

## **A Response to “Music Education in Prince Edward Island: A View Beyond the Bridge” (Shelley M. Griffin)**

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I connected immediately with Griffin’s first sentence, as growing up in Ontario, I too was fortunate to encounter many opportunities in music education and after two dozen years teaching in the publicly funded school system, moved to completing my doctorate while teaching in a faculty of education. I would like to reflect on the similarities and differences between PEI and Ontario, as well as the questions raised at the end of the paper.

Ontario and PEI are similar in that both provinces developed new Arts curriculum within a recent time period, Ontario in 1998 for elementary grades, and in 1999 and 2000 for secondary grades. Similarly, the elementary music policy document had little in suggested teaching strategies, while the secondary policy documents had initial training for teachers as well as specifically designed curriculum units. Schools in both provinces have various grade structures, and I might add we have many split grade classrooms also. There are several ways to become a certified music teacher in Ontario, and our certification is for specific grades, i.e. primary/junior, junior/intermediate, and intermediate senior. Some have a general B.A., some have a Bachelor of Music, and both take a one year B.Ed. after completion of their undergraduate degree, while some take a concurrent B.A./B.Ed. Once certified, teachers are able to take Additional Qualifications

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courses and take three-part courses to become a music specialist in Ontario. Ontario's secondary schools mainly schedule daily music by semester, while there is a huge variance in the amount of music instruction time at the elementary level. The elementary music time is based on individual school time tables and resources. The Ontario Ministry of Education is also reviewing curriculum documents in a new process of a five year cycle. This means that The Arts documents in Ontario are also being reviewed and updated within the next two years. We would all agree that 120 minutes per cycle is ideal, however, this is not reality today in most Ontario elementary schools.

Over the past decade Ontario has experienced school board amalgamations and thus restructuring. Budget restraints, as well as the new calculation of funding for staffing, have resulted in very few elementary music specialists still teaching music, as most have been reassigned to general classroom positions. I envy the fact that PEI still have specialized music teachers in their elementary schools. In a survey (Reid, 2001) of Ontario school board superintendents of curriculum, 34 of the 72 boards responded, and none of the responding boards had a coordinator of music or arts. While there is an emphasis on music curriculum recently in Ontario, music texts, instruments, and support resources have often not been updated in schools, and many music teaching positions have disappeared. We are relying mainly on general classroom teachers to teach our rigorous music curriculum at the elementary level. In addition, the current emphasis on language and mathematical literacy has resulted in few school boards providing professional development through holding music workshops or summer institutes in music education.

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A larger population base in Ontario does mean that we have a larger number of music educators than PEI. We also have a half-century tradition of a very strong Ontario Music Educators Association (OMEA) that publishes the Recorder four times a year, and offers music workshops throughout the province for teachers. Our O.M.E.A. sits at the table of several Ministry of Education committees and as a result, music units have been recently developed for elementary and intermediate grades. Readers might be interested in accessing two internet sites providing Ontario curriculum units – [www.curriculum.org](http://www.curriculum.org) and [www.omea.ca](http://www.omea.ca). I wish we still had music specialists in elementary schools in Ontario – as my parents, myself and my children experienced. It is most unfortunate that my grandchildren are the first generation not experiencing a music specialist in their elementary years.

Teaching in themes with subject integration has also been happening more often in recent years in Ontario, as classroom teachers find they can combine several expectation strands from various subjects under one theme unit. I view this as positive since there might be a better chance of some music being taught by the classroom teacher. As well, children should experience music as an integral part of all school life – and not a subject reserved for a special time and teachers. Therefore, it is up to us as music educators to make that extra effort to work with curriculum writing teams, and dialogue with educators of other specific subjects. This is our challenge given the number of responsibilities of music educators.

In the context of today's youth, i-pods, internet downloading of music, and all the technical and electronic devices to create music - we must address popular music. In any subject we know that good pedagogy starts with what the students are interested in, i.e.

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connecting the new learning to student lives and then taking students beyond their present understandings. We have an advantage of a great “hook” in the subject of popular music. There is much we might learn from our students and about our students’ interests in music by introducing popular music as a topic. This is another challenge of music educators – to make that extra effort in writing curriculum and courses to see how we might incorporate popular music.

The final question raised was one that inspired my doctoral thesis, i.e. attempting to find out what student needs were in music. This may be partially answered in incorporating some popular music in our curriculum. We can also provide students with an opportunity to express their backgrounds and needs in music by setting aside specific journal questions in our music classes. The journal questions can be structured around listening, performing, or creating. Our challenge is creating time in the music curriculum for the journaling, creating the specific questions, and then making the time to read student responses.

Music is a very powerful bridge between countries, provinces, time periods, and people. While music educators may not influence budgets or school structures in our provinces, we are in a special place of influence in our students’ lives through how we chose to direct our efforts in and through music.