

# MMEA Philosophy Statement



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# THE MMEA PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENT

## ***Introduction***

Philosophical inquiry in music education is a means for ongoing professional development of music educators. Supporting professional development among its members is foundational to the aims and purpose of the Manitoba Music Educators Association (MMEA)<sup>1</sup> as music education in Manitoba is a reflection of the societal and community values determined and expressed by practitioners and students alike. Music education that happens both in and outside the formal classroom setting is valued for its artistic properties and experiences, community-building dynamics, and the opportunities that present for individual self-growth and self-knowledge. A philosophical statement establishes a foundation for the nature and value of music education for the members of MMEA, confirming what they already do as active music educators and offering ways of critically reflecting upon their music education practices as a means of keeping current with the discipline.<sup>2</sup>

## ***What is philosophy?***

The word philosophy comes from the Greek “philos,” meaning love, and “sophia,” meaning wisdom. The goal of philosophical thinking is to contribute to the growth of knowledge in a particular field or discipline. In order to do so, philosophy and philosophical thinking require more than common opinion. Bowman (1998) explains:

What distinguishes it [philosophy] from mere personal opinion and credulity is its rejection of passionate convictions as sufficient grounds for belief and action, and its commitment to careful analysis and systematic reasoning ... Philosophy works to render the implicit explicit, with the ultimate intent of enriching both understanding and perception. (p. 5)

A philosophy is a body of ideas and a way of thinking built upon an established practice of understandings. The main goal of philosophical inquiry and practice is to put forth ideas for

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the organization and mandate of the Manitoba Music Educators Association, go to [www.mymmea.ca](http://www.mymmea.ca)

<sup>2</sup> The process for developing a philosophical statement that serves to support and promote the work of MMEA and music education practices across the province of Manitoba is ongoing since October 2009. Prominent music educators that represent all aspects of leadership throughout MMEA met and worked together on an annual basis to provide input and feedback for the ideas and content of this philosophical work. The development of a philosophical statement for MMEA represents a strong commitment to work together towards common philosophical and curricular understandings in music education.

dialogue. A careful examination and analysis of our current understandings of music and music education is a logical place to begin that dialogue.

Philosophical inquiry in music education seeks to answer the following questions:<sup>3</sup>

- What is the nature and value of music?
- What is the nature and value of music education?
- Why is philosophical inquiry important for music educators and how does it influence our music education practices in Manitoba?

Philosophy of music education is necessary to provide meaning, focus, and direction for what happens in various music education contexts throughout the province of Manitoba. When music educators engage in philosophical thought and exercise, they examine actions, common beliefs, and test cultural biases and assumptions. Thinking philosophically defines the role of the Manitoba music educator and helps shape each music education setting through engaging the questions, “what’s working” and “what needs re-defining.” In short, philosophy helps guide decision-making and essentially, “what we do” in the moment of music teaching and learning.<sup>4</sup> Philosophy will also give greater credibility to Manitoba curriculum making and implementing, and inform the various musical practices that exist in and outside the formal music classroom. Philosophy guides a solid approach to music education that withstands critical scrutiny (Jorgensen, 1990).

It is essential to distinguish between the nature and value of music and the nature and value of music education. Philosophical inquiry should not assume that the two are necessarily the same. While the nature and value of music necessarily provides a starting point for philosophical and theoretical reflection, the focus on music education provides further reflection in areas more specific to the practice of music teaching and learning.

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<sup>3</sup> The first two questions are based on David Elliott’s similar questions first posed to the music education community in his pivotal philosophical inquiry, *Music Matters* (1995). In fact, much of the author’s understandings of philosophical practice and philosophy of music education stems from undergraduate and graduate studies with Dr. Elliott at the University of Toronto with credit given accordingly.

<sup>4</sup> From participant responses and feedback provided during Session II of the Music Leadership Conference 2009 on October 22, 2009 in Winnipeg, MB.

### ***What is the nature and value of music?***

Aristotle wrote, “It is not easy to determine the nature of music, or why anyone should have an understanding of it.”<sup>5</sup> This statement provides the initial impetus for music educators to engage in a closer examination of their craft and practice.

Music is a uniquely human activity (Elliott, 1995) that generates a sense of community and relationships with others as an intentional sharing of values occurs with active music making and listening. For Manitoba music educators, the ways in which people engage with music provides evidence for the nature and value of music.

