

The State of Music Education in Canadian and Quebec Schools as reported by Administrators and Music Teachers

Valerie Peters, Professor, Faculté de musique, Université Laval, valerie.peters@mus.ulaval.ca

Jacques Lemieux, Retired Professor, Département de l'information et de communication,
Université Laval, jacques.lemieux@com.ulaval.ca

Abstract

A bilingual survey sent to all Canadian schools was intended to document the state of music education. 1,204 schools representing 7.8% of the 15,500 schools in Canada completed the survey. This article compared the data from the province of Quebec with the data from the rest of Canada as well as scrutinizing the status of respondents. The results document significant differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada regarding singing, artist visits, support and challenges for music education. Music teachers and administrators responses were significantly different concerning the benefits and the perceived quality of music education programs. The demographic, sociological and sociocultural aspects of Canadian music education need to be explored in future research.

Keywords

Survey, music education, music curricula, music teaching and learning, elementary and secondary school music

Introduction

Several studies have reported on the state of music education and the perceptions of administrators and music teachers on a national level in the United States (Abril, C. R., & Gault, B. M., 2006, 2008). However, there is little research on music education programs in Canadian schools. A notable exception is the first-ever report on the state of music education in Canada, a large survey study conducted by The Hazelton Group for The Coalition for Music Education in Canada (2005). The major finding of this study was that school music programs are struggling for continued funding. Lack of resources was the number one concern as evidenced in the verbatims of respondents and delivery of the curriculum was noted as a challenge given timetable pressures. Finally, concerning the valuing of music education by the school and surrounding community, the province of Manitoba was well supported while Quebec and Ontario indicated important challenges. Quebec had the lowest response rate (5.8%) compared to all other provinces.

Given the limited Canadian data on the state of music education, The Coalition felt that it was important to conduct another survey study in 2010. In addition, one of the goals of the 2010 study was to obtain better response rates from all provinces. A larger base size allows the researchers to make interpretations about the state of music education in specific provinces, such as Quebec, and to advocate for changes in policy. The response rate for Quebec was still quite low (6.1%). However, the margin of error allows for comparisons between Quebec and the other provinces in Canada.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to better understand the situation of music education in schools across Canada. The full research report may be found on the Coalitions' Web site¹. However, this article will not report on previous published findings. The purpose of this article is to compare the music education situation in Quebec with the situation in Canadian schools in other provinces and to examine the data taking into account the status of respondents (Music Teachers versus Administrators).

Method

The following is a brief summary of the research method. The Coalition for Music Education in Canada is an advocacy group that promotes the importance of music education in Canadian schools and communities. With the research expertise of Hill Strategies Research, a Canadian company specializing in applying social science research methods to the arts sector, The Coalition conducted a detailed survey study documenting the situation of music education in Canadian schools in 2010.

A bilingual survey sent to all Canadian schools and directed toward principals was online between March 22 and May 31, 2010. Twelve school administrators completed a pilot version of the questionnaire in early 2010 and some adjustments were made following the pre-test. Notices were faxed or emailed to all Canadian schools on March 23, 2010. Prizes were offered as incentives and a few follow-up measures were included to increase the response rate.

1,204 schools representing 7.8% of the 15,500 schools in Canada completed the survey. The sample represents a high standard of reliability, with a maximum margin of error of 2.7

¹ <http://musicmakesus.ca/educate/2010-research/>

percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The responses were weighted to reflect the number of elementary, secondary and mixed schools in each province given the differences in response rates by province and to minimize sampling bias. Incomplete results and duplicate responses from the same school were eliminated.

Results

This section will focus on comparing the survey data results for the province of Quebec with the results from other regions of Canada as well as taking into account the status of respondents. Given our knowledge of the state of music education in Quebec (FAMEQ, 2010) and in other parts of the country as reported anecdotally by music teachers, it seemed unexpected to see such positive evaluations of music education programs in schools. These results did not seem to align with our research hypothesis and therefore, we decided to examine the data closely, in order to interpret these results as perhaps being an artifact of respondent status (administrators versus music teachers).

Part I: The specificity of the Quebec situation

In this section, we present data from the nine survey questions² in the form of tables comparing Quebec with the different provinces and/or regions of Canada. For the questions concerning the perceived benefits and quality of music education in schools, these data are also presented comparing the status of the respondents.

