

Teachers' Perceptions of Music Education

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Abstract

It could be argued that one of the most significant constraints within which music leaders in school work is that of curriculum. In the past 18 years, the Ontario Ministry of Education has released three Arts curricula for the elementary grades. In 1993, the New Democrat Party under the leadership of Bob Rae produced *The Common Curriculum*, followed closely by a new document in 1998 under the Harris "Common Sense Revolution" government. The expectations for music in this curriculum were considered by music education advocacy groups in Ontario to be too difficult to be taught by non-music specialists. Most recently in 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training under yet another new leadership of the Liberal government and Dalton McGinty, released the latest elementary music curriculum. This study investigated the perceived challenges and opportunities that music teachers, both specialists and generalists, have met when teaching the 2009 Ontario elementary music curriculum. Included in this research were a curriculum writer/consultant, a representative from a music education advocacy group in Ontario, and a music educator to preservice teachers. Data were collected through interviews and voluntarily contributed documents and artefacts.

Introduction

- Three versions of a provincial elementary school curriculum developed since 1995: *The Common Curriculum: Policies and Outcomes Grades 1-9, 1995*, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: The Arts, 1998*, and *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: The Arts, 2009*.
- Alliance for Music Education Ontario concerned that:
 - i) the music curriculum was too challenging for generalist teachers to deliver and required the expert knowledge of a music specialist for effective instruction
 - ii) only a handful of school boards across the province employed music consultants to aide teachers in delivering the curriculum
 - iii) there could be an inconsistent or unsatisfactory music education across Ontario
- The Ministry continues to claim the importance of arts education (drama, dance, visual arts, and music) in Ontario elementary schools.
- The revisions found in the 2009 documents could change the way music is taught in elementary education.
- This study investigated the perceptions of elementary teachers concerning the issues posed by teaching the 2009 Ontario elementary music curriculum.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

- 1)What are the opportunities and challenges posed by teaching the Ontario elementary music curriculum 2009?
- 2)What are the differences in perceptions between generalist and specialist elementary teachers of music on this issue?
- 3)What are teachers' perceptions of support desirable to teach the Ontario music curriculum 2009 effectively?

Literature

Curriculum: A Definition & Implementation

- When seeking a working definition of 'curriculum', one must first determine the context in which this word is used because there does not seem to be one precise meaning (Carl, 2009, Henson, 2010, Marsh, C, 2004, Tanner & Tanner, 2007, Wiles, 2009, Wiles & Bondi, 2011).
- For the purpose of this study, 'curriculum' is the written document *The Arts: The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8, 2009*, published by the Ontario Ministry of Education, which "identifies the expectations [overall and specific] for each grade and describes the knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire, demonstrate, and apply in their class work and investigations, on tests, and in various other activities on which their achievement is assessed and evaluated" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p.11).
- Regardless of how we define 'curriculum' it is, in essence, a plan. It is the teachers who implement it and the students who experience it that make it a reality (Marsh, 2004). Teachers are on the front lines of education and it is in their classroom that implementation of the curriculum meets either successes or struggles, regardless of how successful the planning and development was.

