

National Music Education Associations: Pitfalls, Problems, and Possibilities

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Introduction

The provincial overviews appearing in this E-book and sister printed text reveal that the quality, and in some cases the existence, of music education in Canada's public school system is facing significant challenges. These challenges range from a lack of funding for trained music specialists in the elementary systems to a general public that does not value music education. In addition, in many provinces, secondary policies discourage students from participating in music programs, either overtly through budget cuts or an emphasis on acquiring job-related skills, or covertly through an increase of mandatory non-arts related credits and the "lumping" of music with other compulsory subject choices such as business and family studies. Indeed, even in those provinces where the government espouses the value of the arts, an alarming trend of shrinking enrolment in secondary music courses is often evident. A combination of government cut backs, utilitarian educational philosophies and a focus on science and technology has fuelled this problem from the 1960s to the present day.

This story, however, is not all "doom and gloom." Music educators and members of the public who care deeply about music education can seek solace in the fact that there are national organizations "out there" that are devoted to upholding the values of a

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quality music education and ensuring that music education retains its place in Canadian schools. Or can they? Just how useful are these national music education organizations? By drawing on concrete examples from well-known Canadian music education organizations, this chapter calls attention to some of the pitfalls and problems that hinder national music education organizations in this country. Finally, it will outline some of the possibilities these organizations hold regarding the future of music education in Canada.

Pitfalls and Problems

Diversity

Its vast geographical size, federal bilingualism policy, relatively isolated populations and widely differing economical regions have given many of Canada's provinces distinctly cultural "flavours." Further, Canada's policies on multiculturalism have ensured that many immigrant populations have retained their distinctive ethnicities. Not only do different education policies exist in response to the needs of each respective province, it is not uncommon for education policy makers to account for the needs of a wide diversity of cultures within a relatively small area. We see this within such cosmopolitan cities as Toronto and Vancouver. Coupled with this is a movement by many music education organizations to align themselves with other arts educators in an effort to create a strengthened collective voice. Specifically, the question arises of whether or not a national philosophy of music (or arts) education can be sufficiently universal to appeal to all of Canada's peoples and policy makers while still being flexible enough to accommodate the needs and values of each province? Or, if an organization

embraces a vision of music education that accounts for the educational desires of many different stakeholders, can that vision remain coherent and purposeful?

The National Symposium on Arts Education (NSAE) was confronted with the later dilemma during its attempts to develop its *Policy Guidelines for Arts Education*.¹ These guidelines were to be endorsed by arts and arts Education organizations from throughout Canada as a non-legislated document intended to support arts curricular reform in all provinces and territories. The original vision statement was presented at the fourth NSAE in Ottawa in July 2000. Both the document and the conference were entitled *Sharing the Vision*. The document, however, was not ratified until the 2001 Calgary NSAE—which was subtitled “How Can We Dance Together Without Stepping on Each Other’s Toes?”—where, with the help of professional facilitators, consensus was finally reached over its content.

The difficulties in writing a framework for arts education in Canada cannot be underestimated. *Sharing the Vision: A National Framework for Arts Education in Canadian Schools* not only had to be sufficiently broad to ensure that all arts disciplines could be encompassed under its mandate—a formidable task in itself—it also had to be flexible enough for ratification by arts educators, arts organizations, education organizations, and members of the arts industry, all of which have different vested interests in arts education. Perhaps this is why such a broad range of philosophical underpinnings is evident in *Sharing the Vision*. Platonism, MEAE, praxialism,

¹ The NSAE was organized in 1997 to create a resolution urging the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to undertake a Pan-Canadian Arts Project. This project would create a government-supported framework for arts in education, enabling the arts to be acknowledged nationally as part of “basic education.” The Pan-Canadian Arts Project was promoted as a way to legitimize arts education in Canada’s public schools, while supporting and (hopefully) underwriting the on-going changes to arts-centred curriculum throughout the country. When the Council halted all further Pan-Canadian projects, the NSAE created their own national framework.

utilitarianism and Multiple Intelligence theory are all present in the work.² This blending of philosophies was necessary in order to reach a consensus among symposium delegates, but is problematical in terms of presenting a unified theory as the basis for arts education advocacy. Given that the NSAE's second symposium was concerned with effective communication, the marriage of so many different schools of thought regarding the value of arts education is anything but straightforward. Still, the document was ratified by twenty national and provincial arts associated organizations, including Canadian Music Educators' Association, the Canadian Society for Education Through Art and The Writers Union of Canada.³ This document was ultimately reworked and submitted as *Policy Guidelines for Arts Education in Canadian Schools* to the Canadian Conference of the Arts during a conference held by that organization regarding arts education in Canada. Happily, it met with the CCA's approval.

