

# Antigonish students enhance cultural diversity through innovative project

Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, music teacher at St. Andrews Consolidated School is Drumming Up Nova Scotian Culture and enhancing cultural diversity with the help of a grant from Program Development Assistance Fund (PDAF). *The Drumming Up Nova Scotian Culture* project sees Grades Primary to 6 students engaged in new music instruction that is enhancing their cultural learning and experiences.

The \$4,948 grant for the project enabled Dunn MacIsaac to purchase new Mi'kmaq, Celtic, Acadian and African drums as well as percussion instruments to be used to enhance classroom performances, monthly assemblies, cultural events and public concerts.

She explains that this project is a cultural and instructional initiative that will allow all students to learn about the music, the historical meaning and use of the instruments, as well as perform pieces of music from various cultures in Nova Scotia. "Cultural drumming is a perfect fit to immerse children in local cultures since instrumental performance is an immediate 'hands-on' experience where students actively participate in making music, while raising their awareness for the rich multicultural diversity within our school, community and province," she says. "Student experiences will be heightened by learning about and through culture as they perform various genres of music."

Dunn MacIsaac further explains that the art of drumming is not only a powerful music skill, it is a great form of exercise, self-expression, intellectual stimulation, communication, acceptance of others and a powerful and cherished form of cultural music making. "Drum circles have the power to unite mind, body and spirit and leave participants with a healthy sense of self. It is a very accessible form of instrumental music for all students and will be an enjoyable and enriching experience for all students at St. Andrews Consolidated School," she adds.

The goals of the project include:

1. To supply all students with new cultural learning and experiences through the use of new African and Mi'kmaq drums as well as Celtic and Acadian percussion instruments.
2. To provide all students, especially those with developmental and intellectual challenges, the opportunity to experience the power of culture and rhythm while offering students a supportive and cooperative community setting in which to create, share and learn.
3. To provide all students with new cultural performance opportunities while developing their team building skills, creativity, musicianship and cultural knowledge.

If the smiles on the students' faces are any indication, this project has well exceeded expectations. Students look

forward to the next time they will use the instruments and some of their comments include:

- "This was the best music class ever!"*
- Following a turn as drum circle leader, one student said "I have never ever been a leader in school."*
- "Do we get to use the drums again today?"*
- Following a Grade 6 class performance, a Grade 1 student said "The music the Grade 6 students performed was awesome!" and another said "I wish their piece lasted longer. I wish they played it 100 times."*

So, what's next for these budding musicians? Performances and celebrations students will be involved with include: to name a few, African Heritage Month; a drumming showcase at the school's spring concert; International Dance Day; Acadian culture; and Gaelic Awareness Month.

The project will be evaluated through student engagement and participation, assessment and observation during in-class and formal performances, student self- and peer- evaluation and teacher self-reflection.

*The PDAF program encourages innovative program development in Nova Scotia's public schools. Co-sponsored by the NSTU and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development with an annual sum of \$200,000, it provides financial support for projects directly related to the Public School Program. Application deadlines coming up are April 1 and June 1 by 4:00 p.m.*

*For more information visit the Professional Development portal of the NSTU website at [www.nstu.ca](http://www.nstu.ca) or contact NSTU executive staff officer, Gérard Cormier at 1-800-565-6788 or 477-5621 or [gcormier@nstu.ca](mailto:gcormier@nstu.ca) or [pd@nstu.ca](mailto:pd@nstu.ca).*



*Grade Primary students at St. Andrews Consolidated School are very excited to perform using the new instruments!*

*[From The Teacher, March 2015, Volume 53 Number 5, Page 16 © NSTU 2015]*