The State of Music Education

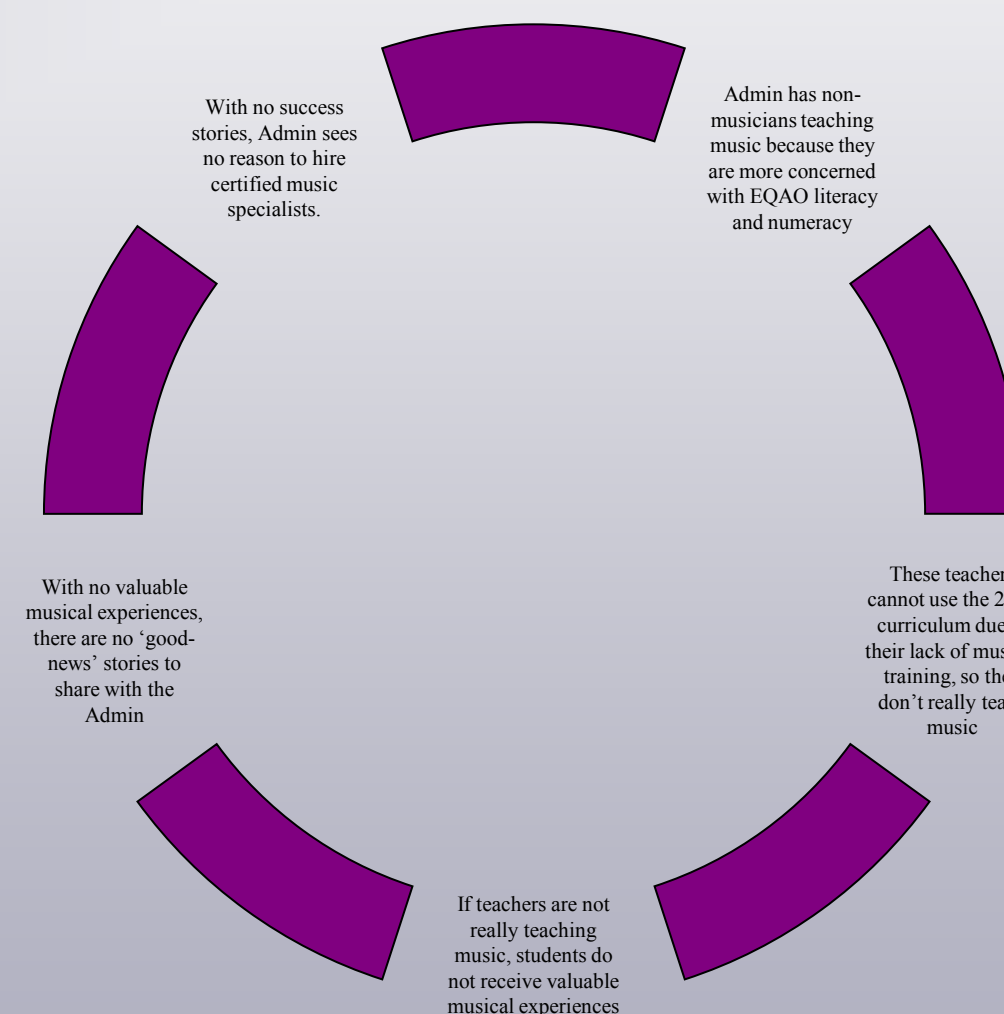
- No legislation for a music specialist to teach music education, as for secondary education in Ontario
- Lack of funding
- Lack of proper resources such as a music room with well maintained instruments
- Minimal class time (Alliance for Music Education Ontario, 2008)

Non-Music Specialist

- While there is concern here in Ontario regarding generalist teachers delivering the music curriculum, studies in the UK done by Holden & Button(2006), Hennessy, (2000) and Mills (2005) reveal that while some non-music specialists are uncomfortable teaching music, there are others who, with support from a music consultant and continued experience, feel confident teaching primary music education.
- Mills (2005) also feels that it could be damaging to students' image of themselves as musicians if there are special arrangements made for music education such as a music specialist required to teach music. It is her belief that if all students must *learn* all subjects, teachers should then *teach* all subjects.

RESULTS

Cycle of Poor Music Education in Some Schools



"There is a legal obligation to teach music. The curriculum music components in the curriculum document (2009) is legislation, a legislative document by the Ministry of Education saying that teachers have to teach this [music]. So many teachers are capable of teaching music, but they don't, yet they magically come up with a mark on the report card for something they are not teaching. This is a mysterious thing that nobody talks about because nobody cares about it. Parents don't put pressure on school and school boards, and principals just turn a blind eye because the vast majority of their teachers don't have music background so they just let it go... The boards do what they want to do and the Ministry of Education turns a blind eye to it. To me, it is completely illegal that these schools are not teaching music"

Quote from Interview: Instructor to Preservice teachers in Ontario.

RESULTS (cont'd)

Main Thoughts

Each participant developed a key thought in their discussions:

Curriculum Writer/Consultant: The curriculum process had more writers and was given more money for curriculum development than any subject area.

Instructor to Preservice Teachers: The 2009 elementary music curriculum and music education in Ontario are undemocratic.

Music Education Advocate: Music education across Ontario is inconsistent and varied.

Teacher 1: Music teachers are not protected as French teachers are, therefore can be deemed surplus and the music program is shut down.

Teacher 2: Music literacy is a complicated form of literacy that requires higher level thinking, parallels language literacy, and is underestimated and undervalued in schools.

No generalist teachers came forward to be interviewed for the study. Is this significant?

"Music literacy parallels language literacy in many ways...Music literacy is a higher-level thinking, one that is underestimated, and undervalued in the schools."

Quote from Interview: Teacher 1

CONCLUSIONS

- Music educators in Ontario continue to believe that the elementary music curriculum is challenging for generalist teachers of music to deliver
- Music instruction to pre-service teachers could be improved
- Music specialists are pleased with the 2009 elementary music curriculum
- OMEA and other music education organizations play important roles in supporting music education in Ontario

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