Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

ISSN 1545-4517

A refereed journal of the



Action for Change in Music Education

Volume 15 Number 2 March 2016

Vincent C. Bates, Editor

Brent C. Talbot, Associate Editor

Yearnings: Music Education and Making a Better World

Deborah Bradley

© Deborah Bradley. 2016. The content of this article is the sole responsibility of the authors. The ACT Journal and the Mayday Group are not liable for any legal actions that may arise involving the article's content, including, but not limited to, copyright infringement.

Special Features: For optimal viewing and to access endnotes and citations by simply placing the cursor over the corresponding number and date, download and open this document in Adobe Reader.

Yearnings: Music Education and Making a Better World

Deborah Bradley, Editor in Chief for MayDay Group Publications

want to thank Vincent Bates, ACT Editor, for giving me this opportunity to write the introduction for ACT 15 (2), the first in my new role as Editor in Chief for MayDay Group Publications. For those ACT readers who may be asking themselves "who is she?" I'll provide a little bit of background. I have been a member of the MayDay Group since 1996; I signed on during my early grad school days as a master's student at the University of Toronto. Past ACT Editor (also former MDG Editor in Chief) Wayne Bowman brought new meaning for me to the word think when he taught Philosophical Foundations in Music Education; that course, along with my four years of undergraduate study with David Elliott at U of T (who also served as ACT editor from 2011–2014), undoubtedly changed the course of my academic trajectory and the types of issues that I felt would be important to explore as a scholar. Their encouragement led me to think outside the typical music education box, and in those explorations, I came to realize the importance of concerns for social justice in all areas of education, how under-explored those issues were, and continue to be. I have been a member of the MDG Steering Committee for the past 10 years, and thus involved in the ongoing evolution of the organization; the MayDay Group membership numbers over 550 music educators and scholars around the world. Most recently, I have served as Editor of the MDG newsletter, and have served on the ACT editorial board since 2014. The MayDay Group has been both influential to and supportive of my academic work in the once uncharted scholarly territory of antiracism in music education. I am indebted to all those who have generously shared their ideas, criticisms, and encouragement with me about these endeavours over the years.

While my research has mainly been focused on concerns for the ways race and racism affect both music teaching and learning, my interests in social justice are wide-ranging, and include the intersections of oppressions that make such research sometimes messy and difficult to present. These intersections of oppressions do not stand in isolation; they exist within social and historical contexts that support and sometimes promote their continuance, despite well-meaning and occasionally effective resistance offered by many music educators, from kindergarten through graduate school. Exploring issues of social justice demands an interdisciplinary approach that typically results in more questions than answers.

I realize here that my use of the term *social justice* requires some explanation. It is a term that no doubt means different things to different people — a term that defies definition — attempts to define it prove nearly futile, as any definition becomes dependent upon the context to which it is applied. Its context-dependency does not "travel well," meaning that every seemingly well-founded definition of the term may be applied to some situation somewhere in which that definition does not serve. I will not go into a full discussion of the problems involved with invoking the concept of social justice. Instead, I refer readers to Wayne Bowman's (2007) editorial in ACT 6 (4): "Who's Asking? (Who's Answering?) Theorizing Social Justice in Music Education," for a discussion about the difficulties inherent in writing about social justice. The concerns addressed in that 2007 editorial, along with the varied perspectives and categories of "social justice" discussed by other authors in ACT 6 (4), remain pertinent in 2016.

The current issue of ACT was not initially conceived as a themed issue, although the strands of a theme run throughout the various articles. The first four articles (Regelski, Hess, Frierson-Campbell and Park, and Qi and Veblen) represent papers presented at MDG Colloquium 27 in New Orleans, whose theme was "Music Education as Social, Cultural, and Political Action." The submissions from Shieh, Graham, and Angelo, however, also carry common threads: concerns for social reform, combined with the desire to help music students (and teachers) understand the world in which they live, so they might shape it into something different and presumably better. These concerns should not be a surprise for regular readers of ACT, since this is a key component of critical theory and pedagogy. In a way similar to the various articles found in ACT 6 (4), each addresses some element of the great complex of issues that

