

Contemplating a Future for Canadian Music Education

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The writers in this E-book have zeroed in on a given topic and provided their best description of the phenomenon through their particular lens; they have made a concerted and systematic effort to do their part in analyzing various aspects of music education albeit through a number of limiting forms, such as geographic, sociological, historical, and/or traditional genres. As we, the readers, attempt to draw conclusions as to what the current state of the art is from their varied writings, we see a fairly clear picture from their limited perspectives as to what music education has been and we can determine some glimpses as to what the current state of the art is. We use the term *limited perspectives* here not to denigrate any writer, but to acknowledge that no one person or group can have a sense of a phenomenon in as broad a context as we might like to think. We all wear symbolic blinders as we choose the point of focus in the experiences we describe and each of the chapters in this book represent the values and lens of that particular author.

Looking Back

Various writers here remind us that there is no doubt that in its earliest days, public education in Canada was heavily influenced by the ruling British Empire and the church, and the songs of both predominated the entire curriculum of the first part of the twentieth century. Music was a critical component of the elementary school curriculum

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and was used primarily to inculcate and give permanence to the traditional norms and beliefs of the colonizing empire. However, post-World War II saw a marked difference as Canada began to grow into its own country, as its economy began to flourish, and the advent of the television brought the entire world – or at least the American world – into middle class Canadian living rooms. Canada began the move from almost an exclusively rural and sparsely populated country to an increasingly urban society, at least in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, and Ottawa, for example, where many of the policy makers lived and made decisions. By the late 1960s music education had developed into a specific subject discipline with a wave of support for instrumental music in urban areas on a large scale that coincided with the bulge of the baby boom.

The massive social and economic changes favoured, emphasized, and in some ways, replicated, the band movement in the United States—for the most part, without the marching band idiom. Certainly we saw in these chapters that there were pockets of orchestral, choral and general music programs, but the cross-country checkup showed unequivocally that the predominant form of music education in the Canadian secondary school since the 1960s was and continues to be band instruction. There is no doubt that music educators began to respond to societal changes and budget pressures of the late 80s and early 90s by introducing alternative music instruction programs such as guitar, jazz band, and in some large centres, music education of various ethnicities. However, these programs have not become the centerpiece programs—the concert band still takes centre stage in most cases. On the other hand, music education in the elementary schools, always spotty at best unless there was a dedicated or specialist music teacher, seems to be declining even further as the back to the basics movement, complete with standardized

testing in Language and Math jamming the curriculum and taking the main stage of attention.

Networking across the Country

The act of pulling this set of papers together resulted in the development of better—but not perfect—communication and accessibility, as well as connective, multcentred and multivocal lenses focusing on various aspects of music education and the following sections review the accomplishments of the writers under these descriptors.

Connectivity

There is a common thread running through all of the papers in this book that is connective, and consists of a rich web of links that spans both the breadth and depth of Canada. We attempted and succeeded to some extent in bringing music education researchers, practitioners, creators and performers together to become more intensively involved in a horizontally integrated and democratic research model that enables the equality of all voices at the table. The researchers herein provide a model of leadership that extends the original focus further than the original intention to ensure that the voice of each representative in the music education network is included. While we have a ways to go, we are working to develop an inclusive integration amongst all participants who represent the diversity of geography, style, and musical and creative interests of Canada.

Multicentricity, multivocalizing

The work demonstrated in this publication has been designed to ensure the examination of some vital questions, and it is these questions that will require music education structures in the future to be adaptive and dynamic in response. As we continue to explore answers and investigate the challenges in looking toward actions, we become increasingly aware that the emphasis in our work cannot afford to focus on the traditional eurocentred and western influences on music performance and music education. We must be open to the prime *raison d'être* of music in any society, and especially in Canada—new developments, new ways of communication and expression, multicentricity, and multivocal as we listen and respond to the new voices. This emphasis on inclusivity will continue to force music educators to consciously investigate and develop, not only new creativities in music, but also in the way in which we approach models of research and action. The networks that grow out of this work have the potential to recast our norms of viewing citizenship, ideologies and norms through investigating creative *scales* perhaps through modules of music creation, performance, response and education.

Internationalization

As we who are the current music educators meet colleagues and share our experiences in music education from around the world, we expect that new forms of communication will form to enhance and expand the network, both within Canada and internationally. Over the past few months as we have developed and implemented this publication, we have experienced a growing interest in this project nationally and internationally. There have been discussions across the country from other researchers

and practicing music teachers who would like to join in such a community where we are aspiring to learn more about music education in the curriculum, and act upon that learning. However, not only are Canadian music educators interested in this model of research development, it appears that other varied audiences would like to share in the discoveries of this cluster, and look to ways of developing research clusters internationally. The reflections in this book from our international colleagues provide thoughtful insight as we think of what could be.

