

Reflection From a University Student's Perspective

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This past Spring I had the privilege of working with Carol Beynon and Kari Veblen on the organization of the *Music Education in Canada: What is the State of the Art?* symposium held at The University of Western Ontario, where I recently graduated with a degree in music education. Being part of the organizational committee and assisting with the running of the events provided me with the unique honour of being the only undergraduate student in attendance. I was thrilled to be part of such an experience, witnessing engaging discussions and insightful presentations.

When all was said and done, there were thirty-six different issues in music education that were addressed at the symposium, ranging from provincial considerations, ensemble specific methodologies and social and cultural phenomena affecting music programs. However, there appeared to be one general theme that emerged from a number of the presentations—a theme that I believe should be of major concern to current pre-service teachers, as it quite probably will define music education in Canada in the 21st century. Are we as music educators clinging desperately to an outdated canon?

Provincial reports presented by representatives of each province consistently made mention of “alternative” music education programs, i.e. classroom and extra-curricular ensembles that deviate from the traditional choral/band/orchestra program. Such ensembles cater towards popular music, rock music and music from different

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cultures. The presence of these programs suggests two issues that need to be addressed. Firstly, assuming that these programs have arisen from a need to accommodate the eclectic musical preferences of today's youth, are we doing enough to encourage student involvement in music education programs through execution of more varied courses of study? Secondly, are we doing enough to prepare pre-service teachers for the challenges of a music program that may include everything from Bach to the Beatles, steel pan, electronic media and gamelan?

While some schools in Sweden, for example, have adopted rock-centric curricula in lieu of traditional music programs, many schools in Canada exist at the opposite end of the spectrum, where non-traditional forms of music education are conspicuously absent. Perhaps these traditional programs are more in line with a "Canadian philosophy" of music education, but more likely, this is probably the result of a commitment to the classical art by those entering music teacher programs. Perhaps the question that is stirring in the minds of music teachers today is not "Are we sufficiently exploring other kinds of music?" but rather "Do we *want* to explore other kinds of music?" It was clear from comments made during the symposium that those in attendance were highly in favour of a continuing commitment to the classical art. Even those that lead the way in endorsing the merits of studying non-traditional repertoire and performance practices still vouched for the continuation of conventional forms of study.

If it is decided that music education should explore alternative forms within the school system, then music education departments in universities across the country must do more to prepare pre-service teachers for the challenges they face. The typical music education student is customarily proficient on a conventional instrument and has little

exposure to the world music and popular/rock music. While undergraduate courses exist as options for interested students to explore, they leave the pre-service teacher with only a smattering of the vast amounts of information on the subject. Furthermore, as these courses are not compulsory, many pre-service teachers escape university without once having to expand their musical horizons. This combination of factors results in a teaching force incapable of sufficiently handling the demands of alternative music education programs that may await them.

This matter is a national concern. Music educators at all levels (pre-service, current teachers, and professors of music education) need to engage in open dialogue about the direction music education in Canada must take. This symposium was a great step in ascertaining details about the current “state of the art,” but now we must venture forward and explore the avenues that music education will travel along in the coming years. Regardless of whether or not a shift in paradigm occurs, the issue must be addressed such that pre-service music teacher programs can properly prepare students for the possible generalist roles that await them.