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WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A QUALITY MUSIC PROGRAM?: A BRIEF FOCUSED INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT: *This study demonstrates the use of BFI by describing the characteristics of a quality music program from the perspective of music teachers, researchers, graduate students and administrators at an international music conference.*

KEYWORDS: Music Program, Brief Focused Inquiry, Music Teacher

INTRODUCTION

Brief Focused Inquiry (BFI) is a strategy designed for researchers working in professional contexts who are undertaking small-scale studies with limited amounts of data (Andrews, 2016). The goal of BFI is to produce initial findings that will establish the basis for future large-scale studies. A researcher investigates an important issue in a field with participants who have expertise in a particular area. BFI employs a two-part structure, that is, Binary Form (AB) which is used in music composition for creating small-scale works. Binary Form can be transformed into larger scale forms: Ternary Form (ABA) by repeating the A section; or into Rondo Form (ABACA) by adding a C section. The use of Binary Form is consistent with the notion of transforming an exploratory study into a full-scale large study.

Conceptualization

Context

Historically, music in education has been defined by Western-European tradition which involves an audience listening to extended works performed in a concert setting by a symphony orchestra, chorus, concert band, and more recently, the big band. School music replicates the Western concert tradition: students learn music repertoire based on Western notation, perform concerts for their parents and the local community, and compete in provincial, national and international festivals (Woodruff, 2005; Snell, 2009). The large ensemble approach to music instruction has worked so effectively in schools through its size, which is congruent with a typical class of thirty to forty students, and by its nature, which consists of families of instruments which provide opportunities for small-group learning. For example, a concert band is comprised of three families of instruments – brass, woodwind and percussion – which can be taught all together, or divided into smaller ensembles for sectional rehearsals. However, this model of instruction encourages music teachers to function as conductors and focus on concerts and competitive festivals (Farish, 2011; Shively, 2004). The considerable amount of the time required to organize concerts and the constant pressure on music teachers to achieve a high performance standard with their ensembles dominates the school curriculum. This situation leaves limited time for alternate approaches to music instruction, such as small group learning (e.g., chamber ensembles), peer teaching, individualized instruction, and new forms of music instruction, such as computer software programs and the internet.

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As students with diverse backgrounds increasingly enroll in music programs, traditional music education has been called into question because of its conservatism and unwillingness to confront controversial issues, such as racism, gender equity, and alternate styles (Bartel, 2004a; Bowman, 2005; Elliot, 1994). There are popular music styles, such as rock, hip hop and rap, which represent the contemporary music of young people, and there are world musics, such as jazz (United States), reggae (Caribbean), klezmer (Romania), flamenco (Spain), mariachi (Mexico), and throat (Canada) music, which are more congruent with students' pluralistic backgrounds. There are also new formats for creating music, such as digital synthesis and remixing, and group composition e.g., garage bands) which allow students to provide input into the creation of the music itself (Green, 2002). In contrast, traditional music programs allow for limited student voice in musical decision-making which is a major criticism of the large group format (Bartel, 2004a; Farish, 2011; Shively, 2004). Conversely, music teachers face challenges teaching popular music. Candidates are accepted into teacher certification programs based upon a music degree from an accredited undergraduate program which in most cases requires knowledge of the theoretical and historical aspects of Western classical music and performing skills on one or more band or orchestral instruments (Roberts, 1991; Woodruff, 2005). Consequently, most music teachers lack expertise in popular and world musics which raises anxiety about teaching them in an authentic manner and often results in tokenism when they are required to do so to comply with government curriculum guides (Countryman, 2009).

Research Action Probe (RAP)

This writer attended the Music in Schools and Teacher Education (MISTEC) Commission of the International Society for Music Education (ISME) Bi-Annual Conference in Frascati, Italy. There were several discussions on the changing nature of music education programs from the dominant Western-European format of large ensemble instruction (band, choir or orchestra) to a broader range of course offerings - guitar, jazz ensembles, swing choir, chamber ensemble, rock band, steel drum, computer music, and world music courses. With the increasing diversity of courses, participants expressed concern about the quality of the new courses and the evaluation of them by external agencies. Their concerns were re-formulated as a Research Action Probe (RAP); that is, the key question "What are the characteristics of a quality music program?" Since my presentation focused on the findings of a visioning exercise (Andrews, 2008), the conference participants were asked to respond using the same exercise.

