

REPORT FROM THE FIELD

RELATIONSHIPS IN LEARNING: ARTS EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF REGINA – AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. NORMAN C. YAKEL

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ABSTRACT. The Arts Education Program at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, provides a unique undergraduate degree and is a model for innovative program design. Dr. Norman C. Yakel, Professor of Arts Education in the Faculty of Education, has been influential in the development and design of the program from its outset. This interview with Dr. Yakel explores the intention behind the design of the program, a design that reflects both a philosophy and a pedagogy of inclusiveness.

LES RAPPORTS ET L'APPRENTISSAGE :

LA FORMATION DES PROFESSEURS D'ÉDUCATION ARTISTIQUE À L'UNIVERSITÉ DE REGINA – ENTREVUE AVEC NORMAN C. YAKEL

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article porte sur le Baccalauréat en éducation artistique offert à l'Université de Regina, Saskatchewan, – un programme vraiment unique en son genre. Au cours d'un entretien avec le Dr Norman C. Yakel, qui a joué un rôle clé dans la conception initiale et le développement de ce baccalauréat, nous en arrivons à mieux comprendre les principes philosophiques qui sont à la base même de ce programme innovateur. Ces principes sont réflétés dans la mise en oeuvre d'une pédagogie qui vise l'inclusion tous dans l'expérience des beaux arts.

The Arts Education Program at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, is about to celebrate the 20th anniversary of its undergraduate degree. Offered as a specialist degree through the Faculty of Education, the program both reflects and directs arts education offered in Saskatchewan schools. The program's unique features and the innovative and influential arts curriculum offered in Saskatchewan can best be understood by exploring both the Saskatchewan context and the influence of innovative individuals (Bush and Browne, 1999).

This article presents a discussion with one such innovative individual, Dr. Norman C. Yakel, Professor of Arts Education, University of Regina, in which he describes the history, design and philosophy of the program. The

interview is prefaced by a brief discussion of education in Saskatchewan, and of arts education both provincially and at the University of Regina.

THE BROAD CONTEXT: EDUCATION IN SASKATCHEWAN

Saskatchewan is a province of one million people. Saskatchewan education must be seen in the particular context of Canada's political and educational system. The Canadian provinces are responsible for schooling approximately 95 percent of Canada's five million young people in publicly funded institutions (Young & Levin, 1998, p. 23). In Saskatchewan, as elsewhere in Canada, authority over most areas of educational decision-making rests with an elected Minister of Education in a provincial Department or Ministry of Education. Each province is responsible for curricula, teacher certification, and grades within the school system (*ibid*, p. 45). The role of the federal government in Canadian education is through various government agencies and departments rather than a federal department of education.

Because Canada is a country characterized by diversity, provincial jurisdiction over education has been both problematic and advantageous at different times; it has served to both oppress and sustain the uniqueness of immigrants and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The provision of education for Canada's First Nations peoples is a critical political, cultural and educational issue in Saskatchewan where a young and growing Aboriginal population represents 11.4 percent of the province's population. Increasing numbers of First Nations children are attending on-reserve, First Nations-controlled schools. (Saskatchewan Education, 2001b). States Saskatchewan Education (2001a), "Aboriginal content and perspectives are in Saskatchewan's core curriculum for the benefit of all students, and . . . their implementation is the responsibility of all teachers."

A HISTORY OF COOPERATION

An atmosphere of cooperation is embodied in the history of Saskatchewan. Large-scale cooperative movements are part of this heritage, evidenced in socialized medical care, stores, financial institutions and insurance plans. The spirit of cooperation extends to education, where teachers, administrators, universities, governments, students, parents and members of the community are active in the ongoing re-design of education (Bush and Browne, 1999; McConaghy, 1990; Taylor, 1992; Yakel, 1985).

In their first policy statement on education in 1949, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, or CCF, forerunner to the New Democratic Party, stated:

Education is the psychological means for making the new type of citizen social and co-operative, without whom it is impossible that any co-

operative commonwealth can come to be or long endure. . . . We should teach the young from kindergarten to college that the main purpose of work is to increase the good life for all We ought to enthrone co-operation. (As cited in McKague, 1980, p. 140)

McConaghy (1990) suggests that Saskatchewan's approach to curriculum reform serve as a model: "Saskatchewan's model of curriculum reform is an excellent example of the process of collaborative decision making. This approach has been a hallmark of Saskatchewan's education system for many years. Education policy has been formulated through extensive consultation with the organizations and institutions connected to schools and teaching" (p 496).

