

Fine-Arts Education in North American Division Secondary

How strong is the fine-arts program in the North American Division? Are the courses offered in Adventist academies adequate to prepare students to pursue a college major and seek a career in the fine arts?

For decades, music has been a valued part of the secondary program in Seventh-day Adventist schools in the North American Division, but in general, visual arts have not enjoyed a similar status. In recent years, however, researchers have discovered the significance of arts education in the overall development of the child. (See “The Not-So-Expendable Curriculum” on page 12.)

But how strong is the fine-arts program in the North American Division? Are the courses offered in Adventist academies adequate to prepare students to pursue a college major and seek a career in the fine arts? The author has served as an academy principal and as a local conference associate superintendent, and hence is well aware of the difficult issues of funding and the shortage of qualified personnel in these disciplines. The need for a more clearly articulated visual-arts curriculum, however, still exists.

A concerted effort was made by the author to gather information on the fine-arts courses offered in each of the senior academies in the North American Division.¹ A summary of the report, by union conference, appears in Figure 1 on page 30.

It is apparent from the survey that visual-arts instruction is not a strong focus in Adventist academies in North America:

1. **Choir** – 107 academies (**98 percent**) offered choir; several academies also offered concert choir, chorale, etc.
2. **Band** – 84 academies (**77 percent**) offered band; one academy had an ensemble instead of a band,
3. **Bell choir** – 57 academies (**52 percent**) offered hand bells,

4. **Art** – 44 academies (**40 percent**) offered a general art course which included painting, drawing, etc.

5. **Drawing** – 30 academies (**28 percent**) offered drawing,

6. **Drama** – 47 academies (**43 percent**) offered drama,

7. **Other Courses in Fine Arts** – 48 academies (**44 percent**) offered a variety of other fine-arts courses such as:

- Art Appreciation
- Art History
- Arts and Crafts
- Guitar
- Instrumental Ensembles
- Music Appreciation
- Music History
- Photography
- Puppetry
- Survey of Art

Even though the NAD Music and Visual Arts Curriculum Guide does not provide course outlines or essential learnings for drama, 43 percent of the academies surveyed offered drama as a course for academic credit. Many Adventist churches, especially those with a strong youth ministry program, have discovered that drama is a powerful medium to convey a message. There is much literature and research to validate the inclusion



Schools



of drama in the elementary/secondary curriculum. Some benefits of drama:²

- It can create multicultural awareness and enhance ethnic literacy;
- It teaches students to be disciplined;
- It enhances memory;
- It helps participants develop self-confidence; and
- It enables students to convey a message with impact.

The lack of an article on drama in this special issue on fine arts should not be regarded as disapproval of its inclusion in

the Adventist curriculum. Concerted efforts were made to obtain a suitable article on the benefits of drama in the secondary curriculum, to no avail. Perhaps someone reading this could submit an article on drama for a future issue.

A second area of weakness identified by the survey was the lack of a strong visual-arts program. This may be due to a shortage of qualified teachers with denominational endorsement to teach visual arts at the academy level. To remedy this problem, college students majoring in the fine arts could be encouraged to enroll in the courses necessary for teacher certification.

Students from Adventist academies seeking a career in the visual arts often enter college without a strong background in visual arts or a portfolio of their work for review by the college art department. A checklist developed in collaboration with the art department faculty of La Sierra University (Riverside, California), might serve as a starting point for teachers to help high school students develop a portfolio and thus be better prepared for college-level courses in the visual arts.³

School boards and principals allocate funds according to the degree of importance and relevance of each line item on

the budget, in relation to the total program of instruction in the school. Instruction in the visual arts should be regarded as part of the core curriculum for every student. This is one of the mandates of the *No Child Left Behind* initiative sponsored by President George W. Bush and embraced by public schools nationwide. But the issues of adequate funding and personnel reach into higher education as well, especially in the visual-arts department, where the chair often must deal with the challenges of underfunding and budget cutbacks.

An Essential Element

For curriculum planners, the *what* (content), the *how* (learning styles), and the *how well* (assessment) are central issues. This is as true in arts education as in English, science, or Bible. But these issues are irrelevant if administrators fail to view arts education as an essential element of the core curriculum, rather than an activity to reward students for good behavior or something to be squeezed in if time allows.

There is much literature and research to validate the inclusion of drama in the elementary/secondary curriculum.

The North American Division's Music and Visual Arts Secondary Curriculum Guide⁴ was developed as part of the goals of Adventist education as expressed in Journey to Excellence,⁵ the roadmap for exemplary Adventist education. One of the 10 goals of Adventist education as presented in Journey to Excellence is "Aesthetic Appreciation." Three specific themes or imperatives in this area with clear relevance to arts education are the following:

- Employing biblical principles as the basis for appreciation and expression of creative and performing arts.
- Developing fine-arts talents through practice, performance, and presentation.

