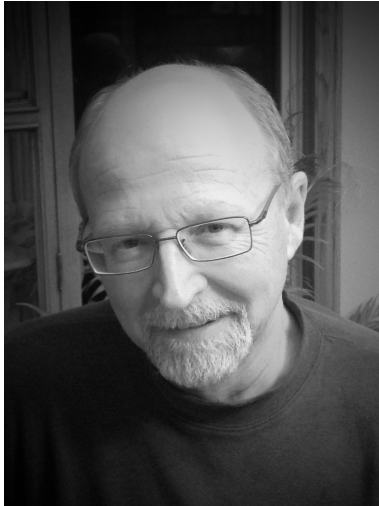




A Conversation with Grant Page

with Chloé Plamondon

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Grant Page taught band Seven Oaks School Division for 34 years starting his career at Edmund Partridge Junior High and moving to Ecole Leila North Community School in 1992. He started the band program and saw it grow from 125 students to over 300 students when he retired in June 2018. While at Leila North, Grant was actively involved in several school-wide initiatives that promoted student-centered, feedback-oriented learning and developed an expertise in the area of assessment. He has defended the arts as an integral part of the curriculum and promoted student participation in the assessment process through the use of portfolios and integrating technology into classes and rehearsals. On the back of the wall in the band room at Leila North is a simple reminder of what Grant believes both students and teachers should do while in school – “Make Your Thinking Visible”.

My Background

I was born in Winnipeg and grew up in the Windsor Park area.

I took piano lessons from a neighbor starting when I was 7, signed up for Band in grade 7 at Beliveau Junior High with Ed Lujan, chose the trumpet and continued to play at Windsor Park Collegiate where Mark Christianson was the band director. I also took organ lessons at the Yamaha Education Center throughout my teenage years.

I began post-secondary school at the University of Manitoba in 1979 and after a year transferred to what was, at that time, Moorhead State University in Moorhead, Minnesota. I started my teaching career in 1984 at Edmund Partridge Junior High School.

I don't know if one particular person was the inspiration for me becoming a band director. It was probably a combination of what my experiences with Ed Lujan, Mark Christianson and the private music teachers that I had growing up. They all seemed to intensely enjoy what they did and music making brought me great pleasure. I guess I just wanted to be able to share those feelings with others.

The moment in your career when you go hmmm....

Back in 2002, as a part of professional development and action research initiative at Leila North, I stumbled across an article about assessment for learning by Rick Stiggins, who made me think seriously about how we should be assessing students in school. His idea of assessing students while they were learning was what I always wanted to do but I had been giving marks and averaging them since I had started teaching partly because that was the way it was when I went to school. I began to look at learning differently, made some small, but significant, changes in my teaching and not surprisingly, my students began to show better understanding and skill. There was no reason to stop so I began implementing more timely assessment without grades or marks. Words became a more powerful way to describe student learning and I also started to have the students themselves participate more in the entire assessment process.

A Memorable Experience

A few years ago after a school concert, I noticed an older woman waiting patiently to speak with me while I gave instructions to the students who were helping return equipment to the band room. She said how much she enjoyed the concert and appreciated how I demonstrate growth in the students from grade 6 to 8 through the music that each group played. I recognized her face, but I could not attach a name to it. So when she said that her grandson was in grade 6, I saw an opening and asked “And your grandson is?” She said his name and included “...you also know my daughter Shelley”. I realized that I had taught two generations of the same family. For a moment I felt old, but I also thought about the power of musical experience. That joyful experience of playing music had passed from one generation to the next to the next. A proud grandmother and the next two generations of her family will never be forgotten.

My Rewards

The best part of being a teacher/band director is when your former students just drop by to say “hi”. In my career, it always was nice to see the young people that were part of my professional life for three years, let me know that I made a difference for them. It goes to show you that it is not necessarily about the music – sometimes it is about the relationship.

My Biggest Challenge

In 2011, I had 190 students in my grade 6 through 8 program, saw my grade 7 and 8 students five out of six days in the timetable, and started between 60 and 75 grade 6 students each year. It was busy, yet manageable. The following year, a trio of changes provided a tremendous challenge for someone who had already taught for 26 years. Our community began to grow so school enrollment as well as band enrollment increased. Our school division began supplying instruments to students at no-cost in grade six so band enrollment increased. The manageable timetable was no longer manageable. More time was needed to administrate the program – inventory instruments, make minor repairs, prepare music and learning experiences, even learn more names!

I decided I was not going to let the quality of the program suffer because of these challenges, but the thought of being the “sage on the stage” for over 5 hours a day with middle years students was a bit overwhelming. Luckily I had been experimenting with a piece of software called SmartMusic as an alternative for students who may need additional help in acquiring the skills needed to function in the band program. It changed the way I taught and energized me as the program grew close to 300 students by 2015.

My Advice to Young Band Directors

Be prepared for change. To be an educator is to change and adapt to the times, to the situation and sometimes to the moment. Listen carefully and keep your eyes wide open!

Provide your students with some voice in your classroom. Not only will you place the responsibility of learning on them but the respect that you show them by involving them in the planning and decisions you make during your time together is priceless.

I think school boils down to a few critical skills – learn how to be a life-long learner, learn to work with others, learn to help those who need more than you do yourself, and find a passion. These skills are all part of being in a band program. It is the connections we make and the sharing we do that make being in the band such a special part of school for so many students.

My Retired Life

Now that I am retired, I volunteer with the Canadian Assessment for Learning Network (CAfLN) as the organizational lead. It affords me the opportunity to stay “in touch” with educators, help provide educators with a place to connect and share their practice, and make use of the organizational skills I developed as a band director.