fall under the umbrella of social justice. Each author takes his or her own unique approach to the concerns raised — some call upon the term *social justice* directly; others do not but explore issues that are without question about social justice. As Richardson (2001) stated, "different languages and different discourses within a given language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another" (36). While these divisions, created by different discourses, may be viewed as problematic because of their partiality and incompleteness, when these partialities are combined into a single journal issue, the divisions transform into perspectives that shed light on a bigger picture, much in the way an edited book illuminates the many facets of an overriding question. Thus taken as a whole, this ACT issue continues the interrogation, from a variety of perspectives, of the ways that both research and pedagogy in music education can chip away at the understandings, misunderstandings, misperceptions, biases, and beliefs that may unintentionally hamper our attempts to generate change to current practices.

Tom Regelski sets the stage in this issue for the various topics that follow. Arguing for an understanding that music education as praxis embodies sociality, a concept which remains absent from aesthestic perspectives of music and music education, Regelski proposes "a praxial framework for both music and music education as . . . an ideological change towards principles of justice and democracy that benefits *all* students, not just the selected few" (10).

As Regelski argues, many music teachers, despite the movement in recent decades toward praxial understandings of music education, continue to accept without question the aesthetic rationale — that what music education is "good for" is to provide aesthetic experience. As Regelski posits, the unquestioned acceptance of this assumption acts as a major impediment to the *pragmatic* and *social effectiveness* of school music. Through his exploration of the social function of school music, Regelski promotes the value of music for human sociality, positing that a music education promoting human sociality also encourages social justice through "music that benefits all in society" (14).

Regelski's article offers a concise and important comparison of aesthetic and praxial philosophies of music education. He concludes the comparison with insight into the ethical imperative of a praxial music education, a concept also taken up, from another perspective, in Elin Angelo's article on MEPRUN (Music Educators'

Professional Understanding). Praxis "focuses on action undertaken in behalf of others; in behalf of people's needs or betterment" (21). Regelski's concern for action on behalf of people's needs or betterment represents a thread that warps and wafts its way throughout each of the remaining articles in this collection of essays.

Juliet Hess undertakes an exploration of the potential of *contrapuntal methodology*, as outlined in Edward Said's (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, for music educators. Said, although best known as a literary theorist and considered a "founder" of postcolonialism, was also an accomplished classical pianist. His contrapuntal methodology at first glance offers an intriguing option for anticolonial and antiracism music education, yet at the same time, and as Hess candidly discusses, represents a challenge to enact meaningfully. As she describes, this methodology as a form of pedagogy promises to allow "us to contextually explore musics that occur both in tandem with human actions and in response to human actions" (46). When approached from an anti-oppression perspective, this offers the type of ethical praxis about which Regelski writes — a praxis that promotes human sociality and also encourages social justice.

Said wrote from an anticolonial stance, and offered contrapuntal methodology as a way to look beyond the words on the pages of European literature written during the height of colonial and imperial conquests. He sought to illuminate "the other side(s)" of the stories, by reading "Jane Austen alongside Frantz Fanon" (47). Said argued that what is excluded from a text is as important for a critical reading as that which is included, and that readers need to look at both contexts simultaneously. (The article later in this issue by Matthew Graham offers a similar approach within the exploration of settler colonialism.) As Hess explains, the relationships between contexts determine how we understand those spaces.

Hess offers a frank discussion of her dissatisfaction with a conference presentation emerging from her research with activist musicians. Her analysis of both the possibilities and challenges involved in the method provide a model for reflection that leads to growth as a scholar. Hess provides us with tangible examples of how contrapuntal methodology might be put to good use in music education research.

