

Music Education Conference Trends: A Content Analysis of State In-Service Sessions

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Abstract

The 442 sessions of the 2004-2007 Wisconsin Music Educators Association State Annual In-Service Conferences were classified according to category, which included educational sessions, concert performances, business meetings, receptions, concert clinics, and general sessions. They also were grouped according to subject areas, including general music, performance-centered sessions, research, multiculturalism, technology, inclusion, and industry-centered sessions. The largest proportionate category means of total sessions was educational (66%) and concert performance sessions (22%), followed by teacher education (M= 40%), performance-centered (M= 33%), and industry-centered (M= 29%) subject areas within the educational category. In contrast to literature trends, industry-centered (19%) and technology sessions (4%) comprised less proportionately, while performance sessions dominated. A continuation of trends in decreasing research sessions and concert performances was found. General music and multicultural music sessions represented 15% and 6% respectively of all sessions. A single session on teaching special learners in the music classroom resulted in the inclusion category forming 0.2% of total conference offerings.

Introduction

Representatives from school districts and higher education institutions throughout the United States participate annually in state conferences that facilitate professional development. Price and Orman (2001), in a study of the National Association of Music Education (MENC) biennial conference, indicate the content of in-service conferences may be a reflection of the interests, focus, direction, and concerns of those affiliated with a professional organization. The Wisconsin Music Educators Association (WMEA) annual conference, as with most state music education conferences, is directly affiliated with MENC. MENC is the largest nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of music education at national and local levels. This organization's publications and comprehensive resources have supported the establishment of music education as a profession, and the development of school music curricula for nearly 100 years (Aquino, 1979; Troth, 1981; MENC, 1995).

Researchers in other disciplines have conducted conference content analyses to gain insights regarding their professions (e.g., Berryman, 1982; Conger, 1997; Fetro and Drolet, 1991; Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Jacobs and McFarlane, 2005; Richmond, 1983). While there is a growing body of music education literature utilizing content analysis methodology (Grashel, 2007; Hooper, 1970; Kantorski and Stegman, 2006; Kavanaugh, 1983; Yarbrough, 2002), there is a need for more research that examines the professional development sessions at music education conferences.

Review of Related Literature

A review of the literature in music education reveals few studies on the analysis of conference in-service sessions (Price and Orman, 1999, 2001); however, these findings point to several trends and implications for the profession. Price and Orman (1999) conducted a content analysis of the sessions at MENC's

national biennial in-service conferences from 1984 through 1998. The researchers concentrated primarily on proportional data, given the wide fluctuation in the number of total sessions offered at each conference. The largest proportion of sessions was educational, with a mean of 60%, and performance-centered and industry-centered sessions accounted for 30% and 18% of total sessions offered respectively. Performance, general music, and MENC subjects represented 10-20% of the educational session content. While general music sessions increased incrementally, the sessions promoting particular products (industry-centered) posted dramatic proportional gains from 1984 to 1998. The researchers reported multicultural music and research sessions accounted for less than 10% of the content of educational sessions, and inclusion less than 5% of the offerings.

Price and Orman (2001) examined the 2000 MENC National Biennial In-Service Conference sessions in comparison to results previously reported in Price and Orman (1999). The number of total sessions for the 2000 conference substantially decreased from the prior conference in 1998, and the authors noted this decrease was not evenly distributed across all categories or subject areas. Price and Orman (2001) report the largest proportionate category of sessions was education (65%), followed by sessions including performances (17%), which far exceeded any other category. Promotion of industry-centered sessions accounted for 29% of all sessions and 40% of the content of educational sessions. Within educational sessions, four subject areas accounted for less than 10% of the session offerings (general music, research, technology, administration), with MENC, multicultural music, teacher education, advocacy, collegiate MENC, and inclusion each representing less than 5% of the offerings. Trends of high industry representation and increasing technology, along with decreasing performances and performance-oriented sessions, support Price and Orman's (1999) findings.