Participation in a music education program

² See page 103 of the full report for a copy of the survey.

In Canada, student involvement is mandatory at the elementary school level (93%) but optional in the majority of secondary schools (86%). Music is offered as a co-curricular school activity in 40% of schools (58% secondary; 36% elementary). There are no significant differences between regions/provinces regarding elementary school participation.

At the secondary level, music is mandatory in 55% of schools in the four Atlantic provinces compared to 40% in Quebec (36% Ontario; 19% Western provinces). Music is available as a co-curricular activity in the majority of schools with no significant differences between regions. The entire student population participates in music class in the formal timetable in only 10% of schools. In 78% of secondary schools, one-half or less students participate in music class in the formal timetable with percentages being quite similar between regions. In 22% of schools, more than half of the student body participates in school music.

Table 1. Percentage of Secondary Schools where 50%+ Students Participate in a Music Program

Quebec	Atlantic	Ontario	Man.+Sask+Alberta+BC
18%	25%	25%	18%

Note. In all tables, significantly higher percentages are in bold.

Musical opportunities for students in schools

There are no significant differences between the number of musical opportunities offered in Quebec schools versus schools in the other provinces. However, the differences are significant when we examine the types of musical opportunities offered more or less in Quebec schools versus Canadian schools.

Table 2. Musical Opportunities Offered More in Quebec Schools versus Canadian Schools

Musical opportunities	Quebec	Canada
Theory and history	55%	40%
Strings	16%	7%
Individual lessons	16%	8%

Table 3. Musical Opportunities Offered Less in Quebec Schools versus Canadian Schools

Musical opportunities	Quebec	Canada
Band	67%	79%
Choir	31%	58%
Jazz	29%	44%
Musical Theatre	16%	27%

Forms of music education

Four forms of music education are most common in elementary schools: listening, performance-based learning, activity-based learning of music concepts integrated with other arts learning activities and visits to the school by community or professional musicians. Activity-based learning, trips to hear musical performances, exploring the context of music and integrating music into other curricular learning areas are less present in Quebec schools.

Table 4. Forms of Music Education, Elementary Schools, % of Schools

Forms of Music Education, Elementary	Canada	Quebec
1. Listening	81%	82%
2. Performance-based learning (e.g. band, choir, strings)	73%	72%
3. Activity-based learning integrated with other arts learning activities	70%	47%
4. Trips to hear musical performances outside the school	66%	50%
5. Exploring the historical, social, cultural, economic aspects of music	54%	40%
6. Integrated in other curricular learning areas	36%	15%

At the secondary level, there are important differences in the ranking of the most common to the least common forms of music education in schools. Listening is ranked as the most prevalent activity in secondary schools in Quebec versus a fourth-place ranking in the rest of the country. “Visits to schools by musicians” is ranked sixth in Quebec versus a third-place ranking in Canada.

Table 5. Forms of Music Education, Secondary Schools, Ranking of Answers

Forms of Music Education, Secondary	Canada	Quebec
Performance-based learning (e.g. band, choir, strings)	1	2
Trips to hear musical performances outside the school	2	3
Visits to the school by community or professional musicians	3	6
Listening	4	1

Who teaches music?

Quebec has the largest number of specialist music teachers in the elementary schools (87%) versus classroom teachers with musical backgrounds in 46% of schools in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba and general classroom teachers with no musical background in 58% of schools in Ontario.

The majority of secondary schools in Canada have music specialists (92%).

The differences between provinces and territories are weak and not significant.

Perceived benefits of music education

In general, fewer schools in Quebec reported a belief in the benefits of music education compared to schools in the rest of Canada. For the 13 items mentioned, the Quebec percentages are inferior to the Canadian average.

Principal sources of funding for music education

Throughout Canada, school boards are reported as the principal source of funding for music education programs in schools (62%). However, school boards are cited less as the principal sources of funding in Quebec (50%). Quebec respondents mentioned more diverse sources: parents, student fees, fundraising or governing boards (school councils).