[S]tudents learn to look for what is absent in the discourses that shape their world. As educators, we can also model inhabiting spaces of discomfort and show

by example ways in which we might challenge our cherished beliefs in order to move toward new possibilities. (66)

Following Hess's discussion of contrapuntal methodology, the next article moves to Said's homeland, Palestine, where research from Carol Frierson-Campbell and **Keumjae Park** draw for readers a picture of the connections between musicking (Small 1998), identity, and resistance. Their description of students in a Palestinian music academy provides its own contrapuntal reading to the somewhat one-sided mainstream media presentations of Palestine and those Palestinians who resist the Israeli occupation. As Frierson-Campbell and Park remind us, Palestine is not a "single story" (Adichie 2009), but rather an area of "diversity of political, national, ethnic, and religious identities of people" (73), representing a complex set of identities and understandings. Yet this diversity is largely ignored in representations of Palestine and Palestinians. "The term 'Palestine,' once a loosely defined regional designation with a lot of internal diversity, has come to denote what is not Israeli-Jewish, and vice versa" (81). In their efforts to tell a more complete story, the authors researched important questions: what does it mean to engage in the production of one's own culture when the territory is occupied by external forces; what does musicking mean in a location where everyday life is precarious and conflict endemic; what is the role of musicking in reclaiming identities that have been silenced; and finally, how might answers to these questions influence music education practices in other marginalized locations?

Similar to the participants in Hess's research, the Palestinian musicians about whom Frierson-Campbell and Park write utilized musicking as a subversive practice of resistance to disrupt the symbolic systems that dominate and control them. Transgressing the discursive constructions for these musicians means to "resist the casting of Palestine as 1) a homogenous collectivity, 2) violent and threatening, and 3) anti-West," (82) just as through their musicking they celebrated and affirmed their identities as Palestinian — "everyday people, of incredible diversity, of cosmopolitan aspiration, invoking a recognition of the physical locus of their family, subsistence, and culture" (94).

Nan Qi and **Kari Veblen** also delve into issues of musicking, identity, and resistance utilizing the discursive lens of transformative learning. Presenting an analysis of five case studies from Brazil, these authors present an argument for the

ways that music can help to disrupt "passive acceptance of the limitations" (103) of the environments of those who are marginalized in their societies. As these authors explain, successful transformative learning experiences represent a challenge, given the barriers created by society for marginalized learners; at the same time, these learners may have the most to gain from transformative learning experiences (Freire 1970). Citing Mezirow (1997) the authors clearly explain that

transformative learning is rooted in the way human beings communicate, and does not link it *exclusively* with significant life events of the learner. Through this combination of reflection and discourse, the learner is able to shift to a more inclusive worldview. (117)

The above statement resonates with the perspectives of other authors in this issue of ACT. Merely providing a musical experience cannot of itself create change. The key components for change are centered upon our communications, the relationships developed through that musicking, and our ability to reflect on situations and life circumstances through meaningful, rather than superficial, discussion.

Concerns for reflection and discussion underlie Eric Shieh's search for meaningful pedagogical responses in music classes after traumatic events. Following the death of Eric Garner in New York City, Shieh shares his experiences and particular pedagogical responses to that tragic event, exploring politicized listening, multimodality, response, and collectivity, along with some admitted "fumbling" through issues of essentialism and authority, race, and aesthetics. Drawing upon the music of John Coltrane as one in a series of pedagogical responses to Garner's death, Shieh asks a crucial question: under what conditions and what understandings can we find our way in to this music, and how do we "find our way back out, out from, outside of, through this music and through this world we inhabit"? (127). Shieh's interrogation is reminiscent of Brent Talbot's (2015) editorial in ACT 14(2), written on the heels of the church massacre in Charleston, SC. As music educators, many of us feel compelled to respond to such violence — to help our students find constructive and compassionate ways to process the trauma that may result from such public tragedies. Yet we often struggle with what we can do musically to address these events in a way that avoids essentializing and re-victimizing. Shieh reminds readers that our actions must be grounded in theory:

If there is no theoretical stance, but rather a response — and response to a particular injustice — a response that calls to us through our ways of understanding our world and our music, then the narrowness is not in the way we inhabit music but in the way we respond *in* music to particular injustice. (134)

Shieh's article resonates with Hess' concerns for contrapuntal methodology, as well as with the preceding articles in this issue related to musicking, resistance, learning, and transformation. How might we, as educators, learn to hear what any music might be *saying* beyond the so-called aesthetic elements? How might we learn to hear Black Lives Matter in the music of Beyoncé? "What if, as a classroom or collective, we share and learn who we are in this world? What if we understand our development as musicians to be a development in musical multimodalities, a politicized and contextual music?" (140)