The establishment of nine new refereed music education research journals in ten years preceding the 1998 MENC conference may reflect an increased interest in research as evidenced by MENC's publication of *A Research Agenda for Music Education: Thinking Ahead* (1998). The main body of this particular research agenda was developed through a content analysis of research questions submitted by MENC members and in consultation with members of the music education research community. The MENC Research Task Force and Music Education Research Council grouped topics and questions into categories, and the following areas emerged: curriculum, learning and development, assessment, teaching and teacher education, diversity and inclusion, school and community, history, research and dissemination, and advocacy. The creation of this guiding document for music education research was almost ten years ago, and its effect needs to be further examined with regard to current issues in our growing teaching field.

The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the sessions of the 2004 through 2007 WMEA state annual conferences to ascertain whether previously noted trends in the literature regarding national conferences continue at the state level, or if there were changes in conference session emphases. While there is a structure in place to select annual meetings and organize individual sessions, there appears to have been no systematic analysis of the state conference offerings. More specifically, the following research questions were posed:

1. What representation trends emerge within specific subject areas such as performance, technology, teacher education, research, general music, multiculturalism, and inclusion?
2. What are the implications of findings within the context of general research objectives in music education?

Methodology

Data were extracted from content located in the published programs of the Wisconsin Music Educators Association (WMEA) state in-service conferences held annually during 2004 through 2007. Similar procedures to those used by Kippendorff (1980), Price and Orman (1999, 2001), and Weber (1985) were followed to allow for comparisons, and make valid inferences from the text in the present investigation. The authors of the present study developed a data collection form to classify all conference components and organize emerging themes (Table 1). The year, page number, title, sponsor (if given), and description of each session listed in the published WMEA annual conference programs from 2004 through 2007 were entered into a database. The information in the published conference programs is the most accurate, and in some instances, the only record of the sessions presented.

Table 1. Data Collection Form for Classification of Conference Components

Conference Year:
Page Number:
Title of Session:
Sponsor (if given):
Description of the session (if given):
Category:
Subject area:
Focus within the subject area:
Other (e.g., topics of interest):

The researchers in the present study identified seven conference categories, 12 subject areas, and seven focus aspects within each subject area for use in the data analysis based on classification procedures utilized by Price and Orman, (1999). Each of the 442 sessions were analyzed according to (a) categories- educational sessions, performances, general sessions, business meetings, concert clinics, receptions, and concerts with receptions; (b) subject areas- general music sessions, performance sessions, administration, research, technology, industry-centered sessions, inclusion/exceptionalities, multicultural, MENC, CMENC, teacher education, and advocacy; and (c) focus within the subject area- band, choir, orchestra, chamber groups, individual performance, professional performing groups, and creative thinking activities.

One researcher classified all WMEA annual in-service conference sessions from 2004 through 2007. Reliability of categorization was examined by a second researcher who independently classified all sessions from two conferences (50%) according to the above stated categories, subject areas, and session focus (Price and Orman, 1999). The formula $[\text{agreements} / (\text{agreements} + \text{disagreements})] \times 100$ was used to determine agreement between researchers in overall session categorization. Berelson (1952) states, "in subject-matter analyses which there is high agreement on the definitions of the relevant categories, there is little difficulty in achieving validity in content analysis" (p. 169). Both authors of this report independently categorized the sessions, resulting in 98.3 % agreement between researchers in coded category and subject areas. This appears acceptable since the reliabilities reported in related music education literature range from 98.1 to 99.5 percent agreement between raters.

One author of the present study attended the WMEA conference planning committee conference, a meeting of Wisconsin music educators who select session proposals for the annual in-service conference. WMEA initially sends a call for presenters to all state MENC/WMEA members prior to each planning

meeting, inviting the submission of proposals. For conferences held in 2004 through 2007, submissions were sent to the director of the conference planning session at WMEA state headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin. Submissions were sorted according to topic areas and distributed to sub-committee chairs for committee discussion and possible selection. The selection of sessions in each sub-committee was based primarily upon the quality of the proposal and perceived interest of the total WMEA membership. Chairs of the selection sub-committees returned their recommendations to the director of conference planning, who along with all members in attendance of the planning conference, made final selections.