Perception of the quality of music education

Quebec is the second to last of the provinces to rate their music programs “strong” or “very strong” behind Saskatchewan (34%). The highest percentages are found in British Columbia (67%) followed by Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Alberta (57% for the 3 provinces). In 24% of Quebec schools, the music program is evaluated as “Adequate” versus 33% of Canadian schools in other provinces. Across all schools in the survey, 29% of Quebec schools believe that their music program needs improvement. The three factors needing improvement that were judged as being the most important by respondents from Quebec were: (a) space, (b) instruments/equipment, and (c) instructional materials.

Table 6. Perceived Quality of Music Education, Canada and Quebec

Quality of Music Education	Canada	Quebec
% of schools that estimated their music program as “strong or very strong”	47%	38%
% of schools that indicated a need for improvement in their music education program	29%	29%

Support for music education from various groups

Respondents were asked how they would rate the support for music education at their school from the following sources: school board, classroom teachers, parents, other members of the community and private businesses. Respondents in Quebec were particularly critical of the support of school boards. 57% of respondents rated school board support as needing some or significant improvement versus 47% for the rest of Canada. 31% of respondents in Quebec believe that the support of school boards is adequate (Canada, 27%) and only 12% indicated that this support is “strong or very strong” (Canada, 27%). Respondents in Quebec judged support from other sources as being adequate, which is similar to the proportion of responses found in other provinces.

Most important challenges for music education

Both in Quebec and the rest of the country, two major challenges emerge: Lack of resources and lack of teaching time. Timetable pressures are an important challenge in Canada and especially in Quebec.

Table 7. Challenges for Music education, Canada and Quebec

Challenges	Canada	Quebec
Funding	26%	23%
Lack of time/timetable pressures	24%	31%
Lack of instruments or equipment	11%	16%

Part II. Status of respondents: Music teachers versus administrators

Perceived benefits of music education

The following table presents the important differences (in descending order) between the perceptions of music teachers and administrators (% of respondents) regarding the benefits of music education. Teachers ranked all 13 benefits more highly than administrators (including the 8 in this table) with at least a 10% difference.

Table 8. Perceived Benefits of Music Education According to Music Teachers and Administrators

Perceived Benefits	Music Teachers	Administrators
Developing critical and analytical thinking skills	69%	52%

Developing effective communication and collaboration skills	73%	58%
Building students' self-esteem and confidence	86%	72%
Developing an ability to understand and appreciate a wide variety of musical expressions and an ability to express oneself musically	82%	68%
Helping students share and understand other cultures and generations	70%	58%
Developing a sense of beauty and imagination	70%	58%
Developing self-discipline	83%	71%
Developing creative problem solving skills	60%	49%

Perception of the quality of music education

The following table presents the rating of music education (% of respondents). Music teachers evaluate certain aspects more favorably than administrators.

Table 9. Rating Aspects of Music Education Programs by Music Teachers and Administrators

Quality	Instruments/equipment		Instructional materials		Overall quality	
	Teachers	Admin.	Teachers	Admin.	Teachers	Admin.
Strong	40%	31%	39%	32%	49%	45%
Adequate	19%	23%	34%	31%	33%	22%
Needs improvement	41%	46%	27%	38%	18%	34%

Discussion

The purpose of this article is to compare the music education situation in Quebec with the situation in Canadian schools in other provinces and to examine the data taking into account the status of respondents.

Most elementary school children participate in some form of music education in Canada.

However, simply indicating that students participate does not guarantee quality of instruction or teaching time. At the secondary level, there is significantly less participation in music programs and only 10% of schools reported participation of all students in a music program. This is a far cry from the idealism of “music for all”! In terms of musical opportunities for students, it seems important to note that the “singing culture” of the rest of Canada (Choir, 58%; Musical Theatre, 27%) is much less present in Quebec schools (31% and 16%). There are significant cultural and historical differences in the different regions of Canada and these differences most probably impact music education programs across the country in specific ways.

Examining the results of the different forms of music education in schools, it is important to note that listening/appreciating music is one of the three disciplinary competencies in the provincial

curriculum in Quebec. With the introduction of the compulsory arts credit for the secondary school diploma, teachers see students only 2/75-minute periods during a 9-day cycle. Therefore, some teachers have chosen to focus on the other disciplinary competencies (listening, creating) rather than giving performing their exclusive attention. Looking at the data regarding visits to the school by community or professional musicians, Quebec seems well behind the rest of Canada. While the program *Culture in Schools* offers a repertory of workshops for schools, many teachers find it difficult and time consuming to organize artist visits.