Matthew Graham offers a different approach to social justice in music education. As both a pedagogical response and an understanding of who we are in this world, his exploration of settler colonialism in the United States illustrates the ways in which music is always-already politicized and contextual. His description of settler colonialism applies in other countries as well, and links his article in some respects to Frierson-Campbell and Park's research in Israeli-occupied Palestine. Graham posits that "settler colonialism is not an event but an omnipresent, oppressive social structure" (149). Drawing upon Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, in which the artist relates an object for the intended viewer, resulting in a distortion of truth, Graham "examines the role of music and music education specifically within the context of settler colonialism in order to theorize how educators might respond"

(146–7). His analysis of Sousa's *Dwellers of the Western World* employs the simulacrum to invite consideration of how the representation works, rather than what it means, thus making apparent the discursive function of the representation.

Graham positions settler colonialism as the foundation for Western society, and his analysis examines how the "portrayal of indigenous people, settlers of European descent, and African slaves and their descendants, discursively function to perpetuate the structure of settler colonialism, both historical and present" (151). As Graham argues, rather than describing works such as *Dwellers of the Western World* as the artifacts of a lamentable past, we should use such repertoire as a window into the racist present, as other authors in this ACT issue also suggest. Such repertoire,

when viewed as foundational to the ideology of settler colonialism, provides educators and students with a way to promote a different subjectivity, to respond to the violence such music represents. As Graham explores the necessity for anticolonial education, both in general and in music education, he acknowledges an inherent paradox: any action will, in some ways, reiterate the very system it seeks to dismantle. As music educators, we must acknowledge that our efforts cannot alone change the world — but we can plant the seeds for change, even in a system that is highly adaptable to resist any threats against it.

The final article in this issue of ACT comes from **Elin Angelo**, who presents the concept of MEPRUN (Music Educators' Professional Understanding) as a way to facilitate strong reflections, enable criticism and change, but also qualify approvals and wisely *un*changed practices, where those may be the better option. Taking a realistic look at the lives of musicians who teach in a variety of settings, Angelo explores the often-conflicting expectations and norms that form professional dilemmas with which educators must deal.

These differences interfere with the ability of music educators (as individuals, collectives or institutions) to communicate with each other across different political affiliations. Such dialogues are necessary, however, and are part of professionalizing the profession of music education — from the inside. (197)

Angelo states that these differences make it difficult, if not impossible, for educators to compare these unarticulated expectations against any common scale, to test for quality or ethics. Hence MEPRUN, grounded as it is in identity, knowledge, and defining authority, provides a basis for music educators to reflect upon the various professional dilemmas they encounter, so as to discern what may be the best, or most ethical, course of action. Angelo joins with other authors in this issue of ACT in the search for ethical courses of action, for pedagogies that might help our students understand their place in this world, and to motivate educators and students alike to develop the types of understandings and ethical actions that might make the world "a better place."

This issue of ACT offers a wide range of perspectives on common themes within the social justice discourses: identity, transformation, power, pedagogical responses to injustice, musical representations of injustice, anticolonialism, and antiracism. Collectively, these authors project a strong yearning for new, perhaps better, ways to address the injustices found in today's world. I trust this issue will stimulate thought,

Bradley, Deborah. 2016. Yearnings: Music education and making a better world. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 15 (2): 1–9. act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bradley15 2.pdf

discussion, and perhaps most important of all, action for change in and through music education.

References

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2009. The dangers of a single story. In *Ted Talks*: TedGlobal.
- Bowman, Wayne D. 2007. Who's asking (Who's answering): Theorizing social justice in music education. *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* 6 (4): 1–20.
- Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed, Continuum book.* New York: Seabury Press.
- Richardson, Laurel. 2001. Getting personal: Writing-stories. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 14 (1): 33–8. doi:10.1080/09518390010007647.
- Said, Edward W. 1993. *Culture and imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books. Original edition, Knopf, 1993.
- Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening, Music/culture.* Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Talbot, Brent C. 2015. "Charleston, Goddam": An editorial introduction to ACT 14.2. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 14 (2): 1–25.