

## **Futures! “Short Rides in Fast Machines”**

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While this conference is “a first” in virtue of its intentions and its “shape,” Canadian music education has a significant history of striving to understand and debate the nature, value, and status of our art of music education. For me, personally and professionally, and in comparison to the histories of music education in other nations, Canadian music education has been a “Short Ride in a Fast Machine” (as composer John Adams titles one his compositions).

Today’s world is moving at a blistering pace. It is accelerating, expanding, and reinventing itself every hour. All areas and forms of education are trying to keep pace. What will the future hold for music education?

It seems fair to say that professionals in all fields face a complex set of related challenges as they attempt to carry out their central missions. One word that is commonly used to summarize today’s challenges is “globalization.” Globalization is an intricately paradoxical phenomenon; “it” is so powerful, so ambiguous, and so polymorphous that no single metaphor will do. Globalization is partly about the ability of high-speed computer communications and high-speed travel to mobilize international capital, production, distribution, and the consumption of goods and services. Today’s extraordinary connectivity has caused the collapse of many geographical and cultural borders, an enormous increase in new migratory populations, unprecedented collaborative research, and a mass back-and-forth transfer of media – including all sorts of “music” media. Thus, “much education” can no longer be conceived as having inevitable ties to its meaning in one nation, or one location, or in traditional senses of “the

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school,” or “students.” All cultures, meanings, and institutions are morphing as people migrate geographically and electronically. Accordingly, globalization opens vast opportunities for the creation of new hybrid forms of cultural products and productivity.

On the other hand, globalization has not resulted in a fair sharing of wealth, here or abroad. This is partly because the main motivations of globalization—more efficiency for more profit—have penetrated and compromised many socially oriented governments to the extent that job security, pension plans, health coverage, and public education have been diminished. More specifically, the extreme economic competitiveness of the global marketplace, and the concomitant need for corporate efficiency, have caused many educational institutions to take a “right turn” toward capitalist values and business models of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. Conservative politicians, business leaders, policy makers, and taxpayers now see “education” as a commodity to be bought, sold, controlled, “standardized,” and evaluated in relation to simplistic corporate “bottom line” results.

Nevertheless, there is hopeful news. The best and deepest benefits of globalization will only come about if educational opportunities become far more available and far better for everyone. Education, well conceived and well carried out, raises people’s dignity, wellness, and economic productivity. Education fuels innovation through creative, interconnected local, regional, and global technologies.

Because globalization depends on horizontal networks and interactions, we are being given a “teachable moment” as students use horizontal networks in their local schools, and across borders, to learn about knowledge making, culture making, media making, and personal meaning making in the world context.

Globalization is also pressuring higher education to address community needs and social ills, not just academic needs. This is causing universities to reinvent their missions in relation to local economic, social, and racial problems.

Clearly, globalization is dramatically altering the ways all people live, learn, love, interact, work, and create self-identity and self-respect. Marcello Suarez-Orozco (2005), a renown scholar of globalization, explains what this means for education:

An education for globalization should aim for nothing more – and nothing less – than to educate ‘the whole child for the whole world,’ . . . An education for the global era must engender life-long habits of body, mind, and heart. It must tend to the social and emotional sensibilities needed for cross-cultural work: empathy and learning with and from others who happen to differ in race; religion; national; linguistic, or social origin; values; and worldviews. (p. 212)

What does this imply for music education? I suggest that music education in the global context requires media-rich, humanistic teaching-learning situations in order to: engage more and more diverse student populations in collaborative artistic projects by combining their educated musical understandings with new sources; teach each other; develop multiple musical/cultural/artistic perspectives; and learn how to value, but move across, culture preferences. As I have written elsewhere, I believe we need to focus on enabling our students to achieve self-growth, the capacity to create their own joy, and to develop empathy for others who differ in race, religion, social origin, values, and worldviews. Creatively reconceived, music education—in schools, around schools, beyond “schools,” and by-and-for people of all ages—

can and must enhance all people's abilities and passions for lifelong learning, personal well-being, and the "inward alignment" they need to be personally and professionally successful in our advancing, global world.

To me, many Canadian music teachers have sought and achieved different versions of these aims as defined by the worlds of their times. This conference is another step along the pathways that our predecessors worked diligently to prepare for us. Now it is our turn. We must continuously renew our profession while living in and through the shorter rides and faster changes that our futures surely hold.

### References

Suarez-Orozco, M. (2005). Rethinking education in the global era. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87(3), 209-212.