

SOURCES AND STRENGTHS OF INFLUENCES  
DETERMINING MUSIC COURSE OPTIONS  
IN GRADE VII

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to examine and compare the strengths of various identified influences which may determine the choice of music course options made by Grade VI students prior to entering a junior high school in a suburban district of Winnipeg, Canada.

It was hoped that information would be made available to those people responsible for junior high music programmes which would help in formulating a policy of compulsory or elective music at this level.

It was further hoped that since the students in the study were required to take a music course in Grade VII but had a choice of one of three different music options, information would be made available regarding the relative strength of the influences as they applied across and within the option groups.

Students' opinion of the option choice system were also sought both over the total sample of 260 and within the option groups.

Information and data were collected from the students' responses to a 39 unit questionnaire. This questionnaire was organized in eight sub-scales each representing an influence or factor and scored on a Likert scale. Several computer programmes were used to analyze the data.

The findings indicated that over the total sample, the

student's perceived value of his chosen option was the strongest influence. This was followed by the influence of information from course description sheets and the elementary music specialist. The influence of peers was the next strongest influence and finally the influence of parents. The difference between each of these four identified main influences was at the statistically significant level.

A further finding was that the relative strengths of these influences changed when the sample was divided into option groups although perceived value of chosen option still remained the strongest.

Peer pressure which was identified as the influence least conducive to sound educational decisions was found to exert an influence to a certain degree but did not appear to be strong when the actual decision regarding option choice was made. Peer pressure, however, was found to correlate negatively with every other influence or factor.

General attitude to music had the highest positive correlation, with four of the six other influences and factors.

Students appear to like the option choice system both overall the total sample and by option group.

The study's main recommendation is that the information flow between junior high and elementary grade schools be improved so that the student's perception of the options be as factual as possible.

This increase in the student's knowledge about the options may serve to lessen the dependency on the peer group and may

help present the music options on an equitable basis. This latter is specially important since the study appears to show that different options attract students of very different motivation and potential.

The study concludes with several recommendations for further study on topics related to the area of research covered in this paper.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

To say that educators and administrators cannot agree about what to do about music at the junior high level is to be guilty of understatement. Currently in North America there is a plethora of arrangements for music at the Grade VII-IX level. This is due not only to different sizes of schools, but to competing views on (1) whether music is a worthwhile pursuit at this age level, and (2) what is to be the nature of the musical offering?

There is for example a school of thought which claims that in the pursuit of meeting individual needs (though often this is confused with individual desires which need not be the same thing) students should be allowed a considerable measure of freedom. There are however differences about what is the best age for the student to be allowed this choice. As a result of these differing views, there are currently in Manitoba junior high schools which,

- (a) offer no music at all
- (b) offer music only as an extra curricular activity
- (c) offer music as an elective (usually in a performance area like band or choral)

- (d) offer music as a compulsory subject at least for part of the time (usually Grade VII and optional in Grade VIII and IX)

Even the latest junior high curriculum guide in Manitoba<sup>1</sup> offers no guidance in this area. In it the desire is expressed that students will stay for three years in whatever music course they begin, but there is no general recommendation as to whether music generally should be compulsory at any of the three junior high levels. This seems to be typical of North America, described by Marple as having "no norm."<sup>2</sup>

This confusion is in sharp contrast to the wide acceptance, availability and compulsory nature of music in elementary schools. Students usually follow the same programme from K-VI and if some acknowledgement is given to individual preferences it usually takes the form of extra curricular activities (lunchtime or after school choir). Occasionally these pursuits are incorporated into an activity period within the regular timetable. Indeed in some rural elementary schools the whole curriculum is centred largely around the music programme.

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Education, Manitoba, Junior High Curriculum Guide Grade VII-IX (Interim) (Winnipeg: Department of Education, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>Hugo D. Marple, Junior High Music, (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1975), p. 10.

compulsory music classes.

The Munn Report<sup>3</sup> is now recommending that students in Scotland be required to take an aesthetic subject, choosing between Art, Music, Creative Dance, and Drama as well as a regular core programme, but this choice is to be made only at the Secondary III level. The curricular diet for Secondary I and II levels must be the same for all students. This includes a compulsory music unit.

The reason for the widespread viewpoints mentioned above can be traced in most cases to differing views regarding the maturity of students in Grade VI and their ability to make sound, sensible judgements regarding their music education future. In Britain the system infers that students entering junior high are not ready to do this, whereas the opposite viewpoint is more accepted in North America.<sup>4</sup>

In the school division used in this study, one of the few which requires music for all students in Grade VII, students are required to choose between three possible alternative music courses when they are eleven years old. These courses are: Band, Choral, and General Music and at first glance seem to be well defined and quite different in content. However the courses do have a lot in common, including

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<sup>3</sup>Her Majesty's Stationery Office, The Structure of the Curriculum in the Third and Fourth Years of the Scottish Secondary School (Edinburgh, Scotland: 1977).