Results

Researchers in the present study examined 442 sessions from the 2004 through 2007 annual conferences. The number of sessions per conference showed little fluctuation with 118 sessions in 2004, 107 in 2005, 113 in 2006, and a low of 104 in 2007. The largest proportion of sessions was educational, with a mean of 65.7%, ranging from 64.4% in 2004 to 66.4% in 2005 (see Table 2). Educational sessions included those designated by MENC and WMEA as clinics, lectures, demonstrations, workshops, or reading sessions. A variety of topics were presented, with sponsorship ranging from teachers sharing instructional ideas to industry presentations and professional organizations. Sessions not considered educational were concert performances, business meetings, receptions, general sessions, and some miscellaneous events.

In contrast to findings from the literature, industry-centered (19.0%) and technology sessions (4.2%) comprised less proportionately. Sessions promoting a particular product or products were placed in the industry-centered classification. Concert performances accounted for a mean of 22.3% of all sessions, and performance-centered sessions for 32.8% of the content of educational sessions. While some concert performance sessions included soloists, chamber groups, more than one ensemble, or more than one type of ensemble, the majority of sessions featured bands, choirs, and orchestras. Combined data for concert performances and performance-centered educational sessions included bands (M= 35.5%), choirs (M= 28.1%), orchestras (M= 20.7%), chamber groups (M= 8.6%), and soloists (M= 7.1%). Overall, there was a decrease each year in both the proportion and number of concert performances; from a high of 26.3% (n = 31) in 2004, declining to 19.2% (n = 20) in 2007.

Table 2. Proportionate Representations of the Total Session Categories and Subject Areas for the Wisconsin Music Educators Association Annual In-Service Conference, 2004 through 2007

Session Category	Conference Year				
	2004 N=118	2005 N=107	2006 N=113	2007 N=104	Total Mean N=442
Educational %	64.4	66.4	65.5	66.3	65.7
Concert Performances %	26.3	23.4	20.4	19.2	22.3
Industry-centered %	22.0	12.1	15.0	26.9	19.0
Business Meetings %	5.1	7.5	9.7	8.7	7.8
Technology %	3.4	6.5	0.9	5.8	4.2
Receptions %	1.7	1.9	3.5	3.8	2.7
Research %	0.8	1.9	0.9	1.0	1.2
General Sessions %	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.9
Concert Clinics %	1.7	0	0	1.0	0.7

Education sessions, the highest proportion of categories and subject areas, were further analyzed (see Table 3). Teacher education sessions comprised the largest proportion (M= 39.7%) of the subject areas, followed by sessions focusing on performance (M= 32.9), music industry (M= 29.0%), and general music (M= 23.1%). Multicultural music sessions and technology sessions each accounted for less than 10%, with advocacy, administration, research, MENC, CMENC, and inclusion accounting for less than 5% respectively of the educational sessions. Within the category of educational sessions, both MENC topics and inclusion demonstrated the greatest decline in representation accounting for 0.3%. Consistent with reports in the literature, there appears to be increased representation in industry and focus on multicultural music sessions in 2006 and 2007.

Technology and teacher education has fluctuated every year, and there appears to be decreased representation in administration, research, and general music sessions during the past two years. The number of performance-centered educational sessions increased 37.5% from 2004-2005 (n = 40) to 2006-2007 (n = 55). Overall, a dramatic decrease surfaced in the already small proportion of educational sessions focusing on inclusion. A single session on special learners in the music classroom resulted in the inclusion category forming 0.2% of all conference session offerings in 2004-2007. The very low representation of sessions on inclusion is consistent with reports from the literature; however, both pre-service and in-service teachers frequently express interest in this subject area and the desire to learn more about effective teaching practices when working with special learners. Finally, sessions featuring a creative thinking focus within the subject area (music improvisation, composition, analysis, creative movement and dance) comprised 11.4% of all educational sessions.