Music, deeply embedded in human culture, exists in, is valued, and is something that people do in a variety of ways within different cultures. It plays an important role in the relationships with and among people as individuals. The term, “musicking” (Small, 1998; Elliott, 1995) describes this action-oriented form of musical pursuits evidenced throughout the world’s cultures. As a uniquely human, intentional activity, music is a way of making connections with others, as performers, as consumers, and as makers of music. The actions of making music and music listening reflect and express who we are as individuals, as a society, and as a community of learners. Our surroundings, our teaching, our students, and our communities shape our identity. The value of music becomes a value of our individual and corporate identity. Truly, music-making and listening is a way of knowing the world and knowing ourselves.

At the outset, it is important to state that music is an art form that “demands to be understood in its own terms.” (Berleant, 2009, p. 54) Music is distinct from other forms of art, particularly aesthetic forms of visual art practices. Learning and understanding a musical practice demands particular knowledge and understanding. Likewise, the other arts also require unique knowledge and skills. In this sense, music is not dance, although music may enter into a partnership with dance when appropriate and meaningful to the performance and educational experience. Music is not a visual art, although understandings of visual artistic ways of knowing may be important to understanding various links to artistic and musical endeavours in many world cultures. In short, music is something that people do with given materials, forms, and knowledge that are of a musical nature. Furthermore, equating music with all the other arts distorts our ability to

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<sup>5</sup> From Aristotle, “*Politics* (Book VIII)” written in 350 B.C.E., translated by Benjamin Jowett (1952). The full text may be found online at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.5.five.html>

understand in full the various musical practices in which we engage our young students.

Bowman (1998) agrees:

Unfortunately, situating music within a class of endeavors called ‘the arts’ begs the questions of what music is, what purposes it serves, and what its values are: for to call it an ‘art’ almost invariably removes from consideration an extensive range of musical practices not regarded as ‘artistic’ – practices and pieces that do not evince ‘aesthetic value’ in high degree. (p. 6)

Therefore, while the arts may exhibit some similar properties, there are unique values for music and music-making that goes beyond basic values shared by some of the arts.

In addition, music is a human practice that requires specific knowledge. Elliott (1995) describes musicianship, or musical knowledge, as a multidimensional form of cognition. Musicianship is a musical form of knowing and doing. Knowledge and action are inseparable and happen in a co-existent and co-dependent relationship. Elliott outlines five distinct forms of musical knowledge that together form the essence of musicianship (musical knowledge): procedural musical knowledge, formal musical knowledge, informal musical knowledge, impressionistic musical knowledge, and supervisory musical knowledge. A brief description of each of these forms of musical knowledge follows:

Musical knowledge is essentially a matter of *procedural musical knowledge* as it manifests itself in a practical manner, in the procedures of doing music. This type of knowledge occurs in active music-making. It is the fundamental “know-how” of music-making and music listening. *Formal musical knowledge* is the verbal knowledge, the set of concepts and technical terms or ideas needed to inform and enhance our musical doing. On its own, formal musical knowledge is non-musical and does not fully produce the real essence of musicianship found in active music-making. *Informal musical knowledge* is the practical, common sense knowledge we develop from learning to do and make music. This type of knowledge enables music makers to make decisions and interpret music in the action of music-making. *Impressionistic musical knowledge*, also manifested in a practical manner, is an intuitive knowledge. Music makers develop this type of knowledge based on their experiences and their cognitive feelings and beliefs. They know intuitively how to make music in a certain style or manner. *Supervisory musical knowledge* enables music makers to adjust their musical thinking in the action of musical doing, monitoring the musical activity in relation to standards and traditions of a particular musical practice.

### ***What is the nature and value of music education?***

Music educators across Manitoba understand music education as a developmental and a sequential process. At the core of music education is the importance of the relationship between the teacher and learner. The ongoing development and nurturing of the teacher–student relationship plays out in the classroom, in the curriculum, and in what teachers choose to “do” in terms of music-making and music education. This is truly an important relationship to consider, an essential need to keep in mind when developing curriculum.<sup>6</sup> Manitoba music educators believe and support the idea that teachers and learners form unique opportunities for learning from each other and developing musicianship through a variety of means. Furthermore, Jorgenson (2003) suggests that music education experiences become living knowledge with those involved:

Teaching and learning are human endeavors ... Building curriculum solely around subject matter, programs of study, and abstract objectives derived from expert knowledge of the field of music is short-sighted because it fails to take sufficient account of the ways in which knowledge is socially and individually constructed and of the centrality of teacher-student interaction in the learner’s and teacher’s experience. (p. 124)

Music is knowledge that is socially constructed. The development of musical knowledge is dependent upon interactions with and relationships formed with music students and their teachers. Teacher–student relationships share cultural and emotional connections, and as students become genuine “music makers,” there is great opportunity and potential for individual and collective or communal growth. Indeed, these relationships nurture a valuable educational community. These values are congruent with the values of music – such that, knowing ourselves and knowing the world better is a value of music education practices.