<sup>4</sup>Music Educators National Conference, The School Music Program: Descriptions and Standards (Vienna, Virginia: 1974) p. 14.

music reading, notational and listening skills. Students who join the band programme just "to play an instrument" find there is more to the course than this. Students who choose choral because they "want to sing" may be surprised to discover a heavy emphasis on other music skills. Likewise, students choosing General Music "to avoid singing" find that this is not the case.

It is possible that, as the eleven year old student makes his option choice, the subtleties of the respective programmes may be lost on him, unless other supporting influences such as good course description sheets, are available. This study will examine the relationships between various identified influences and other possible factors which might be an influence on the student's decision making process as he chooses his music option.

#### Statement of Significance of the Study

In the Introduction, and in a part of the Review of the Literature, the problem of compulsory versus elective music for the junior high grades is identified as a core problem. This study would make information available to people such as curriculum planners, school boards, principals, music supervisors and teachers, who have to make decisions regarding the status of music at the junior high level. The study will also present the students' views on taking one aspect (option) of music and having to drop the rest.

Specifically, in the writer's school division where

music is compulsory in Grade VII but the student has to make a choice between music options, the study may indicate that improvements are necessary if it is shown that students in Grade VI are making uninformed decisions or are unduly influenced by non-musical considerations.

The way that improvements are made could range from remedial action, such as the institution of a better information flow from junior high to elementary schools, to the formulation of a decision that removes the choice of option from the student and gives it to the teachers concerned. This should not be regarded as an extreme or unusual idea, since students are often put in courses on the recommendation of a teacher.

A major concern of the study will be to compare the effects of four important influences, namely:

- (a) parental influence
- (b) peer pressure
- (c) information from course description sheets and from the Grade VI music teacher
- (d) the students perceived value of chosen option.

These identified influences will be compared with each other and with other possible modifying factors both over the total population and between option groups. A study of these various effects and relationships may supply information which contributes towards formulating a policy as regards compulsory versus elective music at this age level.

Since the study is looking at the individual student's basis for choice in his option, information may be made available which might give a better indication than exists at present as to the desired degree of freedom of, or restriction on, the student as he chooses a music option.

#### Statement of the Problem

There are three music options available in Grade VII at the junior high school used in this study. These are Band, Choral and General Music. Students entering from Grade VI must take one of these options.

Each option group will be asked where the influence(s) came from which helped that person to decide which option to apply for. The study will also try to assess the relative strength of these influences and the possible limiting effect of having to choose one option only.

The study will seek answers to the following questions:

- (1) What is the strongest single factor influencing Grade VI students when they make their music option choice.
- (2) What is the nature of the relationship between option choice and,
  - (a) parental influence
  - (b) influence of peer pressure
  - (c) information from course description sheets and elementary music teacher
  - (d) the student's perceived value of his chosen option

- (e) the quality of the student's home musical background
  - (f) the student's general attitude to music
  - (g) attitude to singing activities?
- (3) What is the nature of the relationships among all the following influences and factors:
- (a) parental influence
  - (b) influence of peer pressure
  - (c) information from course description sheets and elementary music teacher
  - (d) the student's perceived value of his chosen option
  - (e) the quality of the student's home musical background
  - (f) the student's general attitude to music
  - (g) attitude to singing activities
- (4) Do students like the option choice system?

#### Theoretical Assumptions

From discussions with students it seems that most do not make their decision regarding a music interest area in a vacuum. The student will get some information on the options from the elementary music specialist and perhaps also from the regular classroom teacher. The student may bring the problem to their parents to hear what they have to say. Visits of performing groups from the junior high school may influence him.

### Organization of the Study

The purpose, significance and limitations of the study are described in Chapter I.

Chapter II will review the relevant literature and research on areas identified as core problems in this study. This includes sections on compulsory versus elective music at the junior high level and the influence of peer pressure both in general terms and how it may apply specifically to this study. A paragraph on perception is included.

Chapter III presents the sources for data, the procedures for collecting data and information how the data is treated.

In Chapter IV the data collected from the questionnaire is presented in statistical form, analysed and interpretations of the results are offered. These interpretations deal directly with the questions raised in the Statement of the Problem.

Chapter V presents a summary of the study, lists important findings and conclusions and addresses itself to the implications regarding music options at the junior high level.

The final chapter lists several areas of possible interest to the researcher which are related to this study.



CHAPTER II  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Music: Compulsory or Elective?

As mentioned earlier, there are many different arrangements for music at the junior high level. Some arrangements are largely or at least in part attributable to such things as the size of the school or the availability of music teachers, but other arrangements can be traced to differing views about the place of music in the curriculum, and in particular the extent to which it should be compulsory.

As far back as 1917 the then United States Commissioner of Education, Philander P. Claxton said,

"If I were to make a public school curriculum, I would put in a little reading and writing, a little arithmetic, a little history and geography and a great deal of music... Music is the most practical thing in our schools." <sup>1</sup>

According to sources quoted in Marple,<sup>2</sup> the Commissioner was not saying anything which implied a radical departure from what was actually the case, because in a 1916 study<sup>3</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup>D. W. Dykema and C. H. Farnsworth, "The Importance of School Music," Music Educators Journal (Feb. 1964).