Conversely, the slogan "Making Music Makes You Smarter" was, until recently, the call to arms of the Coalition for Music Education in Canada (CMEC). Founded by music industry executives, the slogan, which was based on some rather dubious conclusions, became a recognized catchphrase in households across Canada due to the release of a nationwide Public Service Announcement campaign in 2004. Misleading and poorly researched, the slogan assigned a strictly utilitarian value to music education that rubbed many music educators and music education organizations the wrong way.

² National Symposium on Arts Education, *Sharing the Vision: A National Framework for Arts Education in Canadian Schools*, <http://www.artsed.ca/index.html> (accessed March 1, 2005).

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

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Educational Structures

Historically and officially, the federal government has restricted its involvement in public education to supplying non-designative educational funding to the provinces in the form of “block” payments and incentive grants designed to promote the expansion of vocational education in public elementary and secondary schools.⁴ Because the organizations discussed here are concerned with music education on a national level, it is important to note there is no national body governing elementary and secondary education in Canada. Section 93 of the British North America Act of 1867 delegates the responsibility for education to the provinces, creating a decentralized Canadian education system.⁵ This allows for distinctly different educational systems in each of Canada’s ten provinces and three territories. Currently, Canada’s only national educational alliance involving members of government is the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CME,C) established in 1967.⁶ The CME,C was an initiative of the provincial ministers of education, *not* the federal government, created to facilitate interprovincial communication and cooperation in educational policy-making.⁷ The CME,C does not report to the federal government, as currently no federal ministry is responsible for elementary and secondary education. While the CME,C acknowledges that all provinces in Canada share some universal educational values, it also holds that each province has distinct needs.

⁴ Ronald Manzer, *Public Schools and Political Ideas: Canadian Educational Policy in Historical Perspective* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003): 100-111.

⁵ British North America Act 1867, sec. 93, <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/const/loireg/p1t1-3.html> (accessed April 4, 2004).

⁶ This comma is retained in order to distinguish between the acronyms for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and the Coalition for Music Education in Canada (CMEC), which will be the subject of Chapter 5.

⁷ Manzer, *Public Schools and Political Ideas*, 201-202.

The decentralized structure of Canada's education system results in the lack of a federal counterpart with whom national music education associations can work. To whom should issues and proposals regarding the purpose, status and improvement of Canada's music education systems be addressed? If education is a provincial matter, should the responsibility for music education rest at the provincial level and if so, are national organizations that promote music education redundant? Without a clear vision of the answers to these questions, national music education organizations seem purposeless. The struggle with these issues has been exemplified through the Canadian Music Educators' Association struggles to affiliate with the Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia Music Educator Associations (MEAs).⁸ Efforts to affiliate with these provinces were actively undertaken in 1977 when CMEA's relationship with the MEAs was scrutinized by "some very refreshing and provocative minds."⁹ At the time, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia MEAs felt they were an adequately strong presence for music education within their respective jurisdictions and implied that CMEA was redundant.¹⁰ CMEA believed that the reluctance of these provinces to officially affiliate was a loss of both revenue and solidarity for CMEA, a loss that prevented the implementation of key projects CMEA wished to undertake. Under the leadership of President Paul Murray, CMEA made a critical examination of its structure, resources and past efforts with the aim of improving

⁸ Duane Bates, "Editorial," *Canadian Music Educator* 17, no. 1 (1975): 3. Members in affiliated MEAs pay one price for membership in both CMEA and their respective MEA. In 1975, membership in the MEAs of Ontario, British Columbia and Manitoba totalled 2100. Only 600 of those members belonged to CMEA. Affiliation of those three provinces would result in a significant increase to CMEA's coffers. One example of such unrealized projects was a fully bilingual *CME* that would unite French and English music educators. Although Bates did manage to solicit some French language articles and, for a short period, have the president's message and his editorial translated, the cost of a bilingual *CME* ultimately proved too high. See Duane Bates, "Editorial," *Canadian Music Educator* 20, no. 3 (1979): 2.

