

## The Arts, Literacy, and Curriculum

By Dr. Francine Morin

**Since completing my doctoral dissertation, which explored the role of professional development in planned educational change in arts education, I have been researching curriculum transformation. This study has introduced me to a rich and exciting body of theory and research encompassing ideas about the change process and factors that influence change in curriculum contexts, particularly the role of teachers and leaders.**

Woven through my research program on curriculum transformation are investigative themes targeting the implementation of new or different curricula, essential professional learning conditions supporting change, professional content knowledge construction, factors affecting curriculum transformation, and the documentation of professional learning and curriculum transformation.

Findings from various studies I have conducted have shown that some of the most critical conditions for professional learning and curriculum transformation include:

- An intensive sequence of professional learning experiences that move from the comprehension of new curriculum reforms to the development, application, and evaluation of implementation action plans
- A direct connection to school contexts
- A focus on needs of leaders, teachers, and learners
- Strategies for sustaining professional learning communities (e.g., reflection, collaboration, problem solving, dialogue, study groups)
- Ongoing support and feedback on-site (e.g., change leaders, mentors, support teachers)
- Targeted follow-up workshops and impact sessions

Dr. Wayne Serebrin, Professor Liz Coffman, and I recently conducted a study involving an innovative teacher education program for K-4 pre-service educators in a local school. We explored changing views of literacy education theory and practice, and how these changes relate to curriculum renewal and reform in literacy and arts education.

Several interesting findings emerged from these experiences. The arts are important forms of literacy that need to be included, along with language, in a broader and more interconnected approach to literacy education for young children. The use of integrated

literacy experiences and multimodal texts support children’s meaning-making. There is a reciprocal relationship between the interpretive and creative processes in children’s arts and literacy learning. Literacy learning might best be approached as a shared and collaborative venture between classroom generalists and arts specialists. More flexible and extended instructional periods are needed to support children’s multimodal literacy learning.

A large-scale professional learning initiative was launched with a ministerial-funded research project I recently conducted. The forthcoming report, *Study of Arts Education in Manitoba Schools 2006-2007: Final Report of Aggregate Results*, provides rich, critical data aimed at increasing our understanding of many aspects of teaching, learning, and leading the arts in our schools at all levels.

I have also been intimately involved in the Department’s curriculum renewal work in arts education, which was launched with a philosophical inquiry that served to guide the creation of four new framework documents for early education: one in each of dance, drama, music, and visual arts. These progressive curricula align beautifully with 21st century calls for reform in both literacy and arts learning, including an emphasis on a broad spectrum of arts learning experiences, learner-directed inquiry, creative problem solving, integration, social interaction, and a constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

Given the prominence of more traditional, discipline-based, and direct teaching approaches to the arts in many of our schools, embracing new arts curriculum reforms may present some challenges for the field. My research concurs with that of others in that it suggests that the most direct and promising route to implementing the Department’s new vision for arts education is through effective professional learning opportunities for teachers and leaders, the key agents of curriculum implementation and change.

### profile

**Dr. Francine Morin is Professor and Head of the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Manitoba. She teaches in the areas of Early and Middle Years arts education and action research methodology. Her research interests include: arts education and integration, multiple forms of literacy, professional learning, and curriculum transformation.**