All children, adolescents, and adults learn music by doing music. By its nature, music is something that people do, albeit there are differences in the various music practices across all cultures, as acknowledged above. At times, there are possible connections made with other art forms such as drama, visual arts, and dance. Music in the schools can be a support for many cross-curricular connections and the learning of many subjects such as language arts, mathematics, and science. However, music education does not occur solely in these situations

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<sup>6</sup> From participant responses and feedback provided during Session II of the Music Leadership Conference 2009 on October 22, 2009 in Winnipeg, MB.

– music education occurs when the focus is on active and dynamic music-making and music listening.

The recent Manitoba Curriculum for Arts Education (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2008) states the value of music education with the following:

Every student is a music maker, one whose growth and learning are best realized within rich, meaningful, hands-on music-making experiences. In becoming young musicians, students learn to sing and play the music of a variety of places, times, and peoples, as well as to improvise, arrange, and compose music. As increasingly reflective and artistic music-makers, students gain skills, understandings, and attitudes that enrich them in many ways, enabling and inspiring them to continue making music for the rest of their lives. (p. 4)

Manitoba music educators are in the habit of centring the curriculum on their students and within their own context. While individual values exist for the purpose of musicking (including the values of creating expressions of emotion, and representing and expressing cultural contexts and ideologies), it is perhaps of equal advantage for Manitoba music educators to consider the values of music education as relative to an extended population or community of music makers.

Furthermore, it seems logical to suggest that professionally trained music educators be responsible for the delivery of music education programmes; however, problems exist in the current trends of music teacher education programmes:

Most music teachers in schools—public and private music schools—are trained in Classical music, and school music curriculum has typically favored Classical music. To the degree that what is taught in school has little or no lasting, life-long musical impact on students or society, however, it loses (or, to begin with, fails to gain) the economic and cultural support of society. Thus, it typically loses at least any reasonable share of resources (budget, scheduling, physical space, equipment, etc.) in comparison to other subjects ('fields') and school activities (other school-related practices). (Regelski, 2009, p. 68)

The values found within the notion of community music education are at the heart of all music education experiences.<sup>7</sup> Identifying individual musical experiences and music education is, in part, a matter of identifying the music of one's community. Community music education advocates the development of relationships among humans interacting in society and negotiating individual and corporate identities. As Veblen (2005) suggests, music education need not always occur in a formal music education setting. Given that every human society displays and exemplifies complex and diverse music-making and music teaching, it is reasonable that these activities throughout our world cultures deserve greater attention by teachers, students, and members of the community alike. The way in which we shape our surroundings is equally as important as how our surroundings shape us (Froehlich, 2009). Recent research indicates that adolescents value their music learning and desire their school music experiences to include greater expansions in technology and instruments used in popular music (Campbell, 2007). These desires lead to a greater difficulty found in the responsibility placed on music educators when considering the relative role of music education in the lives of their students. Froehlich (2009) explains:

Often, professionally-trained musicians find it difficult to learn from amateur musicians ... Different knowledge domains ... can be barriers rather than enablers for building communities of practice, a fact that explains why it may become necessary for music educators to step outside their own boundaries of professional allegiances for the purpose of facilitating the formation of new loyalties. We would need to do the joining instead of asking others to join us; a political dimension of our professional selves that perhaps is easily overlooked but essential to joint action. (p. 16)

The prevailing issue is that we are not consistent as an organization of music educators across Manitoba in our relevant teaching practices, nor are we comprehensive in our current understanding of today's culture that surrounds us. There is substantial neglect of "cultural and musical pluralism and their implications for music education" (Bowman, 2005). Of course, a valid argument exists in declaring that the fundamentals of understanding musical materials and development of musicianship are inherent in the traditional Western forms. In fact, it is reasonable to suggest that students in a North American context study and learn the musical materials of our Western European heritage that is the traditionally accepted structure of music and music education. However, many cultures have rich musical lives that exist entirely outside

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<sup>7</sup> For further ideas and comments, see the MayDay Group Podcast, *Conversations from Boston* with Dr. David Elliott; Dr. Hildegard Froehlich, and Dr. Thomas Regelski, <http://themaydaypodcast.tumblr.com/>.

a Western context. Canadian culture is a strong mix and influence of many world cultures and traditions. Our cultures of music, indeed the very foundation of our societies and communities, need a greater connection with the music education of our young people:

Exposing students to a wide variety of Musics is hugely positive, but when this exposure consists of minimal exposure within the confines of a “glancing over” of this culture there is again more reinforcement of the Superior–Inferior dichotomy of the educational value system ... In-service teachers must be exposed to more meaningful professional development that will allow them the skills they need to use the student body’s cultural capital as a corner stone of their education. Pre-service teachers must be exposed to various cultures in their student teaching, observation, and course work to develop deeper understanding and create teachers with the flexibility to meet the needs of heterogeneous and homogenous groups of students. (Schmidt, 2009)

One of the main values of music education is the development of musicianship. Through the goal of developing musicianship, music education represents opportunity for every student and teacher. There is possibility for rich learning contexts through the music of many cultures and communities, and for the development of music-makers to explore the value of musical pursuits in our societies and in global contexts.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION IN MANITOBA

Three questions that strive to look at the “big picture” of music and music education while maintaining a practical focus on music education practices in Manitoba guide the current philosophical statement:

1. What are the most critical issues facing Manitoba music educators in today’s social structures? How might a philosophical statement address these issues?
2. How does philosophical thinking in music education inform and influence our music education practices across the province of Manitoba?
3. Is there a gap between philosophical research and the practitioner? If so, how should the music education profession bridge the gap?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The third question comes from the contemporary “think-tank” of philosophical practice in music education, the MayDay Group (2009). Specifically, these questions are from a series of questions asked at the Philosophy of Music Education Symposium III in Los Angeles, CA in 1997 to Drs. Bennett Reimer and Edwin Gordon. All questions are listed at <http://www.maydaygroup.org/php/resources/general/fiske-fivequestions.php>.

At the 2010 Leadership Conference in Manitoba<sup>9</sup>, discussions ensued centring on the guiding questions. Significant themes emerged that reflect the issues and ideas in current music education trends in Manitoba as expressed from the viewpoints of early years music education, middle/senior years music education, rural music education, and those involved in music education policy. The four main themes were:

1. Critical issues in Manitoba music education practices
2. Influence and important matters of community and culture
3. Realities and values of family and social structures
4. Professional development and advocacy

The following represents and provides summative and descriptive statements for these group discussions.

### ***Critical issues in Manitoba music education practices***

Our common understanding of music education in Manitoba needs to encompass and include an established, published, and utilized philosophical statement. The development of a philosophy for music education in Manitoba needs generating from within. Understanding that philosophical thinking opens dialogues and informs our teaching, this statement endeavours to be a practical, accessible, and relevant resource that serves to educate beyond our music educator sector. Manitoba music educators acknowledge the value and importance of the philosophical process and desire to continue the discourse beyond the completed statement through continued opportunities to gather and dialogue.

Manitoba music educators need to shift their perception from teacher to facilitator. Music educators value this educational role as they continuously strive to create and facilitate within each student an image and perception of themselves as musicians. Music educators need to maintain and nurture creativity in the students in ways that urge their thinking “outside of the box” or insofar as they “get rid of the box.” Music is an essential core subject for all (or more) students, and music educators recognize the opportunities for and the significance of

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<sup>9</sup> Leading Change in Music Education in Manitoba – the 2010 Leadership Conference of the Manitoba Music Educators’ Association and the Association for Music Administrators in Manitoba. At this conference, recognized leaders in music education from across the province and across various facets of music education met to discuss the guiding questions outlined in this statement. Discussion groups were formed to represent issues in music education from the perspectives of rural music education, early years and general music education, middle and senior years music education, and curriculum/policy making in music education.

developing inter and intra personal skills, values of patience, as well as building and maintaining relationships.

If the goals of school music education include the desire to involve a larger percentage of the school population<sup>10</sup> as well as acknowledge the influence of individual musical tastes on what music educators choose to engage the curriculum,<sup>11</sup> then the values of music education must necessarily reflect the communities that surround our learning contexts. Jorgenson (2003) asserts:

Music educators ... need to break out of the little boxes of restrictive thought and practice and reach across the real and imagined borders of narrow and rigid concepts, classifications, theories, and paradigms to embrace a broad and inclusive view of diverse music educational perspectives and practices. (p. 119)

This is not to suggest that music education programs across the province of Manitoba need to “re-invent the wheel” by re-creating or re-producing its current practices; rather, the idea simply calls for an expansion to include more students in school music programs.<sup>12</sup>

One of the biggest challenges facing music education practices in Manitoba concerns the changes and use in technology and social media as evident and affective in 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. There is opportunity to reach many students (media and digital learners, multi-modal learners) using technology and social media and to provide more effective windows and connections to the music of world cultures. However, music educators recognize that the process and practice for musical learning and musical success sometimes create tension with somewhat more typical experiences in the life of a student where the making of decisions and consequently receiving feedback is immediate. Interaction with each other via social media creates life experiences and a desirable way of living characterized by instant gratification and immediate feedback. In addition, many students seem to be maturing at a quicker rate, and

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<sup>10</sup> Speaking at a session on philosophy for MMEA’s 2009 Tempo Conference, Dr. Wayne Bowman suggested that only 15% of current student populations are involved in school music programs. He challenged the educators in the audience to think of ways to include the other 85% of the population.

