A REPORT ON THE CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF THE ARTS
NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND EDUCATION IN CANADA
by Patricia Shand

I. HISTORY OF THE CCA INQUIRY

In May 1975, representatives of Canadian national arts and education associations (including CMEA) met under the auspices of the Canadian Conference of the Arts to consider some of their common concerns. CCA is the largest voluntary association in the cultural field in Canada. Its membership includes virtually all the major arts organizations in Canada (professional performing arts organizations as well as educational associations), plus individual members drawn from the performing arts and arts education. CCA seeks to promote the arts in Canada, to serve the interests of Canadian artists, and to gather and disseminate information concerning the arts in Canada. As a result of the May 1975 meeting, the CCA Task Force on Arts and Education in Canada was established. The Task Force began by preparing a policy statement which stressed the need for improved quality and increased quantity of arts education. The Task Force also prepared a report on the status of voluntary arts education associations in Canada, and stressed the need for financial support for such associations which, like CMEA then and now, found it difficult to meet the needs of the profession while relying on voluntary efforts by busy teachers already working full time with their teaching responsibilities. During 1976 and 1977, Task Force meetings continued, culminating late in 1977 with the establishment by CCA of a three-year National Inquiry into Arts and Education in Canada, with the following aims:

1. to report on the current status of arts education in Canada
2. to make recommendations for change, and
3. to pressure federal, provincial, and local decision-makers to improve support for arts education.

The hope was that at the conclusion of the three-year Inquiry, the arts education associations, strengthened by increased support, would take over the Task Force operation and continue to press for improvements in arts education.

II. PROCEDURES USED BY THE CCA NATIONAL INQUIRY

1. The National Task Force was established under chairman Richard Courtney, then president of CCA, and Professor of Arts Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The Task Force and National Inquiry were in fact Courtney’s dream, and he...
provided the vision and drive which made this tremendously ambitious undertaking possible.

2. Members of the National Task Force were drawn from the various voluntary arts education associations across the country. Section heads were named for the various arts disciplines (e.g., music, dance, visual art, integrated arts, etc.), and also for various aspects (e.g., galleries and museums, prisoners, gifted and talented, voluntary associations) and for various levels (e.g., universities, and further education). I represented CMEA as the Music section head. Ken Bray worked with me in the first years of the Inquiry. David Elliott, another CMEA member, was the Integrated Arts section head.

3. Richard Courtney, as National Task Force Chairman, travelled across Canada, holding meetings with various provincial arts education leaders, with the aim of identifying someone in each province willing to act as chairman of a provincial task force. This was not an easy process, but eventually a chairman or acting chairman was appointed in all provinces except Saskatchewan where the Sask. Ministry of Education had already established its own Committee of Inquiry into arts education.

4. The provincial Task Force chairmen named their own provincial members, following the national Task Force model of section heads responsible for the various arts disciplines, aspects, and levels.

5. The National and Provincial Task Forces undertook research to ascertain the current status of arts education nationally and provincially, and to identify needs for change. Most of the information was gathered through mailed questionnaires, with some use of interviews and existing written documentation. Joint meetings of the National Task Force and the provincial Task Force chairmen were held to discuss research procedures and the preparation of the final reports.

6. By the summer of 1979, a draft national report had been prepared. Draft provincial reports had also been prepared or were being prepared by the Task Force of B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and New Brunswick. (New Brunswick in fact produced two reports, one related to francophone education, the other to anglophone education.)

Under the three-year plan of the National Inquiry, these procedures were to have been followed next:

7. Final national and provincial reports were to have been published in 1979 and presented to national and provincial decision-makers.

8. A follow-up meeting was to have been held in 1980 to obtain feedback from those decision-makers as to what steps they were prepared to make to strengthen arts education.

Unfortunately, at this point the planned procedures broke down. Final reports were published by the provincial Task Forces of B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and New Brunswick during 1979 and 1980, but a final national report was never published. By 1979, Richard Courtney’s term as CCA President was over, and the new executive of CCA did not share Curtnev’s interest in and commitment to arts education. They were more concerned with professional arts activities. They were unwilling to provide financial support for the publication of the national report or for the planned follow-up meeting with decision-makers. As a result, the final crucial steps in the process were never taken. This was very disappointing for those of us who had worked so hard for a cause in which we believed.
III. PROBLEMS

In looking back on the National Inquiry, it is obvious, it is obvious that there were some serious problems which impeded its progress. The four main problems were:

1. Lack of time
2. Lack of money
3. Lack of systematic research procedures
4. Problems of communication

Lack of time and money

The three-year time limit set by CCA and the lack of sufficient funds to hire full-time researchers made the process of researching and writing reports very difficult. Lack of funds also made more frequent joint meetings of national and provincial task force members impossible, and CCA’s withdrawal of financial support in 1979 made the publication of the national report and the follow-up meeting with decision-makers impossible. In the United States, the 1977 Rockefeller Report, Coming to Our Senses: The Significance of the Arts for American Education was a glossy professional publication, and the research which led up to the publication of the Rockefeller Report was well supported financially. In comparison, even those Canadian provincial reports which were published, were generally of necessity done cheaply and without the benefit of professional writers, editors, and proof-readers.

Lack of systematic and reliable research procedures

Since the majority of the Canadian research was undertaken by volunteers with little or no background in research techniques, there was considerable lack of consistency in research techniques from one arts discipline to another and from one report to another. The questionnaires developed by the National Task Force were often not appropriate in a specific local situation, and there was the inevitable resistance to “yet another questionnaire.” Insufficient percentages of responses to questionnaires made it difficult or impossible to draw reliable conclusions. The questions asked tended to focus on questions related to quantity rather than quality. It is easier to ascertain numbers and size of music programs rather than the quality of programs, but surely quality should be a crucial concern.

Communication problems

(a) Problems of communication among arts educators nationally and provincially

The Inquiry encountered a number of difficulties related to poor communication. Perhaps the most obvious were the problems in communicating with Quebec arts educators. At the time Richard Courtney tried to establish a provincial Task Force in Quebec, separatist feelings were strong. Although a Quebec member of CCA agreed to serve as acting Quebec Task Force chairman, she was unable to form a Task Force of people willing to participate in a national inquiry. In Ontario, two different men in succession accepted the position of provincial chairman, but neither was able to form a strong Task Force, in spite of the interest and willingness expressed at preliminary meetings. In general, a national educational inquiry is a difficult undertaking, since education falls under provincial jurisdiction and yet there are some common national concerns and some active national arts education organizations. As the national section head for music, I was told not to communicate directly with the music members of the provincial Task Forces,
but rather to communicate with the provincial Task Force chairmen who would pass my requests on to the provincial music members. In practice, communications often broke down between national and provincial section heads, and even within some provinces, there was poor communication between the Provincial Task Force and the provincial associations of arts educators. As a result, many provincial MEAs were either ignorant about or suspicious of the Task Force Inquiry, which was unfortunate since the Inquiry was established to benefit them.

(b) Problems of written communication in the published reports

All those writing reports found it difficult to organize the material. Should the reports be presented by arts discipline (e.g., music), by level (e.g., elementary, secondary, university), or by aspect (e.g., gifted and talented)? Should the final reports be a collection of the individual reports prepared by the various section heads, or should one person do a final overwrite? In the final reports, it was often unclear who was the intended audience (teachers? administrators? researchers? the general public?).

IV. WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE CCA INQUIRY

In spite of the many problems encountered by the National Inquiry, it was a valiant pioneering effort from which we in CMEA can and should learn. We should learn especially:

(1) the importance of communication, and
(2) the importance of examining who we are, what we believe, and where we are going.

Perhaps most important, the Inquiry provided opportunities for committed educators from various arts disciplines, levels, and aspects to work together formally and informally, and to share common concerns and insights. In spite of the many communication problems, there were also some real successes in communication as representatives from various arts education associations worked together. CMEA must continue to provide opportunities for music educators to share ideas and concerns with each other and with educators from other arts disciplines.

Although the published provincial reports were far from perfect, they did provide more information than we had previously, and hopefully researchers in the future can learn from our mistakes and can undertake more systematic research. Although the reports often lacked a strong research foundation, many represented well considered views by leading arts educators based on what they already knew. Bringing together such views in published reports was no mean accomplishment. Although the national report was never published, the research was not altogether wasted. For example, I was able to publish a revised version of the national music report in The Canadian Music Educator.?

Since the demise of the CCA National Inquiry, there has been a growing concern among provincial and national arts education associations to assess who they are, what they believe, and to formulate what they want for the future. CMEA, like the CCA Inquiry, continues to grapple with lack of funds, and problems of communication with provincial associations and individual teachers. Like the CCA Inquiry, CMEA continues to rely on its most valuable resource — committed volunteers. CMEA should learn from the CCA Inquiry the dangers of seeking to accomplish too much in a limited time, but should also be inspired to dare to do
something to improve the status of music education in Canada. Speaking personally, I was inspired by the vision of Richard Courtney as he worked against almost insurmountable odds to bring together arts educators from all parts of Canada, to share and work together. We in CMEA need to establish priorities and to be realistic about what can be done with the available time, money, and personnel, and yet we need to have an idealistic vision of what needs to be done in the field of arts education and we need to seek to achieve that vision.


Patricia Martin Shand is an Associate Professor in the Department of Music Education of the University of Toronto Faculty of Music, and Director of the John Adaskin Project (Canadian Music for schools).