<sup>2</sup>Hugh D. Marple, Junior High Music, (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1975), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Aubrey Augustus Douglass, The Junior High School, (Bloomington, Illinois: Public School Publishing Company, 1916), pp. 78-87, quoted in Marple p. 8.

school needs to provide "definite time during the days"<sup>8</sup> for these activities.

This is not to say that the principals were recommending compulsory music since "providing definite time" can mean offering elective courses and indeed Sur and Schuller themselves define "a well balanced (music) education" as one which offers general music plus electives (usually in performance) but make no recommendations that any of the courses should be compulsory, though like the principals' position paper they wish to see regular and not extra curricular scheduling in music.<sup>9</sup>

This position is taken one step further by Frances Andrews who, acknowledging the problem of compulsory versus elective, states:

"In projecting the curriculum for a given school, it is necessary to decide on  
 (a) all the courses that shall be offered  
 (b) whether they shall be elective or not  
 (my emphasis) (c) what shall determine  
 the qualifications for scheduling elective  
 groups, and (d) time and credit allotment."<sup>10</sup>

She offers the eclectic solution that there should be both required and elective music courses.

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<sup>8</sup>"The Arts in the Comprehensive Secondary School" National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1962, p. 30. quoted in Music Education for Teenagers, Sur and Schuller.

<sup>9</sup>Sur and Schuller, Music Education for Teenagers, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>Frances Andrews, Junior High School General Music, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971), pp. 14-15.

Marple addresses himself to a different angle of this question asking "At what age should music become elective and no longer compulsory?"<sup>11</sup> He does not answer the question directly, but says,

"Recently, more administrators have returned to the position that some general music should be required for each level of the junior high school, with specialised ensembles being offered as electives in addition." 12

He further suggests that,

"In considering the requirement question, administrators (of junior high schools) have usually taken the advice of the local music teacher and have required little or no music unless the local teacher has requested it. In addition they have altered the requirements when a new teacher came into the system. At times music teachers have traded away requirements in general music in order to spend more time with high school and elementary classroom teaching and preparation." 13

This is not an uncommon teachers' viewpoint and part of the demise of junior high non performance music has been the music teachers' unwillingness to try to deal with students in required music courses whom they see as being potential discipline problems. This has had two effects. First, it creates and spreads the "how to survive in general music" mentality.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, as Reimer states "...the general

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<sup>11</sup>Marple, Junior High Music, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>14</sup>Surviving in General Music is actually the title of a book by Michael D. Bennett, Pop Hits Publishing, Memphis, 1974.

group becomes extremely important." The authors see the peer group as "an important reference group", "through which they can...gain support and security" and "gain status and a feeling of belonging."<sup>19</sup>

Perrone, Ryan and Zeran state that "the emerging adolescent (which they partly define as 'beginning in the fifth or sixth grade')<sup>20</sup> draws his value structure from others of his peer group"<sup>21</sup> and quote opinions from other writers to elaborate this statement.

Thus, Schmuck is quoted

"Peer groups are not hesitant to suggest to individual members ways of coping with problems, and members accept the suggestion of the group whereas they would be less amenable to the same suggestion offered by adults or non peer individuals of the same age. To the adolescent the significant others are the group." 22

Sanford makes the point that

"If one of the characteristics of the emerging adolescent is his inability to know exactly who he is or what he

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<sup>19</sup>Beryce MacLennan and Naomi Felsenfeld, Group Counselling and Psychotherapy with Adolescents, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968) p. 37, all quotes.

<sup>20</sup>Philip A. Perrone, T. Antoinette Ryan and Franklin R. Zeran, Guidance and the Emerging Adolescent, (Scranton, Pennsylvania 18515: International Textbook Company, 1970), Introduction.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>22</sup>Richard Schmuck, "Concerns of Contemporary Adolescents." Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Vol. 49, No. 300 (April, 1965), pp. 19-28, quoted in Perrone, p. 100.

wants to become, it is safe to say that immersion in the peer group will bring conflict as he strives to become identifiable as an individual." 23

Frankel's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, is quoted as follows

"...Man in the beginning lost some of the basic animal instincts and hence had to make choices, which in turn require information. More recently the traditions utilized to back up his behaviour have been rapidly diminishing. Since no instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do, the question arises as to how soon it will be before he won't know what he wants to do. When this happens he will be functioning more and more at the whims of others and hence falls prey to conformity." 24

Perrone, Ryan and Zeran see this as a corollary

"fitting well with the characteristics of the emerging adolescent and his confirmity to peer pressures which occur at the very time in his life that he is seeking self identity." 25

Kuhlen says that "Students drop out of school to escape what to them is an intolerable situation when comparing self against group requirements",<sup>26</sup> and Lohman warns

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<sup>23</sup>Nevitt Sanford, Where Colleges Fail, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1968), quoted in Perrone, p.100.

<sup>24</sup>Viktor Frankel, Man's Search for Meaning, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), quoted in Perrone, pp.99-100.

<sup>25</sup>Perrone, Guidance and the Emerging Adolescent, p.100.

<sup>26</sup>Raymond Kuhlen, The Psychology of Adolescent Development, (New York: Harper, 1952), pp.289-291, quoted in Perrone, p.100.