Communication strategies and accessibility

The success of future development in music education on a national basis, depends on aspects of flexibility and multiple communication strategies. Our country is vast and music education by its very nature as a component of arts education, is a vital yet small part of the curriculum in schools and community across this nation. Some areas of the country have few resources and communication tools and the potential for networking is limited and occasionally impossible. It is essential that music educators, researchers and musicians in every part of the country, from the traditional to those pushing the envelope and from the remote to the heavily populated, be able to equally access and discuss ideas such as raised here with the writers. Accessibility and inclusion for developing new scholars and practitioners as well as those excluded by distance or belief system has been and must continue to be a key mandate of the research network that is evolving. Multiple communication tools and flexibility will be essential to ensure equity of access as will expectations of motivation and creativity on the part of those already connected and advantaged to ensure openness and inclusion.

The key factor in the success of change and innovation in music education is accessibility and shared imagining. The people currently making policy need to hear the voices of those who live across the country and in remote area, and while several universities across the country and music education organizations have funded and encouraged the participation of various scholars to allow the start-up of the cluster, it is imperative that we include the missing voices—those who create and perform in the Yukon, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and other remote areas of the country such as Labrador, and northern communities in the provinces. In addition, those who bring different voices to the table from under-represented communities, ethnicities, and other circumstances are significant to the intelligent examination of any issues in music

What Could/Should Music Education in Canada Be Like?

In this book, we have found that music education has largely developed in this country according to norms of societies other than own. In fairness, however, what we are coming to know as a Canadian identity and society is only just beginning to emerge, and it may yet to be seen that to be Canadian is to have a unique identity, not one molded but certainly influenced and enriched by our multiple aboriginal ancestries, our diverse immigrant population, our past ties to the United Kingdom, and living next door to the United States which although smaller geographically, has almost ten times our population. Perhaps the timing is ideal to reconceptualize music education as it could and should be.

R. Murray Schafer in a recent letter to us stated:

I certainly think it is time to assess where music education is going in Canada. As you know, I have argued for more creativity in the music [class]room but with very few exceptions I don't think with much success. I find greater interest in other countries for a creative emphasis...I have recently had some recent conversations with some young teachers in Canada and the interest in creativity *seems* to be growing – which is good.

It is not possible to even consider that any music educator could/would argue with the notion that musicians, artists and teachers need to be spontaneous and creative if music as an art form on our society is to survive. And this book shows clearly that those of us who are music educators, while intelligent and thoughtful about learning, have been more conservative and traditional in our approach to music education as we try to develop programs for the masses, rather than the interested or obviously talented. One only has to read these chapters to realize that fact! Music education has and continues to be dominated by conservative and traditional ideologies, some imposed by public sector constraints of the public educational system.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the ongoing creation, performance and attendance to vibrant, performing arts (*i.e.*, music, visual art, dance, drama, and poetry) are essential to the generation and regeneration of society and its people's quality of life. Just as the arts represent and contribute to any society's values, so too are they an indicator of societal health. As the creation, performance, and attendance to the arts flourishes, so too does societal growth. Likewise history would show us that when the arts wither and die, so too does society's fabric and morale. Historically, music has been

one of the most visible of the performing arts, mainly through live performance. And, the various forms of music continue to tell the stories of past and present society while foreshadowing our future. The health of music as a performing art is as essential to the life and health of a people as is water, sustenance, and shelter.

With the advent of broadcast media over the past 100 years, and now the ever-present inundation of music heard and performed everywhere and at every moment in both public and private spheres, music plays an increasingly vital role, not only in the quality of people's everyday lives but as a gauge of societal well-being. It is essential that the continuous creation of music be encouraged through support of artists, and that citizens have ongoing opportunities, not only to listen but to experience music as knowledgeable consumers who use music (and other arts) to celebrate the realities and possibilities in contemporary life. Each and every person in society participates in music making or consumerism of music to a significant degree, and music education holds a critical and pivotal position in ensuring the future creation of new artists, genres, and informed responders.

Traditional researchers have frequently only conceived of music education in the realm of the school system, however a number of writers in this book remind us that learning about music education occurs in both public and private spheres—in the community, in the home, on the street, via the media, and so on. It is essential for the future health of any society and, especially for our health in Canada, that music education must occupy a vital and fundamental position of consequence throughout society, and that we as researchers link to music educators who are creators, teachers, performers, and audience.

More noticeably and in the public sphere, creators, composers, and performers cannot make a decent living at their art; many are forced to survive through alternative means of employment – some even become teachers. And these forms of employment either makes them unable to continue creating, or limits their creativity by forcing them into the alternative careers that pay the bills. Statistics Canada cites that the average fulltime, professional artist makes about \$8,000 per year—well below the poverty line. As a result of financial pressures, many professional artists find themselves unable to generate or perform contemporary music that records the statements of the present and looks to the future possibilities.

