Thoughts on the Research Agenda: Passion or Pragmatics?
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I recently became intrigued with the question of what motivates people to do research. Why did the authors in this issue do these studies? Why do I do research? Why have I done the studies I have done? Why do some people seem to pursue research all their lives and others only until they have tenure? Why does the research of some people seem to build a unified cumulative record while others seems scattered and unrelated? Maybe I focused on these questions because I now have tenure and have an opportunity to take a "breather" and assess my professional priorities. Or maybe it seems like an important question because there has been a suspension of merit pay at the University of Toronto. Regardless of why I came to this question, I believe it is fundamentally an important one for our profession. In considering it I must admit I have many more questions that answers.

Why does research get done? Is it informal doubt that current explanations are correct? Is it formal scepticism? Do we see the first signs of the research mind in the story of the Garden of Eden when the serpent asks, "Did God really say?" It certainly seemed to get a hearing because of the internal passion of Adam and Eve! Or is this story more about one of the essential characteristics of people and motivators for research - wondering - wondering how the fruit might taste, wondering about knowing good and evil, wondering what "being like God" meant? Or is research more about decision making? To continue the biblical examples, was Noah's sending out of the dove an example of research? There sure was a strong pragmatic motivation for that when all that was visible was water! There is a very strong desire "to know" in humans, to know "what is." Such questions in part are an attempt by people to bring order to their universe. There is also a desire to know "what will be" so that decision making is informed. Research for decision making has a strong emphasis on prediction and strategy. Conservative Darwinists try to predict who will be most likely to survive so that resources do not need to be wasted on inferior individuals. Reform Darwinists try to find ways to enhance the survival rate of all individuals. Both, however, are researchers driven by the pragmatic concern for efficiency or effectiveness.

My experience with research in music education tells me that many studies in our field are done for pragmatic reasons. These reasons are often so blatantly pragmatic that they are not even about solving problems so much as satisfying requirements - finishing a masters or doctoral degree or meeting the research and publication expectations of tenure committees. The topic may be of some interest but the agenda is rarely driven by an inner passion to find out or know for its own sake. However, the pragmatic agenda does not only derive from external requirements. It also is motivated by professional survival necessities. For example, in a recent conversation with a provincial ministry
program director, the primary concern that emerged was the need for research to support advocacy. I suppose that if we do not have a real sense of legitimacy as a field of study then it is less likely that individuals will energetically pursue research on topics internal to the field.

I readily admit that externally motivated pragmatic research is important and needed. However, for a person to become a life-long researcher making a significant contribution to the field, an inner passion must take over. There must be a burning desire to know, a constant wondering, an unquenchable quest for answers and solutions. If this quest has an immediate pragmatic dimension it is even better for the field.

There are some broad agenda directions or categories that are worthwhile to pursue in our field currently. Evidence or findings useful in justifying music education in the schools is one area (unfortunately we tend to think this has to be external to music like the effect of music education on math skills). The most useful evidence, however, may come from research that was not intended for pragmatic purposes at all but was driven by the desire to know about brain function or identity construction or value formation or quality of life. The answers to these may come from both quantitative studies with measurements, rating scales, and statistics or from qualitative or philosophical indepth studies of who and how we are on this earth. There is also a pedagogical agenda of questions of what we can expect with particular groups and how to achieve the effects we want. This agenda should involve questions of what is of value in education; for example, group performance excellence at the expense of positive affective response toward music may be mis-education.

Typically in the past we have thought of research as something done by university people or for university credit in a formal way. That has led to a great deal of passionless pragmatic research. Much better would be a situation where we as music educators have the freedom to reflect on what intrigues us, the desire to answer questions important to us, and the ability and resources to find the answers. This would result in passionate pragmatic research - research driven by the desire to know and the desire to improve something.

Four of the articles in this issue are focused on university and professional education. Authors address the education of music teachers: questions like what competencies should they have, what course and instructional design is best, what effects do particular curricula have? One article examines a topic related to pedagogy: what is appropriate music for jazz education. In these five research reports what is the dominance of passion versus pragmatics? This may not be a particularly important question to reflect on as you read research. It is a very important question to think about as you do research.