<sup>11</sup> From participant responses and feedback provided during Session II of the Music Leadership Conference 2009 on October 22, 2009 in Winnipeg, MB.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, it is prudent and worthwhile to clearly evaluate and define the restrictions in our current thought and practice. Perhaps it is not the music education practice that is restrictive; rather, the restrictions come from outside parameters and structures - such as timetabling issues, school transportation confines, individual school programming priorities, and so on. Given that some of these restrictions exist, the challenges facing music educators become more complex.

have keen understandings of individual rights that sometimes supersede the rights of the group. As a result, Manitoba music educators acknowledge that contemporary student learners are altering our concepts of literacy, education, and curriculum. Teaching practices and curriculum necessarily develop and evolve to focus on the needs of students, not necessarily teachers.

Finally, music in the schools can be a support for many cross-curricular connections and the learning of many subjects such as language arts, mathematics, and science. However, music education does not occur solely in these situations – music education occurs when the focus is on active and dynamic music-making and music listening.

### ***Matters of community and culture***

In matters of community and culture, reflecting cultural and community values is a critical issue for music education in Manitoba. Educating our varied communities on the value of music, maintaining community support, and acceptance of music education serves to cultivate a keener sense of community through music education. Since music is embedded in human culture and music-making for all is at the core of contemporary philosophical thinking, community and culture play a major role in the context for music-making and the development of musicianship. It is imperative that music education practices in Manitoba recognize, support, and value cultural diversity, communal social responsibility, and cross-generational connections as valid curriculum and pedagogical ideals. Music is for all (or more) students.

### ***Matters of family and social infrastructures***

Family dynamics, family structures and values, and the competition of time with other family activities have a direct bearing and impact on music education programs in Manitoba. In addition, there is a critical need for funding and resources to promote ongoing opportunities for music education (for example, there is frequent need for additional funding when transporting large instruments to events outside of the school building). Other requirements that directly affect the need for improving existing infrastructure include appropriate time and space, equipment demands and maintenance, resources, and increased opportunities for professional development. Difficult economic times have affected possibilities for expanding programs and maintaining existing programs. This is a particular concern for rural music education programs.

### ***Matters of the profession – professional development and advocacy***

Philosophy must remain an open dialogue among music educators and administrators. Through the practice of doing philosophy and the ongoing work on philosophical statements for music education in Manitoba, issues of advocacy find grounding and constructive, directive energy. It is increasingly imperative that music education plays a major role in educating prominent educational stakeholders in the value of creativity and creative thinking for the future needs of our society. Creativity (as promoted, developed, and nurtured through music education) is valuable for the future needs of our society.

### ***Bridging the Gap: The impact of music education philosophy for the MMEA***

The MMEA is an organization that meets regularly with the Government of Manitoba to discuss policy, curriculum, and music education issues for the province. It is the mandate of MMEA to implement change, to motivate its members, and to oversee all aspects of music education across Manitoba. Music educators, as members of MMEA, have a professional responsibility to develop and deliver curriculum that is relevant to their specific communities of learners. Therefore, the most important facet of the MMEA philosophy centres on promoting and supporting music education opportunities for diverse musical communities representative of our diverse urban and rural populations. It is reasonable to suggest that the ideologies and tenets in the current discourse surrounding community music education may serve to initiate meaningful and constructive ideals for guiding and, in some cases, expanding or transforming music education practices in Manitoba.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The attempt to explain the nature and value of music-making and music education must take into account the music-making of all human cultures:

It must be able to explain, in fact, not just why members of one social and cultural group differ in their ways of musicking from members of another group but how it is that members of one culture can come to understand and to enjoy, and perhaps creatively misunderstand, the musicking of others. It must explain also how some musical cultures become dominant, sometimes across the whole world, while others remain confined to the social group within which they originated. And of course it must be able to explain why people like to music at all. (Small, 1998, p. 12)

The nature and value of music education, as recognized by MMEA, is a matter of understanding the role of music in our various communities, including inside our schools and outside our schools. The above reflections attempt to outline a brief understanding of the nature and value of music education for the purpose of professional development for Manitoba music educators. The specific matters of teaching-learning contexts and curriculum (developing and implementing) need further consideration and development from individual, local perspectives.

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