Research Process

Currere was employed to explore participants' views on the characteristics of a quality music education program. Currere, a visioning exercise, is a research protocol developed by the reconceptualist William Pinar (1980, 1988, 2000, 2004) which focuses on examining past practices, imagining an ideal future, and reconciling the two with the realities of the present. Twenty-six (26) out of thirty-two (32) attendees at the research presentation voluntarily submitted their worksheets from the currere exercise. They consisted of elementary, secondary and post-secondary music teachers, teacher educators, researchers, graduate students, and administrators. They had from one to thirty-four years of experience and represented sixteen countries.

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Realization

Analysis of Data

Re-create the past: Many of the participants indicated that they experienced music in their home environment and community during their childhood and youth. They had ongoing opportunities to engage in music lessons and participate in community groups, such as local bands and city orchestras. These ensembles were not readily available to students in most of schools at that time. School music was limited to singing folk and popular songs, although there were opportunities for public performances. A participant recalled: "School music was sung in class with participation in a large city-wide choral festival. I still remember the songs."

While home and community levels of music experiences were positive, school music experiences were sometimes negative. This tended to occur where classes were teacher-directed, musical styles and activities were limited, and the focus was on "singing selected school music from the book." A more significant problem for many of the participants was the emphasis on the Western-European tradition in schools – music that was 'foreign' to their own culture. A participant noted: "We learned songs of western culture. There was seldom Chinese music."

Imagine the Future: The participants articulated an ideal scenario where music is the centre of the school curriculum and where students have ready access to a variety of programs. Because students perceive music uniquely, music class should be a place where students learn and experience a "diversity of musical cultures." Positive and divergent musical experiences enable students to develop their personality and confidence.

Through this, teachers will become resources and facilitators of student learning activities and experiences. Music learning commences with what students know and what they can do. As a participant wrote: "I'd use the music they have in their environment and move them to different levels of experience." However, to ensure that music is central to the life of a school and the student is at the centre of learning, school administrators must be supportive in tangible ways: for example, music programs must be well funded so that teachers are not required to fund raise and lobby for resources to develop an effective program.

Some participants noted that music should also be promoted as a vehicle for life-long learning. Consequently, students should have a chance to experience different kinds of music and instruments to motivate them to continue music-making beyond graduation. Music is also a creative art-form and creativity should be fostered in the music classroom. As a participant stated: "I imagine a music program that balances performance of composed music and engagement with unfamiliar music, and ample time to experiment, collaborate and compose in a variety of genres on many kinds of instruments."

Examine the present: Many schools have excellent programs with large and small ensembles. However, classroom instruction and learning activities are limited to print materials. The emphasis in instruction on the Western tradition narrows the students' musical experience. There is simply "too much score reading and notation reading" at the expense of improvisation and oral musical forms Music educators also face a challenge finding quality educational music due to the "poor quality of new compositions written for didactic purposes." A considerable amount of music composed for young musicians is not artistically satisfying, especially when compared to music for professional musicians. School music is "disconnected from students' daily life and doesn't address their interests and needs." Consequently, students are not

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interested and engaged in music classes to the extent that they could be. Although it is a significant challenge, music teachers must integrate "traditional, popular and world musics in school music education" to attract and retain students into their programs, especially in situations where music is an optional subject.

There were also divergent views expressed on teacher training for the music profession which were often correlated with the economic wealth of their country. Participants from industrial countries commented that most teachers are well-educated and open-minded to different types of music despite the pressures of concerts and festivals. However, they admitted that few teachers encourage different cultural groups to work together and promote the study of world musics in their classrooms. Participants, notably from developing countries, indicated that teachers are not well-trained, and consequently are not confident in teaching music. The lack of teacher training in music is exacerbated by the lack of professional development opportunities for them. Indeed the heavy workloads and lack of resources in many situations restricts the amount of time available to engage in life-long learning activities and impacts on the quality of instruction. In addition, "because music is not a major subject at school, less funding is assigned." Consequently, musical instruments - acoustic and electronic - and curricular resources, such as sheet music, instruction books, CD's, DVD's and computer software, are limited or non-existent in many cases, thereby reducing the educational possibilities for both students and teachers.