⁹ Paul Murray, "The President's Palabra," *Canadian Music Educator* 19, no. 1 (1977): 2.

¹⁰ This created a paradox: The MEAs could not be convinced to affiliate until CMEA proved itself as a national organization, but without the affiliation of these MEAs, CMEA lacked the resources to do so.

CMEA's image as a *national* organization. However, it was not until 1982 that CMEA was able to convince Ontario and Manitoba to finally affiliate. Not coincidentally, CMEA President D.M. Humenick had admitted in 1981 that, structurally, CMEA was operating on the format of a large provincial association and there inevitably arose duplications in areas such as membership, resource services, publications and professional development, some facets of which should be the responsibility of the provincial associations.¹¹

New by-laws, some of which were conceived of in 1977 meetings, were passed addressing this issue, and CMEA began to examine how it could influence and support the development of a national policy for the arts—"a policy which recognizes arts education as a national cultural activity."¹² In the process, CMEA developed an official Aim and accompanying Goals that reflected a national position on music education. British Columbia, however, would not join the CMEA fold until 2004, indicating there is still some question of the need for stronger MEAs to draw on CMEA's limited resources.¹³

Other organizations, most notably the Coalition for Music Education in Canada, have focused less on developing national policies, devoting resources to grassroots movements designed to raise public awareness of the importance of music education. For example, CMEC's booklet *Why A Music Specialist* (2000) gives a brief overview regarding the potential impact of relying on a non-music specialist to deliver music education, while *Semestering* (2000) highlights how this cost-effective system weakens music programs. *Semestering* also offers pragmatic suggestions for retaining students in a

¹¹ D.M. Humenick, "From the President's Desk," *Canadian Music Educator* 23, no. 2 (1982): 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5-7.

¹³ More on CMEA's limited resources to follow below.

school music program should a semester system become a non-negotiable reality. CMEC has also assembled and distributed the *Music Advocacy Kit*, facilitated an annual Holiday Tuba Fest to raise awareness of music education, and created an executed a radio and television based nationwide public service announcement campaign centring around the “Making Music Makes You Smarter” slogan. Most recently, their nationwide “Music Monday” movement, whereby music classes from throughout Canada coordinate musical performances of a designated song at a specific date and time has garnered national media attention. All of these activities have been made possible through the extensive funding CMEC has secured, initially from the music industry, and, more recently, through major corporate donors such as Holt Renfrew. No other national music education organization has been able to secure the large amounts of money needed to execute this kind of grassroots movement. The very fact that CMEC has the resources to facilitate a grassroots movement indicates that the utmost care must be taken when crafting its advocacy materials.

Choice

When the Canadian Music Educators’ Association was founded in 1959, it was the first national music education organization in Canada. Not anymore. In 1982, CMEA boasted a membership of over 2600.¹⁴ By 2001, membership was less than 960, with approximately half of the membership arising through Ontario’s affiliation with CMEA.¹⁵ Though this can be partly attributed to member apathy (to be discussed below)

¹⁴ Joan Therens, “President’s Message,” *Canadian Music Educator* 30, no. 5 (1989): 3.

¹⁵ Lee Willingham and Lee Bartel, “The Canadian Music Educators’ Association . . . So What!” *Canadian Music Educator* 43, no. 4 (2004): 15-16.

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one likely reason for a drop in membership is the abundance of choice now available to music educators regarding national music education organizations, each with accompanying membership fees. In addition to a myriad of provincial music education organizations not affiliated with CMEA, such as the Ontario Band Association, they include, but are not limited to, the Kodály Society of Canada, The Canadian Band Association, the Canadian Federation of Registered Music Teachers, the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors and the Coalition for Music Education in Canada. With so much choice available to music educators, music education organizations must be specialized enough to ensure that members feel the organization can directly benefit them, without being so specialized that they do not draw enough members. Conversely, the organization must appeal to a broad membership, each member of which feels that the organization is somehow essential to the betterment of music education. Striking this balance, especially in an age of choice, can be difficult.

