Music Education in Saskatchewan: An Outsider's Perspective

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Introduction

In this chapter I attempt to describe aspects relating to music education in Saskatchewan

during the brief time I lived and worked there as a faculty member involved in music education

at one of the two universities within the province. My perspective as an outsider is intended not

to provoke judgement about music education in the province but to raise some of the issues and

tensions that I encountered in my short sojourn there. As a member of the Faculty of Education

at the University of Regina, I supervised student teachers, adjudicated music festivals, was a

member of the board of directors for the Saskatchewan Band Association, and was involved in

community music making. Prior to my arrival, I had heard numerous positive things about the

music programs in Saskatchewan, much of which was centred on band instruction in the schools

and within the communities. I had often heard about the Police band, the Kiwanis bands, and the

UNIFEST music festival at the University of Saskatchewan. These institutions represented and

continue to represent strong traditions that seem to be well known both within and outside the

province. Without a doubt, band instruction is the recognized mode of music education in the

province with smaller pockets of choral, string and general music instruction.

In Canada, post-secondary music education occurs either in the Faculties of Education or

in Schools/Faculties of Music. Saskatchewan reflects this divide. At the University of Regina

music education is housed within the Faculty of Education while at the University of

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Saskatchewan, in Saskatoon, music education is in the Department of Music, which is further housed within the larger academic unit of the College of Arts and Science. At present, the University of Saskatchewan has three full-time faculty members in music teacher education while the University of Regina has none.

Prior to my arrival at the University of Regina, I was advised to downplay my performance experience (especially band experience) during my job interview at the Faculty of Education. I was not surprised because this perceived need to downplay certain music skills and experience is not uncommon when applying for post-secondary music education positions. Often such applied music expertise is viewed with suspicion—a confusion as to where one's priorities lie. I came to Regina with considerable music experience as a performer, a private teacher, and an educator in the Edmonton Public Schools (music and non-music subjects). In addition to undergraduate and graduate degrees in performance, I had both undergraduate and graduate degrees in music education. I am a musician who is a music educator. Or am I a music educator who is a musician? I quickly became aware of the philosophical and pedagogical differences in approach to music education that were evident within this province. At the University of Regina the emphasis was not on music education, but on arts education while the University of Saskatchewan adhered to the traditional music programs. I felt continuously reminded of this schism during my brief time in Saskatchewan. I use the remainder of this paper to describe and discuss the shift in emphasis toward arts education in the educational system in Saskatchewan.

Arts Education, Not Music Education

Taylor (2001) describes the conditions that made it possible in the fall of 1982 to initiate an Arts Education program at the University of Regina: "A climate of heightened awareness of the

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need for change and reform in arts education both provincially and nationally provided some of the incentive for innovative thinking in arts education" (p. 9). More specifically, she states "the Arts Education Program started first as a response to existing conditions and as a way to address concerns with the manner in which the arts were being taught in classrooms" (p. 11). Additionally, "[a] 1981 *Fine Arts Interim Report* called for a vast broadening of education in the arts under the name of 'aesthetic' education" (p. 10). This philosophical focus would be strengthened over time and, as a result, currently represents a significant component of the Arts Education program at the University of Regina.

One of the conditions that acted as a stimulus for initiating such a program was "the release of the *Fine Arts Report*, [which] provided the necessary confirmation that we at the Faculty of Education had a "window of opportunity" in which to make a move towards the development of an arts education program" (p. 10). The focus at the University of Regina would be on five arts areas: Dance, Drama, Literature, Music, and Visual Art. "Literature was included as an art form to give greater emphasis to creative writing and poetry" (p. 11). It could also be viewed as a strategic move to add legitimacy and strength to the "fine" arts offerings.

To comprehend the significance of this shift, it is important to review the official Government of Saskatchewan website, *Saskatchewan Learning*, and its description of Arts Education (retrieved from http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/branches/curr/evergreen/index.shtml: October, 2005):

Aim: The Arts Education program has one major aim: to enable students to understand and value arts expressions throughout life. This one aim describes the main outcome for students and the primary reason for including Arts Education in the core curriculum for all students.

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Philosophy: The Arts Education curriculum has been developed for all students in the province. For this reason, the program is broad in scope and includes a diverse range of arts experiences. "Arts" includes fine arts, popular arts, traditional arts, crafts, commercial arts, and functional arts, with the understanding that there is much overlap among these categories.

Three Components of Arts Education: The Arts Education curriculum is structured, through the inclusion of the three following components, to achieve a balance in focus. The components are not to be segregated but are intended to be interwoven throughout the program.

The Creative/Productive Component: This component includes the exploration, development and expression of ideas in the language of each strand or art form. In order for an activity to be creative, the student must be actively engaged in a critical thinking process. The student will learn where ideas come from, and how ideas can be developed and transformed. Reflection, both ongoing and summative, is an essential part of the creative process and allows students to evaluate their own growth in their creative endeayours.

The Cultural/Historical Component: This component deals with the role of the arts in culture, the development of the arts throughout history, and the factors that influence the arts and artists. It includes the historical development of each art form. In addition, it focuses on the arts in contemporary cultures, and includes popular culture and various cross-cultural studies. The intention of this component is to develop in students an understanding that the arts are an integral aspect of living for all people.