Coincidentally and simultaneously, it should come as no surprise to note then that recent indicators in educational practice and in the educational literature show that without a doubt, music education programs are at risk. This is a prime concern because in public schools—which provide the only universally accessible source of music education for all Canadian citizens regardless of means—funding has been cut, trained music teachers are no longer being hired, and many students often go through an entire elementary and secondary education with little or minimal music education.

At the same time, mass consumerism of music is branded, funded, and promoted by media giants who focus on market share and corporate profits rather than establishing any sense of commitment to the generation of creators and informed listeners. The proliferation of pop culture in music is designed exclusively to generate profits, often not for the creator, but for the marketer.¹ The impact of this new music on society or the relevance to Canadian citizens is of little concern to the corporate world. The corporate

¹ See for example, the recent arguments between the artists and the recording companies about downloading music from the Internet.

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world has little interest in developing informed and educated citizens, or the role of music (and the other arts for that matter) for furthering societal understanding.

There is an urgent need to examine ways and means of ensuring a vital and vigorous future for the continued creation, performance and response to Canadian music, as one of the essential art forms this nation needs. One significant way to begin to make a contribution to Canadian identity is to:

- Place an emphasis and give credence to the development of creativity as a main cornerstone of music education;
- Bring music education researchers, policy makers, and practitioners from schools and communities together who represent the various fields in music education to examine the state of creativity of music education in this country in schools and community. Use the findings to create cross-country networks of music education researchers and practitioners in schools and communities.

And this is what we tried to do as a starting point to contribute to music education in Canada. About 60 music educators, researchers, and musicians came together to start a discussion that focused not on their primary research interests, but on the state of music education specifically. The contributors to this publication reported on various aspects related to Canadian music education, and in spite of the fact that some chose not to see Canadian music education in a broader construct outside of their own academic interests, their commentary provides thoughtful and informed discussion.

The common theme and goal for all in this book is the potential outcome – an informed discussion of music education, present and past, to support the future growth of music education in Canada, as well as a renewed effort to network with each other across the country to support music education in schools and community. Other outcomes came out of this initial project, besides the development of this book. In deciding to continue the discussion two years hence at Memorial University, we will work to

- Ensure involvement of composers and performers in the discussions and recommendations about music education;
- Establish leadership nodes within the network to communicate and disseminate findings;
- Use varied resources to communicate and to make music nation-wide, including traditional and contemporary genres;
- Attend to the rich and diverse cultural mosaic of Canadian citizenry as well as creative artistry when considering music education practices and possibilities, specifically ensuring that members of Canada's aboriginal communities are included in all discussions;
- Ensure that relevant research in music education is underway on a national scale to support the rebirth, development, and valuing of contemporary Canadian music;
- Make recommendations to policy makers and monitor actions taken.

The continuation of this project past the publication of this book will ensure that we preserve and respect past and current music heritages, as well as stimulate, learn about, and respect the creation of new Canadian music. The findings in this book serve to consolidate current knowledge of music education and may help develop into a national research cluster that brings together music education researchers with public, private and community educators in collaborative and systematic efforts to examine the challenges of creating, mobilizing and sustaining vital music education programs in Canada.

While there are pockets of outstanding music education researchers spread throughout the country examining a wide variety of topics, rarely does their work come together in a common focus. Our work individually is important and has common purpose that supports the goals of this proposal, but as a connective collective, the potential power and impact of this network may serve to make a difference.

Summary

The strength of the various papers in these sister volumes of E-book and printed text is that while they were intended to focus on the past and present of music education, the outcomes of what these readers have accomplished will be far broader and inclusive than music education by itself. This collection of papers will serve to support the development of networks across Canada that can help to establish both research and practical priorities in music creation, education and research from musicians, practitioners, and researchers. This project has developed into a Strategic Research Cluster in Canadian Music Education, funded now by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and although we only had a short-term plan in the

beginning, so much progress in music education research has taken place in a short period of time, and so much momentum is in place that we see that a long-term plan is required. Already, even in its infancy, there has been tangible notice and visible impact across the country, and a solid potential for collective, connected growth.

Music education serves to educate and support both creators of, performers, and responders to music. It follows that healthy music education programs are those that encourage learning musicians to be creative, to take risks, and experiment with sounds and silences; this is essential to develop new musicians for the continuation of a dynamic and vital society – music education programs serve to help develop composers, musicians and responders to the music. But what would happen if we took what Thomas calls “a walk on the wild side” and imagined music education in totally different ways? What if we practiced what we believe about the importance of music education to society?