptive to this idea. I did stress that in no way shape or form would a single credit offering of anything be an acceptable replacement for anything currently offered as a 5 or 3 credit LDC (eg single credit jazz component to replace a 5 credit jazz LDC).
6. We discussed the fact that an "alternate framework" has been started by educators – currently residing with the Alberta Band Association – and will circulate amongst fine arts education organizations and educators for feedback before being presented to Alberta Education. Joan was very receptive to this and has said she looks forward to receiving it. I indicated that the basis involves a core curriculum of sequential skill, knowledge and literacy acquisition in each of the four disciplines (while acknowledging that I don't know what that might look like in drama or dance in the early grades). These would be surrounded by co-curricular enhancements/courses that look similar to many of our current locally developed courses (jazz etc.) and that the LDC should continue to have an important role in areas where there is a need for culturally diverse offerings. Joan indicated that we are on the same wavelength in our thinking.
7. It was acknowledged that our current curriculum contains many excellent components and content and that certain elements of it need to be brought forward into the new curriculum, with updated language etc.
8. It was acknowledged that communication from Alberta Education could have been better in a couple of areas: a) there could have been better

communication in announcing that the new framework had been posted.
B) there is a disconnect between what was *intended* and what is *perceived* in the current document.

9. Perhaps most significant was an assurance that the process does not end for us at the end of January. In fact, once the deadline for response to the currently posted framework has passed, a new framework will be developed. It will also be posted for public feedback and there will be opportunities to discuss it further. I have been assured that we will meet again.
10. Joan asked me directly if I felt reassured at the end of our meeting. My direct answer was yes BUT that I would really feel reassured when I see it in writing in the next draft of the framework. Whatever is written down remains the reality. I do appreciate the time that was taken and do feel listened to.