Table 3. Educational Sessions' Proportionate Representations of Subject Area Classifications

Subject Classification Percentage	Conference Year					Mean n= 290
	2004 n= 76	2005 n= 71	2006 n= 74	2007 n= 69		
Teacher Education %	55.3	29.6	48.6	23.2		39.7
Performance-centered %	39.5	14.1	32.4	44.9		32.9
Industry-centered %	34.2	18.3	23.0	40.6		29.0
General Music %	35.5	19.7	16.2	20.2		23.1
Multicultural %	2.6	7.0	10.8	14.5		8.6
Technology %	5.3	9.9	1.4	8.7		6.2
Advocacy %	5.3	4.3	4.1	4.3		4.5
Administration %	0	5.6	2.7	0		2.1
Research %	1.3	2.8	1.4	1.5		1.7
Collegiate MENC %	1.3	1.4	0	2.9		1.4
MENC %	1.3	0	0	0		0.3
Inclusion %	0	1.4	0	0		0.3

Discussion

Implications for Music Education

The purpose of the present study was to examine the 2004 through 2007 WMEA annual in-service sessions and relate the results to trends previously found in the music education literature. As previously

reported in the results section of this study, the largest areas of representation were educational, performance, teacher education, and industry-centered sessions, respectively. Educational sessions, by far the most common, represented an average of almost 66% of the total sessions. This proportion is close in comparison to the mean (65%) reported by Price and Orman (2001) for the 2000 MENC conference. Sessions in this category often focus on one or more member interests, with sponsorship ranging from teachers sharing instructional ideas from the field to music industry and professional organization presentations. In all, education is the primary purpose of both MENC and WMEA professional organizations.

A concurrent decline in concert performance sessions and research sessions was found in the present investigation; and the number of WMEA performance-centered educational sessions increased nearly 38% from 2004-2005 to 2006-2007. Often a person attending the conference who is responsible for music performance ensembles will be primarily interested in attending both concert performances and performance-centered educational sessions. Perhaps it may be that all purposes must be served and selection committees are merely working to achieve the right balance among professional development needs of most music educators who attend the conference.

Teacher education has fluctuated annually but averaged 40% of the content of educational sessions. This proportion is quite high, and possibly due in part to the interests of the sub-committee or increased number of proposals for teacher education sessions. For example, the state sub-committees meet nine months before the conference date and often have a working conference theme. This allows time for a second call or invited session submissions. Further analysis reveals a wide range of topics specific to Wisconsin pre-service and in-service music educators were presented in teacher education sessions such as professional development plans for licensure, mentoring, life-long learning, assessment, legislation, teaching effectiveness, educational philosophy, and collegiality to name a few.

Consistent with findings in the literature, there appears to be both increased representation in industry and an increased emphasis on multicultural music sessions in 2006 and 2007. Sessions promoting a particular product or products were placed in the industry-centered classification. Industry-centered sessions accounted for 29% of all educational sessions offered during the 2004-2007 period as compared to 40% of all MENC educational sessions during year 2000 (Price and Orman, 2001). Price and Orman have expressed concern that music industry offerings have "always been a comparatively large part of MENC conferences and appear to dominate all other subject areas" (2001, p. 232). There appears to be nothing wrong with this issue, since "businesses have the resources to provide many useful sessions; however, care must be taken that conferences do not become product trade shows" (1999, p. 30). Multicultural music was a curricular theme for the 2006 conference and a wide range of music lessons from various cultures were presented. Although multicultural sessions accounted for less than 10% of all WMEA educational sessions offered during 2004-2007, a steady growth in the number of sessions was demonstrated each year.