Financial Resources

Combined with declining numbers is the perpetual problem of adequate finances with which to undertake long term projects in support of music education. For example, by 1996 CMEA was running out of money. In 1998, former *Canadian Music Educator* editor Brian Roberts told members “to be blunt, we have tried several times to get professional fund raising professionals to help out and every single time the first words out of their mouths is that our members simply don’t pay enough to make any external strategy work.”¹⁶ The membership fee of twenty-five dollars was devoted to sustaining

¹⁶ Brian Roberts, “Editorial.” *Canadian Music Educator* 40, no. 1 (1998): 2.

its three publications: *Canadian Music Educator*; a research edition; and a newsletter. Barely enough to feed a family of four at McDonald's, Roberts told the membership,

some seem to expect so much and then claim that it is not delivered. Try the same claim at McDonalds. They don't deliver gourmet food for their prices. If we want the CMEA to remain as a strong and useful organization then we, as members, must simply look at a reasonable fee to make it happen.¹⁷

Indeed, many organizations are keen to register as non-profit organizations so that tax receipts can be given to their members as incentives to join. Others, such as the NSAE and this research network, rely on government grants. Roberts concluded his appeal for more funding by stating that CMEA members needed to realize that they have ownership over CMEA and then "recognize that the fiscal realities are tied to the willingness of members to support their organization for the collective benefit of all."¹⁸ Lack of financial resources has prevented CMEA from undertaking many of the constructive ideas conceived of by its members, including a bilingual *Canadian Music Educator*, implementing strategies to move outside of "preaching to the converted" and large scale movements to lobby policy makers. Only the CMEC, with its reliance on generous corporate sponsors – a potentially double-edged sword in the best of circumstances—has enough funding to carry out significant advocacy endeavours. And even they, as a charitable organization, are not officially permitted to lobby governments.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Apathy

Wayne Bowman once wrote in an issue of *Canadian Music Educator*, that the important task of crafting advocacy arguments . . . is one that is usually delegated to distinguished experts . . . Meanwhile, the primary concern of the rank and file is to get on with doing what they love to do: an understandable, yet troublesome state of affairs.¹⁹

Membership apathy and apathy on the part of music educators in general can be difficult for even the most highly organized association to combat. All too often, the majority of music education associations rely on the efforts of a few passionate, devoted and often overworked individuals to keep the vision going. At best, membership apathy ensures an unfair and unrealistic workload for those capable individuals who have taken the effort to make a difference. At worst, goals become impossible to accomplish because of the lack of human resources. For example, *Canadian Music Educator*, which is distributed each of the thousands of members of CMEA, has a long history of practically begging its members for contributions. In past editorials, Roberts has asked “why is it that the membership is content to let the universities continue to lecture to them? Clearly writing does not come easily to many. But there are large numbers of highly skilled and experienced teachers who could offer much to our profession.”²⁰ He implored readers to

¹⁹ Wayne Bowman, “Justifying Music Education: Contingency and Solidarity,” *Canadian Music Educator* 35, no. 6 (1994): 27.

²⁰ Brian Roberts, “Under New Management: The *CME*; For Whom and By whom?” *Canadian Music Educator* 29, no. 4 (1987): 7.

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try your hand at communicating your experiences and concerns. Start with a letter to the editor . . . Send in suggestions as to what topics you might like addressed. Send in names of contributors you know will offer worthwhile material . . . [work] with another colleague who might be less intimidated by the writing process. Tell us your greatest successes. Tell us how you did it. Send us just the last funny story from the mouth of a Grade 3 pupil.²¹

One can almost visualize the word “PLEASE!” at the end of Roberts’s plea. In addition, opportunities to work with other agencies have often been passed over by music education organizations because the manpower to undertake activities outside of those planned by the organization was not available.

