

A Response to “Canadian Music Education Policy Development”

(Eric W. Favaro)

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The role of policymaking in revitalizing and rejuvenating music education in Canada, as well the identification of the necessary conditions for establishing operative policies to support music in the schools are critical conversations that have been effectively opened for the profession by Favaro in his thoughtful chapter. In this response, I build upon the ideas presented and share the lessons I am learning through my involvement with the arts curriculum and policy development processes currently underway in the province of Manitoba.

Smith (2002) reminds us that one of the shortcomings of policymaking stems from inadequate philosophical discourse, without which policies can have little direction. Philosophy, most directly stated, is a critical exploration and statement of our beliefs about the nature and value of music. At the collective and internal level, Manitoba music educators like their counterparts in other provinces, have remained somewhat splintered within special interest groups, hampering their ability to articulate a commonly held set of precepts and principles for guiding, developing, and enacting relevant school music programs. Recognizing that it is virtually impossible to make policy decisions without articulating a philosophical position, the process of renewed support for music education in Manitoba began with a philosophy-based decision-making process.

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In 2003, a ministry-appointed committee of eight leaders and experts representing all levels of schooling, universities, four arts disciplines, various arts education organizations, and community arts groups developed a vision statement for the arts in education. Committee members were knowledgeable about the arts and educational issues in general and able to work together towards the development of a single, unified philosophy that could serve the profession of arts education as a whole. In preparing the statement, the committee reviewed the current theory, research, and pedagogical literature in the arts, as well as arts curricula from various Canadian and international jurisdictions.

Favaro refers to the statement, *The Arts in Education*, which articulates the nature and value of the arts, as well as a fresh description of the arts as they exist in the larger community. Goal statements make clear how the arts contribute to the overall education of the student, as well as embody the new and traditional content deemed worth teaching in the arts. A section on the value of the arts in education serves to justify why it is important to teach the arts in the context of contemporary schooling. A constructivist philosophy of arts teaching and learning is also presented along with a set of principles to further guide instruction. And finally, there are recommendations about how curriculum might be organized; addressing both the need for teaching the arts as independent disciplines, as well as in integrated, interdependent contexts.

Noteworthy is the idea that the work of a ministry-appointed committee in Manitoba seems to have been an effective strategy for raising awareness about the arts in education, and a powerful driving force for change. Being fully immersed in educational issues, not only music and/or arts specific issues was critical, allowing writers of the

vision statement to respond to clarion calls for reform in arts teaching and learning in the broader educational context. This collaborative research and exploration of ideas also served to strengthen our convictions as music and arts educators, as well as our potential to have impact on policy decisions. Manitoba music educators, working in concert with their colleagues in the arts and those that hold the primary authority for education in the province, are now armed with current, well informed action plans and clarity about what policy reform is needed.

In the process of policy development in Manitoba, we are also learning that it is very important to invite input from everyone who will be involved in implementing and/or supporting the implementation of that new policy. By way of a survey, the education ministry in Manitoba invited feedback from various stakeholders including classroom teachers, school administrators, arts specialists, trustees, parents, university faculty, and arts organizations. Responses to the vision statement were overwhelmingly positive and the consensus was high that it holds much promise for providing new directions and support for arts education in Manitoba.

Interestingly, the arts emerged as a higher priority for the province the following year and new funding was provided by the ministry to establish a team of arts educators to lead the process of imagining the vision in action during the 2004-2005 academic year. For each of music, visual art, dance, and drama, lead writers were contracted and teacher curriculum development committees established. I was contracted as the Project Manager and oversaw the development of new curriculum framework documents in each of the arts for Kindergarten to Senior 4. A further and significant allocation of funds by the

ministry has now resulted in a three-year appointment of two full-time arts consultants to continue working on the new directions for arts education in the province.

Another lesson learned in Manitoba is that the time for establishing new policies to strengthen and sustain music and arts programs in schools may be most ripe during periods of new curriculum initiatives in the province. Furthermore, we are also convinced that new policies have an increased chance for success if they are based on authentic needs in the schools. Favaro acknowledges the importance of research in policy development; however, no rigorous studies have been conducted to give Canadian arts educators' baseline information regarding the state of the arts within their provinces' educational systems. Recognizing the need for serious and persuasive data, a study is being initiated which aims to: provide a provincial profile of the state of the arts in Manitoba schools (rural, urban, suburban, and northern); determine the scope and implementation of arts curricula and programs; provide the foundation for new beginnings for arts education in Manitoba schools; and use the results to identify areas in need of improvement, guide resources and equitable access, develop policy, and chart a course of action for the next decade (Morin, 2005).

Strategically, the research is proposed as a partnership between the University of Manitoba, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, Manitoba Arts Council, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, and Alliance for Arts Education in Manitoba. Participatory action research has been selected as the research methodology to ensure input, collaboration, and commitment from all stakeholders, as well as the development of action plans for improving arts education practice. Data will be gathered

at the school-division level so that reports can be generated to allow for informed policy development and reform at both the local and provincial levels.

As new curriculum and status studies in the arts are being generated in Manitoba, it will be important to facilitate policymaking as the institutional vehicle by which our philosophy and advocacy efforts are put into action in schools. As Favaro suggests, it is ultimately the government and school divisions who will decide how to fund arts programs, the range and kinds of arts learning students experience, and the kinds of evaluative measures to which students, teachers, schools, and the curricula will be subject. Outreach to local school divisions is viewed as absolutely essential so that they can be supported by leaders in their efforts to develop new policies, programs and budgets for the arts. The ministry, universities, and sustainable arts organizations in the province will now have a pivotal and powerful role to play in advancing policymaking, coordinating, and leading change in the arts. Favaro's overview of policy frameworks will be invaluable to leaders in attending to this important task.

In summary, philosophy and policy, well supported by strategic research, advocacy and outreach, are probably best understood as integrated systems for examining and directing our professional work as music educators. It must also be recognized that the task of creating new policy frameworks with any provincial signature must be tackled by, and will only result from the aggregate efforts of each governing body, institution and organization concerned with music and arts education. The partnership model is a potent one, and integrated ways of working are generating successful strategies for realizing music and arts education policy in Manitoba.

References

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