Bush and Browne (1999) state that the re-design of arts education in Saskatchewan "echoed or foreshadowed many ideas promoted in other parts of North America, such as the Getty Foundation's disciplined art education model and . . . the U.S. National Standards for Arts Education" (p 32).

ARTS EDUCATION IN SASKATCHEWAN

The Saskatchewan Department of Education ("Saskatchewan Education") has developed and implemented arts education curricula for each of Grades 1 to 12. Guides contain separate sections for music, dance, drama and visual art plus an optional inter-related unit. As provincially mandated core curricula, students in Grades 1 to 9 receive two hundred minutes of arts education per week, divided equally among the four strands. At this time, secondary students in Grades 10 to 12 have arts education as one option among three. They may obtain credit in the four strand Arts Education course or through individual Arts Education courses.

The aim of the arts education curriculum is "to enable students to understand and value arts expressions throughout life" (Saskatchewan Education, 1994, p. 6). The curriculum is structured to include the following three components: creative/productive; cultural/historical; and critical/responsive. The interweaving of components is intended to achieve a balance in focus (*ibid*, p. 8). Expectations of gender equity, First Nations and Métis content and perspectives, along with Saskatchewan content provide for a relevant and influential learning experience.¹

Curriculum documents have been adopted or adapted, in whole or in part, by the Northwest Territories and British Columbia, as well as individual school districts in Ontario. Schools in the United States are directed to the Saskatchewan Arts Education Curriculum by the Center for Arts in the Basic Curriculum as a model for creating their own documents (Bush and Browne, 1999, p. 34).

ARTS EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

The University of Regina has an enrollment of more than 11,000 full and part-time students, nearly 1,500 faculty and staff, and a current operating budget of \$81 million. Known as Regina College from its establishment in 1911 as a residential high school, it became a junior college of the University of Saskatchewan in 1925. Full degree-granting status was acquired in 1961 and academic institutional autonomy was achieved in 1974.

The arts education program at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, is a testament to the spirit of cooperation described above. It is unique in that it prepares generalist arts educators in the areas of music, dance, drama, literature and visual arts as a required course of study. The five year Bachelor of Education degree and the two and one-half year after-degree program offer a foundation in aesthetic education, educational pedagogy, classroom and community experience, and lead to full teacher certification. "The first year consists of introductory courses in arts, fine arts, and education. The second year consists of education courses in the five arts areas. Beginning in the third year, students choose a major arts area and a minor arts area of specialization, chosen from the five areas listed above" (University of Regina, 2000).

THE INTERVIEW

The following interview took place during my final semester as an undergraduate student in the Arts Education Program.² Norman C. Yakel is a professor of Arts Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Regina. Dr. Yakel has been influential in the development and design of the Arts Education Program from its outset. He is the last remaining member on campus of the original group of people who planned the program. Through his words, we come to understand the intention behind the design of the program – a design that reflects both a philosophy and a pedagogy of inclusiveness.

Dr. Yakel arrived on campus as Assistant Professor, Department of Arts Education in 1978. He had received B.Ed and B.A degrees from the University of Regina in the early 1970's, an M.A. from Stanford University in 1975 and a PhD in 1979 at Ohio State University. Graduate and post graduate studies were woven amongst seven years teaching at the high school level in Regina.

The interview began from a historical perspective.

Dr Yakel, would you explain how this program was initiated?

When I arrived on campus within the Faculty of Education in 1978, I began teaching in the same program that I emerged from as a graduate – a secondary art education program. At the time I came to work here, there

was great discussion in the community regarding arts education within our school system. I recall as a high school teacher in the 1970's filling out a questionnaire put out by Saskatchewan Education. The purpose was to review current programs in the fine arts and to gather input for future programming for students.

My university colleagues and I carried on these discussions. We examined what was being offered and how we might alter the program for the future. As our dialogue continued, we experimented with aspects of the program. We tried to make it fit with the philosophy of aesthetic education that Saskatchewan Education was considering for our province. The Minister of Education's advisory committee was recommending the inclusion of four arts strands of dance, drama, music, and visual art.