The Critical/Responsive Component: This component enables students to respond

critically to images, sounds, performances and events in the artistic environment, including the mass media. Students will become willing participants in the interactive process between artist and audience rather than passive consumers of the arts. The curriculum suggests a seven-step process to help teachers guide discussion about works of art (for example, visual art works, musical compositions, or dance and drama performances). The process is intended to move students beyond quick judgment to informed personal interpretation, and has been adapted for each of the four strands. A description of the process appears in the introductory section of each strand in the curriculum guide.

Saskatchewan Content: The curriculum encourages students in this province to explore the rich and exciting arts community that exists here. It is important that students become familiar with their own artistic heritage and surroundings. If they study Saskatchewan arts, they will recognize themselves, their environment, their concerns, and their feelings expressed in a diverse range of materials, styles and art forms. They will learn that Saskatchewan artists deal with personal, cultural, regional, and global concerns, and that the artistic accomplishments in this province are cause for celebration.

This curricular approach is reminiscent of the tenets of comprehensive musicianship (Abeles, Hoffer, & Klotman, 1984). From this perspective, students receive a holistic music education where the focus is not on performance, but requires its students to listen analytically to music and to understand the cultural and historical context of the music they are studying (performing). There are a number of similarities that exist between this provincial curriculum document and that of the American *National Standards for Arts Education* (MENC), implying

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that music education in Saskatchewan is heavily influenced by what is happening south of the border in the United States.

Change, Conflict, and Tensions

Putting aside for the moment the change in emphasis on arts education versus music instruction, it is important to look at the state of longstanding traditional music programs in Saskatchewan, specifically, the band programs. Simply because the Ministry of Education introduced a new emphasis for the province, one should not assume it was accepted with enthusiasm. While band instruction is mentioned under the provincial Arts Education curriculum documents (Secondary Level: Band 10, 20, 30 Curriculum requirements) and is the primary field of music taught in the urban high schools, there is no detailed provincial band curriculum. However, as a result of an initiative taken by a few Saskatchewan band educators, a National Voluntary Curriculum and Standards for Instrumental Music (Band) has been created and is presently sanctioned by the Canadian Band Association. Included in this document are (1) administrative standards for band program implementation, (2) curriculum standards, and (3) curricular and technical standards for wind and percussion instruments (Harris, Bueckert, Cochrane, & England, 2005). As is the case with any curriculum document, the challenge is in matching what is found in such documents with the day-to-day realities of teaching. There are strong-willed and committed music educators who are not about to allow the further demise of traditional band programs within the school system.

At the same time, although the government website and the curriculum documents from the Ministry of Education clearly espouse an arts-based curriculum rather than a music education curriculum, while working within an Arts Education environment in Regina, I was continuously

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aware of the philosophical and pedagogical differences that existed within the music education community itself. Setting aside the dilemma facing music as a distinct subject within the arts, there was a significant difference of opinion as to how best to introduce students to the arts (specifically music). In addition another issue rises to the surface, specifically that of generalist versus specialist music teachers. There are two issues here. The first issue speaks to the nature of the roles and levels of expertise of music educators who fall into the category of either generalist or specialist and the second issue relates to the place of music within the arts curriculum.

The Arts Education programme at the University of Regina is a 5-year programme where undergraduate students are introduced to five arts strands (Dance, Drama, Literature, Music, and Visual Art). Students in this program vary, some with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, some with little or no experience in one or more of the strands. From this viewpoint, the focus is on aspects of pedagogy with considerable less emphasis on subject area content knowledge. The elementary area influence is evident. This begs the question: "Can one have effective pedagogy while possessing limited subject knowledge?" The second issue asks the question "What kind of music education should students receive (in the province of Saskatchewan)?" It soon became apparent to me that those who were involved in traditional band programs wished to have little involvement with Arts Education programmes and people were divided on the issues. From my perspective as a newcomer to this setting, it would seem that both pedagogical camps could have learned much from each other.

Some solutions may be found with those music educators who work together to define what music education could or should be. Similar to most other provinces, Saskatchewan has a provincial music educators' association that hosts an annual conference and a well-organized provincial band association. The Saskatchewan Provincial Music Educators' conference is

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similar in format to many such conferences in Canada and features professional development workshops focusing on advocacy, traditional and new 'tips and tricks'', student performances, and the requisite trade fair. As is the case with many provincial conferences, there is a strong band presence because of the number and type of conference presentations, the performances throughout the conference, and the content of the trade fair. There has been no research component as a part of the conference format and at this point in time, a research forum might help the conference participants to discuss contentious issues, aspects of change, and the realities of music education in Saskatchewan.

Challenges Facing Music Educators

The challenges facing Saskatchewan are not unlike the challenges facing music educators across Canada.

- What does it mean to be a music educator in the twenty-first century?
- Where does the traditional band program of the past decades fit?
- To what degree do we teach music *through* performance in band? What are the limitations of this model?
- How might our advocating for band programs, rather than music programs, influence the
 perception of the various stakeholders (parents, administration, students, and the general
 public)?
- Is it realistic or even pedagogically sound to expect generalists to teach music? If this is indeed the case, what might the consequences be?
- What are the consequences of adhering to traditional music programs when the country is

beginning to diversify in distinct ways?

While there are aspects of music education in Saskatchewan that are unique, many of the issues and challenges that emerge from this prairie context are similar to those faced by all music educators in Canada.

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