Integrate past/future into present: The participants strongly believed that music should be a core subject within the curriculum at all levels and not just a peripheral experience for young people. They identified 'curriculum change' as the key factor for improving the quality of educational music. This change involves *shifting the focus of music education* programs. A participant summed up the situation: "Music education is insulated. We don't accept alternate models outside the traditional one. We cannot accommodate diversity and non-traditional (i.e., non-Western) approaches."

The ideal curriculum should not be limited to traditional Western music but should *examine a wide variety of musical genres,* including popular and indigenous music. Most importantly, teachers must select authentic compositions that are age-appropriate and culturally relevant to their teaching situation, thereby aligning the curriculum with their students' life experiences. Also, students must play a larger role in curricular decision-making by providing input into the achievement of outcomes, selection of repertoire, and administration of assessment procedures. Such involvement will engage students more fully and develop a sense of ownership which can lead to well-supported and vibrant music programs.

To broaden the students' curricular experiences, the participants identified the *development of partnerships* with local arts organizations as a viable option. Musicians from the local community can be engaged to demonstrate instrumental or vocal skills, coach extra-curricular ensembles, and assist teacher. This option is particularly valuable for teaching indigenous and world musics that are not generally studied in music teacher certification programs.

The *status of music teachers* as professionals should be improved globally. In many industrialized countries, teachers have satisfactory working conditions and a reasonable standard of living because of unionization and economic wealth. However, in many less developed countries, teachers do not have the time to focus solely on music or undertake professional training because of heavy workloads and low salaries. In a specialist subject, it is important to improve one's knowledge and skills above the level of one's students. As a

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participant noted: "Training can change teacher's foundation to transform them into guides whose travels maybe are a step ahead of students."

Finally, teacher education programs must become more *inclusive* and broaden their approach to what constitutes quality educational music experiences. The emphasis of many programs on musical performance as a specialist art and an indicator of a successful music program must be re-considered. If music in education is to reach out to the general student population and engage young people, music certification programs will need to require a broader musical background from teacher-candidates entering the profession. Further, music teacher educators must promote the teaching of a wider variety of music other than those styles exclusively in the Western tradition, such as popular and world musics. Such a change is essential if music teachers are to develop relevant programs congruent with a global environment where diversity, inclusivity and cultural-relevance are fast becoming aspects of mainstream education.

Reflections on the Findings

Community groups played an important role in the participants' musical development whereas school music instruction was primarily teacher-directed and dominated by the Western classical tradition, often at the expense of music of their own culture. In many countries, community music represents a vital component of the cultural landscape (McCarthy, 2004). Town bands, church choirs, youth orchestras, chamber ensembles, jazz combos, world music groups, and garage rock bands exist outside of school music programs. Generally, these ensembles perform popular, folk and/or light classical repertoire. Large groups, such as choirs, concert bands and orchestras, dominate the community scene in industrialized countries (Aróstegui, 2004). These ensembles require technical skills and the ability to read music notation of its members. However, smaller ensembles, such as jazz combos, world music groups and garage bands, do not require notational ability, thereby allowing for a wide range of involvement by the public. These ensembles also offer their members opportunities to experiment and create because of the inherent improvisatory nature of the music (Green, 2002).

The participants articulated an ideal music education program as one that promoted inclusivity, diversity, life-long learning, creativity, and allowed teacher to function as a facilitator rather than conductor. Inclusivity and diversity are recent thrusts within education intended to respond to the increasingly pluralistic nature of the student body in schools. Inclusivity and diversity are increasingly recognized as an important component of music instruction, but it is a challenge to address these issues within the traditional large-ensemble and competitive format of many programs (Bartel, 2004b; Countryman, 2009). Life-long learning is promoted in education to facilitate a smooth transition from school to the workplace, and to encourage members of the workforce to continually upgrade their skills to compete effectively in a global economy. Unfortunately, the transition from music in school to music in society – amateur or professional – occurs infrequently. Amateur involvement in music is waning because of high-stress working conditions and limited leisure time, especially in industrialized countries. Also, professional involvement has decreased because of reduced career opportunities for full-time musicians (Zenker, 2004). Creativity fosters personal artistic development and offers students an opportunity to express their own voice, which increases the likelihood of a continuing involvement in music in later years. Unfortunately, creativity is often "missing in action" within music education, primarily due to the pressure of performing concerts and competitive festivals (Kennedy, 2004). Co-operative learning strategies and individualized instruction offer the potential for increased creativity within the music