A single session on special learners in the music classroom resulted in the inclusion category forming 0.2% of all session offerings. This trend would seem to run counter to the growing professional interest in mainstreaming and inclusion, exceptional students, and at-risk student populations (Atterbury, 1998; Frisques, Niebur and Humphreys, 1994; Gfeller, Darrow and Hedden, 1990; Price and Orman, 1999, 2001; Shields, 2001). Both pre-service and in-service teachers frequently express interest in these areas and the desire to learn more about effective teaching practices when working with special learners. A national survey conducted by Gilbert and Asmus (1981) noted that 80% of the respondents expressed a need for some special education preparation. Furthermore, federal legislation (Public Law 94-142) has

mandated placing students with disabilities in the “least restrictive environment” possible, and music classes have been one of these environments. Perhaps more conference sessions with focus on specific topics such as the placement process, special education preparation for music teachers, Individualized Education Program procedures, and practical resource materials will help educators work more effectively with these children.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Data in the present study are the content of sessions of the Wisconsin Music Educators Association (WMEA) annual in-service conference meetings for the years 2004 through 2007 as published in meeting programs. These data are limited to titles, brief descriptions, authors and their affiliations, and the intended audience. A more thorough analysis might have been attained from attending each session, had that been possible. It was assumed that the data currently available accurately represented the sessions offered at all four conferences, though not always true of WMEA or other professional meetings. Analyses in the present study allowed for different emphases and numerous topics, resulting in overlapping categories. One obstacle in the present study was to design a scheme that differentiates accurately among sessions. In a similar study design, Price and Orman (1999) discuss, “while there would have been some expediency in establishing exclusive either/or categories, we felt that such dichotomous choices would neither accurately nor fairly represent the breadth of MENC’s conference sessions and the variety of purposes they serve” (p. 31).

Stemler (2001) points that it is important to recognize that a methodology is always employed in the service of a research question, and “validation of the inferences made on the basis of data from one analytic approach demands the use of multiple sources of information” (p. 6). A qualitative approach utilizing triangulation would lend further credibility to the findings of this study through multiple sources of data. For example, the research question in this study aimed at examining specific subject areas could be expanded. A survey of pre-service and in-service teachers regarding the conference session offerings should be conducted to cross-validate the findings. Another approach to validate the inferences would be to further examine data through an extended list of focus areas such as jazz education, elementary-level music, middle school music, high school/college level music, and specific methods of instruction (Orff Schulwerk, Kodaly, Dalcroze). Finally; a closer examination of the research agenda in music education (MENC, 1998) and other related agendas might provide a more comprehensive view and further direction for the music education profession (e.g., Goals 2000 Arts Education Partnership, 1997; Madsen, 2000; National Endowment for the Arts, 1994; U.S. Department of Education/Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1996).

Content analysis provides an empirical basis for monitoring shifts within the context of public opinion, contemporary issues, long-range goals, and the objectives of music education. MENC’s publication of *A Research Agenda for Music Education: Thinking Ahead* (1998) contains nine broad areas: curriculum, learning and development, assessment, teaching and teacher education, diversity and inclusion, school and community, history, research and dissemination, and advocacy. Although subject areas in the published conference programs of the WMEA align with most broad research areas in the research agenda, the results of this exploratory study point to a disproportionate distribution among inclusion, research, and advocacy sessions, representing a combined total of 4% of all sessions offered.

In sum, there appears to be an immediate need for more direct replication research of state, national, and international conference sessions to facilitate direct comparisons with the music education literature. For example, data from the 2002 through 2006 MENC biennial conferences should be examined to

determine the extent of how conference sessions address research priority areas and the music content standards. Finally, it would appear wise to ponder the purpose of in-service meetings in reflection of the data. If the content of conference sessions is intended to reflect the direction of the profession, then it also seems appropriate to survey conference attendees. It is the authors' desire that the present exploratory study and discussion will inspire more educators to share their valuable instructional knowledge from the field and on-going research endeavors in future conference presentations.

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