It is positive that elementary school music is taught by specialists in Quebec given the large percentage of generalists who teach music in other provinces. However, music education is not perceived as positively in Quebec as in other parts of the country. Do our teachers and administrators understand the true value of music education? Are we communicating this information effectively to our preservice and inservice teachers as well as to our administrators? Quebec seems to have less support and funding for its music education programs. When the educational system itself does not value music in the curriculum by providing the support needed, it is difficult for administrators and teachers to perceive music instruction as offering important benefits for students.

Fewer Quebec schools rate their music programs as strong or very strong. Job permanency challenges in Quebec make it difficult for teachers to build strong programs in schools. In general, respondents in Quebec believe that their programs need improvement, specifically pertaining to space, instruments/equipment and instructional materials. According to respondents,

the most important challenges facing Quebec music programs are the lack of funding, time and equipment.

Finally, music teachers and administrators responded very differently to particular questions. Do teachers that rate their programs more highly than administrators reflect a “corporatist” discourse? By reporting positively about their programs, music teachers confer importance on their own profession rather than adopting a critical view of the situation. Perhaps that majority of teachers that completed the survey work in strong music programs.

In general, do the results indicate an over optimistic perspective from respondents? Is this a reliable portrait/reflection of the actual situation of music education programs across the country? According to the respondents of this study, music education in Canada is doing well. These results seem to contradict the negative discourse of many music teacher associations regarding school music teaching today. Is this optimistic perspective linked to the composition of the sample? The majority of the respondents were school principals and there was a higher response rate from schools where the music program is strong and well developed. Perhaps the optimistic perspective of the respondents is linked to these two factors. As documented in other studies, school administrators and music teachers do not share the same perspective on music education in schools (Abril & Gault, 2006, 2008).

Every research method has limitations and while the survey allows the researchers to conduct an extensive analysis of social phenomena, this analysis remains superficial to some extent, unable to answer the more open-ended why and how questions better served by qualitative methods. Are the data valid? The research protocol was followed exactly. However, we might put forward the

notion here of sociological/conceptual validity. In other words, are the right people providing the relevant information needed to evaluate the situation of music education in Canadian schools? Is the data reliable? We know who returned the questionnaires but we do not know who completed them. Was it the administrator, the music teacher or both? This limits our ability to interpret the data given that we are not sure of the status of the respondent.

Conclusion

It is our view that quantitative and qualitative methods are complementary, and ideally, it would be important to follow up this research with interviews and ethnographic fieldwork in order to describe the complexity of music programs in Canadian schools. Given substantial differences across the country, future research needs to document the demographic, sociological and sociocultural aspects of music education. This would allow music teachers to have a better understanding of their increasing diverse clientele and would perhaps offer ideas of practical ways to increase the support of the community for music education in schools. The uniqueness of music learning including its intrinsic learning benefits and its benefits for other types of learnings needs to be understood and supported by our communities and our policy makers if music education will continue to occupy an important place in a child's well-rounded general education in Canada.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge Hill Strategies and the Coalition for Music Education in Canada for conducting this survey research. We are indebted to all the administrators and music teachers who took time to complete the questionnaire.

References

- Abril, C. R., & Gault, B. M. (2006). The state of music in the elementary school: The principal's perspective. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 54(1), 6-20. doi: 10.1177/002242940605400102
- Abril, C. R., & Gault, B. M. (2008). The state of music in secondary schools: The principal's perspective. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 56(1), 68-81. doi: 10.1177/0022429408317516
- Coalition for Music Education in Canada. (2005). *Music education « state of the nation » benchmark study*. Retrieved from <http://musicmakesus.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2010/10/EnglishMusicReport.pdf>
- Coalition for Music Education in Canada. (2010). *Music in our schools survey*. Retrieved from http://musicmakesus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Music_Education_fullreportE2010.pdf
- Fédération des associations des musiciens éducateurs du Québec. (2010). [Sondage FAMEQ 2011 sur le programme de musique]. Unpublished raw data.