Possibilities

Umbrella organizations

Umbrella organizations consist of a collective of organizations that make a formal commitment to work together to share resources and coordinate activities. One organization is usually the nominal head of the group, and is referred to as *the* umbrella organization. These organizations are meant to facilitate a sense of community amongst groups with a common cause and, in addition to creating a pool of human and financial resources, they create a larger group of bodies. This may in turn attract more public attention. Given the pitfalls and problems listed above, specifically, those surrounding the

²¹ Ibid., 9.

issues of choice, funding and diversity, increased communication between and pooling of the limited resources held by our national music education organizations seems in order.

In fact, this promising endeavour is currently being undertaken by CMEA. After much reflection, CMEA is in the process of redefining itself as Canada's music education umbrella organization. In 2002, then CMEA president Barbara Graham admitted that "we need to create a new association for music education," and that, "to date [CMEA has] not collaborated in meaningful and ongoing ways to articulate possible directions for music education in Canada."²² This new CMEA will unite such organizations as the Kodály Society of Canada, The Canadian Band Association, the Canadian Federation of Registered Music Teachers, the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors and the International Association of Jazz Educators, Canada. Dennis Tupman clarifies the role CMEA will take in leading such a collaboration:

If the CMEA is interrelated with all the other music education organizations in Canada, then we can speak with authority at all levels. If CMEA wrestles with the cutting edge research in our field, if the CMEA voices current philosophy in music education that may even be international in scope, then we can have authority as an organization . . . I do not mean to imply that the other important groups like Orff and CBA . . . would cease to exist. Rather we would find ways to network, work, and when necessary speak from a common and authoritative ground in a coordinated and effective manner.²³

²² Barbara Graham, "Celebrations and Reinventions," *Canadian Music Educator* 44, no. 2 (2002): 4.

²³ Dennis Tupman, "CMEA, Wither Goest Thou?" *Canadian Music Educator* 44, no. 4 (2003): 44.

CMEA has taken steps to forge such collaborations by co-planning its first provincial/national conference since 1993.²⁴ Entitled “MUSIC: Made in Saskatchewan, Made in Canada,” the conference joined CMEA and the Saskatchewan Music Educators Association and took place from October 30 to November 1, 2003. Letters about the conference were sent to national and provincial associations across Canada and drew together representatives from Canada’s myriad music education associations. A national symposium strand, entitled “Uniting Our Voices,” ran parallel to the conference.²⁵ Facilitated by Tupman and Eleanor Newman, the two day Symposium sought to:

- Explore common issues and concerns and prioritize them
- Craft a vision for working collaboratively with music organizations across Canada
- Develop structures for inter-organizational communication and collaboration
- Determine collaborative projects
- Determine immediate goals
- Develop long-term goals and projects
- Develop structures for the exchange of resources, expertise and services
- Share current strategies for advocacy in music education
- Develop a strategic action plan to work together
- Discuss timelines, goals, targets groups for action, and next steps for combined projects.²⁶

²⁴ Barbara Graham, “Moving Forward,” *Canadian Music Educator* 44, no. 3 (2003): 4.

²⁵ Jane Cutler, “Uniting Our Voices,” *Canadian Music Educator* 45, no. 3 (2004): 4.

²⁶ Ibid.

CMEA's emphasis is now on *synergy*: "working together will create a synergy more powerful than any work we do as individual groups."²⁷ Talks with other national and provincial organizations also took place at the 2004 OMEA conference.²⁸ The result of all of this networking and community building appears to be a greater interest on the parts of the unaffiliated provinces. British Columbia, long a much-desired target for affiliation, and the Yukon officially joined CMEA in 2004.²⁹ Prince Edward Island and both French and English music education associations in Quebec are also in affiliation discussions with CMEA, making Alberta the only province not currently considering affiliation.³⁰ Several national organizations, including the International Association of Jazz Education, Canada and the Kodály Society of Canada have officially aligned themselves with CMEA and its goal to create a national, authoritative voice.³¹ As CMEA continues to experience success in its goal to unite Canada's music education organizations, music educators draw that much closer to bridging the gaps that exist between us. If CMEA succeeds and Canada's music education organizations are able to come together in one untied voice with the resources to make that voice be heard, the potential for a valid and meaningful action that strongly impacts the continuation and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Gregg Bereznick, "Forging and Sustaining a National Voice For Music Education in Canada," *Canadian Music Educator* 46, no. 1 (2004): 5.