Figure 1. Fine-Arts Courses in North American Division Senior Academies, by Union

Union Conference	No. of Schools Counted	Band	Strings/Orch.	Bells	Choir Chorale	Art	Drawing	Painting	Ceramics	Drama	Private Lessons	Schools offering other courses in fine arts
Adventist Church in Canada	8	5	0	2	8	7	0	0	0	1	0	0
Atlantic Union	8	1	2	2	8	0	7	2	0	5	1	2
Columbia Union	10	7	3	7	9	5	3	1	4	4	6	6
Lake Union	9	9	5	6	9	0	5	5	4	3	7	1
Mid-America Union	10	10	2	6	10	0	8	5	3	4	6	1
North Pacific Union	13	12	3	6	12	7	4	4	2	5	7	7
Pacific Union	33	25	3	19	33	19	3	2	4	18	14	19
Southern Union	13	10	5	7	13	4	0	0	2	6	12	8
Southwestern Union	5	5	0	2	5	2	0	0	1	1	3	4
Totals	109	84	23	57	107	44	30	19	20	47	56	48

- Using aesthetic expression as a means of communication and service.

The North American Division's Curriculum Guide for Music and the Visual Arts⁶ reflects national standards established by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, as well as the ideas expressed in various fine-arts curriculum documents at both state and local levels in the United States.

These standards are:

National Content Standards for Music⁷ plus one:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history, and culture.
10. Understanding the relationship between music, worship, and service. (This standard is not a National Content Standard but was written for Seventh-day Adventist schools and reflects denominational philosophy for music instruction.)

National Content Standards for the Visual Arts⁸:

1. Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes;
2. Using Knowledge of Structures and Functions;
3. Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas;
4. Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures;
5. Reflecting Upon and Assessing the Characteristics and Merits of Their Work and the Work of Others; and
6. Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines.

The NAD curriculum guide includes a description of the content areas, content standards, and essential learnings for each subject area in order to develop a comprehensive fine-arts program. The curriculum guide will equip the fine-arts educator with the following:

- A framework for fine-arts education for grades 9–12;
- Resources for establishing goals and uniform expectations for Adventist education;
- Support for lesson development and assessment.

We thus have the framework for a strong visual-arts program



The North American Division's Music and Visual Arts Secondary Curriculum Guide was developed as part of the goals of Adventist education as expressed in Journey to Excellence.

John F. Kennedy, a great supporter of the arts, rightly observed: "The life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction in the life of a nation, is very close to the center of a nation's purpose—and it is the test of the quality of a nation's civilization."⁹ While preparing students for God's kingdom, we must also equip them to be effective, contributing members of society. It is time for leaders at every level of Adventist education to make a renewed commitment to promote and preserve fine-arts education, thereby making it a truly relevant and meaningful part of Adventist education in the 21st century, as they seek to prepare students "for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come."¹⁰ ✍



*The coordinator for this special issue on fine arts, **Dr. Thambi Thomas** is the Associate Director of Education for the Pacific Union Conference and the author of the NAD Music and Visual Arts Survey, on which this article is based.*

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The NAD Music and Visual Arts Survey—Methodology: The author developed a brief survey that was distributed to NAD academy and junior academy principals through their respective union conference directors and associate directors of education. As the surveys began to come in, it became clear that there were considerable differences in the curriculum, organization, and delivery of music and visual arts in junior academies (grades K-9 and K-10) and in senior academies. There was no standardized nomenclature for music or visual-arts courses offered at junior academies. Time requirements for academic credit, teacher certification, and subject area endorsement expectations were also different. Consequently, between November 2006 and February 2007, a more detailed instrument was compiled and sent to senior academies. Information about music and visual-arts courses came from principals, academy Websites, and through telephone calls made to academies that did not respond. This made it possible to obtain information about each of the 109 academies in the North American Division. The completed chart for his or her territory was sent to each union conference director of education and to the secondary associates so they could have a better understanding of music and visual-arts education in their particular union. One interesting detail gained from the survey is that many academies are including technology in their art programs.

2. <http://www.k12.wa.us/curriculumInstruct/arts/research.aspx>.

3. <http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=8682>.

4. Jim Ingersoll and Thambi Thomas, et al., *The Music and Visual Arts Curriculum Guide* (Silver Spring, Md.: North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 2006).

5. Dennis Plubell, et al., *Journey to Excellence* (Silver Spring, Md.: North American Division, 2003).

6. Ingersoll and Thomas, *The Music and Visual Arts Curriculum Guide*, op cit.

7. <http://menc.org/resources/view/national-standards-for-music-education>. Downloaded July 20, 2008.

8. http://www.education-world.com/standards/national/arts/visual_arts/9_12.shtml.

9. http://www.jiverson.com/main_folder/weekly_tip.html.

10. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1903), p. 13.



for Adventist secondary students. What we need is a commitment by leadership at every level of the organization to develop a stronger visual-arts program in order to help the next generation of Adventist youth discover their God-given talents, to help them understand and appreciate the arts, and to enable them to effectively pursue a variety of careers in the arts.