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classroom, but these approaches have not been adopted in mainstream music education (Bartel, 2004b). Multi-media technology also offers the possibility of alternate approaches to music learning which foster students' personal creativity, such as composition, improvisation, CD recording, re-mixing, and music videos (Peters, 2004; Campbell, 2009).

A considerable amount of new music for schools is of low quality and does not engage young people sufficiently. Each summer, music teachers across the United States and Canada receive a barrage of new music catalogues and CD's from large publishing houses. The marketing blitz is followed-up with reading sessions sponsored by the publishers in targeted schools and at music education conferences during the fall term. Those representing the industry, the salespeople and music professionals leading and conducting the sessions, are not likely to say anything negative about the selections as their job is promote the music, not critique it. Due to the haste with which many of these new compositions are produced with the same roster of composers each year, the music tends lack artistic substance (Darling, 2007; Gersham, 2007), most often "placing function ahead of aesthetics" (Colgrass (2004, p. 20). Further, multicultural music is often depoliticized by deleting references to its context, especially when it involves controversial issues, such as the slavery, apartheid or genocide (Bradley, 2009).

There is a significant disconnect between the traditional music program and the music experienced outside of schools, notably popular and world musics. Professional music groups rely on the public's desire to hear their music, either through recordings, the media, or live performances. Community groups rely on member interest and the support of local audiences to thrive and remain relevant. Music in education tends to function somewhat in a bubble without the demands of public opinion. While this insularity offers the opportunity for experimentation and innovation, often, the profession recreates the past of the Western-European classical tradition (Bartel, 2004b; Shively, 2004; Snell, 2009). Consequently, what students learn in music class seldom translates into their lives outside of school (Kashub, 2009). A respondent in a recent large-scale survey of music programs commented: "I've rarely ever been in a situation where something I learned in music class came up. It's almost as though there are two separate lives and they never cross" (Carlisle, 2009). Knowledge and skill with technology, cooperative learning strategies (small-group), and individualized instruction are required to address the challenges of developing and delivering more relevant curricula for today's students. Unfortunately, many teachers are overloaded, and there is neither the budget nor time for professional development activities, even when professional development opportunities are available (Oreck, 2004; Taggart, Whitby & Sharp, 2004). In these situations, time and money for teacher upgrading must become a priority for advocacy by the music profession – both for professional associations (e.g., Canadian Music Educators Association, Music Educators National Conference, International Society for Music Education) and teacher federations (e.g., Canadian Teachers Federation, American Teachers Association).

To improve the quality of music programs in education, there must be a shift in the focus of current music education programs. Students should have the opportunity to engage in authentic popular and indigenous musical activities and participate in instructional decisions (Farish, 2011). The music education profession must re-think the Western-European canon; that is, the belief that "classical music is the one true music" (Woodruff, 2005, p. 59). To achieve this goal, significant changes to both the role of the music teacher and to the content of the curriculum are required (Wis, 2007). For example, music educators must expand the teacher-directed conductor role into an interactive one by posing and responding to student questions rather than telling students what to do (Shively, 2004). Essentially, one must initiate dialogue

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and stimulate critical thinking by asking students such questions as "What's happening here?" rather than stating "You are playing too loud in bar 25!" and expecting students to follow directions. Coach and mentor are also roles that promote student input. Music teachers can adopt these roles by coaching chamber ensembles and mentoring talented students. In these ways, students' voices are valued and become an integral component of the instruction. Such an interactive classroom environment is more likely to develop ownership and commitment to the program by students. However, to promote student voice, much more than the expansion of the teacher role is required - the content of the curriculum also requires significant change. Curricular materials must be developed by the profession that reflect inclusivity and celebrate diversity (Seddon, 2004). Authentic learning experiences with indigenous instruments must be provided rather than just band/orchestra arrangements (Farish, 2011). Technology must be integrated within music instruction through computer applications, digital synthesis, video games, and interactive internet sites (Wingstedt, 2005). The profession must develop curricula for students who enjoy music but are not interested in the traditional choir, band and orchestra programs. These students often express a desire to learn through popular music techniques, such as extensive listening, copying recordings and playing in small groups (Green, 2002; Snell, 2009).

Partnerships must be developed with community arts organizations to provide a broader range of musical experiences for students and teachers. Local arts organizations, such as modern dance troupes, music theatre societies and theatre companies, can provide a range of arts expertise and resources not generally available to students (Poetter & Eagle, 2009; Upitis, Smithrim & Soren, 1999). There are also informal music learning activities, such as song-writing, remixing and video games (e.g., "Garage Band"), and a wide range of small groups specializing in world musics, jazz combos and popular music where informal learning occurs. These informal learning avenues should be recognized within the school curriculum as valid musical experiences (Karlsen, 2009). Indeed, when artists and teachers work collaboratively in schools, they learn from each other and both parties benefit. Teachers increase their arts knowledge and skills, and conversely, the artists learn to teach and communicate with young people (Arts, Inc. & Performing Tree, 2000; Smithrim & Upitis, 2001; Upitis, 2005).

Finally, the status of the music educator – the qualifications, salary and workload - must be improved internationally. In this way, the next generation of teachers will be better-prepared and better-supported to address the challenges of globalization in music education. This will require a concerted effort by teacher unions and professional associations to convince the public and governments of the importance of a well-qualified teaching workforce and a well-funded education system. However, it is attainable because itis only in the latter half of the last century that industrialized nations professionalized their teaching workforce. For example in Ontario, teachers did not require a university degree until 1974 and were poorly paid. Today, Ontario teachers require a bachelor or honors degree (e.g., B.A, B.Mus.) and a bachelor of education (B.Ed.) to be certified. Further, Additional Qualification (AQ) courses are required to obtain upgrading certificates in specialist areas such as the arts, and graduate degrees are increasingly required for positions of additional responsibility. More will be expected of teachers, but they are well-compensated and receive very good benefits and pensions.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The purpose of BFI is to investigate a particular issue that is important to a professional field and to set the direction for future large-scale study. The findings of the inquiry outlined in this paper point to several areas that could be examined in a large-scale study.

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- What does an inclusive music program look like? (e.g., ethnographic studies of inclusive programs)

- How can the music profession promote quality educational music for schools? (e.g., questionnaire to composers, conductors, music teachers, retail chain staff, and music publishers for recommendations)

- What types of professional development experiences are appropriate for music teachers? (e.g., survey of music teachers across Canada who are members of a national professional music association)

- What curricular resources are available for music instruction that promote diversity? (e.g., curriculum content analysis of recent music texts from major educational publishers)

- How can world musics be integrated into the traditional music program? (e.g., case studies of successful integrated - traditional/world musics - programs in urban, suburban and rural school districts)

- How can a music teacher develop an effective arts partnership with the local community? (e.g., naturalistic study of effective school-community arts partnerships in a variety of settings)

- What policies can be developed and implemented that raise the status of music educators globally? (e.g., international Delphi of leaders in professional music associations, teachers' federations, politicians)

- How can a lifelong involvement in music be fostered within music programs? (e.g., phenomenological study of musicians participating in a community group, such as band, choir, rock band or jazz combo)

Coda:

The findings of this BFI and the recommendations that were generated are based on data voluntarily submitted by individuals with expertise in music education who participated in an international music education research seminar. The study outcomes provide an indicator of the characteristics of a quality music program and of the challenges that must be addressed. However, they are not intended to be generalized to all situations as a *fait accompli*. The richness and variety of musics reported by participants from the sixteen countries does not make this feasible. However, it is reasonable that some of the findings and recommendations would be transferable to those with similar situations and useful to many others where music is a subject within the school curriculum.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is brief focused inquiry?
2. What are some characteristics of a quality music program identified by educators in the research study?
3. How could brief focused inquiry be utilized in future research studies?

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