²⁹ Gregg Bereznick, "Is There a 'Greatest Canadian?'" *Canadian Music Educator* 46, no. 3 (2005): 5.

³⁰ Dennis Tupman, "Uniting Our Voice? So What!" *Canadian Music Educator* 45, no. 4 (2004): 44. Note the reference to Bartel and Willingham's seminal editorial quoted above. Alberta's stance is official. Tupman reports that CMEA Vice-President Allan Anderson "got a standing ovation at the Alberta Orff Conference in Calgary when he spoke of working together and thinking more nationally and even globally in music education."

³¹ CMEA, "Introducing the Family: Music Education Organizations in Canada," *Canadian Music Educator* 45, no. 4 (2004): 8-9.

growth of quality music education in Canada's schools will exist for the first time in our county's history.

Grassroots movements

No music education organization devoted to sustaining music in Canada's public school is likely to desire the label of "preaching to the converted." However, due to a lack of resources and failure on the part of more apathetic members to bring others "into the fold" this is very much the case with most organizations. Informed grassroots movements for public music education are vital to convince the general public, who can then apply pressure to policy makers, of the value of music education. The Coalition for Music Education in Canada appears to be in the best position to implement such a movement. Ingrid Whyte, CMEC's latest executive director is forthcoming about her lack of knowledge in the field of music education. Inspired to work with CMEC after seeing the impact music education has had on her twin daughters, Whyte is inviting of criticism of and new ideas for CMEC.³² She has described herself as a "sponge," willing to discuss matters of music education with those more knowledgeable than herself.³³ If Whyte continues in this vein, she will be able to infuse CMEC with perspectives on the value and purpose of music education, allowing the organization's messages to reflect more current and sound visions of music education. Here is a prime opportunity for organizations such as CMEA who do not have the funds to publicly advocate for music education to communicate with and influence CMEC's advocacy strategies. These two organizations, one with ample resources, the other with ample ideas grounded in the

³² Currently, both of Whyte's daughters are enrolled in McGill University's music program. One is majoring in performance, and the other in music education.

³³ Ingrid Whyte, in discussion with the author, May 26, 2005.

practice of music education, would make a formidable marriage, especially if CMEA is able to forge alliances with other national and provincial organizations. Such a union would allow for Whyte's vision of a more diverse, proactive approach to advocacy, while empowering CMEA members and providing CMEA with the opportunity to truly make a difference in the realm of advocacy.

Research Networks

If there is one theme that runs throughout the possibilities for national music education organizations discussed here, it is the importance of communication between all stakeholders who support quality music education in Canada's public schools. Research networks, such as the one associated with this text, embody that spirit of communication and exchange. Though ultimately agreement on specific benefits music education imparts to students may be needed in order to affect real support for music education at all levels, solidarity begins with an understanding of another party's point of view. As Bowman has elegantly stated, this professional solidarity, "requires neither uniformity nor unanimity . . . these are more trouble than they're worth. The case for music education is not compromised but strengthened by its capacity to be many things and serve many ends."³⁴ Research networks that provide fertile ground for this exchange *and* that are accessible to all who wish it are vital resources for the future of music education in Canada.

Conclusion

³⁴ Bowman, "Justifying Music Education," 29.

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The challenges to Canada's national music education organizations are significant. Gone are the days when the choice of which organization to participate in was limited to one or two choices. Money is tight, and music teachers are hard-pressed to find the time and energy to become involved. Each parent wants what is best for his or her child, whether that be math instead of music courses, or a music education that reflects personal musical values. However, there is hope on the horizon. The recent movement by Canadian music education organizations to work together holds the possibility of drawing together a large cross-section of educators, researchers, fundraisers, policy makers, parents, marketing experts and more, which can create a pool of financial and human resources hitherto unheard of in this country. We need to set aside our differences in order to educate each other on our own histories and points of view, and remain open-minded as we negotiate a path to a coherent vision of and strategy for music education. After all, how can we expect those who do not have a sense of why music education is important to listen to us if we cannot respect our own beliefs on the subject? The groundwork is currently being laid for this specific purpose. Let us not allow this golden opportunity to go to slip away.

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