If the arts were going to be part of the community, we felt that we needed to look at more than the two traditional art forms taught at the university, visual arts and music. We decided to wipe the slate clean and develop our ideas for a program in arts education teacher training. We enlarged our discussion group to include dance, drama and literature. Literature was included because we felt we needed to include all those art forms that would be part of an aesthetic discussion.

What is the relationship between what we experience as students and what you believe the arts to be or what you believe arts education to be? (Is there a distinction between the two?)

I don't see any distinction between the arts and arts education. The lens through which we look depends on our function, but the content is the same. Artists look at it from their perspective of artist in production. Educators look at it as a means of knowing – as a way of understanding the world.

One thing that is significant in our program is a view of the arts that is inclusive. The philosophy we had in the early days of discussions was that the arts shouldn't exclude or be exclusive. The arts then were only addressing fine art. We were excluding many aspects of the arts which in turn excluded children in schools and people in our community. We believed the arts content should include reference to popular arts, applied design, crafts, amateur arts, heritage or ethnic arts as well as fine arts.

What kinds of experiences do you create for your students in this program?

When I address students in my visual arts education classes, I assume that everyone does not feel comfortable in the discipline of visual art. My view is that everyone can participate. Everyone has the means to express themselves. Not everyone expresses themselves equally but that's not the point. The point is that everyone has the potential to speak, to respond, and to create in the visual arts.

How do you address this potential with your students?

I address starting points for all. I ask myself how everyone can be included in the conversation. If everyone can't participate then I'm slipping into the old notion that those who will be included are those who have special talent. I don't agree with that.

I've had experiences at university in classes outside this program where I haven't felt that the intention was to include or to open a dialogue with students. I think the university experience for some can be exactly the opposite.

What you describe is what I call the old or the traditional view of education – there are only a few who can participate and we're there to serve those who can. Or, the content of the course is the primary focus, not the students. We don't view it that way in this program. It would be counter to what education is.

Certainly counter to what public education means, Kindergarten to Grade 12. . .

As a program, we're accountable to carrying out the mandate of Saskatchewan Education. We must demonstrate that we are inclusive rather than exclusive.

What is the applicability of a program design such as Arts Education here at the university to other faculties or to higher education generally?

In addition to the philosophy of inclusiveness I have described, our program centers upon the individual student, not the content, as the most important element. This, too, reflects the focus of Saskatchewan Education. Content is the means of dialogue, the means of communication, and the means of participation. Though many institutions and faculties are changing, historically what is central to most programs is that content is of more significance than students as individuals.

Would you expand on the relationship between the arts education curriculum in Saskatchewan schools and the arts education program within the Faculty of Education?

When the province was beginning to look at curriculum change, we knew we didn't want to be directed by curriculum. As a university, we felt we should provide some leadership. We recognized a responsibility in giving direction not because we had ideas better than anyone else's but because it was our professional responsibility. We took on a role we felt would be appropriate to Saskatchewan's cooperative approach to curriculum development.

Do the arts education curricula reflect this program?

The Saskatchewan school curricula both reflect AND direct this program. They exist at the same time and are always changing because we don't

assume the curriculum is finished. It changes through a process of continuous review. The foundation is good for it to be able to change.

How has this program changed since 1982?

A review began the first year we started the program. One of the biggest changes we made was going from a four year degree and two year after-degree program to a five year degree and two and a half year after-degree program. Many of our colleagues suggested we were committing program suicide by extending it. We were prepared to take the risk. The suggestion was coming from our students.

What were students saying needed to be added to the program?

Students said they would like to have more background in all the arts and they said they would like to have it in the first year. Over the years we've continued to listen to our students in evaluating the design of the program. Most recently we've moved the pre-internship year from the third year of the program to year four.

Our intention is that students take on the responsibility of increasing self direction as they move through the program. We value their input because we encourage them to think creatively and independently. By the final semester, students have a great deal of ownership in the program. They take more control of the classes. We discuss content as it applies to students within the context of their individual future as arts educators.

As a result, we as students don't find ourselves at the end of this program requiring a transition-to-work seminar which I've noticed other faculties providing. The transition is designed right into our program.

The classes you are referring to have been in the program from the beginning. The first has students talking about and acting on issues in arts education in the larger community. Students participate in two or three community projects that will enhance their professional development while providing a service to the community. The second is a writing class designed for students to feel comfortable with the mode of communication that is expected in the professional realm. In this class, students submit articles for publication to local, national and international journals, thereby participating in a dialogue relevant to their individual interests. They broaden conversations with students, peers and faculty both at the university and local schools, to dialogues in a cross-disciplinary, professional forum.

Along with a close working relationship with Saskatchewan Education, we support the work of arts educators throughout the community. We have graduates working across North America and around the world in public and private schools, arts agencies, museums and galleries, and large corporations.

What happens to content when a program is as student-centred as this one?

Many people don't understand our program. They sometimes make the assumption that we have watered down either the arts content or the educational content. But when we compare the two programs, the one prior to 1982 and the current one, we see there is more opportunity for our students to address content today. In our program, all students take classes in all five art forms as a foundation, prior to declaring a major and minor, in order to be able to look at arts education as a career, as a profession.

It appears that faculty for this program require not only a base of knowledge but also a particular way of being in relationship with students.

Yes, that's important. I believe that education doesn't just happen from me to the students. I, as teacher, am educated in the process. It's a different view again of teacher. The teacher is not necessarily the fount of knowledge. The teacher is a participant. Together we can do things. I learn from students. I learn all the time.

It's also the relationship that we have as a faculty. Situated within a Faculty of Education, we talk all the time across disciplines, programs, and faculties. We're not isolated in the way some other programs are when found within a Faculty of Fine Arts, for example.

This program has a lot to do with risk. Arts education has a lot to do with risk.

Of course. We demonstrate it every day. But we as a faculty live it. We don't say to students, "You take the risk – we won't take any." We do it all the time.

We certainly had some difficulties in the beginning. Politically, we knew what we were doing in making these changes, but I think we were ahead of ourselves in the program design, intent and philosophy.

Maxine Greene³ had heard of our program and, knowing the populist reality of Saskatchewan, said she wanted to see how it would be practiced in teacher education. When she visited to review our program in 1984, and to serve as guest speaker to the program and the community, she remarked how we were actually doing what for years others had been talking about.

But back to your comment about risk – Art McBeath, who taught here in the Faculty of Education for many years, was very much involved with developing professional studies in education. He had taught all sections – secondary, elementary, middle years. When he realized he hadn't taught the arts education students, he asked if he could do so. When the course was finished, he said that whatever we were doing in the arts education program, he felt the students were much more advanced in their understanding of concepts in education and teaching than the other sections.

I think it is the risk-taking. I think it is the inclusive nature of our program, and the dialogue that happens within the classes.

AFTERWORD

Arts education is being shifted back to the heart of the curriculum in the United States (Walling, 2001). Canadians are advocating a national vision for arts education in Canadian schools (NSAE Website). This is therefore an appropriate time to consider the Arts Education Program at the University of Regina, which offers a model of innovative program design and educational philosophy in action. Many remarkable features characterize the development of this program. Among these are its belief in the interconnectedness of the arts, its community base and its inclusiveness. It owes much of its success to the creation of relationships in learning, based on risk and cooperation.

NOTES

1. Arts Education Curriculum documents can be retrieved at <http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/evergrn.html>
2. The interview took place March 13, 2000 at 10:00 AM, and lasted approximately one hour. Dr. Yakel and I met in his office. With Dr. Yakel's permission, the interview was tape-recorded for later transcription, thereby allowing a flow of discussion uninterrupted by note taking. I referred to notes that aided me in shaping the interview. The atmosphere of the interview was relaxed and informal, as I have taken several classes with Dr. Yakel over the course of my program.
3. Maxine Greene is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. Her work is broadly recognized in the field of education, particularly for her research in the areas of social philosophy, aesthetics, and the philosophy of education.

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HEATHER M. RITENBURG est une récente diplômée du programme d'éducation artistique au sujet duquel porte son article, après avoir obtenu le grade de bachelière en sciences de l'éducation (enseignement de la danse) en 2000. Mme Ritenburg s'est lancée dans des études universitaires après avoir passé près de vingt ans dans la fonction publique, le secteur privé et le secteur à but non lucratif de la communauté artistique de la Saskatchewan. Elle est actuellement étudiante en maîtrise en enseignement